

NAXOS
AudioBooks

Arthur Miller
Death of a Salesman

Thomas Mitchell as Willy Loman and **Arthur Kennedy** as Biff
Directed by **Elia Kazan** (New York, 1950)

**CLASSIC
DRAMA**



NA199712D

Kermit Bloomgarden and Walter Fried present
Elia Kazan's production of *Death of a Salesman*

CAST

Willy Loman Thomas Mitchell
Biff Arthur Kennedy
Linda Mildred Dunnock
Charley Howard Smith
Uncle Ben Thomas Chalmers
Happy Cameron Mitchell
Howard Wagner Alan Hewitt
Bernard Don Keefer
Stanley Tom Pedi
The Woman Winifred Cushing
Miss Forsythe Constance Ford
Letta Hope Cameron
Jenny Ann Driscoll

Director Elia Kazan

– All Members of the Original Cast Production

The action of the play takes place in Willy Loman's house – its bedrooms, kitchen, basement, backyard – and in various offices and places he visits in New York City and Boston.

Act 1: Willy and Linda's bedroom – the boys' bedroom – the kitchen – the backyard in the past – a Boston hotel as remembered by Willy – the backyard in the past – the kitchen – the backyard in Willy's imagination – the kitchen – Willy and Linda's bedroom

Act 2: The kitchen – Howard Wagner's office – the backyard in Willy's imagination – Charley's office – a small restaurant – a scene in Willy's mind – the small restaurant – a Boston hotel as remembered by Willy – the small restaurant – the kitchen – the garden – the kitchen – the cemetery

Act 1

1	'Willy!'	4:27
2	'Hey Biff, Biff wake up, I think Pop's back...'	4:50
3	'Just wanna be careful with those girls, Biff...'	4:35
4	'Hello dear!'	4:33
5	'Why didn't I go to Alaska with my brother Ben that time?'	6:40
6	'Was rich. That's just the spirit I wanna imbue them with.'	5:44
7	'He's dying Biff.'	4:24
8	'Now Biff. Walk in very serious.'	5:00

Act 2

9	'Wonderful coffee.'	3:53
10	'Let me tell you a story Howard.'	3:54
11	'Ben! I've gotta talk to you Ben.'	4:17
12	'Bernard.'	4:27
13	In a small restaurant Biff arrives and finds Happy...	4:22
14	'Mrs Loman! Mrs Loman!'	5:15
15	'Biff!'	4:45
16	'Hey! Where's Pop?'	4:32
17	'I'm saying goodbye to you Pop...'	4:38
18	'That boy... that boy is going to be magnificent.'	3:18
19	It was a quiet funeral.	2:33

Total time: 1:26:18

Arthur Miller

(1915–2005)

Death of a Salesman

On 10 February 1949, Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* opened on Broadway. It was the play that was to establish Miller as a major American playwright, winning the Drama Critics Circle Award and the Pulitzer Prize. Its subsequent worldwide success established Miller as an international writer of significance; the play has been translated into hundreds of languages and produced in nearly every country in the world.

Though ostensibly set in small-town America, it has proved to have a universality that resonates in all cultures, everywhere. Most people can relate to its main theme of family, a father's relationship with his wife and sons, and his desperate attempt to regain the love of his eldest son. The original director, Elia Kazan, who was of Turkish origin, claimed he recognised his own father in the central character,

Willy Loman, and when Thomas Mitchell played Willy, the play was hailed as the best Irish play ever. Such diverse reaction can be explained by Miller creating in Willy Loman a real human being, an everyman, with flaws and prejudices that all nationalities and people in all walks of life can recognise, and with whom they can identify.

Willy is presented as a likeable rogue, an over-grown adolescent. He was, wrote Miller, 'A man way out there in the blue, riding on a smile and a shoeshine.' He has humour, but his idealistic values do not equip him for the tough world of business in the second half of the 20th century. They are out-dated and naïve. He places emphasis on a salesman's personality rather than his achievements; the pursuit of success for its own sake, whether a man has the requisite skills or not, as if it

was a virtue to be won. Miller is attacking the so-called American dream, the belief, encouraged by advertising and the media, that every American has the right to achieve material success, and shows the utter desolation facing a man when he realises too late the dream is an empty sham.

Revisiting episodes in his dubious past, that gather like shadows around him, Willy is forced to face issues he has ignored, and his self-delusion, though ultimately he is unable to reconcile the hopes he had for his life with the one he has actually lived. He begins to realise his life is an utter failure. The struggles of Willy Loman to come to terms with this, as he spirals towards his end, take on almost heroic proportions in Miller's drama, and with his death he comes close to achieving the status of a figure from classical Greek tragedy. Miller himself has described the play as, 'The tragedy of a common man.'

It could be said that the part of Willy Loman is the King Lear of American drama. It has certainly attracted some of America's greatest actors who have seen it as a test of their talents in the same

way Lear or Hamlet is to actors in Britain. The part was created on Broadway by Lee J. Cobb, while the first national tour brought Thomas Mitchell to the role, later taking over from Cobb on Broadway and appearing on this recording. Frederic March gave arguably the performance of his career in the film version (1951), and later exponents have been George C. Scott, Brian Dennehy, and in a memorable TV version, Dustin Hoffmann (1985).

