



## BWW Reviews: MOBY DICK Surges at Syracuse Stage

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Inherently, [Herman Melville](#)'s great American novel "Moby Dick" is no easy read. The 135 chapters are laborious, sentences reach paragraph length and by the time page 600 rolls around, the reader is tired of whaling jargon.

Perhaps that's why Melville's classic is regarded—notoriously—as the great novel that no one has read.

Still, Melville's writing is mesmerizing. His prose is ripe with poetic flair and nuances. Each fisherman delivers a soliloquy that drips with romance and passion. Captain Ahab's dirges to catch the whale are matched only with his fiery, bitter soul—and missing right leg.

The book has been chased like the whale itself—adaptations, each trying to catch the excitement in Melville's prose. Often, the refurbished whaling expedition falls short. It could be fathomable that getting 600 pages into a two-hour reimaging is unthinkable.

[Syracuse Stage](#) welcomes [Julian Rad](#)'s adaptation of the novel as their 40th season opener. Rad's MOBY DICK opened off-off Broadway in 2003 and was nominated for Drama Desk Awards. This play with songs was heralded for its bare set and authentic sea chanteys.

Rad's adaptation, unfortunately, falls in with the rest. This adaptation is underwhelming—not quite grasping the excitement that the novel exudes.

That is not to say that this production isn't good. It's quite the opposite. **The set, designed by [Linda Buchanan](#) is sparse and skeletal. Lighting design by [Thomas C. Hase](#) is brilliant, and the lighting is used to fill in the imagination where the Pequod, whale and water is not.** And, director [Peter Amster](#) delivers beautiful staging. The cast is spread out coherently across the ship. There is always somewhere, someone to look at. **Beautiful lighting boasts the peacefulness of the sea, and the ever-appearing crimson red to remind of the loss and struggles each man of the crew will face.**

The set is, obviously, on the ship. A mast, ropes and four ladders make up the infamous, textured Pequod. It's dingy, foggy and beautifully constructed. The bareness is filled in with colorful personalities of the characters. The show begins

with an empty set. Void of light, the cast is in shadows until the narrator, Ishmael ([Erik Hellman](#)) blurts out the all too familiar, "Call me Ishmael."

Notably the stand out, Captain Ahab (Kurt Ehrmann) gives a gritty, passionate performance. Ehrmann is intense and devout—his Ahab's desire for revenge on the whale that took his limb is palpable and obsessive to the point of horrifying. His wooden leg lags as he moves about the ship; the constant sound of wood scraping the deck represents his personal vendetta: His need to kill—to see the blood of Moby Dick. Ahab regards himself as god. His mania is enthralling and his wit is almost gone.

One thing that Rad's adaptation does well is eliminating the whaling jargon. The 72-page script keeps the poetic prose intact. Instead of long passages that gorge's itself on whaling lingo and the duties of whaling-men, Rad cuts to point with Melville's passion.

Rad also put in 18 authentic sea chanteys. These a cappella songs are poignant and a rather interesting addition to the show. [The Cast of](#) nine effortlessly sings out sailor tunes that add an element of fun to the depressing voyage. Although the songs range from silly to unsettling, they take the temperature of the ship and act as the passage of time.

Although the Stage's rendition of MOBY DICK is put together with a fierce tenacity, the show doesn't truly capture the imagination. The climactic ending is unrealized and lackluster. The passion is lost in the final thrusts of the harpoon. What's left? Ishmael. The mythical creature and the crew have vanished into the murky depths and shadows. The stage is lifeless and sullen again.

This adaptation fails to grab the audience by the throat and transport them onto the dingy Pequod. Maybe, it's because Moby Dick should simply be left to the imagination.

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