

NAXOS
AudioBooks

Fyodor Mikhail Dostoyevsky

The Idiot

Read by **Michael Sheen**

CLASSIC
FICTION



NA305912D

1	On the train to St Petersburg	12:21
2	A tale of infatuation	5:27
3	General Ivan Fedorovitch Yepanchin	9:22
4	Gavrila Ardalionovitch Ivolgin (Ganya)	1:57
5	General Yepanchin meets Prince Muishkin	5:57
6	A portrait of Nastasia Phillipovna Barashkov	8:07
7	Afanasy Ivanovich Totsky and his 'ward'	10:11
8	Mrs Nina Alexandrovna Yepanchin: 'He's just a child'	4:32
9	The prince tells Marie's story	7:43
10	Gavrila, the portrait – and Aglaya	5:23
11	Prince Muishkin takes up lodging with Ganya Ivolgin	2:43
12	Nastasia Phillipovna appears	5:36
13	Rogojhin and entourage arrive at the Ivolgins	8:54
14	At Nastasia Phillipovna's	6:18
15	Rogojhin arrives with a packet	8:50
16	Nastasia Phillipovna tempts Ganya Ivolgin	3:46
17	Yevgeny Pavlovitch Radomsky is introduced	2:03
18	Prince Muishkin returns to St Petersburg	4:17
19	Lebedev's country house at Pavlovsk	11:44
20	Antip Burdovsky masquerading	2:28

21	The prince responds to accusations	5:32
22	Mrs Yepanchin quizzes the prince	5:49
23	In conversation with Aglaya	12:23
24	Nastasia Phillipovna appears	7:03
25	News of a surprise proposal	1:52
26	The rendezvous	8:25
27	A party at the Yepanchins	12:18
28	At Nastasia Phillipovna's	14:36
29	Preparations for a marriage	8:22
30	The wedding	3:38
31	Prince Muishkin at St Petersburg	3:34
32	Back at the hotel	5:16
33	The house at Gorohovaya	10:20
34	Lying by the bed	6:09
35	The flat is opened	3:02
36	Mrs Yepanchin: 'I've had a good Russian cry'	1:42

Total time: 3:58:09

Fyodor Mikhail Dostoyevsky

The Idiot

'I know for sure that if I had two or three secure years for this novel...I would write a work that they would talk about for a hundred years.' So said Dostoyevsky as he struggled to bring *The Idiot* into existence, and sure enough it has lasted longer than the hundred years he predicted. In his creation of Prince Muishkin, *The Idiot*, a character seeking perfection and yet fraught with ambiguity, Dostoyevsky anticipated the universal metaphysical unease of succeeding generations, and produced an unforgettable masterpiece.

Fyodor Mikhail Dostoyevsky was born in Moscow in 1821. His father was a physician and he was the second son of seven children. After leaving school he studied at the Military Engineering College in St Petersburg, graduating as an officer. His first story was published to great acclaim in 1846, but in 1849 he was arrested and sentenced to death for his involvement in the 'Petrashevsky circle', a group of naive, radical intellectuals who modelled themselves on French socialists such as Fourier. The Tsar ordered a public

'execution', an eloquent account of which is given by Prince Muishkin in *The Idiot*, and at the moment of execution the proceedings were halted and the sentences commuted to hard labour in Siberia.

In 1862 Dostoyevsky travelled abroad and met Mlle Suslova, whom he subsequently married. He became addicted to gambling, which plunged him into debt, and it was his second wife, Anna Grigoryevna who helped him out of his financial difficulties. He returned to Russia in 1873 and died there in 1881. His most important works were *Notes from the Underground* (1864), *Crime and Punishment* (1865-66), *The Gambler* (1866), *The Idiot* (1869), *The Devils* (1871) and *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880).

The task of abridging a great and complex classic like *The Idiot* swings one between joy and despair. The despair comes from trying to convey the inherent complexity of the work, the joy, from the searing moments of clarity and revelation. But this struggle is nothing when compared to the gargantuan problems Dostoyevsky

faced when writing the book. He went through at least eight plans and many variations of each plan. Just before submitting the first part to his publisher, he destroyed most of what he had written and virtually started writing the novel again. It was written in Geneva, Vevey, Milan and Florence, between bouts of gambling, grinding poverty and recurrent epileptic fits.

After four years in a Swiss clinic where he was treated for epilepsy, Prince Muishkin returns by train to St Petersburg. On the journey, he meets Parfyon Rogojhin with whom he strikes up a friendship and who tells him about the beautiful Nastasia Phillipovna, who he is in love with.

On arriving in Petersburg, the prince, penniless and bedraggled, goes to find a distant and wealthy relative, Mrs Yepanchin. She and her husband and their three daughters befriend this strangely naive and sickly character, and he goes to lodge with General Yepanchin's secretary, Ganya. Ganya wants to marry Aglaya, one of Mrs Yepanchin's daughters, mostly for her money, but is also involved with the notorious Nastasia Phillipovna who is living under the protection of Totsky, a man she does not love. Prince Muishkin pities this neurotic and emotional woman and, during

a bizarre incident at her birthday party, offers to marry her. Instead, she runs off with Rogojhin who also turns up at the party. Later, when Nastasia leaves Rogojhin, he swears to kill Prince Muishkin, as he is convinced that Nastasia is in love with him.

