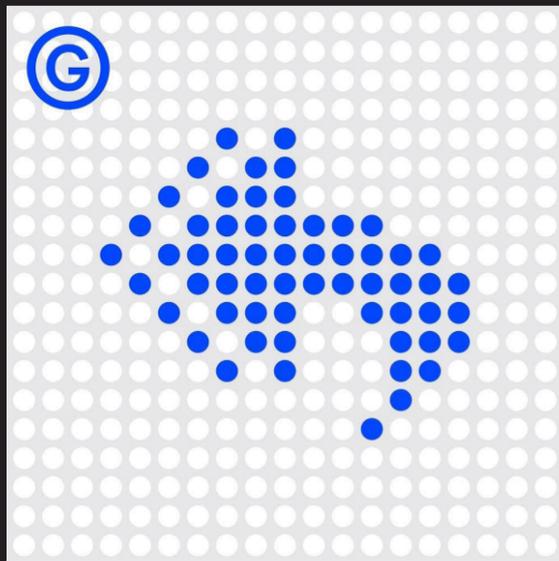


# interview **Alex Goldman:** Reply All

Reply All describes itself as “a show about the Internet,” but really it’s great storytelling about the condition of being human, from an online dominatrix with a penchant for prank calls to the guy who (regretfully) invented the pop-up ad. The podcast, from Gimlet Media, is hosted by PJ Vogt and Alex Goldman.



## **PODSTER:** How’d you get into radio?

**ALEX GOLDMAN:** I graduated from journalism school in 2003 and had no idea what to do with my life. I moved to New York City without actually having a job or all that much money. Some friends of mine who were musicians were doing IT jobs, and so I went into IT to pay the bills. I was a network administrator from 2005 to 2010, and as it

wore on I thought I could make a career out of it. But I didn’t enjoy it. My wife pointed out one day, “Every Sunday afternoon you turn into a real jerk when you have to go back to work on Monday and you’re not happy.” So I had the choice of continuing down that path or trying to get into radio, which is something I’d always been interested in and part of the reason I went to journalism school. So I got an unpaid internship on the air at WNYC and quit my job. I was a mover on the weekend and just stuck around WNYC and that’s how I got into radio.

**PODSTER:** That was really a leap of faith.

**Alex:** Yeah, and I almost didn’t do it.

**PODSTER:** Was it terrifyingly scary or did you feel like, Hey I’m just going to do it?

**Alex:** It was terrifyingly scary, and if it wasn’t for my wife saying you’re idiot for

not taking this opportunity I probably would have just stayed at the job. But having someone who also relies on your financial wellbeing tell you that it’s a good idea—that’s a really strong motivation to do it. I appreciate it so much; it’s the best advice and support I’ve ever gotten.

**PODSTER:** You were at public radio for several years and then you got this offer from Gimlet, which at the time had not really taken off yet. It seems like that was another big risk. What was it about Gimlet that made you want to join them?

**Alex:** PJ and I were employees 4 and 5 at Gimlet; to give you reference I think we’re over 25 employees now just over a year later. There were a couple of things that made us want to do it. First, Alex Blumberg is really smart and was our editor the first six or eight months of the show, which was incredibly helpful. And we felt like we could do things we weren’t able to do at WNYC editorially, which we were really excited about. Like the recent episode where PJ does acid would not have flown at WNYC; that was an idea we had actually floated while we were there and the reaction was, “No, I don’t think you can do this.”

**PODSTER:** At WNYC you were doing a show that was kind of similar. How’d you come up with the idea for Reply All?

**Alex:** WNYC had a contest where they were asking people from within the station to

submit ideas and if they liked the idea they would pilot a show. Anna Sale’s *Death, Sex & Money* grew out of that— she was one of the winners. We were not one of the winners but we were one of the finalists, and our executive producer asked if we could make our show using existing resources. We said we could give it a shot and that’s how TLDR was born. TLDR was similar to Reply All but on a much smaller scale.

