

operahuntsville.org (256) 417-9572

Gian Carolo Menotti Amahl and the Nisht Visitors



A&M Johnson Little Theatre December 12-13 • 7pm December 14 • 4pm





Program

Welcome Opera Huntsville Team

When Christmas Dreams Come True by Cynthia Hammond Divya Lai Hing, treble voice Cynthia Hammond, piano

> O Holy Night arr. Wanda Sobieska Jason McClure, baritone Cynthia Hammond, piano

> > Rain

Kyndal Johnson • Jordyn Massey • Kaileigh Miller Ryleigh Miller • Alayjah Young

Long As I Got King Jesus
Kyndal Johnson • Chassidy Jones • Jordyn Massey
Kaileigh Miller • Ryleigh Miller • Jordyn Rutledge Roxanne
Sims • Ashley Thompson
Alayjah Young • Morgan Young

Brief Pause

Amahl and the Night Visitors

Director's Note

Dear Esteemed Audience,

Welcome to our production of "Amahl and the Night Visitors," a jewel of the operatic repertoire by Gian Carlo Menotti. In this brief yet profound opera, we embark on a journey of wonder and compassion, set against the timeless backdrop of Bethlehem.

As the director, my vision for this performance has been to embrace the simplicity and purity of Menotti's creation. Through a minimalist set and evocative costumes, we aim to transport you to a humble cottage where a miraculous encounter unfolds. The story revolves around Amahl, a young boy with a generous spirit, who encounters three kings on a divine quest.

The magic of this opera lies in its ability to touch the core of our humanity. Through the universal themes of kindness and sacrifice, "Amahl and the Night Visitors" becomes a poignant reflection on the transformative power of love, especially during the holiday season.

Our talented cast and crew have poured their hearts into this production, seeking to bring to life the delicate balance between humor, tenderness, and spirituality that Menotti masterfully composed. As the lights dim and the first notes resonate, I invite you to immerse yourself in the enchanting world we've created. May the spirit of Amahl's journey linger in your hearts, reminding us all of the magic that can unfold when compassion and love guide our way.

With Season's Tidings,

Sierra Hammond, Director "Amahl and the Night Visitors"

Synopsis

Amahl, a boy known for his tall tales and the occasional lie, gets around on a crutch due to his disability. As he sits outside playing his shepherd's pipe, his mother calls for him to come inside. Amahl is slow to react to his mother's commands. Finally, after several attempts to get him inside, he walks into the house. Amahl tells his mom a grand story of a giant star rising high in the sky above their house. Of course, she doesn't believe him and tells him to stop bothering her.

Once the sun has set, Amahl's mother worries about her and her son's future. Before falling asleep, she prays to God that Amahl doesn't have to turn to a life of begging. Suddenly, there's a knock at the door. Amahl's mother shouts for Amahl to answer it and Amahl happily gets out of bed. He opens then the door, and to his surprise, finds three luxuriously appointed kings. Amahl's mother shuffles to the door. Having just traveled a long distance to deliver gifts to a child of great wonders, the Magi ask for permission to stay at their home for the remainder of the night. Amahl's mother warmly ushers the three kings into her home. When she goes to get firewood, Amahl, ever inquisitive, asks the kings about their daily lives and duties. They happily oblige, and after having answered each of his questions, they ask questions of their own. He replies that he used to be a shepherd, but after a series of hardships, his mother had to sell all their sheep. He tells them that it won't be long before they turn to begging to earn a less than ideal living.

King Kaspar, with a similar personality to Amahl, opens his treasure box to show Amahl the magic stones, brightly colored beads, and candies he has brought to the Christ child. He even offers Amahl several pieces of licorice. Amahl's mother comes back to find Amahl buzzing about the kings. She holler's at him to not be a nuisance and sends him out to bring back their neighbors with hopes to entertain the kings.

