



AMBER

A memoir of Bataan

AMBER
An Opera in One Act
By
Richard L. Rose (1997)

Performed in 1999 at the Alexandria Lyceum
By the *Marginal Notes Ensemble*:

Melinda Titus-Fausch(Jenny), Soprano
Allison Baker (Amber), Mezzo-soprano
Richard Rose (Rusty), Tenor
Graham Clark (Harry Goss), Bass
Barbara Wilkinson, Pianist and Director

Recording by *RonArt Associates, Lorton, Virginia*
Drawing by *John O'Connor of Loudoun County, Virginia*

In benefit concerts for the U.S. Soldiers and Airmen's Home in Washington, D.C.

FOLK MUSIC

ANNUNCIATIONS is a collection of five musical settings of scripture that make announcements about compassion. It is the first section of the **Marginal Notes** project, described below and in the *Afterword*. Originally composed and performed in 1969, *Annunciations* was performed several more times over the years and then revised in 2008. As an amateur musician, I made only modest distinctions between improvisation, rehearsal, composition, and performance. My vocal music was written for small forces and performed for local benefits. It featured musical settings of reinterpreted traditional stories, such as Bible parables, fairy tales, folk tales, and patriotic stories.

Folk art has been described as “art created by people who live below the level of historical scrutiny.” (Roger Butterfield, 1983). To this I add that folk art is made by a community. A group assembles not only to recount and sing its stories but to participate in them. By rehearsing and sharing the meaning of the story, the participants reinforce its values—compassion (*Annunciation*), duty (*Amber*), wise conduct (*The Books of Daniel*), acceptance of the other (*The People's Voice*), and the moral implications of life's transience (*The Profit of Doom* and *Frameshifts*).

These stories are not interpreted according to creed. They are, however, a kind of religious folk music because they focus on the human strengths that tie communities together. In a time when the need for locally sustainable communities has become obvious, perhaps such music will be valued.—RLR

Characters:

Harry Goss, A ninety year old retired general who received a field commission in Bataan during the Second World War and now lives in the family home in Tennessee with his daughter, Amber.

Amber Claussen, A 64 year old divorcee with three children who cares for her aged father.

Jenny Farris, A 72 –old daughter who is a retired concert pianist. She is a widow with two children.

Rusty (Harry, Jr.) Goss, youngest child of Harry Goss, Sr. He is a 61 year-old Army Major, also divorced, with no children.

Time: Thanksgiving, November 22, 1996, 10:00 a.m.

Place: The Gosses’ living room and dining room

Scene: *As they await the arrival of guests for Thanksgiving dinner at noon, the four characters are looking through the photographs and albums on the dining room table. The kitchen is stage right. Amber carries dishes from the kitchen to another table off stage right. The front door is offstage left. Behind them is a picture window through which one can see a mountain road above the turn in a river far below. During the overture, Amber wheels Harry onto stage in a wheel chair. He kicks up the foot-rests and doesn’t help her as she changes his jacket, combs his hair, wipes his face with a cloth and gives him a cup of coffee. He stares at her. The overture ends and the other two characters come on stage. They begin looking at the photographs. Jenny uncovers the piano keys and Amber, who is carrying cups back to the kitchen, looks irritably at her sister.*

OVERTURE

Rusty: Families are those you have still
Even when you’ve had it with them.

Jenny: You remember Uncle Edward
Came to visit us in Jersey.

Amber *to Rusty:*
You were three, he brought his daughter,
Fifty-eight now—never married.

Harry: When are all the children coming?

Amber: Noon today, I told you, Father.

ALL (SATB):

Deviled eggs, potato salad,
Ham and turkey on the table,
Women humming in the kitchen,
Children hiding in the attic—

Rusty: *Looking at a photograph*

All the men are pitching horseshoes—
All but me—I watch and listen.

Jenny *Holding a photograph for Rusty to see*

You remember Edward's Gladys
Came to see us in Biloxi.

Amber:

Silver eels were all you caught then.

Jenny and Amber: *To Rusty*

You were thirteen. She was ten.

Harry:

Will Gladys come today at ten?

ALL:

Prying, fumbling, they have found it—
Locked, in cobwebs, in the attic—
Edward's daughter's hidden trousseau.
Speak and some are always listening.
Families are those you have still
Even when you've had it with them.
Speak and some are always listening.

