



TEATRU MANOEL



# **AMAH AND THE NIGHT VISITORS RESOURCE PACK**

*A Teatru Manoel and ŽiguŽajg Co-Production*

Children's Opera for ages 9+

## TEACHERS' RESOURCES

To teach is a creative act and to assist, inspire and help you beyond the classroom, we have put together a section that is just for you.

- Can you remember the first time you were at the theatre?
- The first time you saw a live performance?
- Do you remember its effect on you?
- What is your first theatre memory?
- Would you share it with your class?

## THEATRE ETIQUETTE

Please review this common theatre etiquette with your class before attending the performance.

**DO:** Arrive at the theatre early. Use the toilets before the performance. Turn off mobile phones, alarms, and other electronic devices. Keep your feet on the floor. Show your appreciation of the performers by applauding. Stay with your group or school at all times. Watch and listen closely to the performers.

**DON'T:** Stand in the aisles. Put your feet on the seats or balcony railing. Talk, sing, hum or fidget. Take pictures or record the actors during the performance. Leave the theatre during the performance. Kick the seat in front of you. Eat, drink or chew gum in the theatre. Leave your seat before the performers have taken their curtain call.

## ENJOY THE SHOW!



## ORIGINS OF THE STORY

*Amahl and the Night Visitors* is an opera in one act by Gian Carlo Menotti with an original English libretto by the composer. It was commissioned by NBC and first performed by the NBC Opera Theatre on December 24, 1951, in New York City at NBC studio 8H in Rockefeller Center, where it was broadcast live on television from that venue. It was the first opera specifically composed for television in America.



By 1950, Menotti had become an established composer in the United States. Therefore, it was a natural progression for NBC to commission him to compose a short opera in English for television to celebrate Christmas at the end of 1951. Menotti was often a slow worker and, as the deadline for the delivery of this commission approached, the inspiration to create *Amahl and the Night Visitors* came to him after seeing Hieronymus Bosch's famous painting *The Adoration of the Kings* at the *Metropolitan Museum of Art* in New York. 'Suddenly I heard again...the weird song of the Three Kings,' he later recalled. The score was eventually finished just days before the live broadcast took place, on Christmas Eve 1951, with Menotti's partner, the composer Samuel Barber, helping to complete the orchestration.

The next day *The New York Times* published an unprecedented front page **review** by its distinguished music critic Olin Downes, who described the broadcast as an '**historic event in the rapidly evolving art of television**'.

After 1966, Menotti, disliking a new production first seen in 1963 and later repeated on videotape, refused to allow it to be seen further. 'I would rather see no production at all of *Amahl* than a bad one,' he told the press. Nonetheless the opera lives on. Because Menotti had written a work that could be performed by amateur companies, it has become a Christmas fixture in many communities. Its publishers estimate that it is performed at least five hundred times each Christmas season.

**The plot of *Amahl and the Night Visitors* is straightforward. The crippled boy Amahl lives in poverty with his mother. They are visited by the Three Kings, the Magi, or the Three Wise Men, on their way to see the infant Jesus and, during the night, the mother succumbs to temptation and steals some of their gold. She is caught, but explains that the money is for her son. The Three Kings tell her to keep it, since Jesus will build his kingdom on love. Amahl offers his crutch as a gift to Christ and discovers that he can walk unaided. His mother allows him to accompany the Three Kings on their journey.**

## SYNOPSIS

The opera takes place near Bethlehem just after the birth of Christ. One night, Amahl is playing his shepherd's pipe, when he claims to see a huge star over his house. His mother thinks that he is telling stories, as usual. She begins to cry. Amahl comforts his mother and they hug and wish each other "good night."

In the distance, a traveling caravan is heard. Suddenly, there is a knock at the door. Amahl hobbles over to the door and then returns to his mother's side quickly, telling her there is a "King with a crown!" at the door. Amahl's mother assumes that he is lying again and scolds him.



Finally, the Mother goes to the door and sees the Three Kings. She is astonished and invites them into her humble home. Ashamed of her poverty, she then runs off to fetch food and wood, as she has nothing to offer them. Curious at the wealth of the Three Kings, Amahl asks them all kinds of questions. The Mother returns and sees all of their gold and jewels. The Kings

tell her that these are gifts for a special Child. The Shepherds and Shepherdesses come to greet the Kings with singing and dancing, then bid them "good night."

Before going to bed, Amahl asks King Kaspar if there might be a magical stone in his box to cure a poor crippled boy. While everyone is asleep, the Mother marvels at all the beautiful things and sings of how just one piece of gold could buy wood and food, and solve all of their problems. She thinks only of Amahl while reaching out for a piece of gold, but the Kings' Page awakes and catches her.

The Kings shame the Mother but King Melchior tells the Mother to keep the gold, as the Child that they will visit does not need it. **"On love alone he will build his Kingdom...and the keys to his city belong to the poor."** The Mother returns the gold to the Kings, saying that she has waited her whole life for such a great leader.

