



Audio Book Sales Climb In Spite Of Competition

May 26, 2011

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Talk of the Nation

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Guests

Arnie Cardillo, owner, Live Oak Media

George Guidall, audio book narrator

Janet Benson, president, Audio Publishers Association

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In the anemic economy, audio books are still selling well. The Audio Publishing Association has just awarded the 2011 Audie Awards, the Oscars of spoken word entertainment. But competition from radio, iPods, podcasts and other technology poses a long-term challenge for the industry.

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NEAL CONAN, host:

This is TALK OF THE NATION. I'm Neal Conan in Washington.

Rock legend Keith Richards' book "Life" won top honors at this year's Audie Awards, while writer Walter Dean Myers' poetry collection "Here in Harlem" snagged Best Production. Presented by the Audio Publishers Association, the Audies style themselves as the Oscars for audio books, a medium which continues to grow more mainstream and more popular, but which faces a challenge similar to publishers of print books: revenue.

Between high production costs and often free competition, like radio, audio book publishers find themselves experimenting with different ideas to stay afloat.

So what makes them worth buying for you? Give us a call. 800-989-8255 is our telephone number. Email us, talk@npr.org. You can also join the conversation on our website. That's at npr.org. Click on TALK OF THE NATION.

Later in the program, we'll speak with Serbian Ambassador Vladimir Petrovic about the arrest of General Ratko Mladic and the legacy of Srebrenica.

But first, audio producer Arnie Cardillo joins us from our bureau in New York. He's fresh off his win at this year's Audie Awards for Distinguished Achievement in Production. Nice to have you on the program today, and congratulations.

Mr. ARNIE CARDILLO (Owner, Live Oak Media): Thank you, thank you for having me.

CONAN: And a lot of people probably think, well, what's the big deal? You stick a narrator in a sound booth, and there you go.

Mr. CARDILLO: Not on a production like "Here in Harlem." We had 13 narrators. We had to license from the music publishers and the record labels a number of prerecorded performances from the 1930s and '40s and '50s.

Casting took a while. There was a series of recording sessions to get everyone who was in. We needed a spreadsheet to keep track of all the comings and goings.

We - then there was, after the recordings were made, there was sitting down to sort of storyboard each poem to determine what additional music and sound elements you want to add to and mix in with the narrator and the - and this poem, as I said, it was set in the '30s and '40s. So we wanted to create a sense of time and place and re-create the landscape of Harlem.

CONAN: Well, let's give people a taste of what it sounds like. Here's an example of how complicated the mixing can get.

(Soundbite of audio book, "Here in Harlem")

Mr. CHARLES TURNER(ph): (Reading) George Ambrose, 33, English teacher. My heart must rise and go now to that bright Harlem street where buildings trued in ragtime and Congo rhythms meet.

(Soundbite of car horn)

Mr. TURNER: I'll build a storefront church there, spread amens through the pews, snatch up my cross and gladly tithe my dues. Here will I find the sainted, the week ones and the strong, a thousand mournful voicings, one sweet and tender song.

CONAN: That's Charles Turner, narrating for the production of Walter Dean Myers' "Here in Harlem: Poems in Many Voices." That sound bed underneath him, you've got to get his reading right, but that sound bed underneath him, that's a complicated piece of production.

Mr. CARDILLO: Yes, there are a lot of diverse elements. I started thinking of it as being like a sound montage. The speaker in the poem is walking down the streets of Harlem. He's hearing all the diverse sounds from the music coming from the churches and the cars and the people and all of the street sounds that, together, make up a composite or a montage of the sound of Harlem.

And so we tried to use that technique to enrich the experience and, again, get the characters, get everything set in a certain period.

CONAN: We want to hear from listeners. What makes audio books worth it when there's so much other competition around, much of which is free these days? 800-989-8255. Email talk@npr.org. And Susan's on the line calling us from Anchorage.

