# EDUCATIONAL GUIDE



# **ABOUT THE SHOW**

#### Shakespeare's story of Othello...

Desdemona, a young aristocrat of Venice, has just eloped with Othello, a hired general in the Venetian army—and a Moor. (Moors: the Islamic Arabic people from North Africa who conquered Spain in the eighth century.) Roderigo, lovesick for Desdemona, is assured by lago that he, too, harbors hatred for the Moor, who has promoted Cassio over him as lieutenant. Desdemona's father, Brabantio, seeks the full justice of Venetian law, but the Duke is concerned with pressing affairs of state: the Turks threaten Venetian interests in Cyprus, and the Moor's service is required. Othello prepares to embark for Cyprus with his new bride. lago plots to make Othello believe that the young Venetian officer Cassio is Desdemona's lover. Ensnaring Cassio in a drunken brawl, lago looks on as Othello predictably dismisses his new lieutenant. lago urges Cassio to seek Desdemona's aid in recovering Othello's favor, then suggests to Othello that his wife's interest in Cassio's misfortunes may signify her infidelity. Demanding "ocular proof," Othello is convinced when his first gift to Desdemona, a handkerchief, is misplaced and, with help from lago's wife Emilia, ends up in Cassio's possession. For service to his general, lago is appointed Othello's new lieutenant. Stunned by her husband's accusations, Desdemona pleads with Othello—first for his compassion, then for her life. As Emilia comes to understand her husband's crimes, she is murdered for the truth she dares to speak. Tormented by remorse and grief, Othello takes his own life.

#### ... is remixed into...

Against all odds, MC Othello escapes the ghetto by giving rhythm and voice to the stories of the people in his hood. As he rises to the top of the music industry, he is living proof of the "American dream." Othello falls in love with Desdemona, a beautiful singer whose vocals add the final piece that catapults him to stardom. They marry, despite her aristocratic father's disapproval, and are sent by Loco Vito, the CEO of the record label, on a national tour. Other members of the crew include Cassio, a glitzy pop music rapper, and lago, a hardcore underground lyricist and hip hop purist. Othello decides to release Cassio's album next in an effort to reach a wider audience. Angered by WELL-PACED SOPHISTICATED AND WERVE FUNNY WE SWAP LAMBIC this decision, lago vows to take Othello down. He enlists the help of Roderigo, the nerdy, socially awkward lighting designer on tour—and in love with Desdemona. With a promise to win him the heart of the one he loves, lago steals Roderigo's money and sells him on his plan to remove Cassio from the group. Meanwhile, lago continues to plant seeds of jealousy in Othello about a fabricated affair between Desdemona and Cassio. Further upset by Cassio's bizarre behavior at an important album release event, Othello kicks him out of the group. lago convinces Roderigo to kill Cassio. Roderigo bungles the murder attempt and lago, worried that his plan will be uncovered, kills Roderigo himself. Othello, now on the brink of insanity, flies into a jealous rage and murders his love, Desdemona. lago's wife Emilia enters to find her friend dead, and reveals the truth of her husband's evil plot. In the wake of this overpowering news, Othello takes his own life.

ADAPTED FROM MATERIALS CREATED BY **CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE THEATER** 

### TABLE OF CONTENTS

SYNOPSIS [2]
CHARACTERS [3]
SIDE BY SIDE DIALOGUE [4]
MEET THE CREATORS [5]
FROM THE NEW YORK POST [6-7
SHAKESPEARE'S LIFE [8]
ABOUT OTHELLO [9-10]
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS [11]
TICKET INFORMATION [12]

# **CHARACTER BREAKDOWN**

**OTHELLO** is a modern day hip hop mogul. He is a gifted rapper and a self-made entrepreneur who escaped the pitfalls of the ghetto he was raised in. He is now the most respected rapper in the music industry, with over ten million records sold. (*Archetype: Jay-Z / The Game*)

**DESDEMONA** is a disembodied voice. A powerful soul singer, her musical hooks help to elevate Othello's sound from ghetto rap to mainstream hits. In straight dialogue, she communicates with sound but no words. (*Archetype: Adele / Christina Aguilara*)

**IAGO** is an underground rapper who has been in Othello's crew since its inception. He is the best lyricist of the bunch, and a hip hop purist who is disgusted by the way rap is turning into mainstream pop music. (*Archetype: Eminem / Nas*)

**CASSIO** is the newest member of Othello's crew. He is a great dancer who raps about dancing and flirting with the ladies. For him, entertainment is paramount. Rap comes second. (*Archetype: Will Smith / Mase*)

**EMILIA** is lago's wife and close friend of Desdemona. She is always trying to get lago's affection and attention, but to no avail. She is supportive of his career and only receives verbal abuse in return.

