Amahl and the Night Visitors
by Gian-Carlo Menotti

Cast
Amahl (boy soprano)
Amahl’s Mother (soprano or mezzo-soprano)
King Kaspar (tenor)
King Melchior (baritone)
King Balthazar (bass)
The Page (bass)
The Shepherds

ONLY ACT

Amahl sits outside a poor shack of a house, gazing earnestly at the sky.

MOTHER
(calling from inside the house)
Amahl! Amahl!

AMAHL
(replying absently)
Oh!

MOTHER
(again, coming from somewhere inside)
Time to go to bed.

AMAHL
(answering)
Coming...
(continuing to gaze at the stars above him)

MOTHER
(her voice a bit terser)
Amahl!

AMAHL
(again, the boy replies)
Coming...
(but otherwise he seems not to have heard)

MOTHER
(storming out of the house)
How long must I shout to make you obey?

AMAHL
I’m sorry, Mother.

MOTHER
Hurry in! It’s time to go to bed.

AMAHL
(pleading with his mother)
But Mother – let me stay a little longer.

MOTHER
The wind is cold.

AMAHL
But my cloak is warm; let me stay a little longer!

MOTHER
The night is dark.

AMAHL
But the sky is light, let me stay a little longer!

MOTHER
The time is late.
AMAHL
But the moon hasn’t risen yet, 
let me stay a little...

MOTHER
*(cutting him off curtly)*
There won’t be any moon tonight.  
But there will be a weeping child very soon, 
if he doesn’t hurry up and obey his mother.

AMAHL
*(sighing)*
...oh very well...

*The two go inside.*

MOTHER
What was keeping you outside?

AMAHL
*(replying excitedly)*
Oh mother! You should go out and see!
There’s never been such a sky.
Damp clouds have shined it, 
and soft winds have swept it, 
as if to make it ready for a king’s ball.
All its lanterns are lit, 
all its torches are burning, 
and its dark floor is shining like crystal.
Hanging over our roof, 
there is a star as large as a window; 
and the star has a tail, and it moves 
across the sky like a chariot on fire.

MOTHER
Oh Amahl!
When will you stop telling lies?
All day long you wander about in a dream.
Here we are with nothing to eat –
not a stick of wood on the fire, 
not a drop of oil in the jug, 
and all you do is to worry your mother 
with fairy tales.
Oh, Amahl... have you forgotten your promise
never, never to lie to your mother again?

AMAHL
Mother darling, I’m not lying. 
Please do believe me... please do believe me.

Come outside and let me show you. 
See for yourself... see for yourself.

MOTHER
*(reprimanding Amahl)*
Stop bothering me! 
Why should I believe you? 
You come with a new one every day!
First it was a leopard with a woman’s head. 
Then it was a tree branch that shrieked and bled.
Then it was a fish as big as a boat, 
with whiskers like a cat, and wings like a bat, 
and horns like a goat 
and now it is a star as big 
as a window (or was it a carriage)? 
And if that weren’t enough, 
the star has a tail and the tail is of fire...

AMAHL
But there is a star... and it has a tail... *this* long. 
Well, maybe only *this* long... 
But it’s there!

MOTHER
Amahl!

AMAHL
*(insisting)*
Cross my heart and hope to die...

MOTHER
*(throwing up her hands in exasperation)*
Hunger has gone to your head.
Dear God, what is a poor widow to do, 
when her cupboards 
and pockets are empty 
and everything sold? 
Unless we go begging 
how shall we live through tomorrow? 
My little son, a beggar!

AMAHL
*(trying to comfort his mother)*
Don’t cry mother dear; 
don’t worry for me. 
If we must go begging, 
a good beggar I’ll be. 
I know sweet tunes to set people dancing. 
We’ll walk and walk from village to town –
you dressed as a gypsy,
and I as a clown.
We’ll walk and walk from village to town.
At noon, we shall eat roast goose
and sweet almonds.
At night we shall sleep with the sheep
and the stars.
I’ll play my pipes, you’ll sing and you’ll shout.
The windows will open and people lean out.
The king will ride by
and hear your loud voice
and throw us some gold to stop all the noise.
At noon we shall eat roast goose and sweet almonds;
at night we shall sleep with the sheep
and the stars.

