

Other plays by Peter Shaffer
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Black Comedy
Equus
Five Finger Exercise
The Gift of the Gorgon
Lettice and Lovage
The Private Ear
The Public Eye
The Royal Hunt of the Sun
White Liars

ACT I

Vienna

On stage, before the House Lights are lowered, four objects are to be seen by the Audience. R of the wooden rectangle stands a table bearing a cake-stand. C, further upstage and also on the wood, stands a wheelchair of the eighteenth century, with its back to the Audience. L, on the reflecting plastic, stands a beautiful fortepiano in a marquetry case. Above the stage is suspended a large chandelier showing many globes of opaque glass. The curtains of the Light Box are open

The House Lights go down

In the darkness the Citizens of Vienna, Salieri's Pastry Cook and the Valet enter and take up their positions in the Light Box. Salieri also enters and sits in the wheelchair

Savage whispers fill the theatre. We can distinguish nothing at first from this snake-like hissing save the word "SALIERI!" repeated here, there and everywhere around the theatre. Also the barely distinguishable word "ASSASSIN!"

The whispers overlap and increase in volume, slashing the air with wicked intensity. Then the Lights grow upstage to reveal the silhouettes of men and women dressed in the top hats and skirts of the early nineteenth century — Citizens of Vienna, all crowded together in the Light Box, and uttering their scandal

Whisperers Salieri! ... Salieri! ... Salieri!

Downstage in the wheelchair with his back to the Audience, sits an old man. We can just see, as the Lights grow a little brighter, the top of his head encased in an old Turkish-style dressing-turban, and perhaps a shawl wrapped around his shoulders

Salieri! ... Salieri! ... Salieri!

Two middle-aged gentlemen hurry on from either side, also wearing the long cloaks and tall hats of the period. These are the two Venticelli:

purveyors of fact, rumour and gossip throughout the play. They speak rapidly — in this first appearance extremely rapidly — so that the scene has the air of a fast and dreadful overture. Sometimes they speak to each other; sometimes to the Audience — but always with the urgency of men who have ever been first with the news

Venticello 1 I don't believe it.
Venticello 2 I don't believe it.
Venticello 1 I don't believe it!
Venticello 2 I don't believe it!
Whisperers *Salieri!*
Venticello 1 They say.
Venticello 2 I hear.
Venticello 1 I hear.
Venticello 2 They say.
Venticello 1 } *(together) I don't believe it.*
Venticello 2 }
Whisperers *Salieri!*
Venticello 1 The whole city is talking.
Venticello 2 You hear it all over.
Venticello 1 The cafés.
Venticello 2 The Opera.
Venticello 1 The Prater.
Venticello 2 The gutter.
Venticello 1 They say even Metternich repeats it.
Venticello 2 They say even Beethoven, his old pupil!
Venticello 1 But why now?
Venticello 2 After so long?
Venticello 1 Thirty-two years!
Venticello 1 } *(together) I don't believe it.*
Venticello 2 }
Whisperers *SALIERI!*
Venticello 1 They say he shouts it out all day!
Venticello 2 I hear he cries it out all night!
Venticello 1 Stays in his apartments.
Venticello 2 Never goes out.
Venticello 1 Not for a year now.
Venticello 2 Longer. Longer.
Venticello 1 Must be seventy.
Venticello 2 Older. Older.
Venticello 1 Antonio Salieri —
Venticello 2 The famous musician —
Venticello 1 Shouting it aloud!

Venticello 2 Crying it aloud!
Venticello 1 Impossible.
Venticello 2 Incredible.
Venticello 1 I don't believe it!
Venticello 2 I don't believe it!
Whisperers *SALIERI!*
Venticello 1 I know who *started* the tale!
Venticello 2 I know who started the tale!

Two old men — one thin and dry, one very fat — detach themselves from the crowd at the back and walk downstage, on either side: Salieri's Valet and Pastry Cook

Venticello 1 *(indicating him)* The old man's Valet!
Venticello 2 *(indicating him)* The old man's Cook!
Venticello 1 The Valet hears him shouting!
Venticello 2 The Cook hears him crying!
Venticello 1 What a story!
Venticello 2 What a scandal!

The Venticelli move quickly upstage, one on either side, and each collects a silent informant. Venticello 1 walks down eagerly with the Valet; Venticello 2 walks down eagerly with the Cook

Venticello 1 *(to the Valet)* What does he say, your master?
Venticello 2 *(to the Cook)* What *exactly* does he say, the Kapellmeister?
Venticello 1 Alone in his house.
Venticello 2 All day and all night.
Venticello 1 What sins does he shout?
Venticello 2 The old fellow ———
Venticello 1 The recluse ———
Venticello 2 What horrors have you heard?
Venticello 1 } *(together)* { *Tell us! Tell us! Tell us at once! What does he*
Venticello 2 } *cry? What does he cry? What does he cry?*

The Valet and the Cook gesture towards Salieri

Salieri *(in a great cry)* MOZART!!!

Silence

Venticello 1 *(whispering)* Mozart!
Venticello 2 *(whispering)* Mozart!

Salieri *Perdonami, Mozart! Il tuo assassino ti chiede perdono!*

Venticello 1 *(in disbelief)* Pardon, Mozart!

Venticello 2 *(in disbelief)* Pardon your assassin!

Venticello 1 } *(together)* God preserve us!

Venticello 2 }

Salieri *Pietà, Mozart. Mozart, pietà!*

Venticello 1 Mercy, Mozart!

Venticello 2 Mozart, have mercy!

Venticello 1 He speaks in Italian when excited!

Venticello 2 German when not!

Venticello 1 *Perdonami, Mozart!*

Venticello 2 Pardon your assassin!

*The Valet and the Cook walk to either side of the stage, and stand still. Pause.
The Venticelli cross themselves, deeply shocked*

Venticello 1 There was talk once before, you know.

Venticello 2 Thirty-two years ago.

Venticello 1 When Mozart was dying.

Venticello 2 He claimed he'd been poisoned.

Venticello 1 Some said he accused a man.

Venticello 2 Some said that man was Salieri.

Venticello 1 But no-one believed it.

Venticello 2 They *knew* what he died of!

Venticello 1 Syphilis, surely.

Venticello 2 Like everybody else.

Pause

Venticello 1 *(slyly)* But what if Mozart was right?

Venticello 2 If he really was murdered?

Venticello 1 And by him. Our First Kapellmeister!

Venticello 2 Antonio Salieri!

Venticello 1 It can't possibly be true.

Venticello 2 It's not actually credible.

Venticello 1 Because *why*?

Venticello 2 Because *why*?

Venticello 1 } *(together)* Why on earth would he do it?

Venticello 2 }

Venticello 1 And why confess *now*?

Venticello 2 After thirty-two years!

Whisperers SALIERI!

Pause

Salieri *Mozart! Mozart! Perdonami! ... Il tuo assassino ti chiede perdono!*

Pause. They look at him, then at each other

Venticello 1 What do you think?

Venticello 2 What do you think?

Venticello 1 I don't believe it!

Venticello 2 I don't believe it!

Pause

Venticello 1 All the same ...

Venticello 2 Is it just possible?

Venticello 1 } *(whispering together)* Did he do it after all?

Venticello 2 }

Whisperers SALIERI!

The Venticelli exit

The Valet and the Cook remain on either side of the stage. Salieri swivels his wheelchair around and stares at us. We see a man of seventy in an old, stained dressing-gown with the old Turkish-style turban on his head. He rises and squints at the Audience, as if trying to see it

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Salieri's Apartments. November 1823. The small hours

Salieri *(calling to the Audience)* Vi saluto! Ombri del Futuro! Antonio Salieri — a vostro servizio!

A clock outside in the street strikes three

I can almost see you in your ranks — waiting for your turn to live. Ghosts of the Future! Be visible. I beg you. Be visible. Come to this dusty old room — this time, the smallest hours of dark November, eighteen hundred and twenty-three — and be my confessors! Will you not enter this place and stay with me till dawn? Just till dawn — smeary six o'clock!

Whisperers *Salieri! ... Salieri! ...*

The curtains of the Light Box slowly descend on the Citizens of Vienna. Faint images of long windows are projected on to the silk

The Citizens of Vienna exit

Salieri Can you hear them? Vienna is a City of Slander. Everyone tells tales here: even my servants. I keep only two now. (*He indicates them*) They've been with me ever since I came here, fifty years ago. The Keeper of the Razor; the Maker of the Cakes. One keeps me tidy, the other keeps me full. (*To them*) Leave me, both of you! Tonight I do not go to bed at all!

They react in surprise

Return here tomorrow morning at six precisely — to shave, to feed, your capricious master! (*He smiles at them both and claps his hands in dismissal*) *Via. Via, via, via! Grazie!*

They bow, bewildered, and leave the stage

(*Peering hard at the Audience, trying to see it*) Now, won't you appear? I need you — *desperately!* This is the last hour of my life. Those about to die implore you! ... What must I do to make you visible? Raise you up in the flesh to be my last, last audience? ... Does it take an Invocation? That's how it's always done in opera! Ah yes, of course: that's it. *An Invocation.* The only way. (*He rises*) Let me try to conjure you *now* — Ghosts of the distant Future — so I can see you.

He gets out of the wheelchair and huddles over to the fortepiano. He stands at the instrument and begins to sing in a high cracked voice, interrupting himself at the end of each sentence with figurations on the keyboard in the manner of a recitativo secco. During this the House Lights slowly come up some way to illuminate the Audience

(*Singing*) Ghosts of the Future!
 Shades of Time to come!
 So much more unavoidable than those of time gone by!
 Appear with what sympathy incarnation may endow you!
 Appear *You!*
 The yet-to-be-born!
 The yet-to-hate!
 The yet-to-kill!
 Appear ... Posterity!

The House Lights reach their maximum and stay like this during all of the following

(*Speaking again*) There. It worked. I can see you! ... That is the result of proper training. I was taught Invocation by Gluck, who was a true master at it. He had to be. In his day that was what people went to the Opera for:

the raising of gods, and ghosts! Nowadays, since Rossini became the rage, they prefer to watch the escapades of hairdressers.

Pause

Scusate. Invocation is an exhausting business! I need refreshment. (*He sits again in his wheelchair, moves himself over to the cake-stand, selects a cake and eats it*) It's a little repellent, I admit, but actually, the first sin I have to confess to you is gluttony. Sticky gluttony at that. Infantine, *Italian* gluttony! The truth is that all my life I have never been able to conquer a lust for the sweetmeats of Northern Italy, where I was born. From the ages of three to seventy-three, my entire career has been conducted to the taste of almonds sprinkled with sifted sugar. (*Lustfully*) Veronese biscuits! Milanese macaroons! Snow dumplings with pistachio sauce! ... Do not judge me too harshly for this. All men harbour patriotic feelings of some kind ... My parents were provincial subjects of the Austrian Empire. A Lombardy merchant and his Lombardy wife. Their notion of place was the tiny town of Legnago — which I could not wait to leave. Although devout Catholics, their notion of God was really a superior Hapsburg emperor, inhabiting a heaven only slightly farther off than Vienna. All they required of Him was to protect commerce, and keep them forever preserved in *mediocrity* ... My own requirements were very different.

Pause

I wanted *Fame.* Not to deceive you. I wanted to blaze, like a comet, across the firmament of Europe. Yet only in one especial way. Music. Absolute music! ... A note of music is either right or wrong *absolutely!* Not even time can alter that: music is God's art. (*Excited by the recollection*) Already when I was ten a spray of sounded notes would make me dizzy almost to falling! By twelve, I was stumbling about the fields of Lombardy humming my arias and anthems to the Lord. My one desire was to join all the composers who had celebrated His glory through the long Italian past! ... Every Sunday I saw Him in church, painted on the flaking wall. I don't mean Christ. The Christs of Lombardy are simpering sillies with lambkins in their arms. No: I mean an old candle-smoked God in a mulberry robe, staring at the world with dealer's eyes. Tradesmen had put him up there. Those eyes made bargains, real and irreversible. "You give me so — I'll give you so! No more. No less!" (*He eats a sweet biscuit in his excitement*) The night before I left Legnago forever, I went to see Him, and made a bargain with Him myself! I was a sober sixteen, filled with a desperate sense of *right.* I knelt before the God of Bargains, and I prayed through the mouldering plaster with all my soul.

He kneels

“*Signore*, let me be a composer! Grant me sufficient fame to enjoy it. In return I will live with virtue. I will strive to better the lot of my fellows. And I will honour You with much music all the days of my life!” As I said *Amen*, I saw His eyes flare. (As “*God*”) “*Bene*. Go forth, Antonio. Serve Me and mankind, and you will be blessed!” ... “*Grazie!*” I called back. “I am Your servant for life!” (He gets to his feet again) The very next day, a family friend suddenly appeared — out of the blue — took me off to Vienna and paid for me to study music! Shortly afterwards I met the Emperor, who favoured me. Clearly my bargain had been accepted!

Pause

The same year I left Lombardy, a young prodigy was touring Europe. A miraculous virtuoso aged ten years. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

Pause. He smiles at the Audience

And now! Gracious ladies! Obliging gentlemen! I present to you — for one performance only — my last composition, entitled *The Death of Mozart* — or, *Did I Do It?* ... Dedicated to posterity, on this, the last night of my life!

He bows deeply, undoing as he does so the buttons of his old dressing-gown. When he straightens himself, divesting himself of this drab outer garment and his head-covering, he is a man in the prime of life, wearing an elegant black frock-coat and knee-breeches appropriate to a successful Court Composer of the 1780s. See the Notes on page 97. The House Lights go down on the Audience

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Transformation to the Eighteenth Century

Music sounds softly in the background: a serene piece for strings, by Salieri

The blue curtains of the Light Box rise and part to show the Emperor Joseph II and his Court bathed in golden light, against a golden background of mirrors and an immense golden fireplace. His Majesty is seated, holding a rolled paper, listening to the music. Also listening are Count von Strack; Count Orsini-Rosenberg; Baron van Swieten; and an anonymous Priest, dressed in a soutane

At the same time downstage of this, two Servants enter swiftly. One takes from Salieri his old man's clothes; the other carries a chair, places it UR, and leaves pushing off the wheelchair

An old long-wigged courtier, Kapellmeister Bonno, enters and takes his place at the keyboard

Salieri (in a young man's voice: vigorous and confident) The place throughout is Vienna. The year — to begin with — seventeen eighty-one. The age still that of the Enlightenment: that clear time before the guillotine fell in France and cut all our lives in half. I am thirty-one! Already a prolific composer to the Austrian Court. I own a respectable house and a respectable wife — Teresa.

Teresa enters R; a padded, placid lady who seats herself uprightly in the upstage chair

I do not mock her, I assure you. I required only one quality in a domestic companion: — lack of fire. And in that omission Teresa was conspicuous. I also had a prize pupil: Katherina Cavalieri.

Katherina, a beautiful girl of twenty, swirls on L

The music becomes vocal: faintly we hear a soprano singing a baroque concert aria. Like Teresa's, Katherina's part is mute — but she stands by the fortepiano and energetically mimes her rapturous singing. At the keyboard old Bonno accompanies her appreciatively

She was later to become the best singer of her age. But at that time she was mainly a bubbling student with merry eyes and a sweet, eatable mouth.

The music fades during the following

I was very much in love with Katherina — or at least in lust. But because of my vow to God, I was entirely faithful to my wife. I had never laid a finger upon the girl — except occasionally to depress her diaphragm in the way of teaching her to sing.

The music has gone completely

My ambition burned with an unquenchable flame. Its chief goal was the post of First Royal Kapellmeister, then held by Guiseppe Bonno — (indicating him) — seventy years old, and apparently immortal.

All on stage, save Salieri, suddenly freeze. He speaks very directly to the Audience

You, when you come, will be told that we musicians of the eighteenth century were no better than servants: the willing slaves of the well-born and well-to-do. This is quite true. It is also quite false. Yes, we were servants. But we were *learned* servants! And we used our learning to celebrate men's average lives.

A grander eighteenth-century music sounds. The Emperor remains seated, but the other four men in the Light Box — von Strack, Orsini-Rosenberg, van Swieten and the Priest — come slowly out on to the main stage and process imposingly down it, and around it, and up it again to return to their places

The Priest goes off, as do Teresa on her side and Katherina on hers. Bonno also leaves

(Over this) We took unremarkable men: usual officials, run-of-the-mill bishops, ordinary generals and statesmen and wives — and sacramentalized their mediocrity. We smoothed their noons with strings *divisi*. We pierced their nights with *chittarini*! We gave them processions for their strutting — serenades for their rutting — high horns for their hunting, and drums for their wars! Trumpets sounded when they entered the world, and trombones groaned when they left it! The savour of their days remains behind because of *us*, our music still remembered while their politics are long forgotten.

The Emperor hands his rolled paper to von Strack and goes off

In the Light Box are left standing, like three icons, Orsini-Rosenberg, plump and supercilious, aged sixty; von Strack, stiff and proper, aged fifty-five; van Swieten, cultivated and serious, aged fifty. The Lights go down on them a little

Tell me, before you call us servants, who served whom? And who I wonder, in your generations, will immortalize *you*?

The two Venticelli come on quickly downstage, from either side. They now appear younger also, and are dressed well, in the style of the late eighteenth century. Their manner is more confidential than before

Venticello 1 *(to Salieri)* Sir!

Venticello 2 *(to Salieri)* Sir!

Venticello 1 Sir. Sir.

Venticello 2 Sir. Sir. Sir.

Salieri bids them wait for a second

Salieri I was the most successful young musician in the city of musicians. And now suddenly, without warning —

They approach him eagerly, from either side

Venticello 1 Mozart!

Venticello 2 Mozart!

Venticello 1 } *(together)* Mozart has come!
Venticello 2 }

Salieri These are my *Venticelli*. My "Little Winds" as I call them. *(He gives each a coin from his pocket)* The secret of successful living in a large city is always to know to the minute what is being done behind your back.

Venticello 1 He's been in Salzburg.

Venticello 2 Service of the Archbishop.

Venticello 1 But now he's left it!

Venticello 2 Walked out in anger!

Venticello 1 He's here to find work.

Venticello 2 Means to give concerts.

Venticello 1 Asking for subscribers.

Salieri I'd known him for years, of course. Tales of his prowess were told all over Europe.

Venticello 1 They say he wrote his first symphony at five.

Venticello 2 I hear his first concerto at four.

Venticello 1 A full opera at fourteen.

Salieri *(to them)* How old is he now?

Venticello 2 Twenty-five.

Salieri *(carefully)* And how long is he remaining?

Venticello 1 He's not departing.

Venticello 2 He's here to stay.

The Venticelli glide off

Black-out

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The Palace of Schönbrunn

The Lights come up on the three stiff figures of Orsini-Rosenberg, von Strack, and van Swieten, standing upstage in the Light Box. The Chamberlain, von Strack, hands the paper he has received from the Emperor to the Director of the Opera, Orsini-Rosenberg. Salieri remains downstage

Von Strack (*to Orsini-Rosenberg*) You are required to commission a comic opera in German from Herr Mozart.

Salieri (*to the Audience*) Johann von Strack. Royal Chamberlain. A court official to his collar bone.

Orsini-Rosenberg (*loftily*) Why in German? Italian is the only possible language for opera!

Salieri Count Orsini-Rosenberg. Director of the Opera. Benevolent to all things Italian — especially myself.

Von Strack (*firmly*) The idea of a national opera is dear to His Majesty's heart. He desires to hear pieces in good plain German.

Van Swieten Yes, but why *comic*? It is not the function of music to be funny.

Salieri Baron van Swieten. Prefect of the Imperial Library. Ardent Freemason. Yet to find *anything* funny. Known, for his enthusiasm for old-fashioned music, as "Lord Fugue".

Van Swieten I heard last week a remarkable *serious* opera from Mozart: *Idomeneo, King of Crete*.

Orsini-Rosenberg I heard that too. A young fellow trying to impress beyond his abilities. Too much spice. Too many notes.

Von Strack (*firmly, to Orsini-Rosenberg*) Nevertheless, kindly convey the commission to him today.

