



# My Wife is a Ghost

World Premiere of a New Opera by Bard Composers  
Monday May 20, 2024, 7pm, Olin Hall

Libretto by Susan Bywaters

Composed by students in Missy Mazzoli's *Am I the Drama?* Class:

Scene 1: Garrick Neuner

Scene 2: Zeke Morgan

Scene 3: Wyland Stephenson

Scene 4: Emily Ta

Scene 5: Henry Mielarczyk

Scene 6: Drew Frankenberg

Scene 7: Elena Hause

Scene 8: Samuel Mutter

Conducted by members of the Graduate Conducting Program:  
Timothy Morrow, Emmanuel Rojas and Sam Ross

With performances by Vocal Arts Program Musicians:

Amelia – Jaclyn Hopping

George – Megan Maloney

Brad – Jacob Hunter

Lizzie – Georgia Perdikoulis

Mr. Freiberg – Joey Breslau

Mrs. Freiberg – Nicole Rizzo

Tim – Sam Warshauer

And Post-Graduate Piano Fellowship Program musicians:  
Ahra Oh, Pei-Hsuan Shen and Gabriele Zemaityte

Special Thanks to Kayo Iwama, Lisa Krueger and James Bagwell

## CONCEPT

*My wife is a ghost* is inspired by the story of the 19<sup>th</sup> century heiress Elizabeth Frothingham and her husband, Lord Timothy Dexter. After the couple had marital problems, Lord Dexter decided to kill Frothingham – but only in spirit. While his wife was still alive, Dexter told everyone in their New England town that she had died an unexpected death. But he did not hide or abduct his wife; she continued to live her normal life, shocking the rest of the inhabitants of the town. When friends and neighbors would point out that Frothingham was not dead, Dexter rebutted that this was simply her ghost, which had returned to haunt them all. Eventually, myth overtook reality, essentially making Frothingham a living ghost.

This libretto adapts this story in a modern context. Beginning with a Halloween seance, a teenager named Amelia and her friends conjure the spirit of Lizzie, the infamous ghost who haunts their town. When she appears, the teens are horrified – until they can't get her to leave. Eventually, Amelia and her parents are forced to call Lizzie's widower, who reveals the truth. A dark horror comedy, *My wife is a ghost* confronts the realities of patriarchy, emotional abuse, and depression.

## LIBRETTO by Susan Bywaters

Scan the QR code for the libretto:



## **My wife is a ghost**

a libretto by Susan Bywaters

### SCENE 1

**SETTING** A middle class family living room. The house is old, but not grandiose; the furniture is a mixture of eras of hand-me-downs and trends of bygone decades. There is a couch and a coffee table, and it is storming outside.

**AT RISE** AMELIA, GEORGE, and BRAD sit at the coffee table, a ouija board spread in front of them. Their fingers share the planchette. They stare at each other meaningfully and fearfully in silence for a moment.

BRAD

*(Breaking the tension; mockingly)*

What, are you scared?

*(ALL remove their hands from the board in protest. The following is all overlapping text)*

GEORGE

I'm not / scared!

AMELIA

Stop it, Brad.

BRAD

I didn't know you guys were gonna be such little / bitches about it.

AMELIA

It's my ouija board!

GEORGE

This is fricking scary, you guys.

BRAD

It's only your ouija board because Jenna found it in her attic and said it was haunted.

GEORGE

Nobody told me that!

AMELIA

It's fine!

*(pause; collecting herself)*

It's fine. Put your hands on the thing.

GEORGE

Planchette.

BRAD

How do you know the word for it?

GEORGE

I prepared!

AMELIA

Oh my god, just put your hands on it.

*(demonstrating)* Like this.

*(They put their hands on the planchette. A moment of silence)*

ALL

Lizzie Lee, Lizzie Lie

How did dear old Lizzie die?

Come and see, Lizzie Lee

Show your true self back to me.

*(pause)*

AMELIA

Lizzie? Are you here with us now?

*(the planchette moves to YES)*

GEORGE

*(trying to get up)* No, I don't want to do this / anymore

AMELIA

*(grabbing him)* Sit.

*(beat)*

Do you want to show us?

*(the planchette moves to YES)*

We want to see. Show us, Lizzie.

We want to see.

We want to see.

We want to -

*(The lights go out. When they turn back on, LIZZIE is standing in the living room in a tattered gown, sallow, wet, and pale.)*

SCENE 2

SETTIN Same as before.

