A study of Gian Carlo Menotti's *The Consul, The Saint of Bleecker Street,* and *The Death of the Bishop of Brindisi* as humanized by the music, with focus on the tragic characters (Magda Sorel and Mother, Annina and Michele, the Bishop and the children).

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Julia R. O'Toole

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ABSTRACT

A study of Gian Carlo Menotti's *The Consul, The Saint of Bleecker Street,* and *The Death of the Bishop of Brindisi* as humanized by the music, with focus on the tragic characters (Magda Sorel and Mother, Annina and Michele, Bishop and the children).

A thesis presented to the Music Department

Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

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By Julia R. O'Toole

The purpose of this thesis was to examine the ways in which Gian Carlo Menotti engaged voices and instruments to create humanity in the characters through the music, focusing on three tragic operas: *The Consul*, *The Saint of Bleecker Street,* and *The Death of the Bishop of Brindisi*. The outcome of this study provides insights that can be applied to performance of these and potentially other Menotti operas. This study concentrated on

two prominent tragic characters in each work. A brief biographical background was presented to establish context from which Mr. Menotti wrote, followed by a sampling of reviews for perspective into how these operas have been received, and synopses.

Findings are supported through examination of form, and of the relationship between orchestration and voicing. The following methods were engaged: historical research, analysis of practical application of traditional uses for orchestral instruments, harmonic and rhythmic analysis of the full scores, scrutiny and classification of drama and form, review of text, theme and motive identification, interviews with performers and audience members, and statements by the composer.

The conclusion of the study is that Menotti successfully used the music to establish identifiable, relatable shades of human emotion and expression. He achieved this level of humanization by capitalizing on the strengths of individual instruments and voices and ensembles, joining words and music in a way that defies separation, and evolving standard opera form to better mirror real human action and reaction. Clearly defined and musically individualized characters (particularly the six characters examined in this thesis) provide a convincing emotional experience for the audience.

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These works were chosen to represent tragedy in three different but related genres of Menotti's dramatic works: The Consul - chamber opera, The Saint of Bleecker Street - grand opera, The Death of the Bishop of Brindisi - cantata.

"As a stage director, Menotti translates action into emotion."[1] – Samuel Chotzinoff

Chotzinoff's observation was accurate, but Gian Carlo Menotti was much more than a stage director. In fact, his role as a stage director was subservient to his primary role a composer/librettist. As a composer who wrote his own librettos, he had the capacity and the freedom to form the music and the words to best humanize the characters and by extension, his operas.[2]

[1] Samuel Chotzinoff, A Little Nightmusic (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 59.

[2] To humanize is to give something a human character, or to portray or endow with human characteristics or attributes according to Merriam-Webster, accessed July 9, 2011, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/humanize.

Menotti – Biography

Gian Carlo Menotti was born in the small town of Cadegliano in Northern Italy on July 7, 1911. His family was a prosperous part-owner of a South American coffee exporting company. His mother, Ines, was an enthusiastic amateur musician that taught member of their village to sing Gregorian chant; the remnants of those memories appear in many of his works. Gian Carlo was the sixth of eight children, and apparently the only one with any significant degree of musical talent. He wrote his first opera at the age of eleven, and in recognizing his gifts, his mother secured instruction in piano, violin, and cello. When he was thirteen, the family moved to Milan, and he was enrolled in the Verdi Conservatory of Music.

After his father died in 1928, the family fortune was altered significantly. Concerned that her son needed more music instruction than she could provide for him, Ines Menotti reached out to Arturo Toscanini, and asked his assistance in enrolling Gian Carlo at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia. Toscanini's wife wrote an introductory letter to Rosario Scalero, Curtis's eminent professor of composition, who then agreed to meet with Gian Carlo, but accept him only if he proved to be as gifted as he was described. Menotti was accepted; Scalero promised the boy that the work would be hard and uncompromising, and required a commitment to meet those challenges.

So in the fall of 1928, Ines Menotti left her son in America, residing with a family of Italian-Americans, but unable to speak English, completely alone. The afternoon she left it was rainy, and the streets were deserted. Menotti recalled later that it was immensely sad, and both burst into great sobs as she entered the gate where her train was waiting. "She could not look back. And so, off she went. I was on my own."[3]

Menotti met his lifelong companion Samuel Barber at Curtis. Throughout their lives, they shared homes, friends, and music. Menotti wrote the libretto for Barber's opera *Vanessa*, and they appear in countless interviews about one another, critiquing and commenting on each other's work. In 1933, they moved to Vienna, and it was there that Menotti found the inspiration for his first public opera, *Amelia al Ballo*.

In 1939, Samuel Chotzinoff, music consultant to NBC Radio Network, approached Gian Carlo to write an opera specifically for radio, the first such commission ever given. The opera was to be decidedly American in theme, and therefore widely accessible to a radio audience. The result was *The Old Maid and the Thief*.

Menotti would continue throughout his life to bring "firsts" to the public. *Amahl and the Night Visitors* was written specifically for television, and continues to be a Christmas classic. *The Consul* made its greatest statement by being presented in the Ethel Barrymore Theatre – not an opera house. This helped to break the barrier between opera which was perceived as high-brow, and music theater which was thought of as for the

[3] John Gruen, Menotti (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1978), 17.

general public. Menotti wrote not only the music for his operas, but also the libretto, and directed the premier performances of his own works. In 1958, he founded the Spoleto Festival of Two Worlds, which eventually yielded its sister city in Charleston, South Carolina in 1977. (The South Carolina site has since closed as the official second city of the festival, but presents a similar event under the same name.) The purpose of this festival was to provide young artists – musicians, visual artists, dancers and theater personnel – an opportunity to perform at the highest level, in an "intellectual commune"[4]. Menotti himself said the official reason for starting the festival was "for the joy of it".[5]

In 1974, Menotti adopted Francis "Chip" Phelan as his son. Chip had had a difficult childhood, and suffered with alcoholism and depression, as well as debilitating headaches. He was a skillful skater and talented actor, and performed in several of Menotti's operas. Eventually he took over the presidency of the Spoleto Festival (1994), and became artistic director (1999). After Gian Carlo died in 2007, disagreements between Chip and various supporting foundations arose, causing a decline in funding. Recently, Chip left his position with the Spoleto Festival.

Gian Carlo Menotti died at the age of 95 in Monaco in 2007. He described his life in the words of Jorge Luis Borges, "scattering his gifts with indifferent glee".[6]

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[4] An "intellectual commune" is how Oliver Smith described Menotti's vision for the Festival. (Gruen, 1978, p. 131)

[5] John Gruen, Menotti (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1978), 131.

[6] John Ardoin, The Stages of Menotti (Garden City NY: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1985), pg. 15.

Life influences music

Throughout Gian Carlo's life, he experienced a number of "unusual" characters and events. Many of these strongly influenced his writing, including all three works of this paper, *The Consul*, *The Death of the Bishop of Brindisi*, and *The Saint of Bleecker Street*.

There are several events that brought mysticism and the supernatural to the forefront of Menotti's compositional mind. During the spring of 1936, Sam and Gian Carlo vacationed in Salzburg and Grenoble, staying in the countryside rather than succumb to the more costly temptations presented in the cities. Nearby, a Dutch baron and his wife had an estate where they often invited the composers for tennis, dinner, and a bath (there was no running water in their cottage). Tuesdays and Fridays they would visit the couple, and after dinner, the baroness would excuse herself to "go to chapel". Finally, Menotti asked the baron about his wife's mysterious visit to an apparently invisible chapel. The baron replied, "It isn't really a chapel. It's a room in which my wife holds séances[7]" Their daughter had died at the age of 14 and the baroness believed she could see and speak with their dead daughter.

"Of course, I became instantly fascinated and asked the baroness whether she would allow me to come to one of her séances…We sat in the dark around a table. Suddenly she went into a trance and began speaking to her daughter. She kept saying 'Doodly, Doodly, [the daughter's nickname] can you hear me?' It was a tremendously moving experience

[7] Ibid., 28.

for me, so much so that I found myself with tears streaming down my cheeks. There was no doubt that the baroness was actually seeing her daughter. I, on the other hand, saw nothing at all. It gave me pause, because she *believed* and could see, while I didn't believe and therefore couldn't see anything. It made me wonder whether belief was a creative power and whether skepticism could destroy creative powers."[8]

This wonder bloomed into a fascination unto itself, and is central to *The Saint of Bleecker Street*. There were a number of these experiences: a neighboring couple that held séances in the seaside vacation town of his youth, or the father and his thirty-something year old daughter sitting at a nearby restaurant table, her with an odd white streak through her hair, suddenly and repeatedly screaming out "No!" in the middle of their meal without visible cause. This woman would become the basis of one of the characters in *The Consul*.

The second influence is therefore related, but distinctly separate for Menotti – the juxtaposition of faith and reason. This may have begun with his relative Liline Bianchini who developed religious mania and had hallucinations, eventually committing suicide after being released from a mental institution; she was also one of Gian Carlo's first organ instructors[9]. The impact of religion was further deepened by a local priest, Don Rimoldi, who was a strict and domineering leader with a wild imagination and strange obsessions.

"He was one of the great forces of the town, "Menotti recalled. "He was a sort of genius, passionately fond of astronomy, and obsessive about machinery and progress…..He was also obsessed about sex. All over his house were signs reading 'Woman is the Devil' or 'Woman is unclean'. An old peasant woman was his servant, but he could not bear to be

[8] Ibid, 28.

[9] Ibid, pg. 9.

in her presence. In order not to see her he installed an intercom system….She would bring food to the table and disappear. Only then would the priest come in to eat."[10]

He did not care to hear confessions, and so drew up a list of the most popular confessed sins, which he then handed out and had parishioners check off, rather than hear individual transgressions. Gian Carlo became increasingly aware of the inconsistencies of his Catholic upbringing (in which he was deeply embedded), when he noticed that Don Rimoldi's sermons tended to center on the mysteries of astronomical phenomena, and the occurrence mildly heretic dancing and singing on the alter during mass, encouraged of the children in his parish by the priest. Throughout his compositions, instances of these experiences appear in the form of the stigmata, miracles, rites and rituals, and an ambitious desire for spiritual knowledge and revelation.

In *The Consul*, *The Saint of Bleecker Street*, and *The Death of the Bishop of Brindisi*, visions, dreams, memories, and hallucinations are woven into the lives of the characters with significance. These types of occurrences in his own life made tangible the impact of mysticism and faith/reason, and his operas offered a way to illustrate the impact of these influences in several arenas. At the same time, they widen the expanse of the drama into a fourth dimension of sorts, creating innovative ways to give more human detail through the music/text relationship.

As is the case with any imaginative writer, life experiences of their own are also colored with the broader news and events of the day. On February 12, 1947, The New York

[10] Ibid, pg 9.

Times printed a timely story: “Immigrant a Suicide. Woman Denied Entry to the U.S. Hangs Herself on Ellis Island.” Sofia Feldy, the woman in the article, became Magda Sorel in Menotti’s *The Consul*.

Reviews

"Menotti combined the theatrical sense of a popular playwright and a Pucciniesque musical vocabulary with an Italianate love of liquid language and a humane interest in characters as real human beings; the result was opera more accessible than anyone else's at the time. Writing his own librettos, Menotti had a knack for choosing timeless themes of human conflict in topical settings.[11]" – H. Wiley Hitchcock

"In himself an entirely trivial artist, Menotti is mainly interesting on account of his highly successful exploitation of the bad old ways. Menotti is a sensationalist in the old style, and in fact a weak one, diluting the faults of Strauss and Puccini with none of their fugitive virtues.[12]" – Joseph Kerman

"The opening "scene" between the bishop and a nun is typical of the composer's skill in handling the *parlando* style in English. The text…is by Menotti. It "sets" well, and bears the unmistakable stamp of a writer who knows what he needs to make a dramatic point. The musical style stems from Menotti's well-known and highly successful operatic idiom. It is tonal, triadic, and enlivened by characteristic twists of harmony and melodic line…The very obviousness of the music, in itself never a source of embarrassment to Menotti, is here a positive point."[13] – J. F. Goosen, on *The Death of the Bishop of Brindisi*

There are countless reviews of Menotti's operas, some positive, some not. His earlier works in particular were commercially successful. While that does not necessarily preclude them from also being great opera, it brightens the spotlight under which they are scrutinized. Many of Menotti's contemporaries were composing with non-traditional methods – serialism, twelve-tone, computer-based works, etc. There is little, and very

[11] H. Wiley Hitchcock, Music in the United States, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1988), 230.

[12] Joseph Kerman, Opera as Drama, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), 264.

[13] J. F. Goossen, review of *The Death of the Bishop of Brindisi*: Notes, Second Series, Vol. 21, No. 4 (Autumn, 1964), p. 619.

select evidence of these forms in Menotti's works, which caused some to label him old-fashioned. Words like "Pucciniesque" bear both sword edges, as large, dramatic, sweeping, beautiful opera, but also as dated, out of fashion, and (for the thinking of the time), simplistic.

Some reviewers felt his characters lacked musical identity. Cecil Smith states,

"It is a serious, not to say a fatal, defect in Menotti's craft that he is largely unable to delineate his characters through the music they sing. Nobody confuses Rigoletto's emotions with those of Gilda, or Beckmesser's with Hans Sach's; their individuality is apparent in their music. But Menotti's tunes seldom differentiate one character from another."[14]

He elaborates about the relationship between voice and orchestra:

"The work would have profited from a far more adroit command of the many varying ways in which voice parts can be related to the text on one hand and to the orchestral accompaniment on the other. And the role of the orchestra is too servile; it contributes little to either the moments of high eloquence or the workaday task of moving the musical ideas ahead, and it works too hard at reiterating rhythmic mottos and providing sound effects."[15]

The very purpose, message, and expression of *The Consul*, however, are that we are all faceless, nameless beings, indistinguishable from one another. It is just as likely that Menotti's setting of the characters in this opera, including the instruments, was deliberately not distinctly singular. In *The Saint of Bleecker Street* (which premiered years after Mr. Smith's review of *The Consul*), the primary have very unique music that ultimately contributes greatly to their relevance to the audience.

[14] Cecil Smith, review of *The Consul*: Notes, Second Series, Vol. 8, No. 1 (Dec. 1950), pg. 125.

[15] Ibid., pg. 126.

Very commonly, reviewers through the years have stated some version of the following: Menotti is a good composer – not great. He is also a good librettist. When he combines the two, his operas truly become great works of art. It is in his feeling for the text and how he crafts the music to communicate the drama and the emotion that Menotti was genius. Some felt the libretti he wrote were particularly strong in capturing the expression of the characters and circumstances – if only he could find a composer of equal strength. Others found the music glorious in its power to evoke response and true feeling, and the text as a weak link. John Gruen observes:

"Superficial critics have called Menotti's music background music…[It is his] enormously skillful blending of words and music, without the presence of great melodic sweeps [which] succeeded in keeping audiences completely riveted to the storyline….The fact is, no opera can be digestible unless it has musical value…If a strong play is not transfigured by very strong music, the music becomes a hindrance…Without the propelling drive and texture of Menotti's score, without its acute and subtly integrated momentum, which binds music to word, word to action, action back to music, [Menotti's opera] would not have been a success."[16]

Menotti himself felt strongly that ultimately, the music held priority. He said, "When necessary I always sacrifice the libretto to the music. I cut scenes and scenes, often with a bleeding heart, out of my operas."[17] An admirer of Wagner's beauty in musical composition, he said this about the text:

"He revolutionized so much in music. I think that perhaps what one thinks of as overblown in Wagner is the fact that he was a victim of his own librettos. He took

[16] John Gruen, Menotti (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1978), 68-69. [Gruen was specifically using Menotti's *The Medium* as an example in this case.]

[17] Samuel Chotzinoff, "Gian Carlo Menotti", A Little Nightmusic (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), pg. 69.

himself so seriously as a writer that he was unable to cut his librettos to size. To use every word he wrote, he just trashed his music. It becomes very repetitious."[18]

While Menotti considered the music to take precedence over the libretto, he in no way found the voice (the instrument of text) to be a secondary instrument. To him, the voice was the epitome of emotional conduit. He wrote:

> There is a certain indolence toward the use of the voice today, a tendency to treat the voice instrumentally, as if composers feared that its texture is too expressive, too *human*."[19]

[18] Bruce Duffie , in interview series with Menotti, (1981); audio copy on file at Yale University in the Oral History American Music Archive.

[19] Donald L. Hixon, Gian Carlo Menotti: A Bio Biography (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), pg.14.

Synopses of *The Consul, The Saint of Bleecker Street,* and *The Death of the Bishop of Brindisi*

Before examining the musical aspects of these three pieces, it is important to review their synopses side by side, recognizing similarities, dramatic themes, and the relationship between the characters.

The Consul

[Premiered March 1, 1950 in Philadelphia, followed by an official premiere March 15, 1950 at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre]

Characters:

Magda Sorel (soprano)	thirty-three year old wife of John
John Sorel (baritone)	married to Magda, a political dissident, who flees the country in fear for his life
Mother (contralto)	John Sorel's mother
Baby (silent)	John and Magda's infant son
Secretary (mezzo-soprano)	the Consul's secretary, administrator, and "gatekeeper"
Police Agent (bass) and his two officers (silent)	pursuers of John who keep Magda and her family under threatening surveillance

Magician (tenor), Mr. Kofner (baritone), Foreign Woman (soprano), Anna Gomez (soprano), Vera Boronel (mezzo-soprano)	others in the Consul‘s waiting room, each with his or her own story, caught in the same web of red tape as Magda and John
Assan (baritone)	friend and co-conspirator of John

Setting: an unnamed country, held under an unnamed regime, at an unspecified time, but probably sometime in the mid-twentieth century. The opera takes place over several months.

