

NORTHWEST Sinfonietta

A FLAIR FOR THE CLASSIC

Mozart and Salieri - Friends or Foes?

February 17, 2006 - Town Hall Seattle

February 18, 2006 - Rialto Theater Tacoma

Salieri: Sinfonia in D, "Il giorno onomastico"

Vivaldi: Flute Concerto in G minor "La notte"

Salieri: Sinfonia in D "Veneziana"

Mozart: Flute Concerto No. 2 in D, K.314

Mozart: Symphony No. 36 in C, K.425 "Linz"

Program notes by C. Chagnard

Mozart and Salieri - Friends or Foes?

The rivalry between Mozart and Salieri has become the stuff of legends. Milos Foreman's cinematic masterpiece "Amadeus", based on Peter Shaffer's play, contributed a great deal in fostering the speculation: Had Salieri sabotaged Mozart's career, had he used his great influence to deny Mozart his due professional standing, had he in fact murdered the world's greatest musical genius?

The actual facts are far more civilized: Mozart and Salieri had great professional respect for one another and often crossed paths in Viennese music circles. It is true that Salieri bowed to Mozart's undisputed genius with great reverence and admiration and he certainly must have felt jealousy for his stunning creative ease. Salieri however, held throughout his illustrious career the most prestigious musical posts in the Austrian capital, culminating as Court Kapellmeister in 1788, working for the Emperor Joseph II. Following the emperor's death in 1790, Salieri left his post in 1824 after 36 years at the peak of his profession. He was also the president of the *Viennese Musician's Benevolent Society* and the first Director of Vienna's first music conservatory, founded in 1817. Ironically, Mozart's best efforts to acquire such a position never materialized and became a source of great bitterness and tension. Not to mention constant financial stress. In a twist of cruel fate, history had chosen the lesser composer for the better position. One lived wealthy to be 75 while the other departed at the young age of 36, penniless.

Considering Salieri's humble origins and difficult upbringing, his rise to the apex of his professional status is absolutely remarkable. He was born in 1750 (6 years earlier than Mozart) in the small town of Legnago, then part of the Republic of Venice. He was the eighth child of a merchant and his second wife. Tragedy was to strike when in 1763; Salieri's mother died followed two years later by the passing of his father. Left an orphan, he lived with his brother, a monk in Padua. Young Salieri's fate brightened in 1763 when Giuseppe Mocenigo, a wealthy friend of his late father and the member of one of the most distinguished Venetian families, took him under his wing. Salieri's musical education had begun with the help of his brother Francesco, thirteen years his senior, who taught him violin and harpsichord. The arrival in Venice provided Salieri with a formidable immersion into the finest musical education available. He studied with Giovanni Pescetti, the Assistant Director of Music at San Marco and in 1766 met the most influential force of his career, Leopold Gassmann. During that decisive year the Viennese theaters were closed and Gassmann, the successor to Gluck at the ballet, came to Venice where he was impressed by the young Salieri's abilities and took him back with him to Vienna. The rest as they say is history. Salieri's meteoric rise was most notable through the creation of over forty operas which became the rage in Vienna, Milan, Venice, Rome, Munich, Paris and Trieste. His distinguished legacy lived on through his star pupils including Beethoven, Hummel, Schubert and Liszt.

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So, how good is Salieri's music? Did he deserve such fame or was he simply an exceptionally shrewd socialite? Judging from the two symphonies we have chosen to perform for you, Salieri's muse deserves our sincere admiration; it is inspired, well-crafted, witty and inventive. The first symphony we are presenting, "**Il Giorno Onomastico**", bore the following inscription: "Symphony entitled "Name Day", composed in a garden in the month of August of the year 1775." (We do not know whose name he is making reference to, and can speculate that it is probably for one his patrons.) Throughout its four movements, Salieri shows a wealth of brilliant ideas, expressive melodies and poetic sensibility. The second symphony "**Veneziana**" owes its nickname to its first modern editor Pietro Spada. As a common practice in the 18th century, this symphony is made of various opera overtures. The first movement was originally conceived as the prelude to "La scuola de gelosi" (The School for Jealousy), a *drama giocoso* in two acts composed in 1779 for the Venetian Carnival. The second and third movements form the overture to "La partenza inaspettata" (The unexpected departure), another opera produced at the *Teatro Valle* in Rome.

