

Review of *Amadeus*

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Amadeus is spectacular a 1984 film directed by Milos Forman that chronicles the life of the composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart from the perspective of a rival composer, Antonio Salieri. While the rivalry between them is significantly exaggerated, the story presented is extremely compelling and very enjoyable to get lost in. The presentation's main conceit is that it is told by Salieri as a confession to a father decades after the events took place from inside a mental asylum. Salieri claims to have killed Mozart himself, and laments what he sees as God consigning him to endure torture, as Mozart's work grows in popularity, while his own slowly diminishes and falls out of non-existence.

I was drawn to this particular film largely because of how often I've heard it referenced both in pop culture and media. Having won 8 Oscars and been nominated from 15, *Amadeus* should rightfully be considered one of the most positively acclaimed movies of all time. However, I also must admit that part of what drew me to this movie was a curiosity about the sheer number of memes made from it – and the movie did not disappoint, I certainly can see why Mozart rushing into his own concert that's already started after frolicking with his fiancé is such a poignant meme.

My favorite musical piece from the film was the portrayal Mozart's Don Giovanni. The opera begins almost immediately after Salieri's, which is a lighthearted piece featuring classical scales and arpeggios. Mozart's Don Giovanni, in contrast, opens with dramatic chords and Death breaking down a brick wall, backed by forte music. The melody, largely carried by the violins, shifts between reflecting the intensity of the scene being portrayed by the actors and fleeting around in a way that steadily increases the tension over the course of the entire 8 minute sequence. Repeated sharp rising ostinatos underscore the increasing volume of the ghost's voice, and interspersed shots of Mozart's increasingly frantic conducting serve to bolster the drama

and the realization that something big is about to happen. An argument between the ghost and the merchant is mimicked by a call and response in the music, and the drama keeps increasing. Similarly, cuts to Salieri's increasingly astounded and concerned face steadily give the viewer an idea of what is happening, with the realization that Mozart has represented the ghost of his father in the character of death. Again, as flames erupt on stage and a chaotic dance ensues, Mozart masterfully reflects that in the orchestra, building a chaotic musical scene comprised of harsh dissonances and sharp accents enveloping the viewer. The ending of the opera sequence, with the demon flying in, the brick wall falling down, and the scream from off stage is truly a surprise and sent chills down my spine. But this opera scene does an absolutely spectacular job of setting up the next scene. Salieri arrives at Mozart's house dressed as the ghost of his father in the mask, and the scene is truly terrifying. Even without music, the terrifying nature of the request, combined with the insanity the viewer has just scene makes it one of the most stunning movie scenes I have ever scene.

There really isn't much to dislike about this film. The music is extremely well scored throughout, and finding a piece of music that I don't like is a challenge. Nonetheless, although it may seem like a cop-out, since you're not supposed to like this piece, I'll choose Emperor Joseph's sight reading of Salieri's march for Mozart as my least favorite. Beginning with the emperor's complete inability to sight-read the music, the awkward pauses where there should be no rests, and the occasional flat out wrong note, I can't help but cringe at the playing. Making it worse is the fact that the emperor asked to be allowed to play the piece, and requested that his guards stall Mozart for long enough for him to learn it. And even so, he wasn't able to play all the correct notes, and awkwardly tried to go back and correct them. Altogether, the scene was extremely effective at creating the sense of awkwardness and embarrassment for the viewer and effectively established how little the Emperor actually knew about music.