

# Amahl and the Night Visitors—A New Perspective

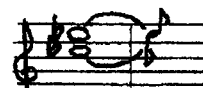
by Carl Topilow

In December of 1982, I had the distinct honor and pleasure of working with one of the finest opera composers of our time, Gian-Carlo Menotti. His presence as stage director of the Cleveland Opera Theater's performance of Amahl and the Night Visitors afforded an opportunity to those working in the production to better understand his intentions in the areas of musical interpretation and character development. For me personally, it permitted a clarification of problems of tempo selection as well as an elucidation of inconsistencies between the score and the orchestral parts. This article is an attempt to put into printed form the countless pieces of information and ongoing impressions produced during that week of rehearsals and performances.

At the very outset, Mr. Menotti insisted that the part of the Mother be sung by a mezzo-soprano; he expressed dismay that the list of characters in both the orchestral and vocal scores indicated a soprano for the part. Further, he pointed out that the Page, again listed in both locations as a bass, should be sung by a baritone or bass-baritone. On the first page of the orchestral score the instrumentation list is somewhat incomplete: the flutist is called upon to double on piccolo; the clarinetist, in addition to a B-flat clarinet, must have an A clarinet to facilitate certain passages as well as to perform a solo passage in the dance that descends to concert C-sharp (second space, bass clef). The percussion instruments used include timpani, suspended cymbal (hard and soft sticks), triangle, tambourine, and snare drum. Excluding the timpani, all other parts can be handled by a single player with the exception of several locations in the march; during these passages, the timpani are not played and, union regulations permitting, the timpanist could perform the additional percussion parts.

The phrasing in the first violins should be the same for each statement of the opening theme (beginning, #110 and #121); the phrasing in the parts is correct except in the passage three measures before the first Allegro non troppo. Here each triplet should have a separate slur. (A rehearsal letter "A" appears in the parts six measures before this Allegro non troppo.) My concept of tempo for this music was apparently too fast. During an orchestra rehearsal, Menotti suggested that I envision a starry sky while conducting the passage; naturally a more sustained tempo resulted. The metronome marking adopted here was about  $\text{♩} = 46$ . During Melchior's aria (at #121), the music is presented one-half step higher and the tempo marking should read Andante sostenuto, not Lento. Two measures before #112, errors appear in the score for the first violins, second violins, and violas. In the parts, the music at two measures before #112 and one measure

before the first Allegro non troppo is identical. One measure before #112 the first violins are tacet, the second violins play:



and the violas play:



Maestro Menotti cautioned that Amahl's oboe tune should not be rushed; I adopted a tempo of about  $\text{♩} = 112$ .

Menotti asked Amahl to play his role as somewhat of a rascal, with his calls of "Oh" and "Coming" sung in an unsentimental and argumentative manner. Menotti asked the Mother to clap her hands two measures after #3; at this point Amahl, startled by the clapping, jumped. At #4, the selected tempo was about  $\text{♩} = 72$ . Two measures before #6 and for all subsequent phrases and sequences, the viola rhythm on beats 2 and 3 should be the same, i.e.  $\text{♩} \text{♩} \text{♩}$ . At #7, despite a harp indication in the score, piano should be used. Menotti agreed that on beats 2, 3, and 4 of the second measure before #12, as well as beat 1 of the next measure, all string parts should be played "down-bow." The segment at #14 should maintain the tempo instead of becoming faster. Menotti lamented that the measure at #16 is often played too slowly; it should be only poco sostenuto. At #17, no pause should occur before the subito pp.


At #18, a tempo of  $\text{♩} = 96$  was used. At one measure after #19 (on the vocal word "dancing"), the rhythm in the orchestral score should read  $\text{♩} \text{♩}$ , not  $\text{♩} \text{♩}$ . Two measures after #20, Menotti insisted that Amahl sing the high G and not the optional C; it mattered little to him that one of our Amahls was having trouble reaching it. He allowed that it did not need to be held out for the full nine beats. We discovered that a slight rallentando before the vocal words "at noon" worked quite well. I was cautioned by Menotti at #21 to make only a poco piu mosso; it can be taken in a relaxed 2-beat;  $\text{♩} = 44$  seemed to work nicely. This poco piu mosso marking needs to be added to the orchestra parts and vocal score, as does the poco ritard before #23. Menotti further suggested that the poco rallentando begin three measures before #24 rather than one-and-one-half measures before, as is indicated in the orchestral score.

