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Family Plays

LADY DITHER'S GHOST

**A musical version of a
Sherlock Holmes mystery**

Book and lyrics by
DUMONT HOWARD

Music by
TOM JUDSON



LADY DITHER'S GHOST

Performed to 5,000 kids in the San Francisco Bay Area, *Lady Dither's Ghost* is a musical version of a Sherlock Holmes mystery, and one of the most successful productions of the Lilliput Players.

Musical mystery. Book and lyrics by Dumont Howard. Music by Tom Judson. *Cast: 4m., 2w., extras. Children in the audience may be invited to participate as Baker Street Irregulars, who blow whistles, do a simple march and become involved in a musical chase scene. Two of the Irregulars have speaking parts (one line each) and capture the villain.* Lady Dither suspects that her house is haunted. She isn't the least bit afraid of the ghosts, but she is sick and tired of the noise they make. Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson take charge, blending humor, mystery and music that appeal to both children and adults. In addition, the script exposes children to useful learning concepts—how to be observant, how to use logic to reach conclusions, etc.—in an entertaining fashion. Tuneful sing-along music and clever lyrics add to the charm of the action-packed story. *Unit set. Costumes: Victorian-era. Approximate running time: 60 minutes. Piano-vocal score available. Vocal score available. Orchestration available. Demo/accompaniment CD available. Code: LH3.*

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ISBN-13 978-0-88680-263-9



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Lady Dither's Ghost

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A Musical Version of
A Sherlock Holmes Mystery

by

DUMONT HOWARD

with music by

TOM JUDSON

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DUMONT HOWARD

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(LADY DITHER'S GHOST)

ISBN: 978-0-88680-263-9

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LADY DITHER'S GHOST

The Characters

Sherlock Holmes, *master detective*

Doctor Watson, *his sidekick, a retired doctor*

Lady Dither, *a regal older woman with unusual ideas*

Violet, *a graceful young woman*

Jasper, *an ancient butler with a chip on his shoulder and a scowl on his face*

The Baker Street Irregulars, *a motley crew of streetwise kids (made up of children from the audience)*

“The Ghost”



Scene Synopsis

Scene 1: 221-B Baker Street, a rainy evening

Scene 2: Armbruster Castle, the next day

Scene 3: Armbruster Castle, that same day

Scene 4: Armbruster Castle, that evening

Scene 5: Armbruster Castle, a few minutes later

Scene 6: Armbruster Castle, that night

Scene 7: 221-B Baker Street, an hour later

Scene 8: The Streets of London, a few moments later

Scene 9: Armbruster Castle, a few moments later

The Time is the late Victorian Period—the days of Sherlock Holmes



Lady Dither's Ghost was first produced by The Lilliput Players, San Francisco, Calif., under the direction of Sue Ellen Nelsen, with the following cast:

Sherlock Holmes Roger Scroggs

Dr. Watson David Geiger

Lady Dither Karen Pew

Violet Viletta Skillman

Jasper Roy Anthony

ABOUT THE PLAY

Dear Lilliput Players,

Thank you very much for putting on that play. I really enjoyed it. At first I thought Violet did it but she didnt.

Now I am giong to start read Sherlock Homes books. Thank you very much.

*Sincerely,
Michelle*

Performed extensively in the San Francisco Bay Area, *Lady Dither's Ghost* is one of the most successful productions of the Lilliput Players. Children in the audience may be invited to participate as Baker Street Irregulars, who blow whistles, do a simple march, and become involved in a musical chase scene. Two of the Irregulars have speaking parts (one line each) and capture the villain (spelling errors, etc., are the kids):

Dear Lilliput Players,

I really enjoyed your play . . . I liked when the two Baker Street Irregulers caught the vilin, best of all. Thank you for coming to my school, making that day a special one for everyone.

*Sincerely,
Nathan*

P. S. I was the Baker Street Irregular who said "Don't worry Lady"! and who caught the villin. Also thanks for the whistle.

The popular characters of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson appearing in an original story which blends humor, mystery, and music appeal to both children and adults. In addition, the script exposes children to useful learning concepts—how to be observant, how to use logic to reach conclusions, etc.—in an entertaining fashion.

Tuneful, singable music and clever lyrics add to the charm of the action-packed story. A single unit set may be used (see Appendix).

