

# MOBY - DICK

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An opera in two acts

Music by . . . . . **Jake Heggie**

Libretto by . . . . . **Gene Scheer**

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

### Cast

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

### San Francisco Opera Orchestra, Chorus and Dance Corps

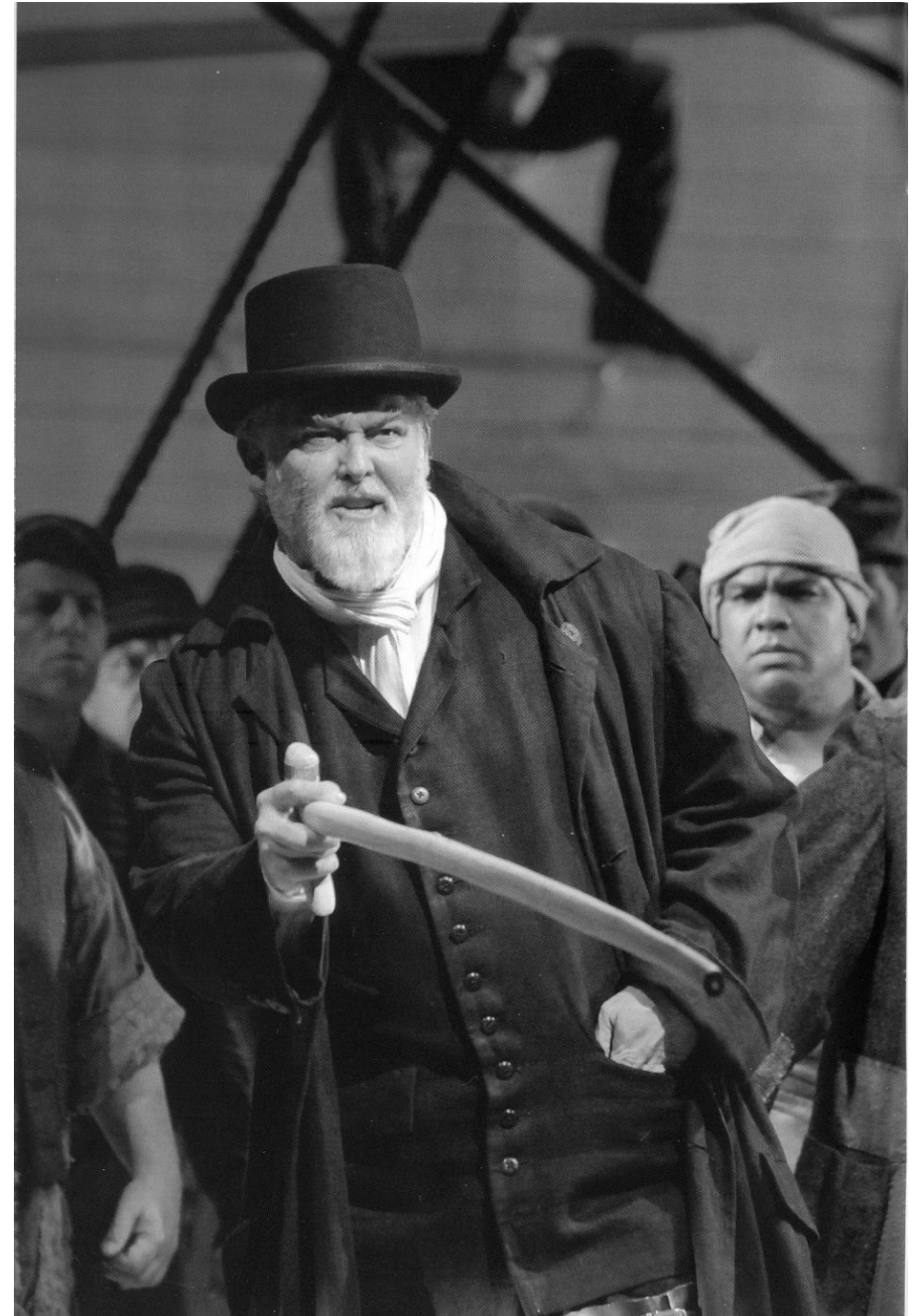
Concertmaster . . . . . Kay Stern  
Chorus Director . . . . . Ian Robertson

Conductor . . . . . Patrick Summers

Directed for the stage by . . . . . Leonard Foglia  
Set Designer . . . . . Robert Brill  
Costume Designer . . . . . Jane Greenwood  
Lighting Designer . . . . . Donald Holder  
Projection Designer . . . . . Elaine J. McCarthy  
Movement Director/Choreographer . . . . . Keturah Stickann

