

The Pescadero Opera Society presents

Moby-Dick



Music by
Jake Heggie

Libretto by
Gene Scheer

Based on Herman Melville's novel
Moby-Dick; or, The Whale

Opera in Two Acts

Place: The high sea
Time: 1841

Characters

Captain Ahab, commander of the *Pequod* (tenor) Jay Hunter Morris
Greenhorn, a new crew member (tenor) Stephen Costello
Starbuck, First Mate (baritone) Morgan Smith
Queequeg, a harpooner (baritone)..... Jonathan Lemalu
Flask, Third Mate (tenor) Matthew O'Neill
Stubb, Second Mate (baritone)..... Robert Orth
Pip, Ahab's cabin boy (soprano)..... Talise Trevique
Captain Gardiner, Commander of the *Rachel* (baritone) Joo Won Kang
Tashtego, a harpooner Carmichael Blankenship
Dagoo, a harpooner Bradley Kynard
Nantucket sailor..... Chester Pidduck
Spanish sailer..... Anders Froehlich

Conducted by Patrick Summers

The San Francisco Opera Orchestra, Chorus and Dance Corps

Première performance at the Winspear Opera House in Dallas, Texas on April 30, 2010

Synopsis

Background: In 1841, young Ishmael signs up for service aboard the *Pequod*, a whaling ship sailing out of New Bedford, Massachusetts. The ship is under the command of Captain Ahab, a strict disciplinarian who exhorts his men to find Moby Dick, the great white whale that had taken his leg. Ahab is obsessed in getting his revenge.

Act I

The whaling ship *Pequod* has been at sea for one week.



Captain Ahab is alone on deck before dawn. Below deck, most of the crew is sleeping. The harpooner, Queequeg, prays and wakes Greenhorn [*the novel's Ishmael, renamed for the opera*], who is a loner and new to whaling. Dawn breaks and the call is made for "All Hands!" The crew raises the ship's sails. Starbuck, Stubb and Flask talk about Ahab, whom no one has seen since the *Pequod* left Nantucket.

After the crew sings of whales, wealth and home, Captain Ahab suddenly appears. He tells the crew about Moby Dick, the great white whale that took off one of his legs. He then nails a gold doubloon to the mast and promises it to the man

who first sites the whale. Ahab then reveals that the real reason for the voyage is to find and destroy this one whale. He calls out, "Death to Moby Dick!" The crew are excited at this call, except for the first mate, Starbuck, who confronts Ahab about what he sees as a futile and blasphemous mission.

Starbuck teaches Greenhorn about the dangers of whaling. He worries that he'll never again see his wife and son. Subsequently overcome with emotion, he orders Queequeg to complete the lesson. Stubb sites a pod of whales, but Ahab forbids the eager crew to hunt them, since Moby Dick has not yet been sighted. Starbuck orders the crew to sail on and sends Greenhorn up to the crow's nest to search for him. Queequeg then joins Greenhorn. At sunset, Ahab looks over the wake of the ship and reflects that his obsession deprives him of any enjoyment of beauty, leaving him only with anguish. Queequeg and Greenhorn remain at the masthead. On deck, Starbuck bemoans Ahab's obsession.

Three months later

Three months have passed without a single whale hunt for the crew of the *Pequod*. Stubb jokes with the young cabin boy Pip about the sharks that are circling the ship. The song ignites a dance among the crew; however, rising tensions erupt and lead to a dangerous racial fight. Greenhorn suddenly sights an active pod of whales. Starbuck finally persuades Ahab to let the men hunt. Starbuck and Stubb harpoon whales, but Flask's boat capsizes and Pip is lost at sea.

On deck a whale is being butchered on the *Pequod*. Flask tells Ahab that the search for Pip is underway. The crew imagines Pip lost and struggling. Flask explains to Starbuck that many barrels of oil are leaking. Starbuck goes below deck to tell Ahab that they must find a port for repairs. Ahab, concerned only with Moby Dick, listens unmoved by Starbuck's report. Starbuck refuses to leave. Ahab grabs a musket and orders Starbuck to his knees. On deck, Greenhorn shouts that Pip has been sighted. Ahab orders Starbuck away. The crew hears from Greenhorn of how Queequeg had rescued Pip and pleads with Starbuck to get help. Starbuck ignores his pleas. Seeing the realities of life at sea, Greenhorn decides to befriend Queequeg.

Starbuck returns to Ahab's cabin and finds him asleep. He picks up Ahab's musket and contemplates killing Ahab, thinking that doing so may allow him to see his wife and child again. Ahab cries out in his sleep. Starbuck replaces the musket and leaves the cabin.

