Rimski-Korsakov - Mozart and Salieri (1988)

1. Scene I 2. Scene II Mozart – Aleksander Fedin (tenor) Salieri – Evgeny Nesterenko (bass) Viera Tchasovennaya – piano Sergei Girshenko – violin Russian Academic Choir Bolshoi Theatre Orchestra Mark Elmler – conductor, 1986

Many years before the movie "Amadeus" based on Peter Schaffer's play of the same name, in fact in the autumn of 1830, Pushkin wrote his "little tragedy" "Mozart and Salieri" which synthesized all the same basic ideas including Salieri's claim in the later years of his mental illness that he had poisoned Mozart because of jealousy. Whether or not Mozart was in fact poisoned, the play goes into depth comparing Salieri's and Mozart's ideas about social behavior and musical genius: in Scene II as Salieri is secretly putting the poison into Mozart's drink, Mozart says that criminal activity and artistic genius are incompatible (thus inadvertently insulting Salieri); in Scene I we have already heard Salieri's opinion that the extreme beauty of Mozart's music would disturb the norms of conventional society and therefore it should not be tolerated. Salieri believes that music is just a matter of following the correct rules, and that "talent plus industry equals genius"; Salieri thinks God is punishing him by giving genius to a free spirit like Mozart. Rimsky-Korsakov's mini-opera (about 40 minutes duration) in two "dramatic scenes" was written in 1897, and he brilliantly incorporates elements of Mozart's style with his own. There are several direct quotes from Mozart's music - an out-of-tune quote from "The Marriage of Figaro" badly played by a street musician, several quotes performed on the piano with orchestral backup by the singer playing Mozart - but in the main Rimsky-Korsakov created richly dramatic music using classical period techniques combined with the advanced modulations of the 1890's. The music keeps the words moving with a sensitive feeling for the natural flow of speech, and underlines the shifting emotions perfectly. An academically correct, but very powerful fugue section separates the two scenes and blends back into the scene in some very ingenious writing. This is a very thought-provoking and emotional work. --- "Blue" Gene Tyranny, Rovi

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