



The Joffrey Ballet Presents A Stunning *Othello*



Fabrice Calmels, Matthew Adamczyk, April Daly, Aaron Rogers. Photo Credit: Cheryl Mann Photography(*The Joffrey Ballet*)



It's easy to assume that *Othello* is a classic centuries-old ballet, up there with *Swan Lake* and *Giselle*—after all, the story itself is a Shakespearean classic—but this is choreographer Lar Lubovitch's version created in 1997. The costuming (Ann Hould-Ward) is still period garb, but with a modern touch on dance on music, this already dramatic story becomes even darker. The timing of [the Joffrey Ballet's presentation](#) coincides with Shakespeare's birthday (which is also known as [Talk Like Shakespeare Day](#), and oddly enough the same date as his death), as well as the celebration of Lubovitch's own 70th birthday.

For those who don't know the story of *Othello*, well, it's a tragedy. It's a tale of jealousy, love, deceit and betrayal. Things just seem to go from bad to worse for our hero thanks to the mischievous, manipulative actions of his ensign, Iago, moves that threaten his new marriage to the young Desdemona. Basically, Iago was passed over for a promotion, and he's pissed about it.

Oscar winner Elliot Goldenthal's (*Interview With the Vampire, Michael Collins*) accompanying musical score sets an ominous mood from the very beginning, fitting perfectly with Lubovitch's haunting choreography. Aggressive drums grow stronger throughout the show, and compliment sometimes stunted moves. This is especially evident in the second act, *The Tarantella*, where the medieval dance (outlawed in Europe for purportedly having satanic connections and causing insanity) is interspersed with the storyline, amplifying the tension.

Visually stunning, the production is filled with picturesque moments that are beautiful whether happy or heartbreaking. The role of Othello on opening night was played by the also photogenic Fabrice Calmels, a favorite principal dancer (and judging by the cheers when he took the stage, a favorite of many ladies in the audience). On his [Chicago Now blog](#), he discusses getting ready for the role with his “Othello Workout” since his costume “doesn't leave much up to the imagination.” At 6'6” he towers over other dancers, making him a dominant leading man and a powerful Othello.

We're more used to seeing mixed repertoire programs from the Joffrey, not full length programs such as this where it can be easy to miss the difficulty of the choreography through the acting and storyline. But we spotted plenty of difficult moves and lifts throughout the performance that Calmels even says are “far more complex than simple overhead lifts that I have grown accustomed to in my ballet training.”

This may be your last chance to see the Joffrey perform *Othello* for quite a while, as it will be retired from their active repertoire after this run. Nine performances remain now through May 5 at the Auditorium Theatre. [Tickets range from \\$31 to \\$152.](#)

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