John Sorel is being pursued by the Secret Police. After being shot in the street, he goes into hiding, and his wife, Magda begins the process of approval for herself, her mother-in-law, and her baby to leave the country to be with John. The Police Agent, a menacing, blatantly cruel officer of the state, constantly hounds Magda to tell him where John or any of John’s friends are.

Magda goes to the Consulate daily to secure papers that will allow her family to reunite in safety. At the Consulate, she is greeted by the Secretary whose job it is to insure that all candidates asking permission to leave have the appropriate and necessary paperwork – the list of which is unending. Magda encounters several other characters dealing with the same obstacles at the Consulate, each with their own sad tale.

She endures a wild and disturbing nightmare in which John returns to her with the Secretary as his sister, and tells Magda she must accept the woman into their home, into

their bed.[20] The dream ends with John realizing that the Baby has died, and accusing Magda of either causing the death or hiding it from him.

While at the Consulate, Mother (John's mother) takes care of the infant. Mother and Baby suffer from cold, hunger, and illness, and it is unclear whether these are common conditions of the state or a result of restrictions imposed by the Police Agent in an effort to gain information about John. In a moving scene, Mother rocks Baby, and as she sings a hauntingly beautiful lullaby, she discovers that the baby has died in her arms. Since Mother's self-stated purpose in life was to care for the baby, she eventually dies as well.

As Magda continues her efforts at the Consulate, she tries to prevent news of these deaths getting to John, as she knows that if he hears of these tragedies, he will return to her at his own peril. One day, at the Consulate, Vera, the character with the least to lose by staying in the country, is granted permission to leave. Magda flies into a storm of anger and frustration, and sings her only true aria in the opera. She decides she must save John, and since there is no hope at the Consulate, and nothing more for her at home, she will sacrifice herself, sending John an explanatory note via Assan.

Immediately after she leaves the Consulate, the Secretary is closing the office for the day and notices that Magda left her purse. Suddenly John bursts in seeking refuge and his wife. Although he knows his life is in danger, he risks himself to try and save Magda. Quick on his heels are the Police Agent and his henchmen. The Secretary tells the Police

[20] There are several instances in Menotti operas, including this reference and one in *The Saint of Bleecker Street* where he touches on incestuous relationships, and in each case they are viewed by the characters as the ultimate in the degradation of human nature.

that John cannot be arrested while in the Consul's office, but cannot protect him when the Police Agent forces John to say (after a kick to the groin) that he will go with them of his own free will. The Secretary shouts after them that she will call Magda herself with this news.

Magda meanwhile arrives at home, and after stuffing blankets under the door, turns on the stove's gas and puts her head in the oven, breathing deeply. As she falls asleep, she is once again taken over by nightmarish visions, in which all of the characters from the Consulate dance and sing around her, and John and his Mother appear dressed to be married. As she takes her final breaths, the telephone begins to ring.

The Saint of Bleecker Street

[Premiered December 27, 1954 at the Broadway Theater]

Characters:

Annina (soprano)	A devoutly religious but very ill young woman who sees sacred visions; on Good Fridays she bears the stigmata, and plans to take sacred vows and become a nun
Michele (tenor)	Annina's brother, with whom she lives, who is skeptical of her faith, but even more so that of the followers who call Annina their "Little Saint"; he forbids her to take holy vows
Don Marco (bass-baritone)	A priest
Assunta (mezzo-soprano)	A religious neighbor (in some revisions of the score, she is called a nun)
Carmela (soprano)	Annina's best friend, who was supposed to take the veil with her, but falls in love with Salvatore and marries him
Salvatore (baritone)	Carmela's (eventual) husband
Desideria (mezzo-soprano)	Michele's girlfriend, and a social outcast of the neighborhood; she is viewed as "loose" because of her relationship out of wedlock with Michele
Maria Corona (soprano)	Newspaper vendor, believer in horoscopes and a bit of a troublemaker
Various neighbors, wedding guests, followers	

Setting: New York's Little Italy. The opera begins on Good Friday afternoon, and takes place over fourteen months.

A crowd of believers await Annina's appearance from her bedroom, where she has been lying sick. They are hoping that once again she will bear the stigmata[21], see visions, and cure them of their ailments. Eventually Annina appears, struck with visions of the crucifixion of Jesus as if she were present. She observes the soldiers, and his mother Mary, and feels Jesus's pain at the climax. She comes out of the vision and faints, displaying the stigmata on her palms. Michele bursts in, shouting at the throngs of people to get out of his home and leave the two of them alone.

The following September, Carmela and Annina are outside the tenement, costuming a young child for the impending Feast of San Gennaro (patron saint of Naples, who is celebrated in an eleven-day festival, concluding with a great parade through Little Italy). Carmela breaks down, telling Annina that although she promised to take holy vows together, she has fallen in love and plans to marry. To her surprise, Annina is happy for her, and talks of her own planned nuptials as the bride of Christ. Maria Corona interrupts, bringing news that Michele is in danger, as the neighbors have heard that he forbade

[21] Stigmata are marks or wounds that coincide with the crucifixion wounds of Jesus, including hands and feet, and sometimes wrists or the side. They may bleed unexplainably, and then heal, without infection, but are very painful. A sweet smell (the Odour of Sanctity) is sometimes perceptible. They are hotly debated as the product of psychotic hysterical phenomena versus the sign of a chosen "saint". Historically, people afflicted with the stigmata exhibit them during Holy Week, the time of the crucifixion. In addition to the highly charged religious element, bearers may be pursued for their ability to cure the sick. Almost three times as many women as men are said to bear the stigmata. Padre Pio is one of the more famous bearers, as was St. Francis of Assisi.(from various sources, incl. Wikipedia and anonymous personal contact in the RCC).

Annina to participate in the feast day parade. Michele appears, telling Annina that he will take her away from all of this manmade nonsense, to another place of humanly love. The crowd overtakes Michele, beats him, and ties him to a fence. They capture a terrified Annina, and carry her, their "Little Saint" to the procession. Desideria arrives, and unbinds Michele, kissing him passionately.

The following May, at the wedding of Carmela and Salvatore, toasts are given, and songs are sung in praise of the bride. Michele participates, but is interrupted by the arrival of Desideria, who is the only neighbor who has not been invited to the wedding. She knows that they call her a whore, and yet find it perfectly acceptable that Michele, her lover, attend the sacramental festivities. She begs him to stand up for her, and escort her into the festivities. He reluctantly agrees, but is faced with Salvatore and guests who challenge him. Don Marco tries to discourage Michele from causing a scene, "for Annina's sake". When left alone, Desideria accuses Michele of being in love with Annina[22], and claims that is why he will not marry her. In anger, Michele grabs a knife and stabs her. Realizing what he has done, he flees, leaving Annina to pray with Desideria as she dies in her arms.

Sometime during the next couple of days, Annina meets up with Michele at a newspaper stand in a subway station. This arrangement has been made at Annina's request by Don Marco. It is there that Annina tells Michele that she is dying, and with only a few days remaining, she will take the veil. He protests saying that he needs her now more than

[22] Another reference to incest, as mentioned in footnote 20.

ever, and becoming a nun would mean abandoning him. She says she can hope to save his soul, but not his life. Michele curses her and runs away.

One week later, Annina lies in bed, waiting for special permission from the Church to pledge holy vows. Carmela gives Annina her wedding dress so she might meet Christ as his bride. The permission arrives, and Don Marco begins to administer the sacred rite. As Annina prostrates herself, accepting the sacrament, Michele bursts in, begging her to stop, but it is too late. Annina sinks to floor, and as Carmela holds her dead body, Don Marco places the wedding ring of Christ on her finger.

The Death of the Bishop of Brindisi

[Premiered in a concert performance at the May Festival in Cincinnati in 1963]

Libretto based on historical information about the Children's Crusades of the thirteenth century[23].

Characters:

Bishop (baritone)	On his deathbed, tortured by guilt; believes he hears the voices of children of the Crusades who died after he faithfully blessed them on their journey to defeat the Holy Land
Nun (mezzo-soprano)	The Bishop's caretaker
Chorus of townspeople	Visions in the Bishop's memories; first as welcoming townspeople for the children's march, then urging him to bless them on their way, finally accusing him of leading them all astray, not exercising God's protection over the children's ships
Chorus of Children	Visions in the Bishop's memories, arriving from their long march, sailing away to the

[23] **Pious and Profane** Program Notes for concert presented by Calliope, February 5, 2011, Old West Church, Boston MA. In the year 1212, after traveling through the Swiss Alps into Italy, thousands of children in a self-sacrificing mission as God's army set sail from the port of Brindisi to the Holy Land, with the intent to convert Muslims peacefully to Christianity. These Children's Crusades are well documented [http://www.historyguide.org/ancient/children.html offers a particularly detailed telling]. As he so often does, Menotti (an avid student of history) chose children as a primary character in this moral story. Memories are given voice as the children sing goodbyes to people waving from the shore, as they pray with innocence "I shall kiss Our Lord's tomb, I shall free the Holy Land!", and finally as they cry out in desperate fear, while the ships heave against the waves in a great storm. The Bishop agonizes over the blessing he gave the children, marching enrobed in blind belief, to be lost at sea, or for the survivors, taken by pirates and sold as slaves.

Holy Land, and then perishing, screaming for their parents, as their ships sink in a violent storm

Setting: The bedroom of the Bishop, sometime in the thirteenth century.
As night falls, the Bishop dreads the dreams that haunt him. He hears the children he blessed, and begs the Nun to lock the doors, so they cannot torture him. She works to calm him, assuring him that only the storm beats on the door. He insists the children are there, bloodless and glass eyed, hung with weeds, and calling for help. She asks why he fears the voices of children, and encourages him as death approaches swiftly, to forgive himself and allow his soul to ascend to heaven.

The arrival of the children in the coastal town is painted by the memories recounted by the Bishop,. The children talk of the parents they left behind, and of the arduous journey they have already had through the mountains to come to the shore where they will board ships that will take them to the Holy Land. There they will use peace as their only weapon to bring God to the heathens. The Bishop recalls the townspeople urging him to bless the children on their way. From time to time he is brought back to the present, begging to understand why he was chosen for this purpose, while the Nun tries to quiet him. She reminds him that he tried to stop them, but the townspeople persisted.

The storm rises in the Bishop's vision, waves crashing, ships churning, children screaming in fear, calling for their parents, and for the Bishop to help them. The children sink below the waves and perish. The townspeople curse the Bishop. He questions God's decision to have placed him in a position to lead like a shepherd, as he is a shepherd that

led his flock to their doom. The Nun tells him to not ask vain questions, but to prepare for his death. She chants *Requiem Aeternam* - rest in peace - as he dies. The townspeople and children appear one last time in his dying dream, offering him forgiveness, and eternal sleep.

All three works share the dichotomy of faith opposing reason, whether religious in nature or faith in "the system". All three include at least one primary character battling both an internal and external struggle. *The Consul* and *The Death of the Bishop of Brindisi* engage passing time and the contrast between youth and old age as significant unifying elements. Each of the three has at least one doomed heroic character, whose fulfillment of their heroism is unsatisfied, or incomplete. *The Bishop* and *The Consul* are chamber pieces, with a small orchestra. *The Consul* contains no chorus but for the small ensemble parts coming together, while in *The Saint* and *The Bishop*, the choruses are a character or persona unto themselves.

In examining how successfully Menotti uses and combines instruments, orchestral and vocal, to humanize the drama, there are two areas this paper explores:

I. Form

II. Orchestration and voicing

Form

There is much debate about the genre in which these three works fall. In part, this is because of Menotti's choice of venues to present the works: *The Consul* and *The Saint of Bleecker Street* both met the public first on a theater stage, rather than in an opera house. In the case of *The Saint*, the Broadway Theater has a long history of vaudeville shows, films, and in 1939 it was purchased by the Schuberts, and has since shown primarily musical theater. Also owned by the Schuberts, the Ethel Barrymore Theatre's repertoire has been limited to musical theater – *The Consul* was an exception. *The Death of the Bishop of Brindisi* premiered at the May Festival in Cincinnati, a two-week annual choral festival charged with helping to keep rich choral tradition alive in the U.S. and Europe. While a number of its conductors were deeply involved in opera (Levine, Rudolf, Rudel), the festival remains focused on choral works.

Beyond the gray area created by the choice of stage, Menotti and his publishers (G. Schirmer & Associated Music Publishers) have described these works in a variety of ways, as have performers and others.

"The title page of G. Schirmer's piano-vocal score of *The Bishop* does not designate the genre of Menotti's creation. According to numerous encyclopedia entries, the composer

called it a dramatic cantata, though important others do label it an opera."[24] says Bruce Burroughs, opera singer (who played the Bishop in the 1970s) and music journalist. He goes on to say, "*The Bishop* is so theatrical and involving that it cries out to be staged, and since its world premiere (in a concert performance at the May Festival in Cincinnati in 1963), that seems to be the way it is most often presented."[25]

The Consul was designated by Menotti as "musical drama", which was considered a new form. B.H. Haggin (music critic) weighed in, "*The Consul*…is not a new kind of musical drama which had to be performed in a Broadway theatre instead of an opera house, it is an opera which could have been performed in the Metropolitan and which would have been as successful there as in the [Ethel] Barrymore [Theatre]. [26] Menotti also called *The Saint of Bleecker Street* a musical drama (in three acts and five scenes).

All three of these works can be defined as opera per The Oxford Dictionary of Music:

> *Opera is a drama set to music to be sung with instrumental accompaniment by singers usually in costume. Recitative or spoken dialogue may separate the numbers, but the essence of opera is that the music is integral and is not incidental, as in a 'musical', or play with music.*[27]

[24] Bruce Burroughs, *The Death of the Bishop of Brindisi*, accessed July 9, 2011, http://www.bruceburroughs.com/Bishop.html.

[25] Ibid.

[26] B.H. Haggin., Nation, June 3, 1950, p. 558.

[27] Michael Kennedy, The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Music, Third Edition, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 463.

Within this definition of the three works, however, there are clear distinctions in terms of overall form. *The Saint of Bleecker Street* is grand opera, requiring a symphony orchestra of sixty, a large chorus, fourteen supporting and minor roles, and vocal skill and stamina for the lead singers on par with Verdi opera. It runs a little over two hours long. *The Consul* is a much smaller production, about ninety minutes in length, with no chorus, a small orchestra, and fourteen characters – a chamber opera. *The Death of the Bishop of Brindisi* can also be defined as a chamber opera, as it has only two characters, a small twenty-five piece orchestra, and two choruses; its runtime is about thirty minutes. The only one of the three that has been labeled a "cantata", it can be as easily performed in concert as with dramatic staging.

Menotti's blurring of recitative and aria is vital in breathing the reality of human emotion in to tragic characters. In all three works, the traditional separation of recitative and aria/duet/small vocal ensemble is blurred. Again referring to The Oxford Dictionary of Music, recitative is defined as declamatory speech-like singing used to advance the plot, while aria is often more reflective or serves as expression rather than action. In these works, it is often difficult to determine whether what is being heard is recitative or aria. Beginning with *The Consul*, the first of the three chronologically, "Menotti deliberately tried to move away from Italian number opera tradition by deemphasizing set pieces and concentrating on long melodic lines in recitative, 'the language of action', and avoiding the aria as long as possible,"[28] according to Richard Marriot. In all three works, arias and

[28] Richard John Marriot, Gian-Carlo Menotti: total musical theatre. A study of his operas. (PhD diss., University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, 1975), from an interview with Gian Carlo Menotti, September 9, 1973.

small ensembles weave in and out of continuous melodic recitative. As a result, much of the music falls into an "arioso" category: [a.] a recitative of the more melodious type, or [b.] a short melodious passage at the beginning or end of an aria.[29] This change from traditional opera division of movements is significant in the humanization of the characters.

The result of this seamless presentation is a more realistic flow of emotion, not bound by the framework of traditional recitative and aria. **Characters are free to express in the most practical and immediate form, whether it be declamatory and speech-like, or more melodious and musical. With the same freedom, action weaves in and out of the human emotion, much like it does in real life, creating characters and situations that are much more three-dimensional and relevant.**

In *The Consul*, dramatic action is enveloped specifically in orchestral passages, without voice. These help to separate the scenes into sections based on action and reaction, however, the separation of plot advancement and reflection do not necessarily coincide with these sections, nor with a division of recitative vs. aria styling. For example, in Act I, scene 1, Magda and Mother react with a brief arioso duet (rehearsal. 8, "Oh, John what have you done?"), engaging motives that will occur in arias later in the opera, but in a

[29] Michael Kennedy, The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Music, Third Edition, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 25.

form closer to recitative than classical duet. In contrast, the advancement of plot is given by John in aria form. Later in the same scene, however, Mother will reflect at length in the aria, "Shall we ever see the end of all this?" (rehearsal 23), and more briefly in recitative-like arioso, "Oh, God! How long must women cry over man's destiny?" (rehearsal 38).

