

NAXOS
AudioBooks

CLASSIC
FICTION

Charles Dickens
Oliver Twist

Read by **Anton Lesser**



NA425912D

1	Treats of the place where Oliver Twist was born and of the circumstances attending his birth	3:18
2	Treats of Oliver Twist's growth, education and board	10:45
3	Relates how Oliver Twist was very near getting a place which would not have been a sinecure	6:18
4	Oliver, being offered another place, makes his first entry into public life	4:52
5	Oliver mingles with a new associate – Noah Claypole	2:07
6	Oliver, being goaded by the taunts of Noah, rouses into action, and rather astonishes him	5:13
7	Oliver continues refractory	4:21
8	Oliver walks to London. He encounters on the road a strange sort of young gentleman	8:04
9	Containing further particulars concerning the pleasant old gentleman, and his hopeful pupils	4:46
10	Oliver becomes better acquainted with the characters of his new associates; and purchases experience at a high price	3:48
11	Treats of Mr. Fang the police magistrate; and furnishes a slight specimen of his mode of administering justice	6:10
12	In which Oliver is taken better care of than he ever was before	3:38
13	Some new acquaintances are introduced	7:00
14	Comprising further particulars of Oliver's stay at Mr. Brownlow's	6:22

15	Showing how very fond of Oliver Twist, the merry old Jew and Miss Nancy were	2:18
16	Relates what became of Oliver Twist, after he had been claimed by Nancy	4:01
17	Oliver's destiny continuing unpropitious, brings a great man to London to injure his reputation	6:00
18	In which a notable plan is discussed and determined on	5:15
19	Wherein Oliver is delivered over to Mr. William Sikes	5:41
20	The Expedition	4:39
21	The Burglary	7:44
22	Which contains the substance of a pleasant conversation between Mr. Bumble and a lady	5:59
23	Treats on a very poor subject. But is a short one, and may be found of importance in this history	3:59
24	Wherein this history reverts to Mr. Fagin and company	3:21
25	In which a mysterious character appears upon the scene	6:02
26	Atones for the unpoliteness of a former chapter; which deserted a lady, most unceremoniously	5:08
27	Looks after Oliver, and proceeds with his adventures	3:54
28	Has an introductory account of the inmates of the house, to which Oliver resorted	3:11

29	Relates what Oliver's new visitors thought of him	7:01
30	Of the happy life Oliver began to lead with his kind friends	4:41
31	Wherein the happiness of Oliver and his friends, experiences a sudden check	6:58
32	Contains some introductory particulars relative to a young gentleman who now arrives upon the scene	5:57
33	Containing the unsatisfactory result of Oliver's adventure; and a conversation of some importance between Harry Maylie and Rose	4:54
34	In which the reader may perceive a contrast, not uncommon in matrimonial cases	9:07
35	Containing an account of what passed between Mr. and Mrs. Bumble, and Mr. Monks, at their nocturnal interview	7:57
36	Introduces some respectable characters with whom the reader is already acquainted, and shows how Monks and the Jew laid their worthy heads together	9:06
37	A strange interview	5:59
38	Containing fresh discoveries, and showing that surprises, like misfortunes, seldom come alone	7:46
39	An old acquaintance of Oliver's, exhibiting decided marks of genius, becomes a public character in the metropolis	7:53
40	Wherein is shown how the Artful Dodger got into trouble	2:45

41	The time arrives for Nancy to redeem her pledge to Rose Maylie. She fails	1:38
42	Noah Claypole is employed by Fagin on a secret mission	2:30
43	The appointment kept	6:05
44	Fatal consequences	6:41
45	The flight of Sikes	4:06
46	Monks and Mr. Brownlow at length meet	8:53
47	“And now you do see me,” said Monks, rising boldly	4:20
48	The pursuit and escape	10:01
49	Affording an explanation of more mysteries than one, and comprehending a proposal of marriage with no word of settlement or pin-money	8:33
50	Mr. Brownlow merely nodded to Mr. Grimwig...	8:36
51	Fagin’s last night alive	8:18
52	And last	3:10

Total time: 4:57:24

Charles Dickens

OLIVER TWIST

Oliver Twist was first published in 1838. It was the young writer's second novel, following the hugely successful **The Pickwick Papers**. **Oliver Twist**, however, is much more clearly a novel as we understand the term: **The Pickwick Papers** is really a loosely connected series of picaresque adventures, while the second work is a single narrative which traces the history of its hero from birth to adolescence. In addition, **Oliver Twist** marks the beginning of the element of social protest in Dickens' fiction: its immediate satirical target is the working of the revised Poor Law. Well-intentioned reforms had led to economies which left the objects of charity, young and old, far more at the mercy of meagre budgets and impersonal or corrupt care than they had been before. The first section of the novel is, in its narrative of the infant, orphaned Oliver, devoted to an attack on these evils.

