

Document Citation

Title	Amadeus brings sense of harmony to Oscar nominee
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Source	<i>Oakland Tribune</i>
Date	1985 Feb 27
Type	article
Language	English
Pagination	D-1, D-6
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	Hulce, Tom (1953), White Water, Wisconsin, United States
Film Subjects	Amadeus, Forman, Milos, 1984

'Amadeus' brings sense of harmony to Oscar nominee

By Harriet Swift
The Tribune

When the film "Amadeus" opened to fanfare, good reviews and new interest in the unknown actor playing Mozart, that actor, Tom Hulce, saw the impact immediately. The theater community, where he began his career, responded with job offers. From Hollywood, there was resounding silence.

But after 2½ months, with "Amadeus" a certified box office smash, the film community took notice. There were phone calls, meetings and people seeking Hulce. Finally came the mark of a successful actor — unsolicited scripts in the mail. The first script included not only a firm offer to star in a movie, but in the sequel too. The film? "Ratman From Saturn."

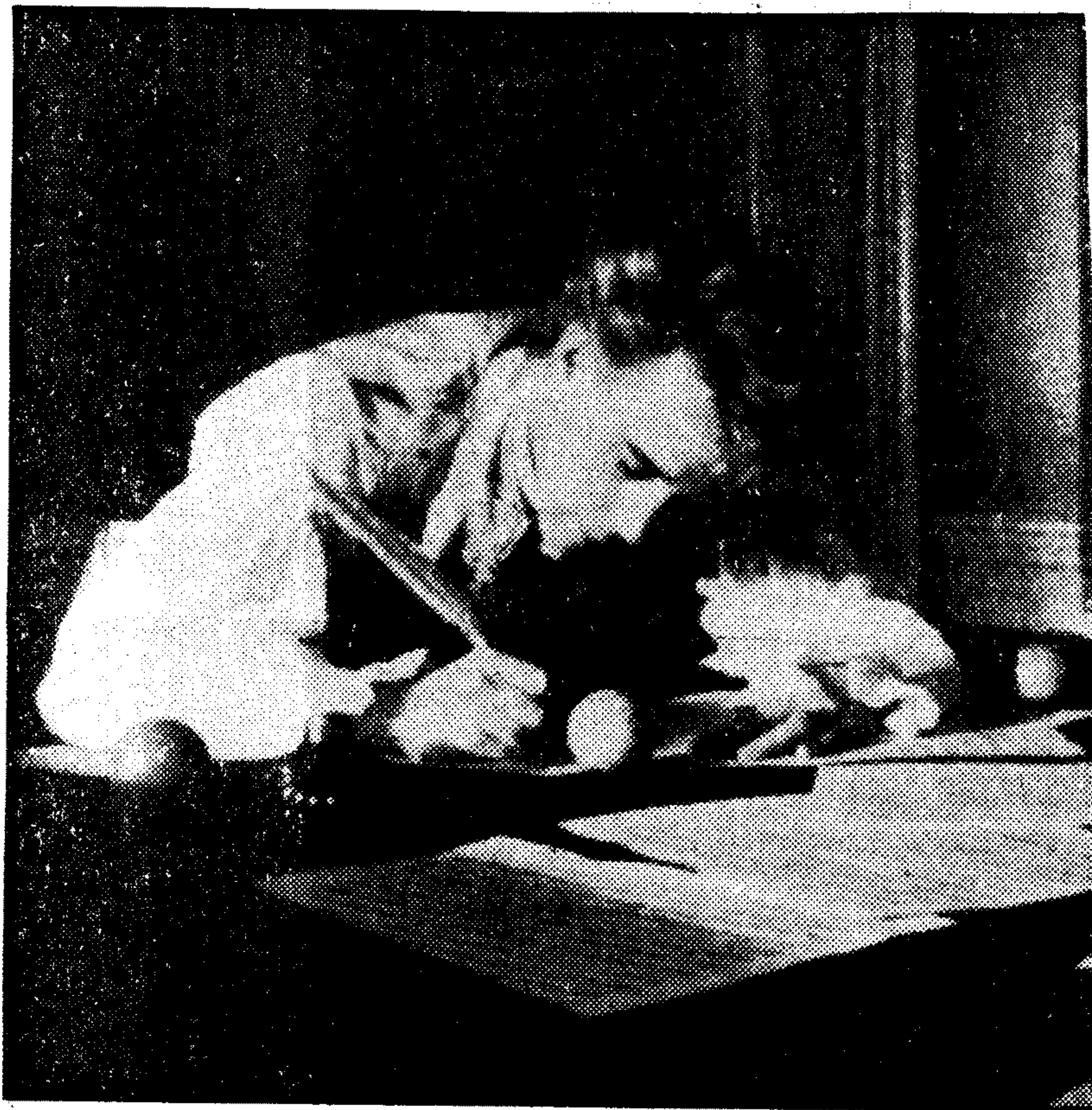
Hulce had an immediate answer to the "Ratman" offer: "I sent a bottle of champagne to ('Amadeus' playwright and screenwriter) Peter Shaffer for changing my life," he told a laughing Berkeley audience Monday night.