Orsini-Rosenberg (*taking the paper reluctantly*) I believe we are going to have trouble with this young man. (*He leaves the Light Box and strolls down the stage to Salieri*) He was a child prodigy. That always spells trouble. His father is Leopold Mozart, a bad-tempered Salzburg musician who dragged the boy endlessly round Europe making him play the keyboard blindfold, with one finger, and that sort of thing. (*To Salieri*) All prodigies are hateful — *non e vero, Compositore?*

Salieri *Divengono sempre più sterili con gli anni.*

Orsini-Rosenberg *Precisamente. Precisamente.*

Von Strack (*calling suspiciously*) What are you saying?

Orsini-Rosenberg (*airily*) Nothing, Herr Chamberlain! ... *Niente, Signor Pomposo!*...

Orsini-Rosenberg strolls on out. Von Strack strides off irritated

Van Swieten (*coming downstage*) We meet tomorrow, I believe, on your committee to devise pensions for old musicians.

Salieri (*deferentially*) It's most gracious of you to attend, Baron.

Van Swieten You're a worthy man, Salieri. You should join our Brotherhood of Masons. We would welcome you warmly.

Salieri I would be honoured, Baron!

Van Swieten If you wished I could arrange initiation into my lodge.

Salieri That would be more than my due.

Van Swieten Nonsense. We embrace men of talent of all conditions. I may invite young Mozart also — dependent on the impression he makes.

Salieri (*bowing*) Of course, Baron.

Van Swieten goes out

(*To the Audience*) Honour indeed. In those days almost every man of influence in Vienna was a Mason — and the Baron's lodge by far most fashionable. As for young Mozart, I confess I was alarmed by his coming. Not by the commission of a comic opera, even though I myself was then attempting one called *The Stolen Bucket*. ... No, what worried me were reports about the man himself. He was praised altogether too much.

The Venticelli hurry in from either side

Venticello 1 Such gaiety of spirit!

Venticello 2 Such ease of manner!

Venticello 1 Such natural charm!

Salieri (*to the Venticelli*) Really? Where does he live?

Venticello 1 Peter Platz.

Venticello 2 Number eleven.

Venticello 1 The landlady is Madame Weber.

Venticello 2 A real bitch.

Venticello 1 Takes in male lodgers, and has a tribe of daughters.

Venticello 2 Mozart was engaged to one of them before.

Venticello 1 A soprano called Aloysia.

Venticello 2 She jilted him.

Venticello 1 Now he's after another sister.

Venticello 2 Constanze.

Salieri You mean he was actually engaged to one sister and now wants to marry another?

Venticello 1 } (*together*) Exactly!

Venticello 2 }

Venticello 1 Her mother's pushing marriage.

Venticello 2 His *father* isn't!

Venticello 1 Daddy is worried sick!

Venticello 2 Writes him every day from Salzburg!

Salieri (*to them*) I want to meet him. What houses does he visit?

Venticello 1 He'll be at the Baroness Waldstädten's tomorrow night.

Salieri *Grazie.*

Venticello 2 Some of his music is to be played.

Salieri (*to both*) *Restiamo in contatto.*

Venticello 1 } (*together*) *Certamente, Signore!*

Venticello 2 }

They go off

Salieri (*to the Audience*) So to the Baroness Waldstädten's I went. That night changed my life.

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The Library of the Baroness Waldstädten

In the Light Box, the background shows two elegantly curtained windows surrounded by handsome subdued wallpaper

Two Servants bring on a large table loaded with cakes and desserts. Two more carry on a grand, high-backed wing-chair which they place ceremoniously DR near the small table. They set the items and leave

Salieri (*to the Audience*) I entered the library to take first a little refreshment. My generous hostess always put out the most delicious confections in that room whenever she knew I was coming. *Dolci, caramelli*, and most especially a miraculous *crema al mascarpone* — which is simply cream cheese mixed with granulated sugar and suffused with rum — that was totally irresistible. (*He takes a little bowl of it from the cake-stand and sits in the wing-chair, facing out front. Thus seated, he is invisible to anyone entering from upstage*) I had just sat down in a high-backed chair to consume this paradisaal dish — unobservable, as it happened, to anyone who might come in.

Off stage, noises are heard

Constanze (*off*) Squeak! Squeak! Squeak!

Constanze runs on from upstage: a pretty girl in her early twenties, full of high spirits. At this second she is pretending to be a mouse. She runs across the stage in her gay party dress, squeaking, and hides under the fortepiano

Suddenly a small, pallid, large-eyed man in a showy wig and a showy set of clothes runs in after her and freezes c, as a cat would freeze, hunting a mouse. This is Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. As we get to know him through his next scenes, we discover several things about him: he is an extremely restless man, his voice, light and high; his manner, excitable and volatile

Mozart Miaouw!

Constanze (*betraying where she is*) Squeak!

Mozart Miaouw! Miaouw! Miaouw!

The composer drops on all fours and, wrinkling his face, begins spitting and stalking his prey. The mouse — giggling with excitement — breaks her cover and scrambles across the floor. The cat pursues. Almost at the chair where Salieri sits concealed, the mouse turns at bay. The cat stalks her — nearer and nearer — in its knee-breeches and elaborate coat

Mozart I'm going to pounce-bounce! I'm going to scrunch-munch! I'm going to chewpoo my little mouse-wouse! I'm going to tear her to bits with my paws-claws!

Constanze No!

Mozart Paws-claws, paws-claws, paws-claws! *Ohh!*

He falls on her. She screams

Salieri (*drily, to the Audience*) Before I could rise, it had become difficult to do so. (*He surreptitiously places the bowl on the small table*)

Mozart I'm going to bite you in half with my fangs-wangs! My little Stranzerl-wanzerl-banzerl!

She laughs delightedly, lying prone beneath him

You're trembling! ... I think you're frightened of puss-wuss! ... I think you're scared to death! (*Intimately*) I think you're going to shit yourself.

She squeals, but is not really shocked. He emits a little babyish giggle

In a moment it's going to be on the floor!

Constanze Ssh! Someone'll hear you!

He imitates the noise of a fart

Stop it, Wolferl! Ssh!

Mozart Here it comes now! I can hear it *coming!* ... Oh what a melancholy note! Something's dropping from your boat!

Another fart noise, slower. Constanze shrieks with amusement

Constanze Stop it now! It's stupid! Really *stupid!*

Salieri sits appalled

Mozart Hey — hey — what's Trazom!

Constanze What?

Mozart T-R-A-Z-O-M. What's that mean?

Constanze How should I know?

Mozart It's Mozart spelt backwards — shit-wit! If you ever married me, you'd be Constanze Trazom.

Constanze No, I wouldn't.

Mozart Yes, you would. Because I'd want everything backwards once I was married. I'd want to lick my wife's arse instead of her face.

Constanze You're not going to lick anything at this rate. Your father's never going to give his consent to us.

The sense of fun deserts him instantly

Mozart And who cares about his consent?

Constanze You do. You care very much. You wouldn't do it without it.

Mozart Wouldn't I?

Constanze No, you wouldn't. Because you're too scared of him. I know what he says about me. *(In a solemn voice)* "If you marry that dreadful girl, you'll end up lying on straw with beggars for children."

Mozart *(impulsively)* Marry me!

Constanze Don't be silly.

Mozart Marry me!

Constanze Are you serious?

Mozart *(defiantly)* Yes! ... Answer me this minute: yes or no! Say yes, then I can go home, shit in the bed and shout "I did it!" *(He rolls on top of her delightedly)*

The Major-Domo of the house stalks in upstage

Major-Domo *(imperviously)* Her ladyship is ready to commence.

Mozart Ah! ... Yes! ... Good!

He picks himself up, embarrassed, and helps Constanze to rise

(With an attempt at dignity) Come, my dear. The music waits!

Constanze *(suppressing giggles)* Oh, by all means — Herr Trazom!

He takes her arm. They prance off together, followed by the disapproving Major-Domo

Salieri *(shaken; to the Audience)* And then, right away, the concert began.

I heard it through the door — some serenade: at first only vaguely — too horrified to attend. But presently the sound insisted — a solemn Adagio, in E Flat.

The Adagio of the Serenade for Thirteen Wind Instruments (K. 361) begins to sound. Quietly and quite slowly, seated in the wing-chair, Salieri speaks over the music

It started simply enough: just a pulse in the lowest registers — bassoons and basset horns — like a rusty squeezebox. It would have been comic except for the slowness, which gave it instead a sort of serenity. And then suddenly, high above it, sounded a single note on the oboe.

We hear it

It hung there unwavering, piercing me through, till breath could hold it no longer, and a clarinet withdrew it out of me, and sweetened it into a phrase of such delight it had me trembling. The light flickered in the room. My eyes clouded! *(With ever-increasing emotion and vigour)* The squeezebox groaned louder, and over it the higher instruments wailed and warbled, throwing lines of sound around me — long lines of pain around and through me — Ah, the pain! Pain as I had never known it. I called up to my sharp old God "What is this? ... What?" But the squeezebox went on and on, and the pain cut deeper into my shaking head, until suddenly I was running——

He bolts out of the chair and runs across the stage in a fever, to a corner DL. Behind him in the Light Box the Library fades into a street scene at night: small houses under a rent sky. The music continues fainter, underneath

—dashing through the side-door, stumbling downstairs into the street, into the cold night, gasping for life. *(Calling up in agony)* "What?! What is this? Tell me, Signore! What is this pain? What is this need in the sound? Forever unfulfillable yet fulfilling him who hears it, utterly. Is it Your need? Can it be Yours?" ...

Pause

Dimly the music sounded from the salon above. Dimly the stars shone on the empty street. I was suddenly frightened. It seemed to me that I had heard the voice of God — and that it issued from a creature whose own voice I had also heard — and it was the voice of an obscene child!

The Lights change. The street scene fades

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Salieri's Apartments

It remains dark

Salieri I ran home and buried my fear in work. More pupils — till there were thirty or forty. More committees to help musicians! More motets and

anthems to God's glory. And at night I prayed for just one thing. (*He kneels desperately*) "Let your sound enter *me!* Let *me* be your conduit! ... Let *me!*" (*Pause. He rises*) As for Mozart, I avoided meeting him — and sent out my "Little Winds" for whatever scores of his could be found.

The Venticelli come in with manuscripts

Salieri sits at the fortepiano, and they show him the music alternately, as Servants unobtrusively remove the large table and wing-chair

Venticello 1 Six fortepiano Sonatas composed in Munich.

Venticello 2 Two in Mannheim.

Venticello 1 A Parisian symphony.

Salieri (*to the Audience*) Clever. They were all clever. But yet they seemed to me completely empty!

Venticello 1 A Divertimento in D.

Venticello 2 A Cassazione in G.

Venticello 1 A Grand Litany in E Flat.

Salieri (*to the Audience*) The same. Conventional. Even boring. The productions of a precocious youngster — Leopold Mozart's swanky son — nothing more. That Serenade was obviously an exception in his work: the sort of accident which might visit any composer on a lucky day!

The Venticelli go off with the music

Had I in fact been simply taken by surprise that the filthy creature could write music at all? ... Suddenly I felt immensely cheered! I would seek him out and welcome him myself to Vienna!

* * * * *

The Palace of Schönbrunn

The Lights change quickly. In the Light Box the Emperor is revealed standing in bright light before the gilded mirrors and the fireplace, attended by Chamberlain von Strack. His Majesty is a dapper, cheerful figure, aged forty, largely pleased with himself and the world

Downstage, from opposite sides, van Swieten and Orsini-Rosenberg hurry on

Joseph Fêtes and fireworks, gentlemen! Mozart is here! He's waiting below!

All (*bowing*) Majesty!

Joseph *Je suis follement impatient!*

Salieri (*to the Audience*) The Emperor Joseph the Second of Austria. Son of Maria Theresa. Brother of Marie Antoinette. Adorer of music — provided that it made no demands upon the royal ear. (*To the Emperor; deferentially*) Majesty, I have written a little march in Mozart's honour. May I play it as he comes in?

Joseph By all means, Court Composer. What a delightful idea! Have you met him yet?

Salieri Not yet, Majesty.

Joseph Fêtes and fireworks, what fun! Strack, bring him up at once.

Von Strack goes off

The Emperor comes on to the stage proper

Mon Dieu, I wish we could have a competition! Mozart against some other virtuoso. Two keyboards in contest. Wouldn't that be fun, Baron?

Van Swieten (*stiffly*) Not to me, Majesty. In my view, musicians are not horses to be run against one another.

Slight pause

Joseph Ah. Well — there it is.

Von Strack returns

Von Strack Herr Mozart, Majesty.

Joseph Ah! Splendid! ...

Conspiratorially he signs to Salieri, who moves quickly to the fortepiano

Court Composer — *allons!* (*To von Strack*) Admit him, please.

Instantly Salieri sits at the instrument and strikes up his march on the keyboard

At the same moment Mozart struts in, wearing an ornate surcoat, with dress-sword

The Emperor stands downstage and as Mozart approaches he signs him to halt and listen. Bewildered, Mozart does so, becoming aware of Salieri playing his "March of Welcome". It is an extremely banal piece, vaguely — but only vaguely — reminiscent of another march to become very famous

later on. All stand frozen in attitudes of listening, until Salieri comes to a finish. Applause

(To Salieri) Charming ... *Comme d'habitude!* (He turns and extends his hand to be kissed) Mozart.

Mozart approaches, bows extravagantly, and kneels

Mozart Majesty! Your Majesty's humble slave! Let me kiss your royal hand a hundred thousand times!

He kisses it greedily, over and over, until its owner withdraws it in embarrassment

Joseph *Non, non, s'il vous plaît!* A little less enthusiasm, I beg you. Come sir. *Levez-vous!*

He assists Mozart to rise

You will not recall it, but the last time we met you were also on the floor! My sister remembers it to this day. This young man — all of six years old, mind you — slipped on the floor at Schönbrunn — came a nasty purler on his little head ... Have I told you this before?

Orsini-Rosenberg (*hastily*) No, Majesty!

Von Strack (*hastily*) No, Majesty!

Salieri (*hastily*) No, Majesty!

Joseph Well, my sister Antoinette runs forward and picks him up herself. And do you know what he does? Jumps right into her arms — hoopla, just like that! — kisses her on both cheeks and says, "Will you marry me: yes or no?"

The courtiers laugh politely. Mozart giggles uncomfortably

I do not mean to embarrass you, Herr Mozart. You know everyone here, surely?

Mozart Yes, Sire. (*Bowing elaborately to Orsini-Rosenberg*) Herr Director! (*To van Swieten*) Herr Prefect.

Van Swieten (*warmly*) Delighted to see you again!

Joseph But not, I think, our esteemed Court Composer! ... A most serious omission! No-one who cares for art can afford not to know Herr Salieri. He wrote that exquisite little "March of Welcome" for you.

Salieri It was a trifle, Majesty.

Joseph Nevertheless ...

Mozart (*to Salieri*) I'm overwhelmed. *Signore!*

Joseph Ideas simply pour out of him — don't they, Strack?

Von Strack Endlessly, Sire. (*As if tipping him*) Well done, Salieri.

Joseph Let it be my pleasure then to introduce you! Court Composer Salieri — Herr Mozart of Salzburg!

Salieri (*sleekly; to Mozart*) *Finalmente. Che gioia. Che diletto straordinario.*

Salieri gives him a prim bow and presents the copy of his music to the other composer, who accepts it with a flood of quick Italian

Mozart *Grazie, Signore! Mille milione di benvenuti! Sono commoso! È un onore eccezionale incontrala! Compositore brillante e famosissimo!* (*He makes an elaborate and showy bow in return*)

Salieri (*drily*) *Grazie.*

Joseph Tell me, Mozart, have you received our commission for the opera?

Mozart Indeed I have, Majesty! I am so grateful I can hardly speak! ... I swear to you that you will have the best, the most perfect entertainment ever offered a monarch. I've already found a libretto.

Orsini-Rosenberg (*startled*) Have you? I didn't hear of this!

Mozart Forgive me, Herr Director, I entirely omitted to tell you.

Orsini-Rosenberg May I ask why?

Mozart It didn't seem very important.

Orsini-Rosenberg Not important?

Mozart Not really, no.

Orsini-Rosenberg (*irritated*) It is important to *me*, Herr Mozart.

Mozart (*embarrassed*) Yes, I see that. Of course.

Orsini-Rosenberg And who, pray, is it by?

Mozart Stephanie.

Orsini-Rosenberg A most unpleasant man.

Mozart But a brilliant writer.

Orsini-Rosenberg Do you think?

Mozart The story is really amusing, Majesty. The whole plot is set in a — (*he sniggers*) — in a ...

Joseph (*eagerly*) Where? Where is it set?

Mozart It's — it's rather saucy, Majesty!

Joseph Yes, yes! Where?

Mozart Well it's actually set in a *seraglio*.

Joseph A what?

Mozart A pasha's harem.

Orsini-Rosenberg And you imagine that is a suitable subject for performance at a national theatre?

Mozart Yes! ... Why not? It's very funny, it's amusing! ... On my honour, Majesty, there's nothing offensive in it. Nothing offensive in the world. It's full of proper German virtues, I swear it! ...

Salieri (*blandly*) *Scusate, Signore*, but what are those? Being a foreigner I'm not quite sure.

Joseph You are being *cattivo*, Court Composer.

Salieri Not at all, Majesty.

Joseph Come then, Mozart. Name us a proper German virtue!

Mozart Love, Sire. I have yet to see that expressed in any opera.

Van Swieten Well answered, Mozart.

Salieri (*smiling*) *Scusate*. I was under the impression one rarely saw anything *else* expressed in opera.

Mozart I mean manly love, *Signore*. Not male sopranos screeching. Or stupid couples rolling their eyes. All that absurd Italian nonsense.

Pause. Tension. Rosenberg coughs

I mean the real thing.

Joseph And do you know the real thing yourself, Herr Mozart?

Mozart Under your pardon, I think I do, Majesty.

Joseph Bravo. When do you think it will be done?

Mozart The first act is already finished.

Joseph But it can't be more than two weeks since you started!

Mozart Composing is not hard when you have the right audience to please, Sire.

Van Swieten A charming reply, Majesty.

Joseph Indeed, Baron. Fêtes and fireworks! I see we are going to have fêtes and fireworks! *Au revoir, Monsieur Mozart. Soyez bienvenu à la court.*

Mozart (*with expert rapidity*) *Majesté! — je suis comblé d'honneur d'être accepté dans la maison du Père de tous les musiciens! Servir un monarque aussi plein de discernement que votre Majesté, c'est un honneur qui dépasse le sommet de mes dus!*

A pause. The Emperor is taken aback slightly by this flood of French

Joseph Ah. Well — there it is. I'll leave you gentlemen to get better acquainted.

Salieri Good-day, Majesty.

Mozart *Votre Majesté.*

Salieri and Mozart bow

Joseph goes out

Orsini-Rosenberg Good-day to you.

Von Strack Good-day.

Orsini-Rosenberg and von Strack follow the Emperor out

Van Swieten (*warmly shaking his hand*) Welcome, Mozart. I shall see much more of you. Depend on it!

Mozart Thank you. (*He bows*)

Van Swieten goes out

Salieri *Bene.*

Mozart *Bene.*

Salieri I, too, wish you success with your opera.

Mozart I'll have it. It's going to be superb. I must tell you I have already found the most excellent singer for the leading part.

Salieri Oh: who is that?

Mozart Her name is Cavalieri. Katherina Cavalieri. She's really German, but she thinks it will advance her career if she sports an Italian name.

Salieri She's quite right. It was my idea. She is in fact my prize pupil. Actually she's a very innocent child. Silly in the way of young singers — but, you know, she's only twenty.

Mozart Yes.

Without emphasis Mozart freezes his movements and Salieri takes one easy step forward to make a fluent aside

Salieri (*to the Audience*) I had kept my hands off Katherina. Yes! But, I could not bear to think of anyone else's upon her — least of all his!

Mozart (*unfreezing*) You're a good fellow, Salieri! And that's a jolly little thing you wrote for me.

Salieri It was my pleasure.

Mozart Let's see if I can remember it. May I?

Salieri No need. It's yours.

