



WSIRN Episode [number]: [Title]
Hosted by Anne Bogel, with guest [name]

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MICHELE: First of all, a celebrity memoir that's read by that celebrity, I'm never going to read that with my eyes. [BOTH LAUGH]

[CHEERFUL INTRO MUSIC]

ANNE: Hey readers. I'm Anne Bogel, and this is What Should I Read Next? Episode 182. Welcome to the show that's dedicated to answering the question that plagues every reader: What should I read next?

We don't get bossy on this show: What we WILL do here is give you the information you need to choose your next read. Every week we'll talk all things books and reading and do a little literary matchmaking with one guest.

A request I hear a LOT from What Should I Read Next? listeners is "please please, can you do another episode about audiobooks??" And I couldn't agree more, because audiobooks are an important part of my life too. So today I brought in someone TOTALLY qualified to not only help me recommend audiobooks for YOU, but to match me with my next great audiobook read. I'll let guest Michele Cobb explain why she's exactly the right person for this job.

We're chatting today about the marriage of a great book with a great narrator, visual and auditory learning styles, jumping off points if you're still on the fence about reading with your ears, and how Michele holds the key to some truly fantastic and FREE audiobooks you can get your hands on this Summer.

Let's get to it!

Michele, welcome to the show.

MICHELE: Hi, thanks for having me.

ANNE: Oh, it is my pleasure. I'm so excited to talk books and today to especially talk about audiobooks. You know, I was about to say they're having a moment, but I don't see this a fad. I think it's more a trend, the surging popularity in audiobooks.

MICHELE: That is definitely true. We've seen as an industry, six years of double digit growth in sales units and dollars. So this is something that's been going on for a while and I think finally, everyone's realizing wow, audiobooks are here to stay and they are really growing and they are really part of the consciousness of the, you know, at least the American population, if not the world.

ANNE: Now you said sale units and dollars, but what's really going on there? Do we have audiobook listeners listening to more audiobooks or is the popularity of the genre spreading?

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MICHELE: Yeah, so it's a little bit of both. We've got more titles being actually made, so over a five year period, the number of titles that was created on a day-to-day basis was doubled. And we've got more people listening. We've got people who are listening to podcasts who then come to audio and vice versa.

So we've gotten this, you know, happy place with audio, not just in your car, but in your home on your smart speaker. On your smartphone. It's really something ... everyone is doing all the time and it's very fun for me as someone who's been in the industry for 20 years now, to see audiobooks referenced on television all the time and things like that. Where as when I started, I would always have to explain, it's like a book on tape that you got from the library. Now I say audiobook and someone gives me the list of what they've listened to over the last six months. So it - it's a fun change.

ANNE: Michele, what do you do professionally before I start interrogating you about the details?

MICHELE: Sure. [LAUGHS] Well I do a little bit of everything. I am the publisher of audiofile magazine and I run the audiobook SYNC program with the help of many people on staff, including the fantastic Francisca Goldsmith. I am the executor director of the audio publishers association. I'm a small audio publisher myself, and I do a lot of consulting about audiobooks and audio items for a variety of organizations around the world.

ANNE: So it's fair to say that your job is all audiobooks, all the time.

MICHELE: It pretty much is, yes. [LAUGHS]

ANNE: Okay. So I can see why your ears would pick up when you see audiobooks mentioned on TV, but I don't even know what that would look like. Do you mean characters on TV shows?

MICHELE: Exactly. So I was watching a medical show the other day and the patient was asking a nurse to leave her room, so that she could get back into her juicy audiobook.

ANNE: [LAUGHS] Now that I can relate to.

MICHELE: Yeah. [LAUGHS]

ANNE: Okay, so it is really becoming a part of the public consciousness.

MICHELE: Absolutely.

ANNE: I love it. Well for all that, I still talk to a fair number of readers who say, ugh, that format doesn't work for me, and I have a list of tips and tricks I like to recommend in those cases because I do think that they work for a great number of listeners. What do you recommend people do when they say it's not a genre they've explored yet and they're not really sure how to get a hang of listening in this medium?

[00:04:31]

MICHELE: Well I always like to give them a good recommendation for a title that they would be interested in reading with their eyes. So what kind of books do you like, what kind of books do you read? And then I try to match that with a good audiobook choice for them. And talk a little bit about their lifestyle. Are they someone that commutes a lot? Are they someone that walks a lot? Are they someone who likes to come home and read a book at night? And try to give them a suggestion for a title and then a suggestion for where to actually listen to that title.

ANNE: Oh, that's interesting. So when I'm recommending books to a reader, I want to match the right reader with the right book. Additionally, it sounds like what you need to do, is get an audiobook because audiobooks aren't ... I called them a genre earlier. That was wrong. [MICHELE LAUGHS] They're ... It is a medium that represents a wide variety of genres. So you need to get the right book for not just the right reader, but the right moment in that reader's life.

MICHELE: Absolutely. You can drill down and ask him what types of podcasts or radio shows they listen to and get a sense for a voice that they might like as well. So you can really spend a lot of time trying to hone in on the right audiobook to start someone on. [LAUGHS]

ANNE: We hear a lot of readers say, "I don't listen to podcasts anymore. I'm just listening to audiobooks." Or "I don't listen to audiobooks anymore. I'm just listening to podcasts." Have you seen ways in which podcasts and audiobooks really play well together? Do you see a lot of listeners doing both regularly?

