



Commissioning Brief



Commissioning Brief No. 31232

Between the Ears

For BBC *Radio 3* for September 2026 -
September 2027

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SECTION A: EDITORIAL OPPORTUNITY

Commissioning Brief ID / Title: 31232: Between the Ears

Commissioning Editor	Matthew Dodd
Commissioning Contact	Matthew Dodd/David Ireland
Commissioning Brief Title	Between the Ears
Network	Radio 3
Guide Price	£8150
Genre	Factual – Arts, Culture and the Media
Duration	30'
No. of Episodes	c.12
Transmission Period	September 2026- September 2027
Slot Day	Sunday
Slot Time	1915-1945
Production Location	No restriction
Commissioning Round	2026/27 – Round 1 (Speech Programming)

Important Points to Note:

Short Proposals and your responses to the **Production Eligibility Questionnaire** must be submitted via PiCoS, **using Commissioning Brief 31232: Between the Ears, and Commissioning Round 1 2026/27**, before the deadline at **noon on Thursday 9th October 2025**.

- This title will be commissioned under the Audio Terms of Trade.
- Proposals must be submitted in accordance with the requirements contained in this document and on the commissioning website. Proposals not complying may be rejected by the Commissioners whose decision in this matter will be final.



The **Production Eligibility Questionnaire** can be found in **Appendix 1**. This is the first part of your submission and it will be considered as part of the process. Please only complete if you've not previously been commissioned by the network, otherwise enter "N/A".

More information relating to all commissioning briefs and rounds, regardless of Network can be found on the '[Pitching Ideas](#)' page of the Radio Commissioning Website.

1. About BBC Radio 3

BBC Radio 3 is the BBC's classical music station, also offering a range of broader cultural programming to entertain and absorb audiences. Classical music leads its daytime schedule, complemented by a host of live concerts and live performance every day. Alongside this are distinctive programmes on jazz, world music, as well as documentaries and speech programmes.

Network Editorial Strategy & Objectives

Cultural programming is a central part of Radio 3's mission.

- We believe classical music is for everyone. We aim to create an inclusive, welcoming space for all listeners that brings people together through shared experience and understanding, providing a place of inspiration, and a means to navigate a complex world.
- We pride ourselves on being a commissioner of distinctive classical music programmes, shining a new light on well-loved artistic works and investing in new talent.
- We are one of the most significant commissioners of contemporary classical music anywhere in the world and the biggest broadcaster of live classical concerts including the BBC Proms.

Diversity

Diversity & Inclusion is a priority for all of us. We want BBC Content to be demonstrably the best organisation in the audio sector to work for and with; one which reflects the diversity of the UK; and where people feel welcomed, appreciated, respected, and can be themselves and produce their best work.

Radio 3 is dedicated to improving diversity and inclusion across the station through a long-term strategy which will lead to an even richer musical and cultural offering. Radio 3 monitors representation across the network through the BBC 50:50 initiative and has launched several creative initiatives on diversity – including our partnership projects with the Arts and Humanities Research Council to support research on and performance of



composers from diverse backgrounds and the Open Music scheme designed to bring creatives and musicians of all genres, styles and backgrounds from across the UK to the BBC.

The station is part of BBC Radio's Diversity and inclusion commitment, looking for new approaches to evolve listener engagement which will broaden the appeal of the network to new audiences. And contributing to a more diverse and inclusive classical music industry as a whole, as well as other genres of music and culture. We are interested to hear your inclusive content ideas and how they might be expressed across the music played, stories told and voices heard. You may wish to consider how your proposal might contribute to the expanded 50/50 Diversity initiative and how your company already aligns with our D&I Commissioning Commitments, or could do so in future (See Appendix 1).

2. The Editorial Opportunity

Between the Ears showcases unique adventures in music, sound and imaginative storytelling that only audio features can create. Its aim is to create innovative and surprising features – whose sonic qualities come to the fore. Programmes in this slot should stop listeners dead in their tracks, leaving them glued to the art of radio. It's an award-winning strand.

The proposals for Between the Ears should be adventurous – primarily in structure and treatment. But they must be human-centred stories. They can use music, sound designed-beds, poetry, interviews, location, special effects – and more. We're looking for ideas that turn features into compositions and have a musical quality – even when they don't involve huge amounts of music.

We try to avoid proposals that:

- Rely on a presenter. This isn't a slot for orthodox presentation – you're more likely to have some sort of lead contributor to take the audience through the story.
- Are too wordy, chatty or informational. We're looking for programmes where speech is part of the composition.
- Are better suited to a sound installation because they lack any narrative or clear evolution.
- Use a short sound effect or an audio gimmick as their *raison d'être*.
- Feel excessively obscure or baffling to the audience.
- Don't have a narrative structure – although we welcome unconventional narratives, anti-narratives and other alternative storytelling.