Throughout the opera, Mother has the most traditional arias, reflective and expressive, that can be separated from the continuous melodic line that encompasses both recitative and aria forms. Not coincidentally, she is also the character in the most traditional personal role – the grandmother who stays at home, rocking her grandchild to sleep, or the mother who worries audibly for her adult son's safety. The first traditional aria is the one mentioned above, "Shall we ever see the end of all this?" (rehearsal 23). The second is in Act II, and is one of the opera's two arias that are often performed as a stand-alone piece, "Mother's Lullaby" (rehearsal 8). Her final definitive aria is in Act II, "For John" (rehearsal 43). She also participates in two reflective trios with Magda and John, one in each act, and in the final large ensemble at the end of the opera, which is part of a dream sequence and is neither plot advancement nor reflection.

Magda has only one clear-cut aria, the other of the two sometimes performed as a stand-alone piece, "To this we've come" (Act II, rehearsal 96). Even this is divided by a recitative sequence and trio that return the listener to the plot action before resuming with "Papers" (rehearsal 103), in which she reacts in the emotional climax of the opera. Like

Mother, she participates in two reflective trios with John, but the rest of her music is a blend of action and reaction, of recitative and arioso, without division.

The Saint of Bleecker Street also fuses action and expression, recitative and aria forms. The overall structure of the opera is more traditional than *The Consul* in that it is in part built around the scene settings and time expanse of the action. Because of its larger and more embroiled cast of characters, specific timeline, and significant orchestra, the music hangs on a bigger frame. In addition, ceremonial music (e.g., sung prayers, religious chants, hymns, and traditional holy day and wedding tunes) plays a part in structuring the melodic line and language of action. Still, Menotti manages to blur the distinction between traditional recitative and aria. [30]

Annina's music is the most varied and complicated, often because she is seeing and verbalizing the action of her visions while simultaneously experiencing reactive emotion. In Act I, she catapults between action and emotion as she concurrently lives through and describes her visionary experience of Christ's crucifixion (rehearsal 28). Menotti crafts this combination of recitative and melody unpredictably and the result is that it captures the audience. We cannot see what Annina sees, and yet, by alternating in uneven fashion

[30] It is important to note here that Menotti's librettos were most often written in English. *The Saint of Bleecker Street* he wrote to be performed in either English or Italian. He is successful in both languages in capitalizing on the merging of recitative and aria.

between action and reaction, we are drawn in, forced to stay alert and aware of every note and every word. In the second scene of Act I, she again fluctuates between recitative and aria, but the content of the libretto is a story, a dream. In "Michael the archangel came to me" (rehearsal 77), her melodic line is very speech-like, but Menotti sets it so that the melodic patterns appear sequentially, including the responses of her friends repeating Annina's words. The rhythms are similar or the same throughout, but he creates a sense of aria by building them into an overall arching gesture that becomes predictably melodic.

Although this opera contains structural confines of ceremonial music and size, Menotti manages to build long stretches of recitative material into the work. In Act I, which is approximately thirty minutes in length, the only non-recitative section is Annina's vision of the crucifixion. In the second scene of twenty minutes, three-quarters of the scene is recitative. In Act II, Michele has the only definable aria section, three and half minutes out of the thirty minute act. In Act III, each of the two scenes has only one pure aria-style piece, and in the first scene, it is Michele and Annina's duet, resulting in only seven minutes out of the forty minute act. Compare this to Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro*, where almost one half of the total music time is aria form.

In The *Death of the Bishop of Brindisi*, written thirteen years after the premiere of *The Consul*, Menotti continued to interlace aria and recitative styles. Just as *The Saint of*

Bleecker Street was shaped in part around its grand dimensions, *The Bishop*'s form is dictated by its abbreviated components. The time frame is extremely short, just a few hours, as the Bishop lies on his deathbed. There are only two characters, the Bishop and the Nun. The role of the choruses, however, broadens the time and action of the piece, as the Bishop's memories are filled with the voices of children and townspeople. There is only one scene and setting, the bedroom of the Bishop, as the visions appear to him there.

It is difficult to separate the Bishop's aria and recitative parts, in part because, similar to Annina, much of what he shares is hallucination, or vision, so Menotti captures the action and the Bishop's emotional reaction simultaneously. This is a more *real* depiction of human response in this situation, as opposed to a telling of the vision (traditionally in recitative), followed by emotional response (in aria). Add to that the condensed frame of the work, and the result is even less room for segmentation. The two moments when the Bishop sings most in aria form are at the beginning, "And now the night begins" (rehearsal 1), as he dreads the coming of night which brings with it tortured memories, and just after the climax of the opera, when the children drown, and he returns from his memory to the present, condemning himself with horror, "I blessed them to their doom," (rehearsal 55).

The choruses' parts are in some ways more distinguishable, when they are not involved in dialogue with the Bishop's memory. In "Good men, let us pass" (rehearsal 15), the children speak for the first time, arriving to the town, without adults. Menotti captures the striking abnormality of the sight of hundreds of young children descending from the

mountains alone with a relatively lengthy, uneven march-like chorus. The response of the townsfolk to this odd sight is depicted in an adult-only chorus immediately following, "Behold the singing children," (rehearsal 24), which details the condition of the children while articulating the shocking impact their presence has on the people. "Give them your blessing, let them depart," (rehearsal 31) turns the townspeople's reaction into action, as they badger the Bishop to sanctify the children's voyage alone to the Holy Land. Finally, the two choruses (children and townspeople) join together as almost a third entity of "angels", releasing the Bishop of his guilt, forgiving him, as he passes into death, "Sleep in peace, o gentle pilgrim," (rehearsal 71), ending the opera.

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The rest of the opera is a stream of recitative, either the Bishop alone, or in dialogue with his memories or the Nun. The form of the work is shaped between pillars of the present, with memories that place action and resulting emotion along a brief timeline. The orchestra portrays the storm at sea in the center of the opera, providing a peak to the overall arch of the work.

The other key element Menotti specifies as imperative to the realness of human emotion is the observance of the length of pause. He builds these in two ways. First, he carefully places fermatas and/or instructive text where an extended wait captures the human pause reaction to a particular statement or happening. Second, he often uses the downbeat to reinforce or change the mood of the moment by not placing text in that moment, whether

it be a sixteenth, eighth, or longer duration rest. Instead he uses the orchestra in that significant moment of downbeat to suddenly color the emotion, strengthening or completely changing what the character and by audience experience.

"In my music, especially, especially in ….*The Consul*, the silences are as important as the sound…Please, when I ask for a long silence, I mean a long silence….There are certain moments…for example, in the first act of *The Consul*, when the chief of police comes and says to Magda, 'When did you see your husband last?' And she doesn't answer. Then he says, 'ANSWER ME!' Now, the way they generally do it is they say: 'When did you see your husband last? ANSWER ME!' I say, 'No! Wait!...you didn't do it long. You must feel the audience…You must feel the silence. If you say, 'When did you see your husband last? [pause] ANSWER ME!' Then it becomes a dramatic moment. The audience itself must say, "Is she going to answer or isn't she going to answer him?'"[31]

In this circumstance, realistically, Magda would delay answering, creating reason for a pause. Similarly, the Police would pause expecting her to answer the question, before changing tact and demanding an answer threateningly. The pause example here creates a more real, human exchange.

Although each of these operas has unique logistical boundaries that provide structure to their form, such as duration, size of orchestra, number of characters, brevity or length of time passing, they have in common an internal flow that deemphasizes the traditional opera format of aria and recitative, and creates a continuous melodic language of action and emotion. The insistence on breathing room and longer pauses by Menotti serves to strengthen the humanization created by this flow.

[31] Bruce Duffie, in interview series with Menotti, (1995); audio copy on file at Yale University in the Oral History American Music Archive.

Orchestration and voicing

As the librettist and composer, Menotti used precise combinations of voice and orchestral instruments, in grand ensemble and individually, to create opera that is relatable and human. Choices made breathe life into the emotions of the characters and the actions that trigger them.

Specific instruments in the orchestra invoke images or connotations through their traditional uses. An obvious example of this is the harp. Often associated with the sacred or mystical, the harp can be used as a solo instrument or in combination with others, deep in the texture of the music or more exposed. Menotti selects a group of these types of associative instruments, and uses some of them in each opera (harp, English horn, alto flute, bass clarinet, contrabassoon). In addition, Menotti relies heavily the clarinet, bass clarinet, French horn, trombone, and the piano at key moments in all three works.

Vocally, soloists occur in all four major voice parts, although without question, Menotti's use of the low registers of the female voice is distinctive and specific. The role of the vocal ensemble varies from opera to opera: *The Consul*'s vocal ensemble is formed of individual characters, *The Saint of Bleecker Street* has a large chorus of unnamed townspeople, neighbors and wedding guests in addition to the solo roles. *The Death of the*

Bishop of Brindisi has two choruses, one of unnamed adult townspeople and a second of unnamed children, and two solo roles.

Unaccompanied voice plays a significant part in all three works. Its effect can be to focus attention on the text in the moment, or to bring the action and reaction into a smaller, more intimate place. It is also used to frame a cry, shout, or emotional burst.

Critics often make mention of the sound "effects" Menotti incorporates without apology in his works. There are mixed reactions to these, but however one feels about their use in general, they add flavor, detail, and imagery. Some examples include the clacking of a train on tracks (*The Saint),* thunder (*The Consul*, produced by the lowest octaves "rumbling" per Menotti), the ticking of a gas stove pilot light (*The Consul*, by the oboe), rising storm and waves (*The Bishop*), heralding brass (hunting calls in *The Consul*, or soldiers in *The Saint*), nailing hands to the cross (*The Saint*, scored for anvil) and the extensive use of ceremonial music (wedding and solemn vows in *The Saint*, the Nun's "Requiem aeternam, dona eis Domine" in *The Bishop*.

Instrumentation by Opera

	The Consul	The Saint of Bleecker Street	The Death of the Bishop of Brindisi
Piccolo	X	X	
Flute	X	X	X
Alto Flute			X
Oboe	X	X	X
English Horn	X	X	
Clarinet	X	X	X
Bass Clarinet		X	X
Bassoon	X	X	X
Contrabassoon		X	
French Horn	X	X	X
Trumpet	X	X	X
Trombone	X	X	X
Tuba/Bass Trombone		X	X
Percussion	X (xylophone, cymbals, snare and bass drums)	X (triangle, cymbal, snare, bass drum, anvil)	X (gong, cymbal, bass drum, snare, xylophone, triangle)
Timpani	X	X	X
Violin	X	X	X
Viola	X	X	X
Cello	X	X	X
Bass	X	X	X
Harp	X	X	X
Piano	X	X	X (2)
Soloists	X	X	X
Chorus		X	Adult, children

It is no one instrument or voice part, however, that provides the human character and emotion to these operas, but the way in which Menotti chose to combine them. Associative instruments make appearances that help set the mood for a particular event. Beyond that, other instruments and voices combine in unique textures and sonorities to make real the human emotion and actions of the characters and situations.

The Consul

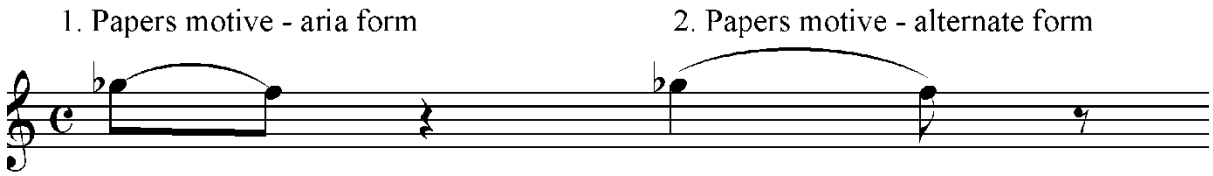
Of *The Consul* Menotti said:

"It carries on in the tradition of *The Medium* [1946]. By that time, my recitatives began to have a very definite style. Of course, thematically and musically *The Consul* is much stronger than *The Medium*. It is richer melodically. I felt that in *The Consul* I was able to give instant life to my characters, which I think is very rare in opera."[32]

The writing is largely tonal, although there are key moments, such as the dramatic action executed by the orchestra at the beginning that can be considered very dissonant, although not atonal. Menotti favors such musical devices as parallel chords, sequencing, and chromatic intervals as part of important motives.

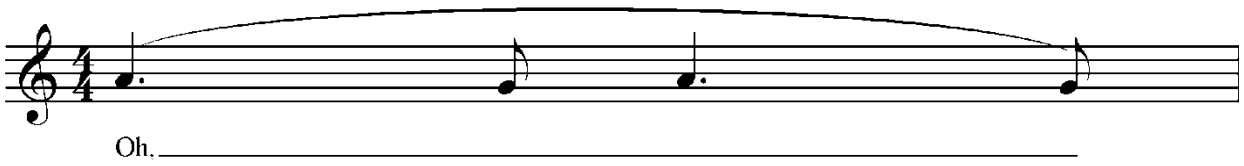
Before examining the relationship between instruments and voices, there are a number of important motives in *The Consul* that draw our attention. The passing of these motives between instruments and voices is effective in foreshadowing and recalling the emotional content of events, and in coloring the evolution of these emotions throughout the action of drama. They occur in original form, but also in inversion, with rhythmic changes, and in assorted variation. Those that are directly related to tragic characters Magda or Mother at key moments are:

[32] John Gruen, Menotti (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1978), 99.



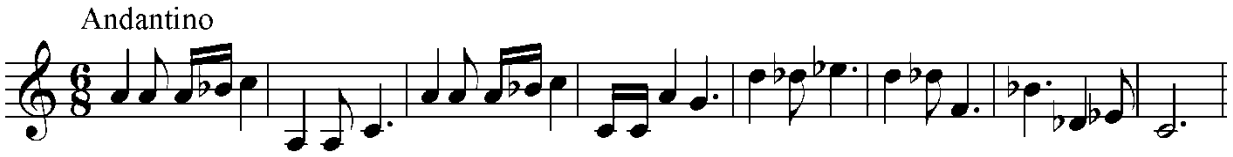
This is the most significant motive, and occurs throughout the opera, increasingly apparent as the drama unfolds. It is sometimes the focal point of a passage, but even more often, lurks in the background, played or sung by a secondary instrument or voice, or folded discreetly into a melody. Because it is a simple half step descent, it is ambiguous and easily malleable.

Mother's swoon motive

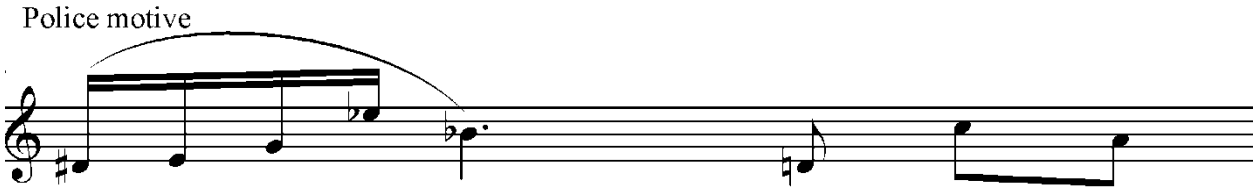


Another simple motive, and as such, can be subtle or obvious. It is often varied slightly, either via rhythm or repeated tones.

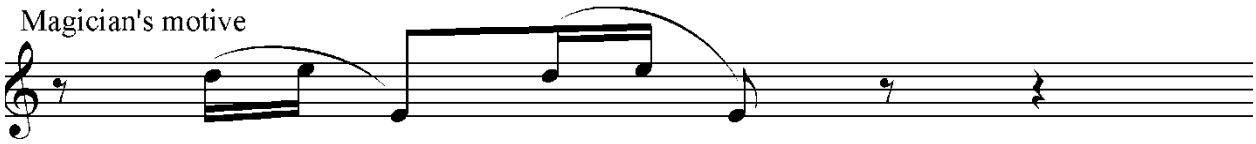
Mother's lullaby motive



This motive appears at various points in the opera. In the final verse of the lullaby proper, the B-flat becomes B-natural; other variations occur particularly when sung or played by another character.



This segment occurs in scenes where the Police Agent appears, as well as those where he (or the greater "They") are referred to. It is also used when the threat lurks even without conscious awareness by the Magda and Mother. It is played by almost all instruments at one time or another.



The Magician's motive occurs frequently, and because it plays a role in his "macabre hypnotic dance", every time it appears, it suggests that the characters are (momentarily) unbalanced, dazed, or acting "en masse", recalling the hypnosis scene at the Consulate. Indirectly, therefore, it is a reflection of Magda and Mother's emotional state.

Menotti's use of chromatics and large intervals (such as the repeated octave drops in the Magician's motive) are elements he turns to in all of his works, but in engaging different ensemble combinations and sonorities, the effects vary according to the human quality of the situation.

