

Interview with *Words in the Dust* audiobook producer Bob Deyan

Trent: Please describe what you do in general.

Bob: I have been producing audiobooks for over 20 years for all the major publishers. And, I couldn't have picked a profession that is more suited to who I am.

Me and my team have been fortunate to have been trusted with many books of extreme beauty and profound public interest. The production of these books into audiobooks has yielded 11 Grammy nominations and 3 Grammy wins along with many other awards. And, I couldn't be more honored and proud.

Usually, publishers come to me with a script (finished book) and ask me to cast three choices of actors. I read the script and try my level best to reflect the author's intent in my selections of actors that I then give to the publisher.

After the publisher has spoken to the author and they have concurred on a choice of actor, I hire the actor and schedule their recording sessions. Meanwhile, myself and my research department will search for any words from the script that we do not know how to pronounce. If, after researching these words, we still have some questions, we go to the author or in some cases hire an expert in that field to pronounce the words. We record sound files of the words being said by the author or expert and let the talent listen to them in the recording session. It is our hope that each audiobook is as authentic as possible.

Trent: How did you get involved in audiobooks?

Bob: I listened to my very first abridged 3 hour audiobook on cassette in 1989 while driving in my car. At that time I was the Operations Manager of a Los Angeles based radio station and I lived in Orange County. It was an hour commute each way and I was just trying to pass the time.

When I heard the audiobook, *This Present Darkness* by Frank Peretti, I right away knew this would be a phenomenon that I had to be a part of. I contacted the studio in Burbank that was credited on the back of the audiobook box and asked if they were hiring. I wanted to learn how to create audiobooks. The studio owner was pleased to take my call and hired me immediately. Six months later I opened my own audiobook production company, Deyan Audio, and I have loved every day of my working life since. In the beginning I must admit that there were days when it seemed no one in the world knew what an audiobook was but me and my wife, Debra. But today everyone knows that audiobooks is a great medium for entertainment and for learning.

Trent: What was your role in production of the *Words in the Dust* audiobook?

Bob: With excellent direction and assistance from Paul Gagne at Scholastic, Deyan Audio took the written PDF script of *Words in the Dust* and turned it into an audiobook

master. The completed audiobook master was sent to Scholastic for approval and once the approval has been given, it will be sent by Scholastic to the duplicator and simultaneously placed on digital servers for public purchase and download.

Paul Gagne at Scholastic, an incredibly experienced and creative individual, hired an Afghani musician for the project and that musician created original music for the beginning and ending of the audiobook. This is a real treat these days, as most publishers either allow no music or music from music libraries to be placed on their titles.

Paul also recorded the section "About the Author" with fantastic author, Trent Reedy, and the Introduction to the book with legendary Katherine Paterson. Ms. Paterson wrote *Bridge to Terabithia* and has received several major international awards for children's literature.

My personal part in the process was assisting Paul with the casting, producing and directing Ariana Delawari to narrate *Words in the Dust*. The Deyan Audio staff of 14 engineers edited, performed quality control, and mixed/mastered the final product.

Trent: Can you describe the process for making *Words in the Dust* into an audiobook?

Bob: After casting the potential actresses along side Paul at Scholastic, I called each potential actress in for a formal audition using several pages from the *Words in the Dust* script. I turned these auditions in to Paul. Paul then asked for the input of the author, Trent Reedy, and later called me with their selection for narrator.

I then hired the chosen actress, Ariana Delawari, and set up her recording sessions. I directed Ariana's recording sessions and my staff of editors worked behind us. One of my QCers followed the editors and gave Ariana and me pickup requests. Then, the mastering engineer took the completed project and mixed the original Afghani music we received from Paul and sent out the master to Scholastic.

Trent: What were the biggest challenges and rewards during the process?

Bob: The casting process was much more rigorous than usual because Paul and I demanded authenticity. Normally I do all the casting myself on the audiobooks I produce, as I have over 400 Hollywood actors to choose from. But, because of the need for the narrator to be a young, accomplished, Afghani actress, which is certainly not prevalent in Hollywood, it took both Paul and me many months to come up with appropriate options. And, although it certainly was not an easy task to find Ariana Delawari, in the end she was certainly worth the effort.

Trent: What was it like working with Ariana Delawari?

Bob: Ariana Delawari is breath of fresh air! I've never worked with a more professional and passionate individual. She and her family have a tremendous story!

I hope the listeners of the audiobook will be as fascinated as I was with the interview I recorded with her at the end of the audiobook. Paul formulated the questions and Ariana's answers are candid and riveting.

One of the things I learned from Ariana was that Afghanistan before the 1960s was modern, beautiful and flourishing. After the Russian invasion the country was devastated and sent "back to the stone age". This devastation created a breeding ground for the Taliban to thrive.

Trent: What part of *Words in the Dust* was the most fun to record?

Bob: The most challenging, therefore the most interesting/fun part of the recording process was helping Ariana maintain the cleft palate sound for one of the main characters. I don't want to spoil anything here for those who have not heard the audio or read the book, so I'll speak in general terms.

I was greatly concerned that the character with the cleft palate be completely understood by the listener, as there is no written text to follow when listening to an audiobook. However, a person who has a cleft palate would not be always understood in real life. But at the same time, I also wanted the audiobook listener to hear what the author intended "the cleft palate sound". Please imagine Ariana in the recording booth using her finger to hold her lip up to simulate this sound.

Maintaining that delicate balance between the character sounding like she had a cleft palate and the listener, while driving their car, still being able to understand her every word was challenging for Ariana and I.

After listening back to the audio, I feel we did a good job getting across that character's voice/distinct sound to the listener, while allowing the listener to understand the words completely.

I also found some of the word pronunciations a bit of a challenge. And, this is common in books that take place in other parts of the world.

However, these words were more difficult because sometimes a word was pronounced one way and then later in the story the same word was pronounced differently when combined with other words. This made for an interesting learning experience for me and a challenge for my QCer. And, here is where having hired Ariana helped. She and her family speak the language. And, it is authentic.

I have to say here that this project is one of my all time favorites! And, that is not easily said. I have personally worked on over 12,000 audiobooks in some form or another.

The Words in the Dust script was fascinating and the creation process was interesting and challenging. An all around excellent experience!

I hope you will listen to the audiobook even if you have already read the book. I spoke with several librarians at a recent conference who loved the book and eagerly await the audiobook, which I believe will come out in February, 2012.