MICHELE: Absolutely. That's what we're seeing in general is people who listen to podcasts listen to twice as many as audiobooks and people who listen to audiobooks are very likely to listen to podcasts. There's a lot of going back and forth because there's a comfort level with the

format and the differences are more in business model and a little bit of content as opposed to how and where you take it in.

ANNE: Interesting. Tell me specifically about audiobook outreach for teens. How did that program get started?

MICHELE: Well it's hard to say, but it's been 10 years. [LAUGHS]

ANNE: 10 years?

MICHELE: [LAUGHS] Yup. Yes.

ANNE: Y'all have been doing this SYNC program for 10 years?

[00:06:33]

MICHELE: Yes.

ANNE: That's amazing.

MICHELE: It is incredible. So it's really the brainchild of Robin Whitten, who's the founder of audiofile magazine, and Kirsten Cappy, who's someone that she worked with in Portland, Maine. They came up with this idea to say hey, we're going to give away audiobooks to teens to really help them in their literacy journey, to help them read more, and to introduce them to the format.

And 10 years later, we're going strong with, you know, nearly 180,000 downloads of the audiobooks last summer.

ANNE: Well this is a program I love and have been blogging about on Modern Mrs. Darcy for years because audiobooks are a valuable resource and one that is not free unless you're getting them from your library. And you all make a huge number of audiobooks free. Two books, one week at a time, every summer, and the quality of the titles is incredible. How are you all able to make this happen?

MICHELE: Well we're really lucky because the publishers support the program. So we actually work in conjugation with them to select a range of titles. This year, we have 14 weeks of titles, so that's 28 titles that we can have, and we try to find something for everyone. You know, have some things about ... that are more sporty or have some things that are more historical, nonfiction, fiction, plays, classics, you know, new stuff. This year was just an amazing experience where we kept going to publishers and saying, this is the title we would like to request, and they kept saying yes. [ANNE LAUGHS] Normally there's a lot more back and forth, but you know, they just really laid out everything that we wanted.

So we're really proud of the selections this summer and of the fact that the publishers are so supportive of the program.

ANNE: I know when I like to listen to audiobooks, I do it when I run. I do it when I'm driving in the car by myself. I do it when I'm folding laundry. What do you find unique about teen listening habits?

MICHELE: That's really a good question. I'm not sure I have the answer to that. But you know, we see teens listening on earbuds a lot and, you know, we just don't know what they're listening to, and I think the funny thing that has been revealed to us over the past few years, is that how many of them are listening to an audio program and not just music.

ANNE: I'm going to think about that the next time I see a 17-year-old with earbuds in at Target.

[00:08:57]

MICHELE: [LAUGHS] Yes.

ANNE: Michele, on my blog for years, I've been sharing what I can book flights and I took the name from wine flights and the idea is when you have several different samples of something that have elements in common, but also have elements unique to that specific thing, whether you're talking about a glass of wine or I'm from Kentucky, so we have bourbon flights here.

[MICHELE LAUGHS]

Or whether you're talking about literature, when you have titles that have a common theme and yet are distinct, I believe that reading those two things together heightens the experience. And something I really appreciate about the way the SYNC program does audiobooks is you do pair two titles that have exactly that - there's a strong link between the two, but they are distinct their interpretation of it.

But it's not always easy to make these flights, to make these pairings. What is your all's process for presenting these books as pairs?

MICHELE: It's very much like a puzzle. So sometimes we go out and we say, okay, we've listened to this particular title and we really want to get it in the program and what might thematically fit with it. Is it a book about friendship? Is it a book about World War II? And then we'll try to go to a publisher, another publisher, and say hey, we've got this title. We think your title would be a good pair, can we have that title?

So sometimes that happens. Sometimes we think, oh, we've got this classic book and we have something that is similar, like a retelling, you know. We might have *Beauty and the Beast* and then *Cruel Beauty*. Things like that, so sometimes those reveal. And sometimes, you know, it's true, we're coming down to the end, we've got all these great titles and we're looking at them, going, okay, which - which ones match together well? And what could be the theme here. So it

might be fighting against a common enemy or it might be divorce, something like that. Where the two books themselves are very, very different, but they happen to have this through line or same key element and then we can pair those together. But sometimes we're definitely kinda pushing the boulder up the hill to figure out. [BOTH LAUGH] What's this pair? You know.

ANNE: I can appreciate that. Can you say what some of the specific titles are you're most excited about for this year's program?

MICHELE: Well I'm super excited in particular about the first week because we have Kwame Alexander's *Swing*, then *Blink & Caution* by Tim Wynne-Jones, narrated by the fantastic MacLeod Andrews. And so these are titles about teens that are, you know, fighting against something and also running away from something, and dealing with all the coming of age things that they have to deal with. And they're just really interesting books.

Swing being kind of a vocal poem, and *Blink & Caution* being a thriller. So those aren't two titles I think most people would listen to together, but it is a really unique listening week and I think an excellent way to kick things off this year.

[00:12:01]

ANNE: Yes. I mean, Kwame Alexander would be an excellent introduction to audiobooks for any listener.

MICHELE: Yeah.

ANNE: Because he writes those novels in verse that I won't speak for you, but I don't always get the feel of how it's supposed to sound when what I see is words on the page. But then I heard him read me *The Crossover* and went ohh! And you can never unhear that.