This music "recycling" method was also a favored tool with the greatest early 18th Century Italian composer: Antonio Vivaldi. His flute concerto "La Notte" (The night) is based on a chamber concerto for flute, two violins and bassoon (catalog number RV 104). Published in 1728, "**La notte**" is a vividly striking description of what 18th century Venetian nights must have felt like to a most creative artist. This unique concerto contains six brief movements of highly contrasting nature depicting different nocturnal tableaux. The first *Presto* for instance bears *Fantasmie* as its heading, making allusion to ghosts who roam the dormant city. The *Largo* entitled *Il Sonno* (The Sleep) brings ephemeral peace though slow moving and surprisingly modern harmonies. The final *Allegro* however, brings back the ghosts in a frenzy of animated rhythms of relentless energy.

Mozart's opinion of the 18th Century flute was not particularly glowing. He found it to be unstable and often hard to tune. Some of his correspondence makes it clear that he did not favor this particular instrument and avoided giving it prominence. This reservation might explain his procrastination in conceiving his only two flute concertos. In 1777, Ferdinand De Jean, a surgeon and amateur flute player commissioned Mozart to compose two flute concertos and three flute quartets. The proposed fee of 200 florins was generous and a golden opportunity for the chronically financially strapped Mozart family. Wolfgang was 22 and very much a free spirit trying to escape the dictatorial grip of his towering father. Rather than dedicating his extraordinary energies to this project, he procrastinated. As a result, the fee was reduced to 96 florins which infuriated Leopold Mozart. In an attempt to sooth his father's disappointment, Mozart (very much like Vivaldi as described above) borrowed from his own music to complete his **Second Flute Concerto in D**. The source was his C major Oboe Concerto in C, which he transposed in the new key and thus created a concerto which has since become a staple of the flute repertoire.

On October 30, 1783, while traveling from Salzburg to Vienna on a belated honeymoon, Mozart and his young wife Constanze arrived in the town of Linz. Count Thun, a local aristocrat who became aware of this momentous visit, insisted on offering them hospitality and invited Mozart to perform some of his music. Although he had no orchestral works handy for performance, he obliged, stating in a letter to his father dated October 31 "On November 4, I am giving a concert in the theater here, and since I don't have a single symphony with me, I am writing one at breakneck speed." This was not an overstatement - the symphony was indeed completed in three days, copied and rehearsed on November 4. Its performance that evening was met with great success and revealed a Mozart of a new creative maturity. One could have presumed that such haste would have resulted in a work of compromises, and yet, not only does the **C Major Symphony, K.425** reject any notion of routine, it reveals a wealth of innovations. It was described by Paumgartner as "A masterpiece that is unwilling to decide between euphoric high spirits and cantabile rapture." It begins with a very rare slow introduction, which later became standard practice in the 19th Century. The mood is at once grand and ominous. The complexity and sophistication of the ensuing *Allegro* first and second motives are simply astonishing! The following *Andante* in 6/8 also innovates with the presence of trumpets and timpani usually

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absent in this type of movement. (Since these instruments were unable to retune to the key of F, they are kept in C, creating a most striking harmonic tension.) The Minuet and Presto are equally fresh and inventive and a reflection of Mozart's years of international travels and his ability to absorb a wealth of styles and transform them into a craft of incomparable subtlety and depth.

The Mozart-Salieri rivalry is, in the end, all fair games. In an ironic twist of fate, nature bestowed Salieri with status, fame and fortune, and for Mozart? It gave him infinite genius.