2008-2009
HOT SEASON FOR
YOUNG PEOPLE PRESENTS

AMAHL AND THE
NIGHT VISITORS
Nashville Opera
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Dear Educators,

Nashville Opera is extremely pleased to join forces with Humanities Outreach in Tennessee to present Gian Carlo Menotti’s opera *Amahl and the Night Visitors*.

This holiday classic premiered on NBC Television Opera Theatre on Christmas Eve, 1951. The production was an immediate success and has become a holiday tradition for opera companies all over the United States. The piece truly captures the joy of giving during the holiday season, while also providing some fun comic relief during this busy time.

This production was designed specifically for Nashville Opera and we consider it our gift to you and your students. Thank you for partnering with Humanities Outreach in Tennessee and Nashville Opera to share the magic of opera with your students! We look forward to the performance and hope your students enjoy the show!

Stuart B. Holt
Stage Director/ Nashville Opera Education Director

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**ON THE LISTENING CD**

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3  “This is My Box” (Kaspar)
4  “Have you seen a Child” (Three Kings and Mother)
5  “All That Gold” (Mother)

Songs from “Amahl and the Night Visitors” by Menotti
Original cast of the NBC telecast, Christmas Eve, 1951.
RCA

**NOTE TO TEACHERS**

The story of *Amahl and the Night Visitors* makes references to the Biblical story of the wise men following the star, the poor shepherds (Amahl sings about being a shepherd), gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, and the Child. The Biblical nativity story may be found in Matthew 2:1-12.
AMAHL AND THE NIGHT VISITORS
By Gian Carlo Menotti, performed by The Nashville Opera

Setting
It is night. The crystal-clear winter sky is dotted with stars. The Eastern Star, with its flaming tail, floods both the sky and earth with glowing radiance. Outside the cottage, not far from the door, Amahl, wrapped in an oversized cloak, sits on a stone, playing his shepherd’s pipe. His crudely-made crutch lies on the ground beside him. Within, the Mother works at household chores. The room is lighted only by the dying low flame of a tiny oil lamp.

Cast
Amahl, a young crippled boy
Mother
Kaspar
Melchior
Balthazar
Page

Story
Summary from Nashville Opera

Amahl, a crippled shepherd boy sits outside his tiny house playing his pipes. His mother calls him to bed (duet: “Amahl!”), but he dawdles, begging for just a few more minutes of playtime (Duet: “But, Mother, let me stay a little longer!”). He tells her of a giant star hovering over their house with a long tail (Amahl: “But Mother, you should go out and see!”). She scolds him for making up fantastic stories (Mother: “Why should I believe you?”), and then confesses to the real reason for her frustration: the last of their money has run out, and they will have to go begging in the morning. Amahl comforts his mother (Amahl: “Don’t cry, Mother dear”), and the two go to sleep.

In the dark distance, a trio can be heard (“From far away we come”). Eventually, four men in exotic dress arrive at the hut. One of them knocks, and Amahl is astonished to find a page and three kings on his doorstep: Kaspar, the oldest, carrying a chalice of myrrh; Melchior, carrying a coffer of gold; and Balthazar, a Nubian, carrying an urn of frankincense. Amahl must convince his mother that he is not making up the kings (Amahl: “Mother…Mother…Mother come with me!”), and Amahl’s mother finally invites them in.

A curious Amahl immediately begins asking questions of the kings (ensemble: “Are you a real King?”). The magi explain that they are following the star to a Child, for whom they have brought gifts (“Have you seen a Child…?”).

Shepherds arrive bearing food for the royal guests (Chorus: “Emily, Emily, Michael, Bartholomew”). Soon, the weary kings go to sleep (Chorus: “Good night, my good Kings”).

Amahl’s mother lies awake, staring at the gold on her floor (Mother: “All that gold!”). Furious that these kings would give the riches to a child they have never seen while her own son goes hungry, she takes some of it. Her hand is seized by the kings’ Nubian page, whose cries wake the house (Ensemble: “Thief!”). Amahl threatens the page to release his mother (Amahl: “Don’t you dare!”).

