



# Commissioning Brief



Commissioning Brief No. 31232

*Between the Ears*

For BBC Radio 3 for Sept 2027- Sept 2028

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## SECTION A: EDITORIAL OPPORTUNITY

**Commissioning Brief ID / Title:** 31232: Between the Ears

|                                  |                                       |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <b>Commissioning Editor</b>      | Matthew Dodd                          |
| <b>Commissioning Contact</b>     | Matthew Dodd/David Ireland            |
| <b>Commissioning Brief Title</b> | Between the Ears                      |
| <b>Network</b>                   | Radio 3                               |
| <b>Guide Price</b>               | £8264                                 |
| <b>Genre</b>                     | Factual – Arts, Culture and the Media |
| <b>Duration</b>                  | 30'                                   |
| <b>No. of Episodes</b>           | c.12                                  |
| <b>Transmission Period</b>       | September 2027 – September 2028       |
| <b>Slot Day</b>                  | Sunday                                |
| <b>Slot Time</b>                 | 1900-1930                             |
| <b>Production Location</b>       | No restriction                        |
| <b>Commissioning Round</b>       | 2027/28 Round 2 - Speech Programming  |

### Important Points to Note:

- All proposals must be submitted via **PiCoS** and will go through **production eligibility checks**.
- The **Production Eligibility Questionnaire** can be found in **Appendix 1**, but **only needs to be completed if you do not already make regular speech output for the network**. This is the first part of your submission that the BBC will consider as part of the process.
- **Short Proposals** and your responses to the **Production Questionnaire** must be submitted via **PiCoS** before the deadline at **noon on Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> November 2026**.

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**

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.

## **2. The Editorial Opportunity**

Between the Ears is a showcase for the unique adventures in music, sound and imaginative storytelling that only audio features can create. This is a strand for 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 – available on BBC Sounds:

**One Last Score - Bernard Herrmann and Taxi Driver** In the 50th anniversary year of Taxi Driver, Between the Ears tells the story of composer's Herrmann's final masterpiece, from his return to Hollywood after years spent in film music wilderness, to his death less than 24 hours after he had finished recording. The programme mixes archive of Bernard Herrmann himself as well as Martin Scorsese and saxophone soloist Ronnie Lang with new interviews with Herrmann's wife Norma, his biographer Steven C. Smith, saxophonist John Harle, Taxi Driver producer Michael Phillips, composer Mica Levi and film critic Dana Stevens.

**The Thousand Voices of Cathy Berberian:** An immersive audio dive into the life and voice of the iconic singer Cathy Berberian, born 100 years ago this year. A singer of remarkable virtuosity. Despite starting out as a 'square' classical opera singer, her firm belief that the voice could do anything meant she became one of the most important voices in contemporary music.

**A Circular History of the Loop:** A truly immersive sonic journey that tells the story of the loop using loops themselves. Voices repeat, overlap, decay and return. Beginning with the physical manipulation of recorded sound and the pioneering musique concrète experiments of Pierre Schaeffer, the programme explores what happened when musicians discovered the possibilities of magnetic tape. Tape loops lead us through music concrete, minimalism and the studio experimentation of the 1960s and 70s, before sampling, digital technology and looper pedals opened up entirely new ways of making music.

**Tides of Sound: The Story of St.GIGA:** A sonic portrait of the visionary Japanese radio station that broadcast no news, no adverts, just music, natural sounds and poetry synced with the tides and the moon. It offered an unbroken flow of music, field recordings from around the world, commissioned poetry, and the quiet announcement of tides. Its programming was not built around schedules or programme titles, it was built around the sea.

**Midsummer Dreaming:** From sunset until sunrise on the solstice, Verity Sharp presents a special dream-like night of radio documentaries from Radio 3's archives. A special celebration of the vast imaginative possibilities of the radio and Between the Ears - Radio 3's own strand of adventurous feature-making - and of Radio 3's predecessor The Third Programme. Midsummer Dreaming features radio signals bouncing off the moon, documentaries woven from our dreams and dancers performing in duet with their younger selves, interspersed with a specially chosen playlist of music and field recordings to fit this magic moment of each year.