Mozart *Grazie, Signore.*

Mozart tosses the manuscript on to the lid of the fortepiano where he cannot see it, sits at the instrument, and plays Salieri's "March of Welcome" perfectly from memory — at first slowly, recalling it, but on the reprise of the tune, very much faster

The rest is just the same, isn't it? (*He finishes it with insolent speed*)

Salieri You have a remarkable memory.

Mozart (*delighted with himself*) *Grazie ancora, Signore!* (*He plays the opening seven bars again, but this time stops on the interval of the fourth, and sounds it again with displeasure*) It doesn't really work, that fourth — does it? ... Let's try the third above ... (*He does so — and smiles happily*) Ah yes! ... Good!

He repeats the new interval, leading up to it smartly with the well-known military-trumpet arpeggio which characterizes the celebrated march from The Marriage of Figaro, "Non piu andrai". Then, using the interval — tentatively, delicately, one note at a time, in the treble — he steals into the famous tune itself. On and on he plays, improvising happily what is virtually the march we know now, laughing gleefully each time he comes to the amended interval of a third. Salieri watches him with an answering smile painted on his face. Mozart's playing grows more and more exhibitionistic — revealing to the Audience the formidable virtuoso he is. The whole time he himself remains totally oblivious to the offence he is giving. Finally he finishes the march with a series of triumphant flourishes and chords!

An ominous pause

Salieri *Scusate*, I must go.

Mozart Really? (*Springing up and indicating the keyboard*) Why don't you try a variation?

Salieri Thank you, but I must attend on the Emperor.

Mozart Ah.

Salieri It has been delightful to meet you.

Mozart For me too! ... And thanks for the march!

Mozart picks up the manuscript from the top of the fortepiano and marches happily off stage

A slight pause. Salieri moves towards the Audience. The Lights go down around him

Salieri (*to the Audience*) Was it then — so early — that I began to have thoughts of murder? ... Of course not: at least not in life. In art it was a different matter. I decided I would compose a huge tragic opera: something to astonish the world! And I knew my theme. I would set the legend of Danaïus, who, for a monstrous crime, was chained to a rock for eternity, his head repeatedly struck by lightning! Wickedly in my head I saw Mozart in that position ... In reality, of course, the man was in no danger from me at all ... Not yet.

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The First Performance of The Abduction From The Seraglio

The Lights change, and the stage instantly turns into an eighteenth-century theatre. The Light Box background shows a line of softly gleaming chandeliers

The Servants bring on chairs and benches and place them facing the Audience, making a row of seven chairs with another placed a little behind this and the benches at the back. When this is completed they leave

The Emperor, von Strack, Orsini-Rosenberg and van Swieten enter and sit in that order. Kapellmeister Bonno and Teresa Salieri come on and sit next to them, followed by Constanze who sits a little behind them. The Citizens of Vienna enter and sit on the benches. Everyone faces the Audience

Salieri The first performance of *The Abduction From The Seraglio*. The Creature's expression of manly love.

Mozart comes on briskly, wearing a gaudy new coat embellished with scarlet ribbons, and a new powdered wig. He struts quickly to the fortepiano, sits at it and mimes conducting. Salieri sits nearby, next to his wife, and watches Mozart intently

He himself contrived to wear for the occasion an even more vulgar coat than usual. As for the music, it matched the coat completely. For my dear pupil Katherina Cavalieri he had written quite simply the showiest aria I'd ever heard.

Faintly we hear the whizzing scale passages for Soprano which end the aria "Martern aller Arten"

Ten minutes of scales and ornaments, amounting in sum to a vast emptiness. So ridiculous was the piece in fact — so much what might be demanded by a foolish young soprano — that I knew precisely what Mozart must have demanded in return for it.

The final orchestral chords of the aria. Silence. No-one moves

Although engaged to be married, *he'd had her!* I knew that beyond any doubt. (*Bluntly*) The Creature had had my darling girl!

Loudly we hear the brilliant Turkish finale of Seraglio. There is great applause from those watching. Mozart jumps to his feet and acknowledges it. The Emperor rises — as do all — and gestures graciously to the "stage" in invitation

Katherina Cavalieri runs on in her costume, all plumes and flourishes, to renewed cheering and clapping. She curtsies to the Emperor — is kissed by Salieri — presented to his wife — curtsies again to Mozart and, flushed with triumph, moves to one side

In the ensuing brief silence Constanze rushes down from the back, wildly excited. She flings herself on Mozart, not even noticing the Emperor

Constanze Oh, well done, lovey! ... Well done, pussy-wussy! ...

Mozart indicates the proximity of His Majesty

Oh! ... 'Scuse me! (*She curtsies in embarrassment*)

Mozart Majesty, may I present my fiancée, Fräulein Weber.

Cavaliere reacts in total surprise

Joseph *Enchanté, Fräulein.*

Constanze Your Majesty?

Mozart Constanze is a singer herself.

Joseph Indeed?

Constanze (*embarrassed*) I'm not at all, Majesty. Don't be silly, Wolfgang!

Joseph So, Mozart — a good effort. Decidedly that. A good effort.

Mozart Did you really like it, Sire?

Joseph I thought it was most interesting. Yes, indeed. A trifle — how shall one say? (*To Orsini-Rosenberg*) How shall one say, Director?

Orsini-Rosenberg (*subserviently*) Too many notes, Your Majesty?

Joseph Very well put. Too many notes.

Mozart I don't understand.

Joseph My dear fellow, don't take it too hard. There are in fact only so many notes the ear can hear in the course of an evening. I think I'm right in saying that, aren't I, Court Composer?

Salieri (*uncomfortably*) Well yes, I would say yes, on the whole, yes, Majesty.

Joseph There you are. It's clever. It's German. It's quality work. And there are simply too many notes. Do you see?

Mozart There are just as many notes, Majesty, neither more nor less, as are required.

Pause

Joseph Ah ... Well, there it is.

He goes off abruptly, followed by Orsini-Rosenberg and von Strack. The rest of the audience leaves also, Cavaliere with a furious scowl

Mozart, Salieri and Constanze remain

Mozart (*nervously*) Herr Salieri, is he angry?

Salieri Not at all. He respects you for your views.

Mozart I hope so ... What did you think yourself, sir? Did you care for the piece at all?

Salieri Yes, of course, Mozart — at its best it is truly charming.

Mozart And at other times?

Salieri (*smoothly*) Well, just occasionally at other times — in Katherina's aria for example — it was a little excessive.

Mozart Katherina is an excessive girl. In fact she's insatiable ... I mean in regard to vocal ornaments.

Salieri All the same, as my revered teacher the Chevalier Gluck used to say to me — one must avoid music that smells of music.

Mozart What does that mean?

Salieri Music which makes one aware too much of the virtuosity of the composer.

Mozart (*mischievously*) Well — I would hate to offend a *Chevalier*. Even though I am one myself.

Salieri Indeed?

Constanze (*brightly*) Oh yes! The Pope made Wolfgang a Chevalier when he was only fourteen!

Salieri (*smiling*) Extraordinary.

Mozart They say Gluck used the name all the time. He insisted on being addressed by it.

Salieri And you prefer not to be?

Mozart I think titles are absurd, in connection with music.

Salieri Ah. (*Slyly*) Even — “Court Composer”?

Mozart What? ... (*Realizing*) Ah. Oh. Ha. Ha. Well! ... That's different, of course ... My father's right again. He always tells me I should padlock my mouth ... Actually, I shouldn't speak at all!

Salieri (*soothingly*) Nonsense. I'm just being what the Emperor would call *cattivo*. Won't you introduce me to your charming fiancée?

Mozart Oh, of course! Constanze, this is Herr Salieri, the Court Composer. Fräulein Weber.

Salieri (*bowing*) Delighted, *cara Fräulein*.

Constanze (*bobbing*) How do you do, Excellency.

Salieri May I ask when you marry?

Mozart (*nervously*) We have to secure my father's consent. He's an excellent man — a wonderful man — but in some ways a little stubborn.

Salieri Excuse me, but how old are you?

Mozart Twenty-six.

Salieri Then your father's consent is scarcely indispensable.

Constanze (*to Mozart*) You see?

Mozart (*uncomfortably*) Well no, it's not *indispensable* — of course not!

Salieri My advice to you is to marry and be happy. You have found — it's quite obvious — *un tesoro raro!*

Constanze Ta very much.

Salieri kisses Constanze's hand. She is delighted

Salieri Good-night to you both.

Constanze Good-night, Excellency!

Mozart Good-night, sir. And thank you ... Come, Stanzerl.

Constanze and Mozart depart delightedly

He watches them go

Salieri *(to the Audience)* As I watched her walk away on the arm of the Creature, I felt the lightning thought strike: "Have her! Her for Katherina!" ... Abomination! ... Never in my life had I entertained a notion so sinful!

The Lights change: the eighteenth-century theatre fades

The Venticelli come on merrily, as if from some celebration. One holds a bottle; the other a glass. During the following Servants enter and take off the chairs and benches

Venticello 1 They're married.

Salieri *(to them)* What?

Venticello 2 Mozart and Weber — married!

Salieri Really?

Venticello 1 His father will be furious!

Venticello 2 They didn't even wait for his consent!

Salieri Have they set up house?

Venticello 1 Wipplingerstrasse.

Venticello 2 Number twelve.

Venticello 1 Not bad.

Venticello 2 Considering they've no money.

Salieri Is that really true?

Venticello 1 He's wildly extravagant.

Venticello 2 Lives way beyond his means.

Salieri But he has pupils.

Venticello 1 Only three.

Salieri *(to them)* Why so few?

Venticello 1 He's embarrassing.

Venticello 2 Makes scenes.

Venticello 1 Makes enemies.

Venticello 2 Even Strack, whom he cultivates.

Salieri Chamberlain Strack?

Venticello 1 Only last night.

Venticello 2 At Kapellmeister Bonno's.

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Bonno's Salon

The Lights change instantly

Bonno stands upstage with a few guests. Mozart comes in with von Strack. He is high on wine, and holding a glass

The Venticelli join the scene, but still talk out of it to Salieri. One of them fills Mozart's glass

Mozart Seven months in this city and not one job! I'm not to be tried again, is that it?

Von Strack *(amiably)* Of course not.

Mozart I know what goes on — and so do you. Vienna is completely in the hands of foreigners. Worthless Italians like *Kapellmeister Bonno!*

Von Strack Please! You're in the man's house!

Mozart Court Composer *Salieri!*

Von Strack Hush!

Mozart Did you see his last opera? — *The Stolen Bucket?! ...* Did you?

Von Strack Of course I did.

Mozart Unbearable!

Mozart sits at the fortepiano and thumps on it monotonously

(Singing) Pom-pom, pom-pom, pom-pom, pom-pom! Tonic and dominant, tonic and dominant, from here to resurrection! Not one interesting modulation all night. Salieri is a musical idiot!

Von Strack Please!

Venticello 1 *(to Salieri)* He'd had too much to drink.

Venticello 2 He often has.

Mozart Why are Italians so terrified by the slightest complexity in music? Show them one chromatic passage and they faint!... "Oh how sick! How morbid!" *(Falsetto)* *Morboso! ... Nervoso! ... Ohimè! ...* No wonder the music at this court is so dreary! ... And in Opera they just use the same old conventions over and over again! *(Illustrating at the keyboard)* *Tremolando* shows rage! *Sforzando* shows excitement! C Minor means gravity! D Minor means terror! ... Round and round like donkeys at a grindstone!

Count Orsini-Rosenberg enters upstage, unseen by Mozart. He wears a waistcoat of dark green silk and an expression of supercilious interest

Von Strack (*half-amused*) Lower your voice.

Mozart Lower your breeches! ... That's just a joke!

Mozart sees Orsini-Rosenberg. A pause

(*Pleasantly to Orsini-Rosenberg*) You look like a toad ... I mean, your waistcoat. And you were goggling like a toad.

Orsini-Rosenberg (*blandly*) You would do best to retire tonight, for your own sake.

Mozart (*sharply*) Salieri has fifty pupils. I have three. How am I to live? I'm a married man now! ... Of course I realize you don't concern yourself with money in these exalted circles. All the same, did you know behind his back His Majesty is known as Kaiser Keep-It? (*He giggles naughtily*)

Von Strack *Mozart!*

He stops giggling. All the guests upstage are watching

Mozart I shouldn't have said that, should I? Forgive me. It was just a joke. Another joke! ... I can't help myself! ... We're all friends here, aren't we?

Von Strack and Orsini-Rosenberg glare at him

Von Strack leaves abruptly, much offended

Mozart What's wrong with him?

Orsini-Rosenberg Good-night. (*He turns to go*)

Mozart No, no, no — please! (*He grabs the Director's arm*) Your hand please, first!

Unwillingly Orsini-Rosenberg gives him his hand. Mozart kisses it

(*Humbly*) Give me a post, sir.

Orsini-Rosenberg That is not in my power. Mozart.

Mozart The Princess Elizabeth is looking for an instructor. One word from you could secure it for me.

Orsini-Rosenberg I regret that is solely in the recommendation of Court Composer Salieri. (*He disengages himself*)

Mozart Do you know I am better than any musician in Vienna? ... Do you?

Orsini-Rosenberg leaves

(*Calling after him*) Italians! ... I'm sick of them! ... Italians everywhere!

He runs at the upstage guests in mock aggression

Old Bonno shepherds them off in alarm. The Venticelli leave hurriedly, another way

Mozart is left alone — save, of course, for Salieri standing out of the scene, to one side. Mozart looks about him, then suddenly giggles to himself like a child, and starts to sing with bravado, to the tune that one day will be that of "La Ci Darem la Mano" in his Don Giovanni

(*Singing*) The girl who doesn't love me — the girl who doesn't love me — the girl who doesn't love me — can lick my arse instead!

But suddenly he strikes his own head fiercely in self-rebuke, and dashes off

Salieri (*watching him go; to the Audience*) Barely one month later, that thought of revenge became more than thought.

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The Library of the Baroness Waldstätten

Two simultaneous shouts bring up the Lights. Against the handsome wallpaper stand three masked figures: Constanze, flanked on either side by the Venticelli. All three are guests at a party, and are playing a game of forfeits. Four Servants stand frozen: two are holding the large wing armchair between them, the other two hold the big table of sweetmeats

Venticello 1 Forfeit! ... Forfeit! ...

Venticello 2 Forfeit, Stanzer!! You've got to forfeit!

Constanze I won't.

Venticello 1 You have to.

Venticello 2 It's the game.

The Servants unfreeze, set down the furniture and leave

Salieri moves to the wing chair and sits

Salieri (*to the Audience*) Once again — believe it or not — I was in the same concealing chair in the Baroness's library — (*taking the bowl from the little table*) — and consuming the same delicious dessert.

Venticello 1 You lost — now there's the penalty!

Salieri (*to the Audience*) A party celebrating the New Year's Eve. I was on my own — my dear spouse Teresa visiting her parents in Italy.

Constanze Well, *what* ... What is it?

Venticello 1 snatches up an old-fashioned round ruler from the fortepiano

Venticello 1 I want to measure your calves.

Constanze Oooo!

Venticello 1 Well?

Constanze Definitely not! You cheeky bugger!

Venticello 1 Now come on!

Venticello 2 You've got to let him, Stanzerl. All's fair in love and forfeits.

Constanze No it isn't — so you can both buzz off!

Venticello 1 If you don't let me, you won't be allowed to play again.

Constanze Well choose something else.

Venticello 1 I've chosen that. Now get up on the table. Quick, quick! *Allez-ooop!* (*Gleefully he shifts the plates of sweetmeats*)

Constanze Quick, then! ... Before anyone sees!

The two masked men lift the shrieking masked girl up on to the table

Venticello 1 Hold her, Friedrich.

Constanze I don't have to be held, thank you!

Venticello 2 Yes, you do: that's part of the penalty.

Venticello 2 holds her ankles firmly, whilst Venticello 1 thrusts the ruler under her skirts and measures her legs. Excitedly, Salieri puts down the bowl on the small table and reverses his position so that he can kneel in the wing-chair, and watch. Constanze giggles delightedly, then becomes outraged — or pretends to be

Constanze Stop it! ... Stop that! That's quite enough of that! (*She bends down and tries to slap him*)

Venticello 1 Seventeen inches — knee to ankle!

Venticello 2 Let me do it! You hold her.

Constanze That's not fair!

Venticello 2 Yes, it is. You lost to me too.

Constanze It's been done now! Let me down!

Venticello 2 Hold her, Karl.

Constanze No! ...

Venticello 1 holds her ankles. Venticello 2 thrusts his head entirely under her skirts. She squeals

No — stop it! ... *No!* ...

In the middle of this undignified scene Mozart comes rushing on — also masked

Mozart (*outraged*) Constanze!

They freeze. Salieri ducks back down and sits hidden in the chair

Gentlemen, if you please.

Constanze It's only a game, Wolferl! ...

Venticello 1 We meant no harm, 'pon my word.

Mozart (*stiffly*) Come down off that table, please.

They hand her down

Thank you. We'll see you later.

Venticello 2 Now look, Mozart, don't be pompous —

Mozart Please excuse us now.

The Venticelli go

The little man is very angry. He tears off his mask

(*To Constanze*) Do you realize what you've done?

Constanze No, what? ... (*Flustered, she busies herself restoring the plates of sweetmeats to the table*)

Mozart Just lost your reputation, that's all! You're now a loose girl.

Constanze Don't be so stupid. (*She too removes her mask*)

Mozart You are a married woman, for God's sake!

Constanze And what of it?

Mozart A young wife does not allow her legs to be handled in public. Couldn't you at least have measured your own ugly legs?

Constanze *What?*

Mozart (*raising his voice*) Do you know what you've done?! ... You've shamed me — that's all! *Shamed* me!

Constanze Oh, don't be so ridiculous!

Mozart Shamed me — in front of *them!*

Constanze (*suddenly furious*) *You* — shamed *you!* ... That's a laugh! If there's any shame around, lovey, it's *mine!*

Mozart What do you mean?

Constanze You've only had every pupil who ever came to you.

Mozart That's not true.

Constanze Every single female pupil!

Mozart Name them! *Name them!*

Constanze The Aurnhammer girl! The Rumbeck girl! Katherina Cavalieri — that sly little whore! *She* wasn't even your pupil — she was Salieri's. Which actually, my dear, may be why he has hundreds and you have none! He doesn't drag them into bed!

Mozart Of course he doesn't. He can't get it up, that's why! ... Have you heard his music? That's the sound of someone who *can't get it up!* At least *I can do that!*

Constanze I'm sick of you!

Mozart (*shouting*) No-one ever said I couldn't do *that!*

Constanze (*bursting into tears*) I don't give a fart! I hate you! I hate you for ever and ever — I hate you! (*A tiny pause. She weeps*)

Mozart (*helplessly*) Oh Stanzerl, don't cry. Please don't cry ... I can't bear it when you cry. I just didn't want you to look cheap in people's eyes, that's all. Here! (*He snatches up the ruler*) Beat me. Beat me ... I'm your slave. Stanzi marini. Stanzi marini bini gini. I'll just stand here like a little lamb and bear your strokes. Here. Do it ... *Batti.*

Constanze No.

Mozart *Batti, batti. Mio tesoro!*

Constanze No!

Mozart Stanzerly wanzerly piggly poo!

Constanze Stop it.

Mozart Stanzy wanzy had a fit. Shit her stays and made them split!

She giggles despite herself

Constanze Stop it.

Mozart When they took away her skirt, Stanzy wanzy ate the dirt!

Constanze Stop it now!

She snatches the ruler and gives him a whack with it. He yowls playfully

Mozart Oooo! Oooo! Oooo! Do it again! Do it again! I cast myself at your stinking feet, Madonna!

He does so. She whacks him some more as he crouches, but always lightly, scarcely looking at him, divided between tears and laughter. Mozart drums his feet with pleasure

Ow! Ow! Ow!

And then suddenly Salieri, unable to bear another second, cries out involuntarily

Salieri *Ah!!!*

The young couple freezes. Salieri — discovered — hastily converts his noise of disgust into a yawn, and stretches as if waking up from a nap. He peers out of the wing-chair

Good-evening.

Constanze (*embarrassed*) Excellency ...

Mozart How long have you been there?

Salieri I was asleep until a second ago. Are you two quarrelling?

Mozart No, of course not.

Constanze Yes, we are. He's been very irritating.

