

A Musing... on

'Amahl and the Night Visitors'

By Alan W. Petrucelli
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Santa has come and gone.

Father Time is safely diapered and dry till next year.

Clara and the Drosselmeyer and the Sugarplum Fairy and the rest of the Nutcracker's crack team have gone back into their shells until the next holiday season.

Post-holiday blues coloring your entertainment calendar?

Wise up.

This weekend, the Gloriæ Dei Cantores Foundation of the Community of Jesus is presenting a fully-staged production of *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, Gian Carlo Menotti's beloved opera of love, hope, faith and the wonder of the three wise men. *Amahl* will be staged tonight and tomorrow at 8 at the Church of the Transfiguration at Rock Harbor in Orleans. A pre-performance lecture will be given one hour before curtain on each night. Tickets are \$35, \$30 for seniors with students and children free. For more information or to make reservations, call (508) 240-2400.

This is the second consecutive year that Gloriæ Dei Arts has staged the show at this time of the year. And with good reason.

Though many people think of *Amahl* as a "Christmas" production - and many theater companies stage it in December - it celebrates the Epiphany, the arrival of the Three Wise Men. And that time is now.

This production of *Amahl* also celebrates the glory of the Community's massive church, still an awesome work in progress, and as much a player as any of the cast members: Gloriæ Dei Cantores soloist Kathy Schuman as the mother; Brother Timothy Pehta as the page; and Brothers Patrick Clark and Paul Norman, and Wayne Schuman as the wise men;



and Laudatè Dominum youth choir member Daniel Pfeiffer as Amahl.

"We are excited that the artwork in the church will be used as part of the show," explained Belinda Schmitt, director of communications for Gloriæ Dei Cantores. "When the wise men make their entrance, for instance, they arrive under the fresco of the Magi in adoration of the infant Jesus" ... promising a theatrical touch both dramatic and different.

And historically accurate, at least according to those who seem a bit more connected to those in the know. Contrary to popular belief and what certain nativity scenes and novelty songs tell us, the triumverate of wise guys visited Jesus when he was a year old ... the age he's depicted in the church's fresco.

As Schmitt explained: "When Jesus was born, the Magi knew something important had happened because they looked up to the sky and noticed the star. So each made the journey from a different area, and it took a year for them to arrive." Ironically, it took a year to iron the kinks out of *Amahl*: Schmitt added that the biggest problem with last year's production - that "the seating did not leave a very good view of everything that was happening on stage" - has been "fixed" and sight lines are "simply wonderful."

Think of this production as a gift from a most talent creative team. Make that teams. Joining the Gloriæ Dei Cantores will be the Vox Cæli Sinfonia and the Tapestry Dance Company. Add to that the most heavenly setting, a cast that (according to Schmitt) "don't simply act their roles but who get into their characters, interpreting the authenticity of what the composer was trying to relate" (like *Amahl*, the composer himself was healed from lameness as a boy) and the most meticulously made costumes.

"The costumes reflect the fact that the opera is written from the perspective of a child," explained Schmitt. "Amahl and his mother are pheasants and so attired, but the clothes of the Magi are brilliantly colored with each representing men from three different

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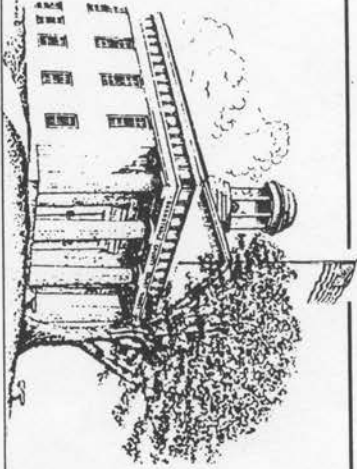
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SATURDAY, JUNE 11, 2005

A work of biblical proportion, 'Pilgrim's Progress' has real spirit

By Richard Dyer
GLOBE STAFF

Opera Review
ORLEANS — The statistics alone are staggering. The New England premiere of Ralph Vaughan Williams's opera "The Pilgrim's Progress," presented by performing-arts organizations affiliated with the Community of Jesus in Orleans, offered a chorus of 95 and an orchestra of 62 — about a 1-to-1 ratio with the seats in the audience. All the participants had been rehearsing since last fall.

