

'Othello' is an acting tour de force

Quinton Skinner, Special to the Star Tribune, October 29, 2009

There is a moment deep into the second act of Park Square Theatre's emotionally striking production of "Othello" when Steve Hendrickson's Iago briefly takes the hand of Stacia Rice's Desdemona. Shakespeare's most despicable villain, in Hendrickson's performance, briefly flashes an expression of shock, as though the touch of his lord's beautiful wife has unleashed the depths of his ardor for her, and a primary cause of his dastardly machinations.



Director Richard Cook's interpretation leaves the action in its period, wisely opting to place his bets on storytelling rather than search for novelty. This strategy works because of a core cast that delivers this story of betrayal and jealousy with adult gravity and a surplus of craft and clarity.

James A. Williams in the title role lends Othello an elegance and passion that allows the audience to comprehend the depths of this warrior outsider so ripe for manipulation. When he recounts telling his life story to Desdemona's father, Brabantio (Bruce Bohne), his blunt but courtly manner lends

No gimmicks, just strong acting, in Park Square's moving "Othello."



dimension to the tale: This onetime slave, risen to military prominence, has fallen in love with the young woman who is moved most by his will and perseverance.

Iago would presumably not be the sort of theatergoer who roots for happy endings, however, and Hendrickson takes obvious relish in portraying one of the stage's all-time greatest heels. His conspiratorial asides to the audience leave one with the urge to take a hot soapy shower, and his one-on-ones with Williams are masterful, with each locating little surprises in the dialogue, and all manner of subterranean currents of envy, insecurity and the malleability of how we perceive this thing called reality.

The secondary aspects of the production are probably best complimented by noting that they don't hinder the principal actors, including Rice's convincing but rather thankless wife of besmirched virtue and Virginia Burke's Emilia, who finds the fire to denounce husband Iago (for all the good it does her). This turbulent stew of emotion is in sound hands with this cast, every twist of the blade just about as inevitable and ruinous as a great tragedy warrants.