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AudioBooks

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Classic Poems
— for —
Boys

Read by

**Anton Lesser
Roy McMillan**

Benjamin Soames et al.

With **Michael Caine**

reading *If* by Rudyard Kipling



1	Casabianca <i>Felicia Dorothea Hemans, read by Benjamin Soames</i>	2:15
2	If <i>Rudyard Kipling, read by Michael Caine</i>	1:57
3	The Arrow and the Song <i>Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, read by Benjamin Soames</i>	0:45
4	At the Zoo <i>William Makepeace Thackeray, read by Roy McMillan</i>	0:30
5	The Vulture <i>Hilaire Belloc, read by Rachel Bavidge</i>	0:40
6	The Walrus and the Carpenter <i>Lewis Carroll, read by Roy McMillan</i>	4:23
7	How Doth the Little Crocodile <i>Lewis Carroll, read by Rachel Bavidge</i>	0:26
8	Talking Turkeys <i>Benjamin Zephaniah, read by Benjamin Zephaniah</i>	1:52
9	The Donkey <i>G.K. Chesterton, read by Rachel Bavidge</i>	1:17
10	The Village Blacksmith <i>William Wordsworth, read by Benjamin Soames</i>	2:34
11	There Was an Old Man with a Beard <i>Edward Lear, read by Roy McMillan</i>	0:18
12	You are Old Father William <i>Lewis Carroll, read by Roy McMillan</i>	1:44

13	A Smuggler's Song <i>Rudyard Kipling, read by Anton Lesser</i>	2:29
14	The Tyger <i>William Blake, read by Anton Lesser</i>	1:22
15	Ozymandias <i>Percy Bysshe Shelley, read by Anton Lesser</i>	1:12
16	The Destruction of Sennacherib <i>Lord Byron, read by Jasper Britton</i>	1:34
17	Lochinvar <i>Sir Walter Scott, read by Anton Lesser</i>	2:52
18	Gunga Din <i>Rudyard Kipling, read by Robert Glenister</i>	4:40
19	The Pied Piper of Hamelin <i>Robert Browning, read by Anton Lesser</i>	15:34
20	The Charge of the Light Brigade <i>Alfred Lord Tennyson, read by Benjamin Soames</i>	1:59
21	The Ballad of East and West <i>Rudyard Kipling, read by Benjamin Soames</i>	8:18
22	A Nightmare <i>W.S. Gilbert, read by Roy McMillan</i>	3:29
23	A Song About Myself <i>John Keats, read by Roy McMillan</i>	2:45

Total time: 65:08

Classic Poems — for — Boys

When you hear a poem that you like, it's a fantastic feeling. Like a favourite story, it can inspire you, transport you to far away lands and make you laugh. It can be short or long, straightforward or nonsensical, rhyming or unstructured, but the most important thing is that it affects you in some way, that you remember it. That's the sign of great writing!

Poetry is a form of art, a very *old* form of art, in fact. Many people believe that the first poems were spoken aloud ('recited') or sung. They were used as parts of religious ceremonies, to bring luck, and to keep a record of important historical events.

On this recording is a selection of classic poems, all of which are still enjoyed today. Hopefully you'll see why! From

A Smuggler's Song to *A Song About Myself* to *The Vulture*, there are battles, escapes and adventures in foreign lands to immerse yourself in.

It's fun to imagine these poets reading their own words aloud as they wrote, trying to make sure they used language that would entertain, make you sad, surprised – any feeling you can think of. When the right words are used in the right combination, the effects can be magical.

You might want to compare the rhythms of the poems in this collection: whether there is a steady beat to the poem or a less obvious pattern made up of soft and strong beats that might change from verse to verse. We won't detail the technical terms here, and you don't need to know them to enjoy the poetry, but it

is worth appreciating that the way a good poem has been crafted is the key to its effectiveness. It's all about how it sounds to you, whether the pace feels right and whether it suits the story.

Some of the poems in this collection are based on real events. Felicia Dorothea Hemans (1793–1835) wrote a poem called *Casabianca* (you might know it as 'The boy stood on the burning deck': this is the famous first line). This was written in memory of a French naval officer, whose son died during the Battle of the Nile between the French and the English in 1798. This is the second verse:

Yet beautiful and bright he stood,
As born to rule the storm;
A creature of heroic blood,
A proud, though childlike form.

This is a poem all about a son's loyalty to his father. As he stands on the 'burning deck', people who are dying surround him, including his father. However, he still stands tall, waiting for 'his father's word', his instructions. It's an image as heroic as it is sad. It's also a great example of poetry's

power to make you feel, and to make you remember.

There's also *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, by Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809–1892), which is about the British cavalry fighting against Russians in the Crimean War (1853–1856). It focuses on the tremendous courage of the horsemen:

Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon in front of them
Volley'd and thunder'd;
Storm'd at with shot and shell,
Boldly they rode and well,
Into the jaws of Death,
Into the mouth of Hell
Rode the six hundred.

The alliteration (use of the same letters or sounds at the beginning of words close together) in line five ('Storm'd, 'shot', 'shell') and repetition of 'Cannon' in the first three lines emphasises how much the cavalry were in terrible danger, and the sinister image of a personified Death, complete with 'jaws', continues this idea. This isn't a poem for the faint-hearted.