**A Hymn to Water:** The River Eden has flowed through the life of poet Jacob Polley, shaping this thoughtful contemplation of water. Vocals: Kathryn Williams. Music and sound: Strijbos & Van Rijswijk. Jacob wanders from the source to the sea, listening, observing and composing as he goes, attempting to discover why water has played such a role in his life and work.



**Return to the City of Darkness:** Kowloon, aka city of darkness, so called because the sunlight rarely penetrated its dense layers of industry and life. A teeming Hong Kong megastructure constructed haphazardly, buildings leaning into each other, passageways punched through corridors no wider than the spread of one's arms. People cheek by jowl in a ramshackle, higgledy-piggledy world of furious, sweated energy. At one point, the densest concentration of humanity anywhere on the planet.

**Elephant Voices:** Laura Spinney explores a unique archive of elephant calls and behaviour with its creator, Joyce Poole, a world authority on elephant communication. They listen to moments of birth, joy, mating, danger and death from the perspective of the elephants – as well as hearing Joyce's field note recordings from her studies.

### 3. Diversity and Inclusion

Diversity and Inclusion is a priority for all of us. We want BBC Music demonstrably to be 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 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 integral to 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. It also contributes 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 company aligns with the BBC's D&I Commissioning Commitments, or could do so in the future (See Appendix 2).

### 4. 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.

The BBC Radio Commissioning site contains inspiration across genres: [Sustainability In Programme Editorial](#)

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](#).

## **5. 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. 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.

## **6. 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.

## **7. 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 **Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> November 2026**.

#### 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 Commissioning Editor, Arts, 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 The Essay.

**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, Radio 3 Commissioning Editor, 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                                                                                                       |
|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Launch</b>                           | <b>Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> October 2026</b>                         | Publication of commissioning brief documentation and round opens in PiCoS.                                       |
| <b>Short Proposals and shortlisting</b> | <b>Noon on Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> November 2026</b>                | Deadline for Short Proposals to be submitted via PiCoS.                                                          |
|                                         | <b>Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> December 2026</b>                       | Suppliers shortlisted, notified of outcomes and asked to prepare Full Proposals.                                 |
| <b>Full Proposals and shortlisting</b>  | <b>14<sup>th</sup> December 2026 – 20<sup>th</sup> January 2027</b> | Opportunity to discuss commissioning brief with Commissioners prior to submitting Full Proposals.                |
|                                         | <b>Noon on Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> January 2027</b>                | Deadline for Full Proposals to be submitted via PiCoS. Evaluation panel shortlists Full Proposals.               |
| <b>Conditional Commissions offered</b>  | <b>Late February 2027</b>                                           | 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](mailto:david.ireland@bbc.co.uk) by 12<sup>th</sup> November 2026 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.

This title will be commissioned under the [BBC Audio Terms of Trade](#).

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.

Once completed, please copy and paste your responses into the ‘**Production experience**’ section of the Create Proposal page in PiCoS – as per the screen-shot below.

### Eligibility

#### Production experience

**i** Tell us about your relevant experience, responding to the questions on the brief

1000 words remaining

**B** *I* U   

**Note:** The answers given in response to the above questions will only be considered during Stage 1 of the commissioning process. If you are shortlisted and invited to submit a Full Proposal, you may wish to consider repeating some, or all of the information given, in your Full Proposal.

### Questionnaire

Complete Part 1 **ONLY** if you plan to submit a full proposal as part of a partnership.

#### Part 1: Partnerships

**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]

**You MUST complete this section:**

## **Part 2: Production Eligibility & Experience**

*In no more than 100 words per question, please outline your relevant production experience, using recent examples, in the following areas:*

**2.1 We require a production base with relevant experience and staffing depth in national music-radio production, particularly within classical music – both studio-based and in the live event/OB environment.**

[Insert details]

**2.2 We require a production base with relevant ‘production team’ experience of producing a non-mainstream music radio programme, with strong current relationships with record labels and artists, as well as an understanding of the BBC Archive.**

[Insert details]

**2.3 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 and social platforms.**

[Insert details]

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

[Insert details]

**2.5 This programme airs outside normal working hours, so we are particularly interested in hearing how any unexpected absence from the production team would be managed at short notice.**

[Insert details]



## APPENDIX 2: Diversity & Inclusion

We want BBC 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](#).

