

**NAXOS**  
AudioBooks

James Boswell  
**A Life of Johnson**

Read by **Billy Hartman**

**NON-  
FICTION**



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1	Dr Johnson's birth and background	4:09
2	Dr Johnson – the student	8:49
3	The move to London	6:07
4	The death of his wife	5:42
5	Publication of the <i>Dictionary</i>	4:53
6	My first meeting with Dr Johnson	9:41
7	With Dr Johnson and Dr Goldsmith	4:13
8	'Pity is not natural to man'	6:54
9	'Jean Bull philosophe'	6:32
10	1764 – The Literary Club	6:25
11	1765 – With the Thrale family	7:02
12	'Smile with the wise and feed with the rich'	8:47
13	Hope and experience	8:39
14	Johnson's personal courage	8:21
15	A capital tavern	5:23
16	Dr Johnson's compassion	5:51
17	Dr Johnson meets John Wilkes	10:24
18	<i>Bons mots</i> from the Johnsonian garden	4:47
19	More dialogues	7:29
20	Lives of the Poets	5:34
21	1783 – aged 74	5:43
22	The last year	4:41
23	The death of Dr Johnson	9:24

**Total time: 2:36:02**

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James Boswell  
**A Life of Johnson**

Samuel Johnson was born in Lichfield in 1709 and died in London in 1784 aged 75. He came from a modestly middle-class background, but his father's bookselling business failed and his Oxford education was abruptly terminated for want of funds. In spite of this, he became the greatest English scholar and man of letters of his day, a man of enormous learning but equally a man who loved life in all its variety.

Having married, in 1735, Mrs Elizabeth Porter, a widow almost twice his age, and having had little success in running a school with only three students, Johnson moved to London – accompanied by his pupil David Garrick. Both found fame in the capital, Garrick more rapidly as the greatest actor of his time, and both remained lifelong friends. Johnson's literary career began humbly enough, producing hack-work for various journals, but it was the publication of his *Dictionary* in 1755 which really set the seal on his reputation. The *Dictionary* was the result of nine years' labour, in conditions of some poverty, and in the teeth of the terrible depressions which frequently afflicted him.

In 1762 Johnson was granted a crown

pension; in 1763 he met James Boswell, so that from this time we have the full and wonderfully vivid account of his life given by the latter. Johnson's acquaintance was wide and included such eminent men as Sir Joshua Reynolds, Edmund Burke, Oliver Goldsmith and Charles Fox: all were members of the *Literary Club* founded in 1764. Other of Johnson's works include his poem *The Vanity of Human Wishes*, his edition of Shakespeare, *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*, *The Lives of the English Poets* and *Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia*.

Johnson was a man of huge personality – almost terrifying to behold, with his scarred face, massive frame and eccentricities of word and movement. He could be a loyal friend and a formidable opponent; he loved to talk and held in thrall a large circle of admirers who contradicted him at their peril. He had read voraciously and could talk on almost any topic; his politics were Tory, yet he abhorred slavery, condemned the English treatment of the Irish and attacked religious complacency – perhaps because his faith in the divine was coloured by a profound terror of death. His generosity to

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the poor and willingness to provide a home for some of those who had enjoyed little worldly success are touching testimonies to his deep humanity. It was, above all, Johnson's love of society, conversation and friendship which gave Boswell the material for his biography – described by Macaulay as the best ever written.

James Boswell (1740-1795) was born in Edinburgh and studied law, but was really more interested in travel, writing and politics – not to mention what he would

have called the 'dissipation' of his London life. His *Journals* give an extraordinarily lively and intimate impression of this excitable, enthusiastic and energetically philandering character. His *Life of Samuel Johnson*, published in 1791, took him many years to compile and was mainly based on the extensive conversations and travels he enjoyed with his subject, for whom he had an affection bordering on worship.

**Notes by Perry Keenlyside**

Cover picture: Samuel Johnson, by Sir Joshua Reynolds.  
Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, London.

**The music on this CD is taken from the NAXOS catalogue**

**HANDEL** FAMOUS ORGAN CONCERTOS

Johann Aratore, organ; Handel Festival Chamber Orchestra, John Tinge.

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# James Boswell

# A Life of Johnson

Read by **Billy Hartman**

Boswell's biography of his friend and hero Samuel Johnson is an acknowledged classic, full of humorous anecdote and rich characterisation. Johnson's complex humanity (his depression, fear of death, intellectual brilliance and rough humour) is set within a vivid picture of 18th century London peopled by personalities of the time such as Sir Joshua Reynolds, John Wilkes, Oliver Goldsmith and David Garrick.



**Billy Hartman** trained in Edinburgh and has enjoyed unusually wide stage and TV experience. He played *Elvis* in the musical, Bill Sykes in *Oliver* as well as appearing in opera (including *Don Giovanni*) and the central Shakespearean repertoire. His numerous film and TV credits include *Highlander*, *Minder* and *Inspector Morse*.

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2:36:02