

Park Square's "Othello" is traditional and satisfying

Rebecca Mitchell, Tuesday, October 27, 2009

It's with some shame I must admit that upon learning I'd be attending William Shakespeare's *Othello* this weekend, I pulled out my paperback Folger Library edition of the popular piece. I wanted to make some attempt to reacquaint myself with the story, lest I get lost in the language. Attendees of Park Square Theatre's production of *Othello* can quash similar worries. Under Richard Cook's traditional direction this production is easy to follow. Still, Shakespeare's familiar language is at the forefront of this production, with simple staging allowing for some of the Twin Cities' finest talent to carry the piece.

The Park Square Theatre production—not to be confused with the Ten Thousand Things production now playing in Minneapolis—uses nearly 20 actors to tell one of Shakespeare's more tragic stories. Unfortunately, while these extra bodies bring a visual



presence to the intimate stage, they are given little to do. Given little to interact with on the bare stone stage, they are at times more of a distraction, as is the music that more often ruins than sets the mood.

It is the infallible cast, even if slightly too large, that anchors a resonating and relevant production. James A Williams's *Othello* is more victim than hero. Yet, that the regal, confident *Othello* we see at the beginning of the play could be so gullible as to believe Iago's suggestion of his wife's unfaithfulness is fully believable.



As Iago, Steve Hendrickson is so sly, so cunning, we do not fault *Othello* for falling for his cruel tricks.

Early on we give in to the fact that *Othello* will succumb to Iago, who maliciously—and deliciously—drives the plot's development through his twisted lies and hidden agendas. In his asides to the audience, there is an uneasy humor in how effortless it is for him to corrupt and control *Othello*'s trust.

Stacia Rice is a convincing *Desdemona*, steadfast and beautiful. However, she seemed to lose that confidence as the play moved forward, hardly putting up a fight upon learning of *Othello*'s intentions to kill her. Quite the opposite in the role of Iago's wife, Emilia, Virginia Burke picked up steam as the play progressed, resulting in a roaring revelation of Iago's true intentions in the final scene.

After reading Jay Gabler's review of the Ten Thousand Things production, it is clear to me that Park Square Theatre went for a more traditional, yet still effective, version. Twin Cities theatergoers should revel in the opportunity to see such vastly different interpretations of such a familiar piece.