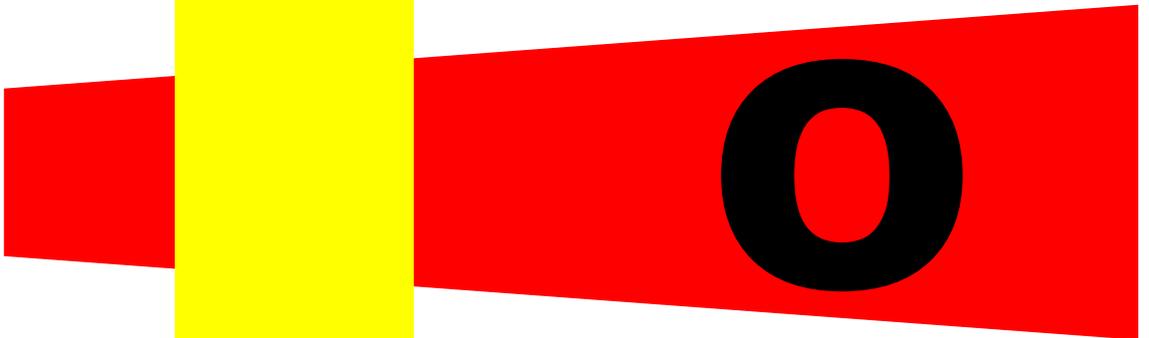


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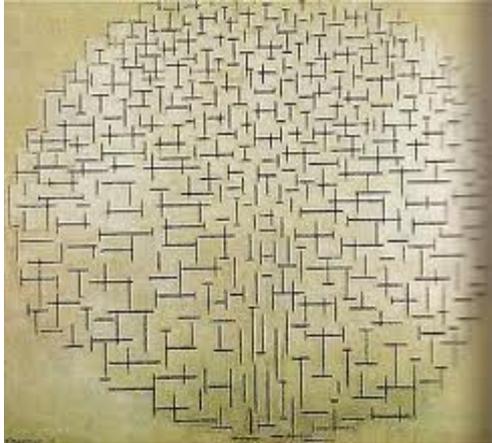


hell



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IN THE HEART OF BEAUTY LIES TRAGEDY AND THE HEART OF TRAGEDY IS BEAUTIFUL.



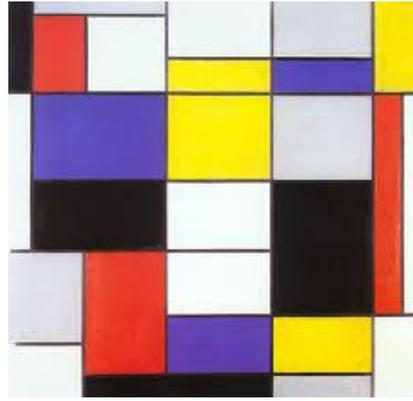
Othello is a play of deep human tragedy and of profound beauty.

This production seeks to find the second by keeping the audience in a robust focus on the first. The audience must walk away with their emotions drawn by the tragedy of the story and their souls elevated by the production's beauty. The production is intellectual in concept but not didactic, allowing for both interpretive and purely entertaining viewing. Whilst not re-inventing the wheel in the telling of the story, we want to let the audience have a unique and restorative experience of this classic text.

The play is well known and travels with its own history of production and audience expectation. We want in some ways to subvert that expectation with new vision whilst tapping the historical notations. To do so we have drawn on the socio-psychological writing of Franz Fanon, notably his seminal work "*Black Skins, White Masks*" and on the visual influence of the modernist painters Piet Mondrian, Paul Klee and even the pop art of Roy Lichtenstein. We are also drawing on the reality of and ideas spawned by the enigmatic city of Venice.█

Beyond the obvious allure of the exquisite text and setting we want also audiences to take ownership of the story. On a deeply intellectual level the play examines the effects of what in post-modern writing has become known as 'othering'. We, apparently far from the centre of classical theatre, are seen, like Othello is, as the 'other'. By infusing this play not only with classical, Venetian elements, but also with signatures of that which is African, we lay claim to the story and allow audiences to access its complexity and beauty.

