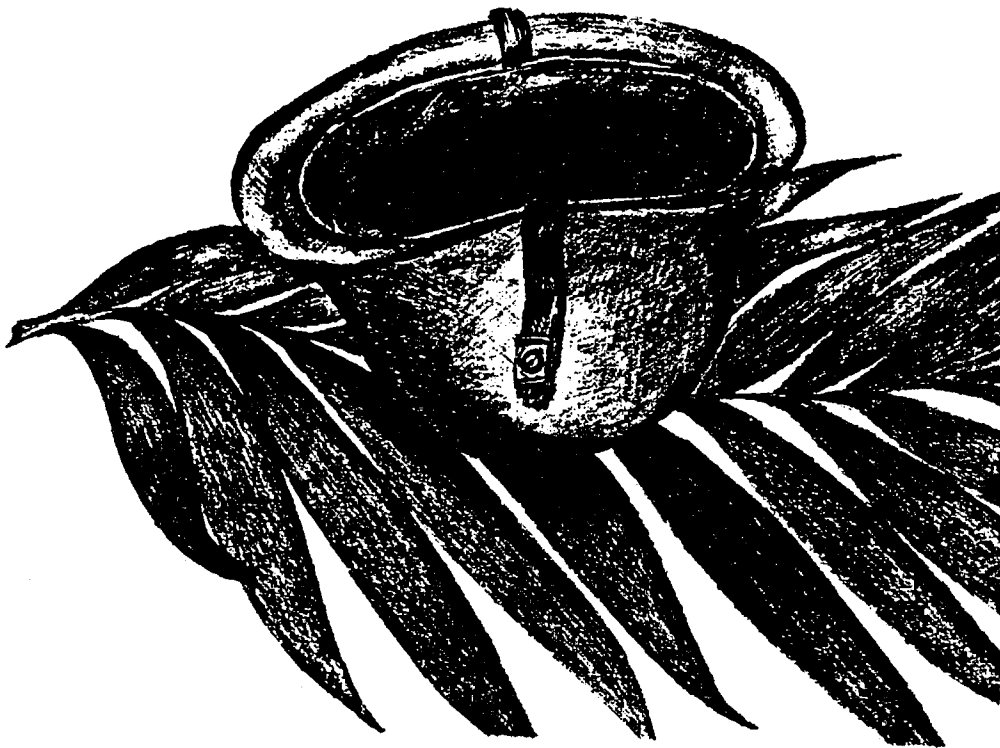

AMBER
A memoir of Bataan



July 31 and August 15, 1999
At the Lyceum in Alexandria
A Marginal Notes Production

Thursday 8/5/99

Week Events



AMBLIN ENTERTAINMENT/UNIVERSAL PICTURES

of dinosaurs amok will be shown
Green in downtown Herndon.

osed-toe shoes, hats and sun block, 10 to 1:30 a.m. or 1:30 to 3 p.m., sponsored by the Alexandria Archaeology Museum, 105 N. Union St., Alexandria. \$5 per person; reservations required. 703-838-4399.

URKE LAKE SYMPHONY CONCERT, the Fairfax Symphony Overture Strings, 10 a.m. Urke Lake Park, 7315 Ox Rd., Fairfax Station. Free. 703-471-5414.

CHANTILLY POLYNESIAN CONCERT, Aloha performing music of Hawaii and Tahiti, 10 a.m., Eleanor C. Lawrence Park, 1040 Walney Rd., Chantilly. Free. 703-631-0013.

ARLINGTON BLUES CONCERT, Michael Aulvaney and Randy Latimer, come early with picnic and explore the park's trails and nature center, no grills or alcoholic beverages permitted, 7:30 p.m., Potomac Overlook Regional Park, 2845 N. Marcey Rd., Arlington. Free admission. 703-528-5406.

ARLINGTON ROCKABILLY CONCERT, roots rock-and-roll by the Grandsons, 6:30 to 8 p.m., Crystal City Waterpark, S. 18th Street and Crystal Drive, Arlington. Free. 703-228-6966.

ARLINGTON PARK WORK DAY, volunteers help with park projects and join other volunteers for a morning of indoor and outdoor tasks, 10 a.m., Potomac Overlook Regional Park, 2845 N. Marcey Rd., Arlington. Free. 703-528-5406.

