

A FAMILY CHRISTMAS

A Child's Christmas in Wales • The Nutcracker

The Little Match Girl and other Christmas favourites

Read by **Philip Madoc • Jenny Agutter**

Benjamin Zephaniah and others

JUNIOR
CLASSICS



| | | |
|----|---|------|
| 1 | 'Twas the Night Before Christmas by Charles Clement Moore | 3:47 |
| 2 | The Story of the Nutcracker by David Angus | 1:07 |
| 3 | When they open the door they gasp with joy... | 2:15 |
| 4 | When they come downstairs there is a great crowd... | 1:12 |
| 5 | In comes Uncle Drosselmyer... | 4:28 |
| 6 | The party comes to an end... | 1:26 |
| 7 | Clara can't sleep... | 3:41 |
| 8 | The battle with the mice... | 3:50 |
| 9 | When the smoke clears... | 3:44 |
| 10 | The Sugar Plum Fairy | 2:48 |
| 11 | The Three Kings by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow | 4:06 |
| 12 | A Kidnapped Santa Claus by L Frank Baum | 4:59 |
| 13 | So, the very next day... | 7:07 |
| 14 | Now it so chanced that on this Christmas Eve... | 5:26 |
| 15 | It is possible that Santa Claus was not as merry as usual... | 4:38 |
| 16 | Marching over the snow toward the mountain... | 3:51 |
| 17 | A Child's Christmas in Wales by Dylan Thomas | 5:27 |
| 18 | Now out of that bright white snowball of Christmas... | 4:08 |
| 19 | We returned home through the desolate, poor sea facing streets... | 3:11 |
| 20 | The Story of King Frost | 7:10 |

| | | |
|----|--|------|
| 21 | The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle | 7:09 |
| 22 | 'I can see nothing' said I, handing it back to my friend | 6:11 |
| 23 | Sherlock Holmes had opened his mouth to reply... | 9:06 |
| 24 | I had been delayed at a case... | 4:52 |
| 25 | 'So much for Mr. Henry Baker,' said Holmes... | 7:04 |
| 26 | Sherlock Holmes looked deeply chagrined. | 6:17 |
| 27 | 'The game's up Ryder,' said Holmes quietly | 4:40 |
| 28 | 'My sister had told me some weeks before...' | 5:28 |
| 29 | Talking Turkeys by Benjamin Zephaniah | 1:50 |
| 30 | The Thieves Who Couldn't Stop Sneezing by Thomas Hardy | 5:10 |
| 31 | There was only just time for him to dart under the table... | 5:37 |
| 32 | When the meal was almost over... | 6:19 |
| 33 | The Little Match Girl by Hans Christian Andersen | 6:20 |

Total time: 2:34.44

Cover picture: A Christmas skating party in the countryside,
Cecil Aldin in The Boy's Own Paper 1901
Courtesy Mary Evans Picture Library

John Chancer 'Twas the Night Before Christmas
A Kidnapped Santa Claus

Jenny Agutter The Story of the Nutcracker (*from* Ballet Stories)

Teresa Gallagher The Three Kings*
The Little Match Girl*
The Story of King Frost*

Philip Madoc A Child's Christmas in Wales
(*from* The Essential Dylan Thomas)

David Timson The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle
(*from* The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes III)

Benjamin Soames The Thieves Who Couldn't Stop Sneezing

Benjamin Zephaniah Talking Turkeys (*from* Poetry for the Winter Season)

* recorded and edited by Simon Foster of How Now Productions

A FAMILY CHRISTMAS

Christmas comes but once a year, yet its impact on our lives, Christian or not, is immeasurable. It may have supplanted pagan end of year rituals but this is fairly irrelevant now. Whether greater prominence is given to The Christmas Story according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, or to Father Christmas and his reindeers, it is certainly a festival that marks the concluding days of the year, and the winter season.

Above all, it is a family event, where children and childhood come into focus. In a family with children, it is the young ones who become the principal focus, with the magic of the symbols – the Christmas tree, the carols, the candles, the presents and the festive dining. Where there are no children, it is, rather curiously, the memories of childhood Christmases that come to the fore, as Dylan Thomas knew so well.

