

# SETTING

## TIME AND PLACE

The action of the play takes place in Vienna, Austria, in November 1823 and, in recall, the decade 1781-91.



“The place throughout is Vienna.  
The year—to begin with—1781.  
The age still that of the Enlightenment:  
that clear time before the guillotine fell in  
France and cut all our lives in half.”

—Salieri

“[Emperor] Joseph’s Vienna did not look like an imperial capital characterized by court ostentation and related ecclesiastical displays, but like a metropolis from which a vast empire was governed, where a bureaucracy with regular business hours produced an overwhelming crush of traffic every morning and evening, and where the bourgeois circles were beginning to mingle at public entertainments, and attire was no longer a reliable indication of social position.”

—*Mozart in Vienna* by Volkmar Braunbehrens



“In addition to its native Viennese, the city’s 1790 population of around 200,000 included Turks, Hungarians, Romanians, Italians, and a variety of others—a cultural and linguistic mix probably unmatched anywhere else in Europe. Its total population, however,

was a far cry from London’s 900,000 or Paris’s 700,000. Salzburg has about 15,000 inhabitants.”

—from *Mozart: An Introduction to the Music, the Man, and the Myths*  
by Royce E. Wates



## Shaffer on Mozart's Music

"It's an extraordinary thing about Mozart that you never tire of him. He never bores me... For example, I think I now know the Beethoven symphonies so well that I don't much play them anymore or go to concerts... They are superb, but I think I have received most of what I'm going to receive from them. But I never stop receiving full measure say, from the great Mozart piano concertos or from a visit to the *Marriage of Figaro*. They are marvelous and inexhaustible works, and they touch an absoluteness in music which I find deeply mysterious and which very few other composers do touch."



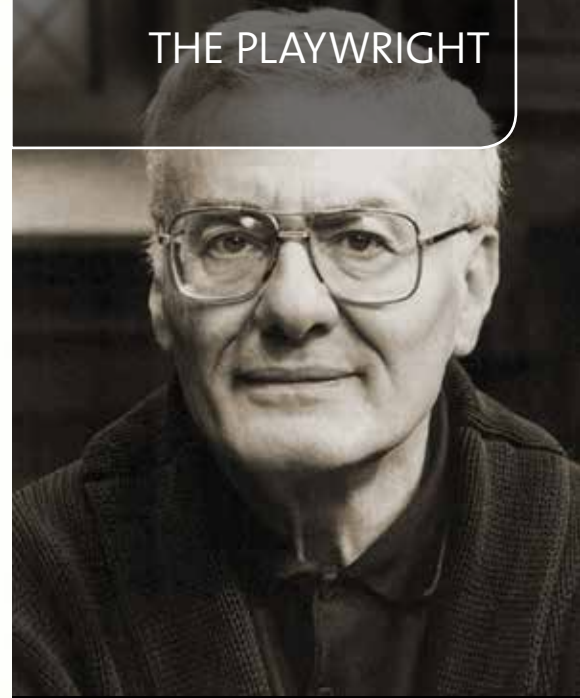
## Shaffer on *Amadeus*

"*Amadeus* is not an objective documentary biography of Wolfgang Mozart... A lot of people who criticize the play on that level appear never to have heard of fiction."

—Peter Shaffer, interviewed by Mike Wood, New York City, 1992.  
Courtesy of the William Inge Center for the Arts.



Photos from the original production of *Amadeus* at the Royal National Theatre in London, 1979.



**Peter Shaffer** and his twin brother Anthony, also a playwright, were born in Liverpool, England, in 1926. From 1944 to 1947, Shaffer worked as a conscript in a coalmine, giving him a lifelong sympathy for hard work. Nevertheless, in 1956, with a successful television play to his credit, Shaffer defied his father's conviction that real work demanded a 'serious' profession and quit to be a writer (and, briefly, a music critic).

After several radio and television dramas, his first stage play, *Five Finger Exercise*, debuted in London and New York in 1958—directed by John Gielgud. It won the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for the best foreign play of the season. This led to a steady series of successes through the 1960s, including a commission for Laurence Olivier at the National Theatre.

*Equus* took the theater world by storm in 1973, and *Amadeus* in 1979, followed by the popular film adaptation. He wrote *Lettice and Lovage* in 1987 for Maggie Smith, and in 1992, won the William Inge Award for Distinguished Achievement in the American Theatre.

Shaffer has won Tony Awards, an Oscar, and many other theater prizes. He was made an OBE in 1987 and knighted in 2001.



IN 1781, Emperor Joseph II summoned to Vienna the 15-year-old Duchess Elisabeth of Württemberg, intending to betroth her to his nephew. As part of her education, he sought a teacher to instruct her in piano and music. Among the obvious candidates for the position were Antonio Salieri—an established member of the Emperor's court—and the young upstart, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. What might Joseph have had to go on in making his decision?