But **Oliver Twist** is far more than (sometimes rather crude) satire. The novel contains elements of melodrama, Gothic fiction, early crime (or 'Newgate') novels, and theatrical comedy. This is a rich mixture which Dickens does not always handle with

complete conviction: the sentimentality of which he is often accused is certainly evident in the 'angelic' unreality of Rose Maylie, and of course in the quite remarkable purity of Oliver's own character in the face of hardships which might have corrupted, or at least tarnished, the virtue of a saint. The plot itself – dependent as it is on far-fetched coincidence and traditional fable-like ingredients such as illegitimate orphans and disputed inheritances – is something of a mess, requiring an elaborate chapter devoted entirely to explanations of its complexity at the end.

Yet the work is a perennial favourite. Why? Perhaps we might begin with Dickens' comic powers, here almost entirely intermingled with the novel's sinister portrayal of evil. Angus Wilson has pointed out that The Artful Dodger is really a criminal version of Sam Weller from **The Pickwick Papers**: even Oliver, horrified as he is by the society of Fagin and his boys, cannot help being amused by their stories and antics. When Oliver famously asks for 'more', the scene is both comic and dreadful; Mr. Bumble the beadle is simultaneously repulsive and entertaining.

The nest of robbers is dominated, of course, by the old man whom Dickens in early editions of the novel referred to persistently as ‘the Jew’ – which brings us to the vexed question of anti-semitism. Dickens, like some other great writers before him, takes it as a norm that Jewishness should be associated with cunning criminality, however uncomfortable that may be for modern readers. But Fagin is more than stereotype: his language is marvellously realised, full of camp ‘my dears’ and insinuating slyness, while the description of his plight in the condemned cell reaches heights of penetrating and disturbing psychological insight which far exceed the reach of conventional prejudice.

Fagin is also the centre of that which in the novel is macabre, even supernatural. His footprints (and those of the melodramatically evil Monks) are invisible after their genuinely terrifying appearance at Oliver’s window. In this respect he is most unlike Bill Sikes, the most brutal figure of all: the passage describing his murder of Nancy – the reformed prostitute – is deservedly celebrated. Sikes is emphatically an embodiment of crude physicality, yet his guilty haunting by his dead mistress’s staring eyes proves that even he is susceptible to the workings of conscience – or is it merely retribution?

Perhaps **Oliver Twist** is best seen as a masterpiece of popular fiction, rather than a masterpiece *per se*: in our post-literate age it has achieved enormous popularity on stage and screen, as play and as musical. Few modern children will ever *read* the book – but at least it may live for them in other forms.

Charles Dickens was born in 1812 in Portsmouth. His father was imprisoned for debt and the twelve-year-old Charles was sent to work in a blacking factory: these experiences influenced (for example) **David Copperfield** and **Little Dorrit**. Having learnt shorthand, he became a Parliamentary reporter and began to submit magazine pieces. In 1837 **The Pickwick Papers** brought Dickens fame, and the rest of his literary career was almost uninterruptedly successful. His personal life was less happy: eventually he separated from his wife, Catherine, partly as a result of his growing intimacy with Ellen Ternan, the actress, and he died relatively young in 1870, his last novel, **The Mystery of Edwin Drood**, unfinished.

Notes by Perry Keenlyside

**The music on this recording is taken from the
NAXOS and MARCO POLO catalogues**

LACHNER Septet Ensemble Villa Musica	8.223282
FUCHS Clarinet Quintet Opus 102 Ensemble Villa Musica	8.223282
SCRIABIN Prometheus Russian State TV and Radio Choir, Ludmila Ermakova director	8.550818
REICHA Wind Quintets Michael Thompson Quintet	8.553828

Music programming by Nicolas Soames

Cover picture: Oliver Twist 'asking for more', from the 'World of Charles Dickens', later made as a Spode plate by H. Devine. Courtesy of: Dickens House Museum, London/Bridgeman Art Library.

Charles Dickens

Oliver Twist

Read by **Anton Lesser**

Oliver Twist, Dickens' second novel, is a thrilling study of childhood innocence thrust into the darkly comic world of Fagin, his apprentice, the Artful Dodger, and their gang of child thieves. Who will help the orphaned Oliver to escape from their clutches and discover his true history? The original story is even more powerful than the musical which has popularised it. Anton Lesser reads with all his intensity and comic versatility.



Anton Lesser has worked extensively at the National Theatre and is an Associate Artist of the RSC where he has played over the years many of the principal Shakespearean roles including Troilus, Romeo, Petruchio and Richard III. His many appearances on television include *The Cherry Orchard*, *King Lear*, *The Politician's Wife* and most recently *Invasion Earth* and *Vanity Fair*. For Naxos AudioBooks he also reads *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*, *The Pied Piper of Hamelin* and *Other Favourite Poems*, *Paradise Lost*, *A Tale of*

Two Cities, *Great Expectations*, *Hard Times*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Old Testament*, *The Happy Prince* and *Other Tales*, *The Pickwick Papers*, *David Copperfield* and takes the title role in *Hamlet*, *Prince of Denmark*.

CD ISBN:

978-962-634-259-6

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Produced by Nicolas Soames
Abridged by Perry Keenlyside
Recorded at Hatsoff Studios, Stonefield
Edited by Sarah Butcher, SBS Studios

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Total time
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