

Joffrey dancers creating evil through movement for 'Othello'

movement for 'Othello'



Victoria Jaiani (front) and Miguel Angel Blanco in Joffrey Ballet's "Othello" at the Auditorium Theatre. (April 16, 2013)

By Sid Smith, Special to the Tribune

11:36 a.m. CDT, April 16, 2013

He is guilty of "motiveless malignity," in the words of Samuel Taylor Coleridge -- for undiluted evil, few characters in literature rival William Shakespeare's Iago.

But everyone, remember, is beautiful at the ballet. In a dance version of "Othello," performers portraying this mythic villain aren't likely to look the part or even have that much experience playing a fiend. Two dancers cast as Iago in the Joffrey Ballet's upcoming revival of Lar Lubovitch's "Othello" are indeed wholesome and handsome -- motiveless malignity is a stretch.

"This takes a lot of homework, it's not 'boy meets girl,'" Matthew Adamczyk said. "But it is a blast. I like to think of myself as a pretty happy-go-lucky guy, so it's fun to find those darker, more twisted ideas and bring them to life. To dabble in those darker emotions and let them run rampant."

"To be honest, this is completely the opposite of who I am," Temur Suluashvili, another Iago portrayer, said. "I actually had to stand in front of the mirror and imitate this scary face to learn how to do it."

In contrast to the theater, dancers must convey evil through pure movement alone -- no vocal tricks allowed. And you want to do so with complexity, Adamczyk pointed out, and not reduce Iago to caricature.

"Iago's moves are sharp, edgy, they don't flow from one to another," Suluashvili said in describing Lubovitch's take. "There's a cut-and-dry quality that I think makes it easier for people to understand the character."

"There are moments when Iago moves crisply and is filled with this energy, and then, a few seconds later, he's extremely snakelike," Adamczyk said. "The moves have to have large amplitude. Imagine a sheet hanging in the wind, the way everything ripples and then finishes out to its completion."

Adamczyk went back and reviewed films of his earlier portrayal of Iago a few years back to make adjustments this time around. "I often found myself back then standing on stage with my feet close together, and it made me look timid," Adamczyk said. "But Iago has great confidence, so I'm trying to keep my feet farther apart to convey his more forceful personality. It can be the slightest thing like that. Just turning your shoulders 20 degrees more toward the audience can make you seem taller, or just the way he cocks his head to one side when he's thinking."

Does art intrude on life?

"Well, there are times," Adamczyk confessed. "Because we're delving so deeply into this personal, mental area. A friend of mine saw it and said to my partner, 'I don't know how you can go home with this guy tonight.'"

"If you're doing a role, you have to do it wholeheartedly," he continued. "I wear a lot of black these days, I dress the part in rehearsal and even outside work. My demeanor changes, and I try to see what people's reactions are to this more sly character."

The issue is compounded for Suluashvili, who, in real life, is married to Victoria Jaiani, one of the ballerinas playing Desdemona, whose death Iago engineers. "It's nice, of course, when you're the prince and she's the swan in 'Swan Lake,' " he said. "That's romantic. But in 'Othello,' my job is to get rid of Desdemona. So on stage I black out that we're married. And I don't bring Iago home. I don't think it would end up nicely."

"Othello" plays April 24-May 5 at the Auditorium Theatre, 50 E. Congress Pkwy. For tickets: 800-982-2787 or ticketmaster.com/auditorium.