

Acting Edition

Ghost Quartet

Music, Lyrics, and Text by
Dave Malloy

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GHOST QUARTET premiered at The Bushwick Starr (Noel Allain, Co-founder, Artistic Director; Sue Kessler, Co-founder, Creative Director) in Brooklyn, New York, on October 8, 2014. The performance was directed by Annie Tippe, with production and lighting design by Christopher Bowser, sound design by Dave Malloy, dramaturgy by James Harrison Monaco, and assistant direction by Ambrym Smith. The board operators were Laura Cornachio, Anna Crouch, and Christine Pardos. It was originally developed, arranged, and performed by Ghost Quartet:

Brent Arnold vocals, cello, guitar, erhu, dulcimer, percussion
Brittain Ashford vocals, autoharp, keyboard, percussion
Gelsey Bell vocals, metallophone, Celtic harp, accordion, percussion
Dave Malloy vocals, piano, keyboard, ukulele, percussion

GHOST QUARTET was developed with support from The Ground Floor at Berkeley Repertory Theatre and The Bushwick Starr.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Ghost Quartet is indebted to numerous sources of inspiration, including *Arabian Nights*; *Matsukaze* (a Japanese Noh drama); Grimms' fairy tales; Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher;" James Joyce's *Ulysses*; Rosemary Timperley's "Harry;" Thelonious Monk's "Ruby, My Dear," "Epistrophy," and "Round Midnight;" *The Twilight Zone* (particularly "The After Hours" and "In His Image"); *2001: A Space Odyssey*; David Bowie's *Ziggy Stardust*; Stephen Sondheim's *Into the Woods*; *Cosmos* (both the Sagan and Tyson versions); Stephen King's *Dark Tower* series; *The Legend of Zelda* and *Castlevania*; Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman*; Bill Willingham's *Fables*; Ken Wilber's *A Brief History of Everything*; Tina Satter's *Seagull (Thinking of You)*; *Frozen*; and R. Umar Abbasi's *New York Post* front page photo, Dec. 4, 2012.

All lyrics and text are by Dave Malloy, except "Usher, Parts 1-3" (which includes text from "The Fall of The House of Usher" by Edgar Allan Poe) and "The Wind & Rain" (traditional with additional lyrics by Dave Malloy). "The Wind & Rain" is an English murder ballad, dating back to at least the seventeenth century.

Special Thanks to the original not-a-loser-but-a-real-human-being, Eliza Bent.

CHARACTERS

BRITTAIN – DUNYAZAD, ROSE RED, (STARCHILD), ROXIE, THE PHOTOGRAPHER/ROSE

GELSEY – SCHEHERAZADE, PEARL WHITE, SOLDIER, LADY USHER, THE VICTIM/PEARL

DAVE – MONK, THE ASTRONOMER, EDGAR, THE DRIVER

BRENT – SHAH ZAMAN, BEAR, THE FOOL, THE PUSHER

(In the original production, the characters **BRITTAIN, GELSEY, DAVE,** and **BRENT** were named after the performers who originated the roles; subsequent productions may replace these names with their performers' names, if they wish.)

TIME & SETTING

Scheherazade, Dunyazad, Shah Zaman, and Monk live in fourteenth-century Persia.

Rose Red, Pearl White, the Astronomer, and Bear live in seventeenth-century fairy tales of blurred Germany and Japan.

Edgar, Lady Usher, Roxie, and the Fool are a family living in gothic nineteenth-century England.

Soldier lives in twentieth-century Sarajevo.

The Photographer/Rose, the Victim/Pearl, the Driver, and the Pusher live in twenty-first-century New York City.

(Starchild) kind of lives in all times.

The Fool grows up to be the Pusher.

PERFORMANCE NOTES

Ghost Quartet is a live performance of a concept album; each track is announced and presented with limited staging, with small breaks between each side. The original arrangements were developed by the original Quartet, worked out through improvisation and experimentation during rehearsals. With that spirit in mind, the music is presented in lead sheet form, giving occasional instrumental lines but with much of the orchestration indicated only in brackets; for those wishing to replicate the original arrangements, a studio and live album are available at <https://davemalloy.bandcamp.com>; these recordings are a complete record of the music in the original show, and should be considered just as definitive as the score. However, other arrangements are certainly possible and encouraged; while the piece should be performed by an ensemble of four singers, the exact instrumentation need not adhere to what is notated in this score.