*Majesty,*

I am pleased to submit myself for your consideration as pianoforte instructor to the Princess Elisabeth. Having been for some years now your majesty's Kapellmeister, and grateful servant, you know my accomplishments and abilities well.

No doubt you recall that, while a proud Viennese today, I was born to prosperous Italian parents in Legnano in 1750, where I was able to study music while I prepared—I believed—for life as a priest. Despite this devotion to God, He had other plans for me.

At 15, with both my parents suddenly dead, a wealthy family friend deigned to bring me to Venice to continue my musical training. Thence I came into the benevolent charge of your own beloved composer and Kapellmeister, Maestro Gassman, who brought me back here to Vienna and further supported such talent as I showed. It was he who brought me first to Church before lessons, telling me "I thought it my duty to begin your musical education with God."

It was surely divine grace that brought me then to your majesty's attention, changing my life forever. You insisted on my attendance, showing yourself a most ardent patron. Thanks to your continued grace, and the beneficence of your court, I was able to compose my first opera at 20, with four more to follow in the next four years. Thus, I was only 24 when, upon Maestro Gassman's sad demise, you made me your imperial royal chamber composer and Kapellmeister to the Italian opera.

With these positions, I have been able to instruct a series of pupils, illustrious and unknown alike. I have, I trust, proven a discreet, reliable, attentive music teacher; I trust that even your majesty has benefited in some measure from my counsel in this capacity.

With your support, I have been able to overcome my own limitations and give glory to God as a composer and conductor. For more than 10 years, I have labored to serve Him and your majesty, writing by your sufferance Italian operas that have been embraced by the world. You allowed me to step in for Maestro Gluck to compose *Les Danaïdes* for the Paris Opera, where even Queen Marie Antoinette enjoyed its triumph. The two commissions that followed, *Les Horaces* and *Tarare*, I must credit to your bounty; so too the further plaudits that have come with them.

Majesty, I have known no success, no achievement, no fortune thus far without the grace of the Almighty and the blessing of your imperial good will. It would give me great honor to repay these in some small measure by helping to see to the musical instruction of her highness, Princess Elisabeth. You have but to command.

Your most humble and obedient servant,

Antonio Salieri

*Antonio Salieri*





## Majesty

I am but recently arrived in your exalted capital from my long misery in Salzburg. I hear of an available position, teaching piano to Princess Elisabeth. Having been a prodigy myself from a very young age, and having since taught many pupils, I am obviously the most competent teacher and musician in the city—if not all of your Empire—to provide instruction to the young princess. What other choice could there be?

Your humble servant,

W.A. Mozart



*To his Imperial Majesty, Joseph II,  
most mighty, glorious, and exalted holy Roman Emperor.*

Forgive the temerity of your humble subject, wife to composer—and your devoted servant—Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart; I hope that your gracious Majesty will find it in your heart to overlook my audacity in writing, but rather can look with favor on the entreaties herein.

You have of course known my husband and his astonishing abilities since his youth. As but a child, he composed his first opera at your request; he previously performed for the court of your mother, Empress Maria Teresa, at a mere seven. Before that, he composed his first concerto at four.

Wolfgang's skills as a performer and improviser have delighted onlookers from his earliest days in his native Salzburg. From that early start, he joined his father on tours across the breadth of Europe. They dazzled courts in Paris and Munich and beyond, as well as here in Vienna. Eight years they devoted to this, your Majesty, earning little but the respect of all who heard him play.

At 14, my husband received from His Holiness the Pope the Order of the Golden Spur, but few other opportunities followed. He has had many private pupils, and pleased many courtiers, but has not found a patron as musically discerning as your majesty. Eventually, and for too long, he took a position as organist for the Archbishop of Salzburg: a position of great glory to God, but of little earthly merit to one as accomplished and innovative as he.

His talents as a composer you know well, from nearly 500 works: his sinfonias and concerti, his symphonies, sonatas, and divertimenti. He has achieved acclaim with operas like *Idomeneo* and *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, and more await. Illustrious and recognized maestros like Haydn and Gluck praise his work and his worth.

It was here in Vienna that we met and married; in fact, I was myself his music student before I was his wife, and can attest personally to his skills and charms as an instructor. It is now here in Vienna that we have settled in hopes that, in the enlightened home for the arts you have made, he may at last find fertile ground for his dreams—and unique abilities—as a composer.

To support these dreams, I hope that your Majesty will invite my husband to instruct the Princess.

With fervent hope and sincere gratitude,  
*Constanze Mozart, née Weber*

# THE MYTHOLOGY

“And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard.



## **1791-VIENNESE COMPOSER AND MUSICIAN WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART BECOMES INCREASINGLY ILL**

He reports visits from a mysterious “grey messenger,” commissioning him to write a Requiem Mass—which he convinces himself will be his own. Increasingly delirious, he shares his fears of an “Italian cabal” at court out to get him.