Synopsis cont'd

Later that night, after the neighbors have left and the festivities have ended, the three kings take to their room and go to sleep. Amahl's mother sneaks down to the kings' unattended treasure boxes to take a few gold coins for her and her son. The kings' page wakes up to find Amahl's mother pocketing the gold and he cries out for help to catch the thief. The page jumps on Amahl's mother's back hoping to stop her. Amahl is woken up by the commotion and rushes out of his room to see his mother being attacked by the page. Immediately Amahl starts fighting the page. King Melchior is able to ease the situation, and understanding Amahl and his mother's predicament, allows them to keep the gold. He says the Christ child will not need all that gold to build his kingdom. Amahl's mother is overcome with joy when she hears of such a king and implores the Magi to take back the gold. She even offers to give a gift of her own, but sadly, she has nothing to give. Amahl, too, wishes to give a gift to the Christ child.

He offers the Magi his most valuable possession - his crutch. As soon as the crutch is handed over, Amahl's leg is healed miraculously. With his mother's permission, Amahl travels with the Magi to see the Christ child in person to offer him his crutch in thanks to healing his leg.

Amahl | Albert "Ace" Dudley III Mother | Iris Fordjour-Hankins King Kaspar | Shane Kennedy King Melchior | Christopher Withrow King Balthazar | Terrance Brown Page | Joshua Ross

--Shepherds--Clarence Ceasor Ephraim Cole Anna Dalvine Kabrina Isabelle Bra'Niy'A Jones Iason McClure

Cast

Daniel Montgomery
Jaylon Newton
Sally Priester
Kedrick H. Scribner, Jr.

Kennady Snodgrass Trevon Smiley

Sophia Thornton Kristin Trumbull Victoria Wheeler --Dancing Shepherds--Kyndall Johnson

Kyndall Johnson Jordan Massey Kaileigh Miller Ryleigh Miller

Orchestra

Flute | Charles Page
Oboe | Brett Stafford, Zoe Tucker
Clarinet | Jenny Maclay
Bassoon | Aiyana Milligan
Horn | Patrick Green
Trumpet | William Range
Percussion | Jeremiah Wang, Nathan Beck
Violin I | Brittan Long
Violin II | Briana Warner
Viola | Sarah Ruff
Cello | Noah Gregory
Bass | Joe Glotzbach

Creative Team

Stage Director | Sierra Hammond
Music Director | John South
Tech Director | Darwin Washington
Choreographer | Monique Ryan
Piano | Jackson Love, Cynthia Hammond
Scenic Artist | Dex Edwards
Chorus Director | Dr. Shonda Devine
Vocal Coach | Dr. Iris Fordjour-Hankins

Cast



Albert "Ace" Dudley III | Amahl Albert "Ace" Dudley III is an 11-year-old talent, the youngest child and only son of Albert II and Jessica Dudley. Ace, alongside his two older sisters, formed "The Dudbots," a dynamic trio that brought hope and inspiration during the pandemic through over 40 virtual worship performances shared worldwide.

Ace is currently a 4.0 6th grader at Oakwood Adventist Academy and recently received a Full Presidential Scholarship to Alabama A&M University following an electrifying impromptu performance at the 2024 Homecoming Gospel Explosion. Ace's journey has been marked by both challenges and triumphs. At just six years old, Ace faced a life-threatening attack during a church family camping trip, where a pit bull tore off his right eyelid. Despite the severity, God's hand was clearly over him, guiding him through emergency surgery.

Again, in October 2023, Ace overcame another significant challenge after falling into a 12-foot skate pit, breaking his wrist and fracturing his skull. Through these trials, Ace's resilience and the powerful calling on his life have shone brightly, showing that his purpose is truly unstoppable.

Ace loves sports, especially soccer, and his passion for the Lord shines through in everything he does. Known for his kindness and respect towards others, Ace is admired by children and adults alike. He is thrilled to play Amahl in "Amahl and the Night Visitors," bringing his love of music, storytelling, and faith to life on stage.



Iris Fordjour-Hankins | Mother

Iris Fordjour-Hankins most recently completed a Doctor of Music Arts degree at the University of Kentucky in voice. She earned a Bachelor of Arts in piano from Oakwood University, a certificate in music education at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan, and a Master of Arts in music education from Boston University. Currently employed as an assistant professor at Oakwood University, Dr. Fordjour-Hankins teaches individual voice, diction, and opera workshop.