SUSAN (Caller): Hi, I'm a huge audio book fan, and I agree: The quality of the production is really important. Most of my books I've gotten off audible.com, and one of the things is you can listen to a preview of the audio, and you get a sense of if this is something you'd be willing to listen to.

I recently listened to "The Emperor of All Maladies," which I think is about 20 hours, a fantastic book, a nonfiction book, very technical. But I don't know that I could have gotten through the print version. But I really enjoyed listening to it.

But particularly in fiction books, another book I loved was "The Inheritance of Loss," and I think I would have been very frustrated -it's about India - of trying to pronounce all the names.

CONAN: Oh, yeah.

SUSAN: And it's a fabulous narrator. I mean, it was just one of my favorites. And of course the (unintelligible) was dramatized. Now, I don't have to have the book dramatized. If it's a really good reader, one voice works for me. Sometimes there are

two, sometimes more, but "The Inheritance of Loss" was, it was just a fabulous production.

And the last point I wanted to make is, my partner is dyslexic, and he, before I met him, he wasn't doing much reading, and after I listen to the book and like it, he usually listens. And so it's a real way for people who may have trouble reading to read, and you can read while you're doing everything else: running, exercising, cleaning the house, doing gardening. It's a great way to increase your reading.

CONAN: And you want to sample it because you're settling down for what may be, what, eight, 10, 12 hours with one book?

SUSAN: Oh, yeah, and it's live-buy. My only problem is - well, I do have a thing on my iPod where I always - I go to sleep at night, we both go to sleep listening to books. But I set the thing to go off in an hour because they do eventually put me to sleep.

But I - although "Unbroken" did not put me to sleep. I was up until three in the morning finishing "Unbroken."

CONAN: And how much do you generally pay for an audio book, Susan?

SUSAN: Well, what I've done with Audible is they have a thing where you get a book every month. So I pretty much get one every month, but then they have sales come along, or we sometimes decide to buy extras.

And you - I think I haven't researched enough. You can get a lot of these from the library, but we're hearing about new books, and a lot of times we want to read them right away.

And I do have a Kindle and a Nook and all that on my iPad. So I do that kind of book, as well. But I find the audio books just much more convenient since I'm a runner. That's, you know, I really enjoy listening while I run.

CONAN: All right, Susan, thanks very much, appreciate it. And Arnie Cardillo, that's - there's a voice for your industry. There's a vote. And the production values make it worth it, but they also make it expensive to make it, don't they?

Mr. CARDILLO: Very, yes. You hope that you'll get a return on your investment, and winning an award helps a lot.

CONAN: Does it?

Mr. CARDILLO: Yes.

CONAN: How much of a difference might it make in sales?

Mr. CARDILLO: Well, it could increase sales tenfold. There's an award given out by the American Library Association, called The Odyssey Award, which is considered the best

children's or young adult audio book of the year. And it's - we can see sales go up, you know, 20, 30 times normal sales, because of winning that award.

CONAN: And how much are you going to charge, or do you charge, for "Here in Harlem," which is obviously a richly, textured production?

Mr. CARDILLO: Yeah, there are two CDs, and we charge \$22.95 for the CD version of it. You can go on Audible or other digital download sites to receive it, as well, and it's usually a little less because there - we don't have the actual, physical cost to produce.

CONAN: Here's an email from Marion(ph): Just as I believe that a good director is more important than a great actor, I believe a good narrator can make a mediocre book both interesting and entertaining. Of course, to be blessed with both a great book and a great narrator is a gift. One of my favorite narrators is Davina Porter, I hope I'm pronouncing that name correctly.

And this from Kathy(ph): I enjoy audio books, as well as digital, Kindle and traditional books; usually having one in progress in each medium at the same time. For audio books, I think I can multitask, reading a book and doing chores or errands. I also listen at double speed, so I'm not so enamored of the dramatic reading or a complex production, just want a reader with a clear voice and proper pronunciation.

And I guess, Arnie, that goes to show it's different things to different people.