Harry:

Will Gladys come today at ten?

Amber: *Bending down to Harry, speaking slowly and carefully*

Father, you know that I told you
Everyone arrives at noon.

He shakes his head and looks away from her.

ALL:

Slice and fry eggplant in bacon.
Gladys always sang so sweetly.

Time was you could hear the peepers
On the green and curling river.

Amber: *She has picked up a photograph for the first time*
Last time Gladys came to see us
All the base was on alert:
Rapid City, where the hunter
Downstairs while his wife was sleeping,
Left his game, drove to his squadron.
Screams—remember?—screams and shouting,
Ducks in sink and bathtub swimming,
Beating bloody wings on tiling,
Not as dead as hunter left them.

Thus the dead fly up to greet us
Just when we had thought them finished.

The others stare at Amber for a moment before offering Rusty something to eat.

Jenny, Amber and Harry:

Have a sliced tomato, Rusty.
Have some scallions and iced tea and
Pecan pie, green beans and okra,
Ribs, ambrosia, guilt and blessing.

Amber: Tell us when you must be leaving.

Harry: You're still stationed in El Paso—

Amber: Father, that was last year, you remember.

Harry: *ignoring her*

Went there TDY in '50.

Amber and Jenny:

All our children grown and gone now
Still we come back to remember
All our childhood spent in travel
To far places we remember.

ALL:

All the stations and assignments,
Tours and temporary duties,
Packing households and unpacking,
Orders cut and orders pending,
Orders issued, never ending,
Every month, new destinations.

Harry:

Every month a new assignment,
Good companions, daily duty,
In a cause worth life and fortune:
All the places I remember.

Amber and Rusty listen to Harry while Jenny goes to the piano, sits on the bench and begins looking through the music on the stand.

Amber: *Aside.*

Thus the dead fly up to greet us
Just when we had thought them finished.

Harry picks up an olive-green scrapbook. Amber listens intently to her father, but Rusty seems distracted, sometimes covering his face with his hands.

Harry: Once the brass band had played its marches,
After reviews, salutes and talk,
My first command was herding cattle
From Balanga to Bagoc.

On the first day, the noncoms left me,
Taking the cattle, jeep, and fuel,
Leaving us just a weekly ration:
A ball of rice—and worried mule.

Jenny continues to look through the music. Rusty looks up when Amber nudges him.

Harry: Clark Field was hit same day as Pearl—
Same day as our dusty walk
In raining ash. It was our buddies.
Close as flesh and white as chalk.

Amber again nudges Rusty toward his father. Jenny puts a hymnal on the music stand.

Harry and Rusty:

We're the battling bastards of Bataan.
No Mama, No Papa, No Uncle Sam;
No aunts, no uncles, no cousins, no nieces;
No pills, no planes, no artillery pieces.
And nobody gives a damn.

Harry: After our stroll across the jungle,
Quenching the friendly insects' thirst,

Zeros above to guide our footsteps,
We fell in with the Ninety-First.

It was the Philippine division,
Slaughtered in April when we fell.
When Dugout Doug returned to save us
Their three hundred heads could never tell.

Harry and Rusty: “We’re the battling . . .”

Rusty: Now, Father, all those days have ended.
All you won is sure to last.
None forgets the cost expended.
Honor crowns your life, your past.

Harry: Yes, it’s true those days have ended—
Swept like brush into the blast.
None recalls what we intended:
Duty, honor, country’s past.

Amber: *Aside*

Every year we tell the story.
It should never be forgotten.
Yet there is another story—

Rusty looks sharply at her.

We will never tell.

Harry and Rusty: “We’re the battling . . .”

Amber: “Every year . . .”

Jenny: *Playing and singing a hymn at the piano.*

Come ye thankful people, come.
Raise the song of harvest home.
All is safely gathered in
Ere the winter storms begin,
God our Father will provide
For our wants to be supplied.
Come to God’s own temple, come.
Raise the song of harvest home.

Amber: *Aside.*

Once a year, or twice, or more,
Miss Pure Art comes, plays some old score,

Sings hymns and praises all my food—
She who never cooked a radish—
Then disappears like some bad mood.
Then Rusty goes off on his own—
Dad and I again alone:
One gives care where none is wanted,
Wanting life where death has grown;
The other taking care to nourish
Nothing but the doubts we've sown.
I think he knows.