Melchior tells her to keep the gold: “The Child we seek doesn’t need our gold. On love, on love alone He will build His Kingdom.” The mother spills all she has taken on the rug, saying that she has waited all her life for such a king and would give him a gift herself if she could (Mother: “Oh, no, wait…take back your gold!”). Amahl offers his handmade crutch as a gift for the Child, and without thinking, he holds it out to the kings and steps forward. Miraculously, he can walk (Ensemble: “I walk, Mother…’”). The kings recognize that he has been blessed (Kings: “Oh blessed child, may I touch you?”), and soon Amahl sets out with the magi to deliver their gifts to the Child in Bethlehem.
ABOUT THE MUSIC
by Gian Carlo Menotti, Composer

This is an opera for children because it tries to recapture my own childhood. You see, when I was a child I lived in Italy, and in Italy we have no Santa Claus. I suppose that Santa Claus is much too busy with American children to be able to handle Italian children as well. Our gifts were brought to us by the Three Kings, instead.

I actually never met the Three Kings -- it didn't matter how hard my little brother and I tried to keep awake at night to catch a glimpse of the Three Royal Visitors, we would always fall asleep just before they arrived. But I do remember hearing them. I remember the weird cadence of their song in the dark distance; I remember the brittle sound of the camels' hooves crushing the frozen snow; and I remember the mysterious tinkling of their silver bridles.

My favorite king was King Melchior, because he was the oldest and had a long white beard. My brother's favorite was King Kaspar. He insisted that this king was a little crazy and quite deaf. I don't know why he was so positive about his being deaf. I suspect it was because dear King Kaspar never brought him all the gifts he requested. He was also rather puzzled by the fact that King Kaspar carried the myrrh, which appeared to him as a rather eccentric gift, for he never quite understood what the word meant.

To these Three Kings I mainly owe the happy Christmas seasons of my childhood, and I should have remained very grateful to them. Instead, I came to America and soon forgot all about them, for here at Christmastime one sees so many Santa Clauses scattered all over town. Then there is the big Christmas tree in Rockefeller Plaza, the elaborate toy windows on Fifth Avenue, the one-hundred-voice choir in Grand Central Station, the innumerable Christmas carols on radio and television -- and all these things made me forget the three dear old Kings of my own childhood.

But in 1951 I found myself in serious difficulty. I had been commissioned by the National Broadcasting Company to write an opera for television, with Christmas as a deadline, and I simply didn't have one idea in my head. One November afternoon as I was walking rather gloomily through the rooms of the Metropolitan Museum, I chanced to stop in front of the Adoration of the Kings by Hieronymus Bosch, and as I was looking at it, suddenly I heard again, coming from the distant blue hills, the weird song of the Three Kings. I then realized they had come back to me and had brought me a gift.

The composer's comments are excerpted from "The Genesis of 'Amahl,'" liner notes that appear on RCA recordings of the work, VIC-1512 and LSC-2762.

Excerpt from http://www.andrews.edu/~mack/pnotes/dec691.html
Menotti’s Inspiration

Menotti said his inspiration for *Amahl and the Night Visitors* was *The Adoration of the Kings*, by Heironymous Bosch, painted in 1510. This painting reminded him of happy childhood memories from the holiday season.

View this painting online at

Teachers, locate a copy of this painting online. Ask your students to look at the painting, and then ask them the following questions:

1) How do you celebrate the winter holidays?
2) Do you see anything in this painting that reminds you of the way your family celebrates?
3) If you had a painting that represented your holiday celebration, what would it include? What would your picture look like?
Amahl and the Night Visitors is a true opera because it is sung through (everything, even dialogue, is sung). The singers will sing in English, but, as with all performances, sometimes it is difficult for audiences to hear every word, especially if this is the first time to listen to an opera. The Nashville Opera will include supertitles (lyrics projected onto a screen above the stage) in English to help your students follow along.