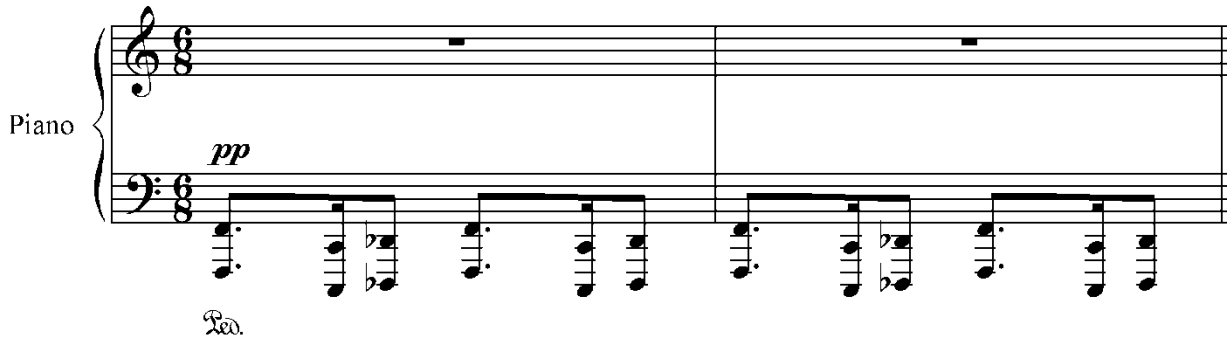
Piano

Menotti begins this dark and tragic opera with the sound of a record player from a café below the Sorel's window, which is playing a French song to an oddly well-known but unidentifiable tune. He scores this with a voice and piano off stage. The piano is established as "familiar", and therefore, close, local, and pedestrian. This association will occur throughout the opera. In addition, the lyrics of the song foreshadow the longing and desires of the main characters, but enveloped in a light melody. The juxtaposition is unsettling, although as a listener, it isn't clear yet why. The song on the record appears again to introduce the second act.

In Act I, the dramatic action (injured John's entrance) crashes in opposition to the introduction with heavy and muted brass, in combination with the low register of other sections of the orchestra (bassoon, viola, cello, bass, and the lowest octaves in the left hand of the piano). The effect is startling, harsh, and emotionally charged. These instruments ascend with grace note triplets and dynamic expanse until pulled up short as John falls, lying across a chair gasping for breath. The texture thins drastically, his gasps are personified in the wheezing slow half-step decline in the bassoon and trombone, over which the piano sketches out short bursts of paired octaves, simple and staccato triplet fragments (rehearsal 3). The piano focuses the action and emotion once again into a small, localized place. The record player re-emerges through the window as if it had always been there. The entrance lines of Magda and her Mother are short, recitative-like, urgent, and made more so by the contrast of the French song.

In the second act, scene 1, the piano again is used to concentrate and personalize, this time narrowing Magda's text from her dialogue with Mother to a feeling of isolation, talking to herself. After a recitative sequence with woodwinds and strings, this sudden and brief single measure of piano accompanying Magda's recollection of the Secretary's repetitious, mundane questions draws us inside of her, focusing intensely on the source of her current emotion.

In Act II, scene 1, (rehearsal 13) the piano introduces Magda's nightmare. Picking up the rhythmic theme from Mother's lullaby motive in parallel left hand octaves (below), once again, it draws the action into a more intimate spotlight.



The piano's initial insistence on a microscopic center to the drama is then enlarged by other instruments. This rhetorical growth stimulates the necessary broadening of the audience's imagination to accept the dream as a plausible event.

Later in this scene, Mother laments for John who will never again see his baby (rehearsal 43). At the end of the aria, the piano strikes a prophesy death toll for Mother. Without the baby to care for, she will succumb to her tired body. "Now let me fold my things and lock my doors. I have behind me nothing but sorrow, but believe that God receives with kindness the empty-handed traveler." While the woodwinds, strings, and harp continue to "sing" their simple accompaniment, Menotti cleverly inserts an octave G1 and G2, root of the chord, three times (rehearsal 47), clearly marked "bell-like", not overt, but suggestive of her fate. He did not choose to orchestrate this with percussion, which would be more realistic and logical, but instead chose the piano, again supporting a sense of intimacy, of closeness, of pedestrian sentiment indicative of Mother as a person and in her weak and unassuming state of mind.

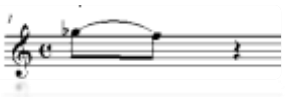
The intimacy of the piano is called on one final time at the end of the opera (rehearsal 78). As the Magician guides Magda into her final sleep in her hallucination, the steady, low left hand of the piano in half notes (doubled by the harp and timpani) again drags the drama, action, and emotion in to a small space, concentrated, converging with the rhythmic ensemble singing, "horizons, horizons". Magda's last breaths take center stage, audible and disturbing. Menotti's final instruction to the piano: "strike with elbows and let ring".

<u>English Horn</u>

The oboe and English horn are often played by the same person in a chamber orchestra such as used in *The Consul*. The English horn is generally associated with mourning

sound, melancholy, or rural airs, according to the Vienna Symphonic Library[33]. In *The Consul*, the English horn is most closely linked with Mother, secondarily with Magda. In a general sense, Mother is the character that expresses grief, in contrast with Magda whose external emotions tend to be frustration, fear, and anger.

The English horn's first appearance is in Act I, during Mother's brief arioso, "How long must women cry…", with obvious reference to the sorrow she is expressing. The second occurrence is in Act I, scene 2, in which the English horn specifically parallels the Secretary's responses to Magda's requests to speak with the Consul. The part moves in rhythm with bassoon, French horn solo, cello, and string bass, and underscores the text, "Your name is a number," "What is your story?" and "No one is allowed to speak to the Consul." Each answer is impersonal and noncommittal. The English horn in this case emulate's Magda's *internal* reaction as she hears the Secretary's statements. Menotti engages simple counterpoint, with contrary motion between the winds and the low strings. The English horn, clarinet and bassoon play the "Papers" motive as Magda describes how the baby and she are the bait, as the Police hunt her husband, foreshadowing her aria in the second act.



[33] English Horn, Vienna Symphonic Library, accessed July 7, 2011, www.vsl.co.at. The VSL has a very comprehensive, thorough description of most symphonic instruments, including history, playing techniques, repertoire, sound characteristics, notation, range, construction, and sound combinations.

The exchange between Magda and the Secretary continues, request answered by aloof contradiction, until finally the Secretary gives Magda the papers she must complete in order for her request to be considered (rehearsal 89).

In Act II, scene 1, the English horn once again appears as part of a woodwind ensemble, this time punctuating Magda's hopelessness as she tells Mother of the frustration she continues to encounter at the Consulate. It continues at rehearsal 4 in duet with the clarinet, as Magda kneels beside her sick infant's cradle.

Later in this scene, the English horn reappears in Mother's lullaby. In the middle section of the aria, there is a possible turning point, when Mother realizes she is no longer rocking a sleeping baby, but one that has died. Menotti does not specify the moment when the child dies, however the addition of the distinctly mourning English horn (rehearsal 10) in conjunction with the change in melody, dynamics, and libretto structure signals something significant has or is occurring. As a reflection of Mother's realization that the baby has died, the English horn is a key indicator of her emotional state. This is immediately followed, upon the return of Magda to the room, by a *subito piano*, a thinning of orchestra (and elimination of the English horn), and off-balance threads of a nursery rhyme cradle song, before Mother begins the main melody again, this time in a major mode, clearly working to disguise the reality of the moment from Magda.

At rehearsal 43, the English horn, with viola, harp, flute, and clarinet, accompanies Mother's aria, "I'm not crying for him [Baby] – not for us…But for John, who will never

see his baby again; …John, my son…" The instrument functions in this aria as part of a greater whole, blending rhythmically with the other woodwinds, and eventually with the strings, and as a section, in contrast with the harp. The ensemble "sings" this lament, without complicated rhythm, and in languid gestures. The addition of the English horn provides again a distinctive melancholy and rural sentiment that mirrors Mother's unpretentious, fundamental desire for peace. Out of standardized character for this instrument[34], the English horn continues (rehearsal 47B) as a soloist in the orchestral interlude that follows, against a *staccatissimo* assembly of brass (horn, trumpet, trombone) and snare drum, and sustained violin and viola. The memory provided by the English horn over the anticipatory roughness of the brass and percussion (which soon expand to include the entire orchestra) provide a remarkably successful while succinct transition into the curtain rising on scene 2.

In Act III following Mother's death, the English horn's role shifts to Magda, specifically when referring to John. In scene 1, Assan brings Magda news of John's plans to return, at risk of his own peril. The English horn as part of a trio with flute and clarinet (rehearsal 6) ushers Assan into the Consulate in search of Magda. As Assan shares his news, the English horn and clarinet continue in a brief chromatic duet, against the drone of cello and string bass. They repeat this sequence a half step higher when mention is made of Mother's death. Finally, Magda decides she must sacrifice herself so that John will not

[34] "In the 20th century several chamber music works were written, but despite this the English horn has not become a solo instrument, remaining chiefly an orchestra instrument." – English Horn, Vienna Symphonic Library, accessed July 24, 2011, www.vsl.co.at.

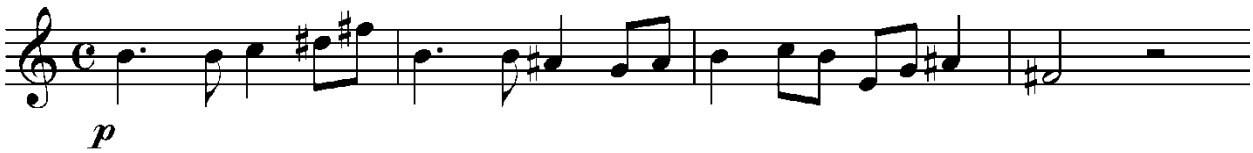
return and be captured (rehearsal 12). As she begins to write her suicide note to John, the English horn and clarinet weep in duet, while flute and low strings agitate nervously.

Clarinet and French Horn

Often, Menotti will score new material, particularly important motives, by introduction via the clarinet or French horn. Both instruments have a distinctive sound. This is the case when the Police motive first appears in Act I, during the interrogation of Magda (rehearsal 28). The clarinet emerges after a fermata and unaccompanied statement by the Police Agent, and then repeats the six-beat fragment, which is then picked up by the oboe. After another fermata several measures later, this clarinet entrance is repeated.

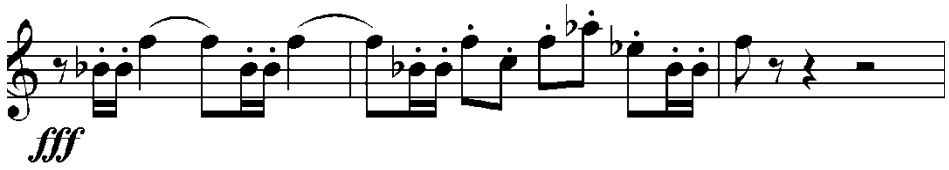
In the moment discussed by Menotti himself about the importance of observing scored silences (see footnote 31), he chooses the clarinet, the French horn and the bassoon to offset the Police Agent's demanding questions, scored "after a long silence, with sudden violence".

Menotti pairs the French horn and clarinet most dramatically with the women's voices. Following a deliberate slowing of the internal action at rehearsal 51 (Act I), Magda, Mother, and John sing a trio, wishing a painful farewell as John goes into hiding. The French horn doubles Magda's entrance to begin the trio, and when John enters with the good-bye melody (below), the doubling is taken over by the strings.



When Mother makes her entrance with the theme, Menotti combines both instrumental elements, and supports her vocal line by doubling with horns and first violins. Weaving in and around the voices, the outcome is that the goodbyes are issued not only by the singers, but also by the voices of the instruments, most noticeably the horns and violins, and with a similar countermelody by the clarinets and bassoons. Fragments of the theme are also scattered among the flutes, oboes, trumpets and trombones.

The orchestral interlude (added in 1984, and not part of the original score) places the French horn in a traditional role – the hunting horn. Two measures before rehearsal 58B, the second horn enters, bellowing its call of pursuit:



The call is repeated four times during the interlude, the last of which is transposed up a step and varied slightly. In scene 2 of Act I, the French horn again alludes to hunter's call (rehearsal 86) when Magda explains to the Secretary that she and her child are bait, and the Police the hunter. The horn/voice combination creates a duet between Magda's inner and outer expression. William L. Crosten says, "Menotti…does not back away from the

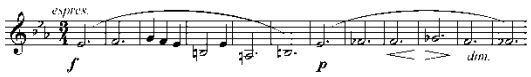
obvious…"[35]. His use of the French horn in the manner of a hunting horn is certainly an example of this thinking.

In Act II, scene 1, the clarinet exposes what Mother is working to conceal. Mother's lullaby begins with the voice doubled by violins. The melody is sweet, soft, and somewhat sad. Before the second verse, the clarinet (doubled by flute an octave higher) skews the gentle rocking of the lullaby by beginning the melody one measure too soon, and continuing as such until the bridge section. The effect is that the voice lags behind, and it feels as though Mother hesitated instead of beginning the second verse. When the main melody of Mother's lullaby returns in major mode (rehearsal 11), it is reinforced by the clarinet. In her effort to be convincing for Magda (rather than soothing for the baby), selecting a lone clarinet to double her melody (and not, for example, returning to the violins), establishes a sense of determination and resolve.

The clarinet solo in the hallucination of final act stands out primarily because it is one of the few solo parts in the scene. The woodwind section, string section, or mix of instruments are common in this extended arioso / duet segment, but when Mother and John tell Magda that her "time" has come (rehearsal 68-71), it is the solo clarinet that plays an expressive *forte* dirge before two extended chromatic sweeps:

[35] William L. Crosten, "The Operas of Gian-Carlo Menotti", Opera in the United States, (Stanford CA: William L. Crosten Papers, 1958), pg. 9.

clarinet solo

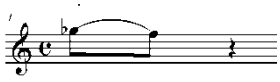


Mother and John: Where is your purse and where are your gloves? I hear the carriage outside your door. I hear them cry for you. The time has come when we must say goodbye, goodbye.

In the midst of this (rehearsal 70) the horns sound the toll of death in parallel octaves, indicated "bell-like" by Menotti. This is the second time he has chosen something other than percussion to mark the passing from life to death. This is quickly swallowed by a chaotic *allegro con fuoco*, horns now omitted, as Magda begs Mother and John to wait for her, as she cries, and hurriedly packs masses of papers from her bureau.

Trombone

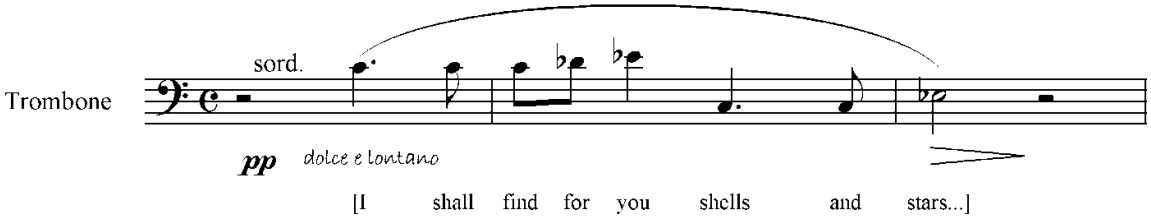
Menotti scores the trombone as "the voice of doom" in all three works. In Act I of *The Consul*, the dragging drone of the trombone signals the weighty monotony as well as the threat that hangs over the characters (rehearsal 20). This occurs underneath the dramatic flurry of the orchestra, as Mother and Magda rush to hide any evidence of John before the Police arrive. The trombone emerges forcefully just as Magda seats herself at the table, sewing basket in hand, with as much nonchalance as she can muster. Regardless of her outer appearance, through the trombone, her inner fear and foreboding are evident.

Menotti repeats the drone in ascent, and doubles it with the bassoon. Shortly thereafter, the trombone plays the "Papers" motive, doubled by the cello, at rehearsal 21, while Menotti indicates the action "With feigned calm, the two women await the entrance of the police." 

The next ominous trombone interruption is later in Act I just after rehearsal 51. It is the finish of an extended recitative sequence where Magda and John hurriedly lay plans for his exile. An *Allegro agitato* in the strings indicates their return to action, until the trombones enter, supported by the French horns in a deliberately expressive legato passage, with a striking combination of quarter- and eighth-note chromatic triplets. The effect is that everything feels as though it is in slow motion, mirroring Magda's inner desire to savor each of her remaining moments with her husband. From this the "good-bye" trio, Magda, John, and Mother, emerges.

In Act III, Menotti scores trombone with bassoon as a counter voice to the suggested sentiment of the moment (rehearsal 27). Flute and strings sing a tender, romantic sustained melody (*andante molto espressivo*) as John open's Magda's forgotten purse, finding her crushed handkerchief, and tenderly closing it again. But under the surface, the trombone and bassoon's harsh, staccato thrusts contradict the moment with a threatening reality. Simultaneous levels of emotion are revealed in this simple juxtaposition.

In the second scene of Act III, Madga breathes gas from the oven and hallucinates. A small, but pointed statement is made by a muted trombone in the transitional measures between reality and dream (rehearsal 41). Amid melodic fragments by the trumpets, woods and piano, the trombone moans Mother's lullaby theme, unaccompanied and sad:



Voices

"His success is a testimonial to the continuing validity of a long a respected operatic tradition. In the case of Menotti, this tradition is reflected in the overriding prominence he gives the human voice. For it, he has shaped melodies that not only sing themselves with utter naturalness and explore the continuing challenge of *parlar cantando* that has faced composers from Claudio Monteverdi forward, but that encapsulate an emotion and vividly create character through music. Anything serves him – melodrama, polyphony, dissonance, popular strains – to conjure a mood or breathe life into a figure."[36]

The voices of course add the element of text, which can both illuminate and shroud the humanity of a moment. He selects the orchestration accompanying the voice with great sensitivity to what is *experienced*, rather than what is *said*.

