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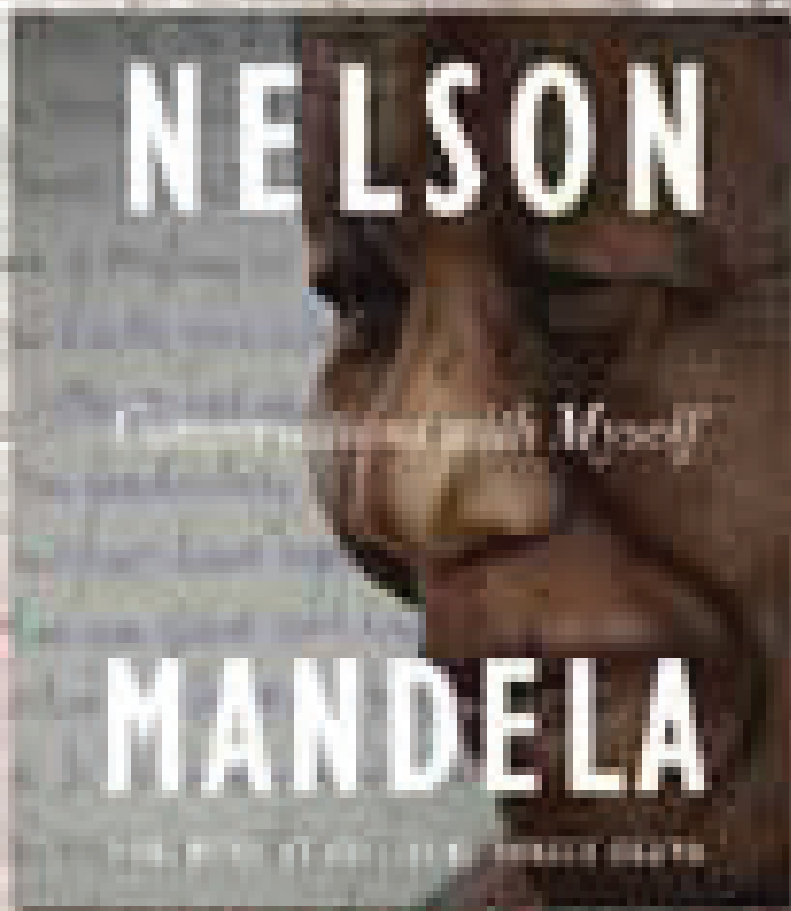


HEARING BLACK HISTORY

Recommended
Listening for
Adults & Kids

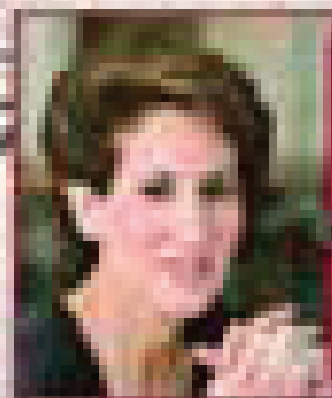
NARRATORS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Linda Emond
Hillary Huber
Joshua Swanson



