

NAXOS  
AudioBooks

POETRY

# The Great Poets William Blake

Read by **Robert Glenister • Michael Maloney**  
**Stephen Critchlow**



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|---|---|------|
| 1 | <b>Auguries of Innocence</b><br>written sometime between 1801–1804<br>read by Robert Glenister          | 7:23 |
| 2 | <b>Introduction to Songs of Innocence</b><br>published originally in 1789<br>read by Michael Maloney    | 0:55 |
| 3 | <b>A Cradle Song</b><br><i>from</i> Songs of Innocence<br>read by Michael Maloney                       | 1:39 |
| 4 | <b>Introduction to Songs of Experience</b><br>published originally in 1794<br>read by Stephen Critchlow | 0:54 |
| 5 | <b>A Dream</b><br><i>from</i> Songs of Innocence<br>read by Robert Glenister                            | 1:14 |
| 6 | <b>The Chimney Sweeper</b><br><i>from</i> Songs of Innocence<br>read by Michael Maloney                 | 1:28 |
| 7 | <b>The Chimney Sweeper</b><br><i>from</i> Songs of Experience<br>read by Stephen Critchlow              | 0:51 |

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| 8  | <b>The Divine Image</b><br><i>from</i> Songs of Innocence<br>read by Michael Maloney   | 1:01 |
| 9  | <b>A Divine Image</b><br><i>from</i> Songs of Experience<br>read by Stephen Critchlow  | 0:34 |
| 10 | <b>from The Gates of Paradise</b><br>published 1815<br>read by Robert Glenister        | 4:15 |
| 11 | <b>Infant Joy</b><br><i>from</i> Songs of Innocence<br>read by Michael Maloney         | 0:34 |
| 12 | <b>Gnomic Verses</b><br>miscellaneous<br>read by Robert Glenister                      | 5:39 |
| 13 | <b>The Fly</b><br><i>from</i> Songs of Experience<br>read by Stephen Critchlow         | 0:43 |
| 14 | <b>Song</b><br><i>from</i> Poetical Sketches, printed 1783<br>read by Robert Glenister | 0:59 |

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| 15 | <b>Holy Thursday</b><br><i>from</i> Songs of Innocence<br>read by Michael Maloney         | 1:02 |
| 16 | <b>Holy Thursday</b><br><i>from</i> Songs of Experience<br>read by Stephen Critchlow      | 0:50 |
| 17 | <b>Laughing Song</b><br><i>from</i> Songs of Innocence<br>read by Michael Maloney         | 0:38 |
| 18 | <b>The Garden of Love</b><br><i>from</i> Songs of Experience<br>read by Stephen Critchlow | 0:50 |
| 19 | <b><i>from</i> An Island in the Moon</b><br>printed 1784<br>read by Robert Glenister      | 1:12 |
| 20 | <b>A Little Boy Found</b><br><i>from</i> Songs of Innocence<br>read by Michael Maloney    | 0:32 |
| 21 | <b>A Little Boy Lost</b><br><i>from</i> Songs of Experience<br>read by Stephen Critchlow  | 1:21 |

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| <b>22</b> | <b>The Little Girl Found</b><br><i>from</i> Songs of Innocence<br>read by Michael Maloney | 2:05 |
| <b>23</b> | <b>A Little Girl Lost</b><br><i>from</i> Songs of Experience<br>read by Stephen Critchlow | 1:24 |
| <b>24</b> | <b>I Heard an Angel</b><br>poems from his notebooks, 1791-92<br>read by Robert Glenister  | 1:11 |
| <b>25</b> | <b>The Human Abstract</b><br><i>from</i> Songs of Experience<br>read by Stephen Critchlow | 1:15 |
| <b>26</b> | <b>Night</b><br><i>from</i> Songs of Innocence<br>read by Michael Maloney                 | 2:01 |
| <b>27</b> | <b>from Jerusalem</b><br>written 1803-04; published 1820<br>read by Robert Glenister      | 4:46 |
| <b>28</b> | <b>London</b><br><i>from</i> Songs of Experience<br>read by Stephen Critchlow             | 0:54 |