Sunday

8

MARTIAL ARTS DEMONSTRATION, the Korean Tiger Team of the College of Martial Arts at South Korea's Yong In University performs precision Tae Kwon Do using human weapons: boards, bricks, swords and knives

Prince and King streets), Alexandria. Free. 703-883-4686.

JUNIOR NATURALIST DAY CAMP, 5th and 7th graders can explore the environment through nature crafts, hikes and games, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Aug. 13 (campers will share a potluck supper with their families Aug. 13), Potomac Overlook Regional Park, 2845 N. Marcey Rd., Arlington. \$90 per child resident in a Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority jurisdiction (Alexandria, Arlington, Fairfax City, Fairfax County, Falls Church and Loudoun); \$110 per nonresident; preregistration required. 703-528-5406.

GADSBY'S TAVERN SUMMER CAMP, campers ages 8 to 12 learn about the 18th century through role-playing and hands-on activities led by historical interpreters, and dress in period attire to portray 18th-century entertainers, travelers, tavern patrons and servants, plus learn 18th-century children's games, dances and crafts; campers should bring bag lunches; beverages and snacks will be provided, 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. Monday through Aug. 13, Gadsby's Tavern Museum, 134 N. Royal St., Alexandria. \$100 per child (includes a tote bag of museum favors); a limited number of scholarships are available for children needing financial assistance; preregistration required. 703-838-4242.

ALEXANDRIA HISTORY CAMP, Camp Lyceum's "Adventures in History" program for ages 8 to 12, with reenactors Pat Sowers and Bonny Fairbank covering the period from the Civil War to the present, paying special attention to the lives of Alexandria's children and offering children's entertainment from bygone days, 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Monday through Aug. 13, the Lyceum, 201 S. Washington St., Alexandria. \$80 per child; preregistration required. 703-838-4994.

FAIRFAX FOSTER CARE ORIENTATION, sponsored by the Fairfax County Department of Family Services, for adults, single or married, 21 and older who want to learn more about becoming a foster parent, 7 to 8:30 p.m., Fairfax County Government Center, 12011 Government Center Pkwy., Fairfax City area. Free. 703-324-7639.

Tuesday

10

ARLINGTON ART EXHIBIT, "Arlington Meets Aachen," work that has just returned from Aachen, Germany. Arlington's sister city, as part of a cultural exchange exhibit, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesdays through Fridays, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturdays, opening reception, 6 to 8 p.m. Tuesday; curators' remarks, 7 p.m. Tuesday, through Sept. 4, Ellipse Arts Center, 4350 N. Fairfax Dr., Arlington. Free. 703-228-7710.

ARLINGTON LOG HOUSE CRAFTS, children learn about early Arlington resident Robert Walker and his family, tour his 1871 log house and make crafts, 10 a.m. to noon, Gulf Branch Nature Center, 3608 N. Military Rd., Arlington. Log cabin tour, free; \$1 per craft. 703-228-3403.

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.

Amber

Foreword

The content of *Amber* is primarily to be found in score and libretto, but stage notes have also been included as background information for the director and performers. Many thanks to Barbara Wilkinson for helping me to edit the manuscript. As she wisely advised, the zealous notation of every nuance risks creating a puzzle rather than a set of clear instructions for performance.

The use of period photographs would greatly enhance the performance, as would more complete instructions on lighting and staging than I vaguely provide. In these matters I must defer to others.

R. Rose
11/14/98

Amber

Scenes

- 1 "Families"**
- 2 Marching orders**
- 3 Thanksgiving hymn**
- 4 Interlude**
- 5 Death march**
- 6 Comfort**
- 7 "So parents give"**
- 8 The War Effort**
- 9 Choral response**
- 10 Wish or dream**
- 11 Revelation and Finale**
- 12 Coda: "Our Father"**

Amber

Overture (190 measures):

The concerted overture introduces both the stumbling “Bataan” theme that moves beneath most of the action and the fluttering, sometimes eerie motive that follows the title character, Amber Goss Claussen. The concerted structure permits a dialog between the irregular, unexpected triplets and the evenness of the “comfort” theme from the duet. Short rests create catches in breath or sobs. The struggling movement throughout is determined and persevering, as when it reappears after a false ending. The piano is introduced as the first singing voice not only because one of the characters, Jenny Goss Farris, is a concert pianist but also because of its representation of a stumbling perseverance through both adversity and through the smooth denials that sometimes follow adversity.

