

Tolstoy, you may remember, died in the freezing chill of an unprivatised railway station without a buffet bar. He was 82. *Tolstoy*, the play about said demise, died last night. It was three weeks old. Only 10 years ago, F. Murray Abraham was clutching his *Amadeus* Oscar for his portrayal of Salieri. This week, in the cavern of the Aldwych theatre, he seemed to be playing the eponymous one just for me: or rather, me and about 35 others.

There is something peculiarly vicious about a theatrical clinker staggering to an early grave. Big American cash, bigish American author (of *The Lion in Winter*), big American star, big flop in which all who sail in her are held up for humiliation. Was it really that bad? It just wasn't that good. The interesting thing was seeing how long nights of going through the motions without the adrenaline of an audience had got to the cast. They were valiant in their low-octane professionalism.

## Preston on Tolstoy

Clipped By:



ianharris

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