THE RECORDING

The well-known Hollywood actor Thomas Mitchell plays Willy Loman in this recording made in New York on 24 April 1950 and released simultaneously on 78rpm records and as an LP. The text has been heavily cut and re-shaped, presumably to fit the single LP format, though the original sleeve note describes it as improving the flow a little. There also seems to be evidence of censorship, as expletives are cut or shortened, which may have been record company policy in the 1950s. Whether the adaptation was done by Arthur Miller himself, who also speaks the

brief narrations, is not clear.

Thomas Mitchell is supported by the original Broadway cast, including superb performances from Arthur Kennedy as Biff and Mildred Dunnock as Willy's wife Linda.

BIOGRAPHIES

Thomas Mitchell was a veteran Hollywood actor when he came to play Willy Loman in 1950. Today he is best remembered for two roles: as Scarlet O'Hara's father in the epic *Gone with the Wind* (1939), and the forgetful Uncle Billy in the classic Christmas film *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946) starring James Stewart.

Mitchell was a first generation American of Irish immigrants who settled in New Jersey. In 1913 he decided to become an actor. He met another future great screen character actor, Charles Coburn, who had his own company, the Coburn Players. Mitchell gained useful experience with them, playing Shakespeare. He also began to write his own plays

It is no exaggeration to say that since

his Hollywood debut in 1923, Mitchell appeared in many of the greatest films of the 20th century. In 1939 alone, he had key roles in five classic films: *Stagecoach*, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, *Only Angels Have Wings*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, and *Gone with the Wind*. As the drunken Doc Boone in *Stagecoach*, starring John Wayne, Mitchell won the best Supporting Actor Academy Award.

Throughout the 1950s Mitchell played regularly in the theatre and on television. He created the part of Lieut. Colombo on stage (his last appearance) which was later turned into the enduringly successful TV series with Peter Falk. Thomas Mitchell died in 1962 aged 70.

Arthur Kennedy, who created the role of Biff in *Death of a Salesman*, was also one of the leading character actors in American film from the late 1940s through to the early 1960s.

Born on 17 February 1914 in Worcester, Massachusetts, Kennedy studied drama at the Carnegie Institute of Technology, and his first professional acting job was with the Globe Theatre Company, which

toured the Midwest offering abbreviated versions of Shakespearian plays. This led to his first appearance on Broadway, in *Richard II* starring Maurice Evans, in 1937. Several more significant roles on Broadway established his reputation before moving to Los Angeles where he was spotted by James Cagney, and his movie career began. The Warner Bros. studio put him in supporting roles in several prestigious movies, including *High Sierra* (1941) and *They Died with Their Boots On* (1941) starring Errol Flynn. He played in many films as a supporting actor and was twice nominated for an Academy Award. One of his last films was *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962).

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s Kennedy continued to play on Broadway, forging an alliance with Arthur Miller and playing Chris Keller in *All My Sons* (1947) and John Proctor in *The Crucible* (1953). In 1968 he appeared in Miller's *The Price*.

Arthur Kennedy died in 1989.

Mildred Dunnock was born in 1901 and was a teacher before becoming an actress in her thirties. She first won praise for her

role as a Welsh school teacher in *The Corn is Green* (1940) and appeared throughout the 1940s on Broadway, culminating in the part of Linda in *Death of a Salesman*, a part she reprised for the film version of the play, for which she was nominated for a Best Supporting Actress Academy Award.

Dunnock created the role of Big Mama in Tennessee Williams's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, although she lost the movie role to Judith Anderson. Her films include *Baby Doll* (1956), *Peyton Place* (1957), *The Nun's Story* (1959) and *Sweet Bird of Youth* (1962). Appearing often in TV dramas, she reprised the role of Linda for the third time in a TV version of *Death of a Salesman* in 1966. She died at the age of 90.

Notes and biographies compiled by David Timson

Credits

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Credits from original LP jacket:

A New Play by Arthur Miller
Directed by Elia Kazan
Music composed and conducted by Alex North
Narration by Arthur Miller
Setting and Lighting by Jo Mielziner

Decca DX 102 (DL 9006/7)
Recorded in New York, April 24, 1950

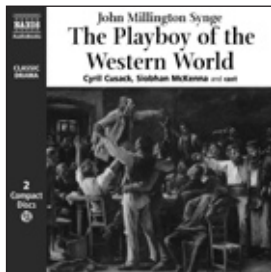
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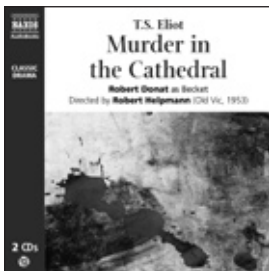
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Arthur Miller

Death of a Salesman

Thomas Mitchell as Willy Loman and **Arthur Kennedy** as Biff
Directed by **Elia Kazan** (New York, 1950)

Death of a Salesman established its author Arthur Miller as a major playwright and chronicler of the failure of the American dream. The salesman, Willy Loman, is an everyman, with flaws and prejudices that all nationalities and people in all walks of life can recognise. They can identify with him as he struggles to come to terms with his failure and alienation from his family. Miller himself termed the play 'the tragedy of a common man'. In this classic recording from 1951, Hollywood actor Thomas Mitchell is supported by the original Broadway cast, including Arthur Kennedy and Mildred Dunnock.

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