What we're looking for:

This is a slot for producers to showcase their labour of love, the programme with a difference that they are passionate to make. Collaborations with musicians are encouraged – but we are unlikely to commission proposals that feel like purely musical compositions.

We'd like to see more proposals that involve collaborations with sound designers and sound artists. There does need to be a strong audio producer working alongside them.

Poets and “Radio poetry” are an important part of this slot – but these need to be genuine radiophonic poems that are an integral part of the feature – not a setting or an accompaniment.

Experimental use of audio-drama is welcome here.

The natural world is a popular subject for proposals for this slot. As a result, we're looking for even more innovation in programmes which engage with the music of nature. We're always looking for more proposals that have a lighter feel to keep the mix in this slot varied.

Between the Ears should provide a shop window for new talent in audio production, as well as a platform for established radio producers. We need more proposals that involve younger contributors, contemporary stories, younger collaborators and the younger sound worlds that is thriving on podcasts.

Some recent highlights – all available on BBC Sounds

Dead Man's Handshake: Between the Ears descends into the pitch-black underworld of Britain's ancient, flooded limestone caves. On a cold day in 1978, three experienced cave divers entered an underwater tunnel at Keld Head, in the Yorkshire Dales. Hours later, one of them had disappeared, seemingly without a trace. With first-hand testimony from cave diver Geoff Yeadon, who led the expedition, and a specially commissioned soundtrack by analogue tape composer Howlround, Dead Man's Handshake is a haunting voyage into the depths, where rescue is almost impossible.

East Piano: The frontline sonic journal of a Ukrainian musician-soldier. Wartime soundscapes recorded by Ukrainian experimental musician-turned-soldier Timur Dzhafarov: sketches on a broken piano in an abandoned house near Bakhmut, rain on a field hospital roof, dogs howling in tune to the sirens...



Snoopy and the Mighty Pucks: A joyous skate into ice hockey for the over-70s, and Charles M. Schulz, creator of Peanuts. Slippery sonic thrills on the rink, Charlie Brown, and the music of John Adams. Schulz loved ice hockey, and built a skating arena right next to his studio, in Santa Rosa, California, eating his lunch there every day. In his cartoons everyone plays hockey – Lucy, Snoopy, Linus, Woodstock, and of course, Charlie Brown. He also hosted “Snoopy’s Senior World Hockey Tournament”, right up until his death in 2000, in which players from the age of 40, up until 97, could compete.

A Young Girl's Guide to Horror: Award-winning poet Joelle Taylor returns to the cinema in Rawtenstall where her mother worked, and where she grew up - celebrating the horror films that turned her into a writer, with brand new poetry that evokes the projection box, the usherettes, memories of being a child in front of the big screen, and the ghosts that haunted the building.

Staggering in the Dark: A sonic mosaic of collective grief and bawdy outpourings of remembrance, woven from recordings made at the annual Staggering in the Dark event at The Hand In Hand pub in Brighton. This mosaic for radio combines the companionship of barroom scenes with forays into the reflective inner worlds of those present on the night, in a sonic exploration of what it is to grieve, collectively and in private.

Vincent van Gogh in Brixton: Retracing Vincent van Gogh's walks home from his office near Covent Garden in the 1870s. A century later, the discovery of his Stockwell lodgings reveals a story of unrequited love. We recreate the sounds of van Gogh's evening walk back to his lodgings on Hackford Road, Brixton.

Automata! Machines in search of autonomy: Between the Ears expresses and ponders the world of the automaton; from a miraculous 16th century table-top mechanical 'Monk' designed to rouse penitence, via the artistically expressive trio of 18th century clockwork performers by the Jaquet-Droz family, to the ever expansive and ambitious "métamatics" of Swiss kinetic sculptor Jean Tinguely.

Einstein Fix: an electronic symphony: Einstein Patrick Mupalu - 'Einstein Fix' - is the go-to repair man in Cape Town for mobile phones and laptops. Any device, almost any problem, six days a week, 'he fix', and in record time. Originally from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Einstein has, since 2009, sought asylum in South Africa where he works out of a tiny shop on Cape Town's affluent Bree Street. In this electronic symphony, Einstein's poignant personal story is told in 'movements', alongside the hustle, humour, energy, noise and multiplicity of voices that fill his every day.



