

A photograph of a man and a woman lying on a pool table. The man is on top of the woman, and they are both looking towards the camera. The pool table has a green felt top and several pool balls (yellow, red, white) scattered around. The background is a dark red wall with a repeating diamond pattern.

OTHELLO

BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

A Comprehensive Guide for students (aged 14+), teachers & arts educationalists
Written by Scott Graham and the creative team



Matthew Trevannion, Tom Gill and Joe Layton

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AN INTRODUCTION



Why Othello today?

by Scott Graham, Artistic Director

There are several answers to this question. We generally have a few shows in differing stages of development. Sometimes they complement each other or are designed to contrast, to refresh the expectations that might gather around and within the company. Within these plans Othello lurked in the distance. I always wanted to return to it but it was not in immediate view. As the world turned upside down so did everyone's best laid plans. Projects could not come together as easily as hoped and there was a risk that rushing them would endanger them. Compromise was not an option. The more we thought about the way the world was tearing itself up the more Othello came back into view.

But why was it pushing its way to the front? It would be wrong to deny a certain pragmatism helped it along the way. Returning from our Covid caves we found our touring theatre sector in a perilous and fragile state. Othello was a production that I knew worked and I believed would be a strong offer for theatres to help bring tentative audiences back. But it had to be more than that. I could not simply tread water and knock out another production of Othello. It had to be saying something to me now.

I found myself looking at it differently. The first two productions (2008, 2013) focused on the tinderbox of racial tension and economic deprivation in the UK in 2001, very much inspired by the Nick Davies book Dark Heart. At the time it felt contemporary but now I felt that the world had lurched and there were new lenses through which to consider Othello and how it relates to us.

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The more we thought about the way the world was tearing itself up the more Othello came back into view.



Director, Scott Graham



Michael Akinsulire, Tom Gill, Felipe Pacheco and Joe Layton

I became fascinated by misinformation and its poisonous effect. Yes, Othello is about jealousy and racism. Yes, it is about sex and violence and all the other things that drew us to it in the first place but more than ever I found myself focusing on the weapons used to create the chaos that ensues. It was about misinformation and how it is used. Also, how little proof was needed to have its effect. Clearly this was a world where the veracity of the information received did not matter. What mattered was how it made you feel. Sound familiar?

Misinformation (or selected lies and carefully curated half-truths) were the poison that corrupted the love and passion of Othello but also Brabantio, Roderigo and Iago himself. It eats them. Remember, Emilia says

*Some such squire he was
That turn'd your wit the seamy side without,
And made you to suspect me with the Moor.*

If anyone knows the power of a little information, it is Iago.

*O, beware, my Lord, of jealousy;
Tis the green eyed monster which doth mock
The meat it feeds on; that cuckold lives in bliss
Who, certain of his fate, loves not his wronger
But, O, what damned minutes tells he o'er
Who dotes, yet doubts, suspects, yet strongly
loves!*

*Good heaven, the souls of all my tribe defend
From jealousy*



Michael Akinsulire

So where are we before the poison began its work? Who knows who Iago and Emilia might have been before it ruined their relationship? (It is probably important to point out that we never dismiss any of the rumours around their relationship as simply false. It is much more interesting to hold the idea that indiscretions were possible. And if that is the case then who were they with? How does this inform any interactions? The possible ambiguity and potential for secrets is really exciting.)

Brabantio and Othello seemed to be a beautifully nurturing relationship until Brabantio was wound up by Iago and Roderigo, unleashing all kinds of racist abuse.

Othello and Desdemona may not have been the perfect love and quite possibly highly naive but without the poison they would have been just like any other passionate and blossoming romance. That might be the point worth making. We are all susceptible to the poison of misinformation and we are not equipped to spot it because it is busy making us feel. Those feelings are immediate and visceral. When, or if we ever see it, we are already its fools.

This 2022 version and the original Resource Pack

There is a line in Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape* that has always stood out and haunted me. The old man listens to versions of himself recorded over the years and feels at times charmed but also repulsed by the naivety, arrogance or even the happiness in the voice of his former self.

The line is

*'Just been listening to that stupid b*****d I took myself for thirty years ago...'*

That line always comes to me when I anticipate looking back over anything I have written. Not that I always come to that conclusion! It is in the anticipation!

This updated resource is to be read with the original resource pack, but it is worth remembering that the original was written during the first creative period, long before our production met its audience. It is a document of a show yet to be made. An indication of the creative ambition.

Things have, quite naturally, moved on and I come to this production of *Othello* from a different perspective. I think the resource pack remains an interesting read and is a valid insight into the early days of making a show but there are a couple of things to point out.



Tom Gill, Michael Akinsulire and Matthew Trevannion



Chanel Waddock

In the original resource pack, you will see a section called Mock Baroque. There is no such scene in our current version (or the 2014 production). As a scene it worked but I wanted to try something else when I returned to it.