MOTHER
Kiss me good night.

MOTHER, AMAHL
(to each other)
Good night.

They both go to bed.

Three kings stroll through the shadows of the night on their journey to see the Christ child.

THREE KINGS
From far away we come and farther we must go.
How far... how far...
my crystal star?
The shepherd dreams inside the fold.
Cold are the sands by the silent sea.
Frozen the incense in our frozen hands,
heavy the gold.
How far... how far...
my crystal star?
By silence-sunken lakes,
the antelope leaps.
In paper-painted oasis,
the drunken gypsy weeps.
The hungry lion wanders,
the cobra sleeps.
How far... how far...
my crystal star?

The kings knock at the door.

MOTHER
Amahl!

AMAHL
Yes, mother?

MOTHER
Go and see who’s knocking at the door.

Amahl goes over to the door.

AMAHL
(returning excitedly)
Mother... Mother... come with me!
I want to be sure that you see what I see.

MOTHER
(having no patience with Amahl)
What is the matter with you now?
What is all this fuss about?
Who is it then?

AMAHL
(unsure how to report the events)
Mother... outside the door... there is...
there is a king with a crown!

MOTHER
(exasperated)
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...

After checking the door again, Amahl returns,
more insistent than ever.

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
*(hanging his head quietly)*
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
*(losing her patience altogether)*
What shall I do with this boy?  
What shall I do? What shall I do?  
*(admonishing Amahl)*
Hurry back and see who it is,  
and don’t you dare make up tales...

AMAHL
*(returning to his mother from the door)*
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
*(feeling more frustrated with Amahl)*
Oh, what shall I do with this boy.  
If you were stronger I’d like to whip you.

AMAHL
I knew it.

MOTHER
*(pulling herself out of bed)*
I’m going to the door myself.  
And then, young man,  
you’ll have to reckon with me!

THE KINGS AND THEIR PAGE
*(greeting the Mother courteously)*
Good evening. Good evening...

The mother gasps quietly.

AMAHL
*(behind her)*
What did I tell you?

MOTHER
*(pushing her son back)*
Shhhh...!  
*(addressing the kings awkwardly)*
Noble sires...

THE KINGS
May we rest awhile in your house  
and warm ourselves by your fireplace?

MOTHER
I am a poor widow.  
A cold fireplace and  
a bed straw are all I have to offer you.  
To these, you are welcome.

KASPAR
What did she say?

BALTHAZAR
That we are welcome.

KASPAR
Oh, thank you, thank you, thank you!
MOTHER
Come in... come in...

_The three kings and page enter the small house._

MELCHIOR
It is nice here.

MOTHER
I shall go and gather wood for the fire.
I’ve nothing in the house.

KINGS
We can only stay a little while.
We must not lose sight of our star.

MOTHER
...your star?

AMAHL
_(feeling obliged to remind her)_
What did I tell you?
_(hushing Amahl)_

KINGS
We still have a long way to go.

MOTHER
_(announcing that she will be going out to gather some firewood)_
I shall be right back.
And Amahl... don’t be a nuisance.

AMAHL
No, mother...

The Mother exits the small creaking doorway into the night air. Amahl, meanwhile, realizes that he must entertain their guests.

AMAHL
Are you a real king?

BALTHAZAR
Yes.

AMAHL
Can I see it?

BALTHAZAR
_(sighing)_
It is just like yours.

AMAHL
What’s the use of having it then?

BALTHAZAR
_(looking quizzically at Amahl)_
No use.

AMAHL
Where is your house?

BALTHAZAR
I live in a black marble palace full of black panthers and white doves. And you little boy, what do you do?

AMAHL
I had a flock of sheep.
But my mother sold them... sold them!
Now there are no sheep left.
I had a black goat who gave me warm sweet milk. But she died of old age... old age. Now there is no goat left. But Mother says that now we shall both go begging from door to door. Won’t it be fun?