IN THE STUDIO

Recording
Nelson Mandela's
Conversations
with Myself
in South Africa



AUTHORS ON AUDIO

Stacy Schiff
Nicole Krauss
Renée Montagnon

In the Studio

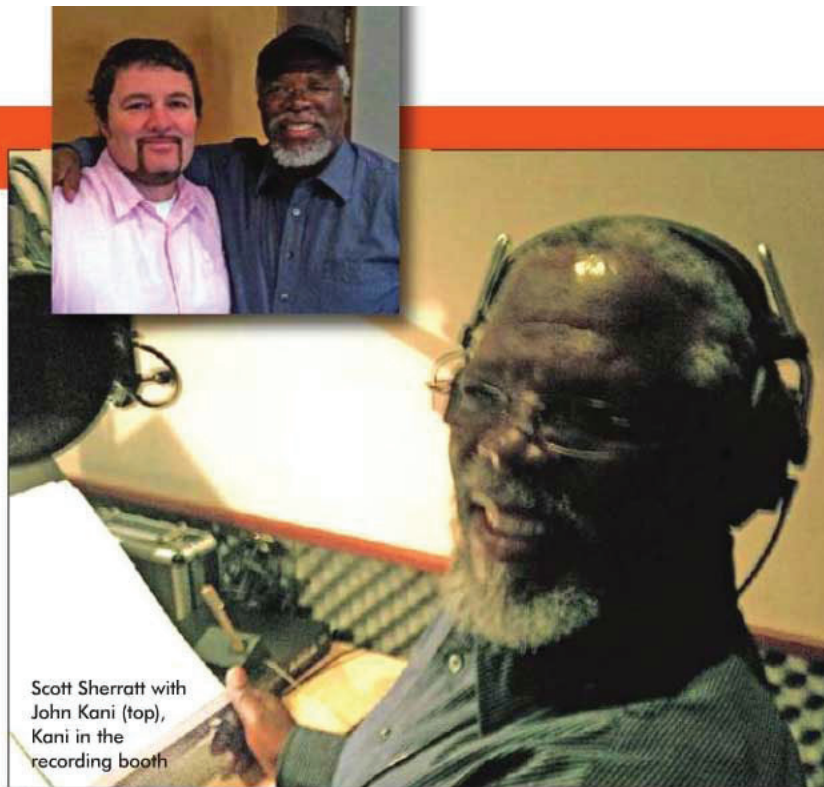
Producer Scott Sherratt describes the experience of recording Nelson Mandela's *Conversations with Myself* in South Africa.

▶ When Executive Producer Laura Wilson asked me if I'd like to direct the new Nelson Mandela book, my answer was a resounding, "Yes!" When she said it would be recorded in South Africa, my reaction was closer to—"You're kidding, right?"

A thirteen-hour flight from New York to Dubai, then a nine-hour flight to Johannesburg, followed by an hour in a jalopy of a South African taxi gave me plenty of time to believe that it was really happening: I would be working on an audiobook by Nelson Mandela, a name almost too iconic, too famous to process.

There's a palpable sense of history in modern South Africa. What makes it feel so powerful is its recent history. South Africans only gained their independence from apartheid rule in 1994. Johannesburg recently hosted the World Cup, which has given South Africa an influx of money and a renewed sense of national pride. However, it feels as if they're speeding along toward progress a little too fast. You can see the casualties of this haste in the massive shantytowns and sprawling ghettos along the route north to Rivonia, a suburb of Johannesburg in the Sandton area. While Jo'burg can be somewhat dangerous, Sandton is a comparatively affluent, albeit fenced-in and guarded, community.

Watch a video interview at www.audiobookcommunity.com



Scott Sherratt with John Kani (top), Kani in the recording booth

One of the many challenges of working 8,000 miles away from home is finding a studio that can meet the requirements of recording long-form voice-over projects. We were fortunate to find Sonovision, the premier South African recording studio. The Sonovision staff were gracious, thrilled to record a book by their most famous citizen and excited to work with narrator John Kani, who, although not yet a household name in the U.S., is an A-list celebrity in South Africa.

I arrived at the studio a day before the session and met Recording Engineer Hamish McArthur. After a few hours of sorting things out, I returned to the aptly named Oasis Luxury Guest-house, a beautiful B&B with lush gardens and a pool, surrounded by electrified fences, barbed wire, and guard shack. Security is a major concern in Jo'burg. The disparity between rich and poor is pronounced, and violent crime and the struggle to defend against it are a constant way of life.

Within minutes of meeting John Kani, I knew that this project was going to be both fabulous and fun. In addition to having a wonderful booming South African voice and the gifts of a natural storyteller, John also happens to be friends with Mandela, or "Madiba," as he calls him, and used

his riveting recollections of Mandela as both leader and friend to draw from. Kani and Mandela are both from the Xhosa tribe, and "Madiba" is a sign of respect adopted by elders of their clan.

Xhosa is a "click language." The words are dotted with dental and palatal mouth clicks. Now, to an audio producer this presented an interesting challenge: In English these sorts of emphatic mouth noises and clicks can be distracting and are something we try to avoid, re-take, or edit out. In this case, however, we used some creative mike techniques to artfully capture all these wonderful sounds as naturally as possible. In Xhosa, these clicks are bold, rhythmic, and beautiful, and John performs them wonderfully, with percussive pride.