Previously, she taught vocal music for the Detroit Public Schools, and believes the 15-year experience has become the bedrock of her skill as a music educator. She welcomes students into her studio and classes believing that every opportunity to work with them is a mutual opportunity for growth. Additionally, Iris served for 15 years, as co-minister of music at the Burns Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Detroit, MI where she founded and directed the "Excelsiors," a choral group that sang anthems, hymns, spirituals, and contemporary religious music.

Though she has spent her career as a music educator, Iris Fordjour-Hankins has been a lifelong student of the classical singing voice. Her early voice studies were with Dr. Ricky Little, Dorothy Duensing and Dina Winter. And, after winning second place in the 2013 Alltech Vocal Scholarship Competition at the University of Kentucky, the full-ride award allowed her to study in the studios of Dr. Everett McCorvey and Dr. Angelique Clay-Everett as a doctoral graduate and teaching assistant.

She sang as an ambassador for the University of Kentucky and Alltech in both the U.S. and China with the mission of singing music that encourages rich cultural exchanges amongst classical singers, spreads goodwill and builds pathways of friendship and collaboration in the musical arts, music education and business.

As a classically trained soprano soloist, it Iris' privilege to sing in various venues. Her most recent chamber recital (May 2021) included Strauss' Vier Letzte Lieder (Four Last Songs), Adolphus Hailstork's Songs of Love and Justice, based on the sermons of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Jake Heggies' contemporary cycle, Faces of Love. Her varied repertoire also include works by European composers, Verdi, Puccini, Handel, Gounod, Mozart, Wagner, Beethoven, and Bellini. In 2020, Dr. Fordjour-Hankins performed "Es gibt ein reich" from Strauss'Ariadne of Naxos, in miniature concert version of the opera performed the Ars Nova School of the Arts in Huntsville, Alabama. In December 2017, she gave a recital of spirituals in Kingston, Jamaica as part of a program where of a Dr. Andrew Marshall's newly composed patois oratorio based on the Jamaican Bible.

.In 2016, Dr. Fordjour-Hankins performed the role of the mother in Menotti's Amahl and the Night Visitors One of her favorite performances was as a featured soloist in Puccini's Messa di Gloria along with the premier of Eduard Perrone's new mass entitled Missa-Fountain of Beauty (2013) at the historic Assumption Grotto Catholic Church in Detroit, Michigan, Other solo engagements include the performance of Rossini's Inflammatus et Accensus and I Will Give Thanks for the 2007 National Baptist Convention held in Detroit. She has been a featured artist for Tuesday Musicale of Detroit, a classical musical society dedicated to performance and arts education. For this group Iris has performed arias and duets from several operas, notably: Aîda, Fidelio. Forza Del Manon Destino. Tannhäuser. Additionally, she was a featured soloist in concert with the ensemble Committed, the 2010 Winner of NBC's show, The Sing Off...

Iris is committed to the study, promotion, and performance of music by African American composers and holds memberships in societies who are dedicated to these goals. She is a member of the International Florence Price Festival whose goal it is to celebrate the life and legacy of African American composer Florence Beatrice Price, the African American Art Song Alliance for scholarly exchanges between those interested art song by African-American composers, and the National Association of Teachers of Singing. Her dissertation, Shining a Spotlight on Female African American Composer Evelyn Simpson-Curenton is part of her continuing effort to educate people about the beauty, elegance and high level of craftsmanship poured into Simpson-Curenton's music for classically trained vocalist. She is married to Ernest Hankins, III. They have two children, Iman Isabella, and Ernest, IV.Iris considers her family to be her greatest accomplishment.