MICHELE: Exactly. And they're so often when there's something written with a particular accent in mind or a particular rhythm in mind that I can't get from reading with my eyes, so I have a really enhanced experience and a much better experience, even understanding the text, when I hear it read by someone.

ANNE: I like to listen to audiobooks set in countries and regions that I'm not familiar with because then the narrator pronounces the names for you, and I never have to wonder, how do you say that? Because it can really nag at me the whole book.

MICHELE: [LAUGHS] Yeah.

ANNE: But it just gives me the feel of it. And I also like that strong sense of place that a book with a good accent gives you. Looking at the SYNC Summer Calendar, I'm also really excited about week 8 with a Mary Roach book, paired with *The Golden Day* by Ursula Dubosarsky. It never occurred to me that teens would be reading Mary Roach, but I don't know why not.

MICHELE: Well that's the fun thing is that we can offer titles that, you know, might not think of as a young adult title, but we know that young adults are interested in the topic and they might not have had the same exposure to it that we did in the press, but suddenly they could try something and be exposed to something new. And I think that's a totally exciting element where we can open someone's eyes.

ANNE: I'm assuming you are an audiobook listener.

MICHELE: I am indeed. [LAUGHS]

ANNE: As a listener, what do you think are the elements that make for a really wonderful audiobook experience?

[00:13:48]

MICHELE: Well there's all sorts of different things when it comes to my listening that I like. So first of all, a celebrity memoir that's read by that celebrity, I'm never going to read that with my eyes. [ANNE LAUGHS] But hearing, you know, Tina Fey do *Bossypants*, I listened to that twice because she was just so engaging, so interesting, and she kind of opened herself up in a different way. All these things I didn't know about her, watching on television. I get way more interested in actors listening to them narrator an audiobook, whether it be their own memoir, or a piece of fiction. That's been really funny for me recently, hearing Gary Sinise for instance, David Tennant narrate audio books. [ANNE LAUGHS] I'm like, oh, right, I like them way more than I had remembered that I liked them, you know? [LAUGHS]

One of the other things that I of course find always exciting is listening to full cast recordings. So listening to plays or pieces that are done with sound effects and music, kind of an audio drama type experience, I really like that. And I listen to a lot of the plays that L.A. Theatre Works has done, and we have *Spill*, which is about the deep water horizon oil spill as part of the SYNC program this year, so I just finished listening to that, in fact.

And what's really fun for me as a listener in a traditional audiobook is a narrator who brings something new to the text that just captures me. I've been known to walk around the block a number of times, [ANNE LAUGHS] drive around the block a number of times, you know, not be where I'm supposed to be because I'm so engaged in a particular story, really due to the beautiful performance that's being brought forth by the narrator. I think I say it again and again, so it feels like a cliché to me, but the marriage of a great book and a great narrator really just keeps me listening and is a very special thing about audiobooks.

ANNE: Oh, is very true, and a reason I just want to encourage new listeners who give one audiobook a try and say, eh, that wasn't for me. Give another book a try because not all performances are equal and also I know that many readers find that they can do one genre

really well on audio, but don't always enjoy other ones. And that's what I had in mind when I picked my favorites because today, I get to get recommendations from you.

MICHELE: Oh, I look forward to that. Yes. [LAUGHS]

ANNE: Readers, The Great Courses Plus is a streaming learning service that offers in-depth, reliable information on tons of different topics. Whether you're interested in learning a language or an instrument or you want to study history, religion, or literature in depth.

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I have a tendency to add just about anything that catches my eye to my watchlist myself. I did this most recently after seeing all of the images from the recent fire at Notre Dame. I'm not inclined to watch a full course on cathedrals, but I am eager to watch the lecture on Notre Dame and share with my kids what makes it such an important and special place.

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ANNE: We're putting a spin on our show format today. Most weeks, a guest tells me three books they love, one book they don't, and what they're reading now, and I recommend three titles they may enjoy reading next. Well today, I get to tell you three of my favorite, fairly recent audiobook listens. I tried to pick ones that have come out in the past year, year and a half or so, and you're going to steer me toward three new audiobook selections.

Readers always say that it is impossible to choose favorites because there's so many different ways they could think about it and their favorites change with the seasons and even with the day of the week, so I had to give myself a structure. I chose fairly recent audiobook listens and I also wanted to choose favorites for me that represented my favorite genres to listen to on audiobook. I imagine you hear about a lot of different listeners and their listening experiences. I've heard plenty of listeners say, I prefer nonfiction, I prefer fiction, I prefer long, I prefer short ... It runs the gamut, I imagine.

[00:19:59]

MICHELE: It really does. And I think it - it depends on the day of the week and the mood someone's in, many times. [LAUGH] You know. They think they enjoy one thing until they try something else. It's like oh yes, I like that too.

ANNE: [LAUGHS] Well I know that three reliable genres from me are memoir, just like you were saying -- I do love a good celebrity read memoir these days and that is what I've chosen here. I love mystery, or even thriller, because when you can't wait to find out what happens next, you walk the extra blocks. Like Daisy gets a really long walk that day and I do think the sign of a

truly fantastic audiobook is if I sit in the car in the driveway, just listening to the end of the chapter, like you mentioned.

