

The logo features the word "NAXOS" in a bold, serif font, with "AudioBooks" written in a smaller, sans-serif font below it. Above the text is a decorative graphic of a classical building facade with columns.

NAXOS
AudioBooks

CLASSIC
FICTION

Kate Chopin
The Awakening

Read by **Liza Ross**



NA210812D

1	Mr Pontellier, a man of forty	11:36
2	Mrs Pontellier was not a mother-woman	4:32
3	The voice of the sea speaks to the soul	9:17
4	Madame Raignolle warns and advises	3:22
5	Mademoiselle Reisz, the pianist	11:32
6	Half-awakened senses...	3:44
7	Asleep in Madame Antoine's cot.	6:45
8	An unexpected farewell	5:56
9	At the beach with Mademoiselle Reisz	4:25
10	The house on Esplanade Street, New Orleans	6:34
11	A few sketches	10:14
12	In the top-floor flat of Mademoiselle Reisz	5:00
13	Mr Pontellier visits Dr Mandelet	4:06
14	Dinner with Edna's father – and Dr Mandelet	7:14
15	To the races with Alcée Arobin	6:47
16	'I am going to move away from my house...'	9:37
17	A final party	7:58
18	'Well, what next?'	7:52
19	A surprise visitor to the 'pigeon house'	11:23
20	In a garden in the suburbs	11:37
21	Back by the sea	6:30

Total time: 2:36:13

Kate Chopin

The Awakening

The 'discovery' of *The Awakening* dates roughly from the 1940s, since when it has been enthusiastically studied by numerous American academics, who have rightly found in it extraordinary qualities: it is beautifully written and constructed, highly sensitive and perceptive in its psychology, and pioneering in its feminist agenda.

The Awakening was Chopin's last novel: published in 1899, it prompted a national scandal and (apparently) discouraged its author from further attempts at longer fiction. Only a few years before, Thomas Hardy in England had been similarly discouraged by the reception of *Jude the Obscure*, but one is entitled in both cases to wonder whether in fact both writers had reached a defining moment with their novels: both have something of a 'manifesto' quality, offering defiantly radical and provocative attacks on social norms, attacks which were inevitably going to stimulate an outraged response.

Chopin's target is the conventional bourgeois idea of woman's role within marriage, where decorative subservience to

husband and devotion to the maternal role are absolute requirements. What makes the novel remarkable (amongst other things) is the subtlety with which this attack is developed: just as the heroine Edna Pontellier is slow to realise consciously what is happening to her at an instinctive level, so the reader is slow to draw conclusions about any of the characters, all of whom are depicted with sympathetic understanding – even, for instance, the dull but well-meaning husband who can hardly help viewing Edna as a possession and is genuinely baffled by the changes he witnesses in her as the narrative unfolds: thus the feminist theme which Chopin develops is set in a fully and persuasively realised context, from the flawless treatment of character to the finely-realised descriptions of Grand Isle. Nevertheless, much of what Chopin has to say must have been unavoidably shocking in its day, and perhaps even now to more conventional readers – take, for example, the challenge Edna offers to conventional views of motherhood when she says that 'the

children appeared before her like antagonists who had overcome her, who had overpowered and sought to drag her into the soul's slavery for the rest of her days'. Yet she is also passionately fond of her little boys: of such paradoxes and complexity is real life made up, and Chopin expresses this repeatedly in the acuteness of her insight.

Sophisticated, too, is the writer's handling of image, symbol and structure. The sea is perhaps the image which binds the novel's themes and narrative together: the story begins and ends at Grand Isle, where the sea's seductive sensuality comes to represent Edna's own growing awareness of her sensual self – her 'liberation' begins when she learns how to swim and overcomes her previous 'ungovernable dread' of the water. Music, too, is important: Mademoiselle Reisz, herself an artist, an 'outsider', plays music in which the deepest feelings are articulated at last for Edna – 'perhaps [for] the first time her being was tempered to take an impress of the abiding truth'.

The Awakening, then, is a novel which works supremely well, both as a love story of poignant intensity and as a powerful corrective to the unthinking oppression of women's individuality. Edna has been

used to living 'the dual life – that outward existence which conforms, the inward life which questions.' However bleak the ending of the novel may seem, Edna's triumph has been to break out of the 'dual life' and into the freedom of living as her deepest impulses tell her she should.

Kate Chopin, née O'Flaherty, was born in 1850 of an Irish father and Creole mother. After her marriage to Oscar Chopin she settled in New Orleans and regularly stayed at Grand Isle, the fashionable resort which features so importantly in *The Awakening*. Her husband died in 1882 and she was left with six children and debts to repay. She began to write short stories with which she achieved some success, but her major work is undoubtedly *The Awakening*, the hostile reception of which turned her to writing poetry and essays as well as short stories. She died from a brain haemorrhage in 1904.

Notes by Perry Keenlyside

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

CHOPIN MUSIC FOR CELLO AND PIANO Maria Kliegel, cello, Bernd Glemser, piano	8.553159
GRIEG PIANO MUSIC VOLUME 12 Einar Steen-Nokleberg, piano	8.553398
GRIEG PIANO MUSIC VOLUME 2 Einar Steen-Nokleberg, piano	8.550882
WIDOR PIANO TRIO Ilona Prunyi, piano/New Budapest Quartet	8.223193
CHOPIN SCHERZI AND IMPROMPTUS Idil Biret	8.550362

Music programming by Nicolas Soames

Cover picture: Summer Evening on the Skagen Southern Beach with
Anna Ancher and Marie Kroyer (detail) by Peder Severin Kroyer.
Skagens Museum, Denmark/The Bridgeman Art Library.

Kate Chopin

The Awakening

Read by **Liza Ross**

This is the moving and powerful story of Edna Pontellier, a beautiful young wife and mother who discovers her true feelings and identity through her love for Robert Lebrun, and in doing so challenges the bourgeois assumptions of her day. First published in 1899 in America, it prompted shock and outrage, but has since come to be recognized as a modern classic.



Liza Ross has appeared on stage in the West End and in repertory across the country, including *Wings* and *The Front Page* at the Royal National Theatre. She has made many TV appearances including *After the War*, *Poor Little Rich Girl*, *Two's Company* and *The Month of the Doctors*. Her film work includes *Batman* and *The Shadowchasers* and she has worked extensively as a voice artist.

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Total time
2:36:13