In the original production, the audience was seated in the round with the musicians at three stations (with Brittain and Gelsey together) around the inner ring, and a small, rug-covered playing space in the middle. Audience members were seated in a variety of chairs, couches, and cushions on the floor, giving the space a cozy living room feel. There was an informal break between Sides One and Two, during which Brittain and Gelsey collected the percussion instruments from the audience.

During “Four Friends,” bottles of whiskey were passed around. In “Fathers & Sons,” both floor toms were placed in the center playing space. Side Three was performed mostly in the dark.

During “The Wind & Rain,” the performers give their instruments away, one by one, and then leave, entrusting the audience with the end of the show. The audience should not be given any external light or sound cues to tell them when or how to stop; the ending should simply go for as long or short a time as it takes to end organically.

STORY NOTES

Persia, Fourteenth Century: Duniyazad and Scheherazade tell stories to Shah Zaman: “Rose Red & Pearl White, The Family of Usher,” “The Subway,” “The Camera Shop.” A piano player tries to invoke the ghost of Thelonious Monk. The Shah tells the sisters how he will kill them and how he will grieve. Years later, Rose Red arrives and seduces Scheherazade into giving her a Piece of Stardust.

Germany/Japan, Seventeenth Century: Rose Red & Pearl White are sisters, salt-makers. Rose loves the Astronomer; but the Astronomer steals Rose’s work and publishes it, and then falls in love with Pearl White. Rose is furious; she visits a Bear, and asks him to kill the Astronomer and turn Pearl White into a crow. He says he will if he receives four items: a Pot of Honey, a Piece of Stardust, a Secret Baptism, and a Photo of a Ghost. Rose Red travels in time to receive the items, first to Sarajevo in the twentieth century, where she seduces a soldier to get the Pot of Honey. When she returns, the Bear tricks her; he has no intention of killing Pearl White, he just wants the stuff. Rose Red gets the soldier to slay the Bear inside of a video game, and she pushes Pearl White into a river to drown. She has a child (by the Astronomer) named Starchild, who dies.

England, Nineteenth Century: The Usher’s daughter, Roxie, is tempted by her invisible friend, Rose, to kill herself; Rose is in fact Roxie’s dead sister, who died when a baby. Lady Usher reads Roxie the *Arabian Nights* at bedtime. Edgar and the Lady both drink a lot. Years later, Roxie has a baby (also a Starchild, also by a mysterious Astronomer); Rose Red steals the baby to get the Secret Baptism. After the baby’s disappearance, Roxie gets sick. She is believed to die, and is buried by her parents. Lady Usher goes mad; during a storm, Roxie (who either was buried alive or is now a ghost) appears and murders her mother. Her brother, the Fool, observes all of this and grows up to be a psychotic killer, the Pusher.

New York City, Twenty-first Century: Rose, Pearl, and the Pusher wait for a subway. Pearl plays a video game on her phone, in which the Soldier slays the Bear. The Pusher snaps, hearing voices in his head about the apocalypse. He pushes Pearl into the path of the train; Rose takes a picture. Later, Rose smashes her camera. She goes to a camera shop, where the ghost of Pearl tells her the tale of Rose Red & Pearl White. Afterward, Rose meets the Driver, a piano player obsessed with Monk; they fall in love and have two children, Rose Red & Pearl White.

SIDE ONE

1. I Don't Know
2. The Camera Shop
3. Starchild
4. Subway
5. Usher, Part One
6. Soldier & Rose
7. Any Kind of Dead Person

SIDE TWO

1. The Astronomer
2. Family Meeting
3. Four Friends
4. Fathers & Sons
5. Usher, Part Two
6. The Telescope
7. Tango Dancer
8. Monk

SIDE THREE

1. Lights Out
2. The Photograph
3. Bad Men
4. Usher, Part Three
5. Prayer

SIDE FOUR

1. Hero
2. Midnight
3. The Wind & Rain

SIDE ONE

1.1 I Don't Know

(DAVE greets the audience and gives any necessary curtain speech. Then:)

DAVE. This is *Ghost Quartet*. Side One, Track One. "I Don't Know."

