

Amahl and the Night Visitors

US TV operetta : 1951- : dir. : NBC : ? min
 prod: Samuel Chotzinoff : scr: : dir.ph.:
[Chet Allen](#) (1951); [Bill Mclver](#) (1952-)
 Rosemary Kuhlmann

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω □ ∅ Z ∞	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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Halliwell's Television Companion review:

“Gian-Carlo Menotti's opera about the shepherds welcoming the birth of Christ was written especially for TV and first produced by NBC in 1951. For many years, in various productions, it was an annual Christmas offering. *** ”

How Sweet it Was – Television: A Pictorial Commentary comment:

“On Christmas Eve, 1951, an opera arrived, commissioned specifically for television, which was to become an annual television tradition. Gian Carlo Menotti's "**Amahl and the Night Visitors**", performed by the NBC Opera Company and produced by Samuel Chotzinoff, has been telecast every year at Christmastime (and once at Easter). In 1951 the crippled shepherd boy, Amahl, was played by Chet Allen. The next year, and for several years thereafter, Bill McIver was Amahl. He is pictured with Rosemary Kuhlmann as his mother. Miss Kuhlmann originated the role and continued to play it in various new productions of the opera.”

Excerpt from **The Moving Picture Boy** entry on Chet Allen:

“The wandering orphan given an extended lift by medicine man Dan Dailey in Douglas Sirk's musical "**MEET ME AT THE FAIR**" was an admired soloist of the Columbus Boychoir. On TV he created the name part in Menotti's popular Christmas opera "**Amahl and the Night Visitors**", and he sang in Honegger's oratorio "King David" at the 1952 Los Angeles Music Festival. (The name "Chet Allen" is sometimes given in inverted commas, implying that it may not have been his true name.)... After 1952 most of his singing was in churches, though he had the role of an opera singer's son in the 1953 TV series "**Bonino**"... ”

[no listing in "History of Television", "Television's Greatest Hits" or "25 Years of ITV - 1955-1980"]

No further information currently available. An operetta commissioned for television? Whatever next? For those who've not seen it (my school did a production of it one Christmas), the crippled-but-undaunted Amahl lives alone with his careworn mother, where they are visited one night by three strangers on a mysterious pilgrimage. They offer the travellers shelter, and later, as if by Magi, the boy finds he is able to walk again. He joins the local football team and is signed up for the Nazareth youth squad. Try as I may, I cannot find it in me to like opera, but one would have to admit this is a more palatable form of Christmas television than the festive trash that has become the staple diet of late - "special" editions of the same old year-round soaps and sitcoms, grotesquely inappropriate feature films, and a tidal wave of warmed-over Disney offerings that nobody would watch any other time of year.

For more common-or-garden shepherd boys, see "**AND NOW MIGUEL**" (66, with Pat Cardi) or "**PADRE PADRONE**" (77). Nothing further is known of Bill McIver, though a Paul McIver appeared many years later in "**STEPHEN KING'S THE TOMMYKNOCKERS**". Chet Allen however was 12 in 1951. He committed suicide in June 1984.

See subject index under **CHRISTMAS / THANKSGIVING, DISABLED / HANDICAPPED, MUSIC / YOUNG MUSICIANS** and **RELIGION**.