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Opera by Jake Heggie & Gene Scheer

## Act I

1	Prelude: The Pequod. . . . .	3:36
2	Scene 1: <i>Fune ala</i> . (Greenhorn, Queequeg, Crew). . . . .	5:58
3	Scene 2: <i>All hands!</i> (Ahab, Greenhorn, Starbuck, Queequeg, Pip, Flask, Stubb, Crew) . . . . .	16:32
4	Scene 3: <i>You, Greenhorn, with me</i> . (Ahab, Greenhorn, Starbuck, Queequeg, Flask, Stubb, Crew) . . . . .	10:04
5	Scene 4: <i>I leave a white and turbid wake</i> . (Ahab, Greenhorn, Starbuck, Queequeg) . . . . .	9:50
6	Interlude: The Pequod sails at night. . . . .	0:28
7	Scene 5: <i>Well, Stubb, wise Stubb</i> . (Ahab, Greenhorn, Starbuck, Pip, Flask, Stubb, Crew) . . . . .	11:30
8	Scene 6: <i>We did our best to find him</i> . (Ahab, Greenhorn, Starbuck, Queequeg, Pip, Flask, Stubb, Crew) . . . . .	15:09
9	Scene 7: <i>Captain Ahab? I must speak with you</i> . (Ahab, Starbuck, Queequeg, Crew) . . . . .	5:24

## Act II

10	Prelude: One year later. . . . .	0:48
11	Scene 1: <i>Rolling white caps</i> . (Ahab, Greenhorn, Starbuck, Queequeg, Flask, Stubb, Crew) . . . . .	10:43
12	Scene 2: <i>Something change. Here in heart</i> . (Greenhorn, Queequeg, Pip). . . . .	4:55
13	Scene 3: <i>Light, thou leapest out of darkness</i> . (Ahab, Starbuck, Flask, Stubb, Crew) . . . . .	6:31

We started working in earnest in April 2008 on a trip to Nantucket, where the story of the book begins. On this remarkable island, Gene and I visited the whaling museum and met with the great author Nathaniel Philbrick, who makes his home there. It was his prize-winning novel, *In the Heart of the Sea*, that made everything jump to life for us. His book is about the true story of the Essex, the whaling ship rammed and sunk by a sperm whale in 1820 off the coast of South America. It was this legend that inspired Melville to write his novel, and it was Philbrick's vivid, modern, human telling of it that made all of it seem terribly real to me.

Gene worked closely with our director, Leonard Foglia, who also served as our dramaturg: asking questions, helping us to trace a meaningful, cogent, and poetic journey. All the while, I was trying to find the musical language of the opera. I wrote a chant for Queequeg and about 60 additional pages of music. In December of 2008, in agony, I discarded everything I'd written. It was good, just not good enough. What was blocking me? I realized that all of the characters had become real to me—except for Ahab. And without Ahab, you don't have *Moby-Dick*. I had been trying to write from the beginning—which is what I prefer. But I had to cast that aside. Halfway through the first act libretto was the great monologue “I leave a white and turbid wake.” And there was the aching human being—the fully formed individual. The music for Ahab emerged and the world of the opera cracked open for me.

After completing that aria, I was able to go back to the first measure and compose straight through Act One. Ahab was the tree from which all branches grew. A four-chord harmonic theme became the meat of the entire opera, and from that all musical, harmonic, and rhythmic motifs emerged organically. Gene had given me a solid architecture on which to build the opera. Act Two went quickly and in July 2009, I had a complete piano/vocal score. A workshop in San Francisco was headed by our first conductor Patrick Summers, which led to further clarification of the story and score. After orchestration and completion of the score, the extraordinary cast and crew for *Moby-Dick* rehearsed tirelessly in Dallas in spring 2010, and miracle of miracles, on April 30, 2010, an opera based on *Moby-Dick* opened and shook the rafters of the new opera house.

Following the Dallas premiere, the opera and original production traveled to the four companies that co-commissioned it: State Opera of South Australia (2011), Calgary Opera (2012), San Diego Opera (2012) and finally San Francisco Opera (2012). It was in San Francisco that most of the original cast was reunited, this time with Jay Hunter Morris as Ahab; Patrick Summers again conducted. And it is this, the fifth production of *Moby-Dick*, that was filmed and recorded for telecast on *Great Performances*, and for this DVD.

# Composing *Moby-Dick*

By Jake Heggie

The creation of this opera began in early 2005, when the Dallas Opera contacted me about composing a new work as part of the inaugural season at the Winspear Opera House in 2010. At the time, I was at work on a piece with playwright Terrence McNally. He had been the librettist for our opera *Dead Man Walking* (2000) and we had been on the lookout for another big project. When I asked Terrence what he thought, he said “There’s only one opera I’m interested in doing: *Moby-Dick*.” I think I was as stunned as anybody. It seemed a gargantuan, impossible undertaking.