After setting a tempo for the entrance of the Kings that Menotti found to be too slow, I settled on  $\text{♩} = 50$ .

Amahl's "walking music" (#30 forward) was performed at about  $\text{♩} = 112$ ; this allowed the pizzicatos in the violins to be playable and have good sound. Menotti asked the violins to play these pizzicatos considerably louder than marked; we ultimately performed all of Amahl's "walking music" at *mf*. At #36, the beginning of the second pizzicato phrase must be carefully timed so that Amahl does not reach his Mother too soon; increasing the tempo was dismissed as a possibility. Starting the phrase as soon as Amahl reacted to seeing the Kings worked perfectly. At #37, a tempo of  $\text{♩} = 128$  was used. At #39, the wind parts are marked *legato* and the score is unmarked. The passage should indeed be played *legato*.

At #49, Menotti instructed that the downbeats in the viola and bassoon be retained. The bassoon G-sharp is in the part but not in the score; it should be played. The door, of course, should be opened exactly at #49. At three measures before #51, Balthazar, on the words "that we are welcome," should sing quite loudly and deliberately, so that Kaspar can hear him. At #51, the standard march tempo of  $\text{♩} = 120$  worked quite well. Menotti mentioned that often this music tends to rush.

At #58, Amahl must make sure his Mother has departed before the music begins. The tempo here was  $\text{♩} = 76$ . Two measures after #62, Menotti added some lines for our performances. After Amahl sang "begging from door to door," Balthazar said: "Begging?"; Amahl excitedly replied: "Yes!" then sang "Won't it be fun?" In this passage, the composer-librettist felt that Amahl's text tended to be lost and needed to be emphasized.


During the rehearsals I learned that Menotti was not responsible for the placement of the rehearsal numbers; several of these numbers are not on beginnings of phrases, and should be changed in the parts if time and library staff permits. For example, #63 was moved back one measure so that each time the  motive is presented a rehearsal number occurs. I am among the many conductors who feel that placement of rehearsal numbers at the beginning of phrases not only helps those who are counting rests, but also helps the musicians feel the form and phrase structure of the music.

I discovered at #65 that Menotti prefers the "Box" aria not to rush; the passage should be performed *lo stesso tempo*. At #68, the score presents the flute line one octave too low; this presentation and the one at #70 should be identical. Two measures before #71, Menotti asked Kaspar to slam the drawer shut on beat 3 and then, at #71, to sing quite mysteriously. I performed the measure before #71 in a deliberate, hesitating manner, with the composer's approval.

A mistake that took place in rehearsal turned out quite well. During a rehearsal, Amahl sang "but it isn't my fault" (three measures after #73) after the music was completed; the words were heard far more clearly than when they had been sung with the strings. Menotti did not object and the text was clearly understandable during the performance.

The quartet at #76 was paced at about  $\text{♩} = 48$ . Menotti suggested that the passage be performed with *rubato*: a *poco movendo* five before #78, five before #81, and two before #83; at two before #78 and two before #81 the tempo gradually began to slow towards the *tempo primo*. Indications for the use of mute in the score should read as follows: violins and violas remain muted until two before #83, as marked in the parts. Earlier *senza sordino* indications in the score should be disregarded. The location of #82 is inconsistent in the score and parts; the rehearsal location in the parts should be used, putting #82 on the last verse of the quartet "Choir of angels."

The offstage chorus is, of course, best performed antiphonally, with Shepherd calls emanating from both sides of the stage. A tempo of  $\text{♩} = 80$  worked well. The maestro did not object to a portamento performed by the chorus from "asleep" to "we are going with Amahl," and from "wind" to "Hold me." He requested also that the "go on, go on" line be sung only at a tempo that retained textual intelligibility. He was quite amused by one chorister's reference to #86 as "the grocery list!" N.B.: The pizzicato at #86 should not be too soft; the chorus must hear the orchestra clearly at this point.