ELEMENTS OF AN OPERA
Listen for each of the following in Amahl and the Night Visitors

PRELUDE is music that comes at the beginning and introduces an act in an opera.
Example: Prelude/Opening

RECITATIVE is dialogue in opera that is sung in natural speech rhythms. This “sing-speaking” moves the action along in an opera. It often comes before an aria or ensemble. Example: “Amahl Go See Who’s Knocking”

ARIA is a term that describes a song sung by one person in an opera.
Example: “All that Gold” (sung by the Mother)

DUET describes a song that is sung or played by two people.
Example: “What to do with your crutch?” (sung by Mother and Amahl)

TRIO is a composition or song of three singers or instrumentalists.
Example: “Far Far Away We Come” (sung by the three Kings)

QUARTETS are performed by four singers or instrumentalists.
Example: “Have you seen a Child” (sung by the three Kings and Mother)

ENSEMBLE refers to a group of two or more that sing or play together. Ensemble means “together” in French and in opera, “ensemble” can also refer to the chorus.
Example: “Shepherds, Shepherds”

What are magi?
According to the Miriam-Webster dictionary, “magi” is the plural of magus, which means: 1.a. -a member of a hereditary priestly class among the ancient Medes and Persians
   b. -often capitalized : one of the traditionally three wise men from the East paying homage to the infant Jesus
2: magician, sorcerer
Menotti’s talent for characterization through orchestral color and melody is one of the most charming elements of *Amahl and the Night Visitors*. Amahl, a rambunctious young crippled boy, is playfully depicted by two distinct musical figures. The first is an optimistic pipe-tune which opens and closes the opera:

The second is a slightly unbalanced “running” motive plucked on the strings, full of dotted rhythms which imitate the boy’s irregular trot. This figure is heard several times as Amahl runs from his mother to the door of his house in the first scene:

The boy’s music is a direct contrast to his Mother’s. Without pause, Menotti creates abrupt shifts between Amahl’s playfulness and his mother’s emotional eruptions. Her music is characterized by dramatic melodic leaps supported by thick orchestrations:
Listen for her heartbreaking aria “All that Gold” near the end of the opera. An outflow of emotion, Amahl’s Mother laments that she can barely feed her son while an unknown child is about to receive the elaborate gifts carried by the kings. The arrival of the Three Kings is signified by a total change in musical atmosphere. Exotic harmonies and tired, trudging bass notes accompany these foreigners in their first trio, “From far away we come.”

With their role as outsiders established, Menotti is free to address their personalities in a humorous instrumental interlude as they process regally into the small cottage. Listen for the ensemble, “Have you seen a child.” In a haunting melody with a subtle middle-eastern flavor, the kings describe the Child they are traveling to see. As they tell of the worthiness of the holy babe, Amahl’s mother echoes their melody, however she speaks of her own sickly son’s kingly virtues.

**Kings**

_Have you seen a Child the color of wheat, the color of dawn?_  
_His eyes are mild, His hands are those of a King, as King he was born.  
Incense, myrrh and gold we bring to his side, and the Eastern Star is our guide._

**Amahl’s Mother**

_Yes, I know a child the color of wheat, The color of dawn.  
His eyes are mild, his hands are those of King, as King he was born.  
But no one will bring him incense or gold, though sick and poor and hungry and cold.  
He is my child, my son, my darling, my own._
SING-SPEAKING: RECITATIVE

Introduction

Recitative is dialogue in opera that is sung in natural speech rhythms. This “sing-speaking” moves the action along in an opera. It often comes before an aria or ensemble. This activity focuses on a recitative section: “Amahl, Go See Who’s Knocking,” included on the listening CD, track 2.

Tempo refers to the speed of the speech, fast or slow.

Pitch refers to how high or low a note is.

Objectives

1. Students will define the meaning and use of recitative, tempo and pitch.
2. Students will identify musical elements (tempo, pitch) in everyday speech, musical selections, and recitatives.
3. Students will compare and contrast a listening example of recitative to everyday spoken dialogue.

Materials Needed

• A copy of the recitative for each student (page 9).
• Listening CD (cue to track 2).

Activity

1. Give each student a copy of the recitative “Amahl, Go See Who’s Knocking.” (There are three parts.) Choose 2 volunteers for each part of the recitative (two volunteers for Part 1, two different volunteers for Part 2, and 2 more for Part 3). One student should read Amahl, and one the Mother for each section. Have the volunteers read the recitative aloud in their normal voices.