Shane Kennedy | King Kaspar

Shane Kennedy holds a Master of Music degree (2008) in vocal performance and church music from Belmont University in Nashville TN. He has sung locally in numerous operatic and musical roles: Tamino from Mozart's Die Zauberflöte (2006) and Camille de Rosillon from Lehar's The Merry Widow (2007) with Belmont Opera Theater-Nashville, Officer Lockstock from Urinetown (2009) with Renaissance Theatre-Huntsville, Max Detweiller from The Sound of Music (2010) with Theatre Huntsville, Gomez Addams from The Family (2014) Independent with Productions-Huntsville, Major General from G&S Pirates of Penzance (2015) with Theatre Huntsville, Sheriff Bill from Gregory Vajda's Georgia Bottoms (2015) with Huntsville Symphony Orchestra, Rodolfo from Puccini's La Boheme (2017) with Ars Nova-Huntsville, The Lamplighter from Rachel Portman's The Little Prince (2018) with Ars Nova-Huntsville, Gherardo from Puccini's Gianni Schicchi (2018), Baritone from G&S in the Rocket City (2021) with Opera Huntsville, Eddie Pensier from Bremen Town Musicians (2021) with Opera Huntsville, and Jack from Jack & the Beanstalk (2022) with Opera Huntsville.

Oratorio tenor repertoire includes Mozart Requiem (2005) with Huntsville Symphony Orchestra, Mozart Solemn Vespers (2005) with Shoals Symphony-Florence AL, Dubois's Seven Last Words of Christ (2012) at Trinity UMC in Huntsville, and numerous performances of Handel Messiah in Atlanta and Huntsville. Mr. Kennedy was a member of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra Chorus 1997-2002.Mr. Kennedy serves as Worship and Fine Arts Associate at Trinity United Methodist in Huntsville, a position he has held since 2002. He is also artistic director of the Heritage Ringers of Huntsville, an auditioned community handbell choir. In 2022, Mr. Kennedy conducted the Opera Huntsville spring show, L'Elisir d'amore.



Christopher Withrow | King Melchior
Baritone Christopher Withrow has been praised for
"bringing masculine gravity both in voice and performance"
to the stage. His "powerful stage presence" and "moving
performance" has been seen throughout the United States
with Opera Fairbanks, Townsend Opera Players, Northstar
Opera Company, Modesto Symphony Orchestra, The
University of Nevada, Las Vegas Opera Theater,
Tuscaloosa Symphony Orchestra, The University of
Alabama Opera Theatre, Mississippi State University State
Singers, and other organizations.

A native of Redding, California, Mr. Withrow has been seen in the title role in Gianni Schicchi, Papageno in The Magic Flute, Count Almaviva in Le Nozze di Figaro, Gabriel von Eisenstein in Die Fledermaus, and James Agee in the world premiere of Joseph Lander's Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. Concert works to his credit include Johannas Brahm's Ein Deutches Requiem, Ralph Vaughan William's Dona Nobis Pacem, Gabriel Faure's Requiem, W. A. Mozart's Vesperae Solennes De Confessore, J. S. Bach's Coffee Cantata, Leonard Bernstein's Chichester Psalms, Felix Mendelssohn's Psalm 42, and Robert Cohen's Alzheimer's Stories. Mr. Withrow holds a Bachelor of Music from California State University, Stanislaus, a Master of Music from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and a Doctor of Musical Arts from The University of Alabama. Mr. Withrow was the 2019 Vann Vocal Institute winner and the recipient of a major scholarship from the McConnell Foundation.

Mr. Withrow teaches at Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama.



Terrance Brown | King Balthazar

American Baritone Terrance Brown is a native of West Blocton, Alabama. Dr. Brown was awarded a Bachelor of Music degree from Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama, and Master of Music and Doctor of Musical Arts degrees from Louisiana State University. Dr. Brown has quickly made a name for himself as a versatile singer and conductor.

An active teacher and stage performer, Dr. Brown has traveled extensively throughout the United States and Europe as a concert artist, recitalist, and operatic artist. He is known for his rich, lyrical baritone voice that is capable of performing a variety of musical styles. His performance credits include: Count Capulet in Gounod's Romeo et Juliette, Bob in Menotti's Old Maid and the Thief, Peter in Humperdinck's Hansel and Gretel, Sarastro in Mozart's Die Zauber Flöte, Collatinus in Britten's Rape of Lucretia, Boaz in James Niblock's Ruth and Naomi, Germont in Verdi's La Traviata, Voltaire in Bernstein's Candide, Salieri in Rimsky-Korakov's Mozart and Salieri, Jake/Robbins in Gershwin's Porgy and Bess, Le Baili in Massenet's Werther, Le Marquis in Poulenc's Dialogues of the Carmelites, Dashwood in Mark Adamo's Little Women, and Bluebeard in Bartòk's Bluebeard's Castle.

