

** https://www.gsarchive.net/pirates/web_op/pirates24.html

The song is self-contained, and would presumably have had some currency on its own; but it only survives (as far as I know) through having been interpolated into the script of "Othello". Somebody had the idea of letting it be performed by the Duke (stanzas 1-2), Brabantio (stanzas 3-4), and a Chorus of Senators (backing vocals).

That, really, was not a good idea. I should have thought that anyone reading the play ought to be warned that this block of text is incongruous, superfluous, and quite possibly spurious; but no edition that I have seen has any comment to that effect.

Actors had their own way of expressing an opinion. Garrick omitted this whole passage (Bell 1773:167); so did Kemble (1804:18). Modern productions, mistaking completeness for faithfulness, sometimes retain this song. For the actors, that is bad news. Deprived of their musical accompaniment, the lines are almost unspeakable -- as anyone will know who has heard them delivered as if through gritted teeth.

Brabantio's speech, uninterrupted by this silly song, goes thus: "I have done, my lord. / I humbly beseech you, proceed to the affairs of state." And that is how it should be.

C.F. Mar 2026