However, not all of the poems you'll hear in this recording are epic and bloody. Lewis Carroll (1832–1898) was a nineteenth-century poet who wrote nonsense verse, among other things. His writing is often witty and funny – you can see this in *How Doth the Little Crocodile*, which is actually a poem that deliberately imitates, for comic effect, the solemn poem *Against Idleness and Mischief*, by a poet and preacher of the previous century named Isaac Watts (1674–1748). Instead of encouraging hard work, *How Doth the Little Crocodile* is all about being sneaky: the crocodile 'welcomes little fishes in,/ With gently smiling jaws!'

On the subject of being sneaky, *A Song About Myself* by John Keats (1795–1821) is about a naughty boy who runs away from home and has scores of adventures:

He ran
To the mountains
And fountains
And ghostes
And Postes
And witches
And ditches

And wrote
In his coat
When the weather
Was cool,
Fear of gout,
And without
When the weather
Was warm –

The pace of the poem is very fast, enabled by its structure: the majority of lines in each of the three verses consist only of two words. This gives us the sense that our mischievous hero is moving speedily, jumping from adventure to adventure. To pack a pen, run away to the mountains and do nothing but 'scribble poetry' sounds quite tempting!

There are poems out there to suit any mood, whether you want to feel stirred into action, scared silly, cheerful, or whether you'd simply like a break from the everyday and a peek into new, fantastic worlds.

Poets use all kinds of writing techniques to make sure their readers are affected by the words, such as those mentioned above: repetition, line-length

and personification. Just as important as the sounds of the words are the images they conjure up: the image of a greedy crocodile, a boy on a burning ship, a secret mountain hiding-place. These stay with us, to be remembered whenever we might feel like it. That is why poetry read aloud can be particularly effective: a good narrator brings the words to life, and can inspire you to consider the poem anew.

Notes by Frances Taffinder



Rachel Bavidge was born in North Shields in Tyneside and moved to Oxford in her early teens. She has narrated numerous audiobooks and has completed six months as a member of the BBC Radio Drama Company. Her theatre credits include Mrs Boyle in *Whose Life is it Anyway?* (West End) and Margaret in *Much Ado About Nothing* (Theatre Royal, Bath), both directed by Peter Hall. Her television credits include *The Bill*, *Casualty*, *Doctors*, *The IT Crowd*, *Inspector Lynley*, *Wire in the Blood* and *Bad Girls*. She has also read the part of Marion Halcombe in *The Woman in White* and featured on *The Great Poets: Barrett Browning and Rossetti* for Naxos AudioBooks.



Jasper Britton's theatre credits include *Macbeth* and *The Tempest* at Shakespeare's Globe, *Oedipus* and *Fram* at the National Theatre, *Richard III* at Regent's Park, *The Taming of the Shrew* at the Royal Shakespeare Company and *Bedroom Farce* at Aldwych Theatre. His film credits include *The New World* and *Morris: A Life With Bells On*. He has read *Treasure Island* and *Gulliver's Travels* for Naxos AudioBooks.



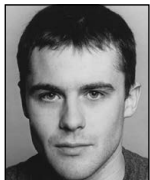
Robert Glenister's varied theatre credits include *Measure for Measure*, *The Tempest* and *Little Eyolf* for the Royal Shakespeare Company; *The Duchess of Malfi*, *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern are Dead* and *Hamlet*. His television credits include *Heartbeat*, *Midsomer Murders*, *A Touch of Frost*, *Bramwell*, *Prime Suspect*, *Only Fools & Horses* and *Soldier Soldier*. He has also read the part of Lovburg in *Hedda Gabler* for Naxos AudioBooks.



Anton Lesser, one of Britain's leading classical actors, has worked extensively at the National Theatre, and is an associate artist of the Royal Shakespeare Company. His many television appearances include roles in *The Cherry Orchard*, *King Lear*, *The Politician's Wife*, *Vanity Fair*, *Perfect Strangers*, and *Dickens*. Films in which he has appeared include *Charlotte Gray*, *Fairytale – A True Story*, *Imagining Argentina*, *River Queen* and *Miss Potter*. He is a familiar voice on radio, and has become particularly associated with his award-winning readings of Dickens and Milton for Naxos AudioBooks.



Roy McMillan is a director, writer, actor and abridger. For Naxos AudioBooks he has read *The Body Snatcher and Other Stories*, *Bulldog Drummond*, *The French Revolution – In a Nutshell*, *Cathedrals – In a Nutshell* and the introductions to works by Nietzsche and the Ancient Greeks. He has directed readings of Hardy, Hopkins, Kipling, Milton and Blake; Austen, Murakami, Conrad and Bulgakov, among many others; and has written podcasts and sleevenotes, as well as biographies of Milton and Poe. He has also directed plays for BBC Radio 3 and 4.



Benjamin Soames trained at LAMDA. He appeared in the popular TV series *Sharpe* and toured worldwide in the acclaimed Cheek by Jowl production of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, directed by Declan Donnellan. He has read *The Tale of Troy*, *The Adventures of Odysseus*, *More Tales from the Greek Legends*, *Great Rulers of Ancient Rome*, *Stories from Shakespeare: The Plantagenets* and featured in *From Shakespeare – with love* 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 and demonstrations, taking poetry to those who don't read books. He has released several records.

For further details: www.benjaminzephaniah.com

Credits

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Music programming by Sarah Butcher

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By **G.K. Chesterton • Edward Lear • Rudyard Kipling et al.**

Read by **Anton Lesser • Roy McMillan • Benjamin Soames et al.**

Classic Poems for Boys comprises a delightfully varied set of poems for 5-10-year olds. From rousing favourites like Felicia Dorothea Hemans's *Casabianca* and John Keats's *A Song About Myself*, to dreamy, thoughtful poems by Rudyard Kipling and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, this is a collection to be treasured.

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