G

AT RISE LIZZIE stands next to an open window. She is not looking directly at anyone, but resignedly staring down in front of her. AMELIA, BRAD, and GEORGE all rush away from her.

BRAD

FUCK this. / No

GEORGE

/ This is not real

BRAD

Who the FUCK are you?

GEORGE

*(exasperated)* It's Lizzie! That's the whole fucking thing!

AMELIA

Guys! Stop swearing! *(beat)* My parents are gonna be home soon.

*(pause; then, to LIZZIE)*

Hi Lizzie. Sorry, we don't really like... have anything to ask you?

*(beat; then, to GEORGE and BRAD in a half-whisper)*

Ask her something!

BRAD

No way. I'm sorry, that is so fricked / up

GEORGE

Is there a heaven?

BRAD

Jesus, George, that's a / big one

AMELIA

/ Yeah! Good. Lizzie: is there a heaven?

LIZZIE

Lizzie Lee, Lizzie Lie,  
How did dear old Lizzie die?  
Come and see, Lizzie Lee  
Show your true self back to me.

Lizzie screamed, Lizzie cried,  
But dear old Lizzie's husband lied.  
It was all in Lizzie's head.  
They all said that she was dead.

Lizzie'd plead, Lizzie'd try  
to make them all see by and by.  
But even though you hear her cries,  
Lizzie knows that Lizzie died.

SCENE 3

SETTIN Same as before.

G

AT RISE LIZZIE sits on the couch. She is not looking directly at anyone, but resignedly staring down in front of her. AMELIA, BRAD, and GEORGE all surround her, trying to find a way to hide her presence.

BRAD

...Okaaaay, so -

GEORGE

What are we gonna do?

AMELIA

My parents are coming home soon! I'm so dead.

*(beat)*

*(to LIZZIE)* Sorry.

GEORGE

*(to BRAD)*

*(stage whisper)* Can you ask her to leave?

BRAD

*(to GEORGE)*

*(stage whisper)* You ask her!

AMELIA

*(to GEORGE and BRAD)*

*(stage whisper)* Shut up!

*(to LIZZIE)* So, it's really been... cool, but my parents are getting home soon and we weren't supposed to be playing with the... afterlife, so...

GEORGE

Can you go? Home? Or like, back? Away? Go away? Please?

*(LIZZIE begins to walk toward the children. She stands over them for a moment, and then sits on the couch. The following is all overlapping text)*

LIZZIE

Lizzie Lee,

AMELIA

Oh god, no

LIZZIE

Lizzie Lie,

GEORGE

Make her stop!

LIZZIE

How did dear old

AMELIA

Please be quiet.

Lizzie die?  
LIZZIE

Here.  
BRAD

*(he puts a blanket over her)*

LIZZIE  
*(as AMELIA, BRAD, and GEORGE consider whether she is visible)*  
Come and see,  
Lizzie Lee

You can still hear her!  
GEORGE

Show your true self  
back to me.  
LIZZIE

I'm so fucked.  
AMELIA

Lizzie screamed,  
LIZZIE

Oh, so now YOU can swear.  
BRAD

But dear old Lizzie's husband lied.  
LIZZIE

We're ALL fricked unless we can get her out.  
GEORGE

It was all in Lizzie's head.  
LIZZIE

Nope, sorry, I'm out. I'm leaving.  
BRAD

They all said that she was dead.  
LIZZIE

AMELIA

You can't leave me here with her! You wanted this!

LIZZIE

Lizzie'd plead,

GEORGE

I never wanted this!

LIZZIE

Lizzie'd try

AMELIA

You did the Ouija board too!

LIZZIE

to make them all see

GEORGE

*(crying)* but I didn't WANT to!

LIZZIE

by and by.

BRAD

You're such a crybaby.

LIZZIE

But even though you hear her cries,

GEORGE

Like you weren't scared!

LIZZIE

Lizzie knows that  
Lizzie died.

BRAD

I moved the planchette!

*(pause)*

I moved the planchette. It was fake.

GEORGE  
*(muttering)*

NOW you know what a planchette is.

AMELIA

It doesn't matter! It doesn't matter. She's here now, let's get her out.

BRAD

No fucking way. *(grabbing his things)* Bye, Amelia. Bye, "Lizzie."  
*(BRAD exits. GEORGE hesitates a moment, then)*

GEORGE

*(walking out)* Bye, Amelia.  
Sorry.

*(GEORGE exits.)*

SCENE 4

SETTIN Same as before.

G

AT RISE LIZZIE sits on the couch. There is a long pause; AMELIA stares at the door, hoping her friends will return. They don't. She sits next to LIZZIE on the couch, resigned.