**RODERIGO** is a nerdy lighting technician who travels with the crew on tour. He is secretly in love with Desdemona, who doesn't even know he exists. He loves sci-fi and fantasy movies/books and videos games. He speaks with a lateral lisp.

**BIANCA** is Cassio's groupie girlfriend. She follows him everywhere the crew tours. She is fiery and feisty. She wants nothing but Cassio all the time.

**LOCO VITO** is the head of First Folio Records, the label to which Othello and his crew are signed. He is a West Coast Chicano gangster who loves tennis.

**BRABANTIO** is Desdemona's father. He is a stuffy and conservative Senator and does not approve of her relationship with Othello.



# **SIDE BY SIDE**

## Othello

#### BRABANTIO

A maiden never bold, Of spirit so still and quiet that her motion Blushed at herself. And she, in spite of nature, Of years, of country, credit, everything, To fall in love with what she feared to look on? It is a judgment maimed and most imperfect That will confess perfection so could err. Against all rules of nature, and must be driven To find out practices of cunning hell Why this should be. I therefore vouch again That with some mixtures powerful o'er the blood Or with some dram, conjured to this effect, He wrought upon her.

I.3.96-109

I.3.320-41

#### IAGO

Thus do I ever make my fool my purse: For I mine own gain'd knowledge should profane, If I would time expend with such a snipe. But for my sport and profit. I hate the Moor: And it is thought abroad, that 'twixt my sheets He has done my office: I know not if't be true; But I, for mere suspicion in that kind, Will do as if for surety. He holds me well; The better shall my purpose work on him. Cassio's a proper man: let me see now: To get his place and to plume up my will In double knavery--How, how? Let's see:--After some time, to abuse Othello's ear That he is too familiar with his wife. He hath a person and a smooth dispose To be suspected, framed to make women false. The Moor is of a free and open nature, That thinks men honest that but seem to be so, And will as tenderly be led by the nose As asses are. I have't. It is engender'd. Hell and night Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light.

### Othello: The Remix

#### BRABANTIO

This has to be a joke. You're a good girl, crazy 'bout Elvis, true. You love horses, of course, and America too. Now forgive me, but I'm just a little bit reticent To understand how he attracts a child so innocent. Perfect and pure, sweet and lily-white, It's silly right? To think he'd be the one she'd really like, And it's really nice to believe we can all just get along, But bunnies don't befriend big bears, it's just wrong. You're so small, he's so much bigger, I just don't see you with that... that... (pause) I was gonna say rapper, you didn't let me finish. What does he bring to society? He's a menace. And I HAVE listened to his raps, well I skim 'em, And it's disgusting the way that he talks about women, Not to mention all the gangs and the guns and the drugs. It's plain to see he's nothin' but a common thug.

#### IAGO

If I'm found here then Othello would doubt My loyalty to him, and he'll know what I'm doin', And my plan to overthrow him will be totally ruined. What a dork, he's obsessed with Orcs. He probably still thinks babies come from storks! But only a dummy would be mad at a dummy. Without fools like him, I'd have far less money. Anyway, check it out, both them clowns -Othello and Cassio - are goin' down. Cassio's a flirt. Othello? Too much pride. I'ma make him think his boy's makin' moves on his bride. I'ma paint a twisted picture and control what this fella see. I'ma cast the seeds of doubt that grow to trees of jealousy!