The spectacular setting was the Church of the Transfiguration, with its floor mosaic depicting man's earthly pilgrimage stretching the full length of the central aisle. It's a fitting atmosphere for Vaughan Williams's theatrical adaptation of John Bunyan's famous allegory about Christian's journey through the traps and snares of the world to the Celestial City.

There must have been at least 300 costumes, all of them created or assembled by members of the community. For the Vanity Fair sequence, depicting the folly of human obsessions, they chose their own getups: everything from Park Avenue elegance through naughty boas and bustiers to tattoos,



PHOTO/ANDRE PHOTOGRAPHY

Human obsessions take center stage during the Vanity Fair segment in the guise of feather boas, bustiers, and spiked hair.

spiked hair, chains, and leather. Revolving painted panels, platforms, chairs, and benches were also created especially for the production.

The preparation by director and conductor Elizabeth Patterson and her assistants, Sister Danielle Dwyer and Richard K. Pugsley, was meticulous; one seldom sees an operatic production as powerful in conception and polished in execution as this "Pilgrim's Progress." This was not a Sunday-

school pageant. All the participants had been encouraged to prepare their contributions through a process of self-examination. The principals pledged to undertake a "singer's diet," avoiding fatty foods, milk, coffee, tea, and alcohol while drinking at least eight glasses of water daily. Orchestra players wrote every word of the text into their parts — a rarity.

Vaughan Williams was preoccupied with the operatic possibilities of Bunyan's work for more

The Pilgrim's Progress

By Ralph Vaughan Williams
At: the Church of the Transfiguration,
Orleans, Thursday night

than four decades before he finally brought it to the stage in 1951. He called it a "morality" rather than an opera; although it addresses such operatic subjects as lust and redemption, it necessarily does so in an unconventional way. The music reflects the harmonies and melodic structures of hymnody and folk song; it mingles simplicity and majesty.

Most of the performers were amateurs in the best sense; there were no great voices, although a couple of the baritones were very good: Brother Paul Norman as the Evangelist and Brother Richard Cragg as the smoothly hypocritical Mister By-Ends. As the Pilgrim, Pugsley offered a strong voice, though one stressed by rehearsal and performance. But everyone performed with spirit, and it was fun to see the young man playing the evil Lord Hate-Good, a villain right out of "Star Wars," also showing up, robed in white, as part of the heavenly host. The overall effect, anchored by the superb chorus *Gloriae Dei Cantores* and

Patterson's assured and probing musicianship, was spectacular.

Vaughan Williams frames his work with scenes of Bunyan in prison, where he wrote "The Pilgrim's Progress." At the end, the writer holds out his book "as if offering it to the audience." The Community of Jesus members prepared this work as a spiritual exercise for themselves, but the performances were also an offering.

Experience ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

'Pilgrim' profound, impressive

THEATER
Review

By Laurie Higgins

Proving that hard work and long preparation pay off, the Community of Jesus' production of Ralph Vaughan Williams' opera "The Pilgrim's Progress" is simply stunning in every regard. The cast of 150 singers and dancers accompanied by 62 musicians in the Vox Caeli Sinfonia, mesmerized audiences on opening night with a performance that literally stimulated all the senses.

The morality "Pilgrim's Progress" is based on John Bunyan's classic allegory "The Pilgrim's Progress," written in 1678 while he was imprisoned for illegally preaching. English composer Ralph Vaughan Williams spent 45 years writing the opera, first performed in 1951 and considered to be his finest achievement.

The opera opens and closes with Bunyan in prison. The four acts opera is presented as Bunyan's dream that follows Pilgrim on his life journey from House Beautiful, to the Valley of Humiliation, to Vanity Fair, to the Delectable Mountains and finally across the River to arrive at the Celestial City.

The production takes place



Richard Pugsley is "Pilgrim" in Ralph Vaughn Williams' opera "The Pilgrim's Progress" opening at the Church of the Transfiguration in Orleans June 3.

in the length of the center aisle of the church against a backdrop of screens to hide the orchestra with six 15-foot panels painted with swirls and waves meant to evoke a sense of journey.