**PODSTER:** Who came up with the title Reply All?

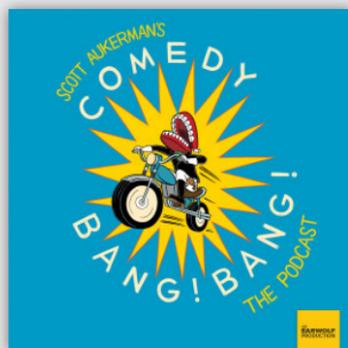
**Alex:** My wife came up with that. We had a meeting where we were going to decide on the name of show. So I was laying in bed with my wife the night before and we were writing down computer terms in a notebook and she was just shouting out words. “Router, modem, reset, power cycle, reply all, send, forward.” The next day in the meeting each of us came with our own name suggestions. It was me, Matt Lieber, Alex Blumberg, and PJ Vogt and we had like 48 titles. We narrowed them down to five and Reply All wasn’t on that list. But then we were not particularly satisfied with the list and PJ said what about Reply All? Alex was like, “Yes, of course. Why did we get rid of that? That’s it!”

**PODSTER:** That’s funny. What makes a good Reply All story?

**Alex:** To craft an interesting narrative there need to be beats, there need to be scenes, there need to be stakes, there needs to be something at stake, and it needs to sort of surprise you. For us to push a “this is a thing that happens” story into an actual Reply All episode, something has to happen, and then something unexpected has to happen from there, and usually we want two or three unexpected things to

**Comedy Bang Bang** ▶

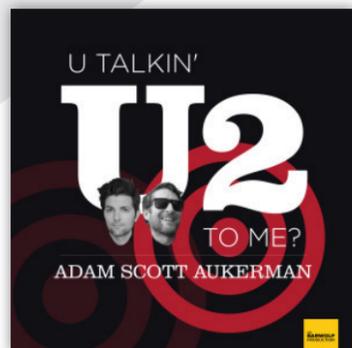
"Comedy Bang Bang is a high-spirited get-together between host Scott Aukerman ("Mr. Show", Producer of "Between Two Ferns") and his funny friends! You can expect conversation, music, improv, games, and most importantly plugs."

**Analyze Phish** ▶

"Harris Wittels and Scott Aukerman are friends, Harris likes Phish, and Scott does not. This show is a chance for Harris to defend his musical taste and maybe even gain a new concert buddy."

**U Talkin' U2 to Me** ▶

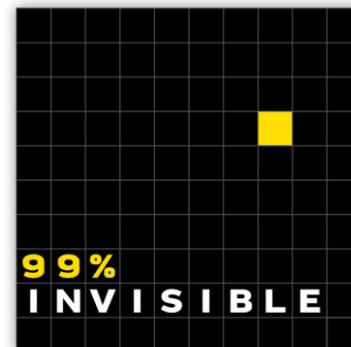
"Adam Scott (Parks and Recreation) and Scott Aukerman (Comedy Bang! Bang!) come together as superfan Adam Scott Aukerman to discuss the music and impact of the band. Listen in as these friends cover everything from Boy to No Line on the Horizon, and reveal a little something about themselves along the way."

**The Truth** ▶

"The Truth is movies for your ears. We make short, often darkly funny stories that take you to unexpected places. Every story is different, and they're usually around 10 to 20 minutes long."

**99 Percent Invisible** ▶

"A tiny radio show about design, architecture & the 99% invisible activity that shapes our world."



happen from there. We want to go on a journey. So ideally, the story focuses on a person or people, there is a narrative arch, and it points to some sort of bigger idea.

**PODSTER:** One of the stories that really sticks in my head is the Berenstain Bears episode, where you talk about the Internet phenomenon of people insisting they remember the books as the Berenstein Bears (different spelling) and that the discrepancy is proof of an alternate universe.