When you read the Characters section it is important to understand that all character thoughts belong to the actors. They were their initial thoughts before rehearsals on who they might be in the context within which we were placing our production. They did not reflect conversations between performer and director and certainly did not reflect thoughts picked up along the way.

We have done the same with the 2022 resource pack. These are initial thoughts and as such, they will change. A bit like that line from Krapp's Last Tape, maybe they will even be unrecognisable once actors have gone through the process of interacting with each other and then with an audience. Those three stages build a character. It would be fascinating to ask the actors if any of their thoughts have changed and what might have surprised them along the way.



REHEARSALS

The company of Othello in rehearsals

The Structure of Rehearsals

We set out with four weeks of rehearsals before our technical week in Leicester. Covid pretty much stole our first week away from us meaning that we were really up against it to make the show in what would be half the time of the original rehearsal period.

I had every intention of sitting with the company and wrestling with every nuance of the text but once time became so precious, we all had to be a little more pragmatic. While we still worked our way through the text, I also had to find a way of them discovering character and relationships through physicality (more on this later). I also had to get performers to understand how I was going to make the production and how their work laced together with that of sound and light to create precise images. This is not to undermine them or their own process. It is to empower and excite them about the potential of the project. It is to get them to understand how the visual picture comes together and the role of the active audience within that (and more on that later too!)

Having essentially three weeks I decided that I needed to get Act 1 done in the first week and Act 2 in the second. Week three would be about a second pass at scenes, building towards a stagger through, then a jog through and then a run through. I would concentrate on physical training and choreography in the mornings and work through scenes in the afternoons. Tuesday and Thursday evenings sessions would both focus on the Othello and Iago scenes. In the second week those sessions would be split Tuesday – Othello and Iago, Thursday – Othello and Desdemona. These scenes are the spine of the play and need a thorough inspection.



Perry Johnson and Scott Graham

The physical aspect of the production takes time. It is ambitious and very few of the performers enter the room on day 1 believing that they are capable of doing what they achieve when they leave the room. This takes time, patience, and a lot of sweat.

Every actor carries their weight, tension and anxiety in a different way, and you have to find and negotiate that while keeping the room positive in the face of what can feel like relentless failure. This is where it is important to keep an eye on the tiny steps forward and hold on to them. We had to remain patient and persistent but always open and receptive to the ways that the performers were processing information.

It is not easy, but I find the process worth it. Each day brings a little success, and we build on that. That in itself becomes empowering and eventually something clicks, and the performers are transformed. This is not a fluke. It is by design. Right from the first moment we were looking to see where each performer carried their weight and where they were holding their tension. This could be resisting a move because they were fearful, or it could be because they were trying too hard to make it happen. It is about having a good eye for the physical mechanics but also a sensitive ear for the anxieties.



Michael Akinsulire and Chanel Waddock

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But when it clicks something wonderful happens and everything gets so much easier. Moves become about balance rather than strength. Performers work together to achieve them rather than imposing themselves upon the other. It just takes time to find it.

Focusing on the text and physicality in different sessions feels necessary to take the pressure off both as thinking about them at the same time too early on can inhibit the performer. The point worth making is that I am always thinking about character in both sessions, and I am encouraging the performers to make discoveries about this in these sessions. Importantly it is about what they find rather than what they think they know. They are defined as much by their interactions with others as they are by any presumptions made by the actor before rehearsal.

Working at such speed and in such a short time frame requires huge buy in from the performers and they worked their socks off. Remarkably, I can't remember a moment from rehearsal where a performer brought their script to a scene. All words were learned meaning that the performers were ready to take on much more new information. The vital thing was that the rehearsals for the performers became as much about listening and receiving as it was about delivering.

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Michael Akinsulire, Joe Layton and Scott Graham

The third week was about returning to the drafts of scenes we had made in weeks 1 and 2. There is always the possibility that these weeks can feel like years away and we either retained very little or find out that what we thought was good is nothing of the kind! Fortunately, this cast was meticulous and was ready to build upon their work in the previous weeks.

I am writing this as we are about to begin our technical rehearsals. We have had one full run in the rehearsal room and what could have been an exercise in merely trying to remember what we have done and not getting hurt in the process began to ignite. I think having a small, friendly audience helped but it was hugely exciting. So much so that I am itching to get started and take that energy to the next level.

Of course, the tech involves so much repetition and standing around for the actor that they can often feel the show and all their connection with it ebbing away. I will be working hard to make sure that doesn't happen.

I love the technical rehearsals. It all gets very real and this can be where the best ideas are born. As ever it is about being open and receptive to possibilities rather than belligerently trying to cram the show you made in a rehearsal room into a new theatre. My job is to share that excitement and potential with the performers and make sure they see the technical rehearsals as a continuation of the creative process rather than a stalling of it.



