

Cinema: Amadeus a note above the rest

By Kathy Amen

Amadeus. Directed by Milos Forman; written by Peter Shaffer; produced by Saul Zaentz for Orion. Starring F. Murray Abraham and Tom Hulse. Rated R. Showing at the Central Park Fox.

Amadeus is wonderful. It's rich, intelligent, funny and tragic. It runs 2 hours, you should be warned. But at extra hour doesn't weigh it down at all. And don't be put off by the subject matter, either. I know little about the music of Mozart, and, frankly, I don't care for opera. But I *love Amadeus*.

The title refers to Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, of course. But the central character is his fellow musician Antonio Salieri, capable enough as court composer to Emperor Joseph II. Certainly something to compare to Mozart, however, a situation which tortures Salieri.

Mozart the man is arrogant, vulgar and tactless. To Salieri it is supremely unfair that he, so proper and chaste, is incapable of making a kind of heavenly music this oaf turns out so effortlessly. So Salieri determines to bring about Mozart's downfall.

The contradictory emotions of

envy and disgust at war within Salieri make for a fascinating character study. And his unfolding plot makes a good suspense story.

But interesting as the characters, events and even philosophical implications are, *Amadeus* is as good as it is because of its music. And the way the music is used to tell the story of Mozart's decline and fall. There really are two storylines in *Amadeus*, one verbal, one musical. By the time Mozart's body is dumped into its pauper's grave, to the powerful sounds of his *Requiem*, it's obvious that the emotional power of great music has accented every point the movie's had to make.

Salieri is a quite unlikeable fellow, made sympathetic nonetheless by Abraham's excellent performance. And Hulse, who might be recognized from *Animal House*, (of all movies) blends the two aspects of Mozart -- musically sublime and social ridiculous -- into a believable person.

The moviemakers are meticulous in their attention to period detail. (You even get used to those incredible wigs.) But they are the first to disclaim complete

biographical accuracy. (Although Mozart *did* like dirty jokes and *could* play the piano upside down with his hands crossed.) Writer Shaffer calls it a "fantasia" on Mozart, not a documentary. But it's more illuminating and worth seeing.



Tom Hulse as Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart in *Amadeus* which was directed by Milos Forman and produced by Saul Zaentz. (Courtesy photo)