

A photograph of a rustic wooden building with a snow-covered roof and a large arched doorway. The scene is set in a snowy landscape with snow-covered trees and a stone wall in the foreground. The building has a gabled roof with a red-tiled section. The doorway is framed by dark wood and has a decorative iron gate. To the right, there is a snow-covered evergreen tree and a wooden bench. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and wintry.

NAXOS
AudioBooks

COMPLETE
CLASSICS
UNABRIDGED

Under the Greenwood Tree

— **THOMAS HARDY** —

Read by **Jamie Parker**

CD 1

1	Preface	5:47
2	Part the First – Winter	7:23
3	Chapter 2 – The Tranter’s	7:11
4	Mrs Dewy resigned Mr Penny.	6:56
5	Chapter 3 – The Assembled Quire	7:18
6	He now drew forth and placed upon the table...	6:21
7	Chapter 4 – Going the Rounds	6:43
8	‘I can well bring back to my mind,’ said Mr Penny...	5:46
9	Chapter 5 – The Listeners	6:13
10	Having done eating and drinking, they again tuned...	6:31
11	Chapter 6 – Christmas Morning	8:56

Total time on CD 1: 75:12

CD 2

1	By chance or by fate, another young man...	6:42
2	Chapter 7 – The Tranter’s Party	8:06
3	We gain a good view of our heroine...	7:42
4	Chapter 8 – They Dance More Wildly	7:59
5	During this discourse the tranter and his wife...	6:59
6	The hour of parting came.	5:53
7	Chapter 9 – Dick Calls at the School	4:55
8	Part the Second – Spring	1:31
9	Chapter 2 – A Meeting of the Quire	5:23
10	Mrs Penny came to the door at this point...	5:49
11	Chapter 3 – A Turn in the Discussion	8:59
12	Chapter 4 – The Interview with the Vicar	8:54

Total time on CD 2: 79:00

CD 3

1	'What I have been thinking' – the tranter implied...	6:55
2	And at the moment of the announcement of the choir...	6:05
3	Chapter 5 – Returning Homeward	5:53
4	Chapter 6 – Yalbury Wood and the Keeper's House	6:47
5	Fancy was gliding about the room preparing dinner...	7:55
6	'Will you pass me some bread?' said Fancy...	7:13
7	Chapter 7 – Dick Makes Himself Useful	9:08
8	Chapter 8 – Dick Meets His Father	7:48
9	'I don't know about that,' said Dick...	7:11
10	Part the Third – Summer	9:44
11	Chapter 2 – Further Along the Road	4:36

Total time on CD 3: 79:22

CD 4

1	The distance between Budmouth and Mellstock...	7:01
2	Chapter 3 – A Confession	6:09
3	After a silence that was only disturbed by the fall...	4:48
4	Chapter 4 – An Arrangement	5:47
5	Part the Fourth – Autumn	5:44
6	He went out, walked down the road, and sat...	6:51
7	Chapter 2 – Honey-taking, and Afterwards	8:17
8	Geoffrey Day's storehouse at the back of his dwelling...	5:28
9	Now, whether by inadvertence...	6:39
10	Chapter 3 – Fancy in the Rain	8:21
11	Chapter 4 – The Spell	9:18

Total time on CD 4: 74:28

CD 5

1	Chapter 5 – After Gaining Her Point	9:22
2	Chapter 6 – Into Temptation	5:55
3	In the porch stood Mr Maybold.	5:43
4	Chapter 7 – Second Thoughts	4:46
5	Maybold stood still upon the bridge...	5:18
6	Part the Fifth – Conclusion	7:01
7	'I do hope he'll come in time!' continued the bride-elect...	6:24
8	'Now, I'll run down,' said Fancy...	6:54
9	They were now all ready for leaving the house...	4:39
10	Chapter 2 – Under the Greenwood Tree	7:09
11	Mrs Dewy came up, talking to one person...	5:20

Total time on CD 5: 68:59

Total time on CDs 1–5: 6:17:01

Thomas Hardy

(1840–1928)

Under the Greenwood Tree

*Under the greenwood tree
Who loves to lie with me
And turn his merry note
Unto the sweet bird's throat...*

Hardy chose the title for his second published novel, printed in 1872, from the well-known song in *As You Like It*, and it is a singularly apt one. Like the Shakespeare play, Hardy's story is a pastoral idyll, which is dominated by love's confusions, while music and poetry play a significant role in the plot. Even Hardy's warmest admirers would not deny that this novel is a slight work, but it is of great interest in foreshadowing so much of what was to come later from Hardy's pen.