As a performer, Dr. Brown has performed as featured soloist with the Canterbury Choral Society, Texarkana Symphony, Chesapeake Chamber Opera, Rapides Symphony Orchestra, Oklahoma City Ballet, Austin Symphony Orchestra, Baton Rouge Symphony, New Orleans Opera, Mobile Opera, Opera Louisiane, Huntsville Symphony Orchestra, Memphis Symphony Orchestra, as well as many other noted performing ensembles.

Dr. Brown served as Interim Chair of the Department of Music and Conductor of Opera at the University of North Alabama. He is currently Dean of Potter College of Art and Letters at Western Kentucky University.



Joshua Ross | Page
Joshua Ross is proud to be working with Opera Huntsville

again after playing Peek/Baby Bear in the early 2023 production of Goldie B. Locks and the Three Singing Bears and will be playing Dudley in Little Red's Most Unusual Day next spring. Additionally, he currently sings as a tenor with Valley Consort.

He graduated from Brigham Young University in mechanical engineering and currently works as a structural analyst contractor at NASA MSFC. While at BYU, he was a part of multiple choirs, produced and performed two solo art song recitals, and was on the stage for three operas, with his debut role being Dr. Blind in Die Fledermaus. Growing up, he learned the piano and was a cellist in various orchestras and didn't get his start as a singer until his freshman year of college. He was previously in the vocal studios of Mindy Ammons, Maya Osuga, and Robert Brandt.

Creative Team



Sierra Hammond | Stage Director
Sierra Hammond is a native Soprano from Dallas, Texas.
She received her Bachelor of Music in Vocal Performance and Pedagogy from the illustrious HBCU, Oakwood University in 2014. She continued her educational pursuits at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville where she received her Masters of Music. During her time in Knoxville, she was actively involved in the University of Tennessee Opera Theatre and Knoxville Opera companies. Here, she participated in La Boheme (Puccini), The Crucible (Ward), Don Giovanni (Mozart), The Consul (Menotti), Mefistofele (Boito), and Il ritorno d'ulisse in patria (Monteverdi).

Sierra has been actively involved with Opera Huntsville since 2018 where she currently serves as the company Production Manager, previously as the Board President. In the Fall of 2019, Sierra made her stage directorial debut with Opera Huntsville directing Menotti's The Old Maid and the Thief. Sierra has participated in various productions with Opera Huntsville since the company's inception such as The True Story of Cinderella (Warren) as The Queen and Step Sister Two, Gilbert and Sullivan in Rocket City as Tart 2, Bremen Town Musicians as Barcolle.

Sierra has supported an active stage director career. Recently, she participated as the assistant director in the world premiere of Leslie Burrs newest opera, I Can't Breathe at Marble City Opera. This was such a success that she was invited to co-direct the west coast priemere at Pacific Opera Project in Los Angeles.

Currently she is faculty at Alabama Agricultural and Mechanical University (Normal, Alabama) in the Vocal Studies Area. Sierra resides in Huntsville, AL.



John South | Music Director

John J. South, a native of Huntsville, Alabama, araduated summa cum laude from the University of Alabama in Huntsville in 2019 with a Bachelor of Arts in Music, Liberal Arts focus, with a minor in history. He earned a Master's degree in orchestral conducting at Western Kentucky University in 2023. As a performer, John played trumpet in the Huntsville Youth Orchestra under the direction of Mr. Joseph Lee for nine years, and served as a collegiate trumpet intern at the Tennessee Valley Music Festival in 2016 and 2017. He was also a member of the UAH Wind Ensemble under Dr. David Raasdale, and studied trumpet with Dr. Carolyn Sanders. Although having maintained a lifelong interest in conducting, John turned his attention to it completely after losing his ability to play trumpet due to focal dystonia, forcing him to retire from trumpet playing indefinitely after graduating college. Ever since that experience, he has made it a goal to spread dystonia awareness and encourage further research in both the musical and medical communities.