Salieri (*rising*) *Caro Herr*, tonight is the time for New Year resolutions. Irritating lovely ladies cannot surely be one of ours. May I suggest you bring us each a *sorbetto* from the dining-room?

Mozart But why don't we all go to the table?

Constanze Herr Salieri is quite right. Bring them here — it'll be your punishment.

Mozart Stanzi!

Salieri Come now, I can keep your wife company. There cannot be a better peace offering than a *sorbetto* of aniseed.

Constanze I prefer tangerine.

Salieri Very well, tangerine. (*Greedily*) But if you could possibly manage aniseed for me, I'd be deeply obliged ... So the New Year can begin coolly for all three of us.

A pause. Mozart hesitates — and then bows

Mozart I'm honoured, *Signore*, of course. And then I'll play you at billiards. What do you say?

Salieri I'm afraid I don't play.

Mozart (*with surprise*) You don't?

Constanze Wolferl would rather play at billiards than anything. He's very good at it.

Mozart I'm the best! I may nod occasionally at composing, but at billiards — never!

Salieri A virtuoso of the cue.

Mozart Exactly! It's a virtuoso's game! ... (*He snatches up the ruler and treats it as if it were a cue*) I think I shall write a Grand Fantasia for Billiard Balls! Trillos! Acciacaturas! Whole arpeggios in ivory! Then I'll play it myself in public! ... It'll have to be *me* because none of those Italian charlatans like Clementi will be able to get his fingers round the cue!

He gives a swanky flourish of the hand and starts to strut off, then suddenly realizes what he has just said and stops

Scusate, Signore!

Salieri gives him a cold nod

Mozart leaves, embarrassed

Constanze He's a love, really.

Salieri And lucky, too. You are, if I may say, an astonishing creature.

Constanze Me? ... Ta very much.

Salieri On the other hand, your husband does not appear to be so thriving.

Constanze (*seizing her opportunity*) We're desperate, sir.

Salieri What?

Constanze We've no money and no prospects of any. That's the truth.

Salieri I don't understand. He gives many public concerts.

Constanze They don't pay enough. What he needs is pupils. Illustrious pupils. His father calls us spendthrifts, but that's unfair. I manage as well as anyone could. There's simply not enough. Don't tell him I talked to you, please.

Salieri (*intimately*) This is solely between us. How can I help?

Constanze My husband needs security, sir. If only he could find regular employment, everything would be all right. Is there nothing at court?

Salieri Not at the moment.

Constanze (*harder*) The Princess Elizabeth needs a tutor.

Salieri Really? I hadn't heard.

Constanze One word from you and the post would be his. Other pupils would follow at once.

Salieri (*looking off*) He's coming back.

Constanze Please ... please, Excellency. You can't imagine what a difference it would make.

Salieri We can't speak of it now.

Constanze When then? Oh, please!

Salieri Can you come and see me tomorrow? Alone?

Constanze I can't do that.

Salieri I'm a married man.

Constanze All the same.

Salieri When does he work?

Constanze Afternoons.

Salieri Then come at three.

Constanze I can't possibly!

Salieri Yes or no? In his interests?

A pause

Constanze hesitates — opens her mouth — then abruptly runs off

The curtains descend on the light box

(*To the Audience*) So I'd done it. Spoken aloud. Invited her! ... What of that vow made in church? Fidelity — virtue — all of that? I couldn't think of that now!

Servants enter and remove the wing-chair and large sweetmeat table. Others come on and replace it with two small gilded chairs which they put c, facing out front, quite close together. Others, again surreptitiously, bring in the old dressing-gown and turban which Salieri discarded before, placing them on the fortepiano. The Servants leave

* * * * *

Salieri's Apartments

On the curtains of the Light Box are thrown again images of long windows

Salieri Next afternoon I waited in a fever! Would she come? I had no idea. And if she did, how would I behave? Was I actually going to seduce a young wife of two months' standing? ... Part of me — much of me — wanted it, badly. *Badly*. Yes, badly was the word! ...

The clock strikes three. On the second stroke the bell sounds. He rises excitedly

There she was! On the stroke! She'd come ... She'd come!

The Cook, still as fat but forty years younger, enters L. He proudly carries a plate piled with brandied chestnuts

Salieri takes the plate from him nervously, nodding with approval, and sets them on the little table

(*To the Cook*) Grazie. Grazie tanti ... Via, via, via!

The Cook bows as Salieri dismisses him and goes out the same way, smirking suggestively

The Valet comes in R — he is also forty years younger — and behind him Constanze, wearing a pretty hat and carrying a portfolio

Signora!

Constanze (*curtsying*) Excellency.

Salieri *Benvenuta. (To the Valet in dismissal) Grazie.*

The Valet goes

Well. You have come.

Constanze I should not have done. My husband would be frantic if he knew.

He's a very jealous man.

Salieri Are you a jealous woman?

Constanze Why do you ask?

Salieri It's not a passion I understand ... You're looking even prettier than you were last night, if I may say so.

Constanze Ta very much! ... I've brought you some manuscripts by Wolfgang. When you see them you'll understand how right he is for a royal appointment. Will you look at them, please, while I wait?

Salieri You mean now?

Constanze Yes, I have to take them back with me. He'll miss them otherwise. He doesn't make copies. These are all the originals.

Salieri Sit down. Let me offer you something special.

Constanze (*sitting*) What's that?

Salieri (*producing the plate*) *Capezzoli di Venere*. Nipples of Venus. Roman chestnuts in brandied sugar.

Constanze No, thank you.

Salieri Do try. My cook made them especially for you.

Constanze Me?

Salieri Yes. They're quite rare.

Constanze Well then, I'd better hadn't I? Just one ... Ta very much. (*She takes one and puts it in her mouth. The taste amazes her*) Oh!... Oh! ... Oh! ... They're *delish!*

Salieri (*lustfully watching her eat*) Aren't they?

Constanze Mmmmm!

Salieri Have another.

Constanze (*taking two more*) I couldn't possibly.

Carefully he moves round behind her, and seats himself on the chair next to her

Salieri I think you're the most generous girl in the world.

Constanze Generous?

Salieri It's my word for you. I thought last night that Constanze is altogether too stiff a name for that girl. I shall rechristen her "Generosa". *La Generosa*. Then I'll write a glorious song for her under that title and she'll sing it, just for me.

Constanze (*smiling*) I am much out of practice, sir.

Salieri *La Generosa. (He leans a little towards her)* Don't tell me it's going to prove inaccurate, my name for you.

Constanze (*coolly*) What name do you give your wife, Excellency?

Salieri (*equally coolly*) I'm not an excellency, and I call my wife Signora Salieri. If I named her anything else it would be *La Statua*. She's a very upright lady.

Constanze Is she here now? I'd like to meet her.

Salieri Alas, no. At the moment she's visiting her mother in Verona.

She starts very slightly out of her chair. Salieri gently restrains her

Constanze: tomorrow evening I dine with the Emperor. One word from me recommending your husband as tutor to the Princess Elizabeth, and that invaluable post is his. Believe me, when I speak to His Majesty in matters musical, no-one contradicts me.

Constanze I believe you.

Salieri *Bene. (Still sitting, he takes his mouchoir and delicately wipes her mouth with it)* Surely service of that sort deserves a little recompense in return?

Constanze How little?

Slight pause

Salieri The size of a kiss.

Slight pause

Constanze Just one?

Slight pause

Salieri If one seems fair to you.

She looks at him — then kisses him lightly on the mouth. Longer pause

Does it?

She gives him a longer kiss. He touches her with his hand. She breaks off

Constanze I fancy that's fairness enough.

Pause

Salieri (*carefully*) A pity ... It's somewhat small pay, to secure a post every musician in Vienna is hoping for.

Constanze What do you mean?

Salieri Is it not clear?

Constanze No. Not at all.

Salieri Another pity ... A thousand pities.

Pause

Constanze I don't believe it ... I just don't believe it!

Salieri What?

Constanze What you've just said.

Salieri (*hastily*) I said nothing. What did I say?

Constanze gets up and Salieri rises in panic

Constanze Oh, I'm going! ... I'm getting out of this!

Salieri Constanze ...

Constanze Let me pass, please.

Salieri Constanze, listen to me! I'm a clumsy man. You think me sophisticated — I'm not at all. Take a true look. I've no cunning. I live on ink and sweetmeats. I never see women at all ... When I met you last night, I envied Mozart from the depths of my soul. Out of that envy came stupid thoughts. For one silly second I dared imagine that — out of the vast store you obviously possess — you might spare me one coin of tenderness your rich husband does not need — and inspire me also.

Pause. She laughs

I amuse.

Constanze Mozart was right. You're wicked.

Salieri He said that?

Constanze "All Italians are performers," he said. "Be very careful with that one." Meaning you. He was being comic, of course.

Salieri Yes. (*Abruptly he turns his back on her*)

Constanze But not that comic, actually. I mean you're acting a pretty obvious role aren't you, dear? A small town boy, and all the time as clever as cutlets! (*Mock tender*) Ah! You are sulking? Are you? ... When Mozart sulks I smack his botto. He rather likes it. Do you want me to scold you a bit and smack your botto too?

She hits him lightly with the portfolio. He turns in a fury

Salieri How dare you?! ... *You silly, common girl!*

A dreadful silence

(*Icily*) Forgive me. Let us confine our talk to your husband. He is a brilliant keyboard player, no question. However the Princess Elizabeth also requires a tutor in vocal music. I am not convinced he is the man for that. I would like to look at the pieces you've brought, and decide if he is mature enough. I will study them overnight — and you will study my proposal. Not to be vague: that is the price.

He extends his hand for the portfolio, and she surrenders it

Good-afternoon. (*He turns from her and places the portfolio on a chair*)

Constanze lingers, tries to speak — cannot — and goes out quickly

* * * * *

The Same

Salieri turns in a ferment to the Audience

Salieri Fiasco! ... Fiasco! ... The sordidness of it! The sheer sweating sordidness! ... Worse than if I'd actually done it! ... To be that much in sin and feel so *ridiculous* as well! (*Crying out*) *Nobilè, nobilè Salieri!* ... What had he done to me — this Mozart! Before he came, did I behave like this? Toy with adultery? Blackmail women? It was all going — slipping — growing rotten — because of *him!* (*He moves upstage in a fever — reaches out to take the portfolio on the chair — but as if fearful of what he might find inside it he withdraws his hand and sits instead beside it. A pause. He contemplates the music lying there as if it were a great confection he is dying to eat, but dare not. Then suddenly he snatches at it — tears the ribbon — opens the case and stares greedily at the manuscripts within*)

Music sounds instantly, faintly, in the theatre, as his eye falls on the first page. It is the opening of the Twenty-ninth Symphony, in A Major

(*Over the music, reading the manuscript*) She had said that these were his original scores. First and only drafts of the music. Yet they looked like fair copies. They showed no corrections of any kind. It was puzzling — then suddenly alarming.

He looks up from the manuscript at the Audience: the music abruptly stops

What was evident was that Mozart was simply transcribing music completely finished in his head. And finished as most music is never finished.

He resumes looking at the music. Immediately the Sinfonia Concertante for Violin and Viola sounds — the vaulting, joyous tune in the first movement

Displace one note and there would be diminishment. Displace one phrase and the structure would fall.

He looks up again: the music breaks off

Here again — only now in abundance — were the same sounds I'd heard in the library.

He resumes reading, and the music also resumes: a ravishing phrase from the slow movement of the Concerto for Flute and Harp

The same crushed harmonies — glancing collisions — agonizing delights.

He looks up: again the music stops

The truth was clear. That Serenade had been no accident.

Very low, in the theatre, a faint thundery sound is heard accumulating, like a distant sea

I was staring through the cage of those meticulous ink strokes at — an Absolute Beauty!

He rises to his feet, holding the portfolio. And out of the low roar writhes and rises the clear sound of a Soprano, singing the "Kyrie" from the C Minor Mass. The accretion of noise around her voice falls away — it sounds suddenly clear and bright — then clearer and brighter. The light too grows bright: too bright: burning white, then scalding white! Salieri stands in the downpour of it, in the flood of the music which is growing ever louder — filling the theatre — as the Soprano yields to the full chorus singing fortissimo its massive counterpoint

This is by far the loudest sound the Audience has yet heard. Salieri staggers towards the Audience, holding the manuscripts in his hand, like a man caught in a tumbling and violent sea

Finally the drums crash in below: Salieri throws down the portfolio of manuscripts — and falls senseless to the ground. At the same second the

music explodes into a long, echoing, distorted boom, signifying some dreadful annihilation. The sound remains suspended over the prone figure in a menacing continuum — no longer music at all. Then it dies away, and there is only silence

The Lights fade

A long pause. Salieri is quite still, lying among the manuscripts

Finally the clock sounds: six times. Salieri stirs as it does. Slowly he raises his head and looks up. And now — quietly at first — he addresses his God

Capisco! I know my fate. Now for the first time I feel my emptiness as Adam felt his nakedness ... (Slowly he rises to his feet) Tonight at an inn somewhere in this city stands a giggling child who can put on paper, without actually setting down his billiard cue, casual notes which turn my most considered ones into lifeless scratches. Grazie Signore! You gave me the desire to serve You — which most men do not have — then saw to it that the service was shameful in the ears of the server. Grazie! You gave me the desire to praise You — which most do not feel — then made me mute. Grazie tanti! You put into me perception of the Incomparable — which most men never know! — then ensured that I would know myself forever mediocre. (His voice gains power) Why! ... What is my fault? ... Until this day I have pursued virtue with rigour. I have laboured long hours to relieve my fellow men. I have worked and worked the talent You allowed me. (Calling up) You know how hard I've worked! — solely that in the end, in the practice of the art which alone makes the world comprehensible to me, I might hear Your Voice! And now I do hear it and it says only one name: MOZART! ... Spiteful, sniggering, conceited, infantine Mozart! — who has never worked one minute to help another man! — shit-talking Mozart with his botty-smacking wife! Him You have chosen to be your sole conduit! And my only reward — my sublime privilege — is to be the sole man alive in this time who shall clearly recognize Your Incarnation! (Savagely) Grazie e grazie ancora!

He hurls the portfolio into a corner

So be it! From this time we are enemies, You and I! I'll not accept it from You — *do you hear!* ... They say God is not mocked. I tell you, *Man* is not mocked! ... I am not mocked! ... They say the spirit bloweth where it listeth: I tell you *no!* It must list to virtue or not blow at all! (*Yelling*) *Dio ingiusto* — You are the Enemy! I name Thee now — *Nemico Eterno!* And this I swear: To my last breath, I shall *block* You on earth, as far as I am able! (*He*

glares up at God. To the Audience) What use, after all, is Man, if not to teach God His lessons?

He crosses to the fortepiano and takes from its lid where they lie the old dressing-gown and turban which he discarded when he conducted us back to the eighteenth century. He slips these on. As he does this, he speaks again in the voice of an old man. It is 1823 again

Before I tell you what happened next — God’s answer to me — and indeed Constanze’s — and all the horrors that followed — let me stop. The bladder, being a human appendage, is not something you need concern yourselves with yet. I being alive, though barely, am at its constant call. It is now one hour before dawn — when I must dismiss us both. When I return, I’ll tell you about the war I fought with God through His preferred Creature — Mozart, named *Amadeus*. In the waging of which, of course, the Creature had to be destroyed.

He bows to the Audience, reaches out to snatch up a pastry — then, unexpectedly, puts it back on the plate in sudden self-disgust, and slowly hobbles off

The manuscripts lie where he spilled them in his fall. As he disappears, the House Lights slowly come up

END OF ACT I

ACT II

Salieri’s Apartments

The House Lights go down

Salieri returns as the old man

Salieri I have been listening to the cats in the courtyard. They are all singing Rossini. It is obvious that cats have declined as badly as composers. Domenico Scarlatti owned one which would actually stroll across the keyboard and pick out passable subjects for fugue. But that was a Spanish cat of the Enlightenment. It appreciated counterpoint. Nowadays all cats appreciate is coloratura ... Like the rest of the public.

He comes downstage and addresses the Audience

This is now the very last hour of my life. You must understand me! ... Not forgive. I do not seek forgiveness. I was a good man, as the world calls good. What use was it to me? Goodness could not make me a good composer. Was Mozart “good”? ... Goodness is nothing in the furnace of art.

Pause

On that dreadful Night of the Manuscripts my life acquired a terrible and thrilling purpose. The blocking of God in one of His purest manifestations! ... I had the power. God needed Mozart to let Himself into the world. And Mozart needed me to get him worldly advancement. So it would be a battle to the end — and Mozart was the battleground.

Pause

One thing I knew of God. He was a cunning Enemy. Witness the fact that in blocking Him in the world I was also given the satisfaction of obstructing a disliked human rival. I wonder which of *you* would refuse that chance if it were offered.

He regards the Audience maliciously and takes off the dressing-gown and turban

I felt the danger at once, as soon as I'd spoken my challenge. How would He answer? Would He strike me dead for my impiety? Don't laugh. I was not a sophisticate of the salons. I was a small town Catholic, full of dread!

He speaks in his younger voice. We are back in the eighteenth-century

The first thing that happened, barely one hour later —

The doorbell sounds

Constanze comes in, wearing a bonnet and shawl, followed by a helpless Valet

Suddenly Constanze was back! *(In surprise)* At ten o'clock at night! ... *Signora!*

Constanze *(stiffly)* My husband is at a soirée of Baron van Swieten. A concert of Sebastian Bach. He didn't think I would enjoy it.

Salieri I see. *(Curtly, to the goggling Valet)* I'll ring if we require anything. Thank you.

The Valet goes out

Slight pause

Constanze *(flatly)* Where do we go, then?

Salieri What?

Constanze Do we do it in here? ... Why not? *(She sits, still wearing her hat, in one of the little gilded upright chairs. Deliberately she loosens the strings of her bodice, so that one can just see the tops of her breasts, hitches up her silk skirts above the knees, so that one can also just see the flesh above the tops of the stockings, spreads her legs and regards him with an open stare. Quietly)* Well? ... Let's get on with it.

For a second Salieri returns the stare, then looks suddenly away

Salieri *(stiffly)* Your manuscripts are there. Please take them and go. Now. At once.

Pause

Constanze You shit. *(She jumps up and snatches the portfolio)*

Salieri *Via! Don't return!*

Constanze You rotten shit!

Suddenly she runs at him — trying furiously to hit at his face. He grabs her arms, shakes her violently, and hurls her on the floor

Salieri *Via!*

She freezes, staring up at him in hate

(Calling to the Audience) You see how it was! I would have liked her — oh, yes, just then more than ever! But I wanted nothing petty! ... My quarrel now wasn't with Mozart — it was *through* him! Through him to God, who loved him so. *(Scornfully)* Amadeus! ... Amadeus! ...

Constanze picks herself up and runs from the room

Pause. He calms himself, going to the table and selecting a Nipple of Venus to eat

The next day, when Katherina Cavalieri came for her lesson, I made the same halting speech about "coins of tenderness" — and I dubbed the girl *La Generosa*. I regret that my invention in love, as in art, has always been limited. Fortunately Katherina found it sufficient. She consumed twenty Nipples of Venus — kissed me with brandied breath — and slipped easily into my bed.

Katherina comes in languidly, half-undressed, as if from his bedroom

Salieri embraces her, and helps slyly to adjust her peignoir

She remained there as my mistress for many years behind my good wife's back — and I soon erased in sweat the sense of his little body, the Creature's, preceding me.

The girl gives him a radiant smile, and ambles off

So much for my vow of sexual virtue. *(After a slight pause)* The same evening I went to the Palace and resigned from all my committees to help the lot of poor musicians. So much for my vow of social virtue.

The Lights change and the curtains of the Light Box rise and part

Two Servants come on and remove the two gilded chairs

The Emperor enters the Light Box and takes up his position before the vast fireplace, between the golden mirrors

(Moving upstage) Then I went to the Emperor and recommended a man of no talent whatsoever to instruct the Princess Elizabeth.

* * * * *

The Palace of Schönbrunn

Joseph Herr Sommer. A dull man, surely? What of Mozart?

Salieri Majesty, I cannot with a clear conscience recommend Mozart to teach royalty. One hears too many stories.