First there is the centrality of love-affairs that are complicated by class divisions. The

flirtatious Fancy Day, newly arrived in the village as a schoolmistress, attracting three highly contrasting admirers, is clearly an earlier version of Bathsheba in *Far From the Madding Crowd*. She finally gives her heart to William Dewy, and here Gabriel Oak's love for the fickle Bathsheba comes immediately to mind; but there is also a strong resemblance between William Dewy and Giles Winterbourne in *The Woodlanders*, who is in love with his social superior, Grace Melbury. In no Hardy novel does the course of true love ever run smooth, but in *Under the Greenwood Tree*, love's trials provide material for light comedy. As Hardy's work progressed however, his view of love grew darker and darker, until it became only a prison-house of emotional conflict, disappointment and

tragedy. The source of this transformation is clear enough in Hardy's own life. In 1870 he met and fell in love with Emma Gifford, a clergyman's daughter significantly above Hardy in social status. They married in 1874 but their marriage descended into a bitter mutual disenchantment, and they lived together for years on terms of cold, loveless hostility, which filled Hardy's novels with tragic despair, and which ended only with his wife's death in 1912.

The romance between William Dewy and Fancy Day would not, I think, enthrall anyone very deeply, but the feature of Hardy's work that is first revealed here is his portrayal of the Dorset peasants, the working men of farm and village who seem to embody the soul of the common man and the essence of the English rural character. It has often been said that these rustics form something like the chorus in a Greek play, commenting on the action yet distanced from it. They are scarcely individuals, rather they seem to share a common mind and speak with a common voice. They are never the principal actors in the drama, to whom they are always socially inferior, and they are apparently

immune to the passions of love, pride, and mental anguish. Yet they watch and partly understand the leading figures, and wonder at their complex, dramatic lives.

All this is generally true, but here the rustics are central to the narrative, because they form the Mellstock village choir and music consort, and the second plot-line of the book is the plan of the new vicar, Maybold, to ban them from performing in the church and replace them with a harmonium. This was a theme dear to Hardy's heart, for he had grown up loving the old-fashioned viol music of the rural church, in which his own father and grandfather had excelled, and something very close to this story had indeed happened in his own church at Stinsford. In reality, the demise of a choir in the face of the prim, respectable Victorian harmonium, played very often by the vicar's wife, was a blow to the traditions of the peasant community. In the novel the two plots are linked by the fact that the new player is not the vicar's wife, but Fancy Day herself, with whom the vicar proceeds to fall in love.

Hardy's two earlier novels – *The Poor*

Man and the Lady (which was never published) and *Desperate Remedies* – had both been social novels with urban settings, but here we see the first appearance of the Wessex novel and the Wessex character that made Hardy's name. He gave the novel the sub-title *A Rural Painting of the Dutch School*, and this clearly referred to the joys and tribulations of the village rustics and the fate of their choir, rather than to the slight love-affairs of Fancy Day. These rustic characters and the homely poetry of their speech was something new in the mainstream English novel, and it was highly successful with both critics and public. They took delight in scenes like the one which opens the novel, where the men of the choir assemble on a cold and starry Christmas Eve, first to sing carols around the village, second to drink cider, and third to marvel at the momentary glimpse they have of the ethereal beauty of Fancy Day. This was in fact to be the opening scene of the extended multi-volume chronicle of Wessex life which Hardy would shape over the following twenty-five years.

For Hardy himself, the story and the people of Mellstock choir had a

deep personal significance, and they re-appear in several very delightful but very contrasting poems that he wrote. The first is entitled 'Friends Beyond', in which the poet communes with their ghosts after their death:

*William Dewy, Tranter Reuben,
Farmer Ledlow late at plough,
Robert's kin, and John's, and Ned's,
And the Squire, and Lady Susan, lie
in Mellstock churchyard now!*

Closely related is 'The Dead Quire', which laments:

*For two-score years, ere Christ-day
light,
Mellstock had throbb'd to strains
from these
But now there echoed on the night
No Christmas harmonies.*

'The Rash Bride' is an extraordinary tale of romance and tragedy among the rustic musicians, but it is too melodramatic to be convincing. The best of these poems is undoubtedly 'The Choirmaster's

Burial', which is close in theme to *Under the Greenwood Tree*, for here the old choirmaster's dying request for music to be played over his grave is brushed aside by the impatient vicar; but he in turn is shocked and chastened when that very night he sees a vision of angels singing and playing over the old man's grave. This picturesque legend is the perfect pendant to the novel, and should perhaps be published as an appendix to it.

Notes by Peter Whitfield



Jamie Parker is best known for his roles in the films *The History Boys* and *Valkyrie* and the television drama *Van Gogh: Painted with Words*. He has also performed in the television series *Foyle's War*, *The Hour*, *Silent Witness* and *Silk*. His theatre credits include *Henry IV Parts I & II* and *Henry V* at Shakespeare's Globe and *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern are Dead* at the Haymarket Theatre. He has also read Hardy's *Far From the Madding Crowd* for Naxos AudioBooks.

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