BALTHAZAR
_(eyeing the boy closely)_
It has its points.

AMAHL
_(turning his attention to Kaspar)_
Are you a real king, too?

Kaspar, being hard of hearing, has to ask Amahl to repeat himself, and Amahl obliges in a loud voice. Finally hearing the boy.
KASPAR
(saying jovially)
Oh truly, truly... truly...
Yes, I am a real king...
(turning to Balthazar for assurance.)
Am I not?

BALTHAZAR
Yes, Kaspar.

AMAHL
(spotting a small animal in a cage)
What is that?

KASPAR
(asking Amahl to speak up)
Eh?

AMAHL
Does it talk?

KASPAR
(pointing to his ear)
How do I know?

AMAHL
Does it bite?

KASPAR
(holding up his bandaged finger.)
Yes.

Amahl points to a decorated wooden box which Kaspar is carrying.

AMAHL
And what is this?

KASPAR
This is my box, this is my box...
I never travel without my box.
In the second drawer, I keep all my beads.
Oh! How I love to play with beads...
all kinds of beads!

This is my box... this is my box...
I never travel without my box.
In the third drawer... in the third drawer...
(looking at Amahl with a gleam in his eye)
Oh, little boy... oh little boy...
(looking around at the other kings a bit sheepishly.)
In the third drawer... I keep...
Licorice! Licorice!
Black sweet licorice... black sweet licorice!
Have some.

Amahl’s mother opens the door. Seeing how
Amahl has become the center of attention, she
admonishes him.

MOTHER
Amahl, I told you not to be a nuisance!

AMAHL
But it isn’t my fault;
they kept asking me questions.

MOTHER
I want you to go and call the other shepherds.
Tell them about our visitors,
and ask them to bring whatever they have
in the house, as we have nothing to offer them.
Hurry on!

AMAHL
(heading for the door)
Yes, mother.

MOTHER
(remarking on the pile of gifts)
Oh, these beautiful things, and all that gold!

MELCHIOR
These are the gifts to the child.

MOTHER
The child... which child?
MELCHIOR
We don’t know.
But the star will guide us to him.

MOTHER
But, perhaps I know him...
what does he look like?

MELCHIOR
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.

MOTHER
Yes, I know 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.
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.

MELCHIOR
Have you seen a child the color of earth...
the color of thorn?
His eyes are sad; his hands are those of the poor
as poor he was born.
Incense, myrrh, and gold we bring to his side,
and the eastern star is our guide.

MOTHER
Yes, I know a child the color of earth...
the color of thorn.
His eyes are sad; his hands are those of the poor,
as poor 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.

MELCHIOR
The child we seek holds the seas
and the winds on his palm.
The child we seek has the moon
and the stars at his feet.
Before him, the eagle is gentle the lion is meek.

THE THREE KINGS
Choirs of angels hover over his roof
and sing him to sleep.
He’s warmed by breath.
He’s fed by mother
who is both virgin and queen.
Incense, myrrh, and gold we bring to his side,
and the eastern star is our guide.

MOTHER
(thinking of Amahl)
The child I know
on his palm holds my heart.
The child I know at his feet has my life.
He is my child, my son, my darling, my own...
And his name is Amahl.

AMAHL
(peering out the door)
The shepherds are coming...

MELCHIOR
Wake up, Kaspar.

THE SHEPHERDS
(greeting each other as they get closer)
Emily... Emily, Michael, Bartholomew —
how are your children and how are your sheep?
Dorothy... Dorothy, Peter, Evangeline —
give me your hand come along with me.

All the children have mumps.
All the flocks are asleep.
We are going with Amahl...
bringing gifts to the kings.

Benjamin... Benjamin, Lucas, Elizabeth —
how are your children and how are your sheep?
Carolyn, Carolyn, Mathew, Veronica,
give me your hand, come along with me.

Brrrr... how cold is the night!
Brrrr... how icy the wind!
Hold me very, very, very tight.
Oh, how warm is your cloak!
Katherine, Katherine, Christopher, Babila —
How are your children and how are your sheep?
Josephine, Josephine, Angela, Jeremy —
Come along with me!