Then I love any book that is elevated by the actual reading experience. Whether there's something to it that makes it better by being read aloud. Sometimes this is poetry. We talked about Kwame Alexander and his novels in verse. Sometimes it's a really excellent performance that just gives it that extra bit of oomph, and so I've chosen one of those as well.

I'm ready to dive into my favorites in more detail if you are.

MICHELE: Absolutely. Let's do it.

[00:21:06]

ANNE: Okay. The first book I chose has been hugely popular. I believe it's the bestselling book in the United States last year. I think, right?

MICHELE: Oh, yes. This has just been, you know ... [BOTH LAUGH]

ANNE: It's sold like a million and a half copies the first week. It was bananas. But I chose *Becoming* by Michelle Obama. I mean, I was looking forward to reading this. I heard it was great on audio because she reads it herself. I don't always love audiobooks more because they're read by the author, but I do love it when an author can tell their own story because I trust their words a little more, I enjoy it a little more when I know that they're emphasizing the things that matter to them.

So for *Becoming*, I was a little bit interested in the political aspect, but like many people, I think Michelle Obama is one classy lady. I love reading stories about people in impossible situations and living in the White House seems awfully close to being an impossible situation, especially with a young family. And as a reader, I love to hear about the behind-the-scenes aspect of pretty much anything. And wow, did this book deliver on that front. Is this one you've read, Michele?

MICHELE: I have listened to a bit of it. I haven't listened to the whole thing yet. But it's, you know, supposed to be the bestselling memoir of all time and I really just wish I could have been a fly on the wall when they were in there recording with Michelle Obama. [ANNE LAUGHS] Because obviously she's a good orator. She knows what she's doing. She can give a speech, but it's a very different skill to record your own audiobook and especially for someone who doesn't do this for a living, you really have to work with them to get the right tone, to get the right pace, even though it's their words, they may not be used to standing stock still in front of a microphone, trying to get all the emphasis out there. And there's a reason that this is such a huge bestseller.

ANNE: Yes, for recording the audiobooks. Just in recording my own, I've found out little things like I pop my p's and-

MICHELE: Yes.

ANNE: Tend to talk too fast and just those little details. With this book, she covered so much ground. She had quite a story to tell, so I loved hearing about the historical aspects. I didn't know her personal background, so that was fascinating. But just ... I felt like I was growing up with her on the south side of Chicago. When she was born in the Johnson era, her family embodied so much of the history of Chicago and it was fascinating to me to learn more about that.

I had no idea how she and Barack Obama met and fall in love, so that was fun and a sweet thread through the book. I didn't know about her experience with infertility, and I had absolutely no idea what it would be like to move a family into the White House. What it would be like to have playdates with normal people-

[00:23:52]

MICHELE: I know.

ANNE: When you needed to get their social security numbers or the complications of having that middle schooler's father come to his kids' tennis match, if he is the president of the United States. So I thought those little details were so fun. And as an extra fun coincidence, my family had just rewatched her carpool karaoke episode with James Corden 'cause it's so fun and funny and it looks so lighthearted and off-the-cuff and I remember we watched it like on a Friday night and Saturday morning, I was folding laundry, and I got to that part in the audiobook, I had no idea she was going to be talking about the behind-the-scenes. But she talked about how it was in the works for months and she practiced so hard, and she was so stressed out.

And it was really fun to have that experience of seeing ... Well, this is what the whole book is about. You see the surface, public presentation and then to hear her interpretation of what was really happening, what was going on in her mind. I thought it was fascinating.

MICHELE: She obviously had, you know, a fantastic editor, fantastic audiobook producer, all of those things coming together to make it a truly compelling listening experience. Really.

ANNE: A lot of times people ask me, well yes, you did the audio, but how would it be on paper? And I feel like, I have no idea. Because once you've read a book, you can't unread it and go back and read it against for the first time in a different format. So I imagine it's quite good on paper, but I love the audio.

MICHELE: That's true, although I would argue there are definitely books where I have read the text, and then gone and listened and it's been a different experience and vice versa. Since they are so different, it can really unveil things that you didn't catch in the first format basically.

ANNE: [LAUGHS] Yeah, I'm laughing because someone was telling me this morning, I read a great book and then I went to read it on paper so I could savor the words and I found out there were no quotation marks and I was angry. I'm like, well, I had no idea. Didn't bother me at all. I'd love to hear about a book that you had that experience with. Are there any titles you remember right off?

MICHELE: I would definitely say *Blindness* by Jose Saramago.

ANNE: Oh, that's a great one.

[00:25:54]

MICHELE: There's no punctuation in that book. [LAUGHS] And I had tried to read it with my eyes unsuccessfully, and then went to the audio and was like, ahh. This is the best book I've ever listened to.

ANNE: Oh, that's so interesting.

MICHELE: I seriously kept not listening to the end because I did not want the experience to end.

ANNE: I love the sentiment. I know readers do that. They just don't want it to end, so they wait. I want to know what happens. I can't relate. [BOTH LAUGH] So I love it, even though that'll never be me.

The second book I chose was a new release. It's the historical mystery, *The Huntress* by Kate Quinn. I really enjoyed *The Alice Network* several years ago, so I was looking forward to this book, and I wasn't quite sure what to expect. It was a book about a female spy network and *The Huntress* picked up on that theme. Oh, it just blew me away. It was so fun. And by fun, I mean it was about war crimes and someone being brought to justice for the atrocious they committed during World War II, but what I mean is as a reader, I was just wholly absorbed in the story. And that is enjoyable.