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| <b>29</b> | <b>The Land of Dreams</b><br>written at latest 1804<br>read by Robert Glenister                                | 1:25 |
| <b>30</b> | <b>Nurse's Song</b><br><i>from</i> Songs of Innocence<br>read by Michael Maloney                               | 0:46 |
| <b>31</b> | <b>Love's Secret</b><br>poems from his notebooks, 1791-92<br>read by Robert Glenister                          | 0:48 |
| <b>32</b> | <b>A Poison Tree</b><br><i>from</i> Songs of Experience<br>read by Stephen Critchlow                           | 0:53 |
| <b>33</b> | <b><i>from</i> the Preface to Milton</b><br>probably written 1804; printed 1810-11<br>read by Robert Glenister | 1:06 |
| <b>34</b> | <b>The Little Vagabond</b><br><i>from</i> Songs of Experience<br>read by Stephen Critchlow                     | 0:58 |
| <b>35</b> | <b>On Art and Artists</b><br>marginalia and miscellaneous verses<br>read by Robert Glenister                   | 0:57 |

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<b>36</b>	<b>The Sick Rose</b>	0:28
	<i>from</i> Songs of Experience read by Stephen Critchlow	
<b>37</b>	<b>Ah, Sunflower</b>	0:33
	<i>from</i> Songs of Experience read by Robert Glenister	
<b>38</b>	<b>The Voice of the Ancient Bard</b>	0:41
	<i>from</i> Songs of Experience read by Stephen Critchlow	
<b>39</b>	<b>To The Muses</b>	0:55
	<i>from</i> Poetical Sketches, printed 1783 read by Robert Glenister	
<b>40</b>	<b>The Lamb</b>	0:55
	<i>from</i> Songs of Innocence read by Michael Maloney	
<b>41</b>	<b>The Tyger</b>	1:39
	<i>from</i> Songs of Experience read by Stephen Critchlow	
<b>42</b>	<b>On Another's Sorrow</b>	1:47
	<i>from</i> Songs of Innocence read by Michael Maloney	

**Total time: 62:24**

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# The Great Poets

# William Blake

William Blake was an engraver, an artist, a poet and a visionary, and a creative man of such unique and vivid talents that he stands apart – almost aloof – from his time, but whose writings and drawings have resonated through English literature for over two hundred years. He was born in November 1757 and died nearly seventy years later in 1827; and while he nominally lived almost all his life in London, he lived essentially in a world of powerful and vibrant imagination, where his visionary companions were rather more real than any literary friends. In theology and creativity he was a bullish individual, a man never at home in society or societies. He believed that the political and religious hierarchies of his time were oppressive forces against the individual and his relationship with the divine; and developed a vast and complex mythology of his own, expressed in his long works such as *Vala, or the Four Zoas*, *Thel*, and *Urizen*. His is a complex world where the traditional values held by the Church and State were often anathema to his

ideals, and much of his poetry alludes to this. *The Gates of Paradise* and *Jerusalem*, for example, use the wide range of his own cosmological imagery and theology to imagine an idealised England (Albion) as it moves towards a state of harmony with the creator and becomes a new Jerusalem.

He lived at a time of profound revolutions, in America, in France and in the arts. He was also living in an England wary of individual liberty and fearful of invasion; but also at a time of the flowering of the Romantics in poetry and music. Blake however had nothing to do with such schools, not just constitutionally (he was too resolutely individual to fit comfortably into any literary or artistic movement) but also in terms of the work he produced. He was a hard-working and dedicated artisan professionally, and in his own works was trying to express something mystic and eternal rather than personal. As such, he was neither at home in the dying years of the Age of Enlightenment, with its emphasis on rationality, nor the early ones of



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Romanticism which focussed on the individual's sentiments.

Some of Blake's verse has a rhythm and cadence that stands comparison to the King James Bible; his works for children still sing with innocence and delight; many of his angry social polemics are couched in seemingly easy stanzas; he produced allusive and symbolic works whose poetical strengths carry them through generations even without their meaning. A good example of the latter is the work for which he is perhaps best known in Britain – the poem that became the hymn 'Jerusalem'. This was written as part of the preface to a substantial work called *Milton*, but Blake removed the preface from later editions. In it, he considers the suggestion that Jesus was brought to Britain by Joseph of Arimathea, and questions whether Christ could have allowed the spiritual deprivation that Blake sees in his contemporary England. The 'dark satanic mills' are almost certainly not those of the industrial revolution, but represent the enslavement of the individual's imagination; or possibly the institutions that do the enslaving, such as the organised religions, the schools and the legal and political systems that Blake believed overwhelmed the natural

man. Blake would be unlikely to view the irony of these verses becoming almost a national anthem with equanimity.