To Rusty:

I think he knows.

Rusty: "Father, all those days have ended . . ."

ALL:

All the world is God's own field,
Fruit unto his praise to yield—
Wheat and tares together sown
Unto joy or sorrow grown.
First the blade and then the ear,
Then the full corn shall appear.
Lord of harvest, grant that we
Wholesome grain and pure may be.

Amber returns to the kitchen. Rusty sits near the kitchen door. Jenny plays the opening chords of Rachmaninoff's C# minor Prelude. Harry interrupts her.

Harry: Jen, don't play that Russian music.
Play good American—

Jenny: *Playfully*

Like Arlen, *Gershvin*, and Berlin?

Harry: The Dorsey tune—
You know the one.

She begins to play "I'm getting sentimental over you."

Harry: When I hear that tune,
The tune your mother sang,
I think of how I stood that time
So long ago.

Death was coming soon—
Before the Bataan Gang
Could ever manage their return.
And none would know.

Amber comes from the kitchen, places a tray of food on the sideboard, and speaks to Rusty.

Amber: If I have to listen to that song another time—
To hear them talk of Mother fondly—fondly!
I'll tell him what he wants so much to know.

Rusty: Careful, sister!

Harry: I could deny—

Amber Lately all he talks about is her—
The two of them—
And that damn song!

Harry: Nothing would belong
To Homma and his crew
If home were safe.
His tanks could grind,
His Zeros strafe.

Thinking of that song
Reminded me of her.
If she and Edward could comply,
There was no risk I would deny—
Even to die.

And yet,
I could deny so much—
The runs and chills,
The living burials.
I could deny so much,
Knowing she was safe—
Knowing she carried on.

Amber speaks to Rusty.

Amber: Our effort in the war
Kept safe the dream
He paid for.

Then the next day,
Leyte fell.
Though we were children,
We'd broken the spell!

Rusty: Amber I wish you wouldn't dwell
On things so long ago,
On stories we should never tell.

Amber: We broke the spell!
We had our proof
That their loyal deaths
Were less for him to bear
Than their faithless lives—
Their killing lives—
Could ever be.

Their every embrace
Wished him to die.
How could we do less—
Our duty deny?

Rusty: Amber, I wish—

Amber: Just a wish makes all the difference.
From the wish the act is grown.
What I determine, I accomplish.
We made our contribution to the war—
Even you, who must be urged
To act at all,
As now you must be urged
Even to recall.
Be proud to have done what we wished.
Let the dead fly all around us:
They are still dead—buried and finished.

Harry: And yet,
I could deny so much—
The runs and chills,
The living burials.
I could deny so much,
Knowing she was safe—
Knowing she carried on.

Amber: *Still speaking to Rusty.*

How she carried on!
If only he knew!
With Miss Pure Art
Gone to her music school,
It was only us two
Left the task to do.
What could we give—little children?
What could we give for our country?

Rusty takes her arm. They exit to the kitchen.

Harry: Living on that song—
As much as rice and snails—
Denying pain and life itself,
I hid and ran;

Paddled to Luzon
Made ambushes and sabotage
My battle plan.

Every chance we had we would unbury men
And nurse them back with turnips and sweet cane.

Throw live rounds in their cooking fires
To scatter them, take prisoners out
And do it all again.

“

Living on that song—
That tune your mother sang.

Harry rises from the chair. Jenny holds his shoulders. He sits again.

Jenny: Mother loved us, never left us,
Always wanted, always kept us.

Harry: Down the river Talisay I sang that song.
We fed a thousand leeches on that trip.

He becomes more agitated, rises in the chair. Again, Jenny holds his shoulders.

Never reaching deep enough to pay all debts:
The ‘sun treatment’ I never had
At fixed bayonets;
The living burial I never had,
“like so much cord-wood in a pit;”

Executions for wearing a watch
Or cooking rice, or whistling a song—
What would I give to unbury them?
What would I give?

Jenny: *Trying to calm him.*

No matter where I've toured,
When I come home,
I am a girl again.
I am your daughter.

At home, here, nothing changes—
I am your daughter;
What fame or war arranges,
What you or I fought for,
It doesn't matter.

