Amadeus, written by Peter Shaffer, directed by Sir Peter Hall, starring John Wood and John Pankow, production designed by John Bar, at the Shubert Theatre until Saturday, 27 June.

Peter Shaffer recounts in Amadeus the story of how Antonio Salieri, Court Composer to the Hapsburg court, plots to destroy his rival, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Salieri imagines God throughout his life to give him some measure of musical talent, and fearing that the youthful Mozart will take his place in the Vienna court and surpass him in prominence. The directors correctly chose John Wood, a master of Shakespearean and modern drama, to play the role of Salieri. Wood's compelling performance and stage presence captured the audience throughout this very intense, concentrated play. John Pankow delivers a scintillating performance as the sly, vulgar, infantile, yet supremely gifted Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

The play begins in Vienna, in November of 1812 with Salieri as an old man. The first sound the audience hears is the word "Salieri" repeated in rapid succession by several people, creating a makeklike hissing interrupted with the word "assassin." Rumors have spread that Salieri killed Mozart, but one believes it. Salieri explains how he conspired to destroy Mozart. In the Third Scene of Act One, the players return to Vienna of 1781, when Salieri was a celebrated Vienna composer, the remainder of Act One and most of Act Two involve the decision 1781 to 1791 when Mozart lived in Vienna.

Salieri first hears Mozart's music at a private concert for the Hapsburg court. He is horrified, even injured, at the beauty of the music. Later, two informants show him the prodigious volume of Amadeus' work. To his demise, Salieri discovers how he conspired to destroy Mozart. In his own words, Salieri discovers that Mozart's music becomes increasingly infused with the passion and fascination he himself experienced at Salieri's plotting. Salieri decides to become Amadeus' closest companion to determine all of his weaknesses. Using every means possible to prevent Mozart from making money, thus starving him to death, Salieri delivers the final blow. He persuades Mozart to incorporate secret Masonic rituals into his new opera, The Magic Flute, a move that turns every last person of means away from Mozart, who subsequently dies. John Wood so perfectly expresses simultaneously Salieri's relief at the death of his rival and pride at the loss of one so gifted, whom he helped destroy.

The first act contains twelve scenes; the second, nineteen, yet the assistants change the scenes so adroitly and so frequently that their presence on stage is scarcely noticed. The lighting brilliantly highlights the important parts of the stage. John Bury, lighting designer and one for best scenic design. Under the direction of Sir Peter Hall, the play flourishes. Peter Hall received the 1981 Tony Award as best director in Amadeus. In brief, this compelling drama of genius and rivalry well deserves the five Tony Awards it has won.

Jonathan P. Dippert

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