Mr. CARDILLO: Yes, you don't - if you're listening at double-speed, you just want information, obviously. You're not concerned about the dramatic performance.

CONAN: And if you're fan of audio books, you probably know our next guest, or at least you know his voice. George Guidall has recorded over 900 unabridged novels, has two Audie Awards under his belt. He joins us now by phone from New York City, where I gather you're working, George.

Mr. GEORGE GUIDALL (Audio Book Narrator): That's right. I'm not now, but I was working.

Mr. CARDILLO: Hi, George.

Mr. GUIDALL: Is that Arnie Cardillo?

Mr. CARDILLO: Yes, it is.

Mr. GUIDALL: Hey, Arnie, how are you doing?

Mr. CARDILLO: Good. George and I have worked together on numerous books.

CONAN: And what makes it worth it, do you think, George, when - for a listener, for an audio book?

Mr. GUIDALL: What makes it worth it?

CONAN: Yeah.

Mr. GUIDALL: Well, that's a great question. The first thing is that it's a very basic, essential human need for people to hear stories. I mean, the opportunity to have vicarious experiences, to listen to books that would - whose purpose is only to make people happy, sad, thoughtful, pensive.

And I just finished the unabridged "Les Miserables," and that was a -that'll be about 60 disks.

CONAN: Wow.

Mr. GUIDALL: It was a wonderful trip, and people who listen to the classics would certainly appreciate it, and yet at the same time, I love doing Westerns because it's a lot of fun, and they're very - they happen to be very honest books because they don't pretend to be anything else but an adventure in the desert.

So people have different reasons for going to a particular genre, but essentially it's to have a story told to them. You know, if you don't hear a story being told to you, you're not really conscious. If nobody's reading to you, you're talking to yourself, aren't you? So that satisfies a very basic need of people to hear something going on in their heads.

CONAN: People can hear, you obviously have a terrific voice. You're an actor, as well as acting in audio books. But how did you come to specialize in this?

Mr. GUIDALL: Well, I'll tell you, at first I had no idea of the fact that it would become the phenomenon that it is. When I started, there were only about two companies doing it, and that was about 20 years ago. And it was just a job between shows.

And after I did about three or four Westerns - this was for Talking Books, which was the Library of Congress that I was working for - and I'd said: You know, I can do something else other than Westerns.

So the man in charge then started me on other books. And I realized that there was something happening here. It was not just a gig between shows. It was something that was satisfying a great range of people in different situations, whether they were unsighted, sighted, whether they were doing something with their hands.

It was beginning to show itself as something that was on the horizon as a major phenomenon for people to involve themselves in various levels of life, depending on who they listen to.

CONAN: Well, George Guidall, here's an email from one of your fans, Matthew(ph): I'm a huge fan of yours. Your narrative style is what got me into audio books. I was never a huge reader, but on my honeymoon, I picked up Stephen King, "The Dark Tower" series, and was hooked from there.

I still see the beach and hear you reading the opening line: The man in black fled across the desert, and the gunslinger followed.

Mr. GUIDALL: Wait a minute. How did you get my email?

(Soundbite of laughter)

Mr. GUIDALL: One of my favorite emails is...

CONAN: We're talking about audio books. You're listening to TALK OF THE NATION from NPR News.

(Soundbite of music)

CONAN: This is TALK OF THE NATION from NPR News. I'm Neal Conan in Washington.

We're talking about audio books today. More than a third of American adults in one survey said they've listened to one. And audio book listeners are also big readers. Ninety percent of them reported reading at least one book the previous year.

The most common genre of books that people listen to: mysteries, thrillers and suspense. The survey was released late last year by the Audio Publishers Association.

With so much competition from technology, like iPods and Podcasts and radio, what makes audio books worth buying for you? Give us a call, 800-989-8255. Email us, talk@npr.org. You can also join the conversation on our website. Go to npr.org, and click on TALK OF THE NATION.

George Guidall is one of the best-known names in the business. He's recorded over 900 audio books in the past two decades and picked up a couple of Audie Awards in the process. He's also an actor.