Joseph They may be just gossip.

Salieri One of them I regret relates to a protégée of my own. A very young singer.

Joseph *Charmant!*

Salieri Not pleasant, Majesty, but true.

Joseph I see ... Let it be Herr Sommer, then. *(He walks down on to the main stage)* I daresay he can't do much harm. To be frank, no-one can do much harm musically to the Princess Elizabeth. *(He strolls away to the one side)*

Mozart enters DL. He wears a more natural-looking wig from now on: one indeed intended to represent his own hair of light chestnut, full and gathered at the back with ribbon

Salieri *(to the Audience)* Mozart certainly did not suspect me. The Emperor announced the appointment in his usual way —

Joseph *(pausing)* Well, there it is.

Joseph goes off

Salieri — and I commiserated with the loser.

Mozart turns and stares bleakly out front. Salieri goes and shakes his hand

Mozart *(bitterly)* It's my own fault. My father always writes, I should be more obedient. *Know my place!* ... He'll send me sixteen lectures when he hears of this! *(He goes slowly up to the fortepiano)*

The Lights lower

Salieri *(watching him; to the Audience)* It was a most serious loss as far as Mozart was concerned.

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Vienna and Glimpses of Opera Houses

The Venticelli glide on

Venticello 1 His list of pupils hardly moves.

Venticello 2 Six at most.

Venticello 1 And now a child to keep!

Venticello 2 A boy.

Salieri Poor fellow. *(To the Audience)* I by contrast prospered. This is the extraordinary truth. If I had expected fury from God — none came. *None!* ... Instead — incredibly — in 'eighty-four and 'eighty-five I came to be regarded as infinitely the superior composer. And this despite the fact that these were the two years in which Mozart wrote his best keyboard concerti and his string quartets.

The Venticelli stand on either side of Salieri. Mozart sits at the fortepiano

Venticello 1 Haydn calls the Quartets unsurpassed.

Salieri They were — but no-one heard them.

Venticello 2 Van Swieten calls the concerti sublime.

Salieri They were, but no-one noticed.

Mozart plays and conducts from the keyboard. Faintly we hear the Rondo from the Piano Concerto in A Major, K488

During the following the Citizens unobtrusively enter the Light Box and take up their positions.

(Over the music) The Viennese greeted each unique concerto with the squeals of pleasure they usually reserved for a new style of bonnet. Each was played once — then totally forgotten! ... I alone, it seems, was empowered to recognize them for what they were: some of the most perfect things made in the eighteenth-century. By contrast, my operas were played everywhere and saluted by everyone! I composed my *Semiramide* for Munich.

Venticello 1 Rapturously received!

Venticello 2 People *faint* with pleasure!

In the Light Box is seen the interior of a brilliantly coloured opera house, and a stage audience standing up applauding vigorously. Salieri, flanked by the Venticelli, turns upstage and bows to it. Mozart's concert can barely be heard through the din

Salieri I wrote a comic opera for Vienna. *La Grotta di Trofonio*.

Venticello 1 The talk of the city!

Venticello 2 The cafés are buzzing!

Another opera house interior is lit up. Another audience claps vigorously. Again Salieri bows to it

Salieri (to the Audience) I finally finished my tragic opera *Danaius*, and produced it in Paris.

Venticello 1 Stupendous reception!

Venticello 2 The plaudits shake the roof!

Venticello 1 Your name sounds throughout the Empire!

Venticello 2 Throughout all Europe!

Yet another opera house and another excited audience is lit up. Salieri bows a third time. Even the Venticelli now applaud him

Mozart's concert stops

Mozart rises from the keyboard and, whilst Salieri speaks, stumps directly through the scene and exits

Salieri (to the Audience) It was incomprehensible. Almost as if I were being pushed deliberately from triumph to triumph! ... I filled my head with golden opinions — yes, and this house with golden furniture!

The Citizens exit

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Salieri's Apartments

The stage turns gold

Servants come on carrying golden chairs upholstered in golden brocade. They place these all over the wooden floor (three c facing out front) and then leave

The Valet, a little older, appears, divests Salieri of his black coat and clothes him instead another black one (see Notes) with gold facings. He takes away the old coat

The Cook — also of course a little older — brings on a golden cake-stand piled with elaborate cakes. Placing this on the little table, he takes away the other cake-stand and plate of brandied chestnuts

Salieri My own taste was for plain things — but I *denied* it! ... The successful lived with gold, and so would I! ... I grew confident. I grew resplendent. I gave salons and soirées, and worshipped the season round at the altar of sophistication!

He sits at ease in his salon. The Venticelli sit with him, one on either side

Venticello 1 Mozart heard your comedy last night.

Venticello 2 He spoke of it to the Princess Lichnowsky.

Venticello 1 He said you should be made to clean up your own mess.

Salieri (taking snuff) Really? What charmers these Salzburgers are!

Venticello 2 People are outraged by him.

Venticello 1 He empties drawing-rooms. Now van Swieten is angry with him.

The Venticelli laugh maliciously

Salieri Lord Fugue? I thought he was the Baron's little pet.

Venticello 2 Mozart has asked leave to write an Italian opera.

Salieri (to the Audience) *Italian Opera! Threat! — my kingdom!*

Venticello 1 And the Baron is scandalized.

Salieri But why? What's the subject?

Van Swieten comes on quickly from upstage

Van Swieten *Figaro! ... The Marriage of Figaro!* That disgraceful play of Beaumarchais!

At a discreet sign of dismissal from Salieri the Venticelli slip away

Van Swieten joins Salieri and sits on one of the golden chairs

(To Salieri) That's all he can find to waste his talent on: a vulgar farce! Noblemen lusting after chambermaids! Their wives dressing up in stupid disguises anyone could penetrate in a second! ... When I reproved him, he said I reminded him of his father! ... I simply cannot imagine why Mozart should want to set that rubbish to music!

Mozart enters quickly from upstage, accompanied by von Strack. They join Salieri and van Swieten

Mozart Because I want to do a piece about real people, Baron! And I want to set it in a real place! *A boudoir!* — because that to me is the most exciting place on earth! Underclothes on the floor! Sheets still warm from a woman's body! Even a pisspot brimming under the bed!

Van Swieten (*outraged*) Mozart!

Mozart I want life, Baron. Not boring legends!

Von Strack (*sitting*) Herr Salieri's recent *Danaius* was a legend and that did not bore the French.

Mozart It is impossible to bore the French — except with real life!

Van Swieten I had assumed, now that you had joined our Brotherhood of Masons, you would choose more elevated themes.

Mozart (*impatiently*) Oh elevated! Elevated! ... The only thing a man should elevate is his doodle.

Van Swieten You are provoking, sir! Has everything to be a joke with you? **Mozart** (*desperate*) Excuse the language, Baron, but really! How can we go on forever with these gods and heroes?

Van Swieten (*passionately*) Because *they* go on forever — that's why! They represent the eternal in us. Opera is here to ennoble us, Mozart — you and me just as well as the Emperor. It is an aggrandizing art! It celebrates the eternal in man and ignores the ephemeral. The goddess in woman and not the laundress.

Von Strack Well said, sir. Exactly!

Mozart (*imitating his drawl*) Oh well said, yes, well said! Exactly! (*To all of them*) I don't understand you! You're all up on perches, but it doesn't hide your arseholes! You don't give a shit about gods and heroes! If you are honest — each one of you — which of you isn't more at home with his hairdresser than Hercules? or Horatius? (*To Salieri*) Or your stupid *Danaius*, come to that! Or *mine* — mine too! *Mithridates, King of Pontus!* ... *Il sogno di Scipione!* All those anguished antiques! They're all bores! Bores, bores, bores! (*Suddenly he springs up and jumps on to a chair, like an orator. Declaring it*) All serious operas written this century are boring!... Well, nine hundred and ninety-nine out of a thousand!

A pause. They turn and look at him in shocked amazement. He gives a little giggle, and then jumps down again

Look at us! Four gaping mouths. What a perfect quartet! I'd love to write it — just this second of time, this *now*, as you are! (*Imitating their voices*) Herr Chamberlain thinking: "Impertinent Mozart. I must speak to the Emperor at once!" Herr Prefect thinking: "Ignorant Mozart. Debasing opera with his vulgarity!" Herr Court Composer thinking: "German Mozart. What can he finally know about music?" And Mozart himself, in the middle, thinking: "I'm just a good fellow. Why do they all disapprove of me?" (*Excitedly, to van Swieten*) That's why opera is important, Baron. Because it's realer than any play! A dramatic poet would have to put all those thoughts down one after another to represent this second of time. The composer can put them all down at once — and still make us hear each one of them. Astonishing device: a vocal quartet! (*More and more excited*)

I tell you I want to write a finale lasting half an hour! A quartet becoming a quintet becoming a sextet becoming a septet — an octet — a nonet! On and on, wider and wider — all sounds multiplying and rising together — and the Together making a sound entirely new! ... I bet you that's how God hears the world. Millions of sounds ascending at once and mixing in His ear to become an *unending music*, unimaginable to us! (*To Salieri*) That's our job! That's our *job*, we composers: to combine the inner minds of him and him and him, and her and her — the thoughts of chambermaids and court composers — and turn the audience into God.

Pause. Salieri stares at him fascinated. Embarrassed, Mozart sounds a fart noise and giggles

I'm sorry. I talk nonsense all day: it's incurable — ask Stanzerl. (*To van Swieten*) My tongue is stupid. My heart isn't.

Van Swieten No. You're a good fellow under all your nonsense: I know that. He'll make a fine new Brother, won't he, Salieri?

Salieri Better than I, Baron.

Van Swieten Just try, my friend, to be more serious with your gifts. (*He smiles and presses Mozart's hand*)

Van Swieten goes out

Salieri rises

Salieri *Buona fortuna, Mozart.*

Mozart *Grazie, Signore.* (*Rounding on von Strack*) Stop frowning, Herr Chamberlain. I'm a jackass. It's easy to be friends with a jackass: just shake his "hoof".

He forms his hand into a "hoof". Warily von Strack takes it — then springs back as Mozart brays loudly like a donkey

Hee-haw! ... Tell the Emperor the opera's finished.

Von Strack Finished?

Mozart Right here in my noddle. The rest's just scribbling. Goodbye.

Von Strack Good-day to you.

Mozart He's going to be proud of me. You'll see.

Mozart gives a flourish of his hand and goes out, delighted with himself

Von Strack That young man *really is* ...

Salieri (*blandly*) Very lively.

Von Strack (*exploding*) Intolerable! ... *Intolerable!*

Von Strack freezes in a posture of indignation

Salieri (to the Audience) How could I stop it? ... How could I block this opera of *Figaro*? ... Incredible to hear, within six weeks, the Creature had finished the entire score.

Orsini-Rosenberg bustles in

Orsini-Rosenberg *Figaro* is complete! The first performance will be on May the first!

Salieri So soon?

Orsini-Rosenberg There's no way we can stop it!

A slight pause

Salieri (slyly) I have an idea. *Una piccola idea!*

Orsini-Rosenberg What?

Salieri *Mi ha detto che un balletto nel terzo atto?*

Orsini-Rosenberg (puzzled) *Si.*

Von Strack What does he say?

Salieri *E dimmi — non è vero che l'Imperatore ha proibito il balletto nelle sue opere?*

Orsini-Rosenberg (realizing) *Uno balletto ... Ah!*

Salieri *Precisamente.*

Orsini-Rosenberg *Oh, capisco! Ma che meraviglia! Perfetto! (He laughs in delight) Veramente ingegnoso!*

Von Strack (irritated) What is it? What is he suggesting?

Salieri See him at the theatre.

Orsini-Rosenberg Of course. Immediately. I'd forgotten. You are brilliant, Court Composer.

Salieri I? ... I have said nothing. (He moves away upstage)

The Lights begin to change, dimming down

Von Strack (very cross) I must tell you that I resent this extremely. Mozart is right in some things. There is far too much Italian *chittero-chattero* at this court! Now please to inform me at once, what was just said?

Orsini-Rosenberg (lightly) *Pazienza*, my dear Chamberlain. *Pazienza*. Just wait and see!

From upstage, Salieri beckons to von Strack. Baffled and cross, the Chamberlain joins him. They watch together, unseen

The Lights dim further

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An Unlit Theatre

The Light Box background shows a projection of lamps glowing faintly in the darkened auditorium. Orsini-Rosenberg sits on one of the three golden chairs, c, looking out front

Mozart comes in quickly R, wearing another bright coat, and carrying the score of Figaro. He crosses to the fortepiano

Orsini-Rosenberg Mozart ... Mozart!

Mozart Yes, Herr Director.

Orsini-Rosenberg (agreeably) A word with you, please. Right away.

Mozart Certainly. What is it?

Orsini-Rosenberg I would like to see your score of *Figaro*.

Mozart Oh yes. Why?

Orsini-Rosenberg Just bring it here to me. (Unmoving) Into my hand, please.

Mozart hands it to him puzzled. Orsini-Rosenberg turns the pages

Now tell me: did you not know that His Majesty has expressly forbidden ballet in his operas?

Mozart Ballet?

Orsini-Rosenberg Such as occurs in your third act.

Mozart That is not a ballet, Herr Director. That is a dance at *Figaro's* wedding.

Orsini-Rosenberg Exactly. A dance.

Mozart (trying to control himself) But the Emperor doesn't mean to prohibit dancing when it's part of the story. He made that law to prevent insertions of stupid ballet like in French operas, and quite right too.

Orsini-Rosenberg (raising his voice) It is not for you, Herr Mozart, to interpret the Emperor's edicts. Merely to obey them. (He seizes the offending pages between his fingers)

Mozart What are you doing? ... What are you doing, Excellency?

Orsini-Rosenberg Taking out what should never have been put in.

In a terrible silence Orsini-Rosenberg tears out the pages, Mozart watches in disbelief. Upstage, Salieri and von Strack look on together from the dimness

Now, sir, perhaps in future you will obey Imperial commands. (He tears out some more pages)

Mozart But ... But if all that goes — there'll be a hole right at the climax of the story! ... (*Crying out suddenly*) **Salieri!** *This is Salieri's idea.*

Orsini-Rosenberg Don't be absurd.

Salieri (*to the Audience*) How did he think of that?! Nothing I had ever done could possibly make him think of that on his own. Had God given him the idea?

Mozart It's a conspiracy. I can smell it. I can *smell* it! It's a conspiracy!

Orsini-Rosenberg Control yourself!

Mozart (*howling*) *But what do you expect me to do?* The first performance is two days off!

Orsini-Rosenberg Write it over. That's your forte, is it not? — writing at speed.

Mozart Not when the music's *perfect!* Not when it's absolutely perfect as it is! ... (*Wildly*) I shall appeal to the Emperor! I'll go to him myself! I'll hold a rehearsal especially for him.

Orsini-Rosenberg The Emperor does not attend rehearsals.

Mozart He'll attend this one. Make no mistake — he'll come to this one! Then he'll deal with *you!*

Orsini-Rosenberg This issue is simple. Write your Act again today — or withdraw the opera. That's final.

Pause. He hands back the mutilated score to its composer. Mozart is shaking

Mozart You shit-pot.

Orsini-Rosenberg turns and walks imperturbably away from him

Sneaky! — Cliquey!

Serenely, Orsini-Rosenberg leaves the stage

(*Screeching after him*) Count Orsini-Rosenshit!... Rosenclit!... Rosen—! I'll hold a rehearsal! You'll see! The Emperor will come! You'll see! You'll see!... *You'll see!!* (*He throws down his score in a storm of hysterical rage*)

Von Strack goes out upstage in the dimness

Salieri ventures down towards the shrieking little man. Mozart suddenly becomes aware of him. He turns, his hand shooting out in an involuntary gesture of accusation

(*To Salieri*) I am *forbidden!* ... I am — But of course you know already!

Salieri (*quietly*) Know what?

Mozart flings away from him

Mozart (*bitterly*) No matter! (*He makes to go*)

Salieri (*always blandly*) Mozart, permit me. If you wish, I'll speak to the Emperor myself. Ask him to attend a rehearsal.

Mozart (*amazed*) You wouldn't.

Salieri I cannot promise he'll come — but I can try.

Mozart (*returning*) Sir!

Salieri Good-day. (*He puts up his hands, barring further intimacy*)

Mozart retreats to the fortepiano

(*To the Audience*) Needless to say I did nothing whatever in the matter. Yet — to my total stupefaction —

Von Strack and Orsini-Rosenberg hurry on downstage

— in the middle of the last rehearsal of *Figaro* next day ...

The Emperor Joseph comes on from upstage

Joseph (*cheerfully*) Fêtes and fireworks! Fêtes and fireworks! Gentlemen, good-afternoon!

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The Theatre

Salieri (*to the Audience*) Entirely against his usual practice, the Emperor appeared!

Von Strack and Orsini-Rosenberg look at each other in consternation. Joseph seats himself excitedly on one of the golden chairs, facing out front. As with the première of Seraglio seen in Act I, he watches the Audience as if it were the opera

Joseph I can't wait for this, Mozart, I assure you! *Je prévois des merveilles!*

Mozart (*bowing fervently*) Majesty!

The Courtiers sit also: von Strack on his right-hand side, Orsini-Rosenberg on his left. Salieri also sits, near the keyboard

Salieri (*to the Audience*) What did this mean? Was this proof God finally decided to defend Mozart against me? Was He engaging with me at last?

Mozart passes behind Salieri

Mozart (*earnestly, sotto voce*) I am so grateful to you, I cannot express —

Salieri (*aside, to him*) Hush. Say nothing.

Mozart goes on quickly to the fortepiano and sits at it

(*To the Audience*) One thing about the event seemed more than coincidence.

Music sounds faintly: the end of the third act of Figaro, just before the dance music starts

Strangely, His Majesty had arrived at precisely the moment when the dancers would have begun, had not they and their music been entirely cut.

The music stops abruptly

He and the rest of us watched the dramatic action proceed in total silence — whilst what should have been a party of celebrating peasants, dancing the fandango in the centre of the stage, stood absolutely motionless, their arms frozen in the air.

Flanked by his courtiers, the Emperor stares out front, following with his eyes what is obviously a silent pantomime. His face expresses bewilderment. Orsini-Rosenberg watches his sovereign anxiously. Finally the monarch speaks

Joseph I don't understand. Is it modern?

Mozart (*jumping up nervously from the keyboard*) No, Majesty.

Joseph Then what?

Mozart The Herr Director has removed a dance that would have occurred at this point.

Joseph (*to Orsini-Rosenberg*) Why was this done?

Orsini-Rosenberg It's your own regulation, Sire. No ballet in your opera.

Mozart (*nervously*) Majesty, this is not a ballet. It is part of a wedding feast: entirely necessary for the story.

Joseph Well, it certainly looks very odd the way it is. I can't say I like it.

Mozart Nor do I, Majesty.

Joseph Do you like it, Rosenberg?

Orsini-Rosenberg It's not a question of liking, Majesty. Your own law decrees it.

Joseph Yes. All the same, this is nonsense. Look at them: they're like waxworks up there.

Orsini-Rosenberg Well, not exactly, Majesty.

Joseph I don't like waxworks.

Mozart Nor do I, Majesty.

Joseph Well, who would? What do you say, Salieri?

Salieri Italians are fond of waxworks, Majesty. (*After a pause*) Our religion is largely based upon them.

Joseph You are *cattivo* again, Court Composer.

Von Strack (*intervening creamily*) Your Majesty, Count Rosenberg is very worried that if this music is put back it will create the most unfortunate precedent. One will have thereafter to endure hours of dancing in opera.

Joseph I think we can guard against that, you know, Chamberlain. I really think we can guard against hours of dancing. (*To Orsini-Rosenberg*) Please restore Herr Mozart's music.

Orsini-Rosenberg But Majesty, I must insist —

Joseph (*with command*) You will oblige me, Rosenberg! I wish to hear Mozart's music. Do you understand me?

Orsini-Rosenberg Yes, Majesty.

Mozart explodes with joy, jumps over a chair and throws himself at Joseph's feet

Mozart Oh God, I thank your Majesty! (*He kisses the Emperor's hand extravagantly, as at their first meeting*) Oh thank you — thank you — thank you, Sire, forever!