NOW I DON'T KNOW

GELSEY, BRITTAIN & BRENT.

NOW I DON'T KNOW

DAVE.

BUT I'VE BEEN TOLD

GELSEY, BRITTAIN & BRENT.

BUT I'VE BEEN TOLD

DAVE.

AND THAT'S TRUE OF

ALL.

EVERYTHING I THINK I KNOW

EVERYTHING I THINK I KNOW

DAVE.

THAT I DON'T KNOW

GELSEY, BRITTAIN & BRENT.

THAT I DON'T KNOW

DAVE.

BUT I'VE BEEN TOLD

GELSEY, BRITTAIN & BRENT.

BUT I'VE BEEN TOLD

ALL.

YES I'VE BEEN TOLD

GELSEY.

I DON'T EVEN KNOW HOW TO BEGIN

BRITTAIN.

I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHO I AM

I'M NOT HERE

GELSEY & BRITTAIN.

NO ONE IS HERE

BRITTAIN.

I STAY AWAKE MOST EVERY NIGHT

WAITING FOR A GLIMPSE TO APPEAR

GELSEY & BRITTAIN.

WHERE'S MY GHOST IN THE MIRROR

I WANT ONE TOO

ALL.

I'VE GOT A THOUSAND ONE STORIES

EVERY SINGLE ONE OF THEM'S A LIE

LET ME READ YOU A STORY

LET ME READ YOU A ROMANCE

I WILL READ, YOU WILL LISTEN

AND THIS TERRIBLE NIGHT WILL PASS

WHEN I WAS A CHILD I USED TO PLAY

PLAY WITH ALL THE VOICES IN MY HEAD

LONG LONG AGO

THAT'S NOT ME ANYMORE

NOW I RIDE THE SUBWAY EVERY NIGHT

STARING AT THE GAME ON MY PHONE

KEEP MY HEAD DOWN

I'M ALL ALONE

DAVE & BRENT.

I DON'T KNOW IF THIS ME AT ALL
OR JUST SOME GHOST OF ME
THAT I DREAMED UP
JUST TO SING MYSELF TO SLEEP

BRITTAIN.

OR SOMEONE THAT I USED TO BE
OR SOMEONE THAT I WILL BE
OR SOMEONE THAT I AM RIGHT NOW

ALL.

OR SOMEONE THAT I USED TO BE
OR SOMEONE THAT I WILL BE
OR SOMEONE THAT I AM RIGHT NOW
OR SOMEONE THAT I USED TO BE
OR SOMEONE THAT I WILL BE
OR SOMEONE THAT I AM RIGHT NOW

1.2 The Camera Shop

BRENT. Side One, Track Two. “The Camera Shop.”

(**BRENT** *underscores with spooky cello.*)

BRITTAIN (ROSE). Excuse me?

GELSEY (PEARL). Can I help you?

BRITTAIN. I hope so.

I lost my camera.

GELSEY. Did someone steal it?

BRITTAIN. No. It got smashed.

GELSEY. Maybe we can repair it?

BRITTAIN. It got smashed and lost. The pieces are lost.

GELSEY. I’m sorry.

Here, have some whiskey.

BRITTAIN. Thank you.

GELSEY. It was a real camera? Not a phone?

BRITTAIN. Not a phone. I do not like phones.

GELSEY. Me neither.

Well, we’ll get you all set up with a new camera.

But sit first, and drink a bit. You need to take care of yourself.

BRITTAIN. Thank you.

GELSEY. Are you traveling?

BRITTAIN. Yes, from Portland.

GELSEY. Oh, I’ve been there once. They have that cool library!

BRITTAIN. That’s Seattle.

GELSEY. Oh.

I get them mixed up.

Did you grow up there?

BRITTAİN. Yes, when I was a kid.