In the dance at #91, the score and parts do not agree. The correct sequence is: the second oboe begins, the first oboe answers; at #92, the first oboe plays both the *forte* and *piano* phrases. Beginning at the pick-up to four before #93, the oboe parts and score agree. A tempo of  $\text{♩} = 100$  works well at #91. According to the composer, one measure before #96 should be re-written as a 12/8 measure, with the rhythm reading  instead of triplets. At the *poco accelerando*, three after #94, I found the  $\text{♩} = \text{♩}$  worked well, as did the tempo  $\text{♩} = 150$ . One measure before #96 should begin "up-bow," and at #96 the last note should be articulated with a down-bow." The downbeat one after #96 should also be articulated. Menotti mentioned that between three before #101 and #101, the trumpet part should play G-naturals and A-naturals. The passage is usually played incorrectly; these are the correct notes. The tempo indications *piu presto* at #104 and *prestissimo* four after #107 are not found in the parts and should be added.

For the choral section at #109, I used a tempo of  $\text{♩} = 76$ ; once the first "Good night" chorus had a controlled tempo, I permitted the singing to continue without conducting.

Two measures before #111 the final first-violin note in the score should be E-natural.

The "All that gold" aria is one that invites *rubato* and can push and pull according to the dramatic and musical intent. Mr. Menotti requested that at three measures after #112, the words be clearly enunciated and the measure performed in an unhurried manner since it contains the principal message of the aria. In this measure, the third beat quarter-note of the horn should read "A-natural." Another horn mistake appears at #113; it should read "E-flat," not "E-natural." The echo phrase of each "do they know" can allow a slight relaxation of

tempo with an a tempo on the following measure. Three measures after #113, the poco piu mosso is incorrectly omitted in the parts, as is the poco rit. before #115. Between the second and third bars after #115, the pause should be observed by everyone except the basses; they sustain the F-sharp while everyone else cuts off. The timing of the Mother's crawl across the stage to the gold is crucial; the silence before the Page sings "Thief!" should not be too long.

At #117, the parts and vocal score contain a 2/4 measure. The 3/4 measure indicated in the orchestra score is incorrect. Menotti mentioned that the measure was originally 3/4 but was musically awkward for Amahl and was changed. The pizzicato one after #117 should not be too soft; mf would be a better dynamic for the second violins. At three measures after #118, the clarinet plays a rhythmically difficult passage that frequently confuses Amahl. To avoid problems, I requested that the clarinet play the passage quite softly. Mr. Menotti confirmed that the little syncopation is absolutely correct. Two measures before #121, the rit. molto should gradually relax into #121. It is at this point that many of the slur markings in the first violins are omitted from the score; they should be performed as they were previously. Mr. Menotti recommended that #123 be played and sung quite broadly.

What follows next is, dramatically, the most difficult section of the opera. Here Menotti worked long and hard with Amahl, showing him how to take his first step without a crutch. He repeatedly demonstrated that he wanted Amahl to stumble forward, almost falling to the floor. After the violin tremolo, Menotti instructed Amahl to slowly count to eight before each "I walk, Mother," and then to speak, not sing, the line. A ppp and an accent should be added to the violin tremolo; these are omitted in the parts. At #125, Menotti asked me to move the tempo somewhat, since the stage was not very large and the action needed to proceed without stagnation. I therefore adopted  $\bullet = 56$ . I cautioned Balthazar not to glance at me for a cue for his words "He walks," as this might have diminished the dramatic impact. Menotti began the accelerando four after #125, coinciding with the Mother's entrance; the a tempo was reached seven after #125, quite different from the indications in the score. Eleven measures after #125 should be an eighth-note for all instruments in the orchestra. Twelve measures after #125 is correct in the parts and vocal score and incorrect in the full score. Menotti liked this measure to begin somewhat slowly and then increase in tempo, as it is marked in the vocal score. He cautioned that #126 should not be taken too fast -- only allegretto con moto; the tempo used was about  $\bullet = 92$ . He requested a poco meno mosso five measures after #127. One measure before #129 the horn note was used to mark the instant the Page touched Amahl's hand.

At #131, the little farewell duet, Mr. Menotti asked me to add a slight rubato to the passage. I maintained it a tempo until four measures after #131, at which point I stretched slightly on beats 3 and 4. Menotti also re-

quested a slight hesitation on "wash your ears" and an a tempo on "Yes, I promise." He instructed that the formula be repeated on each subsequent line ("Don't tell lies," etc.) in order to maintain the imitation of the initial phrase.