Arnie Cardillo, who owns Live Oak Media and produced "Here in Harlem: Poems in Many Voices," also with us. That project won for Distinguished Achievement in Production at this week's Audie Awards.

And Arnie, what was the ceremony like?

Mr. CARDILLO: It was wonderful. They had a reception before the award presentations. We went into a theater, and it was a very pleasant experience for everyone.

There used to be a time when it would be a long, drawn-out process. They've streamlined the event, and it's wonderful.

CONAN: Is it one of those where you know you won going in, or are they opening an envelope?

Mr. CARDILLO: Not at all, it's opening an envelope, and you find out right on the spot.

CONAN: Let's get Garret(ph) on the line, Garret with us from Salt Lake City.

GARRET (Caller): Hi, Neal.

CONAN: Hi, Garret. Go ahead, please.

GARRET: There's - I think the readers, the books by readers, there's three readers I really enjoy, and that's Scott Brick, Tom Stech Schulte and of course George Guidall, and they really bring the story to life.

So you can have a mediocre book and, you know, with them reading it, it makes it interesting and very palatable.

CONAN: So you go particularly for the narrators as opposed to the authors.

GARRET: Exactly. You know, I'll go and search out books just based on who the reader is, and then I'll listen to those.

CONAN: Thanks very much, Garret, that's interesting.

GARRET: Thank you.

CONAN: Here's an email from Mary(ph): My favorite audio books are those narrated by the author. Of course, that's not always possible, but when it is, I prefer them, just as I prefer unabridged over abridged books.

On a long solo drive last week, I inadvertently added an hour to my driving time by becoming so absorbed and entertained by Jill Connor Browne's "The Sweet Potato Queen's Guide to Raising Children for Fun and Profit" that I wasn't paying attention to things like highway signs and the proper exit.

So George Guidall, I assume when you get compliments like that, that kind of makes your day.

Mr. GUIDALL: Oh, it makes more than my day. It's a very rewarding thing that you end up doing. And I'll tell you, in all the experience I've had in theater, nothing quite comes up to the feedback you get from fans who are so committed to the audio book phenomenon and committed to the narrator, also.

You were talking about email before. One of my favorite emails is a guy who was in Montana, driving the freeway there somewhere, and it was at night, and he was listening to "Crime and Punishment" by Dostoyevsky. And he was so into it that he missed his exit, and he had to backup at night on the freeway, and he backed into an 18-wheeler.

And he was writing me this letter from the hospital, in which he was thanking me for the opportunity he now had to finish listening to "Crime and Punishment."

CONAN: I don't want to give it away, but Raskolnikov did it.

Mr. GUIDALL: Pardon me?

CONAN: I didn't want to give it away, but Raskolnikov did it.

Mr. GUIDALL: Yes, he did.

(Soundbite of laughter)

Mr. GUIDALL: But that was - I mean, that's an example of the commitment that people have to it.

CONAN: And it's also - acting on stage is one thing. When you're narrating an audio book, you're literally in people's heads.

Mr. GUIDALL: That's correct. And in people's heads, what happens is that there is a very specific relationship built with the listener, and often times you'll hear people say I want a book by George Guidall or Tom Stech Schulte or whoever their favorite narrator is because a bond has happened between this person bringing them some kind of emotional experience and the listener's empathy with that.

So when those empathic responses match, your relationship is built with this person talking to you. So they come back for more of the same voice. And very often, I do a library of shows called "The Art and Artifice of Audio Book Narration," and as I tour the country, one time a person came up to me after a show and said: Mr. Guidall, my wife thinks you have the sexiest voice in the audio book industry. Now that I see you, I'm not worried.

(Soundbite of laughter)

Mr. GUIDALL: Because I have some gray hairs on my head. But, you know, that relationship is built in people's heads and always a surprise to people when I come see them and say: My God, that's who that character was.

CONAN: Who are you narrating now?

