

JACK BEESON

CENTENNIAL 2021

With the centennial anniversary of Jack Beeson's birth unrolling in 2021, opera companies have a chance to dive into this legendary American wit's 10 operas, which range from "operinas" for the concert stage to grand operas in three acts.

Beeson's operas champion colorful American stories, including such richly dramatic tales as *The Sweet Bye and Bye*, about religious leader Sister Rose Ora's struggle between duty and love in New York. A talented librettist himself, he also drew deeply from great literature, as in his opera *Cyrano*, which first premiered in Germany in 1990 and is available for a North American premiere.

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BOOSEY & HAWKES



Spotlight on Lizzie Borden

An American retelling of the Electra myth, *Lizzie Borden* is Jack Beeson's searing 1965 masterpiece about one of America's most baffling murder cases: Lizzie Borden of Fall River, Massachusetts, charged with killing her miserly father and sniping stepmother with an ax in 1892.

The curious and horrific story has inspired plays, films, and even a ballet by Agnes de Mille ("Fall River Legend"). But Beeson's opera particularly allows for the murderous psychopath to shine, as we see Lizzie cower before her proverb-spouting, tight-fisted father, envy her lovely younger sister who elopes with a sea captain, and spiral from resentment into madness.

The opera is also available for performance in a reduced chamber version.

Critical Acclaim

"A chilling, thrilling tale ... A socko story, with a powerful libretto and music that will make your hair stand on end."

—*Times Union*

"Beeson's score is exquisitely crafted, but its survival, in the end, is due to the extraordinary dramatic insight of a composer who wrote his first libretto at fifteen." —*New Yorker*

Operas by Beeson

Practice in the Art of Elocution (1998)

Operina** for soprano and piano

Duration: 30'

Libretto by the composer, adapted from the writings of Françoise Delsarte and Frances P Hoyle-Pogle, and from the poems of Rupert Brooke, Longfellow, and an anonymous parodist, and JW Riley

** *Operina* is a word created by Beeson to describe an opera of smaller dimensions, meant for the concert stage.

Sorry, Wrong Number (1996)

A conversational chamber opera in one act

Duration: 40'

Libretto by the composer, adapted from the play by Lucille Fletcher

Cyrano (1990)

A heroic comedy in music in three acts

Duration: 140'

Libretto by Sheldon Harnick, based on the play by Edmond Rostand

Doctor Heidegger's Fountain of Youth (1978)

Chamber opera in one act

Duration: 42'

Libretto by Sheldon Harnick, after the short story by Nathaniel Hawthorne

Cover image: *Lizzie Borden*
New York City Opera, 1999
Photo Credit: Carol Rosegg

Captain Jinks of the Horse Marines (1975)

A romantic comedy in music in three acts

Duration: 120'

Libretto by Sheldon Harnick, after the play by Clyde Fitch

My Heart's in the Highlands (1969)

Chamber opera in two acts

Duration: 100'

Libretto by the composer, after the play by William Saroyan

Lizzie Borden (1965)

A family portrait in three acts

Duration: 120'

Libretto by Kenward Elmslie, after a scenario by Richard Plant

Reduced
Chamber
Version
Available

The Sweet Bye and Bye (1956)

Opera in two acts

Duration: 105'

Libretto by Kenward Elmslie

Hello Out There (1953)

Chamber opera in one act

Duration: 40'

Libretto by the composer, adapted from the play by William Saroyan

Jonah (1948–1950)

Opera in three acts

Duration: 115'

Libretto by the composer after the play by Paul Goodman