# **MEET THE CREATORS**



**GQ** co-created, co-directed, and starred in the original productions of *Q* Gents (OSF/ISF), *Q* Brothers Christmas Carol (CST), Othello: The Remix (The Globe Theatre / CST), and Funk It Up About Nothin' (CST). G also co-wrote and starred in the Off Broadway smash hit The Bomb-itty of Errors. Along with his brother and the other Bomb-itty guys, G wrote and starred in a hip-hop/sketch comedy TV show, "Scratch and Burn" (MTV). G's screen credits include the movies Drumline, Taxi, I Think I Love My Wife, What's The Worst That Could Happen (w/ John Leguizamo), and Werner Herzog's Rescue Dawn. He wrote, directed and starred in the film Just Another Story (Showtime, Tribeca Film Fest), has had prominent roles in "Chicago PD" (NBC), "Boston Public" (Fox), "Numbers" (CBS), and co-starred in the one-hour drama "Johnny Zero" (Fox), and John Herzfeld's pilot, "S.I.S" (Sony). He is a member of the Chicago-based comedic hip hop group known as *The Retar Crew* (youtube). Together with his brother JQ, he recorded The Feel Good Album of the Year. Originally from Chicago, he received his BFA from the Experimental Theatre Wing of Tisch School of the Arts at NYU. @gqtheman



JQ co-created, co-directed, and starred in the original productions of *Q Gents* (OSF/ISF), *Q Brothers Christmas Carol* (CST), *Othello: The Remix* (The Globe Theatre / CST), and *Funk It Up About Nothin'* (CST). He made his Off-Broadway debut when he laid down the beats as DJ/Composer for *The Bomb-itty of Errors*. J co-wrote and starred in the hip-hop/sketch comedy TV show, "Scratch and Burn" for MTV. For his brother G's film, *Just Another Story* (Showtime), he created the score and original soundtrack. J produced the solo hip-hop album "Foul Mouth Poet" under his moniker J.A.Q., and other albums including "Smashing" (The Grommits), "The Good Thief" (Postell), and "The Feel Good Album Of The Year" (Q Brothers). He is also currently co-host (with oldest brother TQ) of Smallflower TV, a video blog about natural products and old-school shaving based on Merz Apothecary, the other family business. @ foulmouthp

# **"HIGHLY RECOMMENDED!**

THE 80-MINUTE, LIGHTENING-FAST, HIP-HOP VERSION OF SHAKESPEARE'S TRAGIC TALE OF JEALOUSY AND SELF-DOUBT, IS ABSOLUTELY BRILLIANT, AND IMMENSE FUN. NOT ONLY DOES THIS SHOW'S FIRE-POWERED HIP-HOP LINGO FALL TRIPPINGLY FROM THE ACTORS' TONGUES, BUT JUST AS SHAKESPEARE HELPED SHAPE ENGLISH, RAP HAS DRAMATICALLY REFASHIONED IT." - CHICAGO SUN TIMES



# AN EXCERPT FROM NEWYORK POST

# HIP-HOP REMIX OF SHAKESPEARE'S 'OTHELLO' STRIKES A CHORD WITH CHICAGO INMATES

#### AUGUST 30, 2013

CHICAGO — Act I, Scene 1: Four actors in well-worn coveralls and baseball caps take the stage at the county jail. They're here to tell a tale of love, friendship, jealousy and betrayal. It's the stuff of Shakespearean tragedy. The names and themes haven't changed over the centuries, but the language has a modern beat:

"Othello never knew,

He was getting schemed on by a member of his crew."

This is "Othello-The Remix," the Chicago Shakespeare Theater's hip-hop version of the tragedy about a valiant Moor deceived by the villainous lago into mistakenly believing his wife has been unfaithful. After Othello smothers his beloved Desdemona, he discovers she has been true to him and he kills himself.

That's how Shakespeare told the story 400 years ago. This modern version — performed this week for about 450 Cook County jail inmates — is a rhyming, rapping, poetic homage to the Bard. It has singing and dancing. Comic touches. Men playing women. Sexual talk. References to Eddie Murphy and James Brown. A throbbing beat, courtesy of an onstage DJ.