Menotti agreed with my suggestion that the chorus' "Shepherds Arise" interrupt the last note of the duet, as he had intended. For the "Come, Oh Shepherds" chorus, I adopted a deliberate tempo of  $\bullet = 46$ . At the ff five measures before #131, Menotti had Amahl run back into his Mother's arms. The chorus was equipped with pitch pipes to keep the pitch from sagging since, when the orchestra re-enters at #133, the pitch of the orchestra must be precise. At #133, the full score indicates the bassoon and horn entrance; this is incorrect, they should enter one after #133. Good woodwind intonation on the last chord is difficult to achieve. Any time taken in rehearsal to establish accurate pitch will be well rewarded in performance.

Since I was charged only with musical matters, I shall not attempt to give an elaborate account of the opera's staging. A few observations, however, might prove revealing. Menotti mentioned that he likes to vary his staging somewhat from performance to performance. He noted that his ideas on tempo have changed through the years as he continually re-examines the score. He also indicated that certain locations in the opera need a bit of rubato which, although not indicated in the score, have to be felt. Some of these places have been indicated above. Interesting touches in the staging included the following:

Two measures before #6 (as Amahl enters the house) he throws his cloak and hat onto the floor to be hung up by his Mother. He then moves to the window and stares out at the stars.

Between #8 and #9, the Mother ignores Amahl as she works around the house. Finally, at #9, she looks at him and listens. At #18, after checking the cupboards, and verifying that they are empty, Amahl is remorseful and quickly hobbles across the stage to console his Mother. His mood becomes ever more cheerful as he fantasizes about their future life as beggars. At #21, he gets so excited that he stamps his crutch on the floor on "King" at #22 and on "Here" one bar later.

At #24, the music should not begin until Amahl moves away from his Mother. In this section, there is not a great deal of time in the music to perform all of the indicated stage directions. However, Menotti did not mind if #25 started just as they were finishing their preparations to go to sleep.

Amahl is so frightened at the sound of the approaching Kings that he pulls the covers over his head and, one measure before #35 ("Yes, Mother"), sings from under the blanket. Whenever the Mother says "Shh!" to Amahl (after #49 and after #57), she is quite annoyed with him and forcefully tells him to keep quiet.

Kaspar must be very funny, make us laugh, and be adored by the children. Menotti was most concerned that the children in the audience enjoy the opera. Balthazar yells "that we are welcome" into Kaspar's ear trumpet to help him comprehend. His entrance can be made very amusing if he looks left and right, making it difficult for the Page to carry his train.

At two after #58, Balthazar laughs as he sings "It is just like yours."

At one before #63, the interplay between Kaspar and Amahl should be unhurried. Kaspar should take as much time as he needs to say "Eh?" Amahl becomes increasingly frustrated as he shouts at him. The second "Does it bite?" should literally be shouted, and not sung. When Amahl tries to touch the beads, Kaspar slaps him on the hand. He keeps Amahl in ongoing suspense as he draws out the revelation of the licorice. Amahl, who has stepped back in fright, slowly comes closer.

During the Shepherds' "Olives and Quinces" chorus, the first Shepherd timidly presents a basket at #86; another timidly presents a basket five after #87; finally, as if to say "Nothing to it!" a third Shepherd boldly steps up, puts down his basket, and shakes hands with all the Kings at one before #89. On opening night, Menotti himself came on stage as one of the Shepherds!

The chorus reacts to the dancing throughout this scene, encouraging the shy dancers to perform for the Kings. At #96, they clap and move to the music, finally joining in the dance near its conclusion. Menotti instructed one of

the chorus members to deliberately dance out of step in a drunken manner, and then to pass out at the end of the dance.

When Amahl asks Kaspar if he has a cure for a crippled boy, the purpose for his hesitation on "Is there?" is to see whether his Mother is looking. When Kaspar says "Eh?," Amahl sees his Mother re-enter the house and sings "Never mind. Good night."


After the lights are dimmed (at #110), two lights remain lit: one on the Mother and one on the Page guarding the gold. Menotti said that the aria must be sung with bitterness, with glances and gestures towards the Kings. After the Mother crawls across the stage, she must, according to Menotti, reach for the gold "with trembling hand." In the ensuing scuffle with the page, Menotti instructed Amahl to hit the Page hard and pull his hair. At #121, he lets the crutch drop and falls into his Mother's arms. The action of the miracle scene has already been discussed. At one before #126, the music reflects the halting steps of Amahl which, at #126, turn into a run.

At three before #128, Menotti asked for a slower tempo; it created a more solemn and less hurried scene.


Three before #132 should be an emotional, tearful farewell between Amahl and his Mother.

