

SALIERI'S WOMEN

by
Michelle Lunicke

(Inspired by characters from AMADEUS,
the original play by Peter Shaffer.)

(Edited by and with contribution from
Elia Bosshard)

(Current Revisions by
Michelle Lunicke, November 9, 2014)

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First performed November 9, 2014 at the Genesian Theatre,
420 Kent Street, Sydney, NSW, Australia, in conjunction with
the full production of AMADEUS by Peter Shaffer.

Original Cast:

Teresa Salieri.....Michelle Lunicke

Caterina Cavalieri.....Elia Bosshard

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Please contact Michelle Lunicke at michellelunicke@gmail.com
if you would like to produce this stage play at no cost.

Playwright's Notes:

I wrote these monologues after being cast in the silent role of Teresa Salieri in Peter Shaffer's award-winning play AMADEUS. In part, I began it as an exercise, because there is nothing more galling for an actor to not feel like their character matters. As an actor we have the utmost responsibility to defend our characters, no matter how small or large a role they may play in the drama's unfolding. Though I have the utmost respect for Peter Shaffer, it occurred to me that in the context of AMADEUS he intentionally introduced two historical women who are required by stage directions to be present in many scenes of the play, but have absolutely no voice. Unlike some of the other ancillary characters, these women are closest to the protagonist and must witness a great degree of the drama as it is unfolding through the play.

Armed with my own curiosity and some degree of stubbornness, I refused to accept their being reduced to "lacking fire" and "silly in the way of young girls." These might be true in the moment for Salieri as he tells his story, but after doing a great deal of research I came to find that these women had histories and passions that in Salieri's nearsightedness and era, he no doubt overlooked or outright dismissed. As a playwright I have a special power most actors don't have. I resolved to write something for them.

Rather than asking them more about Antonio Salieri, I asked them about their stories, and what they most cared about, which I knew would include both Salieri and Mozart and the context given in the play. I discovered in these women unique identities and profound courage that compliments AMADEUS. Unlike Mozart, without artists like myself to remember them, these women remain forgotten after their time...mere shadows in the lives of the men around them. I believe we have as much to learn from them as any of the other characters, and I'm grateful I had the opportunity to give them an audience.

I highly encourage theatres producing AMADEUS to consider producing these short pieces as well, using the cast and stage as it is envisioned for each individual production. I hope this work will create some dialogue around the themes of the play, which include providence, right and wrong, jealousy, and a deep need for acknowledgement and justice. Alongside the stories of Salieri, Mozart, and his wife Constanze, I believe these women's stories are worthy as well. I hope Mr. Shaffer doesn't mind that I've made this tiny amendment to what is already one of the greatest plays of the 20th century.

-Michelle Lunicke

MONOLOGUE ONE: TERESA

TERESA

Salieri. I know what you must think when you hear that name. But how often have you thought of him as Antonio? He was many things to many people, but to me he was my husband. Like most things in his life, it was music that brought us together...or perhaps it was Ama-deus. (Translating) "the love of God."

I was a barely a woman when we met. My friend would receive music lessons from him in the convent and the girls and I would sit behind the doors and listen. It was glorious. Beautiful. As he played the notes, I would have the most wonderful feelings...like how I would feel looking at a stained glass window on a sunny day. He had that effect on everyone in those days. He could make us feel sad, or happy, or angry, or frightened, with a few notes this way or that.

After lessons we would collect our friend and go to the church gardens. One week I was late, and having missed the lesson, followed our usual route alone. He approached me then, and asked if he might escort me to mass each week.

I had done nothing to receive this attention. When he confided that he loved me, I was overwhelmed. I had not dreamed such good fortune was possible....to have his love. Antonio wanted to be elevated by everything in life. There was nothing he didn't aspire to or hope for. He wanted to be next to God, and I wanted to be next to him.

I've always been an awkward person. That's why I love the catechism. It's easy to be virtuous when the rules you must follow are clear. Court was like mass, and being the court composer's wife had its own rules. As the years passed, I began to wonder if that's all I ever was to Antonio. The better a wife I became, the less affection he had for me.

And then, Mozart came to Vienna. A strange man. Antonio was suspicious of him and became secretive. At first I suspected jealousy, and then, I don't know, how could he be jealous of such a man? He would not confide in me, and had frequent moods.

I'm not one to meddle. When I did inquire what was the matter he would give me some reason or the other and change the subject. He grew reclusive. I didn't know what to say. What should vex him so much? He was the best composer in Vienna. Was this not enough for him? Was it me? Against my nature, I finally pressed him and he shrieked at me...something about Mozart again.

What could I do for him? For us?

(MORE)

TERESA (cont'd)

I went quietly on with my duties, attended mass alone, and visited my parents often. At first I'd hoped he would join me, and then at times it was good just to have respite from his sensitivities. He'd become decadent and flighty and I didn't recognize him anymore, nor myself as I hardened to the burden of my unknowing.

(She straightens her shoulders and becomes the "La Statua" from AMADEUS.)

And then resigned to coldness forever..."The Marriage of Figaro." I would not have believed after all my years living with Antonio that Mozart's music would have made much of an impression on me. I had seen his work before, and I admit it was colored by my opinion of the man. But "the Marriage of Figaro"...