The first guest in the Berkeley Repertory Theatre's "Lives in the Theatre" series for 1985, Hulce, 31, talked animatedly and almost

non-stop for two hours Monday night about his career on stage and in film.

The sold-out audience of 400 was clearly charmed by the bbyish Hulce, who has been nominated for an Academy Award as best actor for "Amadeus." He began the evening sitting shy and pretzel-like in his center stage chair, but was soon using sweeping gestures and jumping to his feet to describe filming of "Amadeus" and the travails of getting acting jobs.

Sharon Ott, artistic director for Berkeley Rep and Hulce's director in a 1984 Southern California production of Chekov's "The Seagull," acted as moderator, asking Hulce several questions, then directing questions from the audience.



Tom Hulce won an Oscar nomination for his portrayal of Mozart.

Although Hulce has been acting and singing since age "10 or 11," and acting professionally since age 15, it was his career as Mozart that the audience wanted to know.

"It was about six weeks into the filming before I had a hold on what was going on," Hulce said. In addition to mastering the piano ("you know how your parents always tell you you're going to regret not learning?"), becoming totally familiar with Mozart's music and filming under spartan conditions in Prague, Hulce said he wrestled with Mozart's "extraordinary" character, which he described as 12 human beings in one body.

"This was a nightmare," he said.

The nightmarish aspects of the production did not extend to the director, at least not for Hulce. Milos Forman, the colorful emigre Czech filmmaker, was "a dream director with me in front of the camera," said Hulce. "He always said what was bad. Of course, that might not be the director of other people's dreams."

"'Vat are you do-ink!' he would shout at me," said Hulce, "and that's as specific as the director got."

For an made it clear from

the beginning that he wanted a wild, outrageous Mozart and Hulce pushed himself to comply. Hulce's vision of Mozart — which has come in for a heavy share of criticism — is of an 18th-century rock star.

"Mozart lived a life that if described today, and not identified as Mozart, would sound like a rock star," he said. "He was obsessive, he partied a lot, he had authority problems, he was probably alcoholic but he was very innovative in his work; he was on the cutting edge then."

Besides establishing him as a rising actor, "Amadeus" also converted Hulce to the cult of film. Trained as a stage actor at the North Carolina School of the Arts, he went to New York at 19 where he acted in "Equus" (also a Peter Shaffer drama). He worked in stage productions in New York steadily while also doing work in TV and film ("Animal House"

being the most prominent), but found movie work unsatisfactory.

"But with this film ('Amadeus')," Hulce said, "I discovered the possibility of doing one small piece the very best you can possibly do, then the next day another small piece the best you can do — and they've got it all on film! They can string it all together for the best performance possible — better than the performance that you could ever give on