**Alex:** At the end of the episode PJ very foolishly said, "If you've always known it to be Berenstein, send us an email because we want to know." That was a couple of months ago and we're still getting emails saying, "I always knew it to be Berenstein and you guys are wrong; clearly an alternate universe doesn't exist." Which is crazy to me because I don't think I'd ever met anybody who thought it was Berenstein until we posted our episode."

**PODSTER:** I'm absolutely convinced it was Berenstein.

**Alex:** I think that there's just a convergence of universes maybe half of us are from one and half of us are from the other and at one point there was just like a switcheroo.

**PODSTER:** Well, I'm from your universe. What have you learned about crafting stories or interviewing people in the course of doing Reply All?

**Alex:** I've learned so much. Having Tim Howard as our senior producer has been incredible, mostly because he's constantly antagonizing us to do things that we don't want to do, constantly pushing us in the direction of the most difficult version of the story, where PJ and I would be inclined to chicken out and do the easy version.

**PODSTER:** Like what?

**Alex:** Every time we think we have enough voices or enough perspectives or we feel like we've got this narrative down, he'll say, "No, you're missing this idea—you either need to go back and do another hour's worth of interviewing or you need to find another person to talk to." He doesn't let us rest on our laurels, which is really easy to do.

**PODSTER:** So you just had a son, Harvey. How old is he?

**Alex:** He is almost ten months

**PODSTER:** What's that been like?

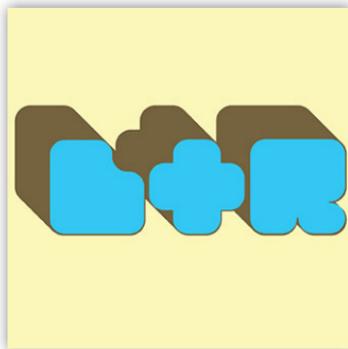
**Alex:** It's been amazing. It's been pretty exhausting to me—I gave birth to this show in November and then my wife gave birth to our son at the end of January. So it's been hard to find enough time in my life to devote to both of them. I'm really happy with both, I just have this constant nagging feeling at all times that I'm neglecting either the show or my son.

**Song Exploder** ▶

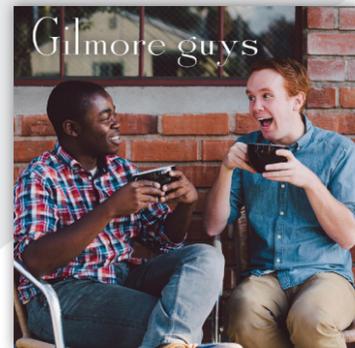
"Song Exploder is a podcast where musicians take apart their songs, and piece by piece, tell the story of how they were made. Each episode is produced and edited by host Hrishikesh Hirway in Los Angeles."

**Love + Radio** ▶

"Nick van der Kolk's Love and Radio features in-depth, otherworldly-produced interviews with an eclectic range of subjects, from the seedy to the sublime."

**Gilmore Guys** ▶

"Veteran fan Kevin T. Porter and newcomer Demi Adejuyigbe go deep into Gilmore Girls episode by episode with special guests to analyze, praise, mock, and gab about all things Stars Hollow and beyond in their hilarious Gilmore Guys Podcast."



**PODSTER:** What's he like?

**Alex:** He is the most laid back, happiest kid in the world. He wakes up with a smile on his face every morning, he loves to goof around and have fun, he's not really a crier. He's just such a sweet kid.

**PODSTER:** And the question I'm dying to ask. At the end of some of your episodes you send listeners to your advertiser MailChimp's site to request a plastic action figure of their mascot Freddie. Do you collect the Freddie's? I have two of them.

**Alex:** MailChimp sent us six or seven so we have all the ones that everybody else has and then I think a couple that are upcoming. We don't collect them but they are there. We have one big desk that we all sit at and the Freddie's sort of hold court in the middle. ⚡