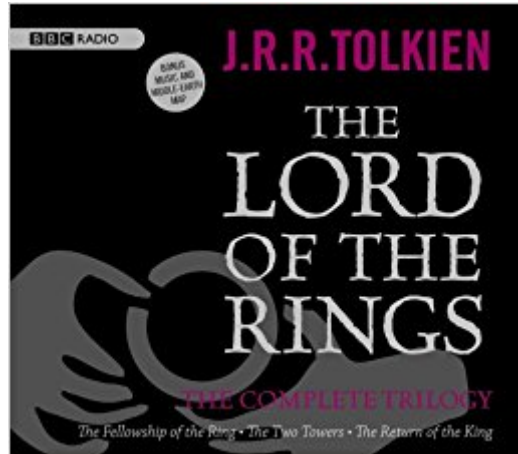


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The Lord Of The Rings (BBC Dramatization, Consumer Edition)



Synopsis

This audio set includes:Â The Fellowship of the Ring; The Two Towers;Â andÂ The Return of the King. Undertaking the adaptation of J.R.R. Tolkien's best-known work was an enormous task, but with its first broadcast on BBC Radio 4 on March 8, 1981, this dramatized tale of Middle Earth became an instant global classic. Thrilling dramatization by Brian Sibley and Michael Bakewell it boasts a truly outstanding cast including Ian Holm (as Frodo), Sir Michael Hordern (as Gandalf), Robert Stephens (as Aragorn), and John Le Mesurier. Tolkiens tale relates the perilous attempt by Frodo Baggins and company to defeat the evil Saruman and dispose of the Ruling Ring. Brian Sibley wrote the opening and closing narration for the character of Frodo, played by Ian Holm, who now stars as Bilbo in the feature films based onÂ The Lord of the Rings.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I picked up this set for a long road trip, remembering fondly the broadcast over NPR (introduced by Tammy Grimes) from many years ago. Of its reputed superiority to the prior and much deplored Mind's Eye production (also broadcast over NPR), which I have never heard, I have nothing to say. I will simply point out that no one purchasing this BBC recording in its current package could possibly mistake it for a reading of Tolkien's unabridged text. It is clearly a dramatization for radio. The music used in this production has received mixed reviews. Those who dislike it, influenced perhaps by bits of the soundtrack from Peter Jackson's films, may have been hoping for something more "Celtic," Enya-like. Forget it. What we get is firmly in the English tradition of Vaughan Williams and others: lush strings with churchy vocals supplied by boy sopranos, countertenors, and other former

choristers. Indeed the songs, which had always struck me as one of the weaknesses of the books, are one of the strengths of this adaptation. Making a virtue of a necessity, the radio production has fully exploited portions of the books all but ignored by the filmmakers, and the supplemental music CD, which at first seemed to me superfluous, proved to be a welcome bonus in the end. Several reviewers have objected to the casting of Robert Stephens as Aragorn. I confess that my initial reaction was unfavorable as well: I kept picturing him as the aged, dissolute, and thoroughly "cudgeled" figure of Pistol at the end of Kenneth Branagh's "Henry V." But just as Sam gets used to the uncouth Strider, I got used to Robert Stephens, even as I got used to Ian Holm as Frodo instead of as Bilbo, whom he portrayed in the films.

This BBC audio adaptation of "The Lord of the Rings" holds its own when compared to both Tolkien's original books and the movies by Peter Jackson. The book gives delightful insights into the plot, characters, and especially the world of Middle Earth, whereas the movies bring powerful visual elements, better music, and more action. This theatrical radio production fits somewhere between the book and the movie; it delves more into the story of the world and what makes the characters tick, without requiring the epic journey of reading Tolkien's masterful tomes themselves. In the radio version, Sam's love of the elves comes out more than in the movies. Merry and Pippin are cast in a different light, with Merry given a wiser role than in the movies, and one grows to love them and their commitment to Frodo in a way that the movies were unable to portray. In the radio version, Gimli's admiration and kinship with the long-passed rulers of Moria is meaningful and deep, and the camaraderie of Gimli, Legolas, and Aragorn really rings true. Overall, the books go into the rich detail of the world, while the movies add visual elements, music, and action scenes. The BBC theatrical radio version draws additional depth of feeling from the characters and focuses less on action but more on story. If you enjoyed Tolkien's poetry from the books, you'll be quite pleased at how the radio version uses many of the poems most pertinent for character development--including Frodo singing the "Walking Song" and a delightfully hobbit-like tune at the Prancing Pony in Bree. Then there is Sam singing of Gil Galad, Gimli quoting the tale of Durin, and many others.

This review is for the 12 disc BBC dramatization of The Lord of the Rings, with the black cover, ISBN 160283492X. There is a newer release, with a yellow cover, that packages The Hobbit (1968) and this version of The Lord of the Rings (1981) together with some bonus material. This is a full-cast audio drama originally developed for radio, not an audiobook. There are 13 episodes clocking in at just under an hour each.***Many purists claim that this is the most faithful of the Lord

of the Rings adaptations, and they are right. Don't let that discourage you, though; this series is not just for Tolkien scholars. It is extremely accessible, and has aged very little since its original airing in 1981. The production values are high, the stereo sound is rich and clear, the music is ageless, and - best of all - the cast has risen to the occasion in a way that perhaps no other cast ever will. If you are listening to the series after having listened to the BBC's 1968 Hobbit production, you will find the technical and artistic improvements made in the 13 year interval to be striking. The cast is almost uniformly excellent, but I want to draw particular attention to (who else?) Frodo and Sam. Ian Holm is known to many Tolkien fans as Bilbo in Peter Jackson's movies, and he brings playfulness and gravitas in equal measure to Frodo here. His deeply conflicted portrayal is much closer to Tolkien's intent than Elijah Wood's young and naive take in the movies. Aside from these stodgy academic concerns of textual accuracy, though, Holm's portrayal is simply more enjoyable because it has so much more depth. Frodo does not set out on this journey as a wide-eyed teenager; he is a man, a master, a scholar, and a friend.

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