*The shepherds arrive at the door of the cottage and peer inside.*

Oh, look! Oh, look!

**MOTHER**
Come in, come in... What are you afraid of?
Don’t be bashful silly girl.
Don’t be bashful silly boy.
They won’t eat you.
Show what you brought them.

**THE SHEPHERDS**
(stumbling over each other, as they try to force their way in the door)
Go on...! No, you go on!

The shepherds present what they’ve brought the kings.

Olives and quinces, apples and raisins, nutmeg and myrtle, medlars and chestnuts. This is all we shepherds can offer you.

Citrons and lemon, musk and pomegranates, goat cheese and walnuts, figs and cucumbers. This is all we shepherds can offer you.

Hazelnuts and chamomile, mignonettes and laurel, honeycombs and cinnamon, thyme, mint and garlic. This is all we shepherds can offer you.

*The kings express earnest appreciation.*

**THE SHEPHERDS**
(eagerly pressing the gifts into the kings’ arms)
Take them, take them... you are welcome.
Take them... eat them... you are welcome, too.

All of a sudden, a squirrely little girl makes a break for the door... and a little boy gets up, also thinking through how he will negotiate his way through the mass of bodies. Some of the young men pull the two children back. After much nudging, the children return into the middle of the one-room cottage, somewhat red-faced and embarrassed.

**THE SHEPHERDS**
(scolding the children using the same words with which the householder mother scolded them earlier)
Don’t be bashful, silly girl
Don’t be bashful, silly boy!
They won’t eat you.

After an interlude of dancing, Balthazar thanks the shepherds.

**BALTHAZAR**
Thank you, good friends, for your dances and your gifts.
But now we must bid you good night.
We have little time for sleep, and a long journey ahead.

**THE SHEPHERDS**
(moving towards the door)
Good night, my good Kings, good night and farewell.
The pale stars foretell that dawn is in sight.
Good night, my good kings.
Good night and farewell.
The night wind foretells the day will be bright.

As the shepherds leave, Amahl goes over to Kaspar.

**AMAHL**
Excuse me, sir... amongst your magic stones, is there... is there one that could cure a crippled boy?

**KASPAR**
Eh?

**AMAHL**
(looking down dejectedly)
Never mind... good night.
(Shuffling off to his bed)

THE SHEPHERDS
(outside, they can still be heard as they disperse
to their own houses and fields.)
Good night, good night...
The dawn is in sight... good night, farewell...
good night... good night...

Amahl listens intently as the shepherds bid each
other good night throughout the small village.
The mother tucks Amahl into bed and then turns
to look at the kings.)

MOTHER
(thinking to herself)
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
on 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 all go to a child
they don’t even know?
They are asleep.
Do I dare? If I take some,
they’ll never miss it...
(moving towards the boxes of gold...)
...for my child for my child...
for my child... for my child...

THE PAGE
(seeing a shadow moving near the pile of gifts,
he awakens)
Thief! Thief!

(One of the kings stirs.)

KING
What is it?

THE PAGE
(shouting)
I’ve seen her steal some of the gold.
She’s a thief! Don’t let her go!
She’s stolen the gold.

THE THREE KINGS
(joining the ruckus with loud voices)
Shame, shame!

PAGE
Give it back, or I’ll tear it out of you!
Give it back, or I’ll tear it out of you.
Give it back... give it back.

Amahl has, by this time, been awakened by the
ruckus and is peering over towards the argument
in the center of the room. Then, seeing his mother
involved in a struggle, he leaps out of bed and
tries to intervene. This is a side of Amahl the
kings haven’t seen yet.)