Act II

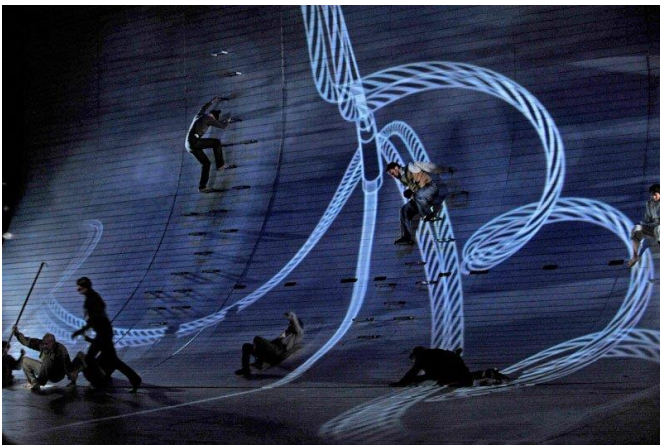
One year later

A great storm is approaching. Stubb, Flask and the crew sing a jolly work song. At the masthead, Greenhorn and Queequeg talk of traveling together to Queequeg's native island. Greenhorn wants to learn Queequeg's language and write down their adventures. Queequeg suddenly collapses. The crew carries him below. Ahab says that he will take the masthead watch himself, as he wants to sight Moby Dick first.

Queequeg tells Greenhorn that he is dying and asks that a coffin be built for him. Pip begins to sing a lament, in which Greenhorn joins in.

A huge storm approaches the *Pequod*. Ahab is defiant, while lightning bolts engulf the ship. The masts glow with St. Elmo's fire¹. Ahab demands that the men hold their posts, stating that the white flame is a sign from heaven to guide them to Moby Dick. To Starbuck's dismay, this freshly inspires the crew.

The next morning



The *Pequod* has weathered the storm. From afar Gardiner, captain of the *Rachel*, another whaling vessel, pleads for help to search for his 12-year-old son who was lost in the storm. Ahab refuses. Pip replies to Gardiner of the *Pequod*'s own lost boy by cutting himself. Ahab's clothes are stained with Pip's blood. Ahab orders the ship to sail on, leaving Gardiner behind. Ahab ponders the heartless God who has devastated so many lives and baptizes his new harpoon with Pip's blood.

Below deck, Greenhorn sees Queequeg's newly built coffin and muses on the nature of human madness. On deck, Ahab and Starbuck look over the horizon. Ahab describes his forty years at sea and all that he has left behind. He asks to what purpose, which he cannot answer. He sees in Starbuck's eyes a human decency, which touches him deeply. Seizing the moment, Starbuck attempts to persuade Ahab that the ship should return to Nantucket, and the crew return to their families who are waiting for them. Ahab seems about to relent, but then he sights Moby Dick on the horizon. In the ensuing excitement, the whale boats are lowered. Ahab looks again in Starbuck's eyes and orders him to remain on board. The crew affirms its loyalty to Ahab.

During the chase, Moby Dick destroys two whale boats in succession, drowning their crews. The whale then rams the *Pequod*, which also sinks. All but Ahab jump or fall off. Finally alone with the white whale, Ahab cries out and stabs at Moby Dick, before being dragged down into the sea.

Epilogue: Many days later

Barely alive, Greenhorn floats on Queequeg's coffin singing Queequeg's prayer. Gardiner calls from afar, thinking that he has found his missing son. Instead, he learns that Ahab and the crew of the *Pequod* have all drowned except for this lone survivor. Gardiner asks Greenhorn his name. Greenhorn replies, "Call me Ishmael."

¹**St. Elmo's fire** — a bright blue or violet glow appearing like fire from the top of the masts.

Jake Heggie

Born March 31, 1961 in West Palm Beach, Florida



Jake Heggie is an American composer of opera, vocal, orchestral, and chamber music. He is best known for his operas and songs as well as for his collaborations with internationally renowned performers and writers. Heggie is most known for his contributions to the American operatic repertoire. Hailed by the Associated Press as “one of the pre-eminent contemporary opera composers,” his operas have entered the standard repertoire with the likes of American composers Carlisle Floyd, Gian Carlo Menotti, and Douglas Moore, as well as with those of his contemporaries. Heggie describes himself as a theater composer who is concerned with “serving [the] drama” and “exploring character.”