AMELIA

Sorry about them.  
They're not usually like that.

*(LIZZIE cocks her head.)*

Sorry. They're always like that.

*(LIZZIE looks forward again.)*

Are you, like, omniscient or something?

Do you know God?

*(LIZZIE looks at the ground. She begins to tear up.)*

Oh my god, I'm sorry, I didn't -

Do you know... *(pointing to the ground)*

*(whispered)* Satan?

*(LIZZIE continues to cry.)*

LIZZIE

Lizzie Lee,  
Lizzie Lie,

AMELIA

Ah god, I never know what the right thing to say is.

LIZZIE

How did dear old  
Lizzie die?

Like, do you know you're dead?

AMELIA

Come and see,  
Lizzie Lee

LIZZIE

Am I dead?

AMELIA

Show your true self  
back to me.

LIZZIE

Sorry, I'm being crazy.

AMELIA

*(thinking; then, joins in with LIZZIE)*

Lizzie screamed,  
Lizzie cried,

LIZZIE & AMELIA

But dear old Lizzie's  
husband lied.

*(LIZZIE turns to look at AMELIA for the first time.)*

It was all  
in Lizzie's head.

They all said that  
she was dead.

Lizzie'd plead,  
Lizzie'd try

to make them all see  
by and by.

But even though you hear her cries,

Lizzie knows that Lizzie died.

AMELIA

That's a sad song.

*(LIZZIE nods.)*

*(meaningfully; reaching out to her)* I'm sorry.

*(before AMELIA can touch LIZZIE, MR. and MRS. FREIBERG enter carrying groceries)*

SCENE 5

SETTIN Same as before.

G

AT RISE AMELIA stands in shock. LIZZIE looks forward again.

MR. FREIBERG

*(Without looking up)*

Amelia, can you get the groceries?

*(To himself)*

Big day for groceries.

*(to AMELIA)*

The car is in the -

*(he notices LIZZIE)*

Is this another one of your little friends?

AMELIA

No, I didn't mean to -

MRS. FREIBERG

Did George and Brad go home?

I'm sorry but I don't like that Brad kid.

He's a bad influence.

MR. FREIBERG

All kids need a bad influence.

MRS. FREIBERG

Yeah, yeah, but all the same -

AMELIA

This is Lizzie.

*(LIZZIE stands and turns to see MR. and MRS. FREIBERG)*

MR. FREIBERG

Jesus fucking christ

AMELIA

Dad!

MR. FREIBERG

Well, she looks half dead!

AMELIA

*(crying)* She's all dead!

MRS. FREIBERG

If this is some prank, then I'm not laughing.

AMELIA

*(through sniffles)* We played with a Ouija board, and we summoned Lizzie, and now she won't leave!

MR. FREIBERG

Lizzie, THE Lizzie?

AMELIA

*(as a cry)* Yes!!

MR. FREIBERG

So this - she - is a ghost?

AMELIA

YES!!

MRS. FREIBERG

Well she has to leave!

AMELIA

SHE WON'T LEAVE!

MR. FREIBERG

Nope. Lizzie, I'm sorry, but it's time to go.

*(LIZZIE turns back and sits down on the couch.)*

MRS. FREIBERG

Do you know what I'm going to do?

*(taking out her phone)* I'm going to call Tim.

MR. FREIBERG

Are you sure?

MRS. FREIBERG

*(dialing)* It's HIS dead wife!

AMELIA

HER name is Lizzie!

MRS. FREIBERG

I don't care if HER name is Jesus Christ, she can't stay for dinner!

*(pause; listening to phone)*

Hi, Tim?

Listen, I need you to come over.

I'm not sure how to tell you this, but -

Lizzie's here.

Yes.

Mmmhmmm.

Okay. Okay.

See you soon.

Buh-bye!

*(she hangs up)*

Tim is on his way.

AMELIA

Can we keep her?

MR. FREIBERG

We're not keeping the ghost.

AMELIA

You never let me have anything!

MRS. FREIBERG

Don't talk back to your father.

AMELIA

She's haunting ME, not YOU.

And it's Halloween -

MR. FREIBERG

As long as this is my house, I get to choose who haunts it.

*(a knock at the door)*

MRS. FREIBERG

That'll be Tim.  
(to AMELIA) You be nice.

SCENE 6

SETTIN Same as before.  
G

AT RISE MR. FREIBERG opens the door. TIM enters, ominous.

TIM

Good evening.