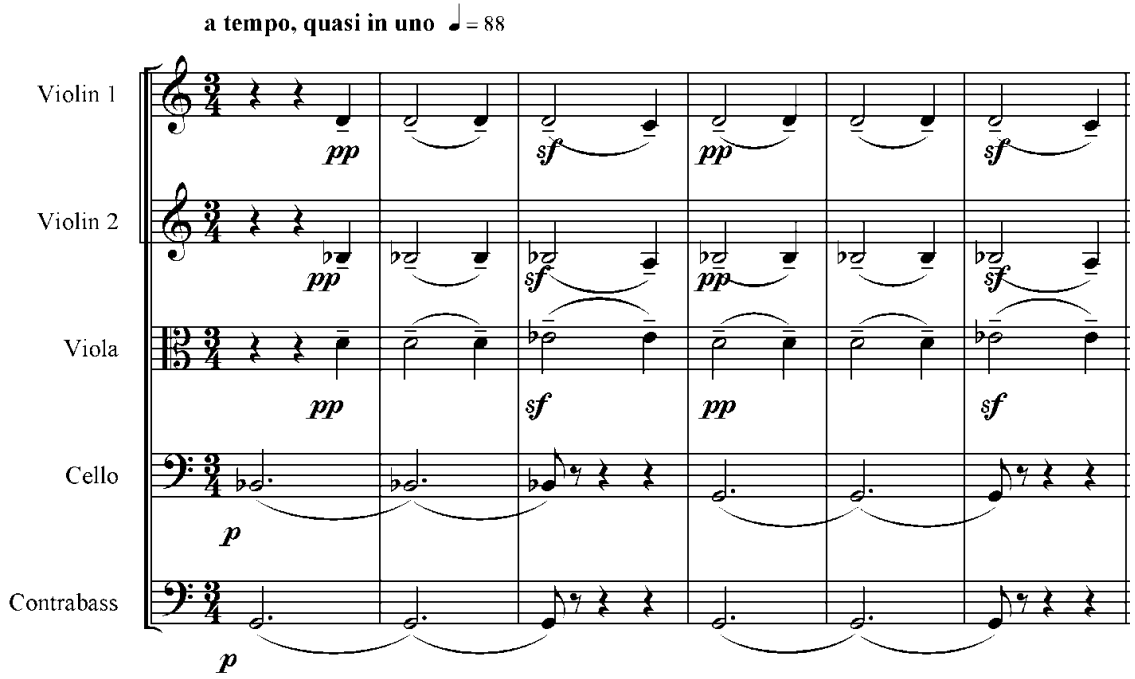
In Mother's first aria, Act I rehearsal 23, he frames the contralto's tone with low register flute, middle register clarinet, and low strings with simple eighth-note couplets. He adds to this a sustained solo French horn, played pianissimo, within an *adagio molto* tempo.

[36] John Ardoin, The Stages of Menotti (Garden City NY: Doubleday 7 Company, 1985), pg. 10.

There is complete focus on Mother's words, "Shall we ever see the end of all this!" This statement is to be the sentiment of the entire opera – the monotonous, faceless existence that seemingly has no end. Only when her voice rises (rehearsal 25) to an E-flat and F5 does he flesh out the orchestration, restoring the thinner texture quickly after an unaccompanied measure at rehearsal 26.

At rehearsal 38 (Act I), Mother sings a brief arioso in which again, he chooses to accompany her lightly, with only sustained strings and a solo English horn offering *sforzando* utterances. The pattern he establishes in the strings creates a sense of "false starts" around Mother's words, "O God! How long must women cry over man's destiny? Have pity on us, this bit of clay, wet with women's tears." The unexpected diminished chord the final beat of each third measure following the *sforzando* downbeat feels as though it is meant to move something forward, and yet each time, it falls back to the original sustained g minor chord. The result is a feeling of hopelessness, punctuated by the melancholy, mournful moan of the English horn. Although very short, this acutely emotional arioso leaves the audience with a clear image of Mother's state of mind. A variation on this string/voice combination returns at rehearsal 43, but this time Magda and John will sing together in recitative, and the moaning line of the English horn has been replaced by a distraught sigh by the oboe. Magda asks John what is to happen, will he leave them now? to which he ultimately answers yes.

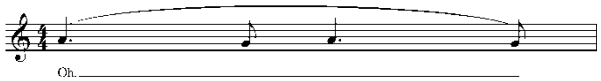
Strings' "false start":



Throughout scene 1 of Act I, effects such as the sound of a palpable heartbeat (referred to in the libretto at rehearsal 32, then audible by the brass) add Magda and Mother's internal human reaction to the text sung by the menacing Police Agent. The listener is privy to both the racing pound of the heart and the scared skipped beats in the sixteenth note rest at the beginning of the pulsing rhythm. A portentous "stomp" reinforces the Police Agent's threats to the women, as a descending fourth in parallel octaves by the piano doubled in the string bass (Act I rehearsal 34), and again (rehearsal 58D) just prior to the orchestral interlude before scene 2, with the addition of the timpani and harp. As John tells Magda and Mother of the violence in the street, the moment when his friend is shot off a rooftop and rolls is reinforced vividly with a rolling chromatic descent by solo trumpet and clarinet, finished with a quarter-note pulsing by the timpani and the bassoon

and horns echoing the chromatic roll, this time illustrating the body rolling slightly as it hits the pavement.

In a section added by Menotti after the 1950 production, (re. 12-16) Mother interrupts John's recounting of the violent action that took place before the opera opened, with fluttering flutes, rolling repetitive sixteenth-note arpeggios in the piano, string tremolo, trumpet trills and octave leaps in the bassoon. Against this vibration in the orchestra, Mother's vocal line swoons in a motive that returns throughout the opera.



The orchestra's busyness creates the dizzy, blackening, ear-buzzing background that often accompanies the physical action of fainting, making Mother's reaction to the story physical and tangible.

In Act II, scene 1, the orchestra/voice relationship creates a disturbing, macabre scene, difficult to watch and to listen to. Following a wrenching moment when Magda says that she wishes the baby had never been born (rehearsal 5), Mother approaches the baby's cradle. She talks to the baby, cooing, trying to amuse, to get any response at all from the child. She asks it, "What is the matter little lamb? Why are you so still?" Once again, Menotti scores pregnant fermatas around her coaxing words, labeling the section *scherzando*. Mother continues with nonsense words, "Koo-roo, koo koo koo, say: Moo-moo, say Da-da." The orchestra accompanies, with slightly off-balance nursery rhyme

like snippets; the addition of chromatics and octave leaps (flute and clarinet) against leaps of a major 7th (bassoon) give it a sea-sick feel. Underneath, the French horn drones *pesante* and the cello plucks *pizzicato* quarter notes on beats one, three and four – but not beat two. Between Mother's phrases, the piano skips in contrary motion, *forte* and *brillante* in chords consisting of two half-step clusters (C and D-flat6 against F and G-flat4). In the last two measures, flute, oboe, clarinet and viola descend in couplets of an octave, a minor sixth, and perfect fifths simultaneously. The trumpets and first violins add an odd two-note march motive. It ends with a solo clarinet, playing a sad sigh, alone. Suddenly, she begins again, this time playing peek-a-boo, with strong quarter-note chords in time with her chant, and a burst of piano, harp, bassoon and flute chromatic flourish. *Quasi parlato*, Mother asks "Won't you smile? (fermata) Come on, give a little smile to your Granny! (fermata)", and then despondently begins her most significant aria in the opera, the lullaby (rehearsal 8).

Later in scene 2, a brief reprise of the lullaby occurs, this time Magda singing, upon realizing that her baby is dead (rehearsal 42). This time, though, Menotti leaves the voice very exposed – only muted strings accompany her, and playing fragments of the melody, but against rather than with her. As librettist, Menotti unabashedly turned the Mother's lullaby phrases to the baby ("I shall buy for you, shells and stars... I shall buy for you sugar and bread.") into Magda's words. Magda asks Mother, "Shall I call the carpenter and the priest? Shall I unfold the white silk coverlet? Shall I go to market to buy white roses?" The lack of orchestration serves to reveal her sudden helpless barrenness. The instrumentation that is present spins fragments of the lullaby around her melody, moving

around her as if she is still. She asks the formidable logistical questions, but there is no strong harmonic pull in the music on which she can pin her bearings. (The music spins A-flat, B-flat and D-flat major chords, over a constant A-flat pedal, inserting a diminished b_9 and an $f\#_7$ before ending on an A-flat major chord.) The listener experiences the sense of frozen paralysis because of the sparse but significant orchestration.

In the second scene of Act II, Magda has her most significant moment musically. "To this we've come….Papers!" is often sung as a standalone aria, one of two performed as such from this opera. Menotti makes the subtle but effective choice here to not highlight any particular instrument of the orchestra, but to clearly draw attention to the voice (and therefore the text). His orchestration in this manner creates the separation of Magda vs. the world. Woodwinds, brass, strings, harp, percussion, and piano comprise a unified personality, distinct unto itself. *Sforzando* markings, gesture shaping, dynamic fluctuation, and rhythmic dialogue with Magda create a dichotomy of sound that serves to draw focus to the libretto. This aria carries the message of the entire opera, the frustration, grief, fear, and anger generated by a faceless, uncaring bureaucracy. In a way, the solidarity of the orchestra is the musical manifestation of this bureaucracy against which Magda, personified in this aria, stands apart. Throughout the aria, members of the orchestra play the "Papers" motive, but in this context and especially in real time against the voice, it mocks her, scorns her words, her emotion, her outburst. It is as if she stands, surrounded by bullies that are protected by rules and regulations, and through the opposition presented in Menotti's score, the listener feels her fight her way through the thick orchestra that threatens to suffocate her once and for all.

In Magda's hallucination in the final act, her duet with Mother and later with John incorporates remnants of the lullaby, musically as well as in the text. Throughout the opera, there are references to the power of time, waiting, today and tomorrow, sleep and waking, age and youth. These allusions are folded into this duet, as Mother becomes the Bride (of John), and Magda becomes The Old:

Mother: Magda, my dear, don't stand alone. Why don't you come here and join our dance?

Magda: Mother I thought that you were dead. You look so young, I feel so old and sad.

Mother: White is my gown and white my gloves. This is the dawn of my wedding day.

Richard John Marriot said, "*The Consul*'s varying moods are underscored by Menotti's almost unequalled compositions skills."[37] Olin Downes wrote in the New York Times in a review of its premiere:

> [He] can write in the most simple, direct, melodic manner. Or he can go contrapuntal, or use at will polytonality, cross rhythms, the most varied orchestration. He knows how to make a few strings chant requiem in the most modern way, and he knows how to rumble with kettle drumsticks on the lowest tones of the piano to make the effect of escaping gas and impending doom."[38]

[37] Richard John Marriot, Gian-Carlo Menotti: total musical theatre. A study of his operas. (PhD diss., University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, 1975), pg 151.

[38] Olin Downes, "Menotti's Consul Has Its Premiere", New York Times, March 16, 1950.

Jan Broeckx perhaps captured the reality of *The Consul* best, commenting in The Musical Quarterly that the real impact of the opera is due "to the exceptional integration of idea, text, music and staging", and not solely to the music.[39]

[39] Jan L. Broeckx, "Current Chronicle", The Musical Quarterly (July 1959), pg. 449-450.

The Saint of Bleecker Street

The conflict between faith and reason is one that haunted Menotti throughout his life. He said:

"I am definitely not a religious man. All the same, I am haunted by religious problems…the intense and incandescent faith which nourished my childhood and my adolescence have [sic!] seared my soul forever. I've lost faith, but it is a loss that has left me uneasy."[40]

His first theatrical music attempt to explore this friction was his opera *The Island God*, which opened at the Metropolitan Opera in February of 1942. It was not a success, in part because after his comedic *Amelia al Ballo* (1937) and *The Old Maid and the Thief* (1939), opera audiences were not used to a "serious" Menotti[41]. It was also a cumbersome plot, and while it was engaging for the composer/librettist, it was less so for audiences.

Amahl and the Night Visitors (1951) was his next work to deal with faith and the spiritual. But it is *The Saint of Bleecker Street* that delves most deeply into the topic of religious faith and how it affects both those that are devoted to it and those who are not. He describes his efforts to understand this phenomenon:

""When I began writing The Saint, I felt emotionally disturbed…I felt a great impatience – a great need to find my faith again….I asked to meet Padre Pio [Father Pio de Pietralcina]. He was an Italian Capucine monk….[who] bore the stigmatas. The Church didn't know how to handle him (because it [the Church] is very suspicious of such people)…The Italian clergy tried to hide him in a little village…where they thought

[40] Donald L. Hixon, Gian Carlo Menotti: A Bio Biography (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), pg. 8.

[41] John Gruen, Menotti (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1978), 44-45.

people would forget him. Instead, thousands of people poured into the little village to see Padre Pio."[42]

Menotti arranged to visit Padre Pio.

"We went to the church. It was an extraordinary experience….The church was crammed full – there was an awful smell of sick humanity. But what was extraordinary was that when Padre Pio came in from the sacristy, the smell suddenly changed…[it] seemed to purify the air….He recited the mass, very slowly. It took hours. Everybody stood. It was so hypnotizing, because in the middle of the mass, he would go into a trance….Each time he would open his arms to say, 'Dominus vobiscum', you could see these huge bleeding scares on both sides of his hands….When the mass was finished, I walked out of the church by myself. I was so preoccupied and was assailed by so many conflicting emotions that I fell into a great unhappiness….Finally I had an audience with Padre Pio. He said to me, 'Do you believe in the Church?' And I said, 'No, I'm afraid I don't believe in the Church.' He asked, 'But who do you think gave you this great gift and talent that you have?' I replied, 'I did not say I did not believe in God, I only said I did not believe in the Church.' Padre Pio looked at me for a time, then said, 'Why did you come to see me, then? *I* believe in the Church, and if *you* don't believe in the Church, then you must think I'm an idiot.' In a sense he was right. But he should have gone beyond…Somehow, I wanted him to tell me why I came to him. At any rate, Padre Pio failed me….If he had simply taken me into his arms, I would have immediately gone back into the arms of the Church. Part of me has such a need for that. ..With it all, I did have the feeling that I *had* met a saint."[43]

Menotti was very hurt by the interaction with Padre Pio, and yet continued to search for some sort of resolution between his religious doubts and his strong sense of spirituality.

The people in *The Saint of Bleecker Street* personify that inner conflict. Faith and reason are in opposition, primarily in the tragic characters of Annina and her brother, Michele. Other characters, such as Don Marco and Desideria, are similarly associated with either faith or reason/skepticism, quite often by the detail of the music more than their

[42] Ibid., pg. 120.

[43] Ibid., pg. 121-2.

prescribed role in the action. As in *The Consul*, certain instruments have traditional connotations, as well as personalities assigned by Menotti himself.

"I think that melodically *The Saint* is an improvement over *The Consul*. A weakness in my early music was that it had a certain 'shortness of breath'. In *The Saint* my melodic line acquires more powerful lungs," said Menotti.[44] In *The Saint,* the orchestration was fuller, not only due to the considerably larger ensemble, but also to more complex harmonies. This also affected the vocal writing, in which the choral composition is more intricate, a feature that is better served by the magnitude of the chorus.

In keeping with the more traditional form in this opera, the orchestration and voicing is also somewhat more conventional. Once again, the clarinet in particular is prominent at key emotional moments, this time expanded by the addition of the bass clarinet. The trombone "voice of doom" appears, as does the rustic melancholy of the English horn, supplementing first and second oboe. The addition of the tuba, contrabassoon, and bass clarinet provide a concrete foundation and availability of deep tones coloring sentiment.

The juxtaposition of women's voices is important. Once again, Menotti makes use of the lower registers, including not just contraltos, but the bottom of the soprano and mezzo voices, both in chorus and with soloists. Annina's range is significant (soprano), and tessitura of many of her solo passages remains high, especially when emotionally charged. While this is not an unusual opera device to communicate heightened passion,

[44] John Gruen, Menotti (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1978), 123.

Menotti is masterful at enhancing and/or contradicting this effect in the way that he uses the other instruments and voices simultaneously. Annina's lines often include great interval leaps. In contrast, Assunta (mezzo soprano) tends to be relegated to much smaller intervals, smoother lines, and a much more encapsulated range in general, so that even when she isn't specifically leading the chorus in chant, the suggestion is still present.