(Play The Marriage of Figaro, "Contessa Perdono!" clip)

...I thought nothing in all the world would wake me up inside again.

(she listens to the music)

The Count sings to his wife, whom he mistakes in her disguise as a maid. Despite the betrayal, she plays along. I was overcome with envy. Surely he saw in this new person, some aspect he had fallen in love with many years ago and had forgotten. That earnest pursuit, however misplaced...Antonio had had that for me! There was my youth, with all the feelings music gave me as an eavesdropping girl, and there was my husband, full of vitality again.

As her disguise fell away and their love was restored, I began to unravel. Would I ever have this from him? Antonio must have felt something too, for he sat with all the intensity of a boy at confirmation. He would never say so, but I believe he was deeply moved in a way neither I, nor anyone in his life, not even his own music could satisfy.

If I never had my husband again, not having the arts of a cunning wife, at least I would have this moment. One solitary moment...together in awe, just as we had been in mass all those years ago. Him next to God, and I next to him.

(music fades out)

MONOLOGUE TWO: CATERINA

(Play Abduction from the Seraglio,
"Marten Aller Arten" clip as Caterina
either lip-syncs or gestures to it)

CATERINA

(translating the lyrics of the
song)

"I scorn torment and pain. Nothing will shake my resolve. I
would tremble only if I were untrue to him."

I know, it sounds different without the music. That was
always my favorite part. It has remained in my memory for
years after my time in the performances were over. When I
think of love, that's what I hear, and in front of me, an
ocean of faces.

My entire life has been set to music. All Viennese parents of
status ensured their children would have a musical education.
My father, having some musical sensibilities, began my
training at age nine. By 16, I showed potential for a
promising career and it was time to pursue the very best
tutors for further instruction. My friends were content with
this conductor or that...but I had ambition, (pause,) I wanted
Antonio Salieri.

I first met Salieri at 19. I had already seen several of his
operas, but then an invitation arrived, as they often did,
for a private concert to be given by one of his pupils. From
the first moment I saw him I felt a girlish infatuation). He
was still a young man himself, and the most renowned composer
in Vienna. When he played the piano, he had that look I know
only too well. He was absorbed. Him and his pupil were in a
world apart, communicating its eternal glory to us through
music.

The piece seemed especially written for her. I wanted that. A
conductor can help you learn a melody already written, but a
composer...a composer can transcribe your very soul into a
song, write you down, note for note, capturing you in a
moment of perfection forever.

Salieri already had many pupils and I came with neither royal
recommendation nor much money, but young girls often marry
and abandon their musical ambitions, and so he soon had time
to audition me. I had prepared a work by Chevalier Gluck,
hoping to impress him. He accompanied and I sang. Everything
after was a blur of enchantment. One song turned into
another, and then another.

(MORE)

CATERINA (cont'd)

When we were done he simply proposed a time for regular lessons to begin the following week. And so, my life would be colored with arias appassionato, sung a piacere, and always espressivo. It was a kind of language between us, and as the years passed, we came to know each other in a way I cannot describe to you, but you must feel what I mean. We were muses for one another, and later, a little more.

The most influential musicians were foreigners, and Vienna hosted the best of them all. If I was going to have the career I longed for, a career worth all that I had sacrificed, I would have to become more than Katerina Kavalier. Opera was born from Italy, and I wanted to be as well. I became CATARINA CAVALIERI. A name Salieri enjoyed saying as if it were one of his sweets.

I was an emerging star, and I wanted everything that it could offer me. I attended parties, bought new dresses, each for their season, and itched always for new work. The court was capricious and rumors circled around one particularly talented composer.

When it comes to Mozart, I can only tell you what I've told everyone else...he made me laugh. The first time I was invited to Wolfgang's house he appeared in his dressing gown. (laughs) Apparently he had been expecting me and wanted me to feel comfortable. (laughs) He had seen me perform and so before I could even suggest it, he asked me outright to sing the role of Constanze in his new opera The Abduction from the Seraglio. I could hardly respond. He jumped right up to the piano and began to play. He said only I could do it. Only I had the voice for this piece and that I had to, just had to, because he'd written it with only me...my voice, in his ears. Well, how could I say "no?"

He promised it would be the very best piece I had ever sung...and he was right. The sounds poured out of me. I was an instrument of the purest love and I knew they felt it too...the audience. We were all lovers when I sang, even if we had never touched. When the curtains fell and the applause erupted, I came to the realization that I had already performed the very best role of my career, although it was still the beginning. My fans would grow in number, and there would be parties and concerts and operas to come, but none would make me feel as this did. This was me, captured in music for eternity, my perfection.

Life can only afford us so much prosperity...so much happiness. Every man would want me to be their Constanze then, and I must say I reveled in it, but nothing was the same as when I stood on that stage. When I performed, I could be more than any wife, mother, or lover I might have been. I could be all those things, to all those people. I could love anyone through music.

(MORE)

CATERINA (cont'd)

If it were possible, I would have played Constanze forever.

(She takes a glorious curtsy as
if at the end of an opera.)

(BLACKOUT)

(Curtain Call: Play Salieri's "Sinfonia
Finez")

The End.

Production time: approx. 15 minutes.