

Songs for *Moby Dick*



Composed and performed by
Peter Thompson

An Ubu Opera production
Theatre Passe Muraille
June 30 – July 12, 2026

Songs for Moby Dick

Composer: Peter Thompson

Text: Herman Melville

Director: Adam Paolozza

Lighting Design: Sebastian Marziali

Stage Manager: Rachel More*

Sets and Costumes: Peter Thompson

Performers

Ishmael: Peter Thompson

Piano: Erika Reiman

List of Songs

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| i. | Ishmael |
| ii. | The Pequod |
| iii. | All's Astir |
| iv. | Starbuck |
| v. | Stubb |
| vi. | Dagoo |
| vii. | Flask |
| viii. | Queequeg |
| ix. | Ahab |
| ix. | The Masthead |
| x. | Ahab at Night |
| xi. | Pip |
| xii. | The Hunt |
| xiii. | Epilogue |

* Courtesy of Canadian Actors Equity Association

Many thanks to Theatre Passe Muraille, Andra Bradish, and Sherry Liang

Synopsis

A ghostly image of a lost sailor begins the performance. Out of the mist, a lost soul appears, to mourn the dead, and to be remembered.

Ishmael is the narrator's name. He travels back in time to his decision as a young man to leave the comforts of home, and sign on to a whale-hunting vessel for a three-year voyage around the world. ("Ishmael"). He travels to Nantucket, the centre of the whale-hunting industry in the 1830's and 1840's, and looks over the various ships preparing to embark. He finds a ship that speaks to his own romantic ideas of the whale-hunt ("The Pequod"). He signs on, and watches the final preparations of the ship for the voyage, but is mystified by the absence of the captain, Ahab. ("All's Astir").

Ishmael is a good-natured, humorous observer of human nature. He describes the crew, and mimics them in a series of short songs ("Starbuck", "Stubb", "Dagoo", "Flask"), but one crew-mate touches him more deeply, and he describes his first intimate encounter with his bosom-friend, the South Seas islander Queequeg. ("Queequeg")

Finally, the captain appears, out of the depths of his cabin. Ahab has been seriously injured during his last voyage, and had his leg ripped off by a particularly large and aggressive sperm whale, an albino whale, named Moby Dick by the whaling community. Ahab rouses the crew, and proclaims that their mission is to hunt and find this whale in revenge. ("Ahab")

Ishmael sings more songs about the voyage, including a philosophical song about the mystical nature of the sea ("The Masthead"), the poisonous atmosphere created by Ahab's obsession with the whale, as he paces the deck at night while the crew attempts to sleep ("Ahab at Night"), and the story of the ship's keeper Pip, a former slave, who is lost at sea and eventually rescued, only to lose his sanity, and of the disturbing relationship that forms between Ahab and Pip. ("Pip").

Finally, Moby Dick is sighted by the crew, and the hunt begins. In a relentless narrative, the crew set out in their small boats to attack the whale. They successfully harpoon Moby Dick, who races away, dragging the boats with him, and Ishmael recounts the whale's desperation and pain. The whale dives, and resurfaces with a vengeance, attacking its tormentors. Ahab stabs at the whale with his lance, but is snagged by a stray rope, and is wrapped tight against Moby Dick, who then turns and attacks the ship, sinking it. The Pequod sinks rapidly, causing a vortex that sucks the crew down, drowning all on board. ("The Hunt").

Only Ishmael survives, and sings one final song, lamenting the hatred and unthinking savagery of Ahab and the crew. ("Epilogue").

Background

The commercial whaling industry dates from the 17th century and continued until 1982, when commercial whaling was officially “paused”. The peak of the American whaling industry was in the 1840's and 1850's, with its main target being the sperm whale. Whale oil was used as a lubricant, and spermaceti, the oil from the head-case of the whale, was highly prized for lighting, as it burns with a clean, bright flame.

Whaling was a dirty, dangerous occupation, attracting young men from poorer economic groups, as well as those seeking adventure, such as Herman Melville. The crews were diverse, and included many black and indigenous sailors, as well as South Sea Islanders. Hunting a whale involved stalking a sleeping whale in small rowboats, harpooning it, and being dragged behind the whale until it is exhausted and able to be slaughtered.

