

NAXOS
AudioBooks

Plato Symposium

THE
COMPLETE
TEXT

UNABRIDGED

Read by **David Shaw-Parker** with full cast

NON-
FICTION

PHILOSOPHY



NA238312D

1	The Symposium	4:24
2	The conversation went something like this...	5:18
3	Well, gentlemen...	5:10
4	Eros is a great god...	6:51
5	That was the gist of it...	3:38
6	Those who start a love affair...	5:29
7	The true position...	5:08
8	So it is absolutely correct...	4:52
9	Medicine, then, is as I say...	5:04
10	So the prophetic arts...	4:41
11	The reason for having three sexes...	4:35
12	That is why we have this innate love...	4:04
13	So that's the explanation...	5:30
14	I want first to talk about how I should talk...	5:15
15	And what about courage?	4:33

16	Well Eryximachus, son of Acumenus...	4:44
17	Let's take a few more questions...	5:30
18	Anyway, I'll let you off...	5:10
19	When Aphrodite was born...	4:10
20	Fair enough, my foreign friend...	5:06
21	The activity we're talking about...	5:47
22	All continuous mortal existence is of this kind.	4:56
23	We would all choose children of this kind.	5:21
24	If a man progresses...	4:06
25	That's my speech, Phaedrus.	4:56
26	What's the plan, Alcibiades.	4:30
27	For my own part, gentlemen...	5:58
28	What I've told you so far...	4:03
29	After this exchange...	4:32
30	In fact the generals were inclined to favour me...	3:55
31	Alcibiades' candour aroused some amusement...	3:56

Total time: 2:31:12

Plato
Symposium

The Cast

Socrates	David Shaw-Parker
Apollodorus /Alcibiades	Tim Bentinck
Aristodemus	Andrew Branch
Agathon	Daniel Flynn
Pausanias /Friend	Gordon Griffin
Phaedrus	Hayward Morse
Eryximachus / Servant	Christopher Scott
Diotima	Susan Sheridan
Aristophanes	David Timson
Presenter	Daniel Flynn

Cover picture: *Socrates and his disciples* by Gustav Adolph Spangenberg (1828-1891)
courtesy AKG-Images

Plato

Symposium

The Greek word *sumposion* means a drinking party (a fact shamefully ignored by the organisers of modern symposia), and the party described in Plato's *Symposium* is one supposedly given in the year 416 BC by the playwright Agathon to celebrate his victory in the dramatic festival of the Lenaea. He has already given one party, the previous evening; this second party is for a select group of friends, and host and guests alike are feeling a little frail. They decide to forego heavy drinking, and concentrate on conversation. The subject of their conversation is Eros, the god of sexual love.

Symposium was written around 384 BC, and many would regard it as his finest dialogue, from an artistic point of view, and the most enjoyable to read or listen to. There are many reasons for this, but I will focus on four: the keyhole glimpse it gives us of Athenian society; the role played in the dialogue by Socrates; the description of what has come to be known as Platonic love; and the characterisation of the speakers.

Athenian society

Symposium is a key text in any discussion of

the Athenians and their attitude to male homosexuality. When Phaedrus, Pausanias and Agathon wax lyrical about Eros, what they have in mind is erotic love between men, or between a man and a boy; and then the byplay between Socrates, Alcibiades and Agathon about who sits next to whom – it all suggests, rather, that nobody can resist a good-looking young man. Do we conclude that the Athenians regarded heterosexual love as business, a family duty, and took pleasure only in homosexual love? Maybe. But if we do, then the plot of Aristophanes' play *Lysistrata* makes no sense. In *Lysistrata* the women of Sparta and Athens bring the war to an end by refusing to have sex with their husbands while it continues.

Quite apart from this, *Symposium* gives us intriguing details of social life in Athens. What was a dinner party like? We tend to regard food and drink as complementary, but in *Symposium* it's a question of eating first, and then drinking afterwards, and nobody suggests that this is an unusual thing to do. And after dinner? Clearly it is unusual to prefer conversation to the entertainment provided by a flute girl (for

whom, to judge by vase paintings, playing the flute might be the least of her duties). And the flute girl reminds us that Athens (like all Greek city-states) was a society based on slavery, so it is interesting to note the courtesy with which Agathon treats the slaves serving the meal. 'Regard us as your guests,' he says, addressing them, not as equals, perhaps, but very nearly as friends.

Socrates in *Symposium*

The Socrates who appears in many Plato dialogues is something of an acquired taste. He claims to know nothing, yet clearly thinks he knows more than the people he is talking to. He is reluctant to offer views of his own, preferring at best to criticise, at worst to misrepresent, the views of others. In *Symposium*, the agreed format (that each guest will make an uninterrupted speech) both prohibits his preferred technique of question-and-answer (though he does try it at one point) and requires him to say something positive himself. On a personal level, he shows more human characteristics than usual. He has his usual passion for what is just and what is true. But we also see him, lost in thought, as he wanders into the porch of the wrong house, leaving his uninvited companion to arrive on his own. We hear how he resisted the sexual advances of Alcibiades, the best-looking

young man in Athens. Yet he is no ascetic. He drinks with the rest of them, and at daybreak, when the last drinkers finally fall asleep, only Socrates remains awake.