Joseph (*withdrawing his hand*) Yes, yes — very good. A little less enthusiasm, I beg you!

Mozart (*abashed*) Excuse me.

The Emperor rises. All follow suit

Joseph Well. *There it is!*

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The First Performance of Figaro

The Theatre glows with light for the first performance of Figaro

Servants enter and arrange the golden chairs in rows behind the three chairs c. Two chairs are placed r side by side, apart from the rest, to form Salieri's box

Citizens come in swiftly together with Kapellmeister Bonno, Katherina Cavalieri, the Venticelli, Constanze and Teresa

The Emperor and his court quickly resume their seats and the others quickly take theirs. In the front row we note Katherina, all plumes and sequins, and Kapellmeister Bonno, older than ever. Behind them sit Constanze and the Venticelli. Salieri's good wife Teresa — more statuesque than ever — sits on the chair UR in Salieri's box. All of them stare out at the Audience as if it were the opera: the people of fashion down the front and the poorer people crowded into the Light Box

Salieri *(crossing to his box, to the Audience)* And so Figaro was produced in spite of all my efforts. I sat in my box on May the first, 1786, and watched it happen. A conspicuous defeat for me. And yet I was strangely excited.

Faintly, we hear Figaro singing the tune of "Non piu andrai". The stage audience is obviously delighted: they smile out front as they watch the (invisible) action

My march! My poor "March of Welcome" — changed by him to enchant the world forever!

It fades. Applause. The Emperor rises, and with him the stage audience, to denote an intermission. Joseph greets Katherina and Bonno. Orsini-Rosenberg and von Strack go to Salieri's box

Orsini-Rosenberg *(to Salieri)* Almost in your style, that last bit. But more vulgar of course. Far more obvious than you would ever be.

Von Strack *(drawing)* Exactly!

A bell rings for the end of the intermission. The Emperor returns quickly to his seat. The stage audience sits. A pause. All look out front, unmoving

Salieri *(raptly and quietly; to the Audience)* Trembling. I heard the second act. *(Pause)* The restored third act. *(Pause)* The astounding fourth. What shall I say to you who will one day hear this last act for yourselves? You will — because whatever else shall pass away, this must remain.

Faintly we hear the solemn closing ensemble from Act Four of Figaro, "Ah! Tutti contenti. Saremo cosi"

(Over this) The scene was night in a summer garden. Pinprick stars gleamed down on shaking summerhouses. Plotters glided behind pasteboard hedges. I saw a woman, disguised in her maid's clothes, hear her

husband utter the first tender words he has offered her in years, only because he thinks she is her own servant. Could one catch a realer moment? And how except in a net of pure artifice? The disguises of opera had been invented for Mozart. *(He can barely look out at the "stage")* The final reconciliation melted sight. *(Pause)* Through my tears I saw the Emperor — yawn.

Joseph yawns. The music fades. There is scant applause. Joseph rises and the Courtiers follow suit. Mozart bows

Joseph Most ingenious, Mozart. You are coming along nicely ... *(To Orsini-Rosenberg, coolly)* I do think we must omit encores in future. It really makes things far too long. Make a note, Rosenberg.

Orsini-Rosenberg Majesty.

Mozart lowers his head, crushed

Joseph Gentlemen, good-night to you. Strack, attend me.

Joseph goes out with von Strack, Director Orsini-Rosenberg gives Mozart one triumphant look and follows

Salieri nods to his wife

Teresa leaves with the rest of the stage audience. Only Constanze lingers for a second, then she too goes

A pause. Mozart and Salieri are left alone: Salieri deeply shaken by the opera, Mozart deeply upset by its reception. He crosses and sits next to Salieri

Mozart *(low)* Herr Salieri.

Salieri Yes?

Mozart What do you think? Do you think I am coming along nicely?

A pause

Salieri *(moved)* I think the piece is ... extraordinary. I think it is ... *marvellous*. Yes.

Pause

Mozart I'll tell you what it is. It's the best opera yet written. That's what it is. And only I could have done it. No-one else living!

Mozart rises and walks away. Salieri turns his head swiftly, as if he has been slapped. They both freeze. The Lights change

The Venticelli rush on

Venticello 1 Rosenberg is furious.

Venticello 2 He'll never forgive Mozart.

Venticello 1 He'll do anything to get back at him!

Salieri (*rising; to the Audience*) So it wasn't hard to get the piece cancelled. I saw to it through the person of the resentful Director that in the entire year *Figaro* was played only *nine times!* ... My defeat finally turned into a victory. And God's response to my challenge remained as inscrutable as ever ... Was He taking any notice of me *at all?* ...

Mozart breaks his freeze and comes downstage

Servants come on and clear the golden chairs off stage

Mozart *Withdrawn!* Absolutely no plans for its revival!

Salieri I commiserate with you, my friend. But if the public does not like one's work, one has to accept the fact gracefully. (*Aside, to the Audience*) And certainly they didn't.

Venticello 1 (*complaining*) It's too complicated!

Venticello 2 (*complaining*) Too tiresome!

Venticello 1 All those weird harmonies!

Venticello 2 And never a good bang at the end of songs so you know when to clap!

The Venticelli go off

Salieri (*to the Audience*) Obviously I would not need to plot too hard against his operas in future. I must concentrate on the man. I decided to see him as much as possible; to learn everything I could of his weaknesses.

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The Waldstätten Library

Servants again bring on the wing-chair, place it as before and leave

Mozart I'll go to England. England loves music. That's the answer!

Salieri (*to the Audience*) We were *yet again* in the library of the Baroness Waldstätten: that room fated to be the scene of ghastly encounters between us. Again, too, the compensating *crema al mascarpone*. (*He sits in the chair and eats greedily*)

Mozart I was there when I was a boy. They absolutely adored me. I had more kisses than you've had cakes! ... When I was a child, people loved me.

Salieri Perhaps they will again. Why don't you go to London and try?

Mozart Because I have a wife and child and no money. I wrote to Papa to take the boy off my hands just for a few months so I could go — and he refused! ... He's a bitter man, of course. After he'd finished showing me off around Europe he never went anywhere himself. He just stayed up in Salzburg year after year, kissing the ring of the fartsbishop and lecturing me! ... (*Confidentially*) The real thing is, you see, he's jealous. Under everything he's jealous of *me!* He'll never forgive me for being cleverer than he is. (*He leans excitedly over Salieri's chair like a naughty child*) I'll tell you a secret. Leopold Mozart is just a jealous, dried up old turd ... And I actually detest him. (*He giggles guiltily*)

The Venticelli appear quickly

They address Salieri as Mozart freezes

Venticello 1 (*solemnly*) Leopold Mozart —

Venticello 2 (*solemnly*) Leopold Mozart —

Venticello 1 } (*together*) Leopold Mozart is dead!

Venticello 2 }

The Venticelli go off

Mozart recoils. A long pause

Salieri Do not despair. Death is inevitable, my friend.

Mozart (*desperately*) How will I go now?

Salieri What do you mean?

Mozart In the world. There's no-one else. No-one who understands the wickedness around. *I can't see it!* ... He watched for me all my life — and I betrayed him.

Salieri No!

Mozart I talked against him.

Salieri No!

Mozart (*distressed*) I married where he begged me not. I left him alone. I danced and played billiards and fooled about — and he sat by himself night after night in an empty house, and no woman to care for him ... We used to sing a Kissing Song at bedtime when I was small. His own silly words: (*speaking them*) "Oragna figata fa! Marina gamina fa!" Then Kiss — Kiss — Kiss! ... No-one kissed him after I left, ever again.

Salieri rises in concern and puts the bowl down on the little table

Salieri Wolfgang. My dear Wolfgang. Don't accuse yourself! ... Lean upon me, if you care to ... Lean upon me.

Salieri opens his arms in a wide gesture of paternal benevolence. Mozart approaches, and is almost tempted to embrace. But at the last moment he avoids it, and breaks away down front, to fall on his knees

Mozart (crying in anguish) Papa!

Salieri (to the Audience) So rose the Ghost Father in his next opera, *Don Giovanni!*

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The two grim chords which open the overture to Don Giovanni sound loudly through the theatre. Mozart seems to quail under them, as he stares out front. On the backdrop in the Light Box appears the silhouette of a giant black figure, in cloak and tricorne hat. It extends its arm menacingly and engulfingly, towards its begetter

Salieri A father more accusing than any in opera. So rose the figure of a Guilty Libertine, cast into Hell! ... I looked on astounded as from his ordinary life he made his art. We were both ordinary men, he and I. Yet he from the ordinary created legends — and I from legends created only the ordinary.

The figure fades. The music stops. Salieri stands over the kneeling Mozart

Could I not have stopped my war? Shown him some pity? Oh yes, my friends at any time — if He above had shown me one drop of it! Every day I set to work I prayed — I still prayed, you understand — “Make this one good in my ears! Just this one! One!” But would He ever? ... I heard my music calmed in convention — not one breath of spirit to lift it off the shallows. And I heard *his* — month after month —

We hear the exquisite strains of the Terzetto “Soave il Vento” from Cosi Fan Tutte

— the spirit singing through it unstoppable to my ears alone! (See Note on page 97)

Through the following, two girls in silhouette appear on the backcloth and walk away from us, arm in arm, their backs to us, and disappear

I heard his comedy of the seduction of two sisters, *Cosi Fan Tutte*: Thus do all women. Aloysia and Constanze immortalized — two average girls turned into divinities: their sounds of surrender sweeter than the psalms of Heaven ...

(To God in anguish) “Grant this to me! ... Grant this to me! ... (As “God”) “No, no, no: I do not need you Salieri! I have Mozart! Better for you to be silent!” (He laughs like Mozart)

The music cuts off

The Creature's gleeful snigger was the laughter of God. I had to end it. But how? (Realizing) *Destitution!* Reduce the man to destitution. Starve out the God.

Servants enter and remove the wing-chair

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Vienna and the Palace of Schönbrunn

Unseen, the Emperor enters the Light Box and takes up his position

Mozart rises, a little frailer

Salieri (to Mozart) How do you fare today?

Mozart Badly. I have no money, and no prospect of any.

Salieri It would not be too hard, surely.

The Lights come up on the Palace of Schönbrunn. The Emperor stands in the Light Box, in his golden space

Joseph We must find him a post.

Salieri (to the Audience) One danger! The Emperor.

Salieri goes upstage to Joseph who comes out of the Light Box to meet him and they walk around the stage together

There's nothing available, Majesty.

Joseph There's Chamber Composer now that Gluck is dead.

Salieri (shocked) Mozart to follow Gluck?

Joseph I won't have him say I drove him away. You know what a tongue he has.

Salieri Then grant him Gluck's post, Majesty, but not his salary. That would be wrong.

Joseph (*pausing*) Gluck got two thousand florins a year. What should Mozart get?

Salieri Four hundred. Light payment, yes, but for light duties.

Joseph Perfectly fair. I'm obliged to you, Court Composer.

Salieri (*bowing*) Majesty.

The Emperor returns to the Light Box, and resumes his position

(*To the Audience*) Easily done. Like many men obsessed with being thought generous, the Emperor Joseph was quintessentially stingy.

Mozart goes and kneels before the Emperor

Joseph Herr Mozart. *Vous nous faites honneur!* ...

The Lights go down on the Emperor but he stays where he is in the Light Box. Mozart rises and he and Salieri come downstage

Mozart It's a damned insult! Not enough to keep a mouse in cheese for a week!

Salieri Regard it as a token, *caro* Herr.

Mozart When I was young they gave me snuff boxes. Now it's tokens! And for what? Pom-pom, for fireworks! Twang-twang for contredanzes!

Salieri I'm sorry it's made you angry. I'd not have suggested it if I'd known you'd be distressed.

Mozart You suggested it?

Salieri I regret I was not able to do more.

Mozart (*overwhelmed*) Oh ... forgive me! You're a good man! I see that now! You're a truly kind man — and I'm a monstrous fool! (*He grasps Salieri's hand*)

Salieri No, please ...

Mozart You make me ashamed ... You excellent man!

Salieri (*imitating the Emperor*) No, no, no, no, no — *s'il vous plaît*. A little less enthusiasm I beg you!

Mozart laughs delightedly at this. Salieri joins in

I shall see you again soon?

Mozart (*warmly*) Of course.

Salieri Why not visit me?

Mozart I will! ... I promise!

Salieri *Bene*.

Mozart *Bene*.

Salieri My friend. My new friend.

Mozart laughs with pleasure and goes off

(*To the Audience*) Now, if ever, was the moment for God to crush me. I waited — and do you know what happened? I had just ruined Mozart's career at court; God rewarded me by granting my dearest wish!

The Venticelli come on

Von Strack and Orsini-Rosenberg enter the Light Box unseen and take up their positions

Venticello 1 Kapellmeister Bonno.

Venticello 2 Kapellmeister Bonno.

Venticello 1 } (*together*) Kapellmeister Bonno is dead!

Venticello 2 }

Salieri opens his mouth in surprise

Venticello 1 You are appointed —

Venticello 2 By Royal Decree —

Venticello 1 To fill his place.

The Lights come up full on the Emperor in the Light Box. He is flanked by von Strack and Orsini-Rosenberg standing like icons as at their first appearance

Salieri turns and bows to the Emperor

Joseph (*formally to Salieri*) First Royal and Imperial Kapellmeister to our court.

The Venticelli applaud

Venticello 1 Bravo.

Venticello 2 Bravo.

Orsini-Rosenberg *Evviva, Salieri!*

Von Strack Well done, Salieri!

Joseph (*warmly*) Dear Salieri — there it is!

The Lights go down on the Palace of Schönbrunn

In the dark, the Emperor, von Strack and Orsini-Rosenberg leave for the last time

Salieri turns round, alarmed

Salieri *(to the Audience)* I was now truly alarmed. How long would I go unpunished?

Venticello 1 Mozart looks appalling.

Venticello 2 It must be galling of course.

Venticello 1 I hear he's dosing himself constantly with medicine.

Salieri For what?

Venticello 2 Envy, I imagine.

Venticello 1 Actually, I hear, syphilis.

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The Prater

Fresh green trees appear on the backdrop. The Lights change to yellow, turning the blue surround into a rich verdant green

Mozart and Constanze enter arm-in-arm. She is palpably pregnant and wears a poor coat and bonnet; his clothes are poorer too and his manner is hectic

Salieri promenades with the Venticelli

Salieri I met him next in the Prater.

Mozart *(to Salieri)* Congratulations, sir!

Salieri I thank you. And to you both! *(To the Audience)* Clearly there was a change for the worse. His eyes gleamed, oddly, like a dog's when the light catches. *(To Mozart)* I hear you are not well, my friend.

He acknowledges Constanze, who curtsies to him

Mozart It's nothing. A few pains. ... And I do not sleep well, always.

Salieri Really?

Mozart I tend to have dreams now. Quite often.

Constanze *(warningly)* Wolferl!

Salieri Dreams? What kind? ... You mean nightmares?

Mozart Well ...

Constanze Not now, dear.

Salieri No, please tell me.

Mozart Actually, it's always the same one ... A looming figure comes to me, wrapped in grey, doing this. *(Beckoning slowly)* It has no face. ... What can it mean, do you think?

Salieri Surely you don't believe in dreams?

Mozart No, of course not — really!

Salieri Surely *you* do not, madame?

Constanze I never dream, sir. Things are unpleasant enough to me, awake.

Salieri bows

Mozart It's all fancy, of course!

Constanze *(coldly)* If Wolfgang had proper work he might dream less. First Kapellmeister.

Mozart *(embarrassed, taking her arm)* Stanzi, please! ... Excuse us, sir. Come dearest. We are well enough, thank you.

Husband and wife continue their walk, and halt at the side of the stage. The light grows less sunny. Constanze helps Wolfgang off with his coat. He is revealed as wearing a Masonic apron

Constanze exits

Venticello 1 He's growing freakish.

Venticello 2 No question.

Venticello 1 Grey figures with no faces!

Salieri *(looking after Mozart)* His circumstances make him anxious, I fancy.

Venticello 1 They've moved house again.

Venticello 2 To the Rauhensteingasse. Number nine-seventy.

Venticello 1 They must be desperate.

Venticello 2 It's a real slum.

Salieri Does he earn money at all, apart from his Post?

Venticello 1 Nothing whatever.

Venticello 2 I hear he's starting to beg.

Venticello 1 They say he's written letters to twenty Brother Masons.

Salieri Really?

Venticello 2 And they're giving him money.

Salieri *(to the Audience)* Of course! They *would!* ... I had *forgotten* the Masons! *Naturally* they would relieve him — how *stupid* of me! ... There could be no finally starving him with the Masons there to help! As long as he asked they would keep supplying his wants! ... How could I stop it? And quickly! ...

Venticello 1 Lord Fugue is most displeased with him!

Salieri *Is* he?

* * * * *

A Masonic Lodge

A Servant brings on a Masonic apron which he gives to Salieri who puts it on

A huge golden emblem encrusted with Masonic symbols descends

Van Swieten enters. He, too, is wearing the ritual apron over his sober clothes

Van Swieten and Mozart clasp hands in fraternal greeting

Van Swieten (*gravely*) This is not good, Brother. The lodge was not created for you to beg from.

Mozart What else can I do?

Van Swieten Give concerts, as you used to do.

Mozart I have no subscribers left, Baron. I am no longer fashionable.

Van Swieten I am not surprised. You write tasteless comedies which give offence. I warned you, often enough.

Mozart (*humbly*) You did. I admit it.

Van Swieten I will send you some fugues of Bach tomorrow. You can arrange those for my Sunday concert. You shall have a small fee.

Mozart Thank you, Baron.

Van Swieten nods and goes out

Salieri steps forward

(Shouting after van Swieten) I cannot live by arranging Bach!

Salieri (*sarcastically*) A generous fellow.

Mozart All the same, I'll have to do it. If he were to turn the lodge against me, I'd be finished. My brother Masons virtually keep me now.

Salieri Wolfgang, it's embarrassing, I know — but you must allow me to relieve you also.

Mozart No!

Salieri If it is the duty of a Mason to help — how much more of a friend?

Mozart Not another word. I would never take money from you. That friendship is worth all the gold in the world. Please — no more of that!

Salieri You overwhelm me.

Mozart I'll manage: you'll see! Things are looking up already. I've had a marvellous proposal from Schickaneder. He's a new member of this lodge.

Salieri Schickaneder? The actor?

Mozart Yes. He owns a theatre in the suburbs.

Salieri Well, more of a music hall, surely?

Mozart Yes ... He wants me to write him a vaudeville — something for ordinary German people. Isn't that a wonderful idea? ... He's offered me half the receipts when we open.

Salieri Nothing in advance?

Mozart He said he couldn't afford anything. I know it's not much of an offer. But a popular piece about brotherly love could celebrate everything we believe as Masons!

Salieri It certainly could! ... Why don't you put the Masons *into* it?

Mozart Into an opera? ... I couldn't!

Salieri laughs, to indicate that he was simply making a joke

All the same — what an idea!

Salieri (*earnestly*) Our rituals are secret, Wolfgang.

Mozart I needn't copy them exactly. I could adapt them a little.

Salieri Well ... It would certainly be in a great cause.

Mozart Brotherly love!

Salieri Brotherly love!

They both turn and look solemnly at the great golden emblem hanging at their backs

(Warmly) Take courage, Wolfgang. It's a glorious idea.

Mozart It is, isn't it? It *really is*!

Salieri Of course say nothing till it's done.

Mozart Not a word.

Salieri (*making a sign: a closed fist*) Secret!

Mozart (*making a similar sign*) Secret!

Salieri Good. (*He steps out of the scene downstage. To the Audience*) And if that didn't finish him off with the Masons — nothing would!