I am the girl you sent
To play-act while you acted;
To dress up, dance and sing
While cruel war exacted

Its price in youth and dreams,
In hopes deferred forever,
In wishes unfulfilled,
In scope of life contracted.

Could I have made some breeze
To bring you home,
Could music sail like ships
To bring men home,

Then all my work and skill
Acquired through endless practice
Would make the white sails fill
To bring you home,
And spill the killing Axis:
I would have brought you home.
I would have sung you home.

Rusty and Amber return from the kitchen.

Harry: Jenny, you know,
You're so much like your mother.
If she had lived
No one could tell you from the other.

What I would keep
She would make me spend.
Here, duties end.

“If only duties remain
When warfare’s over,
Then warfare’s over,”
(so in the night
she whispered—
your dear mother)
“Then what’s the gift
Of living that we send
When duties end?”

What we could give
We gave freely
Because we loved her,
Our daughter Jenny.
You had to go—
In this, we gave again—
Your art begin.

Harry: If only . . .

Jenny: Could I have . . .

ALL:
So parents give
Of every guilt and blessing,
At last give up
The hopes they were caressing;
Let children go,
Grow perfect in their art,
Find duty’s heart.

Amber: Father, when we thought of you
In pain, or dead for all we knew—

Rusty sees where she is leading and tries to restrain her. She pushes him away.

Each night, before we went to sleep,
We’d pray your soul to keep.

Ever your last words recall:
“Always hear your country’s call.
Your duty’s here. Your duty keep.

When country calls, your promise keep.”

Amber picks up his Army scrapbook.

Amber: While you struggled in Bataan
Our mother loved another man—
Your brother Edward—
They didn’t hide it.
”Let the magpies talk.
Let the neighbors gawk.”
They didn’t hide it.”

Rusty draws away from them. Harry watches him.

Once they took us to a show—
I didn’t want to. They made me go.
When the weekly newsreel ran,
It took their breath. It was Bataan.
Their fear—they couldn’t hide it.
That was when I made our plan.
Their fear—they couldn’t hide it.

Their every embrace
Wished you to die.
How could we do less—
Our duty deny?

Rusty: We were children—little children.
What could we know or even try?

Amber: I made their breakfasts, cleaned their room.
I washed their clothes and watched them tough—
For two long years, two years too much!
I planned their doom.

Once I’d made them sure of me,
And Rusty was old enough to send,
On a day overcast and wet,
With a case of oil
To the hairpin turn . . .

She points to the road.

Harry and Jenny:
What is this we learn?

Amber: I prepared them a special omelet—
Crushed wedding crystal in a bowl,
And stirred in the eggs and salt
And served them in bed.

They swallowed whole
The anger I had denied—
Two years of self-loathing and contempt.
Then their bloody pain
Welled up from inside
And racing away
In a helpless attempt,
Without brakes on a deadly road,
They met death's embrace
In a fiery slide.

Father, we did this for you—
This, our effort for the war,
This has drained the traitors' wound,
This, our duty to restore—
To bring you back to us;
To bring you home:

Amber and Rusty:

“Your duty here, your duty keep;
When country calls, your promise keep.
Your promise keep.

Harry: What are you saying?
What is it you—
Both of you—
Have done?

He looks at Rusty.

Rusty:

She told me this story so many times
I seem to believe it.
Still, it's more like a dream
And such horrible crimes—
I cannot believe it.

He waves toward the window and stares.

Braking to slow at the hairpin turn,
A case of oil in my basket;

Soaked to the bone when I return,
The organ drone,
And closed casket.

Rusty: She told . . .

Amber: Always hear . . .

Harry: The burial of the living . . .

Jenny: Could I have made . . .

Amber: Father, we did this for you—

Harry:
Not for me! No, this was not for me!
You killed your Mother, Uncle-Father.

Amber: You are our father. How can it be?

Rusty: You are our father. It was a dream!

Jenny: All in a moment, I am alone now.
Gone is my mother, and unknown now
Are my sister, brother—and Father too?

Harry: No Jen.
You are mine and Clysta's daughter.
Those loving times won't come again.

*Harry rises from the wheel chair and speaks
angrily to Amber and Rusty.*

Safe at home—
I left you safe at home.
The three of us
Had no score to settle.