Prince Muishkin becomes the victim of an extortion attempt, but when he successfully refutes the charges, he offers to give money to his accuser, thus confirming Mrs Yepanchin's view that he is 'an idiot'. Meanwhile, Aglaya falls in love with Prince Muishkin and, after hiding her feelings at first, she is eventually engaged to him. At a party to celebrate the betrothal, Prince Muishkin commits the ultimate social blunder of having an epileptic fit. Aglaya and Nastasia strike up a correspondence, and Aglaya asks Prince Muishkin to visit Nastasia with her. After a hectic and turbulent argument, Nastasia faints, Prince Muishkin runs to her aid and Aglaya, feeling rejected, flees and refuses to see Prince Muishkin.

Nastasia agrees to marry Prince Muishkin, but at the very last moment, she is swept away by Rogojhin. Prince Muishkin pursues them to Petersburg. After a long search, he finds Rogojhin and although he fears for his life, nothing could have

prepared him for the final brutal end. Even then he is still able to forgive, but at a very high price.

Dostoyevsky wanted desperately to write a novel about a 'good' man but feared he was not up to the task, and in the initial plan Muishkin was a proud and demonic figure. Dostoyevsky's notebooks show an author desperately in search of a subject through countless changes of plot and characterisation, but it was in its seventh plan that he finally found his 'beautiful' idiot. However, the character retains layers of ambiguity that remain from the complicated process of his creation. His humility can be seen as overbearing and, in the end, destructive and Muishkin is finally

left devoid of being: a demented idiot. His epilepsy is also crucial. It is both his salvation and a limitation; it prevents him from following through completely his ideas, from being taken as a fully participating member of the society in which he finds himself. He is both part of the world, and yet part of another metaphysical plane, revealed to him at the onset of a seizure. So baffling and opaque is the character of Prince Muishkin that he embodies the whole range of human existence, and readers will puzzle over him and the true meaning of this book for many years to come.

Notes by Heather Godwin

The music on this recording is taken from the MARCO POLO catalogue

CUI SUITE No. 2 Op. 38 LE FLIBUSTIER Czecho-Slovak RSO/Stankovsky	8.223400
RUBINSTEIN SYMPHONY No. 1 IVAN THE TERRIBLE CSSR State Philharmonic/Stankovsky	8.555476
RUBINSTEIN SYMPHONY No.4 'DRAMATIC' CSSR State Philharmonic/Stankovsky	8.555979

Cover picture: The Suitor by Jean Carolus (1867–1880)
Courtesy of The Fine Art Photographic Library Ltd. London.

The main characters in *The Idiot*

Prince Lef Nikolayevitch MUICHKIN – a penniless aristocrat

Parfyon ROGOZHIN – recently inherited a fortune; in love with Nasatasia Phillipovna

LEBEDEV – know-all civil servant

Nastasias Phillipovna BARASHKOV – a well-born former ‘ward’ of Totsky

Afanasy Ivanovich TOTSKY – wealthy landowner and friend of Yepanchin

General Ivan Fedorovitch YEPANCHIN – self-taught but capable, owner of various companies

Mrs Elizabetha Prokofievna YEPANCHIN – his wife

Three **YEPANCHIN** daughters:

Alexandra – pledged to Totsky

Adelaida – pledged to Ptitsin

Aglaya – linked to Muishkin and Ganya Ivoglin

General Adalion Alexandrovitch IVOLGIN

Nina Alexandrovna IVOLGIN – his wife

Gavrila Adalionovitch IVOLGIN – also known as **Ganya**; secretary of one of General Yepanchin’s companies; involved with Nasatasia Phillipovna

Varvara (Varia) IVOLGIN – sister to Ganya

Kolya IVOLGIN – younger brother of Ganya

Ivan Petrovitch PTITSIN – young, elegant suitor to Varvara

Prince S – modest, honest, suitor to Adelaida

Yevgeny Pavlovitch RADOMSKY – 28, aide-de-camp to Yepanchin, wealthy, educated, suitor to Aglaya

Ippolit – consumptive friend of Kolya Ivoglin

Antip BURDOVSKY – masquerading as the son of Pavlichev

Nicolai Andreyevitch PAVLICHEV – deceased sponsor of Prince Muishkin

Fyodor Mikhail Dostoyevsky

The Idiot

Read by **Michael Sheen**

Prince Lef Nikolayevitch Muishkin is one of the great characters in Russian literature. Is he a saint or just naive, an idealist or, as many in General Yepanchin's society feel, an 'idiot'? Certainly, his return to St Petersburg after years in a Swiss clinic has a dramatic effect on the beautiful Aglaya, youngest of the Yepanchin daughters and on the charismatic but wilful Nastasia Phillipovna. As he paints a vivid picture of Russian society, Dostoyevsky shows how principles conflict with emotions – with tragic results.



Michael Sheen is one of Britain's most exciting actors. Since leaving RADA, he has played Romeo for the Royal Exchange, Manchester, appeared in the world première production of Harold Pinter's *Moonlight* and taken the title role of Peer Gynt in Ningawa's world tour production. He has also played Jimmy Porter in Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*. His film credits include *Mary Reilly*. Sheen also reads Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and takes the role of Vicomte de Valmont in Choderlos de Laclos's *Dangerous Liaisons* for Naxos AudioBooks.

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