

DANCE REVIEW 'Othello' **4 stars**

## Joffrey's 'Othello' has killer style



Fabrice Calmels and April Daly in Joffrey Ballet's "Othello." (Courtesy of Joffrey Ballet)

Sid Smith Special to the Tribune

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There are many things to like about Lar Lubovitch's "Othello," and a few to mourn, but none of that matters by the end, after the exceptional, climactic pas de deux.

Most duets in the full-length ballet canon celebrate love in a fairy-tale mode. Even ghostly Giselle, though dead partly thanks to her lover, dances with him in an act of forgiveness.

But however fresh your Shakespeare, you're not quite prepared for how shattering and creepy the final pas de deux of "Othello" must be -- this is a dance between a husband and the wife he's about to kill.

Lubovitch's 1997 work, now getting its Chicago premiere from the **Joffrey Ballet**, is never finer than in this trickiest-of-tricky conceits. This isn't just doomed love; it's homicide in action. Echoing the sometimes haunting, sometimes strange but often interesting mixture of ballet and modern moves, Lubovitch makes this one a killer stylistically, pardon the pun. It's equal parts lyricism, conflict and horror. At one stretch, Othello holds a hanging, motionless Desdemona by his hands, grasping her on either side of her temple -- as if he's going to crush her skull. To Elliott B. Goldenthal's alternately soaring and discomfiting score, he and she enact a hypnotic duet that's anguished and surreal.

Besides a chance to see the Chicago-born Lubovitch work impressively on a large canvas, "Othello" has many virtues. They include his focus less on plot and more on key images and moods that make the tragedy so rich. The handkerchief image gives rise to emotional fantasias on jealousy, betrayal, joy and hints of death, an object first delivered by a mechanistic moving quintet right out of "Coppelia." Iago and Emilia end Act 1 with a dance that's tug-of-warlike, a tad sadomasochistic but sexy -- not something this couple usually calls to mind. George Tsypin's crystalline, geometric set gives it a postmodern gloss.

Wednesday's great cast included April Daly's girlish and poetic Desdemona, Aaron Rogers' silken and innocent Cassio, Matthew Adamczyk's sharp and serpentine Iago and Valerie Robin's tormented, well-executed Emilia.

As Othello, Fabrice Calmels is glorying in the part of a lifetime, his swift abilities and magnificent presence part of a performance that's electric, heartbreaking and unforgettable.

**When:** Through Oct. 25

**Where:** Auditorium Theatre, 50 E. Congress Parkway

**Tickets:** \$25 to \$145 at [ticketmaster.com](http://ticketmaster.com)

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