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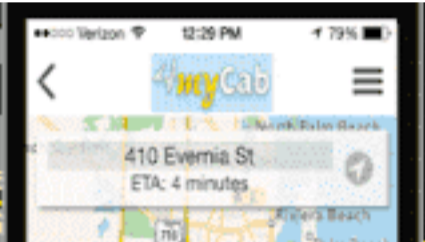
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A Brilliantly Tragic “Amadeus” at Maltz Jupiter Theatre

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By: Skip Sheffield

Why is it that a few rare individuals are so extraordinarily gifted they make ordinary people seem mediocre?

That is the cruel central question asked by “Amadeus,” Peter Shaffer’s 1979 Tony Award-winning Best Play, launching the tenth season of Maltz Jupiter Theatre through Nov. 11 at 1001 Indiantown Road, Jupiter.

“I am the patron saint of mediocrity,” wails Antonio Salieri (Tom Bloom), an Italian-born court musician for Austria’s Emperor Joseph II. “Mozart is touched by God.”

The object of Salieri’s jealousy and despair is Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (Ryan Garbayo), one-time child prodigy now trying to make a name for himself as a 26-year-old newlywed in Vienna in 1782. Salieri is on his death bed at the outset of “Amadeus,” full of regret. He may well be mad too; a victim of guilt.

Scenic designer Philip Witcomb has created a marvelously decrepit, crumbling set that reflects the decline and disintegration of the two main characters. The role of Salieri is an actor’s showcase, and Tom Bloom gives it his all. Salieri is in a penitent mood, speaking directly to the audience as a close friend, trying to explain why he did the terrible things he did to thwart the career of brilliant young Mozart.

Salieri was a pious man. He lusts for his young protégée, Katherina (Traci Blair), but he pledges not to break his marriage vow.

Mozart is married too, against his father’s wishes to stalwart Constanze (Alexis Bronikovic). The couple can barely make a living, as Mozart has only three students versus Salieri’s 50. It only gets worse when they have their first child.

Salieri may not have the gift of God, but he is a good enough musician to immediately recognize Mozart’s genius, as he tosses off note-perfect compositions, one more impressive than the next.

The court of Emperor Joseph II is mostly filled with sycophants and buffoons, principally Kappelmeister (music director) Bonno (Jeffrey Bruce), but even he recognizes there is something very special about the crude, giggling young composer.

Ryan Garbayo beautifully captures the boyish enthusiasm and the naivety of Mozart, an undisciplined boy-man brimming with the joy of creativity.

Salieri’s jealousy curdles into hatred and revenge. When he tries and fails to ruin the honor of Constanze, Salieri vows to block Mozart’s progress at every turn.

You don’t have to be a Mozart expert or classical music lover to recognize the Mozart pieces tossed off and spurned: “The Marriage of Figaro,” “Don Giovanni,” “The Magic Flute” and his own “Requiem Mass.”

Playwright Shaffer took considerable license in exaggerating the rivalry between Salieri and Mozart and the extent of the dirty tricks played by Salieri.

It all makes cracking good theater though, and director Michael Gieleta has brought out a thousand little details of sound, light and shadows to accentuate the drama.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart is acknowledged as one of the greatest musical geniuses of all time, creating up until his death at the tragic young age of 35 in 1791. Antonio Salieri would be but a footnote to history if it were not for this play.

Tickets start at \$46. Call 561575-2223 or visit www.jupitertheatre.org.



Captions: (top) Alexis Bronkovic as Constanze and Ryan Garbayo as Mozart (bottom) Tom Bloom stars as Antonio Salieri

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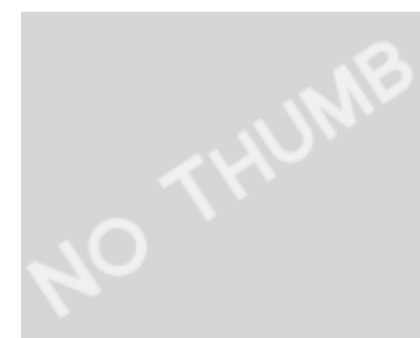
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