

BCC delivers stunning 'Othello'

By Lorraine Lucciola
Standard-Times correspondent

In its innovative and quite simply stunning production of "Othello," the Bristol Community College Repertory Theatre Company introduces "Goodfellas" to William Shakespeare.

There are striking similarities between some elements of the tough-on-the-eye-and-ear mobster film and the seething plot of Shakespeare's "Othello."

Both entities address the loyalty and allegiance of friends and "soldiers"; both plots contain violent episodes of mistrust and misdeeds; both produce threatening weapons (switchblades instead of swords in this show) and put them to use in unbridled moments of sheer nerve, fright and rage.

Could Shakespeare ever have predicted that his works would thrive for centuries beyond his life and death? BCC Theatre Rep's production of this demanding and fulfilling script wakes and shakes the Bard once more.

The production is hip, catchy, very modern in its "gangster-ese" approach to themes of power, jealousy and betrayal. This atmosphere is specifically supported by the actors in speech, movement, conversational delivery of lines and particularly, dress. "We chose to present this tragedy in modern clothing so that it is clear to modern audiences that the plays of the Bard still speak immediately to us," says Rylan Brenner, director.

Mr. Brenner has referred to Julius Franco, who plays Othello, as having a sweet personality. He does, indeed, and it surely embellishes his ability to create the character he plays. As a leader, Othello is doomed from the start by a vulnerability that begins with his total and all-consuming love for his bride, Desdemona. His jealousy ultimately ends this love and both of their lives.

In their scenes together, Ms. Parkington and Mr. Franco are thoroughly convincing. There is consistent affection between the pair on stage, which adds an appropriate and necessary dimension to their relationship. Mr. Franco's demeanor is almost jubilant when he holds her or delivers lines right to her.

As a young performer, Mr. Franco's reactions in confrontational scenes is uniquely mature. His portrayal is balanced between calm and excitement. He exudes a quiet strength and mounting inner anger. He definitely has a flair for making typically Shakespearean dramatic moments flow.

Ms. Parkington speaks and moves beautifully. She is graceful and at ease on stage. She is compelling as a loving wife, wrongfully accused of infidelity.

REVIEW

So much love, so much trust, so much of one life invested in the other are ripe emotional targets for the evil machinations of a jealous, angry mind. Enter the villain, Iago, brilliantly played by Scott Stets. This actor gives us a cool, collected con man. His energy is professionally harnessed and impeccably released.

Mr. Stets' performance is so powerful and so timed that even his exits are exciting. Iago, friend and confidant to Othello, (or so it appears) has been passed up for a "lieutenancy" position. That honor now belongs to Othello.

Mr. Stets presents Iago as a slick, plotting, ticking time bomb, waiting to take Othello down. What better way to do this than to destroy something Othello holds dear and trusts implicitly — Desdemona's love and loyalty. Iago methodically goes about manufacturing false tales of her infidelity and finally presents this information to Othello. "I shall turn her virtue into pitch," he vows.

I distinctly heard that one proverbial pin drop in the theater when Mr. Stets shared with us Iago's calculating monologue. This actor plays to the audience, tempering a cool and deceiving villainous agenda with humor — shades of Joe Pesci, to be exact — and it works.

Supporting performances are equally outstanding. Ivone Rego as Emilia, Iago's wife, is perfect as the ignored spouse, strutting her stuff and occasionally whacking Iago to get his attention. Christopher Murphy as Cassio reacts beautifully to being set up by Iago. Marco Moco as Roderigo humanizes his character and is very adept at comedic playing.

Shawn Elliott's lighting and set designs are workable and intensely dramatic. Sharp costume and make-up designs are by Cynthia Brenner, sound by Anne Watson Born and Ryan Magoni. First-time assistant director Roger Fournier enjoyed his job of "being the eyes and ears of the audience." His observations aided this impressive and ambitious production.

"Othello" will be performed at 8 tonight in the Margaret L. Jackson Arts Center of Bristol Community College, 777 Elsbree St., Fall River. Theatergoers should bear in mind that this show runs in excess of three hours. Tickets are available at the door at \$8 general admission and \$3 for students and senior citizens. For information call (508)678-2811 ext. 2440.