

from Amadeus by Peter Shaffer

Salieri: And then, right away, the concert began. I heard it through the door - some Serenade: at first only vaguely - too horrified to attend. But presently the sound insisted - a solemn Adagio in E flat. It started simply enough: just a pulse in the lowest registers - bassoons and basset horns - like a rusty squeezebox. It would have been comic except for the slowness, which gave it instead a sort of serenity. And then suddenly, high above it, sounded a single note on the oboe. It hung there unwavering - piercing me through - till breath could hold it no longer, and a clarinet withdrew it out of me, and sweetened it into a phrase of such delight it had me trembling. The light flickered in the room. My eyes clouded! The squeezebox groaned louder, and over it the higher instruments wailed and warbled, throwing lines of sound around me - long lines of pain around and through me - Ah, the pain! Pain such as I had never known it. I called up to my sharp old God *'What is this? ... What?!*' But the squeezebox went on and on, and the pain cut deeper into my shaking head until suddenly I was running - dashing through the side-door, stumbling downstairs into the street, into the street, into the cold night, gasping for life. *'What?! What is this? Tell me, Signore! What is this pain? What is this need in the sound? Forever unfulfillable yet fulfilling him who hears it, utterly. Is it Your need? Can it be Yours? ...'* Dimly the music sounded from the salon above. Dimly the stars shone on the empty street. I was suddenly frightened. It seemed to me I had heard a voice of God - and that it issued from a creature whose voice I had also heard - and it was the voice of an obscene child!