Felipe Pacheco, Michael Akinsulire, Oliver Baines, Chanel Waddock and Tom Gill

Early days

There can be a tendency, especially when exploring and trying to find meaning and connection within Shakespeare, for actors to strain and push that towards an audience. Certainly, in my limited experience, affection becomes fawning, we are bludgeoned by jokes and significance is screamed in our faces.

This forgets how active an audience can be and how adept they can be at reading non-verbal situations. They can feel the tension, they can sense a secret being held, they can see the desire to embrace. We just need to make sure we are inviting them forward in their seats and not pushing them backwards. A passive audience quickly becomes a bored, or worse, a patronised audience.



Scott Graham

REHEARSAL EXERCISES



The company of Othello in rehearsals

An Active Audience – The Numbers

I wanted to give the performers the experience of being the active audience. I wanted them to understand how much work that active audience does in finding meaning and reading situations on stage. As ever this is not to take power away from the actors. This knowledge is to empower them and guide them to a precise and considered performance.

As this was early in rehearsal and just after we had read the whole play together, the opinions of the actors were about their own characters. We had spent time talking about scenes and relationships but at this point I wanted an exercise where I could show them these relationships from the point of view of an audience.

The set up was incredibly simple. As our setting was a pool room in a pub, I just invited all of the performers to move through that space, inhabit it as their character and get used to the people that they might meet. All of this was without words.

This presents an already interesting chaos from the outside, but this was essentially the preparation for the next stage.



The company of Othello in rehearsals

I gave each actor a number 1 to 9 (I asked the performer playing Brabantio and Lodovico to just be Brabantio for this exercise). All actors were to inhabit the space, keeping busy, moving around the pool table, chatting, playing pool. I would then call out a couple of numbers and everyone else would leave the room immediately and those numbers would stay there.

Immediately there was electricity between the characters. Straight away there was a tension between Brabantio and Desdemona. You could sense a secret and trouble to come. It lasts for a couple of seconds and then 'Go!' invites everyone back in and the image is wiped. Two more numbers might reveal Iago and Emilia and an intense magnetism, attracting and repelling. All of this without words. All of this without the knowledge of the performers on stage. All of this in the minds of the active audience.

I kept the numbers random, and each combination threw up something fascinating to our observers. Those observers were the creative team but also the actors who had retreated from the scene. It showed just how much we, as an audience can read and project onto a moment. Of course, we had an idea of the relationships already having read the play but the random element of the exercise threw up interactions that did not meet within the play, but they were no less rich.



The company of Othello in rehearsals



The company of Othello in rehearsals

The beauty of this exercise is that there are no right or wrong answers from the observations. A multitude of differing opinions only reinforces how much detail an active audience gets from two people standing still on stage.

Once the exercise was running for a while, I noticed that the actors left on stage began to force the situation a little. As soon as the others had cleared, they were making gestures to each other. Interestingly, this meant that there was no space to invite the audience into. The moment had been defined, the action taken, and the tension dissipated.

I instructed the performers to think about the gesture they wanted to make (it might be as simple as offering a pool cue to someone, inviting them to take a shot) but not make it straight away, to allow stillness to exist before the gesture. Immediately this was the most interesting part. The questioning in the audience's mind. What are they wanting? What are they going to do? The subsequent action or gesture became the dissipation of that tension.

This showed us where the audience was most active and how much engagement there was in stillness and the potential for action rather than simply observing that action.

The point of this was simply to introduce the actors to the idea of an active audience and how best to invite them into the moment. It was clear that the audience is a clever beast and that often less is more in communicating to them.



Chanel Waddock and Oliver Baines

It also helped our actors understand how they did not have to force a moment. So much happens in looks, thoughts and glances and with precise staging and delivery our audience will read them all.

Finding Edges

It was clear from day one of rehearsal that we needed some time to make our actors look and feel comfortable within the setting of our Othello. Rehearsals naturally begin with kind and considerate performers easing their way into new relationships and new characters, but I needed a way of quickly getting them to inhabit a world of sharp edges, summary violence, with a cockiness and sense of belonging. The actors were kind and considerate with each other, but I needed something else from them. Not unkindness but a confidence in the space they take up. Maybe they were a little demure. I needed to unearth a personal and shared confidence if I was ever going to believe these were the people of The Cypress.

I wanted to find the edges in those characters.

It was about how we held the pool cue. It needed to be a split second away from being a weapon. It was about how we passed the cue to someone else. It was not an offer. It should be passed with an expectation it will be received. It does not need to be received with a thanks but with an expectation it should be offered. The mind should be on the next shot rather than on any gratitude for having been given the cue.

This was not rudeness. It was familiarity and it was clear we were not there yet.



The actors were kind and considerate with each other, but I needed something else from them.

The company of Othello in rehearsals

We decided to have a play with some choreography. The opening track of the show has such a building intensity it felt perfect to guide us and help bring some of that confidence and energy out of our performers.

