

# San Diego Gay and Lesbian News

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 [sdgln.com/entertainment/2017/02/03/theater-review-moby-dick](http://sdgln.com/entertainment/2017/02/03/theater-review-moby-dick)

by Jean Lowerison - SDGLN Theater critic

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Most 19th-century whalers went to sea for the money. Some – like Ishmael, Herman Melville’s narrator in his huge classic “Moby-Dick, or the Whale” – were in search of excitement.

Ishmael’s first surprise is his heavily tattooed, easygoing Polynesian bunkmate Queequeg, who reportedly “likes his meat raw...still screaming.”

But they share the desire for adventure, and despite the fact that “there is much death in this business of whaling,” Ishmael (Jamie Abelson) and Queequeg (Anthony Fleming III) sign on to the Pequod out of New Bedford.

It looks like a normal whaling expedition, with the usual contingent of sailors.

But they will soon learn that Captain Ahab (Christopher Donahue) is less interested in a romantic struggle with the elements or making a buck than he is in his monomaniacal revenge quest to kill the leviathan sperm whale Moby Dick that made him a pegleg.

Thus will he draw everyone else on the boat into his lunacy.

Herman Melville is having something of a renaissance. In 2010, opera composer Jake Heggie opened his wonderful opera “Moby-Dick” in Dallas.

Now David Catlin of Chicago’s Lookingglass Theatre has made a fascinating performance piece out of Melville’s 1851 leviathan of a novel, in its West Coast premiere through Feb. 19 at South Coast Repertory in Costa Mesa.

This is a co-production of three theaters: Lookingglass, Arena Stage in Washington, D.C. and Alliance Theatre in Atlanta.

Catlin has done a spectacular job of distilling the story down to a manageable length (the show runs 2:20 including intermission), and his fine cast does the rest, making “Moby Dick” a human as well as a visual wonder.

Courtney O’Neill’s fanciful set consists of a large wooden platform with a series of curved poles that serve as masts (and the carcass of the great beast). Three female characters play a number of roles including the whale, and you’ll see yards and yards of fabric (use your imagination).

These poles are scaled by aerialists, who swing, dangle and jump from the “rigging” in heart-stopping, Cirque du Soleil fashion.

To convey a sort of other-worldly realism to this tale, Catlin (who wrote and directed this piece) uses music – from “Silent Night” (The Pequod sailed on Christmas Day) to chant-like pieces to dirge-like sounds, all made by the aforementioned extremely talented trio of women who play multiple roles (I’ll call them Fates – one of their identities).

In fact, the sound all around is spectacular, and includes heart-stopping thunder crashes and the thumps of the monster thrashing about.

How do you adapt a crazy literary concoction (called by the London “Observer” critic a “rhapsody run mad”) with diverse writing styles including poetry, encyclopedic prose and even a few stage directions – and, let’s not forget, a whale as a central character – into a coherent play?

You'll have to see "Moby Dick" to find out.

I highly recommend it.

The details

"Moby Dick" plays through February 19, 2017 at South Coast Repertory, 655 Town Center Drive, Costa Mesa.

Tuesday, Wednesday and Sunday at 7:30 pm; Thursday through Saturday at 8 pm; matinees Saturday and Sunday at 2:30 pm

Tickets: (714) 708-5555 or [www.scr.org](http://www.scr.org)