Assistant director Danielle Dwyer and choreographer David Ortolani use this space with great skill and imagination, especially during the large choral performances.

In addition to her awe-inspiring job directing such a large cast, Elizabeth Patterson also conducts the orchestra with great skill, evoking music that swells to fill the rafters of the Basilica style church and

adds great depth and emotion to the solo and choral performances.

Richard Pugsley delivers a magnificently realistic Pilgrim, fully embodying the demanding role with his voice and expressions in a manner that makes it hard to take your eyes off of him.

Luke Norman is excellent in his short role as Bunyan and Paul Norman is a perfectly dignified Evangelist who serves as Pilgrim's guide setting him on a path to seek, "Life, Eternal Life."

Other characters tempt Pilgrim in a series of convincing performances that perfectly capture how life can tempt and distract a man from his spiritual journey to God.

While each of the numerous individual performances is strong and compelling, the choral numbers are supreme. In the Valley of Humiliation, Doleful Creatures in full loose gray body suits that cover their heads slither and writhe on the floor in a chilling frenzy, gnawing their own flesh and attacking Pilgrim. Gray lighting and fog created with dry ice add to the drama.

Their leader Apollyon, well acted by David Ortolani with the majestic voice of Yoshio Inomata booming from above, challenges Pilgrim in a rousing

sword fight that almost defeats him.

In the visually dazzling Vanity Fair scene the characters are a contemporary mix of sinners who set out to tempt Pilgrim, urging him to "Buy! Buy! Buy!" Nathaniel Reese is a compelling Lord Lechery. Stalking the stage bare-chested with black leather pants and fur-trimmed coat, with a tattoo on the back of his shaved head, he is a compelling presence.

Madam Wanton, played by Chris Helfrich, and Madam Bubble, played by Kathy Schuman, tempt Pilgrim toward lusty desires with their sexy costumes and shimmying ways. Both sing with angelic voices that belie their naughty characters' intent.

Six black-clad actors carry Lord Hate-Good, played by a deliciously evil Ryan Haig, in on two poles supporting a bench. The evil Lord sentences Pilgrim to death and throws him in jail, where he faces his defining moment. But his journey is not over. Richard Cragg and Sharon Rose Pfeiffer give slyly seductive performances in the roles of Mister and Madame By-Ends, tempting Pilgrim with their suggestion that his spiritual journey need not be so hard.

Alex Pugsley is wonderful

as the Woodcutters boy. His sweet voice keeps Pilgrim on his path and charms the audience.

The finale is appropriately grand and beautifully staged as Pilgrim struggles across the dangerous River of Death to enter a glorious Celestial City.

The costumes and makeup are unbelievably beautiful and add great splendor and symbolism to the show.

The two-and-a-half hour performance has a 30-minute intermission with refreshments in the Paraclete House where audience members can view an exhibit detailing the design process that went into the making of "Pilgrim's Progress."

If you go...

What: "The Pilgrim's Progress," opera adapted by Ralph Vaughan Williams from John Bunyan's allegory

When: 8 p.m. June 9 and 10

Where: Church of the Transfiguration, Rock Harbor, Orleans, 508-240-2400

'Pilgrim's Progress' production a feast for the senses

ANNA CREBO

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

ORLEANS - The various performing arts organizations that grace The Community of Jesus in Rock Harbor have thrown themselves wholeheartedly into their June production of Ralph Vaughan Williams' "The Pilgrim's Progress," based on the classic 17th-century morality tale by twice-imprisoned preacher-

activist John Bunyan.

Featuring a well-rehearsed cast of 150 singers, actors and dancers, backed by a fine-sounding 64-member orchestra, the revered English composer's last completed opera opened Friday night at Church of the Transfiguration with a performance that provided a veritable feast for the senses while sounding a clarion call to the spirit.

