

[Review: Really, Mrs. Amahl--what have you done with your son?](#)

My beloved Mikey and I, along with our friend Erika, went to see [Mr. Menotti's](#) delightful Christmas opera *Amahl and the Night Visitors* yesterday afternoon. It was presented by the [Chelsea Opera](#) in dear old St. Peter's Church on 20th St. in--wait for it--Chelsea.

Mr. Menotti was commissioned by NBC in 1951 to compose *Amahl* for television, and I believe the first live broadcast was replayed annually during the Christmas season until the late 60s. The story is simple. The three kings of legend are on their way to see the Christ child, and stop at the home of the crippled boy Amahl and his penniless mother. They explain their mission (about an hour later!) and Amahl offers his crutch as a gift for them to take to the child, in case he needs it. In so doing Amahl suddenly finds he can walk, and he joins the kings on their journey to give the child his gift himself.

I confess, this opera always reduces me to a puddle of tears. I don't know why. The quartet "Do you know a child the color of wheat, the color of dawn", the mother's aria, when Amahl attacks the page ("Don't you dare, ugly man, hurt my mother!"), the moment when Amahl first walks--I'm getting misty as I write this! Some would call it sentimental drivel, but I find it very sweet. In the spirit of full disclosure, I will admit that I have sung the role of Kaspar, the dotty old king, several times, and one of my dearest memories of the days when I was performing more is of hearing a child in the audience at a school performance say aloud, "He's funny!" after one of Kaspar's moments.

This production was set in the current time, in a one-room flat perhaps in Hell's Kitchen or the South Bronx, and I think it worked in many ways--in some ways better than the traditional setting. (Well, there's one thing that's never really worked for me in any setting: "Let's go over the story again, Mrs. Amahl--you say three men you didn't know appeared at your door, saying they were following a magic star in the sky to visit a miracle child king, and you gave them your own child to take along? Come on!") The update and the direction were the work of Lynne Hayden-Findlay, and I have to give her kudos. When the neighbors came with their refreshment offerings to the kings--a leftover cake, a bucket of KFC, some Chinese takeout and Dunkin Donuts--it was charming. Their dance, particularly when the women dragged the men into the dance, and the men acted like typical reluctant straight men trying to dance, was also charming. Even the Page, a role almost as thankless as a lady in waiting named Inez, was treated with respect by the director and made a more interesting character than usual. And at the end, after Amahl and the kings had left, the mother went out to what we presume is the fire escape where Amahl had been loitering at the beginning of the act, and she saw the star. It was magic. (This reminds me that Michael Megliola deserves applause for his lighting design as well!)

The two leads, Amahl and his mother, were both very well done. The show is double cast, and the mother I saw was Alexandra LoBianco, a very fine singer indeed. She has a beautiful and powerful sound throughout, but she was able to sing with subtlety and to blend in her duet passages with Amahl. Benjamin Perry, the boy who sang Amahl, has lots of experience in musical theater, and it shows. My only criticism is a slight lack of connection between his high voice and his belty middle voice, and perhaps a few too many stock reactions, but overall, it was a very fine performance. The three kings were all good, although they were often drowned out by ensembles and the orchestra. They were sung by David Kellett, Justin Ryan, and Michael Blake O'Hearn, and the Page was sung by Brian DuBois.

The conductor, Carmine Aufiero, did a respectable job with the pick-up orchestra, one or two moments of non-togetherness between singers and orchestra notwithstanding, and this performance was much more beautiful musically than one is accustomed to in typical church-basement productions of *Amahl*.

All in all, I call this a very successful production of *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, and I was very happy Erika suggested we go. Posted 15th November 2009 by [Taminophile](#) Labels: [review Amahl](#)