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D E S I G N

The design takes its lead from the modernist art movement, Venetian Carnevale, African costume and mask and the influences of sea and sail. In all aspects it must have clarity and beauty. It must also support the core concepts of reversal and transience.

As a key concept off Fanon's writing we subvert the expectations of the audience by having the cast play in reverse masking; the Moor is played by a white actor in black-face, Iago by a non-white actor in white-face. Similarly the majority of the rest of the cast is non-white but plays in white-face or vice versa.

We also further disconcert this notion when, at points in the play, characters take on hand held masks that oppose their painted masks. So the non-white actor in the white-face mask becomes briefly once again non-white. We are asking the audience to re-examine the concepts of identity and belonging captured in the play's writing by refreshing the representation of those concepts. Masks have power on two levels firstly they liberate the wearer to conceal motives and behaviour; secondly, in the eyes of others, they define the wearer. We react first to what we see before reacting to what we understand. That is the root of Othello's weakness and downfall.

Venice is also a touchstone for the design. Whilst the play itself moves to Cyprus, that location is in essence an extension of the primary location and we keep the strength of the first to support the position of the second.

There is fluidity in the idea of Venice; it is both of the land and of the water. Rooted in its strong commercial history, with all the wealth and opulence that that brings, it is also transient. Traffic comes and goes by sail, dependent on the tides and winds. The city itself is in a state of decomposition and re-construction; its citizens shoring up the ravages of the water and the fog romanticising the city's decay. The trade on which it

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thrives also brings influences from the east; in the Palaces of the cognoscenti there are hints of the glories of the not so distant Moor palace of Alhambra.

We want then to create a space that has a sense of the fluid that allows shifting from private to very public spaces, that hints at the influence of sail and sea, and which at times conceals in shadows and at others is starkly revealing.



S C È N E

On each side of the stage then are white, gossamer, stretch curtains reaching high into the darkness of the rig. They are fixed at their bases to the stage but their tops can be run out as curtains. As we process up the stage the length of each base is increased by increments. The tops of these



curtains can, on either side, be drawn to stretch to the opposite side. Thus we create a space that can be swiftly and dramatically changed; it can create perspectives that curve up the stage, it can create arches that define an interior and it can draw back to open the stage broadly to more public spaces. The curtains also allow us the opportunity of semi-concealing action behind them; enhancing the sense of intrigue that runs through the text.

At the rear of the stage is a scaffolding tower. This contains three spaces; ground, first and second levels. This too is hung with cloth that can be drawn across each of the levels to conceal or reveal its spaces. The ground floor creates a sense of covered walkways and dark alcoves in the city through which the characters can move. The first level is dedicated to Othello and Desdemona's bed chamber. The floor of this level is raked and supports a bed, sheeted in

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white linen. The use of the second, topmost level is variable, operating for example as a storied house window or as a citadel look outpoint.

The entire scaffold structure trucks gradually, inconspicuously forward during the course of the production until, in the final scene of Desdemona's death, it is front and centre on the stage. The effect is to starkly bring the horror of that death to the audience. Being on a raised level it allows the balconies a clear view whilst the main auditorium is accommodated by the rake and the dramatic choreography of the strangulation.



Colour, both in lighting and in costume, is brought to the production with the influence of the modernists Mondrian, Klee and pop artist Lichtenstein. In a sense the scenery creates the canvas onto which these colours and colour shifts can play out.



