

How do we create intimacy in an audio story?

How do we create intimacy in an audio story that is plausible, genuine and keeps the listener engaged? We speak with two producers about their podcasts.



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Podcasting is, by nature, an intimate medium. We're often listening to podcasts on our headphones, locked deep into a world of sound that is only limited by our imagination. But building trust with your audience and creating a level of intimacy that keeps listeners coming back requires particular skill.

In 2015 journalist Sarah Allely had a bike accident that left her unable to read, write, watch TV or listen to podcasts. Going into nature helped her recover from a mild traumatic brain injury and she's since created the narrative documentary podcast [Brain on Nature](#), a very personal portrayal about her recovery process.

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‘I think the most important part of crafting intimacy is to be yourself. You can’t fake it, it has to be real, your actual real feelings,’ she tells ArtsHub. ‘Authenticity creates intimacy and listeners are drawn to intimate podcasts as they are authentic,’ she said.

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Perhaps this is what keeps listeners tuned into the award-nominated podcast [Love and Luck](#), a queer audio drama about two characters who leave each other a series of voice messages. Its producer, Erin Kyan, said the podcast resonates with listeners because intimacy is relatable to everyone.

‘I think it’s very common to listen to a podcast about love seeking some comfort. We want to feel loved, and we want to be able to take those feelings with us into the world. If there’s a lack of love in our own lives, we want to be able to feel it. If our lives are already full of love, we want to remember to appreciate it,’ he tells ArtsHub.

‘The characters in the podcast love each other and communicate with each other, and by modelling that behaviour, I hope that our audience realises they can take that with them into their lives outside the podcast.’

AUTHENTICITY AND INTIMACY

For both Allely and Kyan, being authentic is pivotal to their storytelling process, but making yourself vulnerable for your art isn’t always easy.

‘It took a while for me to be comfortable with creating such an intimate podcast,’ Allely admits.

As a journalist, she said putting herself front and centre of her story was challenging but with time she came around to the idea.

'This [podcast] was a total departure from my previous work as a traditional journalist and how I had previously interacted with social media,' she said. 'I have generally been a pretty private person in public. But as I discussed with friends the concept I was developing for *Brain on Nature*, they convinced me that my story was what made the idea stand out.'

By taking listeners on a journey that often reveals intimate conversations with doctors, friends and family members in relation to her recovery process, Allely's podcast draws the listeners into a world of raw emotion.

'Vulnerability pulls people in, it makes the audience feel they have been trusted with your story and it makes you more relatable,' she said. 'But I think you need to feel comfortable exposing yourself, even if at first you don't ... If it's forced and you don't really want to expose your vulnerabilities then I think it will come across as too awkward and not relatable.'

TECHNIQUES & TIPS

Creating a show such as *Love and Luck* about love and safety in marginalised communities, Kyan said both he and his team thought about intimacy at every step of production, particularly during the recording.

'I make sure all of our actors speak slowly, so that people don't feel like they're rushing through the action,' he said. 'I mix all our sound levels so that the speech is clear and never cluttered with other sound, and I make sure any sound effects we use are gentle on the ears.'

He also highlights the importance of omitting sound for dramatic effect.

'We let there be silence in our show when it's needed,' Kyan said. 'So much of everyday life is made up of silence and comfortable silence is a very intimate thing to experience, and I think that's true of podcasts, too.'

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For Allely, crafting a sense of intimacy was all about pacing, tone and tense.

'As I developed the series I knew it needed to be written in a very active, present tense voice,' Allely said. 'I also wanted the narration to be casual, relaxed, to sound like I was chatting rather than a formal voice. By writing my story like I was right there in the moment, I felt the audience would be taken along on my journey.'

But if there's one tip Allely would give other podcasters on creating plausible intimacy, it's this: 'I think you just have to be genuine, honest, not hold back, and be doing it for the right reasons.'

'Your heart needs to be in it and you have to be committed to opening yourself up to the world.'