And a contemporary plot: MC Othello is a self-made rap star turned music mogul (think Jay-Z) who decides to promote Cassio, a middleof-the-road rapper, by releasing his next album. That infuriates the edgy rapper, lago, who vows revenge. "This is why I hate the Moor," he fumes. "He never lets me get my foot in the door." Desdemona is not seen, but heard, her ethereal golden pipes occasionally filling the air.

The Othello remix is the brainchild of two Chicago brothers and rappers — GQ and JQ, aka Gregory and Jeffrey Qaiyum. They wrote and directed the show, honing 40 or so drafts over eight months into a 75-minute rhyme-a-thon. It's their third hip-hop translation



Rapper Postell Pringle works it onstage at the Cook Country Jail in a hip hop adaptation of William Shakespeare's 'Othello.' (Photo: AP/Spencer Green)

of Shakespeare, following "The Bomb-itty of Errors" and "Funk It Up About Nothin.'"

This new Othello — originally commissioned by Shakespeare's Globe Theater — has been performed in England, South Korea and Chicago. Taking the play behind bars, the brothers expected the inmates would apply themes written four centuries ago to their own lives today.

"The story of Othello and the way we paint it is very much of an outsider who kind of never feels like he's at home and I think that will be pretty relatable," JQ said before the show. "(It) really comes down to choices and repercussions and often times, poor choices. I can't imagine that some people in there are not going to feel that."

He also points to the show's last words:

"In a cold, dark and unforgiving system we struggle with our destiny. When the world is crumbling, emerge from the rubble and your love will surely set you free."

Watching the inmates applaud and laugh in the sweltering gym, Rick Boynton, the show's creative producer, says he quickly knew the play had struck a chord.

Othello "listened to forces outside himself that made him do really unspeakable acts," he says. "At the end of the play he says, 'Look what happened and heed my advice.' . . . I think the tension and the resonance of that theme in the room were incredible."

# AN EXCERPT FROM NEWYORK POST

Kristy Montgomery, a 29-year-old inmate, agrees. She came away from the play believing it had an important message:

"Be careful of who you affiliate yourself with because they might not actually be your friends. They might be somebody who wants to bring you down." It's a lesson, she says, she'll try to heed "because I befriend the wrong people all the time."

Julian Campbell, 19, who swayed with the beat as lago danced his way down the aisle, found his own meaning in the story. He said it offered two lessons: "Be honest. Always think before you do."

And Kevin Fields, a third inmate, also 19, saw the play as a cautionary tale. "You can't affect what other people do but you can affect what you do," he says. The show was an eye-opener in another way: "In hip-hop," he adds, "I finally found out what Shakespeare really is."

So it is really Shakespeare when Othello briefly dons a blond wig and joins a faux backup girl singing group a la Motown to belt out "It's a Man's World" (shades of the James Brown classic)? And are lines such as ""Othello wouldn't listen, He had crazy tunnel vision" a true reflection of the Bard's greatness?

Absolutely, says GQ.

"Shakespeare was a master storyteller who used musical language and poetry," he says, and the same is true of the best rappers. "So at the very basic level they're doing the exact same thing. ... You're using poetic devices like alliteration and repetition and onomatopoeia. ... They're very similar art forms despite how different they tend to be judged."

The Q brothers say they have chatted with Shakespeare scholars and others who arrive at their shows skeptical and leave impressed. "We're treating the work with respect and we think he was a genius," GQ says. "But our philosophy is you want to live on as an art form 500 years later, you can't do it the same way."

In fact, GQ says, if Shakespeare were around nowadays, "I think he'd be doing this. He'd be a rapper."

The Q brothers are now working on a hip-hop version of Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol" and plan to eventually create hip-hop translations of all of Shakespeare's works, including "A Mad-Summer Night's Dream."

They not only admire the Bard, they also think their words measure up to his standards.

"Without trying to sound like we're tooting our own horn," GQ says, "I would like to think that at our best moments . . . it's like seeing great Shakespeare in his time."

http://nypost.com/2013/08/30/hip-hop-remix-of-shakespearesothello-strikes-a-chord-with-chicago-inmates/



Inmates, from left, Eric McNeil, Kevin Fields, and Julian Campbell, dance in their seats during the performance of 'Othello: The Remix.' (Photo: AP/Spencer Green)



Actors visit the Cook County Jail in Chicago to perform a hip-hop rendition of Shakespeare's 'Othello.' (Photo: AP/Spencer Green)

# **SHAKESPEARE'S LIFE**

#### The following is an estimated timeline of the life and works of William Shakespeare, according to scholar E.K. Chambers.

