

## More Mozart Musings for the Motivated

The hit movie “Amadeus” entertainingly purports a deadly rivalry between Mozart and the Vienna court composer, Antonio Salieri (1750-1825). One of the most striking scenes (scan the QR code below) is the monologue by the elderly Salieri describing a Mozart piece that Salieri was hearing from the printed score:

On the page it looked nothing. The beginning simple, almost comic. Just a pulse. Bassoons and basset horns, like a rusty squeezebox. And then suddenly, high above it, an oboe. A single note, hanging there, unwavering. Until a clarinet took over and sweetened it into a phrase of such delight! This was no composition by a performing monkey! This was a music I'd never heard. Filled with such longing, such unfulfillable longing, it had me trembling. It seemed to me that I was hearing the voice of God.

The piece that so moved Salieri, and which we actually hear in the movie, is the opening of the “Adagio” (third) movement of the *Gran Partita K. 361*-- one of the pieces we will hear tonight.

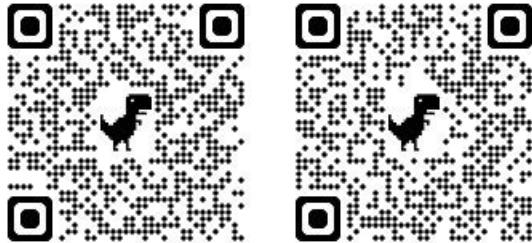


While great fun, “Amadeus” really slanders both Mozart and Salieri. Yes, Mozart was very colorful in his youthful letters to his family and especially suggestive to his female first cousin, “The Bäsle.” Yet, Mozart’s whole family was prone to this scatological vein, including his mother who, in a letter home, wrote some “lavatorial” rhymes to her husband, Mozart’s father, Leopold.

Regarding Salieri, when we next perform a piece by Schubert, there will be an opportunity to praise Salieri’s great tutelage of the budding composer, to which recent scholarship credits a great deal of Schubert’s facility. Schubert wrote over 600 works by his death at age 31, and Salieri composed approximately 40 operas. In one of his concerts, it is documented that Salieri conducted one of Mozart’s “grand” symphonies, and there is some speculation that this was one of the final trilogy of Mozart symphonies of 1788 (*Nos. 39-41 K. 543, 550-51*) that otherwise might not have been performed in his lifetime, since there seemingly was no commission or proposed concert to motivate them.

No, there was no fatal rivalry, and Mozart was not some insensitive twit. Dame Jane Glover in her book, *Mozart’s Women*, makes a strong argument that “The Bäsle” was more than just a recipient of Mozart’s potty humor, but a great emotional comfort to the composer when she accompanied him from Germany on his very difficult return to Salzburg in January 1779. This was the final leg home after the disastrous tour which Mozart took with his mother, who died at the Paris stop in 1778, requiring the 22-year-old Mozart to bury her there and to report the tragic details to his father via letter. Leopold wrote back, very sternly blaming his son for his wife’s death by Mozart’s not having her bled soon enough to overcome the illness. (A treatment which would have actually hastened her death from, likely, typhoid.)

Listen (QR codes below) to the Mozart *A-minor Piano Sonata K. 310* or the *E-minor Violin Sonata K. 304* - both great masterpieces written around the time of that trip if you want to experience Mozart's sense of the tragic.



Even the name, “Amadeus” is “wrong” in a historical sense, though almost universally adopted by Mozart’s admirers after his death. His birth certificate reads Joannes Chrysostomus Wolfgangus Theophilus Mozart with Wolfgangus as a Latin form of his maternal grandfather’s name. The first two names record the feast day of his birth (after St. John Chrysostom). Theophilus means “lover of God” in Greek. Mozart, in his wide youthful European travels, picked up languages as though plucking apples from a tree. (His father implored him to improve his French accent while in Paris in 1788. And Mozart worried about Haydn’s proposed trip to England of 1792 because of his age, while also stating that the elderly Haydn spoke no English. Haydn replied that music was a universal language, and the IPO is to perform Haydn’s final Symphony, the “London” this season. Ironically, Mozart didn’t live to see 1792, having died in 1791 at age 35.) Mozart freely translated his “Theophilus” name into different languages using the German version Gottlieb, the Italian version Amadeo, and the French versions Amadè, Amadé, or Amade with his preferred use, by far, being Amadè which was how he signed several letters and scores (see the QR below for his use of Amadè – and English). (One can also see Beethoven’s name as “Louis” or even “Luigi” in some references in his lifetime.) As for “Amadeus,” Mozart never used this form officially, but it is found in a punning letter where he signed himself, “Wolfgagnus Amadeus Mozartus.” It may be too late to resurrect Amadè though even the CSO has tried.