Mr. GUIDALL: I am narrating an Icelandic mystery, which is very interesting because Icelandic towns have 17 syllables, none of the letters of which are pronounced the way they look. So it's taking me a little longer to come through it. But it's a very good book. Indridason is the author's name. Don't ask me to repeat it because I probably am saying it incorrectly.

But it's a fascinating experience. Here, it's in Iceland, and it gives me the opportunity to speak Icelandic.

CONAN: Probably a skill you didn't know you had until very recently.

Mr. GUIDALL: I still am not sure whether I have it or not.

(Soundbite of laughter)

CONAN: George Guidall, we'll let you get back to work. Thanks very much for your time.

Mr. GUIDALL: Thank you. Take it easy, Arnie.

Mr. CARDILLO: See you, George.

CONAN: And let's bring Janet Benson into the conversation. She's president of the Audio Publishers Association, the organization behind the Audie Awards and joins us today from the studios of Capital Public Radio in Sacramento. Nice to have you with us.

Ms. JANET BENSON (President, Audio Publishers Association): Pleasure to be here.

CONAN: And it's interesting, obviously audio books have come a long, long way, yet you've also written a piece recently in which you acknowledge there are some serious challenges.

Ms. BENSON: Right, financially. We touched on that a little bit just with the cost of production. We've often been compared as an industry to the transitions that the print industry is going through, with going to ebooks or the transition that the music industry suffered through, shall I say, with music costs and downloads.

And one thing that needs to be remembered in that is that we are adding a performance that adds a value to the book that that spoken word reaching out to you, speaking directly to your ear.

And it's also a much longer experience, obviously, when you're talking about 17 or 30 CDs, even, for some of these audio books.

CONAN: And given all of that, the price has to be competitive with, well, free.

Ms. BENSON: Exactly, and that's not an easy challenge to meet. But I don't know how we're going to do it. If I did, I'd be being hired as a consultant right now, but...

(Soundbite of laughter)

CONAN: Here's an email we have from Michael(ph) in Jacksonville: As a mystery writer myself, I wrote the Joe Kosmarsky(ph) series, published by St. Martin's Press and produced on audio by Blackstone Audio Books, I wonder whether the guests think the growth of electronics texts is good or bad for audio.

In the writing and publishing community, we worry about the diminishing use of paper and ink, even as we try to make the most of going electric. And in this huge sea change, where do audio books end up? Janet Benson?

Ms. BENSON: Well, it's interesting. I've seen a couple of samples recently, and it's not fully mainstream yet, of a system where the ebook and the audio book are integrated.

So you wake up in the morning, and over your breakfast cereal, you're reading your book and, you know, having your coffee. Then you switch over into your car, and you

switch on the machine, and it's now going to pick up exactly where you left off on the page, and audio book narrator begins.

And that kind of flexibility, I think, can only be good for the fans of audio books.

CONAN: Arnie Cardillo, I wonder what you think of that.

Mr. CARDILLO: Well, Live Oak Media is primarily a producer of children's recordings. We record children's books, and many of our products are combined with the book in the form of a read-along. So we - and we sell these primarily to schools and libraries.

So the format is changing. There are a lot of ebooks, and there are a lot of e-picture books now, and we're working - we should by the fall have a combination ebook-audio package for kids to have the read-along -excuse me - the read-along experience digitally.

CONAN: Let's get another caller in on the conversation. We'll go to Ellen(ph), Ellen with us from Grand Rapids.

ELLEN (Caller): Hi, am I on the air?

CONAN: You are.

ELLEN: Hi, I'm Ellen. I'm a college student, and I grew up listening to Harry Potter tapes. For me, having the audio book actually enhanced my imagination. You weren't seeing someone else's pictures, but you were hearing someone else's words.

So after reading the book for the first time, I knew how the author wanted to pronounce Hermione. And I could picture them, you know, having their adventures.