Safe at home—
When I saw buddies die,
I could be calm
In the heat of battle
Knowing our preparation
Left you with parents—
Clysta and Edward, the youngest
Of all my brothers:
Omaha, Arizona,
Midway and Tobruk:

All of my brothers gone now—
Even Edward, whom you took.

There is a knock at the door. Amber looks out the window. Rusty seems dazed. Amber speaks to Jenny.

Amber: It's Gladys and our children—

Harry: Where there was honor, now disgrace.
Where there was safety, horror.
If I could return, I would take the place
Of any man dying at Pilar,
Or any boy shot on the road,
Or any girl covering her face
For shame, For shame, For shame.

Without my name,
Let nothing remain!
Without my name—

He collapses on his chair. Amber grabs the curtain. Jenny bends down to him.

Jenny: Father!

She looks at her brother and sister.

Amber: I'll tell them to go—

Jenny: No! Open the door!

Nothing remains but prayer.
Prayer and Thanksgiving.
Gratefulness for such a father,
Grace for the living.

She prays.

Our Father who art in Heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done
On Earth as it is in Heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
Forgive our debts as we forgive.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.

Amber opens the door. Light streams into the room. Amber and Rusty stand on either side of Jenny and Harry.

ALL: Our Father . . .

FINIS

The Weather
Today—Fair and clear. Tomorrow—High 56, low 34. Details on Page 11.

The Washington Post

JAN 3 1942

SUNDAY POST
WAKE-UPS
TAKEN OVER
4 P. M. SATURDAY

NO. 23,942
WASHINGTON: SATURDAY, JANUARY 3, 1942
THREE CENTS

Manila Lost, Our Troops Withstand Fierce Onset North of City; Bay Forts Still Bar Harbor to Foe; 26 Nations Pledge Selves to Fight Axis to Finish

Lack of War Plans for Factories Cause of OPM Auto Quota Rise; Senate Gets Price-Licensing Bill

Henderson Doesn't Say Why Program, At Least for Conversion of Plants, Isn't Ready

By Alfred Friendly

The automobile industry will be allowed to produce approximately 200,000 cars this month, almost double previously determined selling limits, largely because there are no plans available for using the factories, their labor and machine tools in military production, OPM Civilian Supply Director Louis Brandeis said in a statement.

At a press conference during which he announced that all auto production will end "about January 31," Henderson said that before setting the higher production figures he would consult with Army officials.

"The answer was unambiguously," Henderson said.

Henderson gave no direct answer to a question as to why the industry, OPM and the armed services were not in a position to effect military work on, or at least to begin the conversion of, the machines that will be used in January production, particularly those under the regulation program now given forward.

Shipyard Client Of Corcoran Loses Contract

New Measure, Unlike That Passed in House, Calls for 'Care' to Put Lid on Key Commodities

By Robert De Voe

The Senate Banking Committee yesterday unanimously reported out a price-control bill that "takes" into the district's salient features of the measure passed by the House last November and revised language as a major power for enforcement of maximum prices.

In a three-hour session, crowded for the most part by those who wanted to see the bill passed, the committee voted to report the bill to the Senate floor.

The bill contemplates the "selective" system of price control whereby prices are fixed for certain "key" commodities.

Determined that in the case of agricultural commodities no prices shall be fixed below 100 per cent of parity or the price prevailing last October 1.

When maximums "selected" in the words of Senator Beveridge (Dem., Ind.), chairman of the committee, the bill "takes the" of establishing maximums.

Instead, instead, it declares that it shall be the policy of the

The War Today Wavell to Lead Allies in Pacific; Australia Says

Base at Cavite Wrecked by Our Navy and Then Is Abandoned

By Marshall Andrew

Manila and Cavite gone, Gen. Douglas MacArthur's American and Filipino forces last night stood up to Japanese assault of mounting ferocity along a shortened front north and northwest of the fallen Philippine capital.

From two directions the Japanese were closing in. MacArthur's army, faced now with almost impossible difficulties of supply, most high on ground and desperately heavy attacks from north and south, caught between the jaws of a mighty pincer.

Manila fell at 7 a. m. yesterday. Manila stood alone, which was a bitter, bitter afternoon, Manila lone. A War Department spokesman yesterday morning said the last remnants of enemy troops to enter the city for 42 years America's farthest colony, were "driven to a site necessary for the proper defense and maintenance of order."