The golden emblem withdraws. We hear the merry dance of Monastatos and the hypnotized slaves from The Magic Flute: "Das Klinget so herrlich, Das Klinget so schön!". Mozart stands entranced downstage, hearing it too — then moves smilingly into his apartment, L, to write it down

Simultaneously, to the tinkling of the glockenspiel, Servants bring on a long plain table loaded with manuscripts and bottles and a plain stool, which they place beside it. The table also bears a chair and cushions and a blanket. They place the chair and cushions and then take away Mozart's Masonic apron

Mozart sits to work on the stool in his apartment

At the same time Constanze appears wearily upstage, enters this dingy room and sits too. She wears a stuffed apron, indicating the advanced state of her pregnancy

Simultaneously, two other Servants bring on three gilded chairs from Salieri's resplendent salon which they place upstage R and then set the small gilded table with the loaded cake-stand next to them. We now have in view the two contrasting apartments. A Servant takes away Salieri's apron

The music fades down

The Venticelli appear to Salieri

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Mozart's Apartment; Salieri's Apartments

Venticello 1 *Mozart is delighted with himself!*

Venticello 2 *He's writing a secret opera!*

Venticello 1 *(crossly) And won't tell anyone its theme.*

Venticello 2 *It's really too tiresome.*

The Venticelli go off

The music stops

Salieri *He told me. He told me everything! Initiation ceremonies. Ceremonies with blindfolds. All rituals copied from the Masons! ... He sat at home preparing his own destruction. A home where life grew daily more grim.*

He goes upstage and sits on one of his gilded chairs, devouring a cake

Constanze *I'm cold ... I'm cold all day ... Hardly surprising since we have no firewood.*

Mozart *Papa was right. We end exactly as he said. Beggars.*

Constanze *It's all his fault.*

Mozart *Papa's?*

Constanze *He kept you a baby all your life.*

Mozart *I don't understand. ... You always loved Papa.*

Constanze *I did?*

Mozart *You adored him. You told me so often.*

Slight pause

Constanze *(flatly) I hated him.*

Mozart *What?*

Constanze *And he hated me.*

Mozart *That's absurd. He loved us both very much. You're being extremely silly now.*

Constanze *Am I?*

Mozart *(airily) Yes, you are, little-wife-of-my-heart!*

Constanze *Do you want to know what I really thought of your father? ... Do you remember the fire we had last night, because it was so cold you couldn't even get the ink wet? You said, "What a blaze" — remember? "What a blaze! All those old papers going up!" Well, my dear, those old papers were just all your father's letters, that's all — every one he wrote since the day we married.*

Mozart *What?*

Constanze *Every one! All the letters about what a ninny I am — what a bad housekeeper I am! Every one!*

Mozart *Stanzi!*

Constanze *Shit on him! ... Shit on him!*

Mozart *You bitch!*

Constanze *(savagely) At least it kept us warm! What else will do that? Perhaps we should dance! You love to dance, Wolferl — let's dance! Dance to keep warm! (Grandly) Write me a contredanze, Mozart! It's your job to write dances, isn't it? (Hysterical, she snatches up his manuscripts from the table and flings them over the floor — pulling up her skirts and dancing roughly round the room like a demented peasant to the tune of "Non più andrai!". Singing savagely) "Non più andrai, farfallone amoroso — Notte e giorno d'intorno girando!"*

Mozart *(shrieking) Stop it! Stop it! (He rises and tries to seize her) Stanzi-marini! Marini-bini! Don't, please. Please — please I beg you! ... Look there's a kiss! Where's it coming from? Right out of that corner! There's another one — all wet, all sloppy wet coming straight to you! Kiss — kiss — kiss — kiss!*

She pushes him roughly away

Constanze *Get off!*

A long pause

Mozart I'm frightened, Stanzi. Something awful's happening to me. The pains stay. And the dream!

Constanze (*quietly*) I can't bear it. I can't bear much more of this.

Mozart (*absorbed in himself*) The figure's like this now — (*Beckoning more urgently*) Here. Come here. Here ... Its face still hidden. Always hidden.

Constanze (*crying out*) Stop it! Stop it, for God's sake! Stop it! ... Stop! ... It's me who's frightened ... *Me!* ... You frighten me ... If you go on like this I'll leave you. I swear it!

Mozart (*shocked*) Stanzi!

Constanze I mean it ... I do ... (*She puts her hand to her stomach, as if in pain*)

Mozart I'm sorry ... Oh God, I'm sorry ... I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry! ... Come here to me, little-wife-of-my-heart! Come ... Come ...

He kneels and coaxes her to him. She comes half-reluctantly, half-willingly

Who am I? ... Quick: tell me. Hold me and tell who I am. Who? — come on.

Constanze Pussy-wussy.

Mozart Who else?

Constanze Miaouwy-powy.

Mozart And you're squeaky-peeky. And Stanzi-manzi. And Bini-gini!

She surrenders

Constanze Wolfi-polfi!

Mozart Poopy-peepee!

They giggle

Constanze Now don't be stupid.

Mozart (*insistent: like a child*) Come on — do it. Do it ... Let's do it. "Poppy!"

They play a private game, gradually doing it faster, on their knees

Constanze Poppy.

Mozart (*changing it*) Pappy.

Constanze (*copying*) Pappy.

Mozart Pappa.

Constanze Pappa.

Mozart Pappa-pappa!

Constanze Pappa-pappa!

Mozart Pappa-pappa-pappa-pappa!

Constanze Pappa-pappa-pappa-pappa!

They rub noses

Mozart } (*together*) { Pappa-pappa-pappa-pappa!

Constanze } { Pappa-pappa-pappa-pappa!

Constanze Ah! (*She suddenly cries out in distress, and clutches her stomach*)

Mozart Stanzi! ... Stanzi, what is it?

The Venticelli hurry in

During the following, Constanze divests herself of her stuffed apron (thereby ceasing to be pregnant) and slowly rises

Salieri And suddenly she was delivered! A boy!

Venticello 2 Poor little imp.

Venticello 1 To be born to that couple.

Venticello 2 In that room.

Venticello 1 With that money.

Venticello 2 And the father a baby himself.

Constanze turns sorrowfully and walks briskly upstage and goes out, taking the apron with her

Mozart follows her for a few steps, alarmed. He halts

Venticello 1 And now I hear ——

Venticello 2 Now I hear ——

Venticello 1 Something more has happened.

Venticello 2 Even stranger.

Mozart picks up a bottle, then moves swiftly into Salieri's salon. He looks distracted

Mozart *She's gone!*

Salieri What do you mean?

The Venticelli slip away

Mozart Constanze's gone away! Just for a while, she says. She's taken the baby and gone to Baden. To the spa ... It will cost us the last money we have!

Salieri But *why?*

Mozart (*distressed*) She's right to go ... It's my fault ... She thinks I'm mad.

Salieri Surely not?

Mozart Perhaps I am. I think maybe I am ...

Salieri Wolfgang ...

Mozart (*terrified*) This morning I saw a figure much like the one in my dream — only *clear*, not misty. And this time I was *awake!* — in my room — *in broad daylight!* ... Oh God, it *spoke!* It said — it was terrible! ...

Salieri Wolfgang, calm yourself. Just tell me what happened.

Pause. Mozart struggles to control himself

Mozart I was seated at my table working. Suddenly there came three sharp knocks at the door, and a Figure entered, all muffled in grey. But now it had a *face! A death's-head!* — glaring at me with frozen eyes sunk deep in little caves of bone! ... And then it *spoke!* A horrible sound like a man hissing. ... It said, (*hissing*) "Wolfgang Mozart: you are required now by my master to write a Requiem Mass. ... It must be finished completely when you see me next. And you will tell no-one." (*His normal voice*) I asked, "Who has died?" Who is this Requiem, for? ... And who is your master?" ... (*Again hissing*) "Know only this: He will be much displeased with you if it is not ready when required! Therefore write quickly!" (*Normal voice*) Then he turned and left. I went to the window to see him reappear down in the street, but he didn't. He had vanished!

Pause. Salieri goes to him

Salieri This is simply morbid fancy, my friend. (*Earnestly touching Mozart's head*) It was all in there — and only there.

Mozart I'm being silly, aren't I!

Salieri (*smiling*) Yes, I think you are.

Mozart Yet it had the force of real things! ... (*In relief*) No wonder Stanzi left. I frightened her away. Poor girl. ... And now she'll miss the Vaudeville — and I wrote so much of it for her — to make her laugh.

Salieri (*surprised*) You mean it's finished? So soon? It's only been a month.

Mozart Oh music is easy: it's marriage that's hard.

Salieri I long to see it.

Mozart The theatre isn't grand. It's just a popular music hall. No-one from court will be there.

Salieri Do you think that matters to me? I would travel anywhere for a work by you!

Mozart Saturday will be the first performance.

Salieri Good! (*Slyly*) I know I'm no substitute for your little wife, but I know someone who will chase away your glooms.

Mozart (*laughing like a child*) Saturday night then!

Salieri Saturday!

Mozart grabs Salieri's hand gleefully, then turns out of the scene and moves across the stage

(*To the Audience*) What was happening? Could that grim Figure actually exist? A skull-faced ghost ordering a Mass from beyond the grave? Clearly not!

Mozart turns back. The Lights change

Mozart Are you ready? It's time for the performance!

Salieri I can't wait! A Vaudeville by you — *che dilettto assoluto!* ... And if you recall, I promised to cheer you up. Well — behold!

Katherina Cavalieri enters, now fatter and wearing an elaborate plumed hat

Mozart (*bowing delightedly*) Katherina!

She curtsies to Mozart and takes his arm

Salieri (*to the Audience*) And so to the opera we went — a strange band of three!

The other two freeze

The First Kapellmeister — sleek as a cat. His mistress — now fat and feathered like the great songbird she'd become. And Mozart — odd-looking and drunk on the cheap wine which was now his constant habit.

They unfreeze

We went out into the suburbs — to a crowded music hall — in a tenement!

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The Theatre by the Weiden

Servants bring in two benches and place them downstage. There is sudden noise and a crowd of working-class Germans swarms in from upstage: a chattering mass of humanity through which the three have to push their

way to the front. The long table is pushed horizontally, and the rowdy stage audience piles on top of it, smoking pipes and chewing sausages

Unobserved, van Swieten comes in and stands at the back

Mozart You must be indulgent now! It's my first piece of this kind!

The three sit on the front bench: Mozart sick and emaciated; Cavaliere blowsy and bedizened; Salieri as elegant as ever

Salieri We sat as he wished us to, among ordinary Germans! The smell of sweat and sausage was almost annihilating!

Cavaliere presses a mouchoir to her sensitive nose

(To Mozart) This is so exciting!

Mozart *(happily)* Do you think so?

Salieri *(looking about him)* Oh yes! This is exactly the audience we should be writing for! Not the dreary court ... As always — you show the way!

The stage audience freezes

(To the Audience) As always, he did. My pungent neighbours rolled on their benches at the jokes —

They unfreeze, briefly, to demonstrate this mirth

And I, in their midst, heard *The Magic Flute*.

They freeze again as the serene tenor song with flute "Wie stark ist nicht dein Zauberton!" is heard, and the stage audience becomes immediately enraptured from its orchestral introduction onward

He had put the Masons into it right enough. Oh, yes — but how? He had turned them into a secret order of Priests. I heard voices calling out of ancient temples. I saw a vast sun rise on a timeless land, where animals danced and children floated.

A great sun does indeed rise inside the Light Box, and standing in it the gigantic silhouette of a priestly figure robed in Egyptian costume and headdress, extending its arms in universal greeting

And in this sun — behold — I saw his father. No more an accusing figure,

but *forgiving!* The highest Priest of the Order — his hands extended to the world in love! Mozart feared Leopold no longer: a final legend had been made! ... And oh, the sound of that newfound peace in him — so tender — so serene! ... *There was The Magic Flute* — there beside me!

Salieri points to Mozart who jumps up on to the bench excitedly to great applause and acknowledges the clapping with his arms flung wide, a bottle in his hand. He turns back to us — his eyes staring: all freeze

How could this be? — in the face of everything I had done to him. ... Was this his response to all my injuries — these priceless sighs of exaltation?

The music stops. In slow motion Mozart turns to Salieri and Salieri, moved, reaches up a hand to him also in slow motion

(Moved) Wolfgang!

Still slowly, Mozart reaches down to him, but just as their hands touch, they are interrupted by a furious Baron van Swieten

Van Swieten *(calling out)* Mozart!

Outraged, van Swieten pushes his way to the front

The crowd disperses

Mozart *(turning joyfully to greet him)* Baron! You here! How wonderful of you to come!

Salieri *(to the Audience)* I had of course suggested it.

Van Swieten *(with cold fury)* What have you done?

Mozart Excellency?

Van Swieten You have put our rituals into a vulgar show!

Mozart No, sir.

Van Swieten They are plain for all to see! And to laugh at! ... You have betrayed the Order!

Mozart *(in horror)* No!

Salieri Baron, a word with you —

Van Swieten Don't speak for him, Salieri! *(To Mozart, with frozen contempt)* You were ever a crude vulgarian we hoped to mend. Stupid, hopeless task! Now you are a betrayer as well. I shall never forgive you!

And depend upon it, I shall ensure that no Freemason or person of distinction will do so in Vienna so long as I have life!

Salieri Baron, please, I must speak!

Van Swieten No, sir! Leave alone. *(To Mozart)* I did not look for this reward, Mozart. Never speak to me.

Van Swieten goes out. Katherina Cavalieri, embarrassed, goes out another way

The Lights change

Servants come on and remove the benches and chair

Salieri watches Mozart, who stands stunned

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Salieri's Apartments, and Outside in Vienna

Salieri Wolfgang? ...

Mozart shakes his head sharply — and walks away from him, upstage, desolate and stunned

Wolfgang — all is not lost.

Mozart enters his apartment, and freezes

(To the Audience) But of course it was! Now he was ruined. Broken and shunned by all men of influence. And for good measure, he did not even get his half receipts from the opera. *(He sits)*

The Venticelli come in

Venticello 1 Schikaneder pays him nothing.

Venticello 2 Schikaneder cheats him.

Venticello 1 Gives him enough for liquor.

Venticello 2 And keeps all the rest.

Salieri *(ironically)* I couldn't have managed it better myself.

Mozart sits despairingly at his table, in the gloom. He takes up a wine bottle — but it is empty. Suddenly he starts to write, with great vigour, dropping finished pages on the floor. Through this the Venticelli speak

Venticello 1 And as for Mozart ———

Venticello 2 The poor fellow ———

Salieri *(urgently)* What about him? ... I've heard nothing from him in days ... What is he doing?

Venticello 1 } *(together)* We don't know!

Venticello 2 }

Venticello 1 *(confidentially)* He's become really odd, sir.

Venticello 2 Turned dreadfully strange!

Venticello 1 Stays in his apartment all day.

Venticello 2 Burns his candle all night.

Mozart jumps up quickly, and faces front, downstage, looking out in alarm

Venticello 1 But appears over and over at his window ———

Venticello 2 Staring wildly down into the street.

Venticello 1 Twitching!

Venticello 2 Trembling!

Venticello 1 Like a man deeply disordered!

Venticello 2 Or one driven out of his mind!

Salieri looks at them startled. Mozart sits again, and resumes his feverish writing

Venticello 1 *(hushed)* In fact, the rumour is ———

Venticello 2 *(hushed)* The rumour is, sir ———

Pause

Salieri What? ... *Say it!*

Venticello 1 } *(together)* Our Wolfgang has lost his wits!

Venticello 2 }

Pause. Salieri makes a sharp gesture of dismissal

The Venticelli leave quickly

The Lights change, becoming darker

Salieri *(to the Audience, very disturbed)* Was it true? Could it be possible? — *Madness?! ... I'd never thought of that!* — him retreating into that terrible refuge. Yet there would lie my Victory. Loss of wits must surely mean loss of talent! ... Triumph surged up through me. He was disarmed at last! ... And at that same moment came chill — deep-spreading chill. *(Pause)* Was this what I had actually done? Driven a man mad? ... *(Urgently)* I had to know. See for myself. Spy on him unseen — immediately! ... I couldn't keep away!

Two o'clock strikes

The Valet enters swiftly and wraps his master in a long, loose cloak of grey, hands him a wide grey hat and leaves

Salieri speaks through this, finally pulling the hat low on his brow, and moving downstage

And so it was, incredibly late one freezing night in November 1791, I found myself hurrying secretly across the empty city, under a churning sky and a hidden moon, seeking his lodgings where I had never been — no notion what I might see! (*He stops, facing the audience*) There was my goal: that dingy alley, the Rauhensteingasse.

He looks up

Only one window alight, above me. ... Stealthily I stationed myself to watch it from the shadows below — but instantly, as if sensing me, he *appeared!*

Mozart rises and also comes downstage to face the audience. He seems now to be seriously ill

A drawn face distorted by fear, staring straight down at my motionless figure, standing deep-cloaked against the cold.

Mozart mimes speaking his words as Salieri sounds them aloud

A cry came faintly from behind the dirty glass, and through it his mouth began shaping frenzied words: “*More! ... More! ... More time! ... Time!*” (*Desperately*) “*Oh pleeeeeease!*”

Both men now stand staring at the audience

I stood frozen in alarm — until suddenly, without warning, the moon *sprang full out* from behind a cloud, and spilled its merciless light all down me! He saw clearly who it was. And there was nothing for it but to *greet* him—cheerfully!

Salieri takes off his hat and gives a ghastly smile, and a bow

With a gesture of pure *relief*, he flung open the casement and called down.

Mozart *Signore!* ... Oh how wonderful! ... Come up! ... *Come up!* (*Inventing joyfully*) Come up, come up and join the fun! There’s nothing to eat, not even a bun! And alas and alack, there’s nothing to drink. But bottles and bottles and bottles of ink! ... (*He giggles delightedly*) Ascend, if you please!

Salieri (*to the Audience*) Will-less, I climbed his stairs with stone feet.

Faintly the rising and falling scale passage from the Overture to Don Giovanni sounds in repetition, and to this hollow music Salieri moves slowly upstage. Mozart moves also. They face each other. The music fades

He was waiting at the top.

Mozart A thousand welcomes, sir. Enter, if you please, the Palazzo Amadeo!

He gives a courtly flourish, indicating his room. Salieri “enters” it, looking around him

* * * * *

Mozart’s Apartment

Salieri (*to the audience*) Now for the first time I saw the place to which I had consigned him. A filthy chamber in total disorder. Empty bottles everywhere — discarded linen — and across the floor an inky pavement of fresh manuscripts, stirring in icy gusts from ill-fitting windows. ... I knew *at once* what these must be! ... As for his face, it held a look I’d never seen *before* — not madness at all, but some deep-possessing physical *sickness!*

Mozart Tell me, my friend—what are you doing here so late? *It is* late, isn’t it?

Salieri I came to see you. I’ve been concerned. ... Let me ask you what *you* are doing. Surely you’re not working at this hour?

Mozart (*guiltily*) No, not really!

Salieri (*indicating the floor*) Well, what’s all this?

Mozart Nothing! Just silliness. ... A new piece.

Salieri (*sharply*) The Requiem! *It’s the Requiem* — isn’t it?

Mozart (*defensively*) I know. It’s stupid. That Messenger isn’t real — you told me. All the same, there’s no point in taking chances, is there? If he suddenly appeared and there was nothing for him, I’d look foolish. Mind you, it’s not nearly finished. Time was when I could have finished a Mass in a week. Not anymore. ... To be exact, I’m feeling very poorly.

Salieri (*concerned*) My friend!

Mozart It's true. My body hurts all day — my joints, my head. ... And I know why! (*Confidentially*) I've been poisoned.

Salieri Poisoned?

Mozart They say the Masons poison people who offend them! (*In panic*) I didn't mean that! ... (*Defiantly*) I'll tell you one thing, though. If he comes too soon, that Messenger, I'll say it to his face: "Tell your master from me, if He takes me too quick, there won't *be* a Mass — so there!" He can hiss at me all he likes.

Pause

Salieri (*carefully*) My friend, what are you saying?

Mozart Isn't it obvious? (*Pause*) It's for *me*, that's all.

Salieri What is?

Mozart (*factually*) The Mass. It's for me. Myself. ... It's ordered. I am to write my own!

Pause

Why order a Requiem if no-one's going to die! ... You know, the worst thing is denying me proper time. That really shames me. I've never done that in my life — offered unfinished work.

Salieri looks at him astounded

I wonder, sir, if you could oblige me — take a look at it, just a page or two, and tell me if it's worthy. You see, I don't know anymore. Everything's leaving me. Now the *sounds*: they're running away! My hand is tired — it's written too much — it can't catch the notes now. ... The Kyrie's finished — you only need read that. (*He picks a few pages of manuscript off the table*) Kyrie the first theme — Eleison the second: both together make a double fugue. My father would've approved that at least. He'd say, "Only you, my boy. Only you could have done it!" ... *Please*.