‘One Christmas was so much like another, in those years around the sea-town corner now and out of all sound, except the distant speaking of the voices I sometimes hear a moment before sleep, that I can never remember whether it snowed for six days and six nights when I was twelve or whether it snowed for twelve days and twelve nights when I was six.’

Dylan Thomas wrote *A Child's Christmas in Wales* in 1955, with a characteristically evocative, yet challenging opening sentence. In it, he recreates the atmosphere of Christmas Past as he remembered, and each one of us will have similar memories of the glitter and the emotions (probably more delightful than they ever were!). For the fortunate, it was (and is!) a time of innocence, plenty, fun, anticipation and excitement.

This collection of stories, poems, and fairy tales presents a very broad view of Christmas from both sides of the Atlantic. It demonstrates how the romanticised, commercialized, view of Christmas began in the 19th century, releasing a flood of evocation. And yet they are delightful.

'Twas The Night Before Christmas first appeared in the *Sentinel*, a New York magazine in 1823 – without an author's name attached. It was later attributed to Clement Clark Moore, a professor of Oriental and Greek literature at Columbia University, though some academics now wonder if he actually did write it. Its original title was *A Visit from St Nicholas*. Nevertheless, a copy of the poem in Moore's handwriting does exist, and was sold in 2006 for \$280,000.

No ballet speaks Christmas more than *The Nutcracker*, written by Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky in 1891-2. The enchanting story was based on a fairy tale by E. T. A Hoffman called *The Nutcracker and The Mouse King* but it was the dramatisation by Alexandre Dumas père that the composer used as the real starting point for his ballet.

Little Clara, her brother Fritz, some sibling jealousy, the giving of presents including a Nutcracker soldier, and toys that come to life all form the basis of the story which Tchaikovsky, at the height of his powers, brings to life in one of his finest scores. He arranged the main numbers into a Suite, which is how many of us first heard The Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy and the others...but an opportunity to see the whole ballet once in one's life should not be missed.

Many poets visited the Christmas Story in the 19th century. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, of Hiawatha fame, was one of them, and his *The Three Kings* tells the story with a fine, upright metre and rhyme.

Many writers used Christmas time as a backdrop to their stories, among them none other than Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in one of his delightful Sherlock Holmes stories. *The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle* comes from the first group of stories he wrote, The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes. It is, fittingly, a wild-geese chase through London!

Thomas Hardy also wrote an engaging

seasonal story, *The Thieves Who Couldn't Stop Sneezing*, very early in his career (1877) for *The Father Christmas Annual*. One can just imagine the family sitting by the fireside after the big Christmas lunch, and listening as one member of the family read the story – set in the Wessex countryside he knew so well. By this time, he was already making his mark as a writer: one of his greatest achievements, *Far From the Madding Crowd* was published three years earlier. *The Thieves Who Couldn't Stop Sneezing* was probably an enjoyable diversion for Hardy from the serious and much longer novels.

A Kidnapped Santa Claus, however, is very much in the home style of L. Frank Baum, the author of *The Wizard of Oz*. It is often forgotten that the phenomenon of Harry Potter was not the first remarkably popular world hit in junior literature. *The Wizard of Oz* (and some of its sequels) also notched up exceptional sales around the world. *A Kidnapped Santa Claus*, a fun fantasy, is actually a sequel to the first novel Baum wrote on the theme, *The Life and Adventures of Santa Claus* where he charts his hero's life from being a foundling in the

forest to becoming all children's favourite uncle. The sequel has the advantage of brevity.

The prolific Scottish 19th century writer Andrew Lang translated Homer and wrote novels, but he is best remembered now for his collections of books for younger readers, especially his nine volumes of fairy tales named after a colour, such as *The Lilac Fairy Book* and the *Orange Fairy Book*. *The Story of King Frost* comes from *The Yellow Fairy Book*, first published in 1894.

Few winter stories are more affecting than Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Match Girl*. Written in 1848, and strictly speaking a New Year's Eve story, it showed then and now so clearly that the Christmas holidays do not represent fireside, food and presents for all. It never fails to move, yet somehow avoids serious sentimentality.

Finally, another poem, this time with a contemporary swing, Benjamin Zephaniah, (a vegetarian himself) , brings a touch of reality to the festivities with *Talking Turkeys*.

