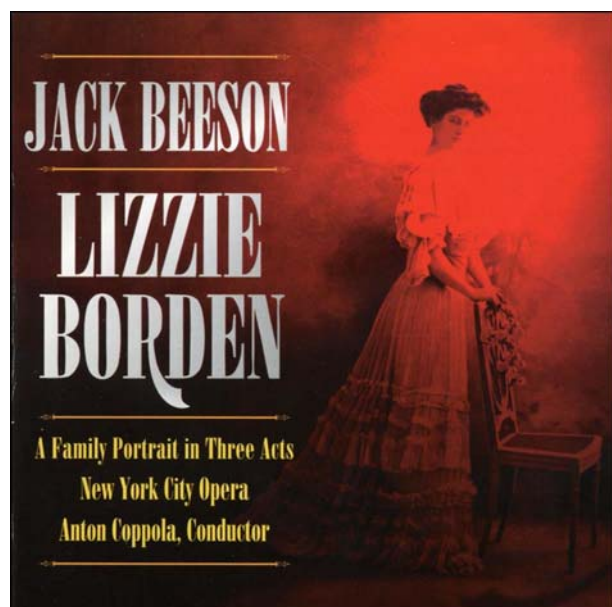


New York City Opera presents:

Lizzie Borden: A Family Portrait in Three Acts

Act I

1. Prelude	(1:30)
2. Act I, Scene 1: Children: "Toiling early in the morning"	(6:20)
3. Andrew: "It is almost finished" and Lizzie	(4:21)
4. Andrew's Aria	(7:08)
5. Act I, Scene 2: Margret's Garden Aria	(7:46)
6. Margret: "The House Watches"	(3:39)

Act II

7. Prelude to Act II/Abbie's Bird Song	(10:30)
8. Unpleasanties and Introductions	(5:45)
9. Two Quintets	(5:42)
10. More Unpleasantness	(5:57)
11. Lizzie: "What am I forbidden now?"	(1:58)
12. Lizzie's Mad Scene	(9:24)

Act III

13. Act III, Scene 1	(6:20)
14. Jason's Song, Duet, Trio	(4:19)
15. Lizzie's Dressing Scene	(4:11)
16. Abbie: "Bravo!" The Bitch Scene	(11:44)
17. Scene 2, Lizzie: "Kill Time," Scene and Murder	(7:15)
18. Andrew and Lizzie: Seduction Scene	(2:02)
19. Second-Murder Interlude	(1:53)
20. Scene 3, Epilogue	(5:13)

Music by Jack Beeson; Libretto by Kenward Elmslie

Based on a Scenario by Richard Plant; Anton Coppola, Conductor;
Staged by Nikos Psacharopoulos; Settings by Peter Wexler;
Costumes by Patton Campbell; Lizzie Borden was given its world
premiere by the New York City Opera on March 25, 1965, with the
aid of the Ford Foundation

Total playing time: 1:52:57

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Notes

More than a century after the acquittal of Lizzie Borden, it is still not certain who murdered her father and stepmother. The opera (which makes use of only some of the "facts" in the case) seeks to explain why *our* Lizzie, given the frustration of her strong passions, was led to do so. The action of the opera is simple, even plain. The cast is small, their varied characters reflected in their music: Mr. Borden, from a "good" family is self-made rich, a throwback to an early New England divine; his only redeeming virtue is his almost illicit passion for his younger second wife, Abbie. She, once the seamstress in the house, is able to inveigle whatever she wants from her doting husband. In some respects the Borden story is a latter-day New England *Elektra* story, with the parents switched, the "evil stepmother" in place of Klytemnestra. Accordingly, our troubled heroine becomes the *older* sister of Margret, who yearns for a peaceful life away from the oppressive house and its sterile garden. Against her father's wishes she looks forward to marrying Jason MacFarlane, a sea-captain invented by us.

In real life Lizzie found the only outlet for her energy and ambition in the church, represented in the libretto by the Rev. Harrington and the children's chorus, which she is rehearsing in a hymn as the curtain opens. The spine of the opera is a series of intermittent scenes of ever increasing intensity in which Lizzie's wishes and desires are denied, each deprivation leading her further

into fantasy and madness. Her success in arranging the elopement of Margret and the Captain will leave her alone with her parents; when she dons the intended wedding gown and imagines the Captain making love to her, she is seen by Abbie and draws blood, her own, at the broken mirror. When Jason returns briefly, her attempt to seduce him is also seen by the taunting Abbie, who orders her out of the house. The murders follow, one after the other, off-stage.