Sperm whales are intelligent, social animals. The whale hunt led to the near-extinction of these creatures. With the banning of the commercial hunt, sperm whale populations have rebounded significantly, despite other threats, such as plastic pollution in our oceans.

Bios

Peter Thompson

Peter Thompson is a Canadian composer, classical singer and teacher. He trained extensively in theatre and movement, and directs stage productions for young performers, preparing adaptations of plays including *The Tempest*, *Macbeth*, *Alice through the Looking Glass*, *Grimm Tales*, and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*.

As a performer, Peter performs regularly in concert, with a focus on art song and 20th century music. His compositions focus on works for music-theatre, including a one-act comic opera based on the absurdist play *Ubu Roi* by Alfred Jarry (concert premiere 2018), and a cycle of songs based on the novel *Moby Dick*. *Moby Dick* was first performed in concert in 2023, and has since been developed in collaboration with Adam Paolozza (Bad New Days Theatre) for the stage. His most recent composition project is a choral piece based on the novel, *The Corner that Held Them*, by Sylvia Townsend Warner.

Adam Paolozza

Adam Paolozza is an award winning performer, director and teacher, and the Artistic Director of [Bad New Days Theatre](#). His work fuses elements of mask, mime, movement, physical theatre, clown and object work to create dynamic, original devised creations. His latest work was the multi-Dora nominated *Last Landscape*, which engaged with eco-dramaturgy, exploring a holistic approach to sustainability in theatre creation & practice. His work has been recognized with numerous awards, including the Ray Ferris Innovation and Sustainability Grant, and has toured nationally and internationally. Adam studied at the Lecoq school in Paris, and holds an MA in Performance Studies from York University.

Erika Reiman

Dr. Erika Reiman is a freelance pianist and chamber musician. She served as head coach and administrator for Brott Opera in Hamilton for five seasons, and at present is the pianist for Chorus Hamilton and MD3 Trio. She is the author of *Schumann's Piano Cycles and the Novels of Jean Paul*, published in 2004 by the University of Rochester Press, and teaches at Brock University. She has previously taught at Wilfrid Laurier University, the University of Guelph, and the University of Toronto; she also maintains a home studio for pianists, vocal accompanying and coaching. She is also the music director at St. Matthew-on-the-Plains Anglican Church in Burlington, Ontario.

Sebastian Marziali

Sebastian Marziali is an award-winning Uruguayan-Canadian performer, designer, and creator based in T'karonto. Sebastian has been Lighting Designer for numerous festivals including the Toronto International Burlesque Festival, Vanguardia Dance Festival, RUTAS, Here & Now, and Dance Ontario DanceWeekend. With their collective Other Hearts they create works that exist between theatre, performance art, and installation with a focus on new creative methodologies for access. Most recently they were Lighting Designer for *Xilopango* in Montreal and *The Herald* at Buddies in Bad Times. Recipient of the 2024 Jack King Award from Associated Designers of Canada & Nominated for the 2026 Pauline McGibbon Award.

Rachel More

Rachel More is a Stage Manager living and working in Hamilton Ontario. Past credits include BrottOpera, Tapestry Opera, Rooks Theatre, and Hamilton Theatre Project. She is thrilled to be part of Songs for Moby Dick.

Ubu Opera

[Ubu Opera](#) is a Toronto-based collective dedicated to creating new and vibrant music theatre that draws on the rich history of classical chamber music and the human voice, fused with the immediacy of physical theatre. Our vision is to bring these arts together to make theatre that is entertaining, thought-provoking, and deeply human.

Ubu Opera's first concert production of Ubu Roy was presented in 2018, as part of the inaugural season of Wild Geese Chamber Music in Hamilton, Ontario. A brief animated trailer for Ubu Roy was included in the 2022 Lift-Off Online film festival. Songs for Moby Dick, first performed in concert in 2023, is Ubu Opera's first fully-staged production.

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