

# A Physical Telling of 'Moby Dick'

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11/28/2016



Arena Stage is at it again bringing larger than life theatre right to DC, and this time, it's sure to make a whale of a splash. Arena's interpretation of the Melville classic is cranking waves with its innovative spin, and it's sure to be a show you don't want to miss. Partnering with the Actor's Gymnasium in Chicago, Arena audiences will be transfixed by aerial stunts and storytelling, as well as journeying with Ishmael in the obsessive quest to battle the infamous great white whale. All hands on deck The Pequod as *Moby Dick* prepares to dock at Arena Stage on November 18.

On Tap got to chat with Chicago's Jamie Abelson (Ishmael), who's making his Arena Stage debut, for the inside scoop on all things *Moby Dick*.

**On Tap: You're making your Arena Stage debut as Ishmael, but this isn't your first time playing this character. What are you planning to do differently this time around?**

**Jamie Abelson:** I wouldn't say that I'm planning on doing anything differently, but I hope that performing in new theatres in different cities with a few new cast members and script changes can bring fresh ideas and images out in my performance. While I think that we do a great job of weaving the narration into the action of the story, I am in charge of imparting a lot of information to the audience. My hope is that while forwarding the plot I can also activate the audience's imagination and create a personalized window through which they can relate the story to some time in their own lives.

**OT: Tell me a little bit about Moby Dick and why DC audiences will want to come see it.**

**JA:** The story of *Moby Dick* is wonderful and as relevant as ever – especially in a city like DC where passionate people come from all over to test their ambitions against the best and the brightest. I'm biased of course, but I think our production is spellbinding and unique. For the most part, the show is true to the book and tells the story as simply as possible. But when events require a leap of imagination, we help the audience make that leap with physical daring and innovative imagery.

**OT: Arena Stage collaborated with the Actor's Gym in Chicago for aerial stunt and stage combat training. Prior to this show, did you have much experience with these art forms?**

**JA:** I have always gravitated towards theatre that is driven by physical storytelling. Maybe this is because I grew up competing as a gymnast, or maybe movement is just the way my imagination is activated. In preparation for this show, I did take a few circus, aerial classes at the Actors Gymnasium in Chicago to build strength and to experiment with my skills. Our cast is made up of performers with all different sorts of training and experience.

**OT: How did you feel going into this? Were you nervous at all?**

**JA:** For better or worse, I'm pretty comfortable being high up in the air and taking calculated risks with my body. However, as we have developed the show, I have thought more and more about safety and how to make sure that I'm not taking any unnecessary risks. I have immense trust for all of my cast mates, and if we are all focused and communicating, there's nothing to worry about. The challenge is to maintain that focus day in and day out for a long tour.

**OT: In what way are you hoping audiences feel after seeing *Moby Dick*?**

**JA:** Invigorated, pensive, nostalgic, and transfixed. There are so many possible messages to take away from this story. For Ishmael, this is a story about a man driven to go on a daring adventure by an overwhelming sense of loneliness, isolation, and frustration with the shallow world surrounding him. On his journey, he finds friendship, purpose, community and passion – enough for a lifetime. He may lose it all, but I hope audiences leave feeling like it was all worth it. The true tragedy would have been if he had never walked away from his desk to explore the world. Better to have loved and lost, than to die wondering what could have been.

**OT: In your time off, will you have much time to explore? What are you looking forward to exploring most in DC?**

**JA:** Once we get the show open, we can't wait to explore the city. We have heard a rumor about the world's largest whalebone collection, run by the Smithsonian somewhere in Virginia. We're trying to get in for a special tour.

*Moby Dick* is currently playing at Arena Stage and will continue its run through December 24. For more information or to purchase tickets, visit [www.arenastage.org](http://www.arenastage.org).

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