First of all, it was done by a single narrator, but I had to look that up because the narrator was quite skilled. She altered the voices. I was never confused about what perspective of the story I was tracking with because *The Huntress* is told from three different points of view. We have an American girl in her late teens, we have a British journalist, and we have a former female Russian fighter pilot. I didn't even know that was such a thing.

MICHELE: Right.

ANNE: So from the beginning, I was all in for all of these threads. Sometimes in a multi-narrated story, there's only one that I really care about, but I wanted to know what was happening to all these people. And I knew that they were going to come together and I hoped it was going to be good, but I couldn't see how these different threads could relate exactly and as Quinn started to weave them together a little more, oh it just got better and better.

The book starts in the post-World War II setting, back in the United States, back in Boston, and then in flashbacks, we found out what happened during and before the war. I really loved that structure. I thought she pulled it off wonderfully. The narration was pitch perfect. Ah, it was just a satisfying reading experience. I do really enjoy historical fictional and stories that feel thoroughly steeped in time and place, and I love a good mystery. And this one gave me both.

And then for my third pick, you know, it's hard to pick just three. I was torn between *The Song of Achilles* and more recently released, *Circe* by Madeline Miller, but I went with the newer one, which I believe is also been quite successful.

[00:28:39]

MICHELE: Yes.

ANNE: I loved this because, oh first of all, the writing is fantastic. I'm always here for good writing. But I appreciate the way that an imaginative, inventive take on a story that is so familiar, I feel like as a reader, I almost take it for granted. It's just been so long since, you know, middle school, high school mythology. I love the way Madeline Miller really gave me fresh eyes to see this story in a new way. It was like I could see it again for the first time.

And it's true -- she did seriously play with it. I'm not - I'm not saying that she's strictly retelling, but she did invite me to interact with this old, familiar myth in an entirely new fresh way, and I really appreciated that. And I think the narrator really made the experience for me, made it fun. Her writing isn't poetry, but it's very lyrical and you can really hear that when it's read aloud by a gifted performer.

MICHELE: Yes, the narrator was Perdita Weeks and she did just a fantastic job. And this was a book, and an audiobook, that was on a lot of people's top 19 - 18 - top 2018 titles.

ANNE: Well I completely understand why. As for audiobooks that don't work for me, I found not - not in terms perhaps of listenability but just in terms of preference, I don't prefer to read straight nonfiction in the audio format. I want it to have a little zing. I do have plenty of time when I can sit down and read paper and that's when I prefer to read for information. So for my audiobooks, I want a good performance. Like I want the story to really hum. It's not just a substitute to me. Like I want it to enhance the story.

On the *Circe* theme, I feel like I've been talking a lot about Madeline Miller a lot lately. And after a conversation with Shannan Malone a few episodes back, I was inspired to finally return to Emily Wilson's translation of *The Odyssey* as narrated by Claire Danes-

MICHELE: Yes.

ANNE: That I told Shannan that I downloaded ages ago and just hadn't turned to yet. So after we started talking mythology in that episode, I did in fact pick it up and begin listening.

MICHELE: What's funny for me is I'm the opposite with nonfiction. So I often find it difficult to read nonfiction with my eyes and really take in that information in part because I'm an oral learner. So nonfiction in the audio format has been great for me because I remember a lot more the information, I get a lot more details from the book that way so it's interesting how many different ways we have of taking in information.

[00:31:25]

ANNE: Yes, it is, and I hear so many readers give up on audiobooks because they think oh, I can't retain, and I just really ... if that's you, I encourage you to try a different genre, listeners.

That's so interesting. It took me forever to figure out that I'm a visual learner. I'm not a visual artist. I don't paint. I don't draw. And it took me a long time to realize that seeing words is still a visual act and I know that sounds silly, but that was really a breakthrough for me -- to realize that if I can like see the words on the page for nonfiction informational content, I can retain it much better.

But a story, I can remember a story. Even if I just hear it instead of read it.

MICHELE: Yes.

ANNE: I didn't mean to say just read it. [MICHELE LAUGHS] How about even if I listen to the audio version instead of see the words on the page.

MICHELE: I always like to say you're reading with your eyes or you're reading with your ears.

ANNE: That's a great way to put it.

MICHELE: It's all reading. It's all taking in that same material, just in a slightly different format.

ANNE: Oh, yes. You know, and until you brought that up, I would've said that it goes without saying, but I still get the question all the time, yes, audiobooks count. I put them in my journal. I number them. You're still reading the book. You're just reading it with your ears. That's a great way to put it, Michele.

MICHELE: I've been doing this long enough that [BOTH LAUGH] I would say over the course of years, I probably listened to more books than I've read with my eyes. So.

ANNE: What a professional perk.

MICHELE: Yeah, absolutely. Well and that's what so fun, I mean, in talking about *The Huntress*. It made me think of a title that we had in the SYNC program a few years back which was *Code Name Verity* by Elizabeth Wein.

ANNE: That's such a good book.

MICHELE: Yes, and you know, Morven Christie and Lucy Gaskell do an amazing job of kind of laying out this mystery. You can't even talk about the book I find without giving too much away, but it's that World War II setting, you're dealing with people behind enemy lines, and this unfolding of this mysterious situation. Just a fantastic listen and a great match for *The Huntress* actually.