Co-choreographer Perry Johnson gave them a simple choreographic string to learn. His disturbing description of the moves involved ripping the heads of rabbits and skewering them! The effect was to take them out of any of their expectations about this show, their character or of Shakespeare. We were just going to have a little fun.

The choreography picked out accents or punctuation within the music (*Just For Today* by Hybrid). This meant really punching out the 2, 4 and 7, 8 of a bar of 8 counts. Once they had learnt the choreography Perry pushed them until the energy ramped up and up. This is where the violence of his descriptions worked their magic. It required commitment and accuracy. It was a directorial note that shaped the intensity of the movement.

From a general dance we then constructed a dance off between two lines where one from each line would come forward within an 8 count, face off and try to outdo each other through the choreography. They would be cheered on by their team and return to the fold once they had completed the moves. They would then be replaced by two others. It was a random choice about who came forward.



Kirsty Stuart, Chanel Waddock, Joe Layton and Hannah Sinclair Robinson

The result was great fun, and the right kind of energy and presence was beginning to emerge both in the dance and in those cheering on. We started again but this time they were instructed to be in character and allow for the random interactions that worked so well in *The Numbers*.

Immediately there was a dip in energy as the performers were caught up in thinking what it meant to be in character or what their character would do. We encouraged them to just go for it, to remember what they had learned from *The Numbers* and allow the audience to do the work. Also, to think about reacting in the moment as your character rather than preparing for something on the outside and presenting it in the middle.

The result was electric. It did not matter whether it was Montano and Desdemona or Brabantio and Othello. It all made sense. Furthermore, the physicality was big and unapologetic. It was celebrated and embraced. Contact was made. It was strong and secure. They were becoming a group. They were bonding as people, as an acting company, and as characters.

And they were finding their edge.



Hannah Sinclair Robinson, Chanel Waddock and Kirsty Stuart

IGNITION



Tom Gill, Joe Layton, Felipe Pacheco, Matthew Trevannion and Oliver Baines

Ignition and Othello

Ignition is our UK wide program to find and nurture talent, bringing new voices and fresh perspectives into the theatre industry.

The idea formed roughly 15 years ago and, as I write, our Practitioners are crossing the country working with partner venues in 13 towns and cities to share the company's working practice and engage and inspire young people to get involved and find their potential. We are not simply looking for those who already want to find a way into theatre. We are looking for those that have the skills but might not know it yet. And to find them we look in the places no one else is looking.

Ignition has been a tremendous success. My ambition was that it would, over time, present a scenario where it had brought some people through to have professional careers within theatre and that, one day, I might come calling. As it is, Ignition has provided many of the Practitioners who now teach the Frantic Method across the world. They are the direct inspiration and indication of the success of Ignition, having come to it from diverse backgrounds and situations that would never have led to this point without the Ignition experience.



Ignition 2017

When you watch Othello, you will also be watching the work of five more Ignition graduates. Three of them are performers and two more are the co-Choreographer and the Associate Director respectively. Their work, energy and contribution has been exemplary. They, too, are examples of what can be achieved through the nurture of Ignition. They are here, within this professional touring production, on their own merit having applied themselves and proving themselves more than worthy.

As a teacher watching the show, think of that young person who might possess the skills, the application, and the energy. Especially the one that doesn't know it yet. That was me. A teacher pushed me through a door because they thought it might work for me. It did, but the point was my previous lack of engagement was not a reticence or fear of going through that door. I did not know the door was there.

Young people who have come through Ignition have found the confidence to find work within all areas of the Arts. There are actors, dancers, writers, poets, and composers who cite their experience on Ignition as formative and inspiring. There are also many who have taken that intense experience and applied it outside the Arts, and this is just as valid and gives us just as much pride. It is vital that we work with you to continue to show people their potential and that the Arts can be for them and that the Arts are a vital expression of our nation's creativity and not just an occasional past-time of those that can afford it.

You can find more information about Ignition [HERE](#)



Michael Akinsulire, Felipe Pacheco, Oliver Baines and Chanel Waddock

A close-up photograph of a Black man with a beard, wearing a light blue t-shirt. He is holding a lit cigarette in his mouth and lighting it with a match held in his right hand. The background is dark and moody, with a spotlight effect on his face. The overall tone is dramatic and contemplative.

CHARACTER STUDIES

Michael Akinsulire

Character Studies

These character studies were the actor's thoughts as rehearsals began. I think they serve as an interesting snapshot of how an actor might begin a process, but it is important to point out that this does not reflect the conversations with and guidance of a director. They do not reflect discoveries made along the way through epiphany or simply by listening and reacting to your fellow actors/characters on stage. I am sure these opinions would develop and change. I have always said that I go into a rehearsal room to find out what I don't know and not to confirm what I do know. I think it is the same for actors and is one of the most exciting aspects of what we do!