MR. FREIBERG

Hey Tim.

MRS. FREIBERG

Tim!

AMELIA

*(begrudgingly)* Hi Mr. Dexter.

TIM

*(turning to LIZZIE. Meaningfully)*

Elizabeth.

*(LIZZIE turns to TIM. They share a moment)*

AMELIA

She goes by Lizzie.

MRS. FREIBERG

*(whisper)* Amelia!

TIM

It's time to leave this family be, Elizabeth.  
You have no business here.  
It's not them you want, Elizabeth.  
I am doomed to walk the earth with your spirit.  
But leave this family be, Elizabeth.  
Leave them be.

*(LIZZIE opens her mouth. Suddenly whiny)*

No wait,

Don't do it!  
Please...?

LIZZIE

Lizzie Lee,  
Lizzie Lie,

TIM

Lizzie, noooo.

LIZZIE

How did dear old  
Lizzie die?

TIM

Ugh, I hate this fucking song.  
She always sings this god damn song.

LIZZIE

Come and see,  
Lizzie Lee

MRS. FREIBERG

Language, Tim.

LIZZIE

Show your true self  
back to me.

TIM

Sorry. My bad.

LIZZIE

Lizzie screamed,  
Lizzie cried,  
But dear old Lizzie's  
husband lied.

TIM

Lizzie, can you just come home with me?

LIZZIE

It was all  
in Lizzie's head.

We can watch a movie.

TIM

They all said that  
she was dead.

LIZZIE

I just bought ice cream.

TIM

Lizzie'd plead,  
Lizzie'd try

LIZZIE

Don't make me carry you home. I'll do it.

TIM

to make them all see  
by and by.

LIZZIE

Okay, here goes.

TIM

But even though you hear her cries,

LIZZIE

You made me do this.

TIM

Lizzie knows that Lizzie died.

LIZZIE

*(TIM walks to LIZZIE and picks her up, putting her over his shoulder. AMELIA, shocked, grabs her arm.)*

## SCENE 7

SETTIN Same as before.

G

AT RISE ALL are frozen in shock.

Holy fuck...

AMELIA

Amelia!

MR. FREIBERG

Are you... real?

AMELIA

Just leave us alone.

TIM

Tim!  
Is your wife alive?

MRS. FREIBERG

FINE. fine. She's alive.

TIM

*(he puts her down)*

I was just so sick of her.  
Sick to death.

She's dead to me,  
I said, she died.  
She's gone now.

But Cheryl saw her,  
buying cornstarch -

And she sat with Dan  
at church  
and asked him  
for a ride home...

But no, I said,  
she's dead to me,  
I said: she died.  
She's gone now.

It can't be, I said.  
She's a ghost, they said.

She's dead to me,  
they said, she died.

She's gone now.

And she was.

MR. FREIBERG

Jesus, Tim...

MRS. FREIBERG

I'm not one to judge, / but

TIM

It all just got away from me.  
I didn't mean for it all to go this far.

MRS. FREIBERG

*(to LIZZIE)* So do you just look around on Halloween to see if anyone is doing the Lizzie thing?  
*(to MR. FREIBERG)* I mean that's not really normal either, is it?

#### SCENE 8

SETTIN Same as before.

G

AT RISE AMELIA approaches LIZZIE.

AMELIA

Stay here.  
You can't go back with him.  
You can't go back to that.

LIZZIE

*(to AMELIA alone)*

Lizzie screamed, Lizzie cried,  
But dear old Lizzie's husband lied.

AMELIA

Stay with me, Lizzie.  
LIVE here. LIVE with me.

LIZZIE

It was all in Lizzie's head.  
They all said that she was dead.

AMELIA

You're alive, Lizzie.  
You're alive.

LIZZIE

Lizzie'd plead, Lizzie'd try  
to make them all see by and by.

*(LIZZIE stands and walks to TIM)*

AMELIA

No! You're alive, Lizzie.  
You can't go back with him.  
*(to MR. and MRS. FREIBERG)* You can't let her go back with him!

LIZZIE

But even though you hear her cries,  
Lizzie knows that Lizzie died.

*(AMELIA rushes to LIZZIE and grabs her hand)*

AMELIA

Don't leave, Lizzie.  
Please.

LIZZIE

*(letting go of AMELIA)*

See you next Halloween.

*(LIZZIE leaves with TIM. ALL stare after her.  
Long pause.)*

MRS. FREIBERG

*(closing the door)*

Well you never really do know what goes on inside a marriage, huh.

*(BLACKOUT)*