



Heathcote Williams

Whale Nation

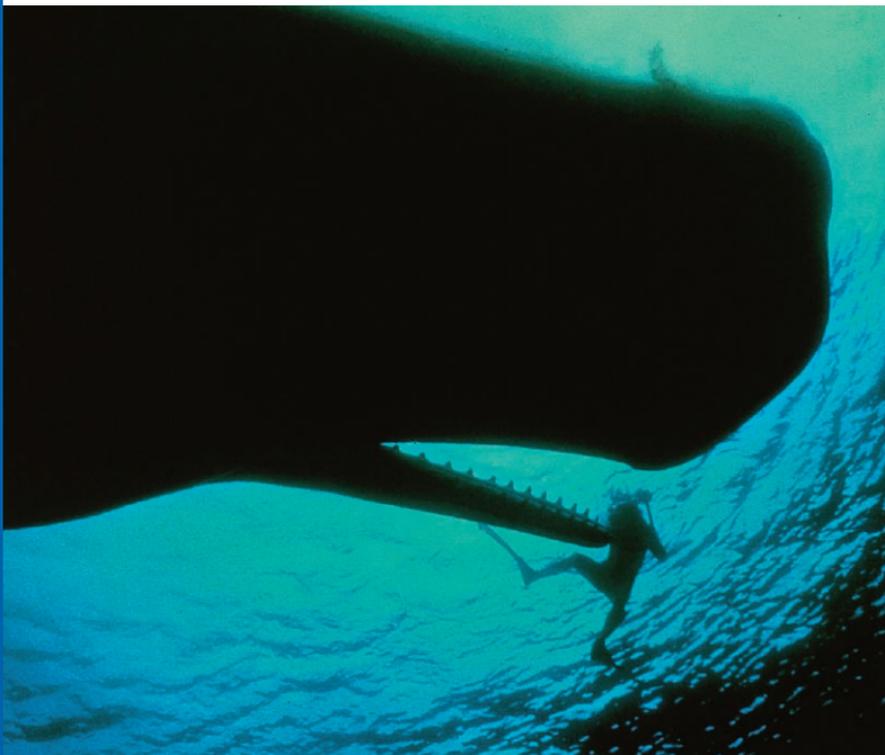
Read by **Heathcote Williams**

with **Harry Burton** and **Caroline Webster**

THE
COMPLETE
TEXT

UNABRIDGED

POETRY



NA245412D

Whale Nation

1	Ancient evolution	2:28
2	Intelligence	1:01
3	Whale games	2:56
4	Lyrical litanies	6:49
5	Echo location and communication	3:02
6	Gargantuan dimensions	4:36
7	To the mating grounds	7:57
8	Maternal instincts	1:41
9	At the hands of man	7:21
10	Materialist societies	5:48
11	The disappearing species	2:35
12	The dolphin – divine and exploited	4:14
13	Death and destruction	4:26
14	The dominant species	2:30

On the Nature of Whales

15	Facts and Figures	5:31
16	Song	11:42
17	Behaviour	13:02
18	Comment	3:18
19	Hunting	6:40
20	Products	6:56
21	Profits	7:02
22	Myths and Legends	5:56
23	Comment	3:29

Total time: 2:01:14

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Whale Nation

‘O ye whales and all that move in the waters...’
‘Benedicite’ – THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER

Actor/writer Heathcote Williams had already started work on what was later to become his poem, *Sacred Elephant*, when in the mid-1980s he started, inexplicably, to have vivid extended dreams about whales. Director Ken Campbell, on hearing this, encouraged him to write a piece about these mysterious creatures for his underwater theatre in Liverpool. So *Whale Nation* came into being, a celebratory epic portraying the history, life and habits of whales and dolphins and their exploitation at the hands of man.

It was performed many times in a stage production with pictures and whale song, initially by the author himself and then toured extensively by actor Roy Hutchens in venues as varied as The National Theatre and the Natural History Museum, London and the Steinhart Aquarium, San Francisco.

The poem was published by Jonathan Cape in 1988 and was coupled with an

extraordinary anthology of facts and figures, *On The Nature of Whales*.

The poet Ted Hughes wrote: ‘The poem is overwhelming...brilliant, cunning, dramatic and wonderfully moving, a steady accumulation of grandeur and dreadfulness and never any sense of exploiting the subject for poetic or literary effects, just a measured unfolding of real things from the heart of the subject.’