These events are prefigured in the prelude to the opera, repeated as the prelude to the second act and (with a cymbal crash and extension) as the orchestral climax of the work. Andrew, disappointed by the birth of a daughter, christened Lizzie Elizabeth *Andrew*. In the brief Epilogue "some years later," it is therefore fitting that she is at his standing-desk working on the accounts, as he had in the first scene. The Reverend comes for a visit but is curtly dismissed after bringing news of Margret's growing family and returning Lizzie's donation, unacceptable to the congregation, though she has long since been acquitted of the murders. As she locks the doors for the night, children's voices off-stage—or in her imagination—sing to the opening hymn-tune, "Lizzie Borden took an axe..."

—Jack Beeson, 1995

Jack Beeson has composed nine operas, of which *Lizzie Borden* is the fourth. All, with the exception of *Cyrano*, which premiered in Germany in 1994, libretto by Sheldon Harnick, are based on American subjects, in part, perhaps, because the composer was born and raised in Muncie, Indiana, long known as Middletown USA. After an uncharacteristic Hoosier education (he decided to become an “opera composer” at age twelve and wrote three libretti as a teenager) he attended the Eastman School of Music and then studied with Belá Bartók in 1944-45. Immediately thereafter he served as coach and assistant conductor of the chamber operas performed at Columbia University and began a teaching career at Columbia that has endured for half a century.

Five of the operas have been recorded, three televised. The most widely performed is *Hello Out There*, which has been performed in four other languages. Its libretto, like three of the others based on plays, is by the composer. He has composed over one hundred other works, some for chamber and orchestral forces, many of them text-settings for solo voice and for chorus.

In addition to composing and teaching, he has served many organizations that aid American composers, such as the NEA, the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and ASCAP.

Kenward Elmslie’s opera librettos include *The Seagull*, *Three Sisters*, and *Washington Square*, all composed by Thomas Pasatieri, and *Miss Julie*, music by Ned Rorem, as well as *The Sweet Bye and Bye* and *Lizzie Borden* for Jack Beeson. He has written the book and lyrics of three musical plays: *The Grass Harp*, *Lola* (music: Claibe Richardson), and *Postcards on Parade*, composed by Steven Taylor, and published by Bamberger Books, as was his play, *City Junket*, produced off-Broadway with sets and costumes by Red Grooms. Poetry publications include *Sung Sex*, *The Champ*, *Champ Dust*, all with drawings by Joe Brainard, *Bare Bones*, *Circus Nerves*, and *Motor Disturbance*, which won a Frank O’Hara Award. His fiction includes *The Orchid Stories*, *Bimbo Dirt* (drawings by Ken Tisa), *26 Bars* (drawings by Donna Dennis), both published by Z Press. A singing poet, he has appeared in a film documentary, *Poetry in Motion*, at MOMA, the Detroit Institute of Art, Beyond Baroque (Los Angeles), the San Francisco Art Institute, and in an off-off-Broadway revue featuring his poem songs: *Palais Bimbo Lounge Show*. In 1994, his poetry appeared in three anthologies: *The Faber Book of Movie Verse*, *Postmodern American Poetry*, and *From the Other Side of the Century*.

Richard Plant as a boy in Frankfurt-am-Main lived across the street from the opera house and became acquainted with those singers who were patients of his father. In 1933—on the day of the Reichstag fire and at the urging of his father—he fled to Basel, where he earned his doctorate at the University with a dissertation on the playwright Arthur Schnitzler. He supported his study as a writer of children’s books and detective stories, thereby making the acquaintance of the Lizzie Borden tale. After emigrating to New York in 1938 he continued writing—book reviews for the *New York Times*, short stories, and a novel, *The Dragon In The Forest*. Later he became professor of German at City College. During all these years he continued to amass information concerning the Borden murders, in part because the story epitomized his dislike of repressive Calvinism and, consciously or unconsciously, because it resonated with the guilt he felt at having been unable to convince his parents to leave Germany before their double suicide in the late thirties. His history of the Nazi persecution of homosexuals, *The Pink Triangle*, has been published in English and German.

Characters

The Family

Andrew Borden,
the father bass baritone, Herbert Beattie

Abigail Borden,
the step-mothersoprano (spinto with coloratura), Ellen Faul

Elizabeth Andrew Borden,
the elder daughter mezzo soprano, Brenda Lewis

Margret Borden,
the younger daughter lyric soprano, Ann Elgar

Reverend Harrington tenor, Richard Krause

Captain Jason MacFarlane lyric baritone, Richard Fredricks

A small chorus of children and young people
Fall River, Massachusetts, 1892.

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Production Notes

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