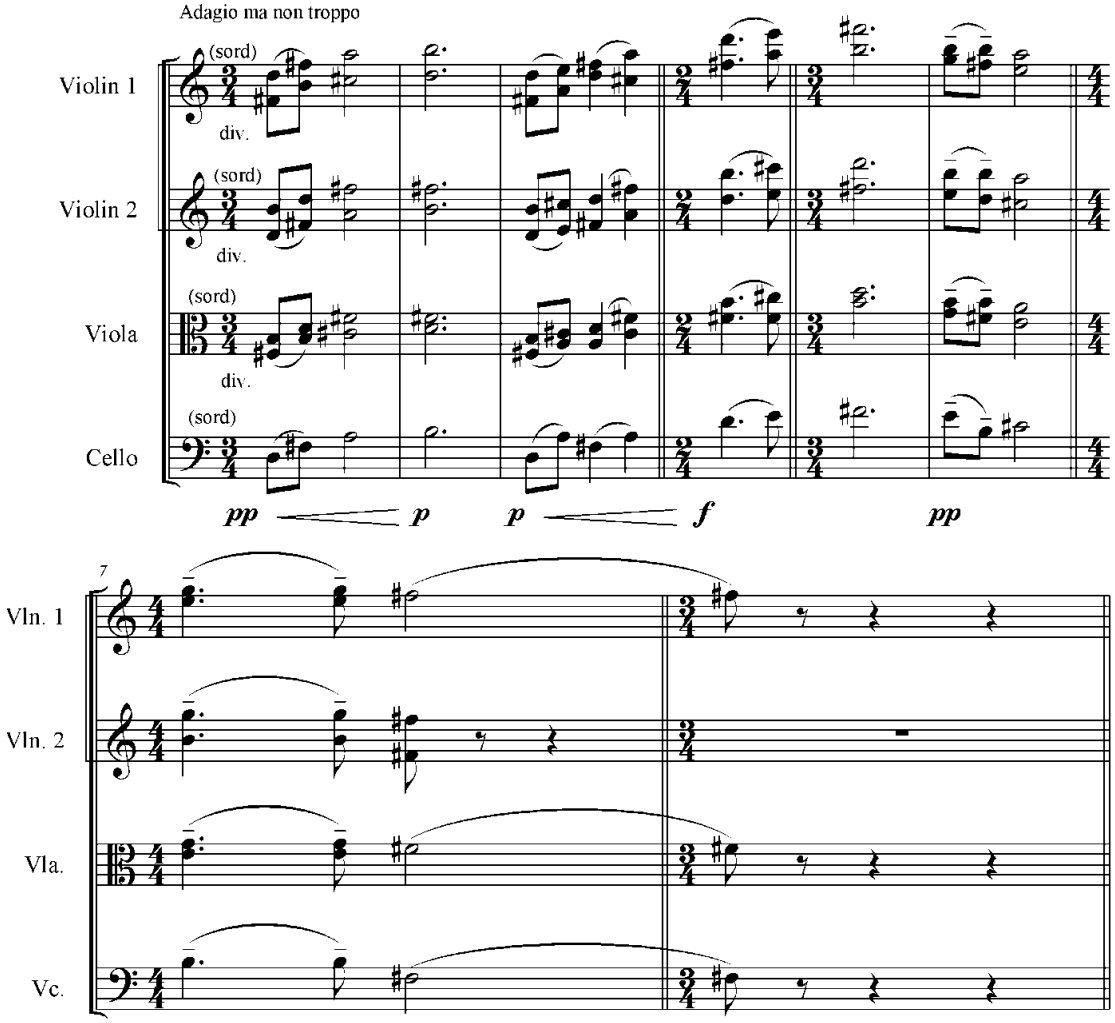
Annina

She is the human representation of pure faith. She bears the stigmata, and is sought by throngs of "faithful" townspeople to heal their ailments and burdens. She is referred to in the libretto as a simple girl. She is all forgiving, and truly believes that she will become the Bride of Christ – it is what she is living for, even in the last few days of her failing body. From Menotti's own words, we know that he held this purity of faith in high regard, even though he did not himself share or even understand it. It is important, therefore, that the audience experience her from the inside, rather than simply as observers, in order to establish the dichotomy between belief and cynicism fundamental to the opera.

Throughout the opera, Annina is accompanied by a theme that is characteristic of her profound devotion. Richard John Marriot says, "Menotti establishes her character of gentleness and piety by giving her a musical motif of luminous beauty."[45]

[45] Richard John Marriot, Gian-Carlo Menotti: total musical theatre. A study of his operas. (PhD diss., University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, 1975), pg. 237.

Annina's Theme



Her theme is first introduced as part of the overture. (This work is different from *Consul* and *Bishop* in that it has an actual overture, containing music of the three acts.) It is played by the strings, as above. It is consonant, and without any strong harmonic movement (other than V/D – D in the third measure). Menotti uses only triads except the final chord of the fourth measure, where he includes the eleventh but excludes the third of the $f\#^{11}$ chord, and the final octave f# in all four voices.

The repeated ascending lines and preponderance of first inversion b minor and f# minor chords gives it an unearthly, delicate feeling – the musical representation of Annina – and setting it in the strings provides a lyric, sustained singing quality.

In the Act I, the face of faith is revealed, in the persona of Annina. It is the longest and most detailed section of the work, consuming eight and half minutes of music, almost double the duration of any other section. It begins with Annina's theme as Don Marco and Carmela carry her, semi-conscious, into the living room of her home (rehearsal 23). As her theme diminishes, muted horns in parallel octaves sustain an f#, while the harp strikes f# in three octaves. One by one, other orchestral instruments enter on f#, while the contraltos in the chorus sing a chant-like line to begin a canon of all voices, that will end a cappella and homorhythmic.[46] "*Super omnes angelos pura et immacolata*." – Among all angels, immaculate and pure.

Suddenly, as the chant ends, the full orchestra rushes, *fortissimo*, brass and percussion roaring as if charging into battle. Annina begins to live her vision, "Oh sweet Jesus, spare me this agony. Too great a pain is this for one so weak…" Her vocal line is a series of descending phrases, and the orchestra is pared down to almost nothing (cello and horns sustained for several measures, and viola and oboe in simple two-note alternating rhythm. After a long fermata, Annina cries, "Where am I? Who are these people?" in unaccompanied recitative. Menotti folds recitative into the aria, as Annina experiences

[46] I was struck by the sheer beauty of this music – it is perhaps one of the most beautiful and shimmering, intimate moments in opera – absolutely gorgeous. (JOT)

the crucifixion as if present for the event. This allows for passages of text that clarify dramatic action, which can immediately turn into her emotional response to the action. It is a clever way for the audience to see and hear action that isn't actually occurring on stage. As sympathetic participants in this manner, the audience experiences everything through Annina, thereby making her more real, more human.

With a seemingly odd combination of harp ascending thirty-second notes against jagged arpeggio thirty-second notes in the bass clarinet, Annina's emotions go from dazed confusion to fear and realization that she is in the middle of a drunken crowd, when the woodwinds, horns and strings play a flurry of triplet sixteenth notes in thirds on the downbeat of the measure. As he did in *The Consul*, Menotti scores the orchestra on the downbeat, while the voice is held back, entering in the middle of the second beat. The result is a complete and immediate change of drama and emotion, after which Annina sings, "Ah, dreadful presentiment!" Menotti took seriously advice he received from Ermanno Wolf-Ferrari (1876-1948): "If you write an opera…remember that the orchestra and the voice must be knitted together like cogs in tow wheels. The accents of either must never come at the same time, so that the words will be understood. In other words, the accents must never meet, otherwise they destroy each other."[47]

In the next measure, he again scores a change on the downbeat. An ominous trudging oppresses her as clarinets, bass clarinet, bassoon, trombone, tuba, low strings (tremolo) and the left hand of the piano play chord clusters of dotted quarter notes in 15/8 before

[47] John Gruen, Menotti, (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1978), 37.

she continues, “Eager and loud they push and sway under the festival sun,” entering part-way through a mid-measure beat. A trumpet (muted) calls out in the background, becoming more prominent with each utterance, drawing the action closer around the girl.

The drama is upon her, when her theme is once again sung by the strings (rehearsal 30), with the addition of clarinet and bass clarinet, while the trumpet blares its arrival. The voice leaps an octave, “I see now! Oh blinding sight, Oh pain! Oh love!” As she ends a sustained A6, piccolo, flute, oboe, brass and strings reach their climax – the moment of sight.

The aria continues as she describes the soldiers marching Jesus up the road bearing the cross. The strings, flute, and clarinet lament, but it is the voice now that tells the story with intense description. Only once does Menotti interrupt with threatening trombones and tuba.

Using horns and clarinets as foil, Menotti begins to quickly alternate her emotional state. Her screams at seeing Jesus falter and be whipped is immediately followed by the caress of woodwinds when he recovers, continuing to yank the listener through Annina’s reactions to the drama.

At rehearsal 33, another sudden turn: xylophone and solo clarinet trill, two first violins sing a brief melody, and then silence. She sings, “Someone is weeping.” The next section gently details the pain of Jesus’ mother as she watches her son’s crucifixion, and the

women with her "weakened by weeping" as they stand behind the mob. From the quiet emerges the English horn in a long solo passage, accompanied by brief touches of the harp. The effect is decidedly feminine, and the juxtaposition of the pastoral mourn of the English horn against the sacred implications of the harp is striking. Through Annina, the listener experiences the torn heart of Mary, suffering a very human and earthly pain, while knowing through her faith that it is because of this agony that her son will bring heaven to souls of humankind. This foreshadows the choice Annina must make in the third act, when in spite of the sorrowful love for her brother, she stands confidently in her faith. She finally begs the women of her vision to take Mary home, saying, "It is her very flesh that will be torn by spear and nail."

Once again the aria builds, and the procession nears the hill of Golgotha, the site of Jesus's crucifixion. Annina's theme enters in the strings, this time obscured by the staccato eighth notes of the trombones and sustained moan of the French horns, finally completed swallowed, as the strings echo the brass. The percussion enters with a militant march beat. Annina sings, "The huge hammer is raised…" She screams a high C (rehearsal 41) when the nail is driven into Jesus's/her hand, and then collapses, percussion, (including anvil) and brass pounding, like the nails being driven, and her own heartbeat.[48] The orchestra repeatedly descends chromatically. The listener is drawn away from and out off Annina's vision and emotional state, as her horror and pain are dissolved

[48] "Menotti calls for the striking of an anvil, replicating the sound of the nail being driven into the hands of Christ. Because of the skill of the orchestral writing and the highly expressive melodic curve of the aria, it is a particularly stunning moment." Per Donald Hixon in Gian Carlo Menotti A Bio-Biography (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), pg.14.

by the pianissimo entrance of unaccompanied chorus singing a hymn-like harmonic progression from f minor to its relative A-flat major.

In the second scene of Act I, Menotti allows us to peak into Annina's past. Her childhood friend Carmela tells her that instead of taking the veil together, as promised, she has met a man that she plans to wed. She expects that Annina will be angry, and goes so far as to ask whether God will forgive her for not following through on her promise. Throughout their intimate conversation, Menotti chose strings and harp to accompany them, recalling the holy promise made to one another as girls. As Carmela reveals her change of heart and her love for Salvatore (her fiancé), the texture of the scoring is thin, revealing, and simple, just low strings under flute and clarinets doubling Carmela's vocal line. When Annina shares Carmela's joy, and sings of her plans to also one day wear a white veil as the bride of Christ, Menotti scores Carmela's melody for Annina with the same simplicity, accompanied by strings rather than winds, consistent with their sacred association with her.

In Act III, scene 1, as Annina tells Michele (who is in hiding from the police after murdering Desideria) that she is close to death, her theme appears again. This is the final battle between faith and disbelief personified by Annina and Michele. She tells Michele that her voices have told her that she will die, "and my voices never lie." Her vocal line is simple arioso, but underscored by her theme in the strings, even facing this dark truth and the impending doom of her brother, she maintains her faith. Michele is furious, but as she says good-bye, Menotti hangs all of her words over her theme, steadfast and committed

to her sacred path as she sees it, concluding, "Only by serving Him [God] I can hope to save you Michele. My everlasting wish is now my last desire."

In the final scene, Annina prays for death to wait a little longer so that she may take the sacrament before dying (rehearsal 80). She is torn, and Menotti shares that divided emotion by scoring her prayer to stay earthbound with cello and string bass against oboe, English horn, and clarinet in their higher registers as the heaven she ultimately desires. Most effective is the doubling of both in the harp, arpeggios bridging the two "worlds" she lives between in these last moments. Her theme appears twice more. As Don Marco cuts her hair as the final symbol of her binding to earth, the chorus quietly sings a prayer. The strings play her theme underneath; the chorus's prayer melody becomes the theme. Finally, the last measures of the opera are again Annina's theme. They rhythm has been doubled, broadening the gesture of the motive; Menotti adds a bass drum roll to the final two measures.

Michele

For Menotti, skepticism is something he developed or grew into personally. It is anchored in practicality and reality. Therefore, unlike personifying Annina's faith through the audience experiencing her visions and feeling her unbending devotion, humanizing Michele requires a sense of questioning, defensiveness, and agitation that is raw, corporeal, and expressed very physically.

A headstrong man, Michele rejects blind faith as simpleminded (as he sees Annina), or manipulative and opportunistic (as he perceives Don Marco and the neighborhood of "believers"). It is unclear whether his cynicism is the result of a string of events or his natural persona. There are four key moments where he personifies skepticism or reason:

1. Act I, scene 1, following Annina's vision, when he throws the throngs of believers out of his home
2. Act I, scene 2, in conversation with Annina after forbidding her to participate in the Feast of San Gennaro
3. Act II, Carmela and Salvatore's wedding, when he faces off with the guests who do not want him to bring Desideria into the wedding
4. Act III, scene 1, when he meet Annina in the subway station and she tells him she is dying, and will make her holy vows

While there is not the same clear cut thematic association with Michele as with Annina, Menotti supports him with generally fast paced, loud, aggressive music, thickly textured. In the overture, his skeptic's music is born out of the contrast between Annina's ethereal theme in the first ten measures, and the *allegro agitato* that follows. "Agitato" describes Michele's temperament, the action that tends to occur around him, and his reaction. In this first instance, the strings play repeating sixteenth note figures and *pizzicato*, while the horns drone; this eventually grows to include the agitated sixteenths in the piccolo and flute, and fortissimo quarter notes in the brass. Menotti bookends this agitation by driving it into a complete stop (rehearsal 5) where the horns issue a single held note in unison, and the chorus chants:

> *"Rosa Mystica, turris davidica, turris eburnea, domus aurea, foederis arca, janua coeli, stalla matutina, salus infirmorum, refugium peccato, ora pro nobis."*
>
> Rose of mystery, the tower of David, a tower of ivory, house of gold, the ark of the covenant, the door of heaven, star of the morning, the salvation of the sick, refuge of sinners, pray for us.

The contrast is palpable, serving to polarize the musical characters at once.

Menotti now grounds the previous moments of skepticism in the person of Michele when he enters (rehearsal 47). He heightens the impact of the moment by once again setting it up with Annina's theme. After shouting at the assembled neighbors, he goes to Annina and tenderly caresses her hair while the strings sing her theme. Abruptly, though, the string strike a *sforzando* pizzicato, and Michele continues with quick bullets of words, "Clowns! Leeches! Fanatics! Out of here quick! Shall I call the police? Out! Out!" After the neighbors leave, he hostilely challenges Don Marco (the priest), but this time, it is musically obvious that he feels he has regained control. The orchestra, while at a less agitated tempo, is still active with dotted eighths, sixteenths, and thirty-second notes, but Menotti eliminates the previous sense of chaos by scoring them all in homorhythm, playing together, controlled, logical, and with reason. This musical change is the first added dimension to Michele as a human. He isn't simply an angry young man, but someone fighting for control, order, and regulation in the face of an unreliable, invisible force that is ruled by a power he can't understand, but is plaguing his home and his

family. His exchange with Don Marco reveals more through the text, exposed recitative and arioso accompanied by a simple instrumental backdrop:

Michele	And you, priest, why don't you go? How often must I tell you that you are not wanted here.
Don Marco	I only came when I was called. Your sister needed me.
Michele	Doctors she needs rather than priests and candles! If we were rich this wouldn't happen Rich people have no vision except in hospitals.
Don Marco	And you who love her so, you are the one to doubt!
Michele	Too much I love her not to know her well. A sickly child who never grew. A simple mind in a pain-pierced body.
Don Marco	Who knows where God will find his saints?
Michele	His saints? Enough of your superstitions. Who are these people that create your saints? They worship God out of defeat. They look for wonders to forget their poverty, to redeem their failure! But I am not resigned, nor am I conquered yet! Tell me, o priest, do you believe in this? Is this the work of God, or the delusions of a sick mind?
Don Marco	A priest is not a judge but only a guide. I do not say that I believe in this, but she believes and must be guided.
Michele	If one must guide her, then I shall be her guide for I am her brother.
Don Marco	So are we all.
Michele	I warn you priest, keep away from us, for I alone shall guide my sister, and I shall save her from your fanatic hunger.
Don Marco	Ah, poor Michele, it is not I your rival, but God Himself.

In the second scene of Act I, Michele again positions himself as Annina's protector. The neighborhood people have asked her to participate in the parade honoring San Gennaro,

but he has forbidden her to do so. Annina is afraid for him – the people are very angry. In an intimate exchange, he looks for answers, and tries to convince her that her faith is unfounded. She does not falter. The orchestra throughout this recitative is non-invasive. An assortment of quarter note pulses underlies the conversation, sometimes in the strings, other times in the winds. An occasional eighth note passage usually played by a low instrument (cello, bass, bassoon) punctuates Michele's words, but when the orchestra plays (and there are many lines that are unaccompanied) it is subtle. This creates a sense of intimacy between brother and sister that is critical to the contradiction between faith and reason.