I trust these observations will prove useful. Amahl and the Night Visitors has become a classic in its own time, and correct interpretation today can ensure correct interpretation in the future.


#### Corrections and Articulations - Amahl and the Night Visitors


Rehearsal or Bar #	Instrument	Correction
Bar 4	Violin I	Slur added.
Bar 6	Violin I	Slur added.
Bar 7	Violin I	Slur added.
2 before #6, #6, 3 after #6, 5 after #6	Violas	Change beat 3 to  .
#7	Violas	Tenuto marking.
#7		Piano instead of Harp.
2 before #12		Downbows for strings.
#16		<u>Un poco sostenuto, a tempo</u> one bar later.
#17		<u>Senza pausa.</u>
1 after #19		Rhythm on <u>dancing.</u>


Rehearsal or Bar #	Instrument	Correction
3 before #24 #35, #40, #74 #39, #44 #46 #49 #54-55 #65 #68	Woodwinds Bassoon Violins, Violas Flute	<u>Poco rall.</u> <u>mf</u> for each. <u>Legato</u> (marked this way in the parts). <u>Poco piu agitato</u> (as before). Add G-sharp (as in part). Articulation. <u>Lo stesso tempo, non troppo presto.</u> Higher octave for A (as in part). <u>f</u> for strings; <u>mf</u> for horn and trumpet. <u>Tempo primo.</u>
2 before #71 #73 5 after #77, 3 after #80, 2 before #83 #86 #91 Pickup to #92. Pickup to 5 before #93 3 after #91, 2 after #93 3 after #95	Violins & Violas Oboes	<u>Poco movendo.</u> <u>mp.</u> 1st and 2nd oboe reversed. <u>f</u> and <u>p</u> phrases both for oboe I. Correct (all the preceding as in parts). Articulation in the wind parts. 12/8 measure, <u>Allegro vivace</u> , articulation in Violin I.
2 before #98 2 after #99 5 after #99 2 before #101 #101 3 after #101 1 before #102 #106 2 before #108 2 after #108 4 after #110, 6 after #110, #111 2 before #111 2 before #112 1½ before #112 3 after #112 4 before #113 #113 1 before #114, 2 after #114, 5 after #114 #114, 3 after #114, 6 after #114 5 after #114 3 after #115	Winds Trumpet Piccolo Oboe Violin I Violins I, II Violins, Violas Violin I Violin I Bass	Articulation. Articulations in piccolo and strings. Articulation in clarinet. Cross out natural sign on A. Articulation. Articulation. Articulation. Articulation. Articulation. Eighth instead of quarter notes. Add slurs. Last note is E, not D. Scoring in violas and viola (as in parts). <u>Poco rall., a tempo</u> at #112. <u>Tenuto</u> marks in oboe, vocal part. <u>Tenuto</u> marks in clarinet and cello. <u>Tenuto</u> marks in clarinet and cello. <u>Poco rall.</u> <u>A tempo.</u> 12/8 time signature. No holds through.

Rehearsal or Bar #	Instrument	Correction
2 after #117, #118, 1 after #119	Violin II	<u>mf.</u>
2 before #121		<u>Rit. molto a Andante sostenuto.</u>
4, 6 after #121	Violin I	Add slurs.
#125, 4,5,6 after #125, 7 after #125		<u>Andante maestoso, Poco a poco accel., Andante con moto.</u>
3 before #126		 for everyone.
2 before #126	Violins I, II	<u>Sempre lento-poco accel. - as in parts;</u> <u>mf - as in vocal score.</u>
5 after #127		<u>Poco meno.</u>
#133		Omit bassoon and horn, they come in at <u>Allegro ma non troppo.</u>


#### Metronome markings - Amahl and the Night Visitors

Beginning -  = 46

Allegro ma non troppo -  = 112

#4 -  = 72

#17 -  = 50

#18 -  = 96

#21 -  = 44

#23 -  = 96

#24 -  = 120

#25 -  = 50

#30 -  = 112

#37 -  = 128


#39 -  = 128


#51 -  = 120


#58 -  = 76

#72 -  = 120


#73 -  = 76

#76 -  = 48

4 after #84 -  = 80

#86 -  = 80

#91 -  = 100


1 before #96 -  = 150


#109 -  = 76


#110 -  = 46


#116 -  = 128

#121 -  = 46

#125 -  = 56

#126 -  = 92

3 after #132 -  = 44

2 after #133 -  = 112

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