[00:33:30]

ANNE: Well I'm glad to hear that's excellent on audiobook because that is a title that I did love on paper. I'm trying to play it cool right now because I really think one of my daughters would love that book, but if you're a mother, and you want one of your children to read a book, you can't say, oh my gosh, read this right now.

MICHELE: Oh, I know.

ANNE: You just - just ... I'm trying to strategically leave it lying around right now.

MICHELE: We've tried with Philip Pullman's books and you know, I keep trying to figure out how we can get my daughter in the car long enough to listen to *The Golden Compass* together. [ANNE LAUGHS] 'Cause I think she'll really enjoy the audio experience, but I think we've told her how many times we've liked the book so much that she just was like-

ANNE: Oh, kiss of death.

MICHELE: [LAUGHS] Yeah.

ANNE: Michele, what would you recommend for a lover of *Becoming* or other really excellent contemporary memoir driven nonfiction?

MICHELE: Well I like to think of that one kinda as a badass woman book.

ANNE: Oh, I like that.

MICHELE: [LAUGHS] So I would recommend *Make Trouble* by Cecile Richards about her, you know, upbringing in a very similar way to Michelle Obama's, and just her coming into her own and everything she's done with Planned Parenthood. It was a really fantastic listen and again, someone who was in the studio with her did an excellent job of making sure that she molded the performance to the format. Highly, highly recommend it.

ANNE: And then for someone who loves an interesting spin on a familiar story like *Circe*. What would you recommend there?

MICHELE: Definitely *Silence of the Girls* by Pat Barker who wrote *the Regeneration Trilogy*. So this is an epic book, you know it's got the tales of Gods and humans. It's got Helen of Troy and Agamemnon. And it's narrated by Kristin Atherton and Michael Fox, who do an excellent job of really drawing you into this story and keeping you there.

I really felt when I listened to this that I didn't want to walk away from the speaker or the car [LAUGHS] at all because something else was going to come up that was totally engaging.

[00:35:37]

ANNE: Readers, it takes way more than just me and a microphone to create this podcast each week. Luckily I have a great team working with me to schedule guests, edit the audio, send out emails and everything else it takes to get this podcast to you.

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ANNE: Now, Michele, we get to do something fun. We asked our What Should I Read Next patrons to share their favorite experiences with audiobooks and we are going to give them the sync treatment by recommending a second audiobook that would pair well with them. So these are our patrons and our patreon community at [Patreon.com/whatsouldireadnext](https://www.patreon.com/whatsouldireadnext).

Are you ready to hear some fabulous reader audiobook experiences?

MICHELE: I am indeed.

ANNE: All right.

Sophie wrote in and said she recently listened to *Emma* and *Anne of Green Gables* and they were incredible. Interestingly, we've been talking about celebrity memoirs, but I believe she's referring to the *Emma* by Rosamund Pike and the *Anne of Green Gables* by Rachel McAdams.

Okay, back to Sophie. "The narrators were able to keep my attention while driving or doing chores around the house. I would love some other recommendations of books that are classics or feel like classics, but can still keep my attention while I multitask." What do you think?

[00:37:45]

MICHELE: I would recommend *March* by Geraldine Brooks, narrated by Richard Easton, and this is a retelling or kinda a reimagining of the characters from *Little Women*. So you're dealing with the father of the little women who's gone off to war and that's something we don't really hear about in the classic *Little Women*. But she has pulled this whole world together of what he's experiencing and the narrator is absolutely spot-on.

ANNE: That strikes me as an excellent pick. Now Melissa wrote, "One of my recent favorites was *Echo* by Pam Munoz Ryan. Each point of view was read by a different narrator. The combination of storytelling and music was so magical. I can't imagine reading this in print and losing the music in each story. This book was recommend on What Should I Read Next and I'm so glad I listened to it. What do you think for a fan of *Echo*, Michele?"

MICHELE: I'm going to recommend a title that we did in SYNC a few years ago called *Symphony for the Dead of the City: Dmitri Shostakovich and the Siege of Leningrad* by M.T. Anderson, and you can see why I'm not an audiobook narrator 'cause getting through that whole title and name really screwed me up there. [ANNE LAUGHS]

The author actually narrators this book and it's got that same use of music throughout that I think if you liked *Echo*, which has music by Quirky Seagull, that you will really like *Symphony for the Dead of the City*.

ANNE: I don't know how much good this would do as a SYNC pairing, but I really liked Bruce Springsteen's *Born To Run*.

MICHELE: Yes!

ANNE: The way they introduce the chapters with the music, he was talking about right then was fantastic.

MICHELE: Yeah, there's so many audiobooks that actually use music in a new way for people that I think there's a lot to recommend there.

ANNE: When I finally listen to *A Tree Grows In Brooklyn*, it was a book I'd gone my whole life without reading and just read it maybe five, six years ago. I listened to a version that had really jazzy interludes as they introduced different chapters. I don't know that it enhanced the story in the same way that it did in *Echo*, but I distinctly remember the jazz interludes for the chapters.

[00:39:54]

MICHELE: Felt so lucky, I actually was able to meet the musician who did the music for *Echo*, which got an Odyssey honor, or actually won ... I cannot remember, but at The Odyssey Awards, I met the musician who did the music for *Echo* and he was really a fun guy. It made me want to listen to the audiobook just after having a quick conversation with him.