And so I think it - all it does is create another outlet for imagination and allows you - you know, my sister and I, we put literally the same tape in every night before we went to sleep. And so we had every word memorized. And there are tapes scattered all over our house now, and I think for me, it was just all about the imagination of it.

CONAN: Do you still buy them today?

ELLEN: I own them all. So I don't need to. But I own all the Harry Potter ones, but I do still buy audio books today. And because I'm of the technology generation, I do do a lot of downloading.

But to me, you still pay for those. So I guess, like, it's not really hurting the industry, I hope. And I think the biggest way people get them is probably through their local libraries.

I know whenever - right now, I'm actually traveling to see my family, and I have a 12-hour trip right now. So I have an audio book, and it makes the time go 10 times faster.

CONAN: Well, Ellen, we're glad you still enjoy the radio, too.

ELLEN: Thank you.

CONAN: All right, thanks very much. And it's interesting, Janet Benson: You've got, yes, you're selling, you know, product. You're selling CDs. But you're also selling downloads, and, well, there's a price difference there, isn't there?

Ms. BENSON: There usually is, yes, because of course you're not paying for the CD production cost, the actual making of the CD, as well as the distribution to a bookstore.

CONAN: Let's see if we can get some other callers in on the conversation. Let's go to Charlie(ph), Charlie with us Washington, Arkansas.

CHARLIE (Caller): Yes.

CONAN: Go ahead. You're on the air.

CHARLIE: Yes. The comment I had to make is audio books are very necessary to me. I am widowed so I'm alone. I don't hear a human voice. And I'm going blind. And so the last three and a half years, I've gone to the public library. I'm a little bit limited on the income.

CONAN: Mm-hmm.

CHARLIE: And I've checked out every audio book in a four-county area. But with the budget cuts, I've used them all up.

CONAN: Used them all up.

CHARLIE: Yes. So I'm encouraging people who have the money to buy them, after they listened to them a few times, please give them to the library. And I just found out a couple weeks ago that I'm eligible for a reading service blind from the state.

CONAN: And?

CHARLIE: And I'm going to sign up for that. And it's going to be a digital format of books.

CONAN: Well, we wish you the best of luck, Charlie, and...

CHARLIE: But it's very necessary for people like me who can't get out much.

CONAN: I can understand that. And...

CHARLIE: Please keep them.

CONAN: ...Janet Benson, it's - this is how the industry really got its start, isn't it?

Ms. BENSON: It really is. Yeah. The library market was one of our first pickups, and we find that most people who are audio book fans started by checking one out of a library on their way on a long trip and the hours fly by. And suddenly they are hooked.

CONAN: And suddenly they are hooked. But it also began as a service, reading for the blind.

Ms. BENSON: Absolutely. Right. And also, the reading for the blind is still there. In fact, 20 years ago, when I started in the industry, any audio book professional will tell you, they've heard this. Oh, I work in audio books. Oh, you mean for the blind? Well, yes, but not only for the blind. And we don't hear that anymore. We've become mainstream and people have come back to realizing just how wonderful it is to have a story told to you.

CONAN: And here's an email from Jessica in Tennessee: I love audio books because, well, sitting at my desk working I can be in a completely different world. Audio books make me feel that I'm in the story. And while sitting at my desk, I am transported to a small Southern town in the 1960s or in a dark lair with vampires, and none of my co-workers around have any idea.

And this is from Kate in St. Augustine: While I remain a printed word purist and love to hold a book in my hands while I take in a story, I have listened to audio books while traveling with my son. Since we almost exclusively read and listen only while in the car, entertainment value in narration is key. "The Pythons: Autobiography by the Pythons," and read by a few of them, would be - should be required listening, so should anything by P.G. Wodehouse.

When I was a teacher, I also found that suggesting that students listen to required reading on audio sometimes in tandem with following along with the book helped a tremendous amount of my students who were either challenged with reading skills or otherwise apathetic readers.

We're talking about audio books. You're listening to TALK OF THE NATION from NPR News. And our guests are Arnie Cardillo, who's the owner of Live Oak Media and just won the Audie Award for "Here in Harlem: Poems in Many Voices." Also with us, Janet Benson, who's president of the Audio Publishers Association.

