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REVIEW: OTHELLO

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O *thello* starts rather light and fun but steadily descends into a bitter and twisted plot for misguided revenge, which left the audience at last night's Opening performance tellingly silent by the show's tragic end.

The Ville



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The tale follows Othello, General of the Venetian Army, who secretly marries Desdemona, much to her father's dismay. Soon after their marriage, Othello is sent to defend Cyprus and Desdemona is trusted to the care of Iago and his wife Emilia. Driven by his hatred for Othello, Iago plots to destroy him by tearing apart his happy marriage. Through a cunning plan, Iago convinces Othello that Desdemona has been unfaithful with his dear friend and lieutenant Cassio; and Othello becomes convinced that the pair must be killed for their disloyalty.

Theatre iNQ, under Direction of Terri Brabon, has crafted a spectacularly powerful show with gripping performances from the talented cast.

Alfie Gledhill has returned to Townsville after 10 years to take on the titular character and his first lead role. Alfie's performance is nothing short of mesmerising – he quickly wins the audience's favour as the charming, trusting, well-loved and loved-up Othello. With his commanding charisma it is easy to see how this

young Moor (Othello is usually portrayed as an older character) has quickly risen through the ranks to General with the backing of his loyal troops. However, as Iago's poisonous words take effect, Othello becomes deliriously jealous and enraged; and Alfie plays this to perfection with a sense of violent confusion and helplessness that starkly contrasts with his earlier confidence.

Brendan O'Connor shines as the lecherous and dastardly Iago; who works his two-faced scheme against Othello from the very beginning. The woman beside me best summed it up when part-way through Act One I heard her mutter '*Ooooh, he's a bastard*'. Indeed, he is. Brendan's skill and experience for bringing Shakespeare's words to life has never been better showcased and the juxtaposition between malice and joviality underpinned a fabulous performance.



Alfie Gledhill and Brendan O'Connor as Othello and Iago PHOTO:
Chrissy Maguire

I doubt there was a heart in the audience that didn't break for the sweet, devoted Desdemona, played by another returning export, Brittany Santariga. Brittany filled this character with such warmth, kindness and purity that her pain at being accused of any wrongdoing was felt by all present. Each of Desdemona's relationships – from her unwavering love for her husband to the sisterhood developing between her and Emilia – was portrayed with subtle nuance; and it was clear that Brittany dug deeply to make Desdemona's final scenes so hard-hitting.

Equally loyal and similarly wronged was Cassio, played by yet another home-coming actor, James Thomasson. James filled this poor, unsuspecting pawn with a beautiful boyish charm that highlights Cassio's devotion to Othello and – upon being cast from his post following a drunken altercation engineered by Iago – his desperation to restore his reputation. James made it easy to sympathise with this good-natured character who is driven by his moral compass and sense of duty.

Taking on the supporting, though pivotal, role of Emilia is Terri Brabon herself. Emilia is a practical woman and headstrong wife; and Terri plays her with fabulous independence and sass. As her bond strengthens with Desdemona and the play's tragedy unfolds, Emilia makes a final, powerful confession that brings everything to a head in another performance that will have your breath catch in your throat.

Injecting some much-needed comic relief – and most certainly stealing the show at times – is Robert Street as the smitten Roderigo, who foolishly aids Iago's schemes in hopes of winning Desdemona for himself. Robert always brings a unique brand of physicality to his performances and this is no exception.



Theatre iNQ's Othello runs until 29 September 2019. PHOTO:
Chrissy Maguire

The main players are supported by a fabulous ensemble including Theatre iNQ mainstays John 'Goodo' Goodson and Michael Sams, and the talented trainee actors from Theatre iNQ's Bridge Project.

Of course, the setting in Queens Gardens is also a major player; and I think this year's was the best yet. Brendan's impressive set stood magnificently against the backdrop of lush garden, with towering pillars and a single gum tree lit to brilliant effect. Kathy Brabon's costumes were a visual feast of gold, teal and ruby; and I found myself seriously coveting Desdemona's wardrobe. Disrupted sight-lines that plague just about every other venue in town were a non-issue. And a sweet perfume that filled the air created a wonderful sense of place that transported the crowd from Townsville's city-fringe to 16th Century Cypress. There were at times some elements within the soundscape that didn't totally

make sense to me – most notably, some otherworldly groans and clanking as Othello recounted how he won Desdemona's heart with his stories of bravery and peril. However, this does not detract from an immensely powerful production.

Theatre iNQ's *Othello* is passionate and sexy; violent and vengeful; funny and at times frightening, when you consider how terribly destructive the mere seeds of suspicion can be. This show is more than entertaining and is sure to leave you musing on how effectively the tiny spark of a rumour can erupt into a blazing inferno.

Theatre iNQ's *Othello* runs in Queens Gardens until 29 September 2019. [For session times and tickets, click here.](https://www.theatreinq.com/html/productions/past-productions/2019/2019-othello.html) (<https://www.theatreinq.com/html/productions/past-productions/2019/2019-othello.html>)

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