1564	William Shakespeare is born in Stratford upon Avon to John and Mary Shakespeare on April 23.
1582	Shakespeare (age 18) marries Anne Hathaway (age 26) on November 27.
1583	Shakespeare and Anne Hathaway's first daughter, Susanna, is born on May 26, just five months after their wedding.
1585	Shakespeare's twins, Judith and Hamnet, are born on February 2.
1590-92	Henry VI, Parts 1-3
1592-93	Richard III
1592-93	The Comedy of Errors
1593-94	Titus Andronicus
1593-94	The Taming of the Shrew
1594-95	The Two Gentlemen of Verona
1594-95	Love's Labour's Lost
1594-95	Romeo and Juliet
1595-96	Richard II
1595-96	A Midsummer Night's Dream
1596	Shakespeare's son, Hamnet, dies.
1596-97	King John
1596-97	The Merchant of Venice
1597-98	Henry IV, Parts 1 and 2
1598-99	Much Ado About Nothing
1598-99	Henry V
1599-1600	Julius Caesar
1599-1600	As You Like It
1599-1600	Twelfth Night
1600-01	Hamlet
1600-01	The Merry Wives of Windsor
1601-02	Troilus and Cressida

1603	Queen Elizabeth I dies. Shakespeare's troupe, The Chamberlain's Men, is re-named The King's Men, in honor of their new king and sponsor, James I.
1604-05	Measure for Measure
1604-05	Othello
1605-06	King Lear
1605-06	Macbeth
1606-07	Antony and Cleopatra
1607-08	Coriolanus
1607-08	Timon of Athens
1608-09	Pericles, Prince of Tyre
1609-10	Cymbeline
1610-11	The Winter's Tale
1611-12	The Tempest
1612-13	Henry VIII
1612-13	The Two Noble Kinsmen (collaboration with John Fletcher)
1613	The Globe Theatre burns down.
1614	The Globe Theatre reopens.
1616	William Shakespeare dies on April 23.
1623	Shakespeare's wife, Anne Hathaway dies.
1623	36 of Shakespeare's plays are assembled in a collection: The First Folio.



# **A HISTORY OF OTHELLO**

# **OTHER ADAPTATIONS**



**Giuseppe Verdi's Opera** Famed composer Giuseppe Verdi's opera, *Otello*, premiered in 1887. It has enjoyed numerous subsequent productions and recordings, and it is frequently performed today.



#### 1951 Film

Orson Welles directed, produced, adapted, and starred in a 1951 film version, which was filmed over the course of three years. It holds a 90% fresh rating on Rotten Tomatoes, though the film is now criticized for utilizing a white actor in blackface.



#### 1965 Film

Stuart Burge directed a film version, starring Laurence Olivier as Othello, alongside Maggie Smith, Joyce Redman, and Frank Findlay. This version is also criticized for its use of blackface.



**1995 Film** This version was the first major film of *Othello* to utilize an African American actor (Laurence Fishburn) as Othello. The film also features director Kenneth Branagh as lago and Irene Jacob as Desdemona.



*O* (2001 film) Tim Blake Nelson's film *O* is a loose adaptation of the play, set in an American high school. It stars Mekhi Phifer, Josh Hartnett, and Julia Stiles.



2002 Ballet Modern dance choreographer Lar Lubovitch created a three-act ballet, featuring music composed by Elliot Goldenthal.

# **A HISTORY OF OTHELLO**

# **SELECT NEW YORK PRODUCTIONS**



A legendary 1943 Broadway production starring Paul Robeson, Jose Ferrer and Uta Hagen.



A 1982 Broadway production starring Academy Award winners James Earl Jones, Christopher Plummer, and Dianne Wiest.



Shakespeare in the Park productions in 1964 (with James Earl Jones) and 1991 (with Raul Julia and Christopher Walken – pictured above)



A 2009 Public Theater production, directed by Peter Sellars and starring John Ortiz, Philip Seymour Hoffman, and Jessica Chastain.



