

Othello in new light

By ANU VENUGOPAL
anu@mmail.com.my

FROM Jan 21 to 27, Malaysians will get to see a different side of *Othello* at the Auditorium Bandaraya, Jalan Raja Laut, Kuala Lumpur.

The cast, from diverse ethnic groups and cultures in Malaysia, are all set to bring the timeless emotions of jealousy, greed, love and betrayal in an adaptation of William Shakespeare's well known play.

"There are two sides to the play. One stays faithful to Shakespeare's work and the other is an ensemble piece," said director Tage Larsen (pic).

Othello, the Moor of Venice is a trag-

edy believed to have been written around 1603 by the famous playwright. Known as one of his greatest tragedies, *Othello* is set against the backdrop of Venice and revolves around a Moor general Othello, his wife Desdemona, a commissioned officer named Iago, and his lieutenant, Cassio.

With its personal domestic setting, *Othello* revolves around the fall of a proud yet dignified man; the murder of his loving, innocent wife; and the hatred of a villain. In this painful and moving tragedy, the audience is sure to question the motives behind the tumultuous plots that make *Othello* a play that is both intriguing and entertaining.

"It is a universal drama about jealousy and power, a timeless tale that could take place anywhere. It is a deep tragedy, but every other scene is funny," added Larsen, about the show.

Presented by Masakini Theatre Company (MTC), Larsen's version of *Othello* is very much a physical play, combining classic English lines with a modern creative arrangement. Coming from a physical theatre background, Larsen is happy that the play gives the chance for all the actors to be on stage.

"Main characters don't have great moments all the time. They are also a part of the ensemble, stage hands who create backdrops as the play progresses," he revealed.

Sitting in on their rehearsals, one gets a sense of excitement watching the actors transform into their alter-egos with zest and passion. The props on stage are minimal and yet have the ability to push the story forward.

"The materials we use can change form. Boxes signify into a tower, door or a path," explained Larsen, who also directed MTC founder Sabera Shaik in the one-woman play, *Lady Swettenham* last year.

Another interesting element used in *Othello*, is the famous hand-

kerchief, which is used to trick Othello into believing Desdemona was unfaithful to him.

"It is a symbol of a wedding ring and has the power to create jealousy and mistrust between the two main characters," said Larsen.

Larsen who is from the renowned Odin Theatre in Denmark, is a big fan of Shakespeare's works. Having acted in roles in *King Lear* and *Richard III* productions, he admires the way the literary genius connects tragedy with comedy and is happy to work with a talented multi-cultural cast, a first for him in Malaysia.

The diverse cast, who will be in contemporary Malaysian costumes, include Gani Karim (Othello), Lim Kien Lee (Iago), Stephanie Van Drisen (Desdemona), Dawn Cheong (Emilia), Pavan J. Singh (Cassio), Azfar Baginda (Roderigo) and more.

Tickets for the matinee show on Jan 23 are at RM65, RM55, RM20 and RM85, while RM65 and RM25 for regular shows. For bookings, visit www.theatreanticsshop.com.