Amber

Scene 1 (162 measures): “*Families*”

The scene is described in the score. Although written for 4 voices, it would be entirely appropriate to have the principal singers joined by others in the choral responses. These choruses must be sung with detachment from the action, even though they reflect on the action. Objective and sometimes ominous in tone, they operate as a Greek chorus might have done in *Electra*. As the furies flutter on the sidelines and finally descend upon Orestes, the undead ducks in Amber’s story introduce a theme that reappears throughout the rest of the opera, and the words, “Thus the dead fly all around us,” (measure 149) full of forboding. In contrast, the rather flat theme introduced by Colonel Rusty Goss (m 8) reaches a different kind of climax (m 57) as the characters seem to agree on their memories of the past. As the scene continues, however, it is clear that each family member has a different remembrance.

Amber

Scene 2 (106 measures): *Marching Orders*

Harry Goss, like Agamemnon, left his wife and children in the care of relatives and went to war. His brother Edward had a daughter by a previous marriage; we learn in a later scene that Edward was the only one of Harry's five brothers to remain stateside during the War in the Pacific. Harry's memories of Bataan are vivid, disturbing and depressing even fifty years afterwards. His children try to steer him away from these thoughts and Rusty joins the duet sections with visible reluctance, prodded by Amber (m 30-36 and again in m 49). Once introduced, however, the "cock-eyed march" material persists to the very end of the opera, despite all attempts to dispel it. The words to the chorus were actually composed and sung to another tune by Bataan prisoners.

Amber

Scene 3 (90 measures): *Thanksgiving hymn*

The orchestra follows Scene 2 without a break or interruption. Rusty sings a kind of *Trio* section to his father's march, but its smooth phoniness does not mollify the old man, who picks up the theme at a faster and more irregular pace (m 20) and contradicts his son's assessment. The Choral response (m 32) introduces the harvest hymn over the duet and the growing agitation of Amber concerning her father's cold treatment of her, despite her sacrifices as his caregiver and her earlier efforts on his behalf during the war. When the chorus is repeated (m 68), entering like a herald, the words are the objective commentary of the hymn but the music reveals the heightened and different concerns of each character.

Amber

Scene 4 (47 measures): *Interlude*

Jenny plays a piano study (Etude) while the Amber continues to prepare the table for the meal and Rusty and Harry look through the scrapbooks. Occasionally, Amber asks for Rusty's help or exchanges glances with him. She looks accusingly at Jenny and at several points (m 11 - 16 and 26-32) shows growing impatience, envy and anger, finally standing at the table and staring fixedly at her father. Her trance-like stare is broken by Rusty, who looks at her pointedly; she moves away and resumes setting the table, making her movements with a mincing, eerie determination (m 40). We sense that she has made up her mind about something. Scene 5 follows immediately.

Amber

Scene 5 (227 measures): *Death March*

The orchestral response to the end of the piano *Study* is immediate. Jen starts another piece of music and then is interrupted. The action is described in the score. At first, she plays the Dorsey tune (“*I’m getting sentimental over you*”) in a playful, almost dismissive way, perhaps trying to get her father’s mind off depressing thoughts (m 19-26); then she sees how seriously he takes this song (m 27 ff) and rises from the piano bench as he becomes more disturbed. Amber also shows agitation but also seems to be calculating her opportunity. At one point, Harry seems to be brushing away flies --or Japanese *Zero* planes -- as he ducks and waves his arms (m 59). Jen and Rusty approach him with alarm (66-70) but Amber stands back. She has heard it all before. She has to listen to him every day, while Jen and Rusty only appear on special occasions. When Amber speaks for herself or with Rusty (m 40 and elsewhere), the other two characters freeze action. In her song of determination (m 112 - 129), all three of the other characters freeze action. With a sure sense of self-justification, she revisits the events of her childhood and confirms her decision and action. In measure 82 , the piano and orchestra are concerted, recalling the overture and foreshadowing Harry’s descent into depression (m 169ff) and retelling of war stories no one wants to hear again. Jen goes to him and waves the others offstage.