Undoubtedly a work of this kind has stirred consciences all over the world. In presenting the subject and its stark realities in such an uncompromising manner, it has been a catalyst both in environmental and emotional terms. Performances have inspired the creation of branches of the environmental group Greenpeace; and many people have related that the poem has directly challenged their thoughts and views on today’s society, its ever increasing

materialism and ruthless greed.

More recently, the book has been described as an icon of anti-consumerism.

Whale Nation has been a best-seller world wide and has, therefore, touched many peoples but it is significant that despite strenuous efforts, the book has still not been published in Japan, Norway or Russia – the three nations which still maintain their right to whale.

In 1983, the explorer and adventurer Thor Heyerdahl wrote, ‘it is not everybody’s fortune to have had bedside company with whales in their own free playground, but those of us who have feel an urge to support the growing majority of mankind that demands that the tiny minority who threatens the remaining whale species with complete extinction for personal economic gains should be forced to leave the whales in peace until able to multiply for the benefit of future generations on this planet.’

Whale Nation was the first of a series of extended poems written by Heathcote Williams on subjects of environmental concern. The others, which have also had a considerable effect, are: *Falling for a Dolphin* (1988); *Sacred Elephant* (1989) and *Autogeddon* (1991).

Although they brought Williams’ work to

a broad public, he had already established himself as a poet and playwright – his *AC/DC* was produced at London’s Royal Court and won numerous awards in the UK and the US. Other plays include *Hancock’s Last Half Hour*, and *The Immortalist*. As an actor he has been equally versatile, playing Prospero in Derek Jarman’s film of *The Tempest* and Dr Haggage in *Little Dorrit*.

Notes by Sarah Butcher

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

MENDELSSOHN CALM SEA AND PROSPEROUS VOYAGE Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra/Oliver Dohnányi	8.550222
HOLST THE PLANETS (NEPTUNE) Czecho-Slovak RSO/Adrian Leaper	8.550193
BACH MASS IN B MINOR Capella Istropolitana/Christian Brembeck	8.550585-6
MOZART REQUIEM Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra and Chorus/Zdenek Kosler	8.550235
BRAHMS SYMPHONY NO 1 BRT Philharmonic, Brussels/Alexander Rahbari	8550278
DEBUSSY LA MER BRT Philharmonic, Brussels/Alexander Rahbari	8.550262
CIURLIONIS THE SEA Slovak Philharmonic/Juozas Domarkas	8.223323
WHALE MUSIC	
LES CHANTS DE LA BALEINE A BOSSE by courtesy of World of Sounds, France.	WSCD 00291

Cover picture: Photograph by Paulo Curto/The Image Bank



Harry Burton is a highly versatile actor. A familiar figure in British theatre, in London's West End and the Fringe, he has become equally known for taking leading operatic roles including Mozart (Figaro and Leporello) and Rossini (Dandini) at the South Bank, the Vienna Festival and on TV. He is also regularly seen on TV



Caroline Webster works extensively in UK TV, radio and theatre. She has appeared in no fewer than four Alan Ayckbourn plays – three of them directed by the playwright – both in Scarborough and the Royal National Theatre, London.

Heathcote Williams

Whale Nation

Read by **Heathcote Williams**
with **Harry Burton** and **Caroline Webster**

*'Leviathan...
Upon earth there is not his like,
who is made without fear.
Will he speak soft words unto thee?'* Job 41

Whale Nation is a hymn to the beauty, intelligence and majesty of the largest mammal on earth. A 'green classic' read with natural resonance by its author, it rarely fails to strike a chord in the hearts of those concerned with the abuse of our planet. On the second CD is a fascinating account of whale history. Sensitive underscoring with classical music.



Heathcote Williams As poet, playwright and actor, Heathcote Williams has made a significant contribution to many fields. He is best known for his extended poems on environmental subjects, *Whale Nation* (1988); *Falling for a Dolphin* (1988); *Sacred Elephant* (1989) and *Autogeddon* (1991). But his plays have also won acclaim notably *AC/DC* produced at London's Royal Court, and *Hancock's Last Half Hour*. As an actor he has been equally versatile – among his most memorable roles was Prospero in Derek Jarman's film of *The Tempest*.

CD ISBN:

978-962-634-454-5

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Total time
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