I have always said that I go into a rehearsal room to find out what I don't know and not to confirm what I do know.

What is written below was written in isolation. Read together it might not match up. It might not make sense. But this section is only to show what an individual brings to a production at the beginning and how, over time and lots of work, that information must adapt different minds come together to make a production.



Scott Graham, Michael Akinsulire and Matthew Trevannion



Othello
Michael Akinsulire

A delicate human with a turbulent past. Approaches life and all its components with the highest of caution and doesn't open up to people easily. His past is filled with pain and loss, and while there is trauma that has left immovable scars in him, there is also a greater understanding and appreciation for life and real, honest relationships. His mighty stature is the thing that has ensured his safety along with his intelligence and ability to really understand people. A trait learned from his first love, his mother.

Othello and Iago share a habit of anger and ego. A friendship built on experiences in violence, women, camaraderie, and past experiences prior to knowing each other.

They are similar.

They share pain.

Othello understands Iago's pain and sees past it, recognising the root of his persona and not judging how he copes. Really seeing him for who he is.

The only relationships he has valued since his mother died are with 'common' people in the pub he calls home.

Nothing glamorous, nothing appealing (to outsiders). Just everyday people, in his eyes, who aren't without they're faults, but people whom he has grown to know, love and appreciate.

Whether it is reciprocated is all perspective. But for the first time since his mother died, there is a place that FEELS just a little bit, like home.



Desdemona
Chanel Waddock

Desdemona is about to turn 18. She is from Croydon. She is bold, bright brave and ballsy.

Her Dad, Brabantio, being a well-respected man and forever frequent within the pub setting makes Desdemona feel comfortable here and is fond and familiar of the boys. She spent a lot of time growing up in the pub, as Dad kept downing pints, she was taken under the wing of the other locals to the pub. To keep busy she would arrange pub quiz and karaoke nights; whether people who occupied the pub would participate is another question. Maybe one day she will fulfil her aim to be an event's organiser as a living?

She is a product of her environment, and she does what it takes to survive. She always thinks of herself through the male gaze. Living in a social environment which is built for men where misogyny undeniably and ignorantly thrives.

Frantic's version, setting this story in this claustrophobic pub riddled with machismo, toxic masculinity, hierarchy, and the value of reputation makes me, Chanel, think about so many current issues around women's bodily autonomy in 2022; the spike in domestic abuse cases being reported during the pandemic, the horrific cases of sexual assault and violence against women in recent years, records within the sexual



misconduct, hypocrisy and abuse of power within upper echelons of society and power, the US Supreme Court's decision to overturn Roe V Wade (Although Desdemona wouldn't be conscious of this herself but I, the artist, find it fascinating how issues of this story have transcended time)

Desdemona wouldn't have gone to school much unless she had classes with people she could doss about or flirt with. She would mostly bunk school to do domestic chores around the house for a couple of quid to then put it together with her girl's money to have enough for a bottle of Smirnoff Ice.

She desires the nuclear family and a harmony within that, that she never had.

She loves loving Othello.

Iago has been failed by the 'system' - neglected as a child, he was surrounded by violence and abuse at home before being taken into care. Excluded from school, he spent time in and out of juvenile detention throughout his teenage years. 'The Cypress' and the people he met there gave him a home and a sense of belonging for the first time in his life. In Emilia, he found a person he could trust, could be vulnerable with and could love. In Othello, he found brotherhood, a person he would give his life for and a man he admires.

A chameleon, capable of shapeshifting into whatever the relationship or situation demands, he's the life and soul of the party - but when we meet Iago at the beginning of the play, he is in a deeply paranoid headspace - recently out of prison after a 3-month sentence - the time inside has given him a lot of time to think and to him, it feels as if his world is falling in on itself. The cocktail of being overlooked by Othello in the promotion of Cassio and the suspicion that Emilia may have betrayed him by sleeping with Othello - proves a deadly catalyst.

Driven by jealousy and a fear of abandonment and insignificance - Iago is doing everything he can to try and survive, to matter, and to have control over his destiny and he's willing to do whatever it takes to make it happen.



Iago
Joe Layton



The cocktail of being overlooked by Othello in the promotion of Cassio and the suspicion that Emilia may have betrayed him by sleeping with Othello - proves a deadly catalyst.

Bianca, 22, is new to this community, having only moved there within the past 2 months. She has moved around a lot in her life so is accustomed to temporary relationships and it takes a lot for her to form true, genuine, lasting connections. Living with her sick mother and younger sister, she is the main breadwinner so has a maturity and a distance to the pub life, that the rest of the characters dwell in. Because of this lack of integration, she is on the fringes of the group and the lowest in status. Her loud, flirtatious behaviour doesn't attract many friends, but she doesn't care. She knows who she is which is a fun, passionate and unashamed individual.

