By JOEL HOCHMAN

In maintenance of a tradition of Shakespearean presentations, the Rice Players presented Othello April 13 through 16 at Hamman Auditorium.

The production was directed by Phyllis Skaff with the assistance of James Kuttler. The major roles were Roy James, Othello; Karen Cowdin, Desdemona; Chuck Yingling, Iago.

FIRST OF ALL it should be recognized that the assemblage of sufficient means for the presentation of Othello is a considerable accomplishment in itself. But to attempt Othello, one of the more difficult of Shakespeare's works, is to commit oneself to present it successfully as a tragedy. And herein lies the main fault of the production: Othello's story did not transcend its context, which is the first requisite for attaining a profound perspective of man's frailty.

Roy James did provide the production with a sorely needed stature and dignity which seemed to grow through the evening. His distance from the rest of the cast widened as Othello retreated farther into the dementia of his suspicions, and thus he made a very successful transition in character.

Othello, at first a proud and dominating warrior, deteriorates into a tormented and confused victim of his own simple nature and the connivances of Iago. But James' performance was seriously hindered by its environment.

ON THE ONE hand Iago was not a character of complexities,—a man within a cloak of convincing honesty who is sublimely evil. Rather Iago here was simply villainous, complete to the last stylized gimmick of the Pearl Pureheart one-reelers. Iago was not the proud serpent but the pesty fly; the possibilities of viewing his self-destruction as tragic were completely destroyed by his lack of stature.

Thus the relationship between Othello and Iago was simply good subverted by bad, rather than human fault manipulated through human fault to a mutual destruction.

ON THE OTHER hand, Desdemona was confusing as the object of Othello's destroying passions. For she was a character of such simply naive and standard responses that she related to Othello only superficially. She offered no substantial grounds for his passions in her child-like persona. Her love, presented as a set of responses, was unsatisfying—it was somehow disturbingly brittle.

Finally, Othello's environment was a hindrance in its curiously diverse distractive-ness. From mechanically delivered wisdoms to babe-like physiognomies the situation was often insistently comic. And when presented before an audience plagued by equally babe-like and determinedly uninformed members, the comedy often smothered the tragedy.

TO RETURN TO the positive side, Louis Bell succeeded in bringing wisdom to the Duke of Venice; he demanded respect. Honey Moore as Emilia though (Continued on Page 7)
(Continued from Page 4) sometimes at a loss for an attitude, was convincingly concerned for her mistress. And Cassio, Sam Stewart, successfully presented himself as a devoted, but human, victim of scheming. Additionally, the set, for the first time since the outdoor production of “Twelfth Night,” provided a sufficiently wide and uninhibited area for the presentation.

In summation, the production of Othello was an ambitious and thus deserving break from the almost traditional succession of comedies. But because of many limitations, the effort did not successfully achieve the necessary dimension; it was almost as if in the confusion someone forgot to invite Melpomene.