



Students Grace Khasar and Bradford J. Barnes in a scene from the "Iago Syndrome." (Photo: Luiza Silva)

## 'Iago Syndrome' draws 'Othello' comparison to violence

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In August 2002, four soldiers returned to Fort Bragg from active duty in Afghanistan. Within five weeks, all four had murdered their wives.

Cal State East Bay will open the fall 2009 theatre and dance season Nov. 13, with "The Iago Syndrome," an original drama by Assistant Professor Marc Jacobs. The production explores how stress and jealousy can turn deadly, a situation that resonates with the domestic murders committed on a military base in Shakespeare's "Othello."

The drama, with choreography by Nina Haft, assistant professor of Theatre and Dance, and music by Rafael Hernandez, assistant professor and chair of Music, will be performed Friday and Saturday, Nov. 13-14 and 20-21 at 8 p.m., and Sunday, Nov. 22, at 2 p.m. It all takes place on the Hayward Campus of CSUEB in the University Theatre, 25800 Carlos Bee Blvd.

Jacobs had always been fascinated by the relationship between Iago and his wife, Emilia, in "Othello." Iago kills his wife when he has nothing to gain. Jacobs wondered, "What if it was really his own wife he had meant to kill all along, but used Othello and Desdemona as a sort of trial run?"

It wasn't until Jacobs learned of the tragic news at Fort Bragg that he was able to flesh out his story on the premise, what if the worlds of "Othello" and the soldiers came together?

The play takes place in 2002 during the war in Afghanistan, but it could be any war. Post-traumatic stress disorder has probably been around as long as men have gone into battle and seen horrors and violence that they can't reconcile with home and peacetime.

The men go to war with a noble mission, fighters for the cause. They return as time bombs. The skills they use are coupled with the shock, horror and fear of what they've seen or done. Some leave as patriots, and come back as weapons. Everything they've known as "home" or "love" is now twisted and colored by what they've experienced in the war zone. They can't go back; can't be what they were, explains the playwright.

The women and the families are the helpless victims, as are the men. They are on a trajectory where they are swept towards a tragedy that started with the impulse to come together, to love, to fight for their country and all those things they've held sacred. Would they turn back and stop if they could?

A silver lining? The tragedies forced the military to rethink post-traumatic stress syndrome, and take a pro-active role in helping its veterans.