She is also the only other person of colour aside from Othello within our staging of the production, which could influence why the rest of the group don't gel with her. Othello has had a chance to prove himself in "battle" and is therefore accepted however Bianca doesn't have that nor has she been around long enough to earn the respect of the group.

Her relationship with Cassio is new and exciting with genuine care and affection between them. From the outside it looks purely physical but when alone with Cassio, Bianca can reveal the vulnerable side of herself, which makes his later betrayal much more hurtful. However, no matter how badly Cassio treats Bianca in public, she still wants him and believes there will be a time where they can be open, free and honest with their intimacy.



Bianca
Hannah Sinclair
Robinson



Roderigo is naive, yet switched on; impressionable, yet confronting; quick to run away, yet fiery. He is the culmination of all these contradictions, which express themselves quickly and sharply throughout the play. Surprising, maybe, for a character who from a first reading, might seem like a bit of a cry-baby! I have been keen though to delve deeper into Roderigo. If you think about where he comes from, why he's there, and what he does in the play, he becomes a lovely challenge from an acting perspective.

Firstly, (as if all these contradictions weren't enough) he both truly belongs in this tense and volatile world we create - partaking in all of the fun and games and manoeuvring comfortably in its spaces - but in many ways, is also seen as an outsider, no-one except for Iago pays him much attention. This is partly because he is younger than most of the pub-goers. We spoke about him being roughly the same age as Desdemona, and that really affects his relationships on stage. He is terrified of Brabantio for example, once the top-dog in the pub, and gets on better with the youthful Montano and Cassio, although they probably make him the brunt of their jokes. What can you do if you're the youngest? Secondly, something



Roderigo
Felipe Pacheco



key to note is that Roderigo has more money than most in the pub. We hear (and see) that a lot, and in the original text, he is described as a gentleman of Venice. The relevance of this in our story isn't particularly important, but it does help me decide what he might do to earn his money, or where he may have first encountered Iago (who brought him to The Cypress in the first place). These questions then offer clues to his character

and start painting a picture of someone who a whirling ball of highs and lows, hopes and frustrations. One thing that does always stay the same for Roderigo though, is his tunnel-vision pursuit of Desdemona. So, whilst it is an exciting challenge for me to squeeze all these juicy traits into one character, I find that coming back to a singular driving force really helps to ground him in his scenes.



Brabantio/Lodivico
Matthew Trevannion

I play two characters within the play, both related to Desdemona. Firstly, as her father, Brabantio, it was important that Chanel (Desdemona) and I discussed the absence of her mother, my wife. Once we understood this missing piece, we were better able to relate to each other. In short, we built a shared history which is never seen but helps tie us to one another as a family. Later, as her cousin, Lodivico, I decided that the key lies in hailing from the same place. I adopted her accent, which not only serves to establish a familial link, but also helps differentiate my first character from my second. In any play, the lead actors carry the narrative, so it is vital that supporting actors enter the stage ready and willing to serve the play with focus, commitment, and energy. For me, it is this simple principal that sets Frantic Assembly apart. It is vital that the cast work as a unit with regards to both the text and our physical selves. It is only then that we can ensure connections in every sense and in doing so provide the audience with something worth watching.





Cassio
Tom Gill

Cassio is a Mancunian lad in his early 20's well respected by the boys and a massive flirt with the ladies. His shiny reputation means the world to him and he's desperate to maintain it at all costs. He buzzes off being Othello's trusted lieutenant and is ever reliable in his service to Othello. He struggles with alcohol, too much boozing brings up deep rooted anger stemming from early trauma and a difficult upbringing. He suffers with panic attacks and knows certain spirits just do not agree with him. On the other hand, he also loves to be the life and soul of a party. Plus, what else is there to do round here? Despite his shortcomings, he is smarter than he lets on, and has a genuine connection with outsider Bianca. He keeps this on the down low, so as not to jeopardise his own status within the group. Throughout the play he learns some difficult lessons, but lives to tell the tale, and is eventually handed power of 'The Cypress'.





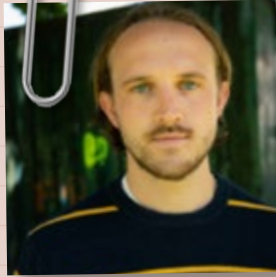
Emilia
Kirsty Stuart

Emilia left an unhappy home (Falkirk, Scotland) as soon as she could, and found work and friendship with the regulars at The Cypress. It became her home and the people in it, her family. A young Desdemona would come into the pub with her dad, Brabantio, and Emilia took her under her wing and helped her navigate the masculine and often violent world of the pub. Emilia always has an eye on Desdemona – she feels a sense of responsibility even though Desdemona is now an adult and in a relationship with Othello.



