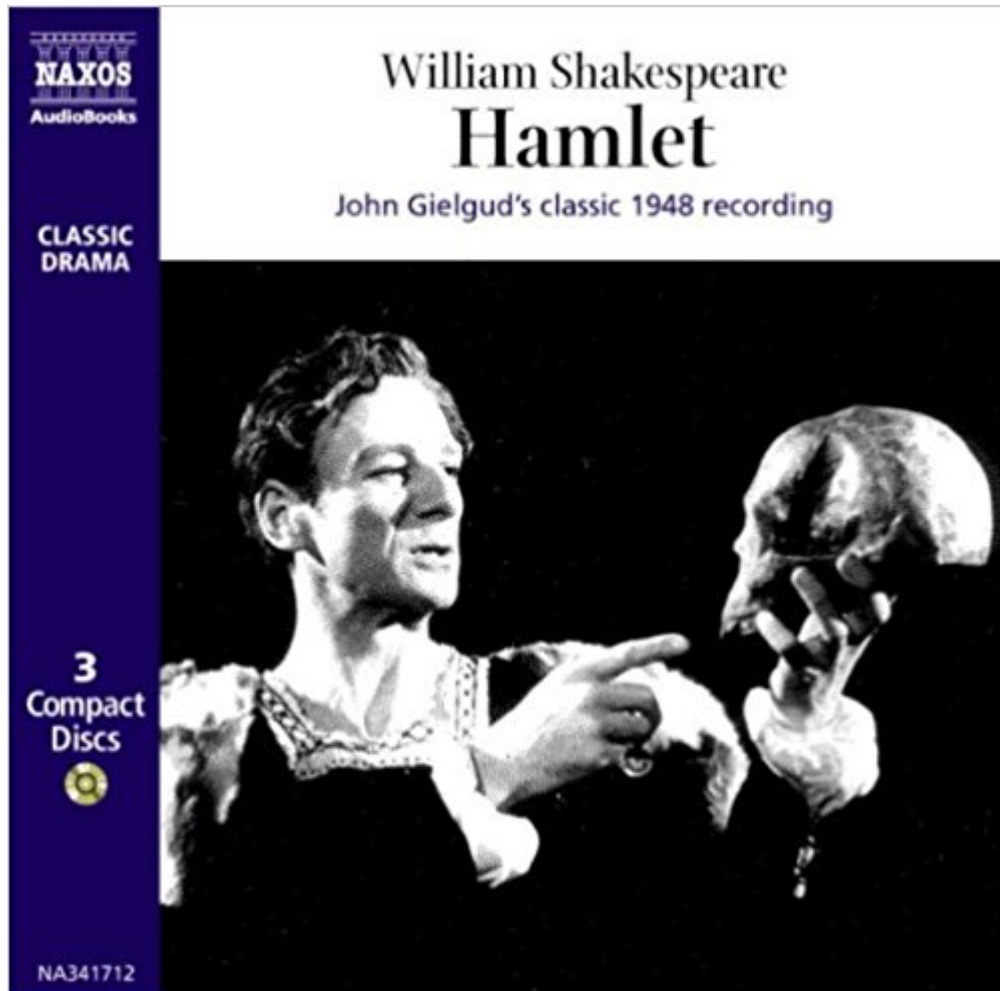


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Hamlet: John Gielgud's Classic 1948 Recording (Classic Drama)



Synopsis

This outstanding historical recording made in 1941 for radio is widely regarded as one of the finest Hamlet performances ever, and one of John Gielgud's greatest moments. Though he went on to record it for commercial release, nothing matched this recording in the BBC studios, made before the days of editing.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

After reading the negative and only review of this CD, I decided to see how terrible this recorded performance was for myself. First of all, I was surprised at how clear the sound of the performance actually was, considering the date of the recording. Second, I've seen and heard numerous performances of Shakespeare's Hamlet over the years, (including Mel Gibson, Nicol Williamson, Lawrence Oliver, Richard Burton, and Kenneth Branagh), most of which I have enjoyed, more or less, for different reasons. (I find it is a lot like listening to the many, great violinists who have recorded Beethoven's, one and only, Violin Concerto in D, Op. 61, i.e., some are good and some are great, for different reasons.) At the time of this recording, John Gielgud had played Hamlet over 500 times and this performance in 1948 came late for him to play the role, yet Gielgud was also at the height of his abilities as an actor. I found that beyond the various interpretation's of Hamlet's personality by others, no one can "Speak the speech, I pray you, ...trippingly on the tongue..." in the decisively commanding, poetic, and eloquent manner as John Gielgud. It is the beauty of Shakespeare's language that Gielgud offers here, and that I believe is worth the price of admission,

(or in this case, the 3CDs). Of course, the cast is not perfect, but Andrew Cruickshank is the best Claudius, I've ever heard, and Hugh Griffith's monologue as the First Player is just marvelous. Also, memorable is Marian Spencer as Gertrude, Baliol Holloway as Polonius, Sebastian Shaw as Horatio and Hugh Burden as Laertes. If that's not enough to wet your palette, get this CD set for no other reason than it is a historic performance of a John Gielgud with an enchanted voice, like none other.

Sir John Gielgud was one of the premier Shakespearean actors of the 20th Century. He was well known for his Hamlet, having played it approximately 500 times by the time of this broadcast. Another reviewer brands him "simply not Hamlet" and describes his performance as "weak and lacking in intelligence." Inexplicable criticisms and wrong. "Simply not Hamlet" defies the judgment of Gielgud's contemporaries, who held his Hamlet as the standard by which to measure all others. The erring reviewer can only mean not conforming to his individual pre-conception of the role. No useful information is conveyed by such criticism. "Weak?" Is Gielgud's Hamlet recessive, inarticulate, unimportant, ineffective, uninvolved, lacking in reserves? Heck no. Therefore it is not weak. "Lacking in intelligence" is vague and unprovable, as no one makes more of Shakespeare's language than Gielgud. We might not make the same choices today, but none of his choices are unintelligent, and some of them remain unmatched. So, what do we really have here, all preconceptions to one side? A poetic performance that, top-to-bottom, concentrates on the language in a florid, large-than-life manner, almost operatic, that is no longer current. The style is not invalid, just lost. And being broadcast live, without editing, the energy level of the whole cast is that much higher. Any fan of Shakespeare on audio should have this performance as a centerpiece of his or her collection. Required listening.

Play: NA. It is a classic. Radio Drama: I chose this version since all the reviews said that Gielgud's version of Hamlet was the best. Since I have not seen or heard another, I can not judge. However, it was very good.

Gielgud is absolutely brilliant. One has to remind oneself that he knew Hamlet inside and out, having done the play in a number of productions over the years, not just once or two time experienced. probably the most fleshed out version of Hamlet ever done by an actor.

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