Indeed, "The Pilgrim's Progress," interpreted ecumenically as the journey of a soul through many earthly temptations to its ultimate goal of immortality, could well be the ideal vehicle to mobilize the community's rich artistic resources in support of its lofty spiritual aims. As though aware of this challenge, each member of the cast gave utmost attention to the performance, and the effect was stunning.

On Stage

■ **WHAT:** "The Pilgrim's Progress," opera by Ralph Vaughan Williams

■ **PRESENTED BY:** The Gloriam Dei Artes Foundation and The Community of Jesus

■ **WHEN:** 8 tonight, Thursday and Friday

■ **WHERE:** Church of the Transfiguration, 7 Bay View Drive, Rock Harbor, Orleans

■ **TICKETS:** \$30-\$45, free for children and students

■ **RESERVATIONS:** 508-240-2400

Colorful scenes such as Act 2's slithering, howling, mysteriously shrouded "Doleful Creatures" and Pilgrim's excitingly realistic sword battle with Apollyon, their black-clad satanic ruler, were carried off with great zest and panache. A robust, yet satirical, humor came to the fore in Act 3's presentation of the frivolously and/or mischievously occupied residents of the Town of Vanity, whose modern-dress occupants included an array of recognizable characters ranging from pimps and prostitutes to cell-phone obsessed shoppers and money-crazed merchants,

all shouting "Buy!", "Buy!" The scene fairly sizzled with energy.

Certainly, Vaughan Williams, who devoted much of his creative energy to works for school and community-based ensembles, would have roundly applauded this imaginative, professionally polished staging of what he considered to be his finest opera.

Considering the level of technical proficiency (and sheer number of players) demanded by the symphonic-style orchestration, Friday's fine performance by a primarily community-based ensemble, which included players ages 8 through the mid-60s, was most impressive.

Music director Elizabeth Patterson, who also conducted, has a genius for capturing and conveying the overall structure and meaning of a multi-dimensional musical work, while not losing sight of the "nuts and bolts" of actual performance requirements. Few choral conductors are as expert as she in leading instrumental ensembles and coordinating with

the vocals on stage.

Baritone Richard Pugsley - who, incidentally, is Patterson's son - excelled as the determined Pilgrim, inspired to leave his abode and follow the King's Highway to a Celestial City where he can forever dwell with God. Resonant-voiced and fully identified with the demanding role, Pugsley readily engaged and held the sympathies of the audience.

Other outstanding performances were turned in by Paul Norman, whose crisply articulated, incisive baritone and slim, dignified appearance was perfect for the role of the Evangelist.

Provocatively clad in green satin, a vocally radiant Chris Helfrich was an exciting stage presence as Madam Wanton, accompanied by an equally seduc-

tive Kathy Schuman as Madam Bubble. As the lithe, sleekly clad Lord Lechery, tenor Nathanael Reese was clarion-voiced and dramatically engaging. Richard Cragg and Sharon Rose Pfeiffer charmed the audience with their deft waltzing, animated singing and amusingly drawn portraits of the superfi-

cial spiritual seekers Mister and Madam By-Ends.

Costumes, sets and lighting were ingeniously designed and carried out by members of the community. Kudos to stage director Danielle Dwyer and choreographer David Ortolani for a job most imaginatively and professionally done.

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The objective of THE LIVING CHURCH magazine is to build up the body of Christ, by describing how God is moving in his Church; by reporting news of the Church in an unbiased manner; and by presenting diverse points of view.

THIS WEEK



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Singers to the Glory of God

An ecumenical religious community in Massachusetts is committed to the best music of the church.

By Patricia Nakamura

Gloriæ Dei Cantores and the Gloriæ Dei Cantores Schola are but two expressions of the modified Benedictine rule of life adapted by the Community of Jesus from its beginnings in 1958. The ecumenical religious community "on the inside elbow of Cape Cod" near the small town of Orleans, Mass., grew from the desire of two Episcopal lay women, and later a small group of people, to develop a ministry of teaching and prayer. The community, consisting of extended households, a convent, and a friary, was formally chartered in 1970. Benedict called his monastery "A school for the Lord's service," and this is evidenced in the lives of the 300-plus members from at least nine different religious backgrounds.

