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**For Immediate Release:**

## **Riot Grrrls return to slay more of Shakespeare's toxic men**

*Taffety Punk's all female classical band takes on the all too resonant complexities of Othello*

### **The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice**

by **William Shakespeare**

Directed by company member Kelsey Mesa

**Where:** Capitol Hill Arts Workshop (545 7th Street SE, Washington, DC 20003)  
**When:** Sep 19 - Oct 12, 2019  
**Price:** \$15. Tickets available at [www.taffetypunk.com](http://www.taffetypunk.com).

The Taffety Punk Riot Grrrls return to present an all-female production of Shakespeare's tragedy *Othello*. The women of Taffety Punk began the Riot Grrrls theatre project as an activist reaction to the lack of gender parity on DC stages. They take their name and inspiration from the 90's punk movement that was focused on bringing "grrrls to the front". This is an ongoing project to provide opportunities for women in theatre to play the roles ordinarily denied them.

Director **Kelsey Mesa** brings together a seven woman cast to portray all the characters in this sharp vision of the play. The actors play multiple parts, deftly navigating scenes and smart costume changes to keep the play's brisk pace moving forward. Moving between Venice and Cyprus, Mesa presents a sparse set and says the "production is stripped of a lot of spectacle; the actors are the heart. Every single actor has thrown their all into this production and prioritized telling this story."

At the start of the play we discover from rumor that **Othello**, Venice's highly decorated warrior, and **Desdemona**, daughter to a member of the Duke's council, have secretly married. The jealousies of those around them do not keep this secret long, and this scandal catches the heels of incoming threats of war, all leading to hasty decisions by the Venetian council to send Othello and his new bride over the sea to protect Venetian interests in Cyprus. The battle is prelude to the personal hell that is about to ensue from the most unexpected source. At the height of their triumphs, in love and war, Desdemona and Othello face their greatest foe in the subterfuge of a trusted ally. Operating from an inflated sense of wrong—from being passed over on a promotion, and from unsubstantiated rumors about his wife—Iago, Othello's ensign, is determined to have his revenge on someone. How he enacts this revenge drives the the play into ever increasing crises.

Enjoying the very rare chance for a woman to play the coveted role of Iago, **Lise Bruneau** says "This is a play that I've been involved with for many years, I've played Desdemona, I've played Emilia, and I've always been deeply curious about what's happening on the other side of the play. I am very excited by Iago's duplicity and what that means as an actor. It's very challenging playing a scene through a character who is lying well — it can be a lot to keep track of. There is also the added element of Iago being a character that is not immediately simple to understand. His motives, his backstory, Shakespeare doesn't give us a lot. So it is a lot of fun to explore."

In a recent interview with TheatreWashington, actor **Danielle A. Drakes**, who plays Othello, praises the Riot Grrrls' rehearsal process and says, "The necessary conversations around power and race are a breath of fresh air. The genuine care of the humans making magic onstage is also inspiring. And the pushups." (A daily retinue of pushups is a long held tradition in Riot Grrrl rehearsals.)

Stage combat is also an element of many classical plays that is ordinarily denied to women — even though women receive the same training and certifications in combat as men. **Taffety Punk's newest**

**company member Teresa Spencer**, in addition to playing Cassio, has choreographed the fights throughout the play.

Other members of the cast vigorously take on the work of playing more than one role — and more than one gender. Stefany Pesta doubles as Bianca and Montano. Company member **Tonya Beckman** takes on the role of Emilia after first playing Desdemona's father. Liz Daingerfield is first seen as the Duke and later as the Duke's envoy Lodovico. Newcomer to the Riot Grrrls Julie Weir has the unique task of playing both Desdemona and her suitor Roderigo.

Mesa has staged the play in the round in the intimate black box space at the Capitol Hill Arts Workshop that is Taffety Punk's home. She says, "I am in the fortunate position of getting to watch runs from different seats in the house—it's like catching the light in a different facet of a prism every time. So, I'm surprised by how often I am surprised, because I keep seeing and hearing new things. I'm still surprised by how much some of the language of this play hurts."

As she imagines what the audience might take away from this production she says, "I hope the audience feels a little bit complicit in the telling of *Othello*, and perhaps want to spend some time thinking about how we stop our present-day Iagos from getting as far with his vile actions as Shakespeare's Iago does."

*Othello* opens at the **Capitol Hill Arts Workshop** (545 7th Street SE, Washington, DC 20003 – two blocks from Metro's Orange/Blue Line stop at Eastern Market) on Friday, Sep 27 and runs through Saturday, Oct 12 on Wednesday through Saturday nights at 7:30pm. There are two pay-what you can previews on Sep 19 & 20, and discounted previews Sep 21, 25, & 26. There is an additional Monday night (industry night) performance on Oct 7, and there is one matinee on Saturday, Oct 12 at 2:30pm.

**This show is estimated to occupy 150 minutes of show time.** Give or take.

Featuring Danielle A. Drakes in the title role with company members Lise Bruneau (Iago), Tonya Beckman (Emilia), and Teresa Spencer (Cassio, et al), with Liz Daingerfield (Lodovico, the Duke, et al), Stefany Pesta (Bianca, Montano, et al), Julie Weir (Desdemona, Roderigo). The Riot Grrrls' *Othello* is directed by Kelsey Mesa. Lights designed by Katie McCreary. Costumes designed by Elizabeth Haley Morton. Sound designed by Kristin Hamby. Text coach: Esther Williamson. Fight Choreography by Teresa Spencer. Dramaturg: Tiffany A. Bryant. Stage Manager: Haviland Atha-Simonton.

Taffety Punk Theatre Company is the resident company at Capitol Hill Arts Workshop (545 7th Street SE, Washington, DC 20003 – two blocks from Metro's Orange/Blue Line stop at Eastern Market.

**For hi-res photos, go to: [www.taffetypunk.com/press](http://www.taffetypunk.com/press)**

**Taffety Punk Theatre Company** is the resident company at Capitol Hill Arts Workshop. The company won the very first John Aniello Award for Outstanding Emerging Theatre Company at the Helen Hayes Awards. More recently, the company received two Helen Hayes nominations for original choreography in both *Phaeton* and *An Iliad*. Taffety Punk's mission is to maintain a dynamic ensemble of actors, dancers and musicians who ignite a public passion for theatre by making the classical and the contemporary exciting, meaningful, and affordable.

**Kelsey Mesa** (Director, *Antigonick*): Directing credits include *She Rode Horses Like the Stock Exchange* by Amelia Roper; *The Trojan Women*, by Euripides, *Charm* by Kathleen Cahill, *dREAMtRIPPIN'* by Thomas Campbell, and the staged reading of *First Citizen* by Anna Lathrop and Katherine Clair, all at Taffety Punk Theatre Company; as well as *The Pavilion*, *The Magi* and *Wish List* at the Hub Theatre, where she also serves as Associate Artistic Director. She has directed for The Inkwell, The Source Festival, Young Playwrights' Theatre, the American College Theatre Festival, and Theater Alliance's Hothouse New Play Development Series. She is the Manager of KCACTF and Theater Education at the Kennedy Center. Kelsey is a native of Miami, FL and a graduate of Northwestern University.

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