2. Discuss the meaning of tempo and pitch. Do these musical elements affect everyday speech? How?

3. Listen to the recitative excerpt in “Amahl, Go See Who’s Knocking” (track 2).

4. Discuss the following questions:
   • How did the song differ from the normal speech of the volunteers?
   • How was it the same?
   • What musical choices did Menotti use to make it speech-like?
   • What words did he emphasize by making louder, softer, shorter and longer?
   • How did the tempo and pitch affect the meaning in the words of the song?
   • How do tempo and pitch affect the meaning in everyday speech?
   • Why do you think Menotti wanted this piece to sound more like speaking than singing?

5. Now that they have heard the recitative, have students try to “sing-speak” Part 1 of “Amahl, Go See Who’s Knocking.” In pairs, have students try to sing Part 1 aloud as a recitative.

6. Review - Discuss the differences in spoken dialogue and recitatives. Do you think recitatives are difficult or easy for performers? Why?
Recitative Activity

Part 1

Mother: Amahl!
Amahl: Yes, Mother
Mother: Go and see who is knocking at the door.
Amahl: Mother, Mother, Mother, come with me. I want to be sure that you see what I see.
Mother: What is the matter with you now, what is all this fuss about? Who is it then?
Amahl: Mother...outside the door...there is...there is a King with a crown.
Mother: What shall I do with this boy, what shall I do, what shall I do? If you don’t learn to tell the truth, I’ll have to spank you! Go back and see who it is and ask them what they want.

Part 2

Amahl: Mother, Mother, Mother come with me. I want to be sure that you see what I see.
Mother: What is the matter with you now, what is all this fuss about?
Amahl: Mother...I didn’t tell the truth before.
Mother: That’s a good boy.
Amahl: There is not a King outside.
Mother: I should say not!
Amahl: There are two kings!
Mother: What shall I do with this boy, what shall I do, what shall I do? Hurry back and see who it is, and don’t you dare make up tales!

Part 3

Amahl: Mother, Mother, Mother come with me. If I tell you the truth I know you won’t believe me.
Mother: Try it for a change!
Amahl: But you won’t believe me.
Mother: I’ll believe you if you tell me the truth.
Amahl: Sure enough, there are not two Kings outside.
Mother: That is surprising.
Amahl: The Kings are three, and one of them is black.
Mother: Oh! What shall I do with this boy! If you were stronger I’d like to whip you.
Amahl: I knew it!
Mother: I’m going to the door myself, and then, young man, you’ll have to reckon with me!
KASPAR’S BOX – WHAT'S IN YOUR TREASURE BOX?

Introduction
In this lesson, students will listen to track 3 “This is My Box,” sung by Kaspar, the oldest king. The role of Kaspar is sung by a tenor, which is the highest voice of the three Kings. At this point in the opera, young Amahl is curious about what is in Kaspar’s box.

Objectives:
The student will create a collage of “treasures” in their lives.
The student will determine a purpose for wanting each “treasure.”
The student will reconstruct lyrics using their own “treasures.”

Materials needed: Poster board or letter sized paper, magazines, photographs, scissors, glue, and other art supplies, teacher’s prepared treasure box, and lyrics.

Before starting the lesson: Teacher, prepare a treasure box and lyrics to “This is My Box” prior to the lesson as per the activity instructions below for the students. The treasure box should contain items that are of value to you. You can use pictures or words, and you can draw items to go in your box. The lyrics from “This is My Box” include a reason that Kaspar has each item. Change the lyrics to tell about your box. The lyrics will tell about each item and why you chose it, such as “One heart to give you love” if you put a heart in your box.

Activity  Part 1.
• Give students a copy of the excerpt of lyrics to “This is My Box.” Play the song (track 3).
• Ask students to identify Kaspar’s treasures (magic stones, beads, licorice).

Part 2.
• Kaspar never traveled without his box of treasured belongings, and each one had a purpose or meaning. Ask students what would be in their treasure boxes, and why. Ask students to think of things that they treasure or value. Discuss. Their “treasures” may be things they currently own or would like to own, or more abstract items like love, safety, or warmth.
• Show students your treasure box, and read aloud your version of “This is My Box” lyrics.
• Give students a blank poster board or piece of paper to create a treasure box collage. Using magazine clippings, photos and their own artwork, they should put what they value into their treasure box. Remember: Each treasure should have a purpose or special meaning.
• After making their collage, students should take the lyric excerpt from “This is My Box” and change them to tell about each of their treasures and their purpose. (Students may choose things that are not necessities, such as potato chips or TV. Help them find a reason they might treasure this, such as potato chips to stop hunger, or TV to entertain.)
• Let each student present his/her treasure box by showing the collage and reading their lyrics to the class.