The Divine Office is sung each day, in Gregorian chant, in Latin, as it was "before the split in the Church." The Eucharist is celebrated by one of the five ordained clergy.

The desire for the best music in their Church led the early choir to commit to a rigorous schedule of learning and practice. Gloriæ Dei Cantores director Elizabeth Patterson and her 40-some singers, "ages 17-70," rehearse daily, sing Saturday and Sunday services, and attend bimonthly master classes. Then there are concerts, and tours which have taken the choir around the world, from Albania to Wales. The recordings, now numbering about 40, arose out of audience requests. They reverberate with the choir's devotion to musical excellence, and to thorough study of the texts, whether in English or Latin, Croatian or Russian. Part of this was the desire of the ecumenical community to understand and respect others' faiths.

Ms. Patterson, a midwesterner, is also prioress of the community, elected by the lay and monastic members. She sees the work of the singers as bringing more rewards, "a sense of deep fellowship, a sense of a job well done, a sense of pleasing God ... Compromise simply wasn't a question, nor was it a question of leaving anyone out," she said in a 2003 *Gramophone* interview.

The choir's newest recording is *Thou Art My Refuge: Psalms of Salvation and Mercy*. This is the first of three in Anglican chant. Many are



Lee Andre photo

The singers in Gloriæ Dei Cantores range from age 17 to 70.



Steve Sherman photo

Elizabeth Patterson directs the choir of 40 singers.

accompanied by the restored and expanded E.M. Skinner organ in the Church of the Transfiguration, the community's basilican-style church dedicated in 2000. The liner notes feature meditations on these "songs of lament" by the Rev. Martin Shannon, an Episcopal priest and one of the five clergy members.

In another print interview, Ms. Patterson stated that a personal goal "is to be part of the movement that helps to build church music back to some kind of more laudatory level. There has been a lot of decay, and that has been of particular concern to me." And so the choir's repertoire, ranging widely through periods and nations but emphasizing 20th-century and American music, serves "to bring attention to works that it is possible for other choirs to do, and so put good music back into the service." In some cases that indicates lofty ambitions: Among the Cantores' composers are Barber, Billings, Casals, Copland, Hancock, Neswick, Rorem, Sowerby, White and Wyton.

For the Love of Chant

The Gloriæ Dei Cantores Schola specializes in chant, particularly Gregorian but also Ambrosian and Sarum. The chant "sung in Latin, represents a musical form that incorporates both language and tunes that were known in Christ's day." The women's group is directed by Sister Christine Helfrich, the men's by Brother Tim Pehta, who select themes, research music, and prepare the singers. Singers are drawn from the larger choir for "a particular love of chant, and a particular voice," Sister Chris said. She and Brother Tim have other jobs, either inside or outside the community; Brother Tim is an electrician. "Choir and chant take a big part of the day. We do ongoing education for the community, too," as well as chant workshops. "Even if you don't understand the words, chant works inside. Each time during the day — at the office or the Eucharist — it helps us refocus on the Lord's gifts."

The Schola's newest recording, *Shining Like the Sun*, was inspired by the community's home, the Church of the Transfiguration. Mary Berry, CBE, who travels from England to conduct for concerts and recordings, said, "They've come to see the Church in its universal context, going back many centuries. They decided to make a wonderful church, Romanesque in style, with rounded arches. All their art is at very high standards — mosaics, frescoes, sculpture. Chant fits in perfectly. Chant goes back even to Jewish times — the first Christian cantors were Jewish.

"Transfiguration

lies behind the recording. The texts are mostly biblical. They are such good singers! They learned the chant and they love it. I'm very proud of them."

Brother Tim said, "There are few recordings on the Transfiguration; the pieces are not often heard. It was celebrated very early in the Eastern Church, but in the Western, not until the 15th century. Some things were borrowed from earlier feasts, 9th or 10th century Epiphany, for example the theme of light."

Dr. Berry will return this month to Massachusetts, to "do whatever they want me to do," perhaps teach advanced interpretation. She spoke of the monks of Solesmes going "back to the very ancient roots of chant," and how it had gotten distorted over the centuries. "Usually it had been slowed down; some tended to take it at a snail's pace. It should be more like the rhythm of prose, far freer. The Latin underlay was changed — absolutely barbaric."