Emilia has always been 'one of the lads' and manages to hold her own just fine in this world. She has been in a relationship with Iago for several years, she was first attracted to him because he was different from the other lads; intelligent and a big thinker. Their relationship was brilliant in the beginning, but over the last year or so she has felt him slipping away. She is hurt by his dismissive and jealous behaviour but would love to get things back on track – she sees the new, pure love between Othello and Desdemona and wishes she could return to that time with Iago. She knows she should probably leave him but still loves him deeply, so can't make the leap. What would she have left if she lost Iago?

Othello and Emilia's relationship is an interesting one. She respects him and will be loyal to his leadership, but also won't just follow him blindly. Her loyalty to Desdemona comes first. As older members of the group, they have a respect for each other and each other's experience. It is this that allows Emilia to challenge Othello in ways that others wouldn't dream of.



Montano
Oliver Baines

Montano is a lad from Manchester in his early 20s. He lives at home with his mum and his dog, Duke. A drug dealer by trade, he's the life and soul but also has an edge to him. You would not want to cross him because he's the kind of guy who would not only hit you, but he'd do it with a pool ball in his hand just for good measure. He is a foot soldier and goes from 0 - 100 in a second; he would fight to the death for the others in "The Cypress". His passion and likeliness to flip his lid comes from a place deep inside him that wants to be respected and accepted as a member of the group since his dad walked out. This is especially apparent with Othello and Cassio. He fears their rejection because he doesn't have anywhere else, he feels at home. Even though Montano lives in this dingy and dark world full of deceit he values the truth above all else. This is woven naturally into his speech; he wants everyone to put everything on the table so they can move on and have a good time or go outside and sort it out. He is respected for his unhinged brawling abilities and his sense of humour. Montano's protective and flirtatious with the ladies, but he's also one of the boys. He can be cheeky and charming, but don't push him too far.





INTERVIEWS

The company of Othello

David Gilbert

Associate Director

Q What is the role of an Associate Director?

David: An Associate Director, particularly for Othello is essentially just being an extra pair of hands. With Othello there are a lot of moving parts - there is the physical work, the text work and then there is also a complicated set. It's about being an intermediary for the Director if they can't be in two places at once so being able to be the eyes and ears of that scene work or conversation.

Q What does a typical day look like for you working on Othello?

David: A typical day starts off with a conversation before rehearsals start, that's checking in on what the day is going to look like, what we are going to do, what we are going to focus on between myself, Scott (Artistic Director) and Perry (Co Choreographer). We start off with a big warm up, everyone's involved, jumping in and getting the body ready for work. After warm up its essentially looking at the movement. There was one session where Scott needed to work on the Cassio drunk scene but also, we needed to work on the Othello and Desdemona scene so we would split, and I worked with the two actors. Usually, the mornings up until lunch is movement and the afternoon would be text work with the actors which would then take us to the end of the day, usually movement in the morning as you have got the energy for it! In the afternoon you can go light on the body which is good with such a physical show.



David Gilbert

Q What is your relationship with the cast and creatives?

David: It's about trying to identify what each person needs might be, as they are there learning the show there's a lot of spinning parts. Sometimes I might be there looking at the truth and of the moment and finding time to give my perspective on it or if we are doing a particular movement piece seeing a way to solve it and going in with that. A big thing that has been part of this process has been my relationship with Michael who is playing Othello and having so much to say within the play so looking at the text and working out what is going on for Othello in each moment. In terms of the wider cast, it's about spirit and morale, checking with people and saying, 'how are doing, are you ok?'. It is making sure people feel good and strong in themselves and offering little tips and advice particular in a play where this is a lot- the props, the set, the movement, making sure they are getting the counts. It's about making sure you get everything and sometimes Scott cannot hit everyone at the same time so if you can see someone, having a chat about the section and how it can be played with.

Q What has been the most challenging thing in the rehearsals?

David: Time, we lost a few rehearsals in week one, so we have had less time to build everything so it's trying to make the show as we intended but also find new things but with the added pressure of time running out so just balancing that. It has a huge impact on such a physical show, tech week we will all have to bring our 'A' game!

Q What's been your highlight so far?

David: Ultimately it's when they play and what we are doing really clicks, there is a particular lift that Chanel (Desdemona) and Hannah (Bianca) do on the pool table and for ages we just couldn't work out why the lift was not working- it's the moment of when it clicks and we realise 'oh my gosh that's how you do it' and it's not by accident, it's by work, craft and technique. It is finding the truth in their bodies and doing the lift again and seeing it work, the joy of that moment was brilliant! That moment and seeing them pushing and wanting to crack it and knowing its possible.

Q What does Othello mean to you in 2022?

David: What's powerful about telling Othello now is the fascination of how Othello as a black man has a position of power and what that means and what that represents. You meet Othello and with that power and position he is also speaking with such poetry and has this relationship with Desdemona- these are human things that are always important, especially through the lens of being a black man that are being explored. As black men there is a diversity there, there's a complexity to us- it's not just this image of violence or the criminal, seeing Othello fall in love and have heart break and be vulnerable and having these thoughts and feelings I think is powerful. Ultimately, we love to see people fall in love.