GELSEY. That's nice. It's nice to have roots.

BRITTAİN. What about you, have you been here long?

GELSEY.

THIS STORE HAS BEEN IN MY FAMILY FOR FOUR
GENERATIONS

BRITTAİN. Wow.

GELSEY.

SEE THAT FIDDLE ON THE WALL?

IT BELONGED TO MY GREAT-GRANDMOTHER
HER NAME WAS ROSE

BRITTAİN. Well, that's my name!

GELSEY. It's a beautiful name.

OLD-FASHIONED, YOU DON'T HEAR IT A LOT ANYMORE

BRITTAİN.

THE COLOR IS SO LIGHT... WHAT'S IT MADE OF?

GELSEY.

AN OLD BREASTBONE

BRITTAİN.

CREEPY

GELSEY.

IT WAS THE BREASTBONE OF HER SISTER
HER NAME WAS PEARL
I'LL TELL YOU THE STORY:

GELSEY (PEARL WHITE).

ROSE AND PEARL LIVED BY THE SEA
GATHERING SALT BY THE MOONLIGHT

GELSEY & BRITTAIN (ROSE RED).

AND ROSE LOVED A MAN WHO LIVED IN THE TREES

GELSEY.

ROSE CRIED TO PEARL,

GELSEY & BRITTAIN.

“HOLD ME TIGHT, HOLD ME TIGHT”

GELSEY.

ROSE WENT TO HIS TREEHOUSE
AND LOOKED AT THE STARS THROUGH HIS TELESCOPE
SHE WANTED TO HOLD HIS HAND
SO SHE WROTE HIM A POEM
SIGNED IT AND SEALED IT
IN A RICE PAPER ENVELOPE

BRITTAIN.

WITH A LILY FOR A STAMP

GELSEY.

BUT THE MAN STOLE HER WORK
HE WAS THE EDITOR OF A PRESTIGIOUS ASTRONOMY
JOURNAL
HE WROTE DOWN ALL SHE SAW
AND PUBLISHED IT IN HIS NAME
AND ROSE GREW TO HATE HIM
AND THEN PEARL CAUGHT HIS EYE

BRITTAIN (ROSE).

I'M A LITTLE CONFUSED
AND MORE THAN A LITTLE FRIGHTENED

GELSEY (PEARL).

IT'S OK MY DEAR
THIS IS A CIRCULAR STORY

GELSEY (PEARL WHITE).

AND SO ROSE RAN INTO THE FOREST
AND ASKED A GREAT BEAR TO MAUL THE ASTRONOMER
AND TO TURN THE CRUEL SISTER INTO A BLACK CROW
AND PUT THE CORPSE AND THE CROW IN A CAVE
'TIL THE CROW STARTED TO STARVE
AND SHE'D HAVE NO CHOICE
BUT TO PECK OUT THE EYES OF HER LOVER AND EAT THEM

BRITTAIN (ROSE).

I DON'T BELIEVE ANY OF THIS

GELSEY (PEARL).

DON'T YOU REMEMBER?
THE BEAR NAMED HIS PRICE:

BRENT (BEAR).

ONE POT OF HONEY
ONE PIECE OF STARDUST
ONE SECRET BAPTISM
AND A PHOTO OF A GHOST

ALL.

ONE POT OF HONEY
ONE PIECE OF STARDUST
ONE SECRET BAPTISM
AND A PHOTO OF A GHOST

GELSEY (PEARL).

ROSE STOLE THE HONEY FROM A SOLDIER

GELSEY & BRITTAIN (PEARL WHITE & ROSE RED).

SHE PRETENDED TO LOVE

GELSEY.

STOLE THE STARDUST FROM AN ANCIENT

GELSEY & BRITTAIN.

SHE PRETENDED TO CARE

GELSEY.

AND FOR THE BAPTISM

SHE STOLE A BABY

FROM HER MOTHER

A FRIGHTENED TEENAGER IN A MANSION

GELSEY & BRITTAIN.

AND TOOK THE CHILD INTO THE SEA

AND THE CHILD WAS BLESSED

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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