

Alexandre Dumas The Man in the Iron Mask

Read by **Bill Homewood**

CLASSIC
FICTION



1	Two old friends	7:52
2	An interview with the Queen Mother	6:30
3	The former Musketeer, Aramis	5:33
4	Raoul de Bragalonne	4:20
5	Porthos' plan of action	3:15
6	Rival politics	3:26
7	Wounds upon wounds	2:15
8	The Bastille	2:52
9	The Secret Order	8:20
10	The King's Tailor	6:47
11	The Beehive	2:22
12	The General of the Secret Order	8:19
13	The Chateau of Vaux-le-Vicomte	7:01
14	High Treason	5:10

15	A night in the Bastille	3:08
16	The burnt papers	6:14
17	The false king	2:56
18	Porthos and Aramis escape	10:51
19	A last salute	2:38
20	The king refuses to forgive	4:56
21	Belle-Isle-en Mer	5:03
22	The grotto	17:07
23	King Louis XIV	3:37
24	Porthos' will	4:27
25	The Angel of Death	5:51
26	Epilogue	2:59

Total time: 2:24:00

Alexandre Dumas

The Man in the Iron Mask

This gripping tale of valour and honour in seventeenth-century France continues the adventures of the proud heroes of *The Three Musketeers* by the same author. We now know them as venerable leaders; their swashbuckling has become diplomacy – though the sword is never very far from the hand – and Dumas skilfully enhances their legendary status through the characters around them:

‘... “The musketeers! the musketeers!” repeated they. And among all these brave men, the idea that they were going to fight two of the oldest glories of the French army made a shiver, half enthusiasm, half terror, run through them. In fact, those four names – d’Artagnan, Athos, Porthos and Aramis – were venerated among all who wore a sword, as in antiquity the names of Hercules, Theseus, Castor and Pollux were revered...’

The musketeers, an elite royal corps, show unmatched courage and quick thinking in the face of danger. They are specialists in the arts of killing, disguise and deceit, but we are drawn to them as

romantic and attractive heroes – their actions always, of course, in a noble cause – imbued with the great French court traditions of *politesse*, flamboyant costume and honour. One of them bids his son, off to war: ‘...do not die without honour or advantage to France.’

Dumas writes with fun and dash, pushing the story on with repartee as fast as swordplay, earning the right, every now and then, to dwell on an especially important moment. For these lyrically written passages his unique skill is to spice his richly descriptive language with images of sense or taste, or with perfectly-timed details which underscore the mood of a scene or a character (‘...a bird of night uttered from the depths of the forest a prolonged and plaintive cry...’).

The book contains some of the funniest scenes Dumas wrote. Especially rich in comedy is the visit by Porthos to the King’s tailor, where Porthos is observed with fascination by Molière and, Dumas suggests, becomes the inspiration for the great writer’s *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*.

This is typical; Dumas adds to the 'reality' of his work with a painstakingly researched and beautifully-presented historical backdrop, and by the inclusion of actual people: noted artists of the Left Bank and 'Le Roi Soleil' himself (Louis XIV), among many others.

Alexandre Dumas wrote or collaborated on nearly 100 plays and many novels, including *The Three Musketeers* and *The Count of Monte Cristo*. He was born in 1802, the son of a general in Napoleon's army and the grandson of a French Marquis and a Saint Domingo negress. As a child he lived through the upheavals of the Napoleonic Revolution and the subsequent restoration of the monarchy of France. He received his private education from a priest (like Monte Cristo). He was politically active and, though he is thought to have rather embellished the actions in his *Mémoires*, was involved heroically in skirmishes during the 1830 revolution. He was the father of Alexandre Dumas (fils), most famous for his *The Lady of the Camellias*. Alexandre Dumas (père) ran his career as an industry. It is thought that he would sketch the outline of a story to an assistant who would write it up; then Dumas himself would take the story by the throat and wrestle it into a masterpiece. He was a generous, idiosyncratic and fun-loving man who

cooked brilliantly, gave a lot of money to cadgers and hangers-on, and spent prodigiously on his private life, most notoriously on various highly-publicised *affaires* and the construction of a monstrous folly of a house at Saint-Germain-en-Laye.

He died, just solvent, in 1870.

Notes by Bill Homewood

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

RAFF SYMPHONY NO. 10 Czecho-Slovak State Philharmonic Orchestra (Kosice) / Schneider	8.223321
GOLDMARK SYMPHONY NO. 2 Rhenish Philharmonic Orchestra / Halász	8.220417
RAFF SYMPHONY NO. 8 Slovak State Philharmonic Orchestra (Kosice) / Schneider	8.223362
BORODIN SYMPHONIES NOS 1 & 2 Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra / Gunzenhauser	8.550238

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Alexandre Dumas

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The Man in the Iron Mask continues the adventures of the dauntless heroes of *The Three Musketeers* – Aramis, Athos, Porthos and d'Artagnan. In old age their swashbuckling ought to have been replaced by a more gentle way of life, but the veteran warriors find themselves at the centre of a plot in which both hearts and heads are broken, and the very throne of France is at stake.



Bill Homewood is well-known for his innumerable television shows and leading credits in the West End, major theatres and the RSC. He has also directed theatre on both sides of the Atlantic and his various writing credits include *Theatrical Letters*, published by Marginalia Press. His other recordings for Naxos AudioBooks include *The Three Musketeers* and *The Count of Monte Cristo*.

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Engineer (speech): Alan Smyth, Bucks Audio Cassette

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2:24:00