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL AVAILABLE FROM THE PUBLISHER

- 1) A study guide which may be reproduced by producers of the play and distributed to schools or groups for whom the play will be performed
- 2) An audio cassette tape of the music, with vocals
- 3) An accompaniment tape—the music without vocals
- 4) A piano/vocal score
- 5) Orchestrations for an ensemble (B-flat clarinet, violin, and cello)
- 6) Vocal lead sheets

PRODUCTION NOTES

Properties

Beakers, test tubes, and bottles of chemicals—on table in Holmes's study
 Newspaper—Holmes
 Cup of tea—Watson
 Change purse containing money—Lady Dither
 Coins—gloved hand (of cabbie)
 Handkerchief—Lady Dither
 Handkerchief—Holmes
 Toy police whistles—one for each Irregular
 Feather duster—Jasper
 Tray with tea service, cups, spoons, small tray of crumpets—Jasper
 4 lanterns—Watson, Lady Dither, Jasper, Violet
 Letter and hunting knife—Lady Dither
 Spiked medieval club—Watson
 Straight chair—Watson
 Heavy cane, rope, and gag—Masked Figure
 Violin—Holmes
 Police whistle—Holmes
 Ropes and gags—on Jasper, Violet, and Lady Dither

Costumes and Make-Up

The play would be appropriately costumed in traditional clothing of Sherlock Holmes's day—around the end of the nineteenth century. **Holmes**, of course, should wear the trademark cape and deerstalker cap. When he surprises **Watson** (Scene 4), he has a different type of hat pulled down over his face. In Scene 1 **Lady Dither** wears a ragged shawl over her expensive dress. In Scene 6 **Watson** appears in a ridiculously striped night cap and nightshirt, and **Lady Dither** also appears in a night cap. For complete authenticity, **Jasper**, **Violet**, and **Lady Dither** would wear nightclothes when they are found tied up in Scene 9, since they were apparently abducted after going to bed. **Violet** should have suntanned arms and face.

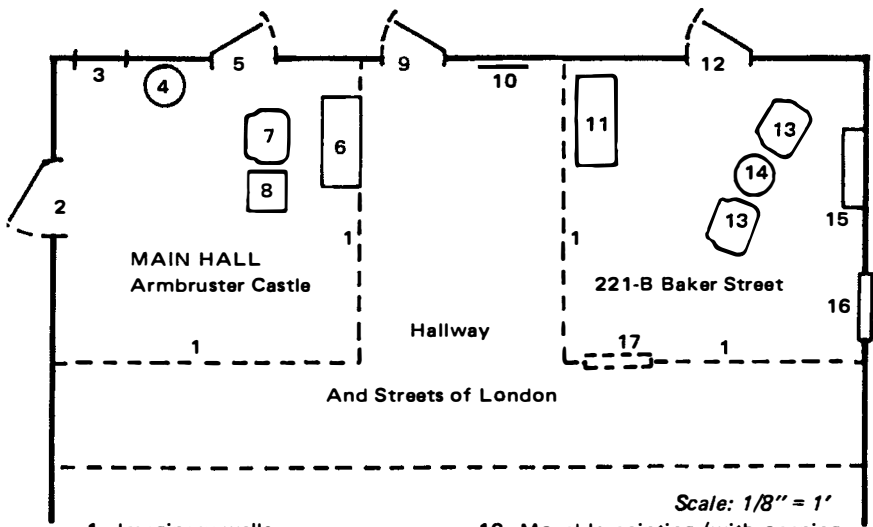
The **Baker Street Irregulars** may wear ragged "ragamuffin" clothes, or the clothing they have on when they come to the play. In the latter case, perhaps providing each with a tattered sweater or coat, and a worn cap or hat would convey the right idea.

Sound

In addition to the music, which may be live or taped (an accompaniment tape is available from the publisher—see introductory notes), and the live screams, bumps, and howls, the script calls for **wind**, **rain**, and **thunder**, and an "eerie, echoing gong" (front door bell). Other sound effects, of course, are possible—the approach and departure of Lady Dither's hansom cab, a creaking castle door, a slide whistle as the candle on the table moves about, and so on.

The Set

The 60-minute play takes place in nine scenes; however, there should be little or no time-lapse between scenes. A unit set, something like the floor plan pictured on the next page, can be used to negate the need for changing scenery.