Notes by Nicolas Soames



John Chancer is the award winning narrator of many audiobooks. He is an American who has a long association with the theatre on both sides of the Atlantic. John's recent television appearances have included *Broken News*, *Spooks*, *The Long Firm* and *William and Mary*. Films include *Unstoppable*, *Grim* and *Project: Shadowchaser*. He has also been heard in many radio dramas, documentaries, and cartoons in Britain, US, and around the world. He has read *Norwegian Wood* for Naxos Audiobooks.



Jenny Agutter began her performing life as a ballet dancer in the Walt Disney film *Ballerina*. But she rose to fame in the television production and subsequently the film of *The Railway Children*. Since then her film credits have included *The Eagle Has Landed*, *Equus* and *An American Werewolf In London*. She has been equally active in the theatre in varied roles for the RSC, Royal National Theatre and on Broadway. Her recent TV credits include *The Buccaneers*, *Heartbeat* and the Channel 4 series *And The Beat Goes On*. She also reads *Pride and Prejudice*, *Ballet Stories* and *The Secret Garden* for Naxos AudioBooks.



Teresa Gallagher has performed in many leading roles in both plays and musicals across the country, London's West End and Broadway. In addition, she is a well-known voice to listeners of BBC Radio Drama. Her work on film includes *The Misadventures of Margaret* and Mike Leigh's *Topsy Turvy*. For Naxos AudioBooks she has recorded the *Biography of Jane Austen* and selections from *The Decameron* by Boccaccio, *Classic Women's Short Stories*, *Heidi*, *The Treasure Seekers*, *The Wouldbegoods*, *The Story of Jesus*, *Thailand from after the quake* and *Little Lord Fauntleroy*.



David Timson has made over 1,000 broadcasts for BBC Radio Drama. For Naxos AudioBooks he wrote *The History of the Theatre*, which won an award for most original production from the Spoken Word Publishers Association in 2001. He has also directed for Naxos AudioBooks four Shakespeare plays, including *King Richard III* (with Kenneth Branagh), which won Best Drama Award from the SWPA in 2001. In 2002 he won the Audio of the Year Award for his reading of *A Study in Scarlet*. He also reads *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*, *The Reminiscences of Sherlock Holmes*, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, *The Sign of Four*, *The Valley of Fear* and *The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes*.

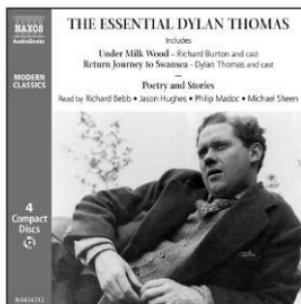


Benjamin Soames trained at LAMDA. Since then, he has been active on both stage and screen, appearing in the popular TV series *Sharpe* and touring worldwide in the acclaimed Cheek by Jowl production of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* directed by Declan Donnellan. He also reads *Tales from the Norse Legends*, *The Tale of Troy*, *The Adventures of Odysseus* and *More Tales from the Greek Legends*, *Venus and Adonis*, *Great Inventors and their Inventions* and *Great Scientists and their Discoveries* for Naxos AudioBooks.



Benjamin Obadiah Iqbal Zephaniah was born and raised in Birmingham. His poetry is strongly influenced by the music and poetry of Jamaica and what he calls 'street politics'. He has read all around the world, from Argentina to Palestine, in prisons, theatres, youth clubs, demonstrations, taking poetry to those who don't read books. He has released several records.
For further details: www.benjaminzephaniah.com

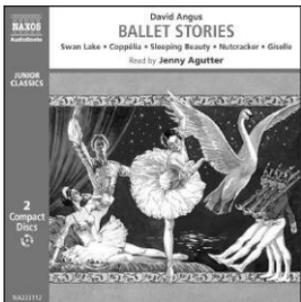
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and others

The tree, the fireside, the candles, the presents and the festive food may be the main features of the traditional Christmas, but so are the stories, the poems, and the traditional tales. Here is a delightful confection of Christmas texts: the story of *The Nutcracker* told with Tchaikovsky's immortal music, Dylan Thomas's *A Child's Christmas in Wales*, as well as 19th and 20th century poems and the always affecting tale of *The Little Match Girl*. An enchanting collection for those family Christmas evenings.

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