I think it also speaks of the difficulty of being in England, the tensions we live with - Othello being in this community as the only black man and having to navigate that space, its important for us to reflect on that. Its relevant because we are still navigating these tensions.

Q So, what happens next?

David: As part of my role, it starts off being the eyes and ears in the room but as the show goes out on the road, I will be essentially the one who will go into each venue and make sure the show is looked after and will report back to Scott (Artistic Director). I will be looking after the show as it travels up and down the country!

Perry Johnson

Co-choreographer

Q What is the role of a Co-choreographer?

Perry: The co-choreographer is mainly there to assist having eyes on and capturing the movement as it is happening, also being given a chance to look at things differently. If Scott were to set something up, he might then ask if there is another way. It's to keep an eye on the movement as it is a bit more structured, so making sure I am on top of the counts when people are coming in, so it takes a bit of pressure off Scott, and I can step up and be the lead in that. It's helpful (having a co-choreographer) as so many of the moments are intertwined, there's so many small sections happening between people all at the same time - it's difficult for one person to be stood at the front and see all of that! It is keeping my eye on the movement and looking out for little details as well, we might get the foundation of movement and then I might suggest little shifts within it. It's fine tuning it!



Perry Johnson

Q What does a typical day look like for you working on Othello?

Perry: We all start off with a warmup and everyone is involved. After the warmup it is looking at what we are going to hit first, all the movement gets tackled in the morning. This is when I know after the warmup, I need to be fully switched on so I can make it as productive as it can be. We figure out what movement we are going to look at, refine the movement or it might be making a whole new piece of movement or looking back at parts we need to change - really looking at all the physical scenes and then running them. With movement it's about repetition that's going to make it better, it is about being in tune with the cast as well and knowing when they are flagging and when they are slipping but really trying to keep them motivated. After lunch we will be looking at scenes. Even then, when it becomes a bit more directional and focused on text, there is still a lot of movement and as a choreographer you do look at bodies and space differently. When a scene might happen, I have had input into entrances and exits or just the general shape of the stage where people are stood.

Q What has been the most challenging thing in the rehearsals?

Perry: The biggest challenge for me personally was not having stepped into the rehearsal room of a theatre show as a choreographer before. I have made work back at home (in Plymouth) with dancers but have never been part of a rehearsal room where I am in that role with that responsibility. There are nerves and anticipation of whether I can do the role! A challenge would be having the confidence, you need to make relationships in the room, being able to come in and get on with everyone in the room - you can't be timid as you need to get them to move and take control of it. You also must be quite adaptable, its being able to work off a change, so if I have a strong idea in my head being open to change. Also, for me it's being confident about music and understanding the tempos and timings, that's what you need to install in the cast- it's not necessarily about counting bars, it's about listening to the music and hearing the changes.

Q What's been your highlight so far?

Perry: When I got to work independently with a couple of cast members and create movement with them. There was one rehearsal where we split the room, Scott told me he wanted me to make the scene on the pool table, so I got to do this. I have had my own input into the show as well, I have been able to take the lead on some moments. I knew the Director had the confidence in me in that role and I took ownership of the scene.

Q What does Othello mean to you in 2022?

Perry: The introduction of misinformation and how this is relevant in our lives in terms of social media, the news and how much things get twisted, and people generate their own opinions which can have massive followings. Othello to me is the presentation of how exploited we are to misinformation and how exploited generally we are every day, when are we making our own mind up?

Bibliography

This is a section where I reference what has genuinely contributed to the conversations and breakthroughs that occur around the creation of his show. You will see from the original resource pack what fed into that production and many of them are still valid today.

I think it is important to point these references out as they can come from anywhere and you should not dismiss anything you might feel is not highbrow enough. If it works, it works.

They can be a moment from a film, an anecdote, a misunderstanding, it does not matter. If they help you and your team understand a moment, then they should be noted. So here are a couple of belters!

Young Frankenstein 'Hello handsome!' Film dr. Mel Brooks

The desperate change of tack Victor Frankenstein takes when confronted with his monster when both are locked in a cell was referenced when Iago has to think quickly to stop Roderigo leaving to tell Desdemona all about his skullduggery.

Grease 'With relish' Film dr. Randal Kleiser

The look of understanding that passes between Danny and Rizzo that seems to suggest a whole history between them as well as commenting so much on his current relationship. She appears to be able to see right into him. This created a tiny but very important moment between Othello and Emilia. It does not suggest anything definite. It just tantalizingly opens a possibility.

FRANTIC ASSEMBLY

BRIXTON HOUSE,
385 COLDHARBOUR LANE,
BRIXTON,
LONDON, SW9 8GL

+44 (0)20 7841 3115



Michael Akinsulire