As a conductor, John has been passionate about helping to enrich his local community. From 2017 to 2019, he participated in the Summer Band and Summer Orchestra programs at UAH, and has also conducted the UAH Wind Ensemble. In 2019, he became a member of the Opera Huntsville family. He served as music director for Cosi fan Tutte in March 2020, Gilbert & Sullivan in Rocket City in April 2021, and Die Fledermaus in May 2023. For Gilbert & Sullivan, he transcribed five Gilbert & Sullivan pieces for reduced orchestration, including the show's overture. John also served as Assistant Conductor of the WKU Symphony Orchestra from 2021 to 2023, and the Bowling Green Youth Orchestra in 2022.

John is also an avid history and amateur astronomy enthusiast, and often combines these interests with music to form a unique, diverse brand of musicology. He has researched and written about the relationship between music and astronomy, from both a historical and scientific perspective. In 2018, his essay "An Art Corrupted: Classical Music and Musicians in the Third Reich" was published in UAHuntsville's Perpetua Journal of Undergraduate Research. He has contributed two biographical sports articles, "Willie McCovey" and "Terrell Owens," to the Alabama Humanities Foundation's Encyclopedia of Alabama.

John has been mentored and influenced as a conductor by Dr. David Ragsdale, Dr. Brian St. John, Joseph Lee, Erin Huelskamp-Bohn, and Gregory Vajda. As an instrumentalist, his mentors include Dr. Carolyn Sanders and Bruce Zeiger (trumpet), Ingrid von Spakovsky-Weaver (piano), and Phil Weaver (classical guitar).

Aside from music, John's hobbies and interests include amateur astronomy, baseball, gaming, and writing, and he is a self-described root beer enthusiast. He currently lives in Huntsville, Alabama.



Darwin Washington | Tech Director DARWIN O. WASHINGTON is a retired Army Lieutenant Colonel with 20 years of service. He received a BA degree from Hampton Institute (university) in Hampton, VA. During his years as a member of the Hampton Players, Darwin developed a love for live theatre and the skills of a theatre technician - lighting, sound and set construction. Through-out his years of military service, Darwin has been active in community theatre and live music in the American Theatre in Wiesbaden, West Germany: Fort Bliss, Texas: Fort Richardson, Alaska: Fort Monmouth, New Jersev: and Hampton, Virginia. He has been lighting designer, sound technician, or technical director for such productions as; "Godspell", "Two Gentleman of Verona", "J.C. Superstar", "Fiddler on the Roof", "Barefoot in the Park", "Hobbit", "Wizard of OZ", "Rain Maker", "Man of LaMancha", and "The Parable of the Biscuit and the Gravies".

Darwin is volunteering as Technical Director for the Johnson Theatre, Alabama A&M University. He has provided technical support for university productions of; "The Wiz", "The Tempest", "Twelfth Night", and "Much Ado About Nothing". He also did the set design for the Fantasy Playhouse production "Freedom Riders". He did the lighting for the Theatre Huntsville production "Mountaintop".

Darwin also serves as the Director of the Media Ministry, Saint John AME Church, Huntsville, Alabama. He supervises a team of volunteers to provide audio, video, lighting, and streaming services.



Monique Ryan | Choreographer

Monique Rvan, Executive Artistic Director of Dance Theatre of Huntsville, moved to Huntsville from Atlanta, Georgia, where she choreographed and performed with the nationally known dance company Atlanta Ballet, Total Dance / Dancical Productions, and The Patdro Harris Co. Her extensive training comes from a long list of master instructors from all around the world. Her choreography and style have been enjoyed by several audiences throughout the nation as well as North Alabama. She has been invited to share her love for the art of dance with several public school programs and arts organizations. The goal of Dance Theatre of Huntsville is to touch a heart, open a mind, and lift the spirits of audiences nationwide. This year Monique was named one of eight State of Alabama artists honored for the 2024 Arts Impact Awards. These artists were honored individuals who have made unique and meaningful contributions to arts in Alabama.





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Fantasy Playhouse
Office of Sen. Arthur Orr

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OPERA HUNTSVILLE







CONNECT





Amahl and the Night Visitors December 12-14 Opera Bytes All Season

Don Pasquale April 3-5