City Was Not Defended

The news came to a halt here last night. MacArthur had arranged with the Japanese commander for the protection of the city against air attack and looting. MacArthur public and a detachment of the Philippine constabulary had been left behind to assist in keeping order and maintaining order.

Manila had been declared an "open city" and was not defended. All military installations had been abandoned.

The great naval base at Cavite was abandoned before the evacua-

MESSAGE BY ROOSEVELT

A JOINT DECLARATION BY THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND, THE REPUBLIC OF CHINA, THE REPUBLIC OF INDIA, THE REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES, THE REPUBLIC OF INDONESIA, THE REPUBLIC OF MALAYA, THE REPUBLIC OF BURMA, THE REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE, THE REPUBLIC OF CEYLON, THE REPUBLIC OF Ceylon, THE REPUBLIC OF SRI LANKA, THE REPUBLIC OF THE MALAY STATES, THE REPUBLIC OF THE MALAY STATES, THE REPUBLIC OF THE MALAY STATES, THE REPUBLIC OF THE MALAY STATES.

The foregoing signatory hereto, being committed to a common program of purpose and principles embodied in the Joint Declaration of the President of the United States of America and the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland dated August 14, 1941, known as the Atlantic Charter.

Being convinced that complete victory over their enemies is essential to defend life, liberty, independence and religious freedom, and to preserve human rights not justice in their own lands or well as in other lands, and that they are not engaged in a common struggle against savage and brutal forces seeking to enslave the world, hereby:

(1) Each Government pledges itself to employ the full resources, military or economic, against those members of the Axis who have attacked the United States, and

(2) Each Government pledges itself to cooperate with the Government of the United States and not to make a separate truce or peace with any such member of the Axis.

The foregoing declaration is hereby adopted by other nations who are, or will be, entering into similar agreements and commitments in the struggle for victory over Axis.

Allies, Including Russia, Accept Atlantic Charter As Basis of Aims

By Hedley Dore

Twenty-six nations, led by the United States, Britain, Soviet Russia and China, have subscribed to the principles of the Atlantic Charter and agreed to make no separate peace with the Axis, the White House announcement yesterday.

Terms of the agreement, officially entitled a "Declaration by United Nations" were released simultaneously in the capitals of all governments at war with the Axis.

Under the declaration, which states have yesterday were calling the "Washington plan" or anti-Axis pact, each of the 26 governments "pledge itself to employ its full resources, military or economic, against those members of the Axis who have attacked the United States, and to cooperate with the Government of the United States and not to make a separate truce or peace with any such member of the Axis."

The signing of the agreement gives obvious recognition to the fact that Russia, after its withdrawal from the relations with Japan, has the Soviet Union's assistance in the struggle against the Axis powers in the determination that they are now engaged in a common struggle against savage and brutal forces seeking to enslave the world.

By outlining the official statement of British and other members of the anti-Axis bloc for the first time, the Atlantic Charter, the

GEN. WAVELL, British commander, will head land, sea and air forces in the Pacific, Australia reports.

Sources:

Stanley Falk *Bataan: The March of Death* (1962) The words to the “Battling Bastards” song is on p.38 of the Jove Books edition of 1982, ISBN 051508918.4 The words “stacked like cordwood in a pit” are those of Ltr. Michael Doberovich, USMC.

Tommy Dorsey “*I’m getting sentimental over you*” (1937)

W. Alford and G. Elvey “*Come, ye thankful people, come*”

Sergei Rachmaninoff, C# minor *Prelude*

Any resemblance of characters or story to any except those of an ancient Greek military family are coincidental.

Amber was first performed in concert version on July 31 and August 15, 1999 at the Lyceum in Alexandria, VA as benefit concerts for the Soldiers’ and Airmen’s Home in Washington, D.C. 3700 N. Capitol St 20137.

Barbara Wilkinson was Musical Director and Accompanist. Graham Clark played Harry Goss, Allison Baker played Amber, Melinda Titus-Fausch played Jenny, and the composer played Rusty.

Joseph McClellan, music critic for the *Washington Post*, wrote the following review of the performance on August 5, 1999.