3. Sustainability

The BBC is committed to informing and inspiring listeners about how they, as individuals, can take steps towards more sustainable living.

Your proposal should consider how the editorial and production methods contribute towards the BBC's Net Zero strategy – you can read about this [here](#).

Where appropriate sustainability themes should be woven into the editorial – either implicitly or explicitly. Unsustainable portrayals should be avoided in favour of showing more sustainable practices, e.g. if the narrative allows maybe a character takes a train journey instead of a flight, or presenters use re-usable cups instead of disposable ones.

Production methods should demonstrate good practice – minimising negative environmental impacts (e.g. from energy, waste, travel) and where possible making a positive contribution.

For further information please discuss sustainability with the Commissioning Editor, and see our Radio Commissioning site [here](#).

4. Key Deliverables

Audio four weeks ahead of broadcast; Proteus description that is designed for BBC Sounds; readiness to co-operate with BBC Radio 3 Comms and Marketing teams.

Music is central to these programmes, and the proposals commissioned in this slot will need to align with the BBC's music policy guidelines for availability beyond 30 days on BBC Sounds, and potentially on the RSS feed. The policy is available here [Using Music in BBC Speech Audio Content](#). The commissioning editor is keen to ensure those music guidelines work effectively for your proposal, so please don't hold back or restrict the scope of any idea because you are uncertain of what can be achieved within them. If your short proposal is selected for development, the music element can then be discussed.

5. Success Measures

Clear audience impact; strong on-demand performance on BBC Sounds – particularly for over-45s; critical and press attention; Reinforcement of Between The Ears as an appointment to listen.

6. Compliance and Editorial Guidelines

You will be required to deliver programmes that are in line with the BBC's Editorial Guidelines and be able to adapt to the BBC's changing editorial and business needs during the period of the commission.



SECTION B: PROCESS, ASSESSMENT & EVALUATION

STAGE 1: Short Proposal and Shortlisting

Step 1: Production Experience

- Review the Production Experience Questionnaire section in Appendix 1.
- Enter your responses in the 'Production Experience' section in PiCoS.
- The questionnaire is designed to allow the BBC to understand more about your company and your experience of producing Radio 3-style programmes.
- The evaluation team (see full list below in Section 2), will review all production questionnaires against the editorial brief set out in Section A before evaluating the Short Proposal.
- Note: your short proposal may be declined at this stage if the information provided indicates you do not meet the criteria, so please answer these questions carefully.

Step 2: Short Proposal

- Suppliers who performed best on their production questionnaire (by best demonstrating their experience and capability in producing (inset network/department) style programmes) will have their Short Proposal assessed and a shortlist will be compiled.
- Your Short Proposal should be no more than 250 words and summarise your specific ideas. (PiCoS will allow you to enter more words but you should still stay within the word count for this commissioning round in order for your proposal to be fully considered) The proposal should demonstrate your ability to produce the programme, and answer the editorial objectives and other requirements as set out in the Editorial Opportunity.
- Enter your proposal in the 'Short Proposal' section in PiCoS before the deadline at noon on Thursday 9th October 2025.

Step 3: Shortlisting notification

You will be notified of the outcome of Stages 1 & 2. Shortlisted suppliers will be asked to submit a Full Proposal. No feedback will be provided for unsuccessful proposals at this stage.



STAGE 2: Full Proposal

Step 1: We may issue further relevant programme production information to all producers reaching this stage. If sensitive information is being released then producers will be asked to sign a non-disclosure agreement (NDA).

Step 2: Producers will be invited to provide Full Proposals, via PiCoS, responding to this commissioning brief, which includes all the elements outlined in Section D (“Full Proposals”). For guidance, your Full Proposal should not exceed **two sides of A4** when printed using Arial font, size 11. (Any scripts or samples can be in addition).

Step 3: Producers will be offered the opportunity to discuss the programme brief with Radio 3 Head of Speech prior to submitting their Full Proposals.

Step 4: We will evaluate all full proposals against the editorial brief, as given above, and commission those we feel most successfully fulfil the brief and help to make up the most varied and balanced season of Between the Ears.

Step 5: Producers who are successful will be notified on PiCoS. Feedback for rejected proposals will be also be given here. Further feedback can be requested at a later stage.

Note: At any stage of the process, we may need to come back to you to seek clarification. Your answers will be factored into the evaluation process as appropriate.

STAGE 3: Commission Awarded and Contract Signed

THE EVALUATION TEAM

The following people may be involved in the evaluation of your proposal at various stages:

Sam Jackson, Controller, Radio 3

Matthew Dodd, Head of Speech Programmes, Radio 3

David Ireland, Senior Planning Manager, Radio 3

Subject matter experts (e.g. production experts, network management, diversity, finance, etc.) may also be consulted.



