

**OPERA**

FROM PAGE B1

a child. The documentary includes an interview with Menotti. We're recreating his story. This is a Menotti production.

"It's really special. I want to get children away from video, want them to experience live theater and sound. Opera — there's nothing like it."

Michael Atchoo was only 10 years old when he first saw *Amahl & the Night Visitors* at Music Hall last year. Today, he steps onto the Detroit stage as a member of the children's chorus.

The Troy student has never sung opera before and couldn't wait for the first rehearsal at Smith Theatre at Oakland Community College in Farmington Hills, where Lynch's brother, Ed Callaghan, is president.

Friends and family have come together to help with the production in any way they can. Mary Ann Atchoo, Michael's mother, agreed to let her son audition not only because of her friendship with Lynch but because of the opportunity for Michael to sing in an opera company with professionals like Lynch, who has performed in numerous roles with Michigan Opera Theatre, Dayton Opera and Toledo Opera since graduating with a bachelor's degree in theater from Marygrove College.

"It's given him a different appreciation for music when someone shows an interest in



Steve Lussman, John Mac Masters and Daniel Washington play the three kings following a star that will take them to a special child for whom they bear gifts.

you like Mary," says Atchoo. "I'm so excited. Michael's fairly interested in piano and has won awards. I think it's so nice for him to be well-rounded, and it gives him an appreciation for the arts. Theater is one of my passions and the symphony. We took the kids to see it last year. I just loved it. It was only 60 minutes long and in English."

A student at St. Regis

Catholic School in Birmingham. Michael thought the "music and story were great," so even though he really didn't expect to pass the audition, the 11-year-old wanted to try out for the chorus.

"My favorite part is when Amahl gives the crutch to the wise men and then he can walk," says Michael.

The message of *Amahl & the Night Visitors* — that it is in the giving that we receive — is what makes the story important for Sara Rottman this holiday season. The mother of a 26-month-old and with another child on the way auditioned for the chorus after hearing about the production from a fellow member of Kirk in the Hills Presbyterian Church choir in Bloom-Field Hills.

"It's geared toward kids and getting kids interested in music, and being a Christmas opera it's great for the holidays," says Rottman, a Waterford resident. "I've never done opera before but was always in choral groups in Pennsylvania and Grand Rapids. I auditioned for it because it was something different. It's been fun. It's been very fast. Rehearsals began at

**'It's really so gratifying to talk to kids about opera. ... You want to hook them young.'**

Mary Callaghan Lynch  
founder, Motor City Lyric Opera

the end of November and we go on Dec. 19."

This is the second year for members of the Eisenhower Dance Ensemble. Artistic director and founder Laurie Eisenhower choreographed the dance last year under the watchful eye of Menotti. Like Atchoo and Rottman, it was Eisenhower's first opera but not her first collaboration.

Eisenhower Dance Ensemble frequently brings in guest choreographers for its five-concert season. She's currently working with the Southfield-based Detroit Chamber Winds & Strings and the Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival for a June 28 performance of Stavinisky's *The Soldier's Tale*

at the Seligman Family Performing Arts Center at Detroit Country Day School in Beverly Hills.

"Frankly, I was a little nervous about the project with Menotti coming last year," says Eisenhower. "It's a very short dance by the peasants for the three kings and I incorporate some of the chorus people. That was my biggest task because Menotti didn't want it to feel separate from the production."

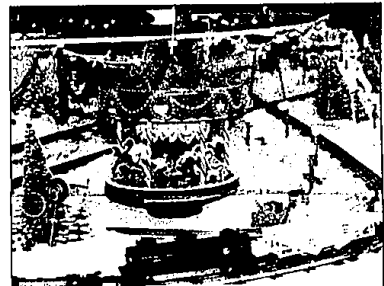
Lynch attributes the success of the production to artists like Eisenhower and board members like Tutman, Martha Reeves and Frank D. Stella, who are willing to devote time to bring opera to a larger audience. The 2003-2004 season offers a spring production of *Little Women* in addition to the holiday classic *Amahl & the Night Visitors*, but before then Lynch and Reeves plan to take the art into metropolitan Detroit classrooms with an Opera on Wheels program.

"We're just getting it off the ground," says Lynch. "It's really so gratifying to talk to kids about opera. I was in a third-grade classroom in West

Bloomfield and was amazed how none of them had been to a real opera. You want to hook them young. I took my daughter Caitlin at age 2 1/2 to see me sing the role of Yum-Yum in *The Mikado* at Michigan Opera Theatre. I taught voice and she came to choir with me and now she's entering the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music for a master's degree in fall after graduating with a degree in vocal performance from University of Michigan. My son Paddy was 4 years old when I was Musetta in *La Boheme*. He sat there for the entire three acts and didn't move. They just grew up with it. It's been part of their lives."

"With the company I want to present family-friendly opera, to make it accessible, very cost-friendly. The idea was for them to be able to go and experience a piece of theater. *Amahl* is a perfect introduction into the world of opera for audience members for whom this might be their first opera. We're hoping to reach families. I feel grateful to make a difference in children's and families' lives."

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