MUSIC

'Amber': A Tragedy All Too Familiar

Opera Varies the Myth of Agamemnon

By JOSEPH MCLELLAN
Special to The Washington Post

In the one-act opera "Amber," by Alexandria composer Richard Rose, which had a concert performance Saturday at the Lyceum, a hero of World War II, 90-year-old retired Gen. Harry Goss, is celebrating Thanksgiving with his three aged offspring and recalling the horrors he witnessed and endured on the island of Bataan.

His daughter Amber wants to tell him a story she has kept secret for more than 50 years; her brother, Rusty, opposes the idea: "I wish you wouldn't dwell/ On things so long ago,/ On stories we should never tell."

While his daughter Jenny, a pianist, plays an old love song (Tommy Dorsey's "Getting Sentimental Over You"), Harry reminisces about his loving wife, who died in an automobile accident while he was at war.

Finally, Amber cannot keep the secret any longer. For two years, while he was away, she tells her father, his wife—her mother—had an affair with his brother: "They didn't hide it . . . / Their every embrace/ Wished you to die." And as an act of love for their father, she and Rusty arranged for the illicit lovers' death on a slippery mountain road: "Father, we did this for you . . . / To bring you back to us/ To bring you home." The shock of this revelation kills the weak old man.

Hearing this opera for the first time, one begins by wondering whether the sordid story is based on reality. A cryptic clue comes in a note at the end of the libretto that, "any resemblances of characters or story to any except those of an ancient Greek military family are coincidental."

Then one might reflect that the name "Amber" is a precise translation of the Greek "Elektra" and that the nickname "Rusty" has a family resemblance to the Greek Orestes,

and it becomes clear that Richard Rose has fashioned a new variation on the ancient myth of Agamemnon, his wife, Clytemnestra, and his children Elektra and Orestes. It is a myth about a deeply dysfunctional family that fascinated the Greek tragedians Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, modern German composer Richard Strauss and American playwright Eugene O'Neill. The saga of betrayal, violent death and revenge has lost none of its power in the course of more than two millennia.

Rose has taken liberties with the traditional tale; usually the death of Agamemnon has happened before the curtain rises or very early in the plot, and the focus of the action is on the children's bloody revenge. It is interesting to see a variation in which Agamemnon has survived and knows nothing of his wife's betrayal and the punishment she incurred.

The old story takes on new life in Rose's treatment, with dramatically apt music to control the pace of the performance and energize the text. It is cleverly constructed to be performable, as it was in the Lyceum, on a plain stage without scenery, costumes or props, with a piano (eloquently played by Barbara Wilkinson) serving as the accompaniment.

Only four singers were needed: mezzo-soprano Allison Baker in the title role, bass Graham Clark as the father, soprano Melinda Titus French as Jenny and the composer (who is also a proficient tenor) as Rusty. All did justice to their roles, and anyone who would like to see a fresh treatment of this timeless story will want to attend the repeat performance at the Lyceum on Aug. 15.

"Amber" was produced by Marginal Notes, a company operated by Rose to sponsor performances for the benefit of worthy causes. Its Web site (www.marginalnotes.com) has information about its activities and many of his other works.



. . . *sharing all lines and the quilted cover
of the Earth, now surveyed,
waiting to be remade.*

—*FRAMESHIFTS* (vol.2, p.376)
(Quilt design by Mary Hobson)

AFTERWORD

Annunciations surround us. Attention to them reveals patterns in the world around us and inside us. Attention is always rewarded, but annunciations come on their own terms. Mary did not make a deal with Gabriel. Newton did not select his own spectrum. Proper attention requires the proper frame of reference. You do not watch the *chola* cactus grow without yourself slowing down. You don't see through the *sipapu* hole in the floor of a *kiva* without knowing that the character of the world can change so much that only a few survivors may rise into the new reality—the new frameshift.

My writing and music is about accepting annunciations, changing your frame of reference, and crossing thresholds into new realities. We cross thresholds at a child's birth and coming of age, at the death of a loved one, and in other moments of insight and

sacred encounter. *Annunciations*, my first musical work, was an oratorio about the angel's message to Mary. In my works, annunciations come in many forms: a crocodile's warning (*The Queen and the Crocodile*); a child's disappearance (*Shura*), a tattoo (*Hidden Moves and Hidden Faces*), a frequency distribution (*Spearpoints Bright*, second story in *FRAMESHIFTS*), a veteran's memories (*Amber*, a chamber opera), and even a virus that seems to have a message for its hosts (in the second volume of *FRAMESHIFTS*).