Let's go next to Audrey, Audrey with us from Boulder.

AUDREY: Hi. I travel a lot here in the West. It's a lot of long stretches and I listen to a lot of audio books. Love George Guidall, but the two books that really changed it for me, books that I had read before, you know, with my eyes, and listen to, one was Amy Tan's "The Hundred Secret Senses," where Amy Tan read it, and also "Lolita" by Jeremy Irons. And those books were completely different stories when I heard them in someone else's voices than the way - than the voice that I have in my head reading them. And it's made a huge difference.

CONAN: Of course, Nabokov wrote "Lolita," Jeremy Irons narrated it.

AUDREY: Yes, exactly.

CONAN: Okay.

AUDREY: And, you know, all I can say, she sounded - that nasty little girl. It was a completely different story than when I read it myself, where - yeah, Humbert was a terrible person.

(Soundbite of laughter)

CONAN: Okay. Audrey, thanks very much for the phone call.

AUDREY: Okay.

CONAN: Appreciate it. And Arnie Cardillo, it must add an awful lot to production when you have to bring in a talent like Jeremy Irons. That can't be cheap.

Mr. CARDILLO: No, working with a celebrity just adds to the cost of the production and - but, you know, it's a great - again, as George said, it's an opportunity to do something other - and experience another mode of performance for the actors and actresses. So I think they enjoy doing it and sometimes they're very reasonable in their expectations.

CONAN: Sometimes they're reasonable.

(Soundbite of laughter)

CONAN: Sometimes. Elizabeth in Denver, Colorado, emails: How does one begin a career as a producer of audio books? And I guess, Arnie, that's to you.

Mr. CARDILLO: It's not easy. I mean, you - it's hard to start from ground zero or scratch and then try to develop a line of audio books. You know, I had a background in sound engineering, sound editing, and it became the platform for me to then develop my skills and become a producer.

CONAN: Janet Benson, are people knocking down the walls to become audio book producers?

Ms. BENSON: You know, we have more people knocking down the walls to be narrators because their children tell them their voice is wonderful and they don't realize the long hours of studio time and the challenge that it is to actually knocking out a great audio book.

Producers, there's always more opportunities. The challenges are there. If you're looking to do a book that's been published, then you need to clear the rights with the publisher who did the print book. You have to figure out, you know, who you're going to have narrate and what sales - what channels you can use to sell it. But it's an open industry and our website, audiopub.org, can tell a lot of people the basics of audio book industry and how to break in.

CONAN: Let's see if we get one more caller in, and you have to make it quick, David. David is calling us from Sand Springs, Oklahoma.

DAVID (Caller): Yes. And a quick question. How often do authors narrate their own books? I mean, I've heard interviews with authors and they had kind of the voice of a - the character of a jellyfish, maybe. But some of them...

(Soundbite of laughter)

DAVID: ...especially the ethnic ones - you mentioned Amy Tan and I...

CONAN: OK. OK. We have to make it quick, David. Janet Benson, is there a breakdown on how often authors read their own books or you hire golden voiced radio announcers?

Ms. BENSON: There you go, Neal. You can call me anytime. The - there's not really a breakdown on that. The publisher has to decide. Is that - does that person have the voice, and will they have the stamina?

CONAN: OK. David, thanks very much for the call. We appreciate it. And we want to thank our guest, Janet Benson, who's the president of the Audio Publishers Association, with us from Capital Public Radio in Sacramento. Thanks very much for your time today.

Ms. BENSON: Thank you, Neal.

CONAN: And Arnie Cardillo, again, congratulations on your Audie Award.

Mr. CARDILLO: Thank you very much. Appreciate it.

CONAN: Arnie Cardillo is the owner of Live Oak Media. His Audie Award was for "Here in Harlem: Poems in Many Voices." He joined us from our bureau in New York.

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