Platonic love

Socrates is always reluctant to lay claim to knowledge of his own. But he will, he says, report something he once heard on the subject of love from a wise woman (Diotima). According to her, admiration for physical beauty is the first step on a ladder which can lead us from love of the beauty of one person to love of all physical beauty; from there to love of mental beauty, the realisation that beauty of the mind is finer than beauty of the body; from beauty of the mind to beauty in customs and institutions; and from institutions to knowledge and beauty in general – in other words, to philosophy; here the lover will gain in strength and stature until finally he catches sight of absolute beauty itself (what in the *Republic* Plato calls 'the form of the good'). In the modern world Platonic love has been reduced simply to non-sexual love; for Plato, as *Symposium* shows us, there is much more to it than that

Characters

Agathon's guest list has a generous sprinkling of A-list celebrities. Apart from

Socrates, there is Agathon himself, winning playwright in a competition in which Sophocles and Euripides must have been entrants – glamorous, good-looking, talented, though gently ridiculed by Socrates for his vacuous rhetorical style. Aristophanes, the leading comic playwright of his day – dry, ironic, facetious, as we might expect, and also a good friend of Socrates (as we might not expect, given his satirical portrayal of Socrates in *The Clouds*). Pausanias, Agathon's lover (according to Aristophanes) – confident, successful, man of the world to his fingertips. Not much to say? Then say it with assurance. We have Eryximachus – the fussy, precise society doctor; Phaedrus – the naïve and enthusiastic devotee of Eros, and of rhetoric. And above all, Alcibiades – top of anybody's A-list. Not strictly a guest, since he gate-crashes the party, but clearly a good friend of Agathon. Alcibiades is good-looking (irresistibly so, to anyone but Socrates), charismatic, darling of the Athenian mob, and potential coup leader. It is his arrival drunk, halfway through the proceedings, which destroys the praiseworthy aim of keeping the drinking moderate. His description of his attempt, as a boy, to seduce Socrates, is both entertaining and a confirmation that Diotima's ladder is not a pipedream. It is

possible, says Plato, to go beyond physical desire, because here is someone – Socrates – who has done just that.

THE SPEAKERS IN THE DIALOGUE

AGATHON, a writer of tragedies

SOCRATES, a truth-loving eccentric

PHAEDRUS, an idealist

PAUSANIAS, a realist – Agathon's lover

ARISTOPHANES, a writer of comedies

ERYXIMACHUS, a doctor

ALCIBIADES, a politician and playboy

Notes by Tom Griffith



Tim Bentinck trained at the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School where he won the Carleton Hobbs radio award, subsequently joining the BBC Radio Rep. He is a successful voice-over artist with *Crouching Tiger*, *Hidden Dragon* and *the World Is Not Enough* among his credits, as well as appearing in regional, fringe and West End theatre. His TV credits include *By The Sword Divided*, *Square Deal*, *Made In Heaven*, *Strike Force*, *Casualty*, *The Bill*, *Prince Among Men* and *Enigma*. On radio he plays the part of David in *The Archers*. For Naxos AudioBooks he has also read the parts of Francisco and the Boatman in *The Tempest* and reads *A Very Short Introduction to the Classics*.



Andrew Branch has worked extensively in London the theatre - *40 Years On*, *St. Joan*, *Henry IV*, *The Tempest*, *Antony & Cleopatra*, *Julius Caesar*, *The Collection* and regional theatre - *Peer Gynt*, *Candida*, *Cabaret*, *The Homecoming*, *Othello*. His film and TV appearances include *A Bridge Too Far*, *People Like us*, *Making Faces*, *Cold Feet*, and *London's Burning*. His radio work includes over 1000 broadcasts and plays.



Daniel Flynn has worked extensively in film, radio, TV and theatre for the last 25 years. His many theatre credits include principal roles at the Royal National Theatre, the RSC, the Royal Court and the Donmar and at the time of this recording he was about to embark on a national tour followed by a West End run at the Haymarket of Robert Bolt's *A Man For All Seasons*, in which he was playing the role of Henry VIII.



Gordon Griffin has recorded over 220 audio books. For Naxos AudioBooks he has also recorded *The Trial and the Death of Socrates* and *Dead Souls*. Gordon also appears regularly on television and in films. He was dialogue coach (Geordie) on *Byker Grove* and *Kavanagh QC*



Hayward Morse trained at London's RADA and has since worked on stage, television and films in Britain, Canada and America. He was in the original stage production of *The Rocky Horror Show*, the film *Death Wish 3* with Charles Bronson and received a Tony Award nomination for his performance in *Butley* on Broadway opposite Alan Bates.