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## MOZART IS DEAD

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On December 5, Mozart dies after an intense bout of fever. On December 7, a Berlin newspaper reports “Mozart is—dead... Because his body swelled up after his death, it is even believed that he was poisoned.”

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**1798-**Biographer Franz Niemetschek fuels the rumor with accounts that Mozart had foreseen his own death—weeping that,

**“It won’t be long now;  
I’ve surely been given poison!”**

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**1803-**Fellow composer Carl Maria von Weber, related to Mozart by marriage, hears of an accusation implicating Salieri in Mozart’s death—rumors he seems to credit. That same year, an early biography of the dead musician wrestles with the question of possible poisoning, putting on record the fact of the suspicions even as it tries to dismiss them.



**1822-**Gioachinno Rossini, visiting Vienna, reportedly jokes with Salieri about the persistent rumors.



**1823-**

## **AFTER A SEVERE PHYSICAL AND MENTAL BREAKDOWN, SALIERI IS ADMITTED TO THE HOSPITAL.**

Word soon spreads through Vienna and beyond that he has admitted to Mozart’s murder, then attempted suicide. An old friend reports him insisting, “I can in all good faith swear that there is no truth to the absurd rumor.” This does little to dampen public ardor for the popular version of events.

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**1824-** The story of Salieri’s guilty anguish spreads. Beethoven’s nephew joins others in letting Mozart’s former student know, **“Salieri declares that he has poisoned Mozart.”**

One ardent defender publishes a Letter in Defence of Salieri Regarding the Accusation of His Having Poisoned Mozart. Leipzig’s noted journal, the Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung, features the debate. But denials only serve to confirm the rumors in the court of public opinion.

# OF MURDER

“All the rumors fit to print.”

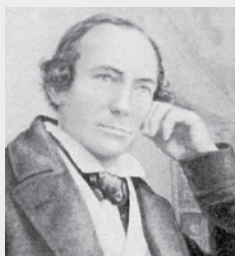
So Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.” —Genesis 4: 3-5

## 1830-RUSSIAN POET ALEXANDER PUSHKIN PUBLISHES

the short poetic dialogue “Mozart and Salieri” in his Little Tragedies, cementing for all time the tale of Salieri poisoning his rival, Mozart, and with it, the elemental confrontation between divine genius and envious mediocrity.

“Who dares to say that even proud Salieri  
Could stoop to envy, like a loathsome snake...?  
No one! ... But now - myself I say it - now  
I do know envy! Yes, Salieri envies,  
Deeply, in anguish envies. O ye Heavens!  
Where, where is justice, when the sacred gift,  
When deathless genius comes not to reward  
Toil, devotion, prayer, self-sacrifice,  
But puts her halo round a...frivolous idler's brow?  
O Mozart, Mozart”

## MOZART WAS MURDERED BY HIS FELLOW FREEMASONS!



**1861-**German antiquarian Georg Friedrich Daumer has a new theory: Mozart was murdered by his fellow Freemasons. Daumer claims that Mozart had not fully carried out Masonry’s “party line” in *The Magic Flute*, and so was sentenced and executed by his Brothers. This theory

later gets elaborated in the Nazi period, notably by General Erich Ludendorff and his wife, who devote the family press to the propagation of their claims.

**1898-**Russian composer Rimsky-Korsakov uses Pushkin’s poem as libretto for an opera retelling once more the story of envious Salieri defying God and genius to poison Mozart; ironically, he uses many of Salieri’s technical innovations in the dramaturgy of his composition.



### Die Zauberflöte.

Eine  
große Oper in zwey Aufzügen.

von  
Emmanuel Schikaneder.

Die Musik ist von Herrn Wolfgang Amade  
Mozart, Kapellmeister, und mittheiltem L.  
I. Kammere - Compositur.



**1967-**A study of Mozart’s death argues that an engraving on the frontispiece of the first libretto of *The Magic Flute* contains eight allegories of Mercury, the god who gave his name to the poison which the author insists killed Mozart; the engraving was made by the Freemason Ignaz Alberti. Secret hints of Masonic vengeance are traced all the way up to the Mozart postage stamp issued by Austria in 1956, bearing eight Mercury allegories in its frame.

## GREY MESSENGER

Agent of the Masons

**1971-**In *Mozarts Tod* (1971) three German doctors publish more explicit incrimination of the Masons as the murderers of Mozart; according to this theory, the “grey messenger” ordering the Requiem was an agent of the Masons announcing their death sentence for the crime of having revealed Masonic secrets in *The Magic Flute*. They implicate Salieri, and—as doctors—go to great lengths to analyze Mozart’s final symptoms as evidence of his poisoning.

## MYTH BECOMES LEGEND

**1979-**

In his award-winning play, later filmed by Milos Forman, Peter Shaffer reprises elements of all of these swirling rumors, myths, speculations, and theories. Myth becomes legend.