ANNE: Amy writes, "My favorite audiobook is *Calypso* by David Sedaris. David Sedaris on audio is always a good choice because his audiobooks resonate with my own slightly anxious internal voice. [MICHELE LAUGHS] The book feels like a conversation and a story all at once. Listening to Sedaris feels like catching up with an old friend or a family member to reamiss a family drama, what's new and bizzare observations about the world these days." What do you recommend for David Sedaris fans, Michele?

MICHELE: Well if you like David Sedaris, I would say something by Augusten Burrows. So something like *A Wolf At The Table: a memoir of my father*, or *Dry: a memoir*. So he's got very, kinda really off-beat sense of humor and an interesting way of looking at the world as well. And he narrators his own titles also.

ANNE: I want to share Mandy's because I wholeheartedly concur with her audiobook love. She loved Rick Bragg's *My Southern Journey*. "His great slow southern drawl just made the story even better and even funnier. I love hearing a good author read their book." What would you recommend to Rick Bragg fans?

MICHELE: Well I actually pick something very different.

ANNE: Ooh, fun.

MICHELE: So I was thinking of *Empire Falls* by Richard Russo, which is a collection of stories about Maine that are read by Ron McLarty. It's a really fantastic book. It's a really fantastic listen. And it gives that same sense of you know, the theme, stories from a particular area. So I thought it'd be a nice SYNC pair.

ANNE: Interesting. Because I was also thinking of a good novel, although my thoughts were going south, not north. I was thinking of pretty much anything by Joshilyn Jackson. Georgia writer, writing contemporary southern fiction and she is a trained performer and narrators her books herself.

The way she reads her own story just syncs you into the place. And I just love her stuff.

Jeanine says, and I know many people have this on the brain right now, "I loved *Daisy Jones And The Six* on audio." Oh, speaking of books and music, okay. "Some books are fine on audio and some books shine in the format. This book was perfectly suited for audio because it's told as an oral history of a rock band in the spirit of VH1's *Behind The Music*." *Daisy Jones* is everywhere right now. What do you recommend for readers who enjoyed that book?

[00:42:40]

MICHELE: Well I think what *Daisy Jones* did was take a wide variety of narrators who are long-term narrators and then people who are celebrities, like Jennifer Beals, and put them together in this very much, as you say, behind the music format. And so this made me think of *Amadeus* by Peter Shaffer, which L.A. Theatre Works did, full cast production that was done in front of a live audience and recorded for audio. And it starred James Callis from *Battlestar Galactica* and Michael Emerson from *Lost*.

So it's got a lot of interesting themes that are similar in musicians and things are going through in their lives and it's also got some big name stars that I think you'll enjoy.

ANNE: Ooh, that's fun. If I can drop a podcast rec in, if what you loved was the idea of going behind the scenes with the band, the podcast *Song Exploder* is a good one that does that. 20 minutes at a time.

MICHELE: Yes, and you know what's fun, is audiophile has a podcast *Behind the Mic* and we just talked about or we're just about to talk about *Daisy and the Six*, it's coming up I think in two weeks. So we're excited.

ANNE: Oh, very fun.

Okay. The next book was definitely the most mentioned book in our patreon comment section. Although *Becoming* was a close second. So here's the book as voiced by Julie, she says *Born A Crime* by Trevor Noah was her fabulous listening experience. She said she "already read it a

couple of years ago on the page and absolutely loved it, but I kept hearing how great it was on audio, so I decided to re-read and I'm so excited I did.

Noah's stories of growing up are so vividly described and the characters from his childhood, especially his mom, are so fascinating. I also love learning about post-Apartheid South Africa with its mix of races, cultures, and languages.”

MICHELE: So I thought immediately about *Power of One*.

ANNE: Ooh.

MICHELE: Yeah. So that's again, kind of you know thematically paired, but not the same genre or anything like that. But it's about a South African child who dreams about being a boxer and you're dealing with those themes of injustice and racism which certainly Trevor Noah actually addresses. And it's just a beautiful narration by Humphrey Bower of *The Power of One*, and it stuck with me for quite a long time. So yeah, I thought that was an interesting pair.

[00:45:00]

ANNE: I loved *Born A Crime* and I was very excited to hear that there's a sequel of sorts on the way, if that's what you call a follow-up memoir. For a South African story, I also loved *Hum If You Don't Know the Words* by Bianca Marais. It's set in 1970s Johannesburg and it's about an unlikely friendship that develops in the wake of the 1976 Soweto uprising.

We have a nine-year-old whose life is shattered when her parents are killed because of the uprising, and then we have an older woman who grows to care deeply for this child that she is hired to nanny, but really comes to love. And something I really loved about this story is it has two narrators, Katherine McEwan and Bahni Turpin, who is one of-

MICHELE: Oh, yes.

ANNE: My very favorite narrators. I might listen to her read anything. I mean she could read me The Cheesecake Factory menu and I'd be happy.

MICHELE: Excellent choice and she actually won audiobook of the year along with Macmillan for *Children of Flesh and Bone* by Tomi Adeyemi.