The apparently endless range of his creative energy was by no means limited to his major works. He was expressively spontaneous, too, and scattered epigrams, verses, comments, philosophical or satirical couplets and fragments in margins and notebooks throughout his life. Some of these are included here, in the tracks named 'Gnomic Verses' and 'On Art and Artists'. At the same time, his visual imagination was as vibrant, unique and compelling as his written works, and he deserves to be considered alongside the likes of Turner in the history of British art. Engraving and printing may have been his profession; but the scale and scope, the vigour and expressiveness of his work are outstanding and now iconic. Although this collection is oral rather than visual, it would be wrong – indeed impossible – to disentangle the two completely. They were, after all, almost always paired together, with verses sinewing their way around or into the engravings, which themselves were full of movement, brilliant colour and hauntingly powerful images of gods and monsters, symbols and allegories.

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This selection can serve only as a brief introduction to Blake and his works, and it draws heavily upon his two best known collections, *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*. These contain some of his finest, most beautiful and concentrated works, as well as many of his best known ones. Some have the memorability of nursery rhymes, others the darker implications of fairy tales; some are straightforward, some almost impenetrable; but all carry the stamp of Blake's complex world, one where innocence is celebrated and mythologised, but shadowed by the dark and forbidding symbol of experience with all the terrors of the London of 1795 and its implications for mankind in general. The poems in the two books are intended to stand in opposition to each other, and this collection acknowledges that with several pairings of poems, contrasting for example the two views of The Chimney Sweeper or Holy Thursday (the annual service for the capital's charity children). *Songs of Experience* contains works that are in open outrage at the cruelties he saw around him at the time; *Songs of Innocence* was originally intended as a kind of primer for children, although much of it is of more use to parents as it places its emphasis

on allowing the children to be free to express themselves and thus their essential spirituality.

*Songs of Experience* was published jointly with *Songs of Innocence* five years later and usually only published in conjunction with it. However, Blake occasionally continued to publish *Songs of Innocence* separately. This was to some extent a commercial decision, since the book was in the vein of other popular books of the time; but Blake is rarely straightforward. For him, the innocence and joy of childhood was a symbol of mankind's innocence and freedom as well, a state to which he wanted everyone to return. 250 years after his birth, William Blake, engraver and printmaker, is still calling to us to return, and more people than ever before can hear him.

### Notes by Roy McMillan

Cover picture: William Blake by Thomas Phillips  
courtesy National Portrait Gallery, London



**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.



**Stephen Critchlow** is a popular and versatile actor who has enjoyed a wide variety of work, including *Hamlet* and *Pygmalion* in The West End, *Cyrano De Bergerac* at The Royal National Theatre and playing Kenneth Horne in *Round The Horne Revisited on Tour*. Television and film work includes *Cider with Rosie*, *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, *The Prince and The Pauper*, *Heartbeat*, *Monarch of The Glen*, *Fantabulosa*, *Trial and Retribution*, *The Calcium Kid* and *Churchill The Hollywood Years*. He has been in over two hundred productions as a member of the BBC Radio Drama Company.



**Michael Maloney's** many Shakespearean roles on the London stage include Edgar in *King Lear*, the title roles in *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*, Prince Hal in *Henry IV Parts 1 & 2*; on film he has appeared in Branagh's productions of *Hamlet* and *Henry V*, as well as in Parker's *Othello*. Other notable films include Minghella's *Truly, Madly, Deeply*. He frequently performs on radio and TV. He has been involved in other Naxos AudioBooks' productions including *King Richard III*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Poets of the Great War*. He has also played the part of George Tesman in *Hedda Gabler* and read *Selections from The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, *The Physician's Tale* from *The Canterbury Tales III* and *The House on the Strand* for Naxos AudioBooks.

# The Great Poets

# William Blake

Read by **Robert Glenister • Michael Maloney • Stephen Critchlow**

William Blake was a poet of intense passion, of visions and angelic visitations and of bullish non-conformism. From a world where he was inspired by the terrible cruelties of child labour and the social and political revolutions swamping Europe and America, he created poetry of both power and tenderness.

Unique in his methods and influential to this day, these readings of some of his works show the range of his concerns and styles. Some are fuelled by angry despair at Man's inhumanity, others joyously childlike, and others almost spiritual manifestos couched in language of rare delicacy.

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Total time  
62:24