Scale: 1/8" = 1'

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| 1—Imaginary walls | 10—Movable painting (with opening
in wall behind it) |
| 2—Front door to Armbruster Castle | 11—Table with chemistry equipment |
| 3—Secret panel | 12—Door |
| 4—Suit of armor | 13—Easy chairs |
| 5—Door to interior of castle | 14—Table |
| 6—Fireplace and mantel | 15—Fireplace and mantel |
| 7—Chair | 16—Practical window |
| 8—Table (with moving candlestick) | 17—Imaginary window |
| 9—Door (or curtained exit) | |

Add additional furniture, trim props, etc., as desired

LADY DITHER'S GHOST

Prologue

[FOG billows across the apron. Three cloaked FIGURES step stealthily through the audience and mount the stage as they sing:]

Music No. 1: **ONLY CRIMINALS HAD NOTHING TO FEAR**
(In the London of Yesteryear)

[A la Grand Guignol, Spike Jones, and Kurt Weill]

FIGURES. Here danger lurks everywhere—

Look lively, have a care.

Plotting, scheming,

A gunshot, screaming *[a WOMAN SCREAMS]*.

Why only a criminal had nothing to fear

In the London of Yesteryear.

Through fog as thick as pea soup

There troops a careless dupe.

Cloak and daggers *[a loud GROAN]*,

The victim staggers—

Yes, only a criminal had nothing to fear

In the London of Yesteryear.

[Upbeat, a la TV crime show]

Crime never pays

In modern days

Of computer and squad cars and labs galore,

But that's not how it was before.

[Original style]

A crook looks sharp as he roams

Streets just like honeycombs.

Cat-and-mousing *[a MEOW sound]*,

He's always grousing

'Bout the one thing that criminals had always to fear

In the London of Yesteryear—

MISTER SHERLOCK HOLMES!

[The FIGURES pull aside the CURTAIN to reveal SHERLOCK HOLMES, who bows and turns to take part in . . .

Scene 1

221-B Baker Street

The Home of Sherlock Holmes & Dr. Watson

[SHERLOCK HOLMES and DR. WATSON are seated before a fireplace flanked by bookshelves. In one corner a table is piled high with a fantastic mad-scientist array of beakers and test tubes. HOLMES is reading the newspaper, while WATSON drinks his tea. WIND, RAIN, and the crash of THUNDER can be heard outside]

WATSON. *[Contentedly]* It is certainly a relief to stay home and have my tea in peace. I wouldn't want to be scampering all over London in this rain. And it's about time we had a rest. This detective business can be downright exhausting. That Study in Scarlet case didn't give a man a chance to catch his breath. Missed my tea two days running.

HOLMES. *[Setting aside his newspaper; mocking]* What?! Two days without crumpets? When merely the most fantastic criminal case in England's history hung in the balance? *[Stretching with a bored sigh]* Don't worry, Watson. It appears you'll be getting your tea on a regular basis. While this rain holds up at any event. Bad weather seems to drive the crime right out of men's hearts. I suppose even criminals know enough to come in out of the rain.

WATSON. It wouldn't take a mastermind to know enough to stay inside on a night like this. Listen to that wind.

HOLMES. *[Rising and pacing]* If it never stops raining, crime may be wiped out entirely. As for me, I'd give every crumpet in England for a thorny crime puzzle to solve. *[Standing by the window Stage Right]* Hallo! What's this? Quick, Watson, look here. *[WATSON ambles over; HOLMES points out the window]* That woman. Getting out of the cab. *[Downstage Right the side curtain is pulled aside and a WOMAN dressed in a ragged shawl steps out]*

WATSON. Yes, what of her?

HOLMES. Our next case—Lady Dither.

WATSON. Come now, Holmes, a woman steps out of a hansom cab and you pretend to know her name and declare she's our next case. That's a far-fetched hypothesis even for you. *Lady Dither* indeed! She's nothing of the kind. Look at her clothes. *[A gloved HAND reaches out from behind the curtain. The WOMAN opens her change purse and places money in the outstretched hand. The HAND is retracted]*

HOLMES. Ah! Yes, take a look! A close look. She is dressed shabbily

to escape notice. Point Number One: How many poor women can afford a hansom cab? [*The gloved HAND appears again, holding out shining coins. The WOMAN waves the hand away. The HAND salutes and disappears*] And Point Number Two: How many poor women can afford a handsome tip? Did you notice that she let the driver keep the change?

WATSON. [*Befuddled*] Well, uh, no I'm afraid I— [*The WOMAN looks around anxiously for a moment*]

HOLMES. Observation is the greatest tool of the detective, Watson. Finally, there is an air about her—a certain grandness. She stands erect and moves gracefully though she is an elderly woman. Merely intuition, I grant you. But intuition has its place in detective work. And as for her coming here, you can see by the way she's looking around that she is a stranger to this neighborhood. Ask yourself—what would bring a woman alone to a strange place on a night like this? [*The WOMAN exits Up Right. WATSON puts his thinking cap on:*]

WATSON. Well . . .

HOLMES. Trouble. Only trouble.