Amahl then offers to give his crutch to the Child as it is the only thing of value that he owns. A miracle occurs and Amahl is able to walk. The Three Kings see this as a sign from the Holy Child. Amahl begs his mother to let him go with the Three Kings to bring the crutch to the Child himself. Amahl goes with the Three Kings, and the Shepherds and Shepherdesses sing of a "sweet dawn of peace."

## A NOTE FROM THE 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 camel's hooves crushing the frozen snow, and I remember the mysterious tinkling of their silver bridles.*

*My favourite king was King Melchior, because he was the oldest and had a long white beard. My brother's favourite 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 Christmas time 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 old 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 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.*

*I am often asked how I went about writing an opera for television, and what are the specific problems that I had to face in planning a work for such a medium. I must confess that in writing *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, I hardly thought of television at all. As a matter of fact, all my operas are originally conceived for an ideal stage which has no equivalent in reality, and I believe that such is the case with most dramatic authors.*

*Gian Carlo Menotti*

## **ACTIVITY - CHARACTERS**

*Here is a list of the principle characters. Listen to the songs in the performance to answer the questions about each character.*

### **Amahl**

Amahl is a poor crippled shepherd boy. He loves to play his little pipe and daydream. He is very curious and tells his mother tall stories.

- **His mother loves him but why does she scold him?**
- **How do you think Amahl felt after the miracle occurred?**

### **Amahl's Mother**

Amahl's mother is desperately poor and cannot even feed her son. She is sad and tired of Amahl's storytelling. She loves Amahl and feels guilty that she cannot properly care for him.

- **What does Amahl's mother try to steal from the kings?**
- **Why do you think Amahl's mother tries to steal?**

### **Shepherds and Shepherdesses**

The Shepherds and Shepherdesses come to Amahl's house to honor the Three Kings. They live in the village, and Amahl's mother asks them to bring the Kings welcoming gifts.

- **What are some of the things they bring to the kings?**
- **Why do you think they are so eager to meet the kings?**

### **The Three Kings & The Page:**

Kaspar is a deaf King. Melchior is the King who is trying to make sure that the caravan stays on time for their journey. Balthazar is a noble Arabian King. The Page, who accompanies the kings, carries a special box full of wonderful magic stones, beads, and delicious licorice.

- **What gift is each king carrying?**
- **Why do you think the kings respond the way they do when they catch the mother stealing?**

## RESOURCES

Information on Composer Gian Carlo Menotti

[www.britannica.com/biography/Gian-Carlo-Menotti](http://www.britannica.com/biography/Gian-Carlo-Menotti)

[www.musicacademyonline.com/composer/biographies.php?bid=120](http://www.musicacademyonline.com/composer/biographies.php?bid=120)

Footage of the TV presentation of *Amahl and the Night Visitors*

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hxz-s46vjpY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hxz-s46vjpY)

Menotti said his inspiration for *Amahl and the Night Visitors* was the painting *The Adoration of the Magi*, by Heironymous Bosch. It reminded him of happy childhood memories from the holiday season. The painting is in the collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art and can be viewed online at:

[www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/435724](http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/435724)

## OPERA TERMS

Act	One large part of an opera; "Amahl" is a one act opera
Alto	The lowest female and child voice
Aria	A solo sung by one person conveying feeling rather than fact; a generic Italian word for featured solos in opera; (pronounced ARE-ee-ah)
Ballet	A dance performed in an opera; the shepherds dance in "Amahl"
Baritone	The male voice range between tenor and bass; Melchior is a baritone
Bass	The lowest male singing voice; Balthazar and the Page are basses
Boy	Soprano The highest of a boy's unchanged voice; Amahl's part is for boy soprano
Chorus	A song sung in parts by a group of people; the shepherds are a chorus
Conductor	Directs music to keep both orchestra and singers together
Costumes	Clothing worn by the actors to establish the time, place, and mood adding colour and interest to the story
Duet	Two people singing two different parts together; the mother and Amahl sing a duet
Librettist	The person who writes the libretto or words; in some cases this person is different from the composer of the opera, and in other cases this person is also the composer
Libretto	Literally, "little book", it is the actual text of the opera
Opera	A play that is sung; a drama with costumes and scenery in which all or most of the text is sung to the accompaniment of an orchestra
Orchestra	A group of musicians accompanying the entire opera and occasionally playing purely instrumental sections
Pit	The area where the orchestra is located below and in front of the stage
Recitative	A song-speech performed by one person which is half-sung; half-spoken; it is used to quickly convey ideas important to the action of the story; (pronounced reh-chita-TEEVE)
Scene	A part of an act
Set	Scenery used to establish the time, place, and mood adding color and interest to the story
Soprano	The highest female and child voice; the Mother in Amahl is a soprano
Tenor	The highest male singing voice; Kaspar is a tenor
Trio	Three people singing three different parts together