



Amadeus

By **ROBERT L. DANIELS**

A Shakespeare Theater of New Jersey presentation of a play in two acts by Peter Shaffer. Directed by Joe Discher.

Antonio Salieri - Robert Cuccioli
Wolfgang Amadeus
Mozart - Jordan Coughtry
Constanze Weber - Tricia Paoluccio
Joseph II - Mark H. Dold
Count Johann
Killian von Strack - John Little
Count Franz
Orsini-Rosenberg - Colin McPhillamy

Shakespeare Theater of New Jersey shifts into high gear with a richly textured production of Peter Shaffer's "Amadeus." Sumptuously mounted and staged, the 1979 courtly thriller is acted with compelling force, and the inclusion of snatches of Mozart's music offers a hint of the composer's extraordinary legacy, especially a few glorious strains from the Requiem Mass. Director Joe Discher accents the play's devilish humor, creating a keen balance between the giddy palace antics and the tragic dissipation of a genius.

Robert Cuccioli, who starred in the double lead role in the 1997 Broadway production of "Jekyll & Hyde," turns in a stunning performance as sarcastic court composer Antonio Salieri. Slyly venomous and obsessively jealous of Mozart's musical mastery, the aging, dying Salieri relates, in a series of graphic flashbacks, the subtle but ruthlessly manipulative acts that destroyed Mozart's career and ultimately his life.

Cuccioli, who has triumphed in recent seasons at the Garden State theater as Mark Antony, Brutus and Macbeth, remains onstage throughout the play, creating a chillingly authoritative characterization laced with fury and cunning wit.

Obsessively addicted to sweets, Cuccioli's Salieri finds subtle humor in a deliciously seductive moment by serving Roman chestnuts in brandied sugar to Mozart's sassy wife (a pertly spirited Tricia Paoluccio).

In marked contrast to the poised Salieri, Jordan Coughtry's Mozart is a well-crafted mix of vulgarity, conceit and blatant arrogance, with an effectively unnerving, incessant giggle. From buffoon to dying genius, Coughtry's Mozart cuts a compelling and tragic figure.

Praiseworthy support is provided by Mark H. Dold as the pompous monarch, John Little as a testy court chamberlain and Colin McPhillamy as a cranky opera director.

Director Discher has harnessed both the play's dry mocking humor and its dark, tragic thrust. Set to allegro and spiraling presto tempos, the action moves so fluently that its three hours pass surprisingly fast.

Dick Block's set is ornately populated with candelabras and glittering chandeliers, while Maggie Dick's period costume design, from the powdered wigs of brocaded courtiers and citizens to the visual splendor of the 18th century Viennese court, is as eye-filling as a Technicolor screen epic.

Set, Dick Block; costumes, Maggie Dick; lighting, Matthew Adelson; sound, Richard M. Dionne; production stage manager, Christine Whalen. Opened, reviewed May 31, 2008. Runs through June 22. Running time: 3 HOURS.

With: Daren Kelly, Greg Jackson, Patrick Toon, Tom Robenolt, Robert Hock, Robyn Berg, Jon Barker, Todd Quick, Katie Fabel, Christopher Payseur, Mary Trotter.