Sometimes nature's annunciations must be mediated, as when James Hansen explained the frameshift of climate change to a Congressional committee or when Bill McKibben wrote his book, *Eaarth*—giving a new name to our altered planet. In *Marking Time*, a memoir, my reflections are mediated by the mountains, wildlife, and people of New Mexico, where I lived as an adolescent. Avery Crawley, the weather-prophet in *FRAMESHIFTS*, comments on the way things and places seem to hold our memories:

**In some way, railing and cloud could be trusted;
They kept his memories, as did Ark and Salvage Yard.
These and his museums and Foxglove Center
Were his vessels for such memories . . .**

Returning to New Mexico after more than forty years, I found that many places and objects still held memories. Annunciations surrounded me. Perhaps, like the teepee stone formations of Cochiti, the annunciations had been there all along. The poet Basho wrote:

**Stillness—
soaking into the rocks,
the cicada's cries.**

Were so many annunciations soaked up by the desert during forty years, or was I finally quiet enough to hear them?

—*Richard L. Rose*



Other works by Richard L. Rose:

FRAMESHIFTS? *Two volumes? What is it?*

It is literary fiction made of multiple genres united by theme and character. At first glance, it appears to be a story collection, beginning with a mystery; but look at the back and you find a philosophical poem. Between the covers are mysteries, suspense stories, literary fiction, science fiction, love stories, fictional memoirs and letters, adventure stories, dramatic dialogues, and a section of poetic narrative made of dozens of forms—sestinas, sonnets, *terza rima*, *droeg-kvaet*, prose poems, ballads.

One may read the stories and poems in any sequence, but as one reads, a novel emerges. Its narrative concerns a fictional community in Northern Virginia from the current time to a disturbing future of climatic and social upheavals. Both volumes are listed on Amazon in hard copy and in Kindle versions. Rose's book blog is <http://www.frameshifts.com>. To find or add to the reviews on Amazon, look for *Frameshifts* by Richard L. Rose. A sample of *Frameshifts*, the mystery story *Death Wears A Tricorn*, is also available in multiple ebook platforms.

MARGINAL NOTES. Words and music, collected with personal papers, are on the website marginalnotesinwordsandmusic.org. Here find reference to the set of operas—*Annunciations*, *Amber*, *The People's Voice*, *The Books of Daniel*, *La Rinuncia*, and *The Profit of Doom*—as well as other works and information, including the sequel to *Frameshifts*, entitled *Hidden Moves and Hidden Faces* and information about works in progress, such as *Floats and Sinkers*, a poetry collection, *Marking Time*, a poetic memoir, and *The Fisher of the James*, a solo work retelling a Grimm Brothers' fairy tale about always wanting more than we have.

About Richard L. Rose

Richard L. Rose has retired from several careers, including teaching, medical laboratory work, environmental education and research, math and science supervision, and teaching science and science teaching methods in public schools and universities. After growing up “on the road” with a military family, described in the memoir *Marking Time*, he settled in Northern Virginia with his wife to raise two sons and follow his vocation of teaching and avocations of writing and musical composition.

Since retiring, he has produced a poetry collection, *Floats and Sinkers*, and a set of chamber operas, *Annunciations*, *The Books of Daniel*, *Amber*, *The People’s Voice*, and *The Profit of Doom*. Following his wife’s death and beginning a second marriage, he composed *La Rinuncia* and self-published the novel, *FRAMESHIFTS*, in 2011. All but the last of the operas were benefit concerts for groups like Amnesty, Habitat, and local charities. Another musical work, *The Fisher of the James*, on environmental concerns, and a set of stories, *Hidden Moves and Hidden Faces*, come from living in Richmond. The book and other projects are described on his website marginalnotesinwordsandmusic.org and book blog site, <http://www.frameshifts.com>. In his spare time, he collects rejection slips.

Recurrent themes are the transience of our lives and habitat and an insistence that we find effective ways to attend to this fact. By producing benefit concerts, reducing royalties, and recommending nonprofit organizations worthy of their attention, he invites readers to make their own creative responses. Perhaps readers of *FRAMESHIFTS* will be inspired to imagine and accomplish something positive for their communities. In writing, however, his intention is simply to tell a good story with interesting characters in surprising situations.

