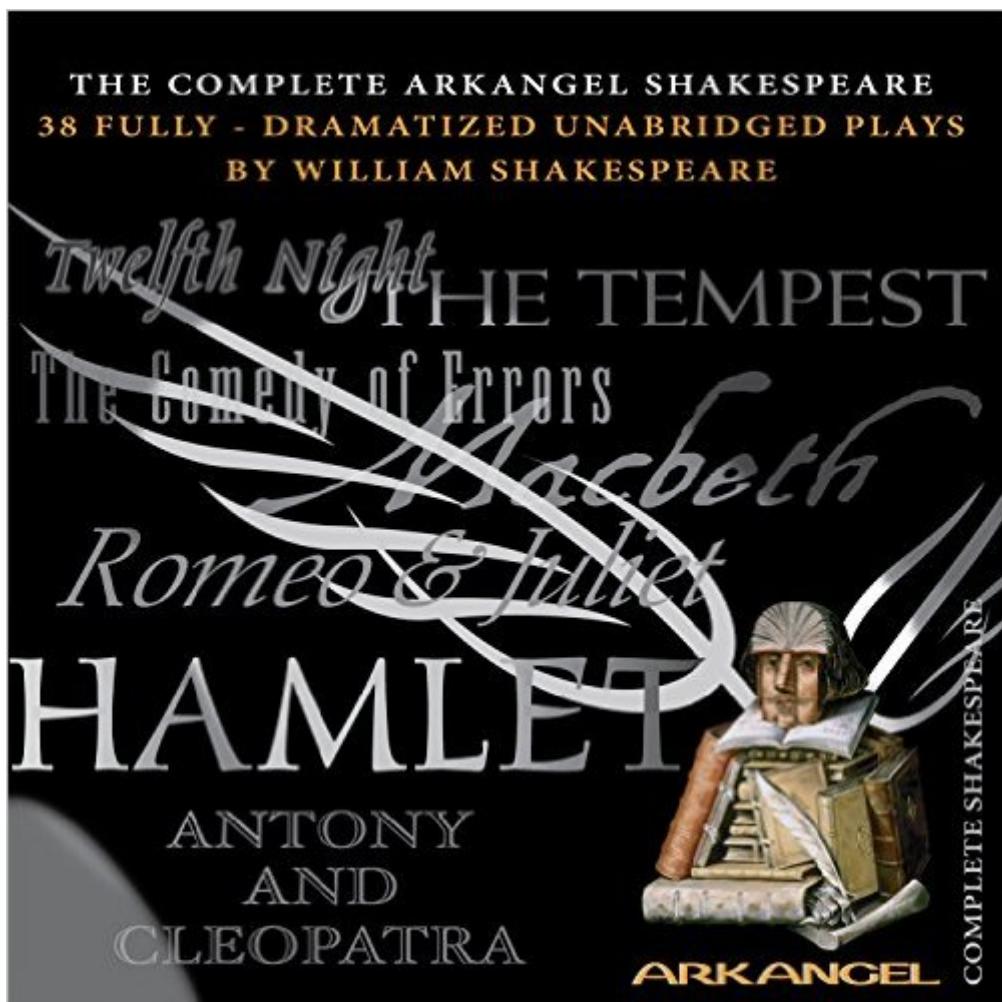


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# The Complete Arkangel Shakespeare: 38 Fully-Dramatized Plays



## **Synopsis**

[Performed by a Full Cast, including Eileen Atkins, Joseph Fiennes, Sir John Gielgud, Imogen Stubbs, Ciaran Hinds, Simon Russell Beale] For the first time in audio publishing history, all of Shakespeare's plays are available in one extraordinary, definitive collection. Based on "The Complete Pelican Shakespeare", here are all of the master's 38 plays, complete and unabridged, fully dramatized on CDs with an original score and sound design for each play. A monumental project that spanned five years and cost \$3 million, "The Complete Arkangel Shakespeare" represents the collective vision of four people: Shakespeare scholar Tom Treadwell, film producer Bill Shepherd, BBC director Clive Brill, and composer Dominique Le Gendre. Together they have assembled the 400 great actors of the British theater and produced a landmark digital recording with a sophisticated layering of sound that immerses the listener in Shakespeare's world.

## **Book Information**

Audio CD: 1 pages

Publisher: BBC Audiobooks America; Unabridged edition (April 7, 2003)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1932219005

ISBN-13: 978-1932219005

Product Dimensions: 14 x 9 x 19.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 10.8 pounds

Average Customer Review: 4.9 out of 5 stars See all reviews (24 customer reviews)

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## **Customer Reviews**

To Buy or Not to Buy! Educators, lovers of theatre and great literature--take note! Late in the 1990s, Harper Row began to release on cassettes the Arkangel Complete Shakespeare, all of which I reviewed in one paper or another. Using some of the best of the young theatrical talent in Great Britain and some of the older established stars of stage and screen, the producers gave us readings of every single word of every single play by Shakespeare, including the seldom-performed "Two Noble Kinsmen" which is partially by Shakespeare. Well, hold on! Audio Partners has been contracted to release the entire set on CDs. The trick is that you cannot purchase the individual sets but are required to purchase the entire package of 38 plays for \$600. That is 98 CDs in all with a

playing time of just over 101 hours! Libraries and school departments take note. Hearing them as they were released on tape in batches of four or five, I was impressed mostly with the enormity of the project but found some things to quibble about. Casting Oberon and Titania with a pair whose voices were South African or Jamaican (no Henry Higgins, I) made some sense in that it emphasized their other-worldly-ness. So did assigning Malvolio in "Twelfth Night" to an actor with a distinct Scottish accent, but giving Mercutio in "Romeo and Juliet" to the same actor was absurd. Then too there is that sudden sound effect of a train pulling out of a station in the middle of "All's Well That Ends Well"! Granted there was a production current then that did place the play in more modern times, but when one is hearing a recording with no clue as to setting, the result was jarring and should have been omitted.

I give this project five stars, but a qualified five. Like one of the other reviewers, I agree: there were certain scenes/characters I would have liked to hear performed differently, but considering the enormity of the project, 100% sustained satisfaction seems an unreasonable expectation (indeed, the bard himself has some weak moments across the 38 plays--he was only human, after-all). And I would have liked it if the nondramatic poetry were included (there are several wonderful recordings of the sonnets available--I recommend Helen Vendler's rather introspective performance and Alex Jennings has recorded a fine complete version of the same--he also plays Berowne in the Arkangel "Love's Labor's Lost", a fine touch, considering the connections between the sonnets and that play!). But overall, how can you argue with an effort like this? Shakespeare is the greatest poet the Western world has known, and these recordings give overwhelming support to that critical commonplace. As literary values change (decline?), the eminence of Shakespeare becomes more important. To hear these plays is to hear the English language bursting at the seams. To know these plays is to know what poetry is capable of, which is nothing less than a sanction of life. And the audio format is perfect for poetry, which MUST be heard. Long live the audiobook! Some notable strengths of this collection include, first & foremost, the use of reliable, unabridged texts. An industrious student, armed with the Pelican Shakespeare, can become intimately familiar with Shakespeare's glory. The sound engineers deserve special praise, they have created a most sophisticated aural environment: these recordings love the headphones. I recommend some fine wine, candles, and comfy furniture.

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