

# A hauntingly beautiful 'Moby Dick' surfaces at Arena Stage

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BY GAIL CHOOCHAN / THE FREE LANCE-STAR

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*"Come, come hither. Broken and brokenhearted."*

These are words sung—slowly and eerily—by the only three actresses in this male-dominated production of “Moby Dick,” which is now making waves at Arena Stage in Washington, D.C. Although Herman Melville’s weighty and philosophical tome follows the men aboard the ill-fated whaling ship Pequod, their siren-like presence lends a haunting and feminine touch to their epic journey. And you will want to answer their call.

Lookingglass Theatre Company tackles this classic staple of American literature and delivers an awe-inspiring evening full of artistry and athleticism. In this visually stunning adaptation by director David Catlin, this “Moby Dick,” while rooted in the mid-19th century, is retold with some modern circus flourishes.

The Chicago-based troupe captures the beauty and danger of the Pequod’s titanic quest to find the great white whale, showcasing some dazzling trapeze work by the multitalented actors. Underwater death and near-death scenes are beautifully orchestrated, thanks to Sylvia Hernandez-DiStasi’s imaginative aerial and acrobatic choreography.

Set designer Courtney O’Neill puts audiences right in the belly of the beast, with the stage encircled by oversized whale rib bones and backdropped by plenty of rigging. Performers are often seen climbing the bones and swaying from the ropes, and sometimes riding aboard large swinging wooden planks, illustrating the crew’s life on rough waters. The whole design, topped with William C. Kirkham’s ominous dark-hued lighting, is well executed. And enormous sheets of fabric are cleverly incorporated into the aquatic scenes, bringing an ethereal quality to production. In one breathtaking move, the show wraps the audience into the seafaring adventure.

Christopher Donahue leads this exceptional cast as the grizzled Captain Ahab, whose all-consuming obsession with finding the whale that took his leg reaches high levels of madness. Jamie Abelson and Anthony Fleming III are enjoyable as the oddball couple Ishmael and Queequeg. It’s a fine friendship that begins with the bespectacled sailor/narrator thinking the heavily tattooed islander is a savage who wants to eat him. Queequeg may be heavy on the drama, but light comedy can often be found in his lines. Anticipating his death at sea, he has an endless list of items to pack into his coffin.

Kelley Abell, Cordelia Dewdney and Kasey Foster are listed as the Fates, ghostly walking about in heavy dark cloaks or tattered white dresses with gothic makeup. “Moby Dick” may be all about the men at sea, but their performances help drive the storytelling as they portray their loved ones, water and whales. And it’s their portrayal of the hunted down whales that will make viewers feel for these beautiful creatures.

Lookingglass Theatre Company’s “Moby Dick” is an epic production for an epic tale. Catch this high-flying adaptation before it departs Christmas Eve, just a day before the Pequod left on its unforgettable voyage.