A 2015 Metropolitan Opera production of Verdi's opera, directed by Tony Award winner Bartlett Sher.



An Off-Broadway production at New York Theatre Workshop currently stars David Oyelowo and Daniel Craig, directed by Sam Gold.

Now, the Q Brothers' **OTHELLO: THE REMIX** takes New York City by storm, beginning October 25 at the Westside Theatre, following acclaimed runs in the United Kingdom and Chicago!



THE SHOW IS A TRIUMPH FROM BEGINNING TO END! THE Q BROTHERS PERFORM THE TALE EXPERTLY AND DID NOT SHIRK THE DARKER ELEMENTS OF THE PLAY. THE SHOW FIZZED ALONG WITH SO MUCH VERVE THAT THE STORY WITH ITS FAMILIAR THEMES OF JEALOUSY, FRIENDSHIP AND BETRAYAL WAS UTTERLY ENGROSSING." – DAILY TELEGRAPH

# **QUESTIONS & TALKING POINTS**

### **CHARACTER STUDY:**

Choose a character and write an analysis of that individual, based on how they are portrayed in Shakespeare's *Othello* and how the character has been adapted for *Othello: The Remix*. What are the similarities and differences? Analyze a major turning point for the character in *Othello* and a major moment for the character in *Othello: The Remix*. How do those moments differ in each work?

## **MUSICALIZING SHAKESPEARE:**

**OPTION 1:** West Side Story uses song and dance to tell the story of Romeo and Juliet, set in New York City in the 1950s. Analyze and compare the film West Side Story to Romeo and Juliet, and Othello: The Remix to Othello. How do these two completely different musicals relate to their source materials? Do they relate to each other? How does the decade in which they were written factor into the adaptation?

**OPTION 2:** Choose another Shakespearian work and outline how you would adapt it into a musical theatre piece. What style of music would be used and why? How does the adaptation serve the original story while moving it forward? Would you change or remove any major characters?

# OTHER OTHELLOS:

Watch a film adaptation of *Othello*. What are the differences and similarities between that film, *Othello* the play, and *Othello*: *The Remix*? How do the adaptations differ from Shakespeare's original text? How does the film compare to *Othello*: *The Remix*?

### RACE:

Discuss the role that race plays in both *Othello* and *Othello*: *The Remix*. Is it relevant to 21<sup>st</sup> century America? Compare it to another major work that deals with race.

### **GETTING TO KNOW IAGO:**

lago is widely believed to be one of the great villains in theatre and literature. What makes him an effective villain? Are any of his actions are justifiable? Compare and contrast him to both a real-life individual with questionable morals, and to another villain in literature or film.

### **CRITICISM:**

Write a review of *Othello: The Remix* as though you were a newspaper critic. Explain what you liked and disliked about the show (acting, singing, staging, visual aspects, etc.), and defend your opinions. What type of symbolism is evident in the staging or the writing? What was the theatre space like, and how did the audience around you respond to the show?

### THE HIP-HOP CONNECTION:

Listen to other rap and hip-hop music. Why does rap lend itself well to an adaptation of Shakespearean language, particularly the story of *Othello*? Would rap work as well for another Shakespeare play?

## **CONDENSING SHAKESPEARE:**

*Othello* is a five-act play. *Othello: The Remix* is an 80-minute musical. How would you condense the story of *Othello* into just 15 minutes? Write a 15-minute version of the play using only the most important moments. Why did you choose those moments, and what makes them critical to the storytelling? Which characters and moments had to be omitted, and why?



# to purchase GROUP TICKETS

CALL **212-889-4300** PARTIES OF 8 OR MORE PEOPLE

# TO PURCHASE INDIVIDUAL TICKETS

**OthelloTheRemix.com** 

### call 212-239-6200

STOP BY **The Westside Theatre** (407 W. 43RD STREET, BETWEEN 9<sup>TH</sup> AND 10<sup>TH</sup> AVENUES)





FOR THE FULL PERFORMANCE SCHEDULE AND MORE INFORMATION, VISIT

OthelloTheRemix.com