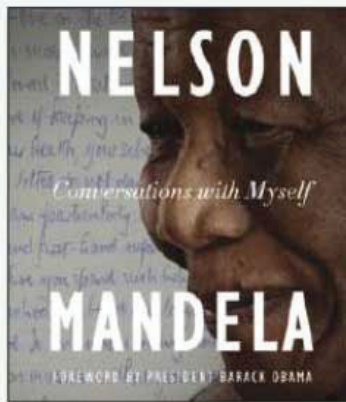
Mandela's *Conversations With Myself* is a unique collection of meditations, reflections, letters, journal entries, interviews, and thoughts. History itself, and our knowledge of how it all fits together, shapes the narrative. With that in mind, what might have been challenges for John and me, as narrator and director, became opportunities, a chance to explore Nelson Mandela the man, the father, the husband, the friend and to lift these snapshots of time off the

CONVERSATIONS WITH MYSELF

Nelson Mandela
Read by John Kani

Listening to this unique memoir is both interesting and frustrating, with interesting mostly winning. Composed of diaries, letters, personal notes, and speeches written by Mandela during his twenty-seven-year imprisonment by the South African apartheid regime, the writings reveal a man thinking himself into the great statesman he became. His intellect, humor, and drive shine from his words. However, those words are often hard to understand. Famed South African actor John Kani enunciates clearly and reads with feeling in a warm voice. Yet his strong accent—stronger, in fact, than Mandela’s—can be hard for American listeners to understand. Also, the book’s structure, jumping among wildly dissimilar documents, is difficult to follow in audio format. The listening effort makes this important book best for those interested in politics and social justice. *A.C.S.*

Macmillan Audio 9 hrs. Unabridged
Trade Ed.: CD ISBN 9781427210517 \$39.99 (also DD)



Mandela's intellect, humor, and drive shine.

page to hear and feel moments both big and small.

One day, during our lunch break, on a roof deck overlooking a valley, John pointed to some nearby buildings and said, “That is the Liliesleaf Farm, right there.” Liliesleaf Farm, mentioned throughout the book, is where Mandela and key African National Congress members met, sought shelter, and were eventually arrested, although Mandela actually avoided arrest by posing as a gardener. The studio is also near the site of the infamous Rivonia treason trial, where many of these ANC members were convicted of treason and sentenced to prison by apartheid judges. It was moving to hear and see how, in narrating this book, John was reliving powerful, sometimes-painful, memories.

Kani himself was jailed for writing and performing *The Island*, a play about life on Robben Island, where Mandela was imprisoned. During apartheid years it was illegal to mention Mandela’s name or even the name of the prison in which he was being kept. Kani and his comrades took a production of the play to Europe and to the U.S., where he won both a Tony and an Obie. During

breaks in recording John would describe his experiences of world-changing events such as Mandela’s release from prison, the fall of apartheid, and Mandela’s election as president. Through it all, John did a spectacular job, narrating with confidence, grace, and authenticity.

On the last day, my gracious host at Sonovision decided that no trip to South Africa would be complete without one key element. That’s right . . . safari! After an early morning start and about an hour’s drive north toward Botswana, Hamish and I arrived at Krugersdorp Game Reserve. We spent the day driving the South African plains, spotting lions, hippos, giraffes, zebra, monkeys, wildebeest, jackals, impala, and even meerkats. Not quite the “Big 5”—but close enough for me. Toward the end of our day Hamish received a call from his parents, concerned that we might’ve gone to Jo’burg. A labor strike had, as they often do, turned violent. We were happy to be far away.

A guard at the entrance to the game reserve summed up South Africa quite nicely when he said—“Lions eat meat. You are meat. Stay in the car.”
—Scott Sherratt

More Listening

LONG WALK TO FREEDOM

Nelson Mandela, read by Danny Glover

Hachette Audio Abridged
Trade Ed.: CD, DD

NELSON MANDELA'S FAVORITE AFRICAN FOLKTALES

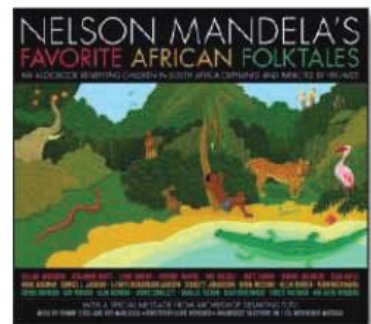
Nelson Mandela [Ed.],
read by Gillian Anderson, Benjamin Bratt,
LeVar Burton, et al.

Hachette Audio Abridged
Trade Ed.: CD, DD

PLAYING THE ENEMY

John Carlin, read by Gideon Emery

Recorded Books Unabridged
Library Ed.: CS, CD, DD, PRE



“A funny and magical collection of folklore.”

—From the review of
Nelson Mandela's Favorite African Folktales