This is my box, this is my box, I never travel without my box.
In the first drawer I keep my magic stones.
One carnelian against all evil and envy,
One moonstone to make you sleep,
One red coral to heal your wounds,
One lapis lazuli against quartern fever,
One small jasper to help you find water,
One small topaz to soothe your eyes,
One red ruby to protect you from lightning.

--Lyric excerpt from “This is My Box”
A MOTHER’S DILEMMA

Introduction
The characters in Menotti’s opera *Amahl and the Night Visitors* are on opposite ends of the economic spectrum. On one extreme are the kings who come from great wealth and opulence. On the other extreme is an impoverished single mother and her crippled son who have had to sell their flock of sheep to survive and now they must go begging. In the quartet “Have you seen the Child?” the Kings describe the Child to whom they are bringing expensive gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. The mother echoes the same melody as she laments about her own child. This beautiful melody sometimes soars and yet is mysterious and sad all at once. In her aria “All that Gold,” the Mother sings of her desperation and chooses to steal some gold to provide for her son.

Objectives
1. Students will distinguish the difference between wants and needs.
2. Students will analyze the difficult situation faced by Amahl’s Mother.

Materials Needed
- Copies of the song lyrics (page 12) for each student.
- Listening CD, track 5, “All that Gold.”

Discussion
1. Distribute the lyrics to “All That Gold.”
2. Guide students in reading the lyrics.
3. After reading the lyrics, ask the students to consider the mother’s situation. Amahl and his Mother are poor – so poor that they will soon have to beg for money and food. She is tempted to steal the gold.
   • What types of things does the mother sing about when she thinks of the gold?
   • Is she singing about things she wants or needs?
   • Ask the students to share wants and needs in their lives.
   • Have you ever been tempted to do something you know is wrong? How did you handle it? Was it based on a want or a need?
4. What do you think about the mother’s decision to take some of the gold?
5. As a class, listen to the song.
   • How does the music add meaning to the words?
   • How is listening to the music different from reading the words alone?

Further Discussion/Activity
- The mother wanted to use the money to help Amahl. If you had gold or money, who would you help? Ask students to write a letter to the government asking for help for their cause.
- Encourage students to perform the lyrics of “All that Gold” as a dramatic monologue.
- We know the value of gold. What about the other two gifts brought by the Kings? What are frankincense and myrrh? Why are they valuable?
“ALL THAT GOLD”

Performance note: All in the house have settled to sleep. The mother, however, is eyeing the gold that is guarded by a Page.

All that gold, all that gold!  
I wonder if rich people know what to do with their gold.  
Do they know how a child could be fed?  
Do rich people know?  
Do they know that a house can be kept warm all day with burning logs?  
Do rich people know?  
Do they know how to roast sweet corn by the fire?  
Do they know? Do they know how to fill a courtyard with doves?  
Do they know? Do they know?  
Do they know how to milk a clover-fed goat?  
Do they know? Do they know how to spice hot wine on cold winter nights?  
Do they know? Do they know?

All that gold! All that gold!  
Oh, what I could do for my child with that gold!  
Why should it go to a child they don't even know?  
They are asleep. Do I dare?  
If I take some they'll never miss it.

For my child. . . for my child . . .

Performance note: The mother reaches for the gold, and as she does the Page is instantly aroused from sleep. He seizes her arm, and yells to his masters...
RESOURCES

Nashville Opera Association: www.nashvilleopera.org

Fictional picture book:
Amahl and the Night Visitors (Hardcover)
by Gian Carlo Menotti (Author), Michele LeMieux (Illustrator)

Recording:
“Amahl and the Night Visitors” by Menotti
Original cast of the NBC telecast, Christmas Eve, 1951.
RCA

The Metropolitan Opera: http://www.metoperafamily.org/metopera/

To learn more about opera terminology:
http://www.evermore.com/azo/terms.php3