WATSON. But her name—

HOLMES. There was an intriguing case in the newspaper concerning a woman that fits her description. So her name is just a guess. But an *educated* guess. [*A KNOCK at the door*] Ho! Now we'll see what the woman herself has to say. Come, Watson, don't leave Lady Dither waiting.

WATSON. [*Grumbling*] Lady Dither indeed! [*WATSON opens the door and admits the woman, greeting her with an airy:*] Lady Dither, I presume?

LADY DITHER. [*Gushing dramatically to Watson*] You are the great sleuth Sherlock Holmes! I would have known you anywhere! And if you know me even before I step through the door, then you are even greater than people say. [*A sheepish, grumpy WATSON shakes his head and points to Holmes*]

WATSON. That's him. Over there.

HOLMES. Welcome, Lady Dither. I hope Dr. Watson and I will be able to uncover the mystery that hangs over Armbruster Castle.

LADY DITHER. [*Shriek*] You know all about Armbruster Castle! Astounding!

HOLMES. Nonsense, dear lady. Your story was all over the newspapers. Come, sit and tell us your fantastic story.

LADY DITHER. Well, I'm sure from those dreadful newspaper ac-

counts you know that many *peculiar* things have been happening in Armbruster Castle.

HOLMES. Such as?

LADY DITHER. Oh, strange clanking noises, groans, all manner of revolting noises late at night. [*Warming to her subject*] Honestly, a woman of my age being kept up all night to hear such goings on! We Dithers are not that sort of family. And I'm just not as young as I used to be . . . [*a thought strikes her*] . . . but then who is? [*She laughs merrily*]

HOLMES. You can't think of any logical explanation for all these noises?

LADY DITHER. [*Isn't it obvious?*] Well, it's ghosts of course!

WATSON. [*Alarmed*] Ghosts?!

HOLMES. Surely you don't believe in ghosts?

LADY DITHER. [*Staunchly*] Of course I do!

HOLMES. I'm afraid getting rid of ghosts is not my line of work.

LADY DITHER. [*Quickly*] Oh, but you don't have to get *rid* of them! No, no. I wouldn't want to be inhospitable! The ghosts can stay. It's a big house, plenty of room. They can have the whole west wing. I'll even throw in the ballroom. I haven't danced in ages. [*Stern*] But they simply must be quieter! Their infernal racket is making a nervous wreck of me. Mr. Holmes, I want you to understand that we Dithers are a most gracious family. Lord knows I've entertained hordes of the most *impossible* guests and never so much as lifted an eyebrow. But these ghosts . . . [*She throws up her hands and sings:*]

Music No. 2: A GHOST IS SO DIFFICULT TO IGNORE

LADY DITHER. Why that friend of Cousin Phoebe's

Made us dance the heebie jeebies

Till my very eyeballs were sore,

But not a muscle do I flinch

When I'm caught up in a clinch—

Yet a ghost is so difficult to ignore.

And my dearest Uncle Dudley,

When his brain had gone quite mudley,

Played the tuba from nine to four.

I'd just slowly count to ten,

Then begin at one again—

But a ghost is so difficult to ignore.

Please don't mention Lady Stoker,
 Who won fifty pounds at poker
 Till I started checking the score.
 But ne'er a moment did I blanch;
 I held out the olive branch—
 But a ghost is so difficult to ignore.

I've remained most warm and charming
 When my guests have proved disarming,
 Though it sometimes took great guile,
 Still I always wore a smile. [*Improvise as on score*]

But Lord Li'nel was the rudest—
 He turned out to be a nudist.
 Though it shocked me to the core,
 I was most demure and meek;
 I just turned the other cheek.
 But these ghosts are a bloody chore to ignore.

And furthermore
 To underscore
 I must encore
 That heretofore
 I've put up with boors, bores, and bounders galore,
 I've endured fiends, fools, and flakes by the score.
 Now after entertaining all these kooks,
 I find I'm playing host to spooks,
 And a ghost is so difficult—

[*spoken*] Just impossible
 To ignore.

[*Spoken, pleading*] Mr. Holmes, you *have* to quiet down these noisy ghosts. You're my last hope. Those ridiculous men at Scotland Yard won't lift a finger. [*Dabbing at her eyes with a handkerchief*] I don't know what this country's coming to. Ghosts wreaking havoc and no one does a thing—

HOLMES. [*Gently*] You don't think it possible you—well—imagined some of these things?

LADY DITHER. [*Regal*] Mr. Holmes, I am not dotty!

HOLMES. May I ask who would inherit the castle if anything happened to you?