As the set is essentially a blank, though mutable canvass, lighting is critical in denoting location and depth and underscoring mood. From Mondrian and Klee we get panels of light projected onto the canvas. These can indicate, for example, windows of the city's buildings, or the shifting reflections of the canals and sea, or the

internal lighting of sumptuous rooms both public and private. From the pop artists we take bright, strong colouring for the lighting design. This can include under-wash to the specific design for a scene that draws on the emotional content of the story as it unfolds. We are looking to the lighting to support and enhance the production on an intellectual, practical and emotional level.

M A S Q U E

The influences of Carnevale and Africa are touchstones for the masks, both painted and practical, used in the production.

The painted masks very strongly take influence from the clean, precise masks of Carnevale, being all white or all black as required. However they are also individual, being integral to the 'society' that we create for the production.



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So these are masks that the characters put on as part of their daily routine and function. They are a societal norm as much as a tie and suit might be to a modern banker for example. This gives their affect and purpose significance in the play's themes.



Part of that purpose is the intellectual and dramatic potential of the masks that the actors can explore through touching, or smearing, or wiping, or repairing as the play moves to its conclusion.

The hand held masks used in incidents through the play are also influenced by both West African and by Carnevale masks.

These masks however are almost ceremonial in use. As such they have an ornamental feel, perhaps not fully sized but impeccably made. Like a lady's fan or a dictator's fly-tail they are always used with purpose and meaning. They become then further indication of the strictures of this society; both revealing status and concealing intent.

As an interesting device alternative, perhaps it is Desdemona's ornamental mask, not handkerchief, which goes missing and finds its way into Iago's evil plot?

C O S T U M E

The costumes are specifically mono-tonal. The impression must be of bold strokes of colour that move on the canvas. Colour influences come from West Africa and from the Carnevale of Venice. Whilst some costumes can take softer, more pastel shading, the tone throughout is strong and vibrant. Where appropriate the costumes also take on the military precision of modern uniforms. Notably, as an example, Iago may have a definitive costume of a crisp white uniform, picked out with clean gold braid and a neat band of medals.



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West African and Carnevale informs the structural elements of the costume, implied through both robes and flowing garments or formal, military cuts. All costumes must speak to the prosperity and power of the milieu; tailored, wealthy and bold.

S O U N D

Being as strong an emotive play as Othello is, sound is vital to the enhancement of the audiences experience.

The play has a robust, masculine tone on the whole; these are soldiers and politicians. They are not afraid to kill to defend their or their country's honour. They drink, seduce women and brawl. They love passionately, fight fearlessly and covet power, rank and influence.

Laced through this masculine tone is the innocent feminine of Desdemona's story and the perhaps more mature tone of Emilia's story. The counterpoint of these with the masculine must serve to heighten the hopeless tragedy of both their fates. It feels that these more delicate, rational tones are annihilated by the onslaught of the masculine emotions.



I would like to explore the emotive lines of the story through the use of both classical European and traditional African sound. It is also important that the text and story line are assisted by the audio. To this end a jazz, or rich afro-jazz feel in combination or juxtaposition to classical works. On one hand the works of African jazz artists like Kasse Madi from Mali or even the compilations of Tim Regisford to enliven the action and on the other classical influences, particularly works in cello and violin, which clearly underscore the audience's emotion.

On a more ambient level I would like to subtly draw the audience in to the action and we return again to the touchstone of Venice. Exploring the use of subliminal sound that captures the audience's attention on a subconscious level before revealing itself more emphatically.

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J U S T I F I C A T I O N

I think that this play has the potential to stir audience emotion through strong, intelligent performance and to delight them with the support of beautiful, creative design. I believe that an audience must be given the opportunity to exercise their intelligence and experience strong emotions. Production must keep these priorities in mind from casting through closing performance.

I believe that this concept will offer performers and I the opportunity to robustly engage with the text, dynamically explore the characters and geography, and thoroughly revel in the process of rehearsal and performance.

We are always looking to be able to tell the story as well as possible and I believe this concept offers the opportunity to tell the tragedy of Othello clearly and stimulate audience and performers alike to new comprehension of the play.