SECTION C: THE COMMISSIONING TIMETABLE

The commissioning process for this opportunity consists of a number of stages, as set out in the timetable below:

Stage	Timings	Activities
Launch	Tuesday 2nd September 2025	Publication of commissioning brief documentation and round opens in PiCoS.
Commissioning Webinar	Friday 12th Sept 2025	An online briefing from commissioners (full details to follow)
Short Proposals and shortlisting	Noon on Thursday 9th October 2025	Deadline for Short Proposals to be submitted via PiCoS.
	Tuesday 4th November 2025	Suppliers shortlisted, notified of outcomes and asked to prepare Full Proposals.
Full Proposals and shortlisting	10th November – 5th December 2025	Opportunity to discuss commissioning brief with Commissioners prior to submitting Full Proposals.
	Noon on Tuesday 9th December 2025	Deadline for Full Proposals to be submitted via PiCoS. Evaluation panel shortlists Full Proposals.
Conditional Commissions offered	Late January 2026	Commissioning decisions made, subject to contract. Editorial specifications agreed. Feedback submitted on PiCoS.

We will assess your proposal according to this timetable. **Late submissions cannot be accepted.**

If you have any questions about this commissioning brief that need answering before you submit your Short Proposal, please ensure you email them to david.ireland@bbc.co.uk by 3rd October 2025 at the latest.



SECTION D: FULL PROPOSALS AND REFERENCE INFORMATION

Please refer to this [important information](#) on the Radio commissioning website, regarding submission of your full proposal, including guidance on how to set out your budget.

Proposals must be submitted in accordance with the requirements contained in this commissioning brief and on the commissioning website. Proposals not complying may be rejected by the Commissioner whose decision in this matter will be final.

All the information required should be included in the two pages of your proposal (plus any supporting information).

The BBC reserves the right at any time prior to award of a commission, and without incurring any liability to the affected suppliers, to accept or reject any proposal, or to annul the commissioning process, rejecting all proposals.

More information relating to all commissioning briefs and rounds, regardless of station, can be found on the [Pitching ideas](#) page of the Radio commissioning website.



APPENDIX 1: Production Eligibility & Experience

Guidance

The Production Eligibility Questionnaire is the first part of your submission that the BBC will consider as part of the process. Please only complete it if you have not previously been commissioned by the network. Otherwise just insert “N/A”.

Once completed, please copy and paste your responses into the **‘Production experience’** section of the Create Proposal page in PiCoS (maximum 1,000 words).

Questionnaire

Part 1: Production Eligibility & Experience

Please outline your relevant production experience, using recent examples, in the following areas:

We require a production base with relevant experience and staffing depth in national radio production.

[Insert details]

We require a production base with an understanding of the importance of multi-platform content, and recent company/production team experience of producing engaging content for online/on demand and social platforms.

[Insert details]

We require a production base with relevant production team experience of talent management to the level required and the ability to build those relationships quickly and effectively.

[Insert details]

Part 2: Partnerships

Complete Part 2 ONLY if you plan to submit a full proposal as part of a partnership.

Please list each partnership and describe the responsibilities each partner will take.

[Insert details]

Please indicate the lead company with whom the BBC will contract.

[Insert details]

Please include the key personnel responsible for the production and delivery of the programme and details of the partnering company they are currently contracted to.

[Insert details]



APPENDIX 2: Diversity & Inclusion

We want BBC Radio & Music to be the best organisation in the audio sector to work with and for - with an inclusive culture, diverse teams and representative programmes. That's why, across radio and television, we are prioritising £80m annually of our commissioning budget on commissions that meet our criteria for diverse and inclusive content.

Programmes must meet two of the three criteria to count towards the commitment:

- Diverse stories and portrayal on-air: Representing all audiences around the UK
- Diverse Production Leadership: Influential roles off-screen or off-air involved in shaping and making programmes for the BBC
- Diverse Company Leadership: Senior roles involved in shaping and leading production companies making programmes for the BBC

There will be opportunities throughout the commissioning process to discuss how programme-makers and suppliers are meeting the criteria. This will not affect whether or not your commission is accepted, and our commissioning teams will be on hand if you need any further support or advice. It is important to note that this commitment is not a commissioning criteria, but rather a way for us to invest a proportion of our existing commissioning budget to increase representation both on and off air.

The full definitions supporting each priority can be found [here](#) and some FAQs [here](#).

