

Jad Abumrad – storytelling master

Jad Abumrad is the creator and co-host of “Radiolab,” a public radio program carried on WFYI and 600 other stations across America. It is also the nation’s second-most downloaded podcast (behind “This American Life”) and a winner of the prestigious Peabody Award. Abumrad chatted with WFYI prior to his Indianapolis appearance on Sept. 19.

Q: What do you think it is that makes Radiolab stand out from other programs?

A: I don’t know is the short answer. I do think that what we try to do is create these character driven, curiosity fueled joy rides through the landscape of a thought or an idea or experience. One of the things that might separate us is our very strange, often cinematic use of sound.

My background is a composer, so I got into radio through the side door. I kind of wanted to be a musician and failed at that and somehow ended up in a radio booth, and then realized I’m telling these stories and I can treat the voices like musical objects. I can write music to use in these stories and I can use sound in really strange ways.

All that Bach counterpoint I learned in music school I can put it into my stories. And I think our sound is just straight up weird sometimes and that might be one of the things.

Q: How did you come to create your unique storytelling approach?

A: I’d say it’s fifty percent planned and fifty percent you’re just kind of making it up on



the fly. “Radiolab” as a successful show was never something that I imagined or planned for. Ten years in, you look up and you go, people are listening and there is this whole universe called podcasting and we are one of the bigger ones, that’s weird. But none of that was ever planned really.

Q: What can people expect during your appearance here Sept. 19?

A: What they will hear is something that really feels like a “Radiolab” episode and there’s going to be a lot of music and sound and finely edited cues. They’re gonna see stuff, tons of video and experimental visuals that have been created for this, so it’s somewhere between a guy talking and a live show but the content I’m going to be talking about is what really makes a story work. I’ll be talking about the crisis which led me to reevaluate what it is that I do, so it’s going to be kind of like a master class in storytelling.

SEE JAD LIVE!

7:30 PM Thursday, September 19
Clowes Memorial Hall at Butler University
 See Jad live as he unearths the hidden ingredients to the stories that inspire, change and connect us all. Tickets start at just \$19. Want up-front seating and a meet & greet with Jad himself? VIP tickets are also available at wfyi.org/events.



Dolly Parton and Radiolab fans: unite

ABUMRAD TEASES SERIES WITH COUNTRY MUSIC LEGEND

At first, one might ask what the science podcast “Radiolab” and country music superstar Dolly Parton have in common. “Radiolab” host Jad Abumrad offers a simple explanation.

“She’s been called the ‘Great Unifier’ for her rare ability to bring people together across divides,” he

recently said. That’s something “Radiolab” strives for as well. And that’s why the podcast will be airing a nine-part series on Parton titled “Dolly Parton’s America.”

Announcing the series in a Twitter post, Abumrad asked, “What does @DollyParton’s story tell us about America? I’ve been going back home to Nashville to figure it out.”

The series does not yet have a launch date, but you can listen to “Radiolab” at 9 p.m. every Friday or 4 p.m. each Saturday on WFYI 90.1 FM.

And if you want more Dolly before then, you can find her in Ken Burns’ “Country Music” documentary that begins Sept. 15 on WFYI | Public Television (page 10).