All the community's recordings are distributed by Paraclete Press, at www.paracletepress.com, an independent, for-profit publishing house in Orleans; many community members work there. Several websites offer more information on the Community of Jesus and Gloriæ Dei Cantores, including www.gdcchoir.org, and communityofjesus.org.



Lee Andre photo

Gloriæ Dei Cantores has toured from Albania to Wales.

Happy 250th, Wolfgang!

Mozart concert hits high note in Orleans

By Dana Franchitto

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart could not have asked for a better 250th birthday present than the program of two of his sacred choral works Saturday evening at the Church of the Transfiguration at Rock Harbor in Orleans.

The spacious house of worship, adorned with Italian frescoes on Biblical themes, resonated with the glorious sonorities of the *Gloria de Cantores* (voices to the glory of God) along with the *Vox Caeli Sinfonia*, all under the direction of conductor Richard K. Pugsley.

MUSIC Review

With an imposing image of an ascending Jesus watching over all of it, arms extended high behind the altar, the audience was quickly drawn into the opening bars of the relatively unknown "Litaniae De Venerabili Altaris Sacramento K.243." Whether in the Kyrie's reverent exhalation or in the earth shaking tremors of the "Tremendum," the sanctuary remained awash in the unwavering celestial harmonies of the chorus. Of the four fine soloists that served as a balance to the full-bodied choral sound, the crystal clarity of Christine Helfrich's soprano voice via solo duet or quartet settings reflected a certain lyric beauty and faith. Brother Nathanael Reese, tenor, wound and whirled his way with keen agility around notes of joy and gratitude in the aria, "Panis Vivus" (Living Bread) — very Italian and very expected at the Austrian court of the 1770s. Incidentally, was that a visitation of angels singing the "Vaticium in Domino" or the soprano section of the choir?

All of the fine forces combined into a mighty, yet well tempered "Hostia Sancta" with the four soloists, the orchestra and the chorus each holding their own but in concert to a majestic effort. At this point, the deep warmth of Sister Estelle's alto voice and the solid steady bass of G. Luke Norman should be recognized for their fine solo and quartet roles.

Once again, Sister Helfrich's acrobatic melismas (long phrases on one syllable)

served as a lyric prelude to what must be one of the most moving choral settings of the "Agnus Dei" (Lamb of God) these ears have ever been blessed with. Who said that Latin was a dead language?

Now, for all its emotional power and sophisticated vocal and instrumental writing, the Litany merely hints at breadth and depth called for in the "Requiem K. 626." All that Mozart explored and mastered in his symphonies and operas reaches a transcendent summit in this timeless unfinished masterpiece. Certainly, in 1791, a young Beethoven was listening.

Indeed, one could immediately hear the difference as the warm harmonies of the Litany surged into towering waves of drama and, at times, terror, especially in the sobering warnings of the "Dies Irae" (Day of Wrath). Occasionally, timeless beauty does come crashing down. The voluminous fortissime harmonies heralding the consumption of the world in burning ashes were underpinned by ominous beats of the tympani.

The calm but forceful "Tuba Miram" (Trumpet Scattering) came in during a lull in the wrath but its message of judgment was hardly comforting. It opened with the manly but gentle voice of Brother Paul Norman in duet with a French horn. In addition, tenor Brother Richard Cragg sang with controlled strength. Soprano Kathy Schuman lit up the sanctuary with radiant brilliance. The quartet was rounded off with the equally strong but more darkly hued alto vice of Sister Helen Spatzeck-Olsen.

The meaningful strings and voices of "Confutatis" sent the music to the edges of tonal ambiguity. "Searing flames" of chaos dramatically contrasted with angelic voices of supplication.

The symphonic drama and sophisticated polyphony reached heavenly heights in the final five chorus of the score, from the exuberance of the Sanctus to the famous fugue that concludes the work.

How well-suited the divine "Lux Aeterna" was to Schuman, joined by the chorus in praise of that eternal light.