ANNE: She is fantastic. Michele, Elizabeth loved *Once Upon A River* by Diane Setterfield, narrated by another one of my favorites, Juliet Stevenson. She says, "Setterfield's lyrical writing style really lends itself well to being read out loud. It's very important in my audiobook experience for both the dialogue and the narrative to have a consistent flow."

MICHELE: This actually made me think of *Roots* because I found, you know, the Alex Haley book, it's the saga of an American family, and this case narrated by Avery Brooks. And again it's

that kind of lyrical sound to the writing read by, you know, a rather big name star with Avery Brooks who was captain on Deep Space Nine. And that's one again I never really experienced it with my eyes, but listening to it brought something super special to it.

ANNE: In the Juliet Stevenson vein, I was not motivated to pick up the 800, 900 page George Eliot book *Middlemarch* until-

MICHELE: Oh, yeah.

ANNE: I found out that Juliet Stevenson would read it to me. And she did. And so I checked that box and was happy to do so. I just love the story told through her I want to say sparkling British wit. I really enjoyed hearing the story told in her voice. And as a tell you about it right now, I can picture myself walking my dog on endless loops at the park by where I lived then because I just kept walking because I wanted to keep listening to Juliet Stevenson read *Middlemarch* to me.

Okay, we have one more, and this is from Terry. She said that her fantastic listening experience was the Aubrey/Maturin series book one, *Master And Commander*. She wants to make sure that we know that it's unabridged by Patrick O'Brian as narrated by Patrick Tull. She says, "His narration is phenomenal, the series is set in the early 19th century English royal navy, told as all the characters, all the languages, all the naval jargon so well, that I formed a strong relationship with the characters. It was so strong in fact that I began to miss them if I didn't listen to one of the books -- there are 21 in the series -- at least once a month. This went on for years." She's never experienced that with an audiobook before or since *Master and Commander*. How do you follow that up?

[00:48:22]

MICHELE: Well I'm going to follow it up with one of my favorite series which is *Ender's Game*. It's the Orson Scott Card series and it's done as full cast recordings with Stefan Rudnicki, really a, you know, cast of thousands. But again it's that military stance, this time of course, dealing with technology in a way that you're not on a ship ... not on a sailing ship, but now you're on spaceships.

And first time reason I thought this would be a really, kind of cool SYNC pairing, do a *Master and Commander* title and and an *Ender's Game series* title. [LAUGHS]

ANNE: Michele, any parting advice for those of us who either want to dive into audiobooks for the first time or enhance our listening experience?

MICHELE: Get a recommendation from someone that you know that likes to listen and who knows your taste and if you don't know anyone that's listening, talk to a librarian. They're so good at helping people pick the first title that will drive them into the world of audiobooks, hopefully in your car as you're driving, right? [LAUGHS]

ANNE: So smart and if you would like to hear What Should I Read Next recommendations for audiobooks, we did an audiobook deep dive in episode 54 with Melodee Skiles and we talked to professional audiobook narrator in episode 31. We will put those in show notes so you can find them any time.

And I love that audiobooks are continuing to be more and more of an area of interest for so many of our listeners. Michele, thank you so much for coming on the show to talk audiobooks with me today.

MICHELE: Well thanks for having me. This was super fun. I love the format of trying to come up with SYNC recommendations.

[00:49:59]

ANNE: Readers, we'll put that information about this too good to miss audiobook program in the show notes. So don't panic if you don't have a pen handy, but you can find it in our show notes and at audiobooksync -S-Y-N-C - dot com, and Michele, I look forward to reading your recommendations for me on audio and to the sync picks this year. Thank you for coming on.

MICHELE: My pleasure. Talk to you soon.

[CHEERFUL OUTRO MUSIC]

ANNE: Hey readers, I hope you enjoyed my discussion with Michele today! If you're interested in the SYNC program, you should know it launched LAST WEEK on April 25th and the first two books - *Swing* by Kwame Alexander and *Blink & Caution* by Tim Wynne-Jones are available for download right now. The selections refresh every week, so make sure to sign up for text alerts when each new pairing drops. You can find all the details at audiobooksync - that's S-Y-N-C-audiobooksync.com. You can also follow the program on Twitter and Instagram @audiobookS-Y-N-C.

For the full list of titles and other resources we discussed today, visit whatshouldireadnextpodcast.com/182.

Next week, I'm talking to reader Karuna Riaz about bookish anxiety, the story behind a pseudonym, middle grade fiction, and more. Here's a sneak peek.

[00:51:17]

KARUNA: You know I end up kind of flipping through for ... the other night, it was almost an hour, and I was flipping back and forth and I was trying to figure out what am I actually in the mood for? Too many choices, it can become extremely overwhelming and you know, kind of get frustrated and talking back and forth with myself, well what do you want to read? And I'm like, I don't know. I don't know what I'm in the mood for that makes me forget why I want to read in the first place, which was to enjoy myself.

ANNE: Does that mean that you don't particularly enjoy the deliberation?

KARUNA: I don't. I'm a very indecisive person. When someone tells me you decide, I freeze up and it feels like a life or death choice. Even over as something as small as what book are you going to be reading right now?

[CHEERFUL OUTRO MUSIC]

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Thanks to the people who make this show happen! What Should I Read Next is produced by Brenna Frederick, with sound design by Kellen Pechacek. Readers, that's it for this episode. Thanks so much for listening. And as Rainer Maria Rilke said, "Ah, how good it is to be among people who are reading." Happy reading, everyone.