

# 'Amadeus' portrays true Mozart character

Review by Toger Swanson  
Daily Nebraskan Staff Reporter

Rich in drama and fueled by emotional intensity, the University Theatre's *Amadeus* provides gripping theatrics at times, at others it needs a shot in the arm, and in still other instances the dramatics are overdone.

Most impressive are the lighting and music. They combined at times for maximum theatrical effect, increasing the drama furnished by the actors and actresses in varying degrees. At times the music becomes the true communicator of the scene's tone

dwarfing the cast and their work. Mozart's work is a tough comparison to stand up to, but the acting does in several instances, mainly in characters of the two dynamic roles, Salieri and Mozart.

The most striking actor is Larry French, who portrays the troubled Antonio Salieri who narrates his 40-year ordeal in the shadow of the great composer Mozart. French never leaves the stage, although his presence is, at times, obscured by the antics of Jeff Talbott as Mozart, the crying impatient, frustrated composer.

At times Talbott's character regresses to a childlike demean-

nor, a refreshing but somehow unsettling view of this musical genius. His lively antics and bawdy humor lend surprise and life to what would have been a heavy-handed drama without him.

Roxanne Baird gives a bright, if not particularly memorable, performance as Constanze Mozart, the wife of the composer. The fault probably lies also with the character which Peter Shaffer wrote. She is motivated and competent, yet clumsy in the ways of the imperial court, an assessment which parallels Baird's performance.

William Schutz provides a bright spot in the cast as the slightly dimwitted and decidedly tone-deaf Emperor Joseph II of Austria. Schutz's timing and tone express well the emperor's helplessness behind his air of superiority.

University Theatre's "Amadeus" is best shown on a small stage to involve the audience. The passion and intensity of the show is con-

stantly directed toward the audience for it is an audience's play. The characters transcend time and setting to transmit their feeling and message to the 20th century. The sense of timelessness which Shaffer may have tried to communicate, works best when the actors lighten their tone.

The audience is constantly reminded that the music of Mozart is much more timeless than the show. The staging draws the audience into the drama, although the audience may not be willing when the drama dragged during Salieri's lengthy soliloquies. The long speeches to the audience irritate those who are accustomed to eavesdropping on others' lives portrayed on stage. The shock of seeing the famous composer as a fouthmouthed, immature creature unsettles the audience who also hears the eloquent, bucolic music of this man.

"Amadeus" is not a happy play; it boils with intensity and seethes with conflict. The play leaves the

audience unsettled, sometimes because of its three-hour length, sometimes for the grief felt by the characters. "Amadeus" does cast a fine insight into what Salieri himself calls the "joy of mediocrity."

What is most unsettling is that most of us can identify with Salieri because of our own mediocre existence, which never reaches the height of greatness attained by Mozart and his immortal music. In his speeches and character, Salieri exudes mediocrity. He can do some things well for his time, but nothing which will be remembered by future generations. The character of Salieri may be remembered for the fact that he was so average, so real, so like most of us.

What may bother the audience the most is that while we may not like it, we may have much more in common with the average man of the day and his average works than with the immortal genius of Mozart.

by Berke Breathed

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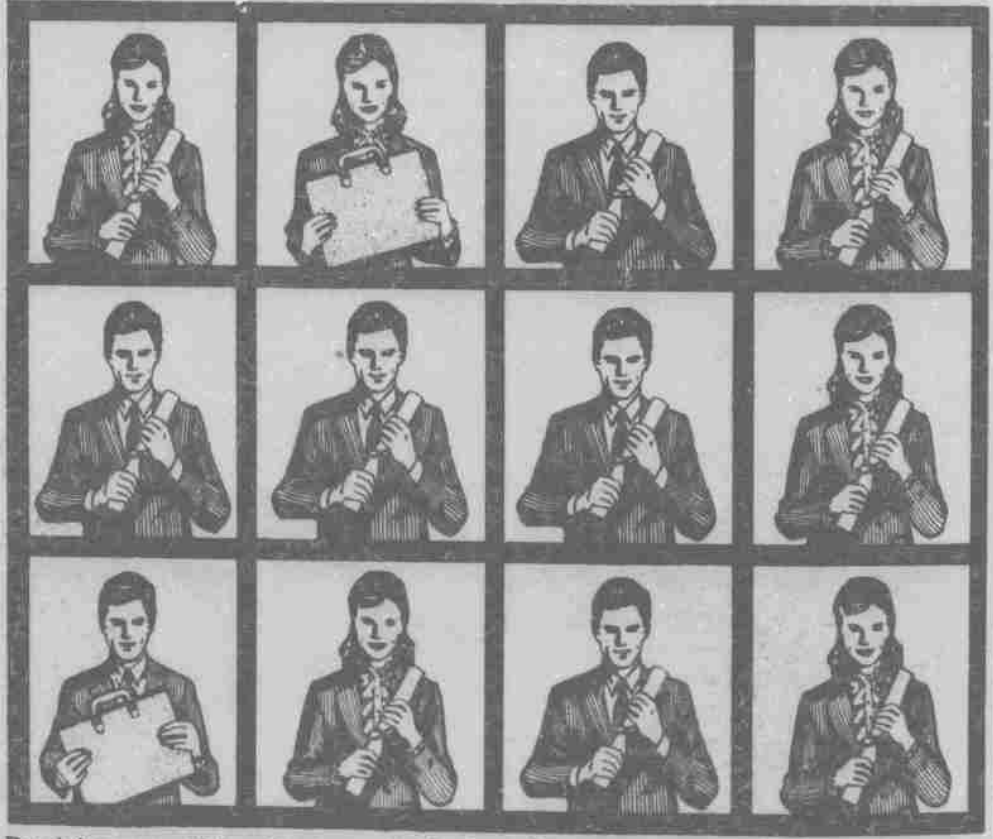
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