Christopher Scott, the Nazgul from the BBC's award winning *The Lord of the Rings*, has narrated over 200 audio books, including The King James Bible. He adapted Anthony Couch's hilarious book, *Memoirs of a Twelfth Man*, for Radio 4 and was part of the TV series *Absolute Power* with Stephen Fry.



David Shaw-Parker trained at RADA and began his career with the Royal Shakespeare Company at Stratford-Upon-Avon having toured with them to Europe, Japan, Los Angeles, Washington and Broadway NY. He combines a busy career in theatre and television with a wide variety of radio work, from drama to narrating documentaries. In 1992 he was invited to join the cast of *The Muppets' Christmas Carol* as the voice of Joe The Spider. David has also appeared at the Royal National Theatre in *The False Servant* and *My Fair Lady* and in the West End in Victoria Wood's musical of *Acorn Antiques*.

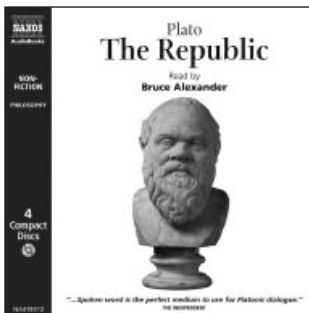


Susan Sheridan trained at The Guildhall School of Music and Drama, winning the Malvern Prize for comedy. A versatile actress, she has voiced cartoons from *Noddy* to Disney's classic *The Black Cauldron*, was twice on the BBC Drama Rep, and was the original Trillian in the award winning *The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. She also performs her own stage play *The Merry Wife of Wilton* in which she plays the Countess of Pembroke.

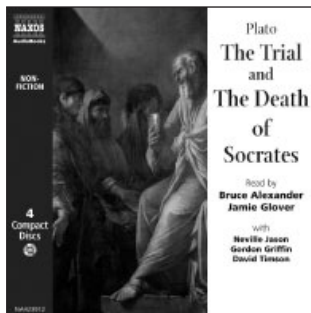


David Timson has made over 1,000 broadcasts for BBC Radio Drama. For Naxos AudioBooks he wrote *The History of the Theatre*, which won an award for most original production from the Spoken Word Publishers Association in 2001. He has also directed for Naxos AudioBooks four Shakespeare plays, including *King Richard III* (with Kenneth Branagh), which won Best Drama Award from the SWPA in 2001. In 2002 he won the Audio of the Year Award for his reading of *A Study in Scarlet*. He also reads *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes I, II, III, IV, V and VI* and *The Return of Sherlock Holmes I, II and III*.

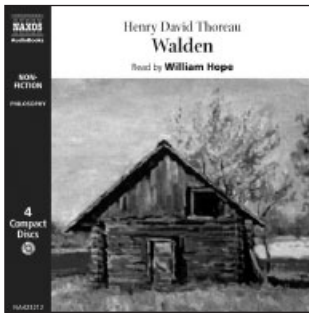
Other works on Naxos AudioBooks



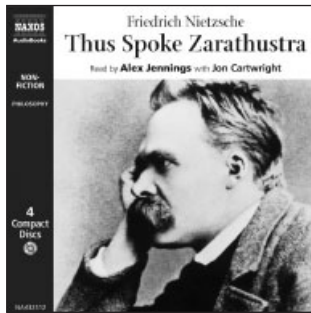
The Republic
(Plato) 4CD – NA419512



The Trial and Death of Socrates
(Plato) 4CD – NA423912



Walden
(Thoreau) 4CD – NA423212



Thus Spoke Zarathustra
(Nietzsche) 4CD – NA432512

Plato

Symposium

Read by **David Shaw-Parker** and full cast

New translation by Tom Griffith

In *Symposium*, a group of Athenian aristocrats attend a party held by Agathon to celebrate his victory in the drama festival of the Dionysia. They talk about love until the drunken Alcibiades bursts in, and decides to talk about Socrates instead. *Symposium* gives a picture of the sparkling society that was Athens at the height of her empire.

The Cast

Socrates	David Shaw-Parker
Apollodorus /Alcibiades	Tim Bentinck
Aristodemus	Andrew Branch
Agathon	Daniel Flynn
Pausanias /Friend	Gordon Griffin
Phaedrus	Hayward Morse
Eryximachus /Servant	Christopher Scott
Diotima	Susan Sheridan
Aristophanes	David Timson
Presenter	Daniel Flynn

CD ISBN:

978-962-634-383-8

View our catalogue online at
www.naxosaudiobooks.com



Produced and directed by Garrick Hagon
Translation by Tom Griffith
Edited by Wolfgang Dienst
Recorded by Ross Burman at RNIB Talking Book Studios

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. UNAUTHORISED PUBLIC PERFORMANCE,
BROADCASTING AND COPYING OF THESE COMPACT DISCS PROHIBITED.
© 2006 NAXOS Audiobooks Ltd. © 2006 NAXOS Audiobooks Ltd.
Made in Germany.

Total time
2:31:12