Jake Heggie operas are *Dead Man Walking* (libretto by Terrence McNally), *Moby-Dick* (libretto by Gene Scheer), *It’s A Wonderful Life* (Scheer), *Great Scott* (McNally), *Three Decembers* (Scheer), *To Hell and Back* (Scheer), *Out of Darkness: Two Remain* (Scheer), *At the Statue of Venus* (McNally) and *The Radio Hour: A Choral Opera* (Scheer). He is currently at work on *If I Were You* (Scheer) a new opera based on the Faustian story by Julian Green, commissioned by the Merola Opera Program for Summer of 2019. Heggie has also composed nearly 300 art songs, as well as concerti, chamber music, choral and orchestral works, including the *Ahab Symphony*.

The operas – most created with the distinguished writers Terrence McNally or Gene Scheer – have been produced on five continents. In February 2017, *Dead Man Walking* received its 50th international production at the Kennedy Center in Washington DC in a new production by director Francesca Zambello. In addition to major productions throughout the USA, *Dead Man Walking* has been seen in Dresden, Vienna, Sydney, Adelaide, Calgary, Montreal, Cape Town, Dublin, Copenhagen, and Malmö, with future production set for Vancouver, Madrid and London. *Moby-Dick* has received seven international productions since its 2010 premiere at The Dallas Opera with future productions in the USA and Europe. The San Francisco Opera production was telecast as part of Great Performances’ 40th anniversary season and released on DVD. *Moby-Dick* received its East Coast premiere at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. in 2014. It is also the subject of a book by Robert Wallace, titled *Heggie & Scheer’s Moby-Dick — A Grand opera for the 21st Century*. Heggie & Scheer’s *Three Decembers*, a three-character chamber opera, has received nearly 20 productions internationally.

In 2016, Heggie was awarded the Eddie Medora King Prize by the UT Austin Butler School of Music. He was also the recipient of the Champion Award from the San Francisco Gay Men’s Chorus in a private concert that featured a performance by the great Patti LuPone. Heggie was the keynote speaker for the 2016 meeting of the National Association of Schools of Music in Dallas, and this year, he will give commencement addresses at Eastman’s Jacobs School of Music and Northwestern’s Bienen School of Music. A Guggenheim Fellow, he served for three years as a mentor for Washington National Opera’s American Opera Initiative. He is a frequent guest artist and master teacher at universities and conservatories, including Boston University, Bucknell, Cincinnati Conservatory, Cornell, Eastman, CU Boulder, Northwestern, The Royal Conservatory in Toronto, UNI, UNT, UT Austin, USC’s Thornton School, Vanderbilt University, and at festivals such as SongFest at the Colburn School, Ravinia Festival, and VISI in Vancouver.

Jake Heggie lives in San Francisco with his husband, Curt Branom.

Moby-Dick

Moby-Dick is composed in two acts and sung in English. Composer Jake Heggie and librettist Gene Scheer's opera adaptation brings a thrilling new musical dimension to one of the towering classics of American literature, Herman Melville's celebrated novel *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale*. Jay Hunter Morris sings Captain Ahab in Leonard Foglia's multimedia production.

In 2005, Dallas Opera commissioned an opera from Heggie, intended for the company's inaugural season in the Winspear Opera House in 2010. In consultation with Terrence McNally, Heggie suggested *Moby-Dick* as the subject. Subsequently, Dallas Opera shared this commission jointly with San Francisco Opera, San Diego Opera, State Opera of South Australia and Calgary Opera. McNally subsequently withdrew from work on the opera because of health issues. Heggie continued work on the opera in collaboration with Scheer and stage director Leonard Foglia. Scheer estimated that approximately 50% of his libretto used Melville's words directly. Heggie specifically wrote the role of Ahab with Ben Heppner in mind.

Moby-Dick received its highly acclaimed world premiere on April 30, 2010, at the Winspear Opera House in Dallas, Texas, as part of its inaugural season. *D Magazine* wrote, "a new chapter in opera history may have opened [with *Moby-Dick*]," with the *Dallas Morning News* applauding the work as "a triumph." Duncan Osborne, the great-great-grandson of Herman Melville, was in attendance.

The 2012 production of *Moby-Dick* at San Francisco Opera was featured on Great Performances' 40th Season, telecast nationally in 2013 and subsequently released on DVD. That same year, *Heggie & Scheer's Moby-Dick: A Grand Opera for the 21st Century*, a book by Robert Wallace, with photos by Karen Almond, about the making of the opera was published by UNT Press. *Moby-Dick* received its East Coast premiere in February 2014 in a production by the Washington National Opera.

The production at the State Opera of South Australia in Adelaide followed in August-September 2011, with Jay Hunter Morris as Ahab. Calgary Opera staged the work in early 2012. San Diego Opera staged its performances in January and February 2012, with Heppner as Ahab.