As a result of Menotti's setting and text for this scene, Michele becomes more comprehensive as a person. The intimacy reveals his love for his sister, and the text provides some of the back-story that may explain Michele's distrust of those that seek and follow Annina. This is a critically defining moment in the humanization of Michele. An audience will not feel anything for a character that is without just cause; Menotti needs the audience to feel something for Michele, to sympathize with him. He reminds her that as a child, people were cruel to her, called her "numbskull". His frustration is audible in the rapid-fire of his text as he tries to dissuade Annina, convince her that her faith is the manifestation of a simple mind. In contrast, her answers are short and slower rhythmically, and in the lower-middle of her vocal range. He gently prompts her to find the cracks in her faith. Finally he says, "Do you really believe that it is Jesus who appears to you?" She answers, "Yes, that I know," as the strings lay fragments of her theme. Michele begins to argue, becoming more upset, but each time she answers his questions,

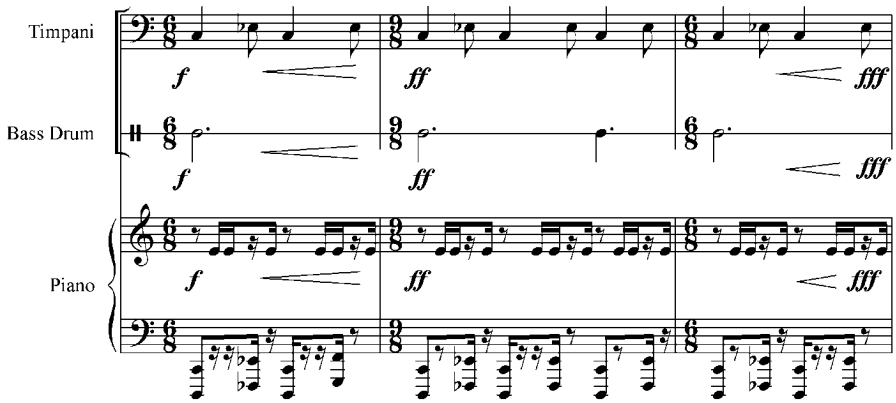
her theme supports her. He tells her he loves her, and asks why God would choose someone as simple and a sickly as her to carry out His work. She answers, “Perhaps because I love him.” Michele responds, “You love Him as if he were a man. God is not a man. He is everything and nothing.”

In the duet that follows, both characters sing the same melody, Michele telling Annina he will hide her away from these damaged fanatics, Annina replying that she will lead him away from his fears of the world to the city of God. The orchestration is very traditional accompaniment throughout the duet. Because the setting is unique in its conventionalism (within this opera and Menotti’s settings in general), the end result is a unification of the two characters. There is nothing unusually specific or identifying for Michele or Annina in this duet. This serves to remind us that skepticism cannot exist without faith, that the very definition of skepticism implies that there is something with energy and a force that demands questioning.

Michele’s big aria is in Act II, at the wedding. He faces the crowd of guests who do not want him to bring the uninvited Desideria inside. He is torn between being part of the group (which includes Annina), and standing up for the woman that he loves, who is excluded because of her affair with him. There is obviously a double standard imposed by the social neighborhood, and he clearly sees that it is wrong. At the same time, the need to belong to something is a strong human desire and difficult to deny. He ultimately chooses to stand up for Desideria and escort her into the wedding. His aria voices his choice and his understanding that he will never really be part of this social circle. “I know

that you all hate me…Since I was a child you've always hated me because I never asked for love, only understanding." He goes on to point out that they are all outsiders, foreigners (from Italy) that have sold their noble ancestry for false contentment in the US. The orchestra provides his internal distress with arpeggios and sixteenth notes in the strings and harp, and long droning chromatic lines by the woodwinds. The aria is broken momentarily by two measure of questioning recitative, "Where is my home?" He proceeds with colorful descriptions of Italy, the homeland he has never seen. He concludes by collapsing under the weight of strings and winds in a wave of *fortissimo* chromatic sixteenth notes, and silence.

Michele's last stand occurs in Act III, scene 1, in a subway station. Don Marco, at the request of Annina, has found the hiding Michele (he unexpectedly stabbed Desideria at the wedding, and ran away) and brought him to her so she can share important news. They greet one another in embrace, surrounded by the muffled and indistinguishable underground sounds created by the orchestra. A flutter-tongue flute, an uneven timpani sounding wheels on the track in nearby tunnels, bass drum rolls, violin and viola flourishes, and the pulse of the piano create the sense of hurry, hiding, and fear.



Following the initial recitative, Menotti again engages in traditional duet style, and Michele and Annina share a brief melody, first in staggered entrance, and then in unison. The orchestra again is conventional. The strings double the voice parts and the winds wind in and around the melody. It ends with Michele's statement, "I must fight on for you," to which Annina prays for the strength to tell him her news. She tells him that she will die soon, that she is very ill, and that her voices have told her so. Her familiar theme underlies her reference to the voices, but Michele bursts in, orchestra in ascending chromatic sixteenth notes, begging her to forget the voices, because they lie to her.

The remainder of this scene is a musical conversation, the voice of Michele robes in volatile, uneven, punctuated bursts of denial, and Annina in *dolcissimo* sustained lyrical lines. The gap between the siblings widens, and with it the division of faith and doubt. The music embraces each of them as individuals, characterizing their human traits with sound.

Chorus

Unlike *The Consul*, *The Saint of Bleecker Street* has a large and involved chorus. It appears in every scene except Act II, scene 1 (in the subway station). The role of the chorus is interesting in the context of the faith vs. reason/skepticism content. On the outside, the chorus is primarily a group of followers, believers in Annina's stigmata and her gift of faith. But Menotti adds depth and personality to the chorus by developing an underlying doubt. Are these people truly devout, or are they opportunists, superstitious, or simply looking to be part of something bigger than themselves?

Menotti establishes them as pious at the beginning of the opera. The first voices are those of Assunta and chorus chanting a prayer, accompanied by a single French horn tone. Suddenly, however, he presents another side, as the clarinets burst into a wild *allegro* passage, and the chorus emerges, questioning, demanding, slyly spying through the crack in her bedroom door at the afflicted girl: "We've waited long enough!" "Why don't they bring her out?" "Watch out! They'll see you!" "Come out and bless us! Come out and heal us!" The libretto in combination with the chromatic moaning of the crowd and the agitated orchestra unveil a self-absorbed mix of possibilities. As the scene continues, individuals from the crowd speak up, voicing suspicion, hope, doubt, and confidence that she is the Chosen One. They bicker among themselves (rehearsal 18), captured best as the contraltos and tenors murmur, "Soon she will come" in monotone middle voice, while the basses sweep in wide gesture, describing her eyes and her pallor. On top of that, a young woman screeches in great leaps of major sevenths, arguing in support of Annina's gift, while another screams at her to mind her own business. The orchestra is equally chaotic, as the strings *pizzicato* repetitive patterns of eighth and sixteenth notes, solos woodwinds curve around two-measure gestures, the trombone whispers a low A over a bass drum roll – a blanket of white noise. Eventually the piano pulses on each beat in parallel octaves, and muted French horns repeat a two-measure motive. Finally the bedroom door opens and everything comes to a halt (rehearsal 21) as Don Marco emerges, cautioning the crowd, threatening to throw them out should anyone reach to touch the bleeding wounds.

In the second scene, the crowd again reaches frenzy in their hunt for and beating of Michele, and their stealing Annina away against her will. The festival is a holy one, in

honor of a saint, but their actions are not – criminal, violent, vengeful, and selfish. Are these religious pilgrims or an angry mob of fanatics?

In the second act, the chorus provides the voice of wedding guests, in celebration of the sacrament of matrimony. But they are exclusive, and refuse to admit Desideria because of her supposed adulterous sin. There is no forgiveness here. Yet, after Desideria accuses Michele and Annina of an incestuous love, it is Annina that holds her, prays with her as she dies. Unlike Annina's purity of heart, and willingness to have mercy, the people humanized by the chorus are in as many ways tainted with distrust, suspicion, and skepticism.

In the final act, Menotti gives the chorus back its faith, as they pray and chant over Annina as she takes the veil and dies. This, however, is not the hypocritical, disingenuous crowd of people, but a pious, loving congregation. Their prayers are strong, even as they are unaccompanied, moving in homophony, text clear and uninhibited. In the moments when the orchestra plays, it is a sweetly singing violin, or consonant chord by the harp and piano. The great "Alleluiah" (rehearsal 94) is set with confident authority, the orchestra moving with the vocal lines, filling out the sound with great homophonic chords of faith. Menotti creates a point-perfect focus on Annina and her vows, and engages the chorus and orchestra in drawing the audience to the center of the focus. With his setting, Menotti has humanized the chorus in the most real sense: people with conflicting emotions and motivation, swayed by both faith and reason.

Richard Marriot said, "In spite of the fact that Annina is a rather static character, that Michele lacks adequate motivation, and that there is stereotyping in the character of Desideria, Menotti has created a colorful assortment of personages."[49] Whether his assessment of each of the individual characters is agreeable or not, one cannot deny that Menotti was quite successful in wholly personifying the tragic characters of Annina and Michele.

[49] Richard John Marriot, Gian-Carlo Menotti: total musical theatre. A study of his operas. (PhD diss., University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, 1975), pg.246.

The Death of the Bishop of Brindisi

This work has been referred to as both a cantata and an opera. Even when staged, the action is minimal, occurring in a bedroom, with the Bishop and Nun. This presents different challenges than *The Consul* and *The Saint*, and places greater responsibility on the libretto and music to humanize the characters. Not only is the action negligible, the duration of the work is condensed into just thirty minutes, and there are only two solo, named characters. The time frame is also brief, just one night between sundown and sunrise.

As opposed to Marc Blitzstein's assessment of *The Saint*, "[Menotti] rarely, if ever, writes about themes which have been his long-time convictions; the convictions grow with the actual working, and may quite possibly fade with a work's completion,"[50] Menotti built *The Death of the Bishop of Brindisi* around his continuing compulsion to explore the clash between spiritual devotion and reason. The conflict around which *The Bishop* is built is again related to questioning one's faith, but not in the form of skepticism. Instead, it presents three devout bodies, each steadfast in their vow to uphold their faith at all costs. Ultimately, this commitment causes pain and suffering for others, and draws attention to the division between mankind's interpretation of this obligation, and the ideal for which it stands.

[50] Marc Blitzstein, (untitled review), Notes, Second Series, (June 1956), p. 523.

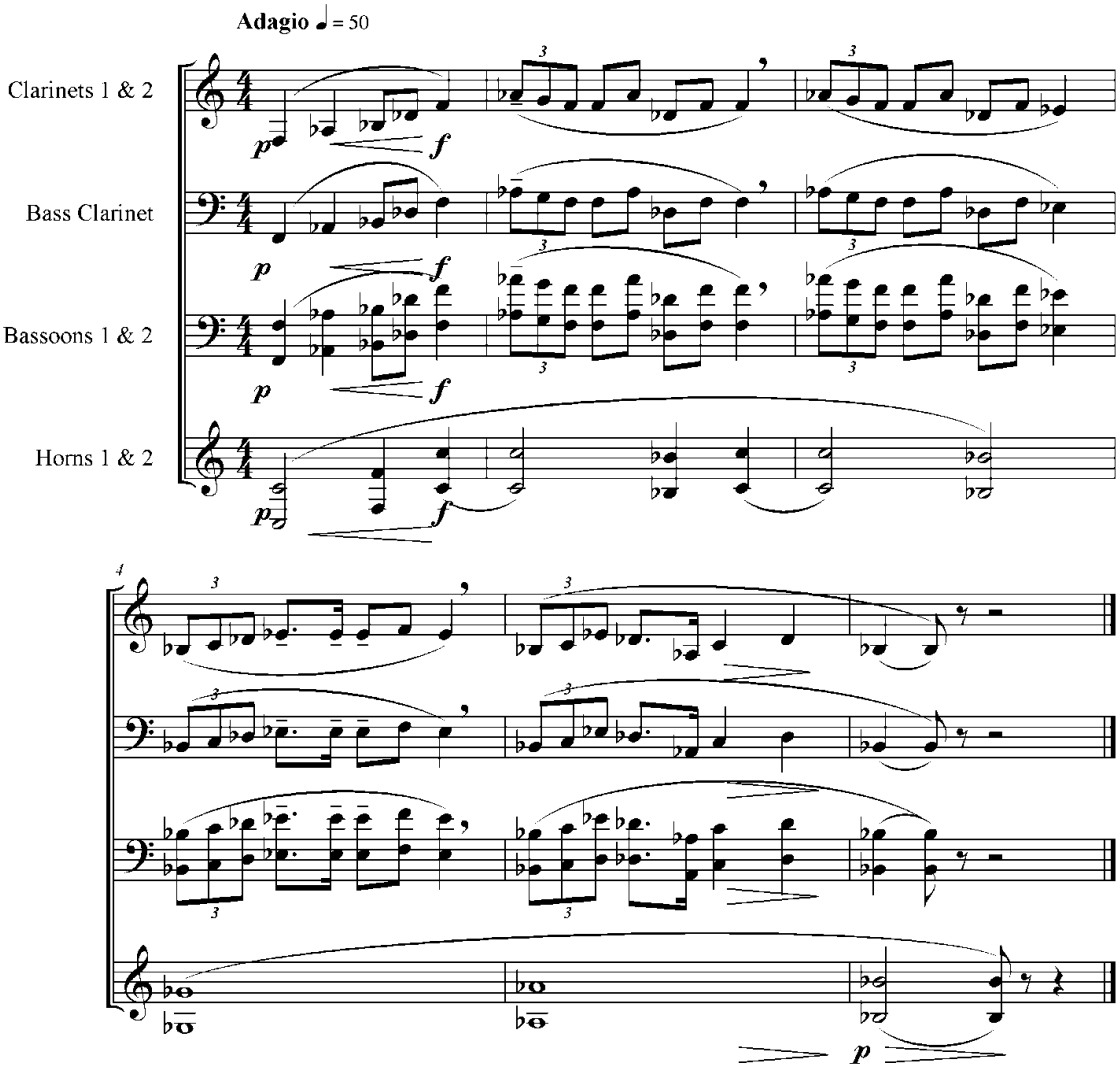
Similar to *The Saint*, the choruses play a significant part in the drama of this piece. It can be argued that the chorus of children is as human as the Bishop in its role. The adult chorus is a more faceless humanity. Its "everyman" quality is important in establishing a self-reflective perspective for the audience. The Nun is a minor role for who Menotti provides soothing, somewhat benign music and text.

The orchestra's creation of the fatal storm is a critical part of the human emotion of the work. The rising and falling of chromatic waves, the fury of crashing and creaking ships, and the howling of the wind stand the audience's nerves on end. It is obvious what the outcome of the storm will be, but the listener experiences this terrifying scene through the eyes of the children and the Bishop, which in turn makes the emotion touchable.

As in the other two works, clarinet and French horn add important elements at key moments. The trombone "voice of doom" is even more vocal than in *The Consul* and *The Saint*. Menotti scores two pianos and a harp, allowing for percussive broken and clustered chords, and sliding glissando. Memories of his mother instructing the townspeople in Gregorian chant surface, as he said, "[The Death of the Bishop of Brindisi] is…built on recitative, much of it inspired…by Gregorian chant." [51]

The primary theme of *The Bishop* begins the work. (This theme will occur many times, in various ways, sometimes set with text):

[51] John Gruen, Menotti (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1978), 167.



It is followed immediately repeated in the strings, with the flute and oboe playing the French horn part. At the conclusion of the strings, the Bishop's journey begins. The tempo changes drastically, *allegro molto*, and the low instruments stomp away with running arpeggiated eighth notes. The Bishop enters:

> "And now the night begins.
> No longer can the deceptive sun eclipse the hovering ghosts.
> The unraveled mind can no longer weave its reassuring patterns.
> Mem'ries unlock their secret dungeons to haunt this crumbling halls like evil mice."

By 1963, Menotti's command of the English language was masterful. The images invoked by the text are vivid, and the pounding eighth notes in the orchestra add both the waves crashing outside the castle, and the Bishop's own pounding heart as he fears the impending dreams of the night.

As the Bishop describes his terrible visions, the emotions he felt at the time are revealed through the orchestra, while the emotions he feels in the present are expressed through the words.

1. As he recalls a time before the arrival of the children, he sings of "holding a glass of sweet Salernian wine, I saw the setting sun place a golden sword upon the sluggish sea". The vocal line is arioso, and he is accompanied by the harp and warmth of an alto flute solo – the contentment of a time past.

2. When he is approached by the children and townspeople to bless the ocean voyage, the strings and pianos animate the sense of increasing pressure he felt with dissonant, chromatic chords on the downbeat of each measure. Menotti again devises a constantly evolving atmosphere for the Bishop to respond to by delaying his text until just after the instrumental statements on the downbeat.

3. As he pleads to God for answers, and curses himself for blessing the children to their doom, strings build underneath him, while around his shouts, the trombones and brass herald the impending tragedy.

4. Finally, in the last hours of the night, he accepts the guilt and the blame:

> "Yes, I must be at fault. What love, what faith can justify the man who makes himself the arbiter of other people's lives?...
> If this be death…I pray not for eternal bliss or peace or immortality. For all that I have suffered, for all that I have sought, let me, if for an instant only, behold the eternal truth. Give me, give me the answer!
> No forgiveness can wash my guilt away, for without knowledge absolute there can be no paradise for me. No gate of heaven shall I enter unless it be revealed to me why, why I, who loved so purely, was cursed with such destructive love."

With these words, Menotti removes the mystery that shrouds clergy, and shows a mere man underneath, someone with pain, confusion, looking for answers. Faith becomes mortal through the Bishop's tragic words.

Throughout the piece, the Bishop calls out to the Nun, whose attempts to soothe him are cloaked in smaller instrumental combinations – one piano, the harp and sustained bassoon, for example. The tempo often slows around her passages (*molto meno mosso).* Her presence has two purposes – to provide a calm contrast to the Bishop, heightening the emotional response he has to the visions we cannot see, and to insert unspoiled, loving faith that the audience can experience as the purity from which the Bishop, the children and the townspeople acted.

