

Actors shine in Guthrie's production of 'Othello'

Written by Harry Colbert, Jr.



OK, before I start with my review of "Othello," let me offer a bit of perspective so everyone can understand my viewing lens.

I like to think I'm "cultured." I have varied tastes and an appreciation for multiple forms of art.

I'm also from "the hood." I grew up on the west side of St. Louis (Cabanne and Goodfellow to be exact). I preferred to speak "Ebonics" when I could get away with it, which was well out of earshot of my mother and grandmother. In Ebonics terms, they wasn't havin' it. And while I grew up in a very intellectual household, we did not speak Shakespearian vernacular.

Prior to my recent trip to the Guthrie Theater, I had never experienced a William Shakespeare work live. Sure, I read "Romeo and Juliet." It was required 9th grade reading. If I must be candid, I'm pretty sure I read more of the Cliff Notes than I did the actual play. And I knew the story of "Othello." I knew Othello was black. I knew he died. Hell, it's Shakespeare – everyone dies in his plays (even in the lighthearted "Taming of the Shrew" Katherina's independence was killed). But other than that, to quote Col. Klink from "Hogan's Heros," "I know nothing."

Yeah, that sums up my perspective – I quote "Hogan's Heros," not Shakespeare.

So it's understandable that for the first 20 minutes of "Othello" I was trying to figure out what the heck was going on by actors' movement and not words because I couldn't understand a darn thing. I was begging for subtitles to magically appear.

What I could understand, simply by watching the actors and catching one out of every 20 words, was Othello was a revered warrior who married a white woman and her father wasn't havin' it and O's right-hand-man, ace boon coon, Iago was plottin' and plannin' against my man O.

The previous sentence was written purely in jest to show how language can sometimes impair or distort understanding.

But, again, the actors of "Othello" (running until April 20 at the Guthrie) carried out their performances in such a magnificent way that the words were no longer a hindrance. Then the strangest thing happened ... I actually began to understand the words.

Actors shine in Guthrie's production of 'Othello'

Written by Harry Colbert, Jr.



Words fail, but for those who are actors, you've got to act it out. As I said, I can't understand all the