Urgently he proffers the pages. Reluctantly Salieri takes them and sits to read. Immediately we hear the sombre opening of the Requiem Mass

(*Over this*) Oh it began so well, my life. Once the world was so full, so happy. All the journeys — all the carriages — all the rooms of smiles! Everyone smiled at me once — the King at Schönbrunn: the Princess at Versailles — they lit my way *personally* to the keyboard! Papa bowing, bowing, bowing with such joy! — "Chevalier Mozart, my miraculous son!" ... Why has it all gone? ... Was I so wicked? ... (*Outraged*) *Why must I go?*

Salieri is reading the score with increasing disturbance. Suddenly he crumples the paper. Instantly the sound stops. He sits, deeply shaken and alarmed

(*Watching him, in panic*) It's bad, isn't it? It's *bad!*

Salieri (*slowly*) Bad? ... It will help the ages to mourn.

Mozart (*fervently*) Oh *grazie*. ... *Grazie, Signore!* (*He reaches out in gratitude, and freezes*)

Salieri (*to the Audience*) What could I say? In my shaking hands I held a terrible contradiction that only Art can show. Something *immortal* — stinking of death. *Indestructible* — yet *rotting!* (*He gives a faint gasp*) Suddenly I was seized by an overwhelming horror!

Mozart (*unfreezing*) I bless you.

Salieri (*still to the Audience, clutching the manuscript*) Who was this for, this appalling music? Not himself. Of course not himself! What need to mourn a man who will live *forever?*

Mozart I bless you, *Signore!*

Salieri (*still to the Audience*) Who, then? (*He rises in growing distress*)

Mozart I cannot believe you came here. Sought me out. No-one seeks me anymore. ... Only you — my one Protector — (*kneeling and laying his cheek against the man's hand*) — Antonio. (*In this gesture he freezes again*)

The grim Kyrie is now heard continuing. Over it, in huge anguish, Salieri speaks

Salieri (*to the Audience*) I stood there — his despairing Mass sounding over and over in my head its gigantic lamentation — and knew *absolutely* who it was for! ... *The boy!* ... That eager boy who once stumbled around the fields of Lombardy, singing up his anthems to his Lord. (*Pause*) In ten years of unrelenting spite — I had destroyed *myself!*

The music stops

And then — any feelings still left uncorrupted in me rose up, crying, "*End this! Before it is too late! ... Confess! Confess to him!* ... Get from *him* whatever Absolution he can possibly grant. *He — he alone!* — the Creature you have broken. . . . How else can you live on after?"

A pause, Salieri tries to find the strength to begin

Wolfgang, you must hear me.

Mozart raises his head and looks at him

You are right. You *are* poisoned. It is true.

Mozart What do you mean?

Salieri By me! No-one else. ... We are both poisoned. *Both — together.*

Mozart (*bewildered*) I don't understand.

Salieri Both. Both. With each other.

Nervously Mozart rises

Mozart Excuse me, sir. I'm stupid sometimes. ...

Mozart starts to back away. Salieri follows him. The scene quickens

Salieri You with me. I with you! (*In his urgency he relapses into his native tongue, gesturing urgently*) *Si! — Tutti due! Tutti due! ... Tu con me! — Io con te!* (*He holds up the manuscript Kyrie*) I eat what God gives me. Dose after dose. For all of life! ... *His poison!* (*Savagely he tears off with his teeth a piece of the manuscript and chews it fiercely — then quickly spits it out and throws out his arms widely*) *Eccomi! Antonio Salieri! ... Il tuo Nemico! ... Il tuo Assassino!* (*In pain*) *Il tua morte!*

He clasps his breast in a sign for swearing, but Mozart only bursts out laughing and clapping delightedly

Mozart *Bravo! Bravissimo!* ... *Signore*, are you perhaps a little tiddly? (*Amused*) I think you are! ... Tiddly-widdly! (*Mock scolding*) You had some before you came! I thought that might be so!

Salieri (*desperately*) Wolfgang, you must hear me now.

Mozart (*giggling defensively*) Tiddly-widdly-piddly! ... Well, why not? It's a cold night. ... And a good performance!

Salieri (*raising his voice*) No — you have to listen! ... Understand what has been done to you.

Mozart What?? ... Why are you being like this? ... It's stupid! (*With sudden apprehension*) Why have you come here? ... What do you want? ...

Mozart retreats across the room to the table. Salieri moves after him relentlessly. His manner becomes increasingly out of control

Salieri Don't you know at all what I have endured from you? ... From the day you appeared I have lived in Hell. ... What I did to you was nothing to what you did to me!

Mozart Stop this, please, *Signore*. I don't know what you're saying!

Salieri My God smiled — and *permitted it!* ... Whatever I did — you would fill the world! (*Outraged*) You left me with *nothing!* (*He forces himself to smile, his manner wheedling*) No matter. You're not to blame. It's His will. I don't hate you — you're only an instrument.

Mozart *Signore*, please! ... This makes no sense.

Salieri (*agreeing, gleefully*) No! No! — None! ... And now you're *going*. You're right: He's finished with you. You're too feeble to be used anymore. *Worn through!* ... And He does not care, Amadeus. God does not care! He cares nothing for whom He uses — nothing for whom He denies! We are equal at least in that. ... Ha?

Mozart (*distressed*) Stop this! Stop it at once! You're frightening! (*Like a child he puts his hands over his ears*)

Salieri (*urgently, seizing his arm*) Be merciful, therefore! Show mercy — because *we can!* That's for *us* alone to do — us, not Him! — *Us!* ... *He can't!* ... (*Urgently*) Grant me forgiveness, Wolfgang, for pity's sake. ... You have to! You must! You must!

Mozart (*revolting*) NO! ... It is *stupid!*

With all his strength Mozart pushes Salieri away. Salieri staggers back. Mozart glares at him

(Suddenly, like a scared child) Go away! (He stamps his foot) Go away ... Now!!

He makes fierce little jabs of dismissal and, when Salieri does not move, defiantly shoots out his lips and emits one of his fart noises. And another — more challenging. Then suddenly he snatches up his blanket and runs headlong across the room, skitters to a stop and falls to the floor, hurling the blanket over his head and holding it tight to conceal himself entirely. Under this covering he sits quite still. Salieri approaches him carefully

Salieri (*quietly*) Wolfgang? ... Wolfgang, hear me one last time.

The muffled figure starts to rock slowly to and fro. Salieri kneels directly behind him. He speaks simply

I'm begging now. On my knees. Grant me Absolution.

Under his blanket Mozart starts faintly to sing his father's bedtime "Kissing Song" — nonsense Italianate words to the tune of "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star!"

Mozart (*singing*) "Oragna figata fa! Marina gamina fa!" (*And the sound of three kisses*)

Salieri (*greedily*) *L'Assoluzione!* ... *L'Assoluzione!* ... (*Pronounced "L'Ahsolutsiohnay!"*)

The song comes again, in strict repetition, together with the kisses. This Mozart now repeats again and again without stopping, a little louder and more desperately each time

Salieri (*over this with hard intensity*) For all my sins against you — damages unnumbered — slanders unnumbered — foul thoughts unnumbered — endless injury and endless wrongs — absolve my wicked soul!

The singing has grown faster and mechanical, as if being used as a charm to keep him at bay. Above it Salieri finally cries out to the impervious figure, his hands clasped tightly before him, as if in prayer

Dammi! ... Dammi! ... Ti imploro! ... (In great distress) L'Ass-o-luzi-one!...

The singing stops. Salieri waits, expectantly. A pause

(Whispering) Amadeus!

Silence

Amadeus!! ...

But the singing implacably resumes. And then suddenly — violently — Salieri raises his clenched hands high, and for a moment they stay poised as if he might smash them down on Mozart's unseeing head — but he cannot. Finally, he lets them fall again, powerlessly, to his sides. Mozart's singing sounds much lower in volume, and becomes a frightened, speedy gabble. Salieri rises to his feet

(Coldly, to the Audience) Reduce the man — reduce the God. Behold my vow fulfilled. The profoundest voice in the world reduced to a nursery tune.

Mozart stops singing

(Very bitterly) And so finally I left. Refused. Unheard! (Looking to heaven) Of course! (He is almost laughing) Of course! ... (To God) Grazie — per sempre!! (He takes a step downstage towards the Audience) And never — never after — could I confess to anyone. Until I summoned You — tonight. (Pause) My last.

* * * * *

He moves to one side

Constanze appears upstage, bonnet in hand and wearing a shawl. She has returned from Baden. She comes downstage toward the blanketed figure on the floor

Constanze (*tentatively*) Wolfi? ... I'm back.

Mozart (*hardly daring to believe it*) Stanzi? ...

Constanze Yes, my love. ... Little-husband-of-my-heart!

Mozart Oh!

She bends down and helps him to his feet. He is very frail now — they embrace, he clinging to her in overwhelming pleasure

Constanze I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry ...

Mozart gives a groan

Oh — my dear. ... Come now — come with me. ... Come on, now. There ... There ...

She helps him gently to move around the table to the chair behind it. Mozart sits weakly

Mozart (*like a child still, and most earnestly*) Salieri ... Salieri has killed me.

Constanze (*indulgently*) Yes, my dear. (*Practically she busies herself clearing the table of its manuscripts, its candle, its bottles and its inkwell*)

Mozart He has! He told me so.

Constanze Yes, yes: I'm sure. (*She finds the chair cushions and places them at the head of the table*)

Mozart (*petulantly*) He did ... He did!

Constanze Hush now, lovey.

She helps her dying husband on to the table, now his bed. He lies down, and she covers him with her shawl

I'm back to take care of you. I'm here now for always!

Mozart (*in distress*) Salieri. ... Salieri. ... (*He starts to weep*)

Constanze Oh lovey, be silent now. No-one has hurt you. You'll get better soon, I promise.

The Venticelli steal in to Salieri

Venticello 1 (*quietly*) Dr Closset says there's little hope.

Venticello 2 No point in seeing him at all.

Venticello 1 } (together) And especially as he cannot pay.
Venticello 2 }

Venticello 1 They say he's still trying to finish that Mass.

Venticello 2 But little wife won't let him, anymore!

The Venticelli leave

Faintly the Lacrimosa of the Requiem Mass begins to sound. Mozart sits up to hear it — leaning against his wife's shoulders. His hand begins feebly to beat out drum measures from the music. During the whole of the following it is evident that he is composing the Mass in his head, and does not hear his wife at all

Constanze Can you hear me? Try to, Wolferl ... Wolfi-polfi ... Try to hear. If I've been a bore — if I've nagged a bit about money, it didn't mean anything. It's only because I'm spoilt. You spoilt me, lovey. You've got to get well, Wolfi — because we need you. Karl and Baby Franz as well. There's only the three of us: we don't cost much. Just don't leave us — we wouldn't know what to do without you. And you wouldn't know much either up in Heaven, without us. You sappy thing. You can't even cut up your own meat without help! ... I'm not clever, lovey. It can't have been easy living with a goose. But I've looked after you, you must admit that. And I've given you fun too — quite a lot, really! ... Are you listening?

Mozart's drum strokes get slower, and stop

Know one thing. It was the best day of my life when you married me. And as long as I live I'll be the most honoured woman in the world. ... *Can you hear me?*

She becomes aware that Mozart is dead. She opens her mouth in a silent scream, raising her arm in a rigid gesture of grief. The great chord of the "Amen" does not resolve itself, but lingers on in intense reverberation

* * * * *

The Citizens of Vienna enter, dressed in black. Constanze kneels and freezes in grief as Servants come in and stand at the four corners of the table on which the body lies. Van Swieten also enters

Salieri (*hard*) The Death Certificate said kidney failure, hastened by exposure to cold. Generous Lord Fugue paid for a pauper's funeral. Twenty other corpses. An unmarked lime pit.

Van Swieten approaches Constanze

Van Swieten What I can spare, you shall have for the children. There's no need to waste it on vain show.

The Servants lift the table and bear it with its burden upstage c, to the Light Box, in which a cemetery appears, in stormy light

Salieri What did I feel? ... Pity! Pity — at last!—for the man I helped to destroy. I felt the pity my God can never feel! ... I weakened God's flute to a thinness. God blew—as He must—without cease. The flute split in the mouth of His insatiable *need!*

Some of the Citizens kneel, and the Servants swiftly tip the table: Mozart's body slides down into a pit at the back. We hear the sound of crows briefly cawing and flapping up. The cemetery fades. The Citizens rise in the dark and face the back

Constanze unfreezes and starts assiduously collecting the manuscripts scattered all over the floor. Salieri now speaks with an increasingly ageing voice: a sound soured more and more with its owner's bitterness

As for Constanze, in the fullness of time she married again — a Danish diplomat, as dull as a clock — and retired to Salzburg, birthplace of the Great Composer, to become the pious keeper of his shrine.

Constanze rises, wrapping her shawl about her, and clasping manuscripts to her bosom

Constanze (*reverentially*) A sweeter-tongued man never lived. In ten years of blissful marriage I never heard him utter a single coarse or conceited word. The purity of his life is reflected absolutely in the purity of his music! (*More briskly*) In selling his manuscripts I charge by the ink. So many notes, so many schillings ... That seems to me the simplest way.

Constanze leaves the stage, a pillar of rectitude

Salieri One amazing fact emerged concerning that mysterious Messenger with the skeletal face and the (*imitating it*) sinister rasping voice, who came to commission the Requiem. Mozart had not imagined him. He was *real!* ... The man was the excessively bony servant of an eccentric nobleman, who longed to write music and be praised for it. His wife had just died, so he sent this servant in deepest secrecy to order a Mass from Mozart.

Incredibly the nobleman's plan was actually to copy out the manuscript himself — and pass it off as his own work! (*Pause*) It would seem there is literally nothing a man won't stoop to in order to be thought a great composer!

The Lights come up

The Citizens turn around and advance on Salieri, bowing to him, and kissing their hands extravagantly. During his following speech they all fall on their knees in an adoring ring around him, clapping their hands at him with silent vigour and relentlessly extending their arms upwards and upwards, until they seem to obliterate him

And so I stayed on in the City of Musicians, revered by all: On and on and on for *thirty-two years*. And slowly I came to understand the nature of God's punishment. (*Demanding directly of the Audience*) What had I asked for in that church as a boy? Was it not *fame*? Well now I had it! I was to become, quite simply, the most famous musician in Europe! ... I was to be bricked up in fame! Buried in fame! Embalmed in fame! — This was my sentence — I must endure thirty-two years of being called "distinguished" by people incapable of distinguishing! ... And finally — when my nose had been rubbed in fame to vomiting — Receptions, Awards, Civic Medals, and Chains — suddenly, his masterstroke!

The Citizens freeze

It would all be taken away from me — every scrap.

The Citizens rise, turn away from him and walk indifferently off stage

The finale of the Jupiter Symphony is heard, swelling louder

(*Over the music*) Mozart's music would sound everywhere — and mine in no place on earth. I must survive to see myself become ... *extinct*. ... (*Calling up savagely*) *Nemico dei Nemici! Dio implacabile!*

The curtains of the Light Box close

A Servant brings on the wheelchair and places it centrally, as before. Another Servant brings on the old dressing-gown, shawl and turban

Salieri divests himself of his cloak and puts on these former clothes, once more becoming the old man. He sits in the wheelchair. The Lights change. Six o'clock strikes

The Servants leave, taking the cloak and hat

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Salieri's Apartments

November 1823. Six o'clock

Salieri (*to the Audience*) Dawn has come. I must release you. One moment's violence and it is over. You see, I cannot accept this. To be sucked into oblivion — not even my name remembered. Oh no: I did not live on earth to be His joke for eternity. I have one trick left me — see how He deals with this! (*Confidentially*) All this week I have been shouting about murder. You heard me yourselves — do you remember? "Mozart — *pietà!* Pardon your assassin! *Mozart!*"

Whispers of "Salieri" begin: at first faintly, as at the start of the play. During the following they grow in volume, in strict and operatic counterpoint to Salieri's speeches

Whisperers (*faintly*) *Salieri!*

Salieri (*triumphantly*) I did this deliberately! ... My servants carried the news into the streets!

Whisperers (*louder*) *Salieri!*

Salieri The streets repeated it to one another!

Whisperers (*louder*) *Salieri! ... Salieri!*

Salieri Now my name is on every tongue! Vienna, City of Scandals, has a scandal worthy of it at last!

Whisperers SALIERI! ... ASSASSIN! ... ASSASSIN! ... SALIERI!

Salieri (*falsetto; enjoying it*) "Can it be true? ... Is it possible? ... Did he do it after all? ..."

Whisperers (*fortissimo*) SALIERI!!!

Salieri Well my friends, now they all will know for sure! They will learn of my dreadful death — and they will believe the lie forever! After today, whenever men speak of Mozart's name with love, they will speak mine with loathing! As his name grows in the world so will mine — if not in fame, then in infamy. I'm going to be immortal after all! — And He will be powerless to prevent that! ... (*He laughs harshly*) So, *Signore* — see now if man is mocked!

He rises, walks forward and addresses the Audience simply, gently and directly

Amici cari. I was born a pair of ears, and nothing else. It is only through hearing music that I know God exists. Only through writing music that I

could worship ... All around me men hunger for General Rights. I hungered only for particular notes. They seek Liberty for Mankind. I sought only slavery for myself. To be owned — ordered — exhausted by an Absolute. Music. This was denied me — and with it all meaning.

He produces a cut-throat razor from his dressing-gown pocket, and carefully opens it

Now I go to become a ghost myself. I will stand in the shadows when you come here to this earth in your turns. And when you feel the dreadful bite of your failures — and hear the taunting of unachievable, uncaring God — I will whisper my name to you: “Antonio Salieri: Patron Saint of Mediocrities!” And in the depth of your downcastness you can pray to me. And I will forgive you. *Vi Saluto.*

He cuts his throat and falls backwards into the wheelchair. Mozart’s sombre Masonic Funeral Music sounds in the background

The Cook enters carrying a plate of buns for breakfast, and, seeing Salieri, screams in horror. The Valet rushes in from the other side

Together they pull the wheelchair with its slumped body backwards upstage, and anchor it midstage

The Venticelli appear again, in the costume of 1823. Venticello 1 carries books and a newspaper

Venticello 1 Beethoven’s Conversation Book, November eighteen twenty-three. Visitors write the news for the deaf man.

He hands a book to Venticello 2

Venticello 2 (reading) “Salieri has cut his throat — but is still alive!”

Salieri stirs and comes to life, sitting up and looking about him in outraged bewilderment

The Valet and Cook depart

Salieri stares out front like an astonished gargoyle

Venticello 1 Beethoven’s Conversation Book, eighteen twenty-four. Visitors write the news for the deaf man.

He hands another book to Venticello 2

Venticello 2 (reading) “Salieri is quite deranged. He keeps claiming that he is guilty of Mozart’s death, and made away with him by poison.”

The Lights narrow to a bright cone, beating on Salieri

Venticello 1 The *German Musical Times*, May twenty-fifth, eighteen twenty-five.

He hands the newspaper to Venticello 2

Venticello 2 (reading) “Our worthy Salieri just cannot die. In the frenzy of his imagination he is even said to accuse himself of complicity in Mozart’s early death. A rambling of the mind believed in truth by no-one but the deluded old man himself.”

The music stops

Salieri lowers his head, conceding defeat

Venticello 1 I don’t believe it.

Venticello 2 I don’t believe it.

Venticello 1 I don’t believe it.

Venticello 2 I don’t believe it.

Venticello 1 } (together) No-one believes it in the world!
Venticello 2 }

The Venticelli go off

The Lights dim a little. Salieri stirs, rises, comes down front and looks out far into the darkness of the theatre

Salieri Mediocrities everywhere — now and to come — I absolve you all. Amen! (He extends his arms upwards and outwards to embrace the assembled Audience in a wide gesture of benediction — finally folding his arms high across his own breast)

The Lights fade to Black-out and the last four chords of the Masonic Funeral Music of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart sound throughout the theatre

CURTAIN