The chorus of townspeople provides an anonymous persona, inhabitants of the Bishop's memory. Menotti makes them tangible and human from their first entrance (rehearsal 24) by supporting them with the entire orchestra except the harp. At once this setting removes the one instrument (harp) that is often associated with the celestial divine, while providing substance and depth with the instruments. Flute, oboe, bassoon, string bass, percussion and piano play staccato running eighth notes in 12/8, while trumpet and trombone sustain long, lyric passages underneath. Violin, viola, horn and clarinet double the voices, which sing, "Behold the singing children, the innocent dreamers, barefoot and ragged, their eyes consumed with loneliness, they come toward us." With this entrance, Menotti uses the orchestra music to substantiate the adult chorus, and subsequently establishes the children's existence with the text.

The remainder of this chorus is a flurry of variation. The text elaborates on the children and the scars they carry from their journey (physical and emotional):

"Their tender beauty scathed by fest'ring wounds…On tiny carts driven by goat or donkey, the sick and wounded lie – no dog will bark at them. Behold the singing children, God's own little knights."

The seemingly unending procession of broken but determined children whisks the townspeople through a sentimental spectrum. Menotti creates a jumbled tangle of pity, awe, worry, admiration, horror, and wonder with jarring changes in pulse, triple against duple time, fragmented and conflicting statements in the orchestra, instruments in opposition with one another, and carefully selected articulation, accents, and dynamics. Because of the intensity and thick texture, the chorus must be precise in focus, tone, and

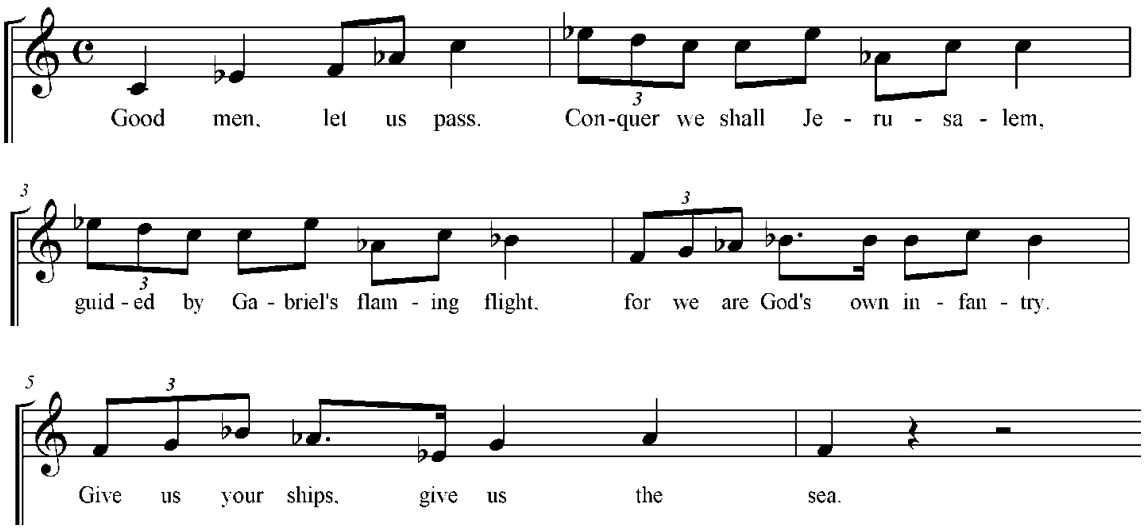
articulation in order for the important descriptive text to be heard. This is a challenge – the section is unrelenting. One outcome is that through the chorus's necessary laborious, painstaking singing and articulation, an exhausting kaleidoscope of emotion washes over the audience, giving life to the townspeople's experience, and establishing them as a human entity unto themselves.

In a most compelling musical moment, the turbulence is suddenly halted (rehearsal 28), as the chorus and entire orchestra come together as one in a *largamente* section of parallel rhythm and solid consonant, hymn-like unity. "What burning vision in their sunken eyes…gave them such lasting strength?"

The chorus's next entrance is simpler, and straightforward. They demand of the Bishop a blessing on the children, with whom they have placed all of their confidence and faith. "Who else shall free the Holy Tomb?" Their message is single-minded, and this is reflected in the scoring of the orchestra. The third chorus begins similarly, but quickly splinters, as the townspeople shout out ways to punish the holy man who blessed the children to their deaths. In the nine years between composition of *The Saint* and *The Bishop*, Menotti's inventiveness and ability to expand the musical resources, crafting a collage of simultaneous manifestations of mob mentality has developed. "Stone his palace! Break his staff, and cast his ring into the sea! Burn his books!" The four voices alternate between two-part duets and staggered, jagged entrances. The orchestra functions similarly, and often the initial statements are scored lightly so that the text is comprehensible before the chorus weaves and twists it.

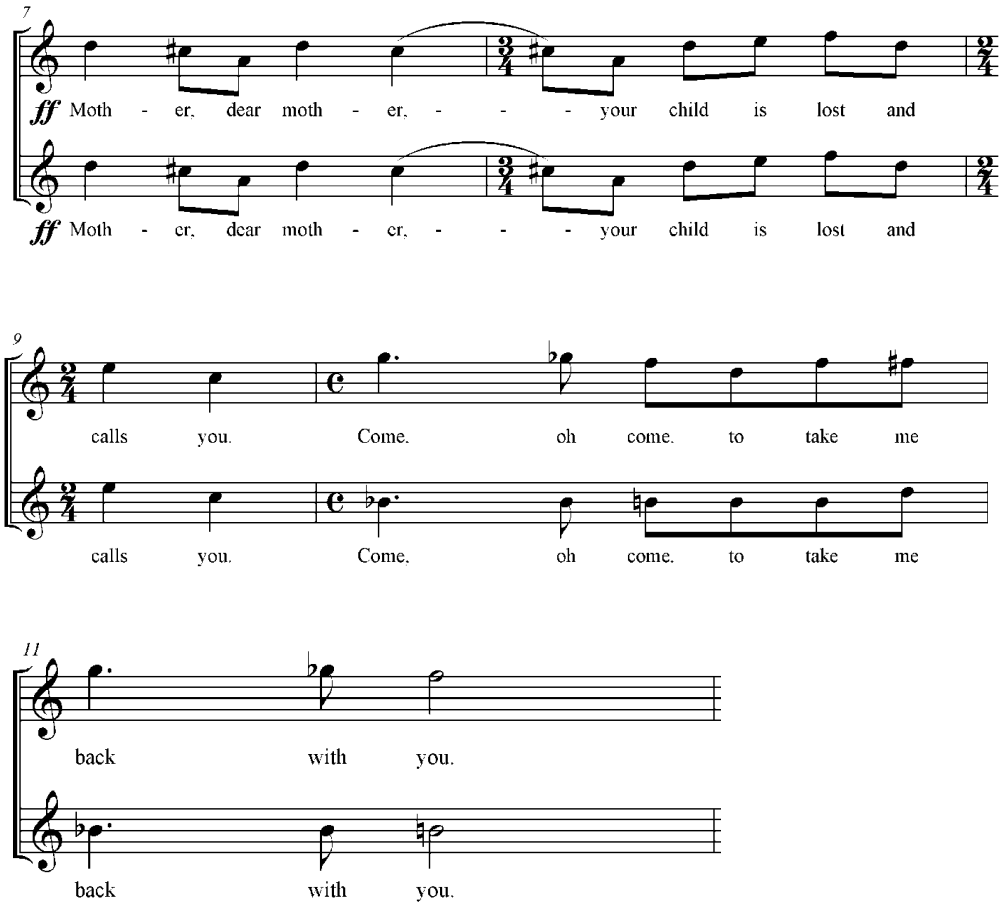
The second tragic character, the chorus of children, tears at the audience's soul in its very real humanity. Shreds of nursery rhyme-like passages wind through their music, a constant reminder of their innocence. This section is accompanied by clarinet, bass clarinet, and alto flute.

Lento

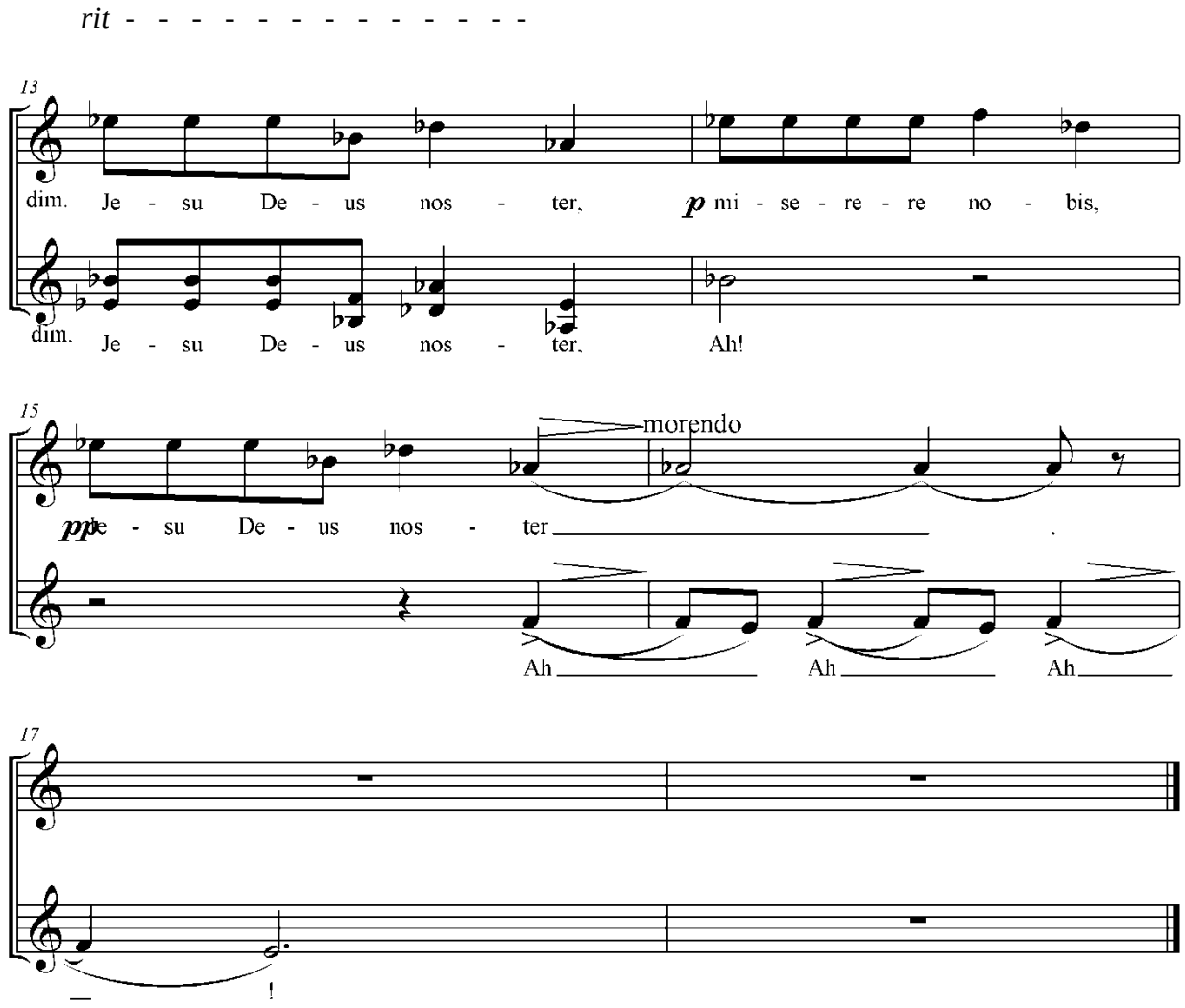


They sing together either in unison or two parts, with one exception. As the storm rips their ships to timber, drowns the children and smashes their mission, Menotti likewise splinters their music. They cry out for their mother, father, or angel to rescue them, in this section accompanied by tremolo violins, *sul ponticello*, tremolo flute, clarinet, oboe, and piano, and viola doubling the vocal line:

Allegro



As they sink below the stormy waves, they pray "*Jesu Deus noster, Miserere nobis*!" in three-part harmony, which disintegrates to a single line of text over dying moans:



The orchestra begins this section with racing sixteenth-notes by the bass clarinet, violins and cello; French horns trombone and timpani doubles the voices; string bass (*sul ponticello*), bass drum and gong tremolo. As the children's parts diminish to two and then one voice part, only harp and cello accompany them to their deaths.

In each occasion where the children sing, the timbre of their voices against the orchestra is monumental in drawing the audience in, recognizing their simple and childlike naïveté, and experiencing their tragic fate.

The powerful libretto has an immense impact on the degree to which the audience finds the characters believable and authentic. It can certainly be argued that with *The Bishop*, Menotti truly found his voice. In this work, he presents a personally weighty conflict within the framework of a relatively small piece that did not have the dramatic advantage of great sets, movement, or physical action. At the age of fifty-two when *Bishop* was premiered, he was economical with his writing of both the libretto and the score. Every word, every note and chord has vigor, depth, and meaning. The imagery conjured by the combination of text and music does not allow the listener to maintain distance, and demands emotional response.

In my own experience conducting *The Death of the Bishop of Brindisi* in concert, the audience's response was fervent and overwhelming. Many wept as the praying children were swept under the waves. The Nun's calming passages visibly consoled the audience, which was strongly affected by the terror and shame exhibited by the Bishop. The fickle disposition of the townspeople seemed to leave them uncomfortable. The orchestration masterfully lulled them at moments, and shocked them at others. The musicians were also moved. Over the twelve week rehearsal period, many singers and instrumentalists commented that they loved the work, and planned to look for more opportunity to

perform Menotti's music. After the performance, several remarked to me that they were shaken, emotional wrung out, and thrilled to have been a part of such a masterpiece.

Other performances have received similar reactions. Bruce Burroughs has written:

"I remember the audience members approaching afterward in all manner of moods, from the lady, visibly shaken, who said simply, 'I don't know when I have ever been so moved by anything', and then hurried away, to the one that exclaimed in apparent astonishment, 'I understood every last word!' The reason for the first statement, of course, is Menotti himself, who poured not just heart and soul and, ultimately, perhaps a sense of hope, but all his doubts about God, faith, and man's place and duties in the cosmic scheme…into his score, each episode of which strikes exactly the right musical and textual mark to channel not only his characters' deepest feelings, but to reveal the composer's own as well."[52]

While many musicians have heard of Gian Carlo Menotti, not many are familiar with specific works, other than the popular holiday opera *Amahl and the Night Visitors*. While he was alive and actively composing, he was more recognizable by the greater population. *The Death of the Bishop of Brindisi* is a perfect example of why his work should be more mainstream, and a significant part of any study of twentieth century or American repertoire.

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[52] Bruce Burroughs, Stage Memories - The Death of the Bishop of Brindisi, accessed January, 2011, http://www.bruceburroughs.com/Bishop.html.

Conclusion

An examination of Menotti's *The Consul*, *The Saint of Bleecker Street*, and *The Death of the Bishop of Brindisi* presents an abundance of devices and techniques the composer/librettist used to bring the characters alive.

1. By obscuring the hard lines between recitative and aria, and between action and reaction, he molded musical form to become more true to human expression.

2. He capitalized on the strengths of instruments and voice, and created ensembles that convey emotions that touch an audience very personally. Using instruments with specific traditional connotations (English horn, harp), as well a handful of favorite instruments with distinct sonorities (clarinet, French horn, trombone, and piano) opened up a more colorful palette of sound combinations to suit the many shades of human expression depicted in his operas.

3. He masterfully sculpted a marriage of words and music in a way that defies separation. As a result his characters become real, living, and human.

4. The combination of all of these provides effective dramatic action, clearly defined and musically individualized characters (particularly the six tragic characters studied here), and a pragmatic and emotional experience for his audiences.

Gian Carlo Menotti himself may have summarized best:

"Music exists only in my ear, but I need your ear to make it work…the audience is also part of the work of art."[53]

"I think the composer must make clear what he is saying…You have to make your point then and there. You cannot wait until the curtain is down and the people go home and then say, 'Ah! That is what you wanted to mean.' You must. You're speaking. It is a conversation. It is a very direct conversation…People are saying something to you then, and the emotion must be made then and there."[54]

Recalling a conversation between Toscanini and Puccini, contrasting Toscanini's performances of Bohème with one at Teatro dal Verme (Menotti called a "second-rate theater"):

At the end of the Verme performance, Toscanini said, "It was a terrible performance." All of a sudden he looked at Puccini, and Puccini was crying. Toscanini said, "I don't believe it! I gave you a marvelous performance [of *Bohème*] at La Scala and I never saw you so touched." Puccini said, "Well, you gave me perfection, and they gave me their heart." Menotti went on to talk about falling in love with the characters one creates as composer and librettist. "The only way you really can create a character is that you have to live their life, and you have to find yourself on stage with them, in a certain way."[55]

[53] Bruce Duffie, interview with Menotti, WNIB Studios in Chicago, March 19, 1981.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Bruce Duffie, interview with Menotti, Drake Hotel in Chicago, October 28, 1993.

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*The scores referred to in Richard John Marriot's dissertation included *The Consul* (1947) and *The Saint of Bleecker Street* (1955). The scores that I used included a 1984 edition of *The* Consul that included added sections, and a 1978 revision of *The Saint of Bleecker Street*.

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