

## Ambition consumes us: Reviewing "Moby Dick"

Few names at Northwestern have the kind of awesome, deity-like sheen about them as the name "David Catlin." Ever since co-founding Chicago's Lookingglass Theatre Company in 1988, Catlin's work has been revered, both throughout Chicago and nationwide. Even before I knew I would attend Northwestern myself, people informed me about this upcoming adaptation of "Moby Dick" and all the circus styles it would encompass in production. Basically, the show has been hyped for about a year now.

Understandably, I was slightly wary when walking into the theater. It's one thing for a play to have a lot of really good ideas, but another entirely for it to fully follow through with them and make everything come together onstage. I'd also heard stories about the show's tumultuous rehearsal process beforehand and knew that the show I'd be seeing wasn't perfectly polished yet. It would, however, be nonetheless impressive.

That's why I am recommending that you see "Moby Dick," specifically this next weekend. Not last weekend. Let me explain.

"Moby Dick," adapted by Catlin from Herman Melville's 1851 novel, was co-created along with The Actors Gymnasium in Evanston. The show employs many acrobatic tricks to tell its story, which all appear to feel motivated and never seem to be thrown in randomly. Many of the effects work quite well, such as the six Fates (the only female actors in the production) becoming everything from lightning to seagulls to grieving wives to the sea itself. True, many of the moments before our narrator Ishmael (Communication senior Sammy Zeisel) actually steps onto the ill-fated Pequod don't exactly lend themselves to acrobatic technique. A scene in a church or the initial signing of him and his bedfellow Queequeg (Communication senior Brandon Powers) to the ship's crew aren't particularly active. Still, Catlin and the 16 actors find ways of representing these moments on stage in ways that capture the audience's attention.

But none of the tricks feel — what's the word — safe?

I know they all are. Gymnastic performance is very stringent about making sure there are spotters and catchers for every move they do. It just feels like the actors, as well as the impressive crew, haven't settled into a routine yet. There's still a hyper-awareness for every trick: a sense that the tricks have failed before or the hope from the actors that "it should work this time!"

I was informed by a friend who worked on the show that the performance I saw was the first time everything worked perfectly. It showed, in two ways. First, every effect was as impressive as it should have been, and not a rope was out of place in the expansive and open scenic design. But secondly, I could feel the cast breathing a sigh of relief after every move. I can't blame them for this, because it's not their fault, or Catlin's. It's just a lack of time. If "Moby Dick" had had another week to really settle into its run and move from "the trick worked that time" to "the trick works every time," it would be really impressive.

That's not to say the show wasn't incredible when I saw it. I can hardly even bring up specific moments, there are too many to mention — though the moment when Captain Ahab (Communication junior Daniel Chenard) pulls himself up a rope without using his ivory peg leg is a particular standout. Costume and lighting work together in many cases to make the story both time-period specific as well as timeless (though there's one tech very clearly wearing a leather jacket). I guess it's a question of what you value more: that they try to do so many impressive things, or that they succeed at most of them.

But these issues will slowly fade with time, and "Moby Dick" will have time. Even as you read this, the show is fermenting in the minds of its cast and crew. We got a taste of it last weekend, and it needed to cook for a

little longer. This weekend, though, the boil will be just right.

"Moby Dick" runs until May 4 in the Ethel M. Barber Theatre on campus.

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