AMAHL
Don’t you dare, ugly man
hurt my mother!
I’ll smash in your face; I’ll knock out your teeth.
I you dare! Don’t you dare!
Don’t you dare... ugly man...
hurt my mother!
Oh, Mr. king,
don’t let him hurt my mother.
My mother is good.
She cannot do anything wrong.
I’m the one who lies; I’m the one who steals.
Don’t you dare...
I’ll break all your bones;
I’ll bash in your head.
Don’t you dare... ugly man...
hurt my mother.
MELCHIOR
(seeing what has erupted)
Oh, good woman, you may keep the gold.
The child we seek doesn’t need our gold.
On love, on love alone
he will build his kingdom.
His pierced hand will hold no scepter.
His haloed head will wear no crown.
His might will not be built on your toil.
Swifter than lightning,
he will soon walk among us.
He will bring us new life,
and receive our death,
and the keys to his city belong to the poor.
Let us leave, my friends.

MOTHER
Oh, no! Wait! Take back your gold!
For such a king I’ve waited all my life...
and if I weren’t so poor
I would send a gift of my own to such a child.

AMAHL
(pipes up)
But, Mother, let me send him my crutch.
Who knows, he may need one,
and this, I made myself.

MOTHER
(drawn in a breath sharply)
But that you can’t, you can’t!

Suddenly, Amahl begins to walk without his crutch.

AMAHL
I walk, Mother. I walk, Mother.

KINGS
He walks! It is a sign from the holy child.
We must give praise to the newborn king.
We must praise him.
This is a sign from God.
Truly, he can dance, he can jump,
he can run! Ah!

MOTHER
(admonishing Amahl)

Please, my darling, be careful now.
You must take care not to hurt yourself.

Something has crystallized in the kings’ minds as they have watched this whole event play out.
They realize that they must admonish the mother to treat her child differently.

THE KINGS
Oh good woman,
you must not be afraid,
for he is loved by the son of God.
(playing along with the boy’s ruse)
Oh, blessed child, may I touch you?

AMAHL
(Seeming confused, he looks at the Page with a sharp gaze.)
Well, I don’t know
if I’m going to let you touch me...

MOTHER
(admonishing Amahl sharply)

AMAHL
(thinking better of his reticence)
Oh, all right... but just once.

AMAHL
(showing off his new ability)
Look, Mother, I can fight,
I can work, I can play.
Oh, mother, let me go with the kings.
I want to take the crutch to the child, myself.

THE THREE KINGS
(eagerly entreating the mother)
Yes, good woman, let him come with us.
We’ll take good care of him.
We’ll bring him back on a camel’s back.

MOTHER
(turning to Amahl)
Do you really want to go?

AMAHL
Yes, Mother.
MOTHER
Are you sure, sure, sure?

AMAHL
I’m sure.

MOTHER
(pausing for a moment)
Yes, I think you should go...
and bring thanks to the child yourself.

AMAHL
(parroting her query)
Are you sure, sure, sure?

MOTHER
Go on... get ready.

KASPAR
(not really hearing what is going on)
What did she say?

BALTHAZAR
(bending over and speaking loudly in Kaspar’s ear)
She said he can come.

KASPAR
(unable to contain his enthusiasm)
Oh, lovely, lovely, lo...

BALTHAZAR
(cutting him off curtly)
Kaspar!

MOTHER
(preparing Amahl for his journey.)
What to do with your crutch?

AMAHL
You can tie it to my back.

MOTHER
Don’t forget to wear your hat!

AMAHL
I shall always wear my hat.

TOGETHER
So, my darling goodbye!
I shall miss you very much.

MOTHER
Wash your ears.

AMAHL
Yes, I promise.

MOTHER
Don’t tell lies.

AMAHL
No, I promise.

TOGETHER
I shall miss you very much.

AMAHL
Feed my bird.

MOTHER
Yes, I promise.

AMAHL
Watch the cat.

MOTHER
Yes, I promise.

TOGETHER
I shall miss you very much.

Amahl finishes his preparations.

MELCHIOR
(checking with Amahl)
Are you ready?

AMAHL
Yes, I’m ready.

MELCHIOR
Let’s go, then.
Amahl and the kings set out across the darkened prairies. And as they trek, they hear the sounds of the shepherds singing the songs of the morning in their fields and homes.

THE SHEPHERDS
Shepherds, arise!
Come, oh shepherds, come outside!
All the stars have left the sky.
Sweet dawn — oh dawn of peace.

Curtain