San Francisco Opera produced the opera in November 2012. The Bay Area premiere ran for eight performances in the fall of 2012 at the historic War Memorial Opera House. San Francisco Opera Principal Guest Conductor Patrick Summers presided over a vocally resplendent cast of singers. Bay Area music critics warmly embraced the opera's premiere. The San Francisco Opera production was filmed for later television relay, which occurred in late 2013.

Following the initial productions by the companies involved in the commission of the opera, Washington National Opera produced the work in February/March 2014. Los Angeles Opera staged its production in November 2015. Dallas Opera revived the original production in November 2016.

Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*

Herman Melville's novel *Moby-Dick* first appeared in 1851 and is universally regarded as one of the great American novels. The Heggie-Scheer opera is not the first attempt to set the novel operatically. A composer by the name of J. Low premiered a work based on the novel in 1955 but is not listed anywhere among his musical works). Other Melville works set operatically are *Bartleby the Scrivener* (Walter Aschaffenburg, 1964), *The Bell Tower* (Ernst Krenek, 1957), *The Confidence Man* (George Rochberg, 1982) and, of course, *Billy Budd* (Benjamin Britten, 1951).

Melville spent time in the navy as well as on the 1841-1842 whaling expedition of the *Acushnet*. But he took his inspiration from the real-life ramming and ultimate wrecking of the *Essex* in 1820, a Nantucket whaling ship that was destroyed, seemingly deliberately, by a sperm whale off the western coast of South America. The first mate of the *Essex* published a memoir of the event in 1821. Melville read it and was greatly influenced by it just prior to his writing of *Moby-Dick* in 1850. He was also influenced by a story published in *The Knickerbocker* in 1839, concerning the dispatch of a large albino sperm whale known as "Mocha Dick" for its presence around the Chilean island of the same name.

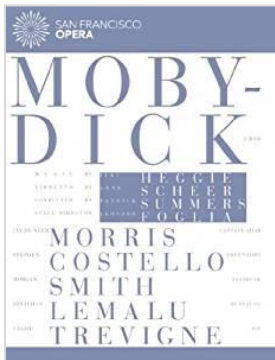
Melville was also inspired by the dark, shadowy side of the works of author Nathaniel Hawthorne whom he met at a picnic in the spring of 1850. He ended up dedicating his novel to Hawthorne, as much for his respect for him as a writer as for his friendship and support.

Melville's work essentially disappeared from the American scene after the publication of *Moby-Dick* because of its scathing reception by critics and readers who could not grasp or understand its sprawling structure. Melville died in 1891, forgotten by all except a subterranean collection of New York aficionados. Shortly before World War I author Carl Van Doren began to preach of Melville's importance at Columbia University. This marked a resurgence of interest in Melville and in *Moby-Dick* as a pillar of American writing.

In *Moby-Dick* Melville creates an entire world, held in the crucible of a whaling ship under the orders of a fanatical "monomaniac" (as Melville calls him) whose only focus is to take revenge on the great albino whale who tore his leg from his body. The opera *Moby-Dick* is an extremely effective and successful dramatization of the story. Its three creators (Jake Heggie, Gene Scheer, and Leonard Foglia acting as dramaturge and stage director of the project) did an incredible job capturing the flavor, spirit and intent of the novel even if many important events in the book had to be jettisoned.

Moby-Dick: The Video (2010)

Starring Jay Hunter Morris and Stephen Costello; conducted by Patrick Summers



Heggie's new opera, *Moby Dick* has proven to be an instant American operatic classic. The production, filmed live from the San Francisco Opera, features state-of-the-art technology (lighting, projections, etc.) to seamlessly move the opera's scenes deftly and, not infrequently, adding a little "awe" power for the audience. But the show is not about effects, but rather about epic storytelling through music and the effects and stage designs are simply the platform for an overwhelming operatic treatment of one of our great classic tales.

Grammy-winning tenor, Jay Hunter Morris, plays the role of Captain Ahab in Herman Meville's epic tale of a fierce, obsessive whaling-boat captain who descends into madness, putting his crew in mortal danger, is brought to the stage in this thrilling production from San Francisco Opera. Composer Jake Heggie is in his finest creation since *Dead Man Walking*, and librettist Gene Scheer's adaptation is vibrant, compelling piece of musical theater.

Patrick Summers, a Heggie favorite, leads the San Francisco forces with assurance, driving the music furiously in its storm scenes while allowing his singers plenty of room for lyrical expansion — which Heggie gives his characters plenty of. Frank Zamacona's video work captures the detail and emotional strength of Leonard Foglia's direction, and the seasoned and secured cast under the excellent leadership of Patrick Summers functions both vocally and dramatically as a fully invested ensemble.

Moby-Dick emerges as an opera that has everything, taking its place alongside the esteemed oceanic operas *Billy Budd* and *L'amour de loin*.