But he is a great man of the American theater, and when I saw the knowing sparkle in his eye, I knew it was possible. I had never read the book itself, but when I did, I realized how essentially musical and operatic it is. The charged lyricism of Melville’s writing is deeply influenced by Shakespeare and there is great theatricality. The characters themselves are Shakespearean, and the events so epic they seem biblical. The drama could certainly fill an opera house, and it struck me that the music was already there. I could hear musical textures, rhythms, orchestral and vocal colors as I considered it. The hardest part would be to craft a workable, stage-worthy libretto.

Terrence suggested three things off the bat: Ahab should be a heroic tenor, the action of the opera should be entirely on the ship, and the cabin boy Pip should be a pants role for a soprano—the sole female voice. And then about a year into the process, Terrence had to withdraw from the project for personal reasons. It was devastating. But as luck would have it, I had worked extensively with the gifted writer Gene Scheer. He is a prolific collaborator, and we had already created several song cycles, a one-act opera (*To Hell and Back*), and were in the process of creating a three-character opera (*Three Decembers*). Gene read *Moby-Dick* and thought deeply about what he might be getting into. I wanted to keep Terrence’s initial thoughts, which meant Gene would have to take on something already in process. He bravely agreed to join me.

About this time, we had the idea that the famous first line of the novel—“Call me Ishmael”— should be the last line of the opera. We could treat the novel as a memoir that would be written long after the events of the opera took place. This...

...would give us enormous freedom to move events around, create moments and dialogues that aren’t in the book, but are in the spirit of the book, and would work well on the stage. The central journeys of the opera became immediately clear and the architecture started to take shape.

14	Interlude: The next morning. . . . .	0:50
15	Scene 4: <i>Captain Ahab!</i> (Ahab, Starbuck, Pip, Flask, Stubb, Gardiner) . . . . .	7:53
16	Scene 5: <i>Human madness is a cunning and most feline thing.</i> (Greenhorn, Crew) . . . . .	4:47
17	Scene 6: “The Symphony” - <i>Ah, Starbuck. It is a mild, mild wind.</i> (Ahab, Starbuck) . . . . .	10:02
18	Scene 7: <i>There! There! She blows!</i> (Ahab, Greenhorn, Starbuck, Queequeg, Pip, Flask, Stubb, Crew). . . . .	12:38
19	Epilogue: Days later: <i>Fune ala.</i> (Greenhorn, Gardiner) . . . . .	3:29

## MAIN DECISIONS BY THE ADAPTERS:

- Recast Ishmael as GREENHORN, moving his first line to the very end.
- Keep all action on the Pequod, but transfer the encounter of Greenhorn and Queequeg to the ship itself
- Avoid all “gams,” but keep Captain Gardiner as an offstage voice.
- Eliminate repeated actions (eg. Pip now overboard only once)
- Focus on 5 characters: Ahab, Greenhorn, Queequeg, Starbuck, and Pip.
- Cast Ahab as a *Heldentenor*, contrasting him to baritone Starbuck.
- Make Pip a soprano playing a boy, the only female voice in the show.
- Keep the other two mates (Stubb and Flask), giving them mainly a choric function for commentary and exposition.
- Keep the other two harpooners (Tashtego and Daggoo), but as minor roles.
- Eliminate Fedallah’s men and other specific crew members.
- Vary the deck setting by isolating areas on deck, and using the rigging.
- One whale hunt per act.
- Extensive use of projections.

# Synopsis

## Act I

**The whaling ship Pequod has been at sea for one week** Below deck, the harpooner Queequeg prays and wakes Greenhorn, a loner new to whaling. Dawn breaks and while the crew raises the ship's sails, Starbuck, Stubb, and Flask discuss Ahab, whom no one has seen since the ship left Nantucket.

Ahab appears and tells the crew of Moby Dick, the white whale that took off one of his legs. He nails a gold doubloon to the mast and promises it to the man who first sights the whale. This is the real reason they have sailed, he explains: to destroy this one whale. His rousing call of "Death to Moby Dick!" excites everyone but the first mate, Starbuck. To no avail, he confronts Ahab about what he sees as a futile and blasphemous mission.

Starbuck instructs Greenhorn about the dangers of whaling and is soon overcome with the prospect of never seeing his family again. Stubb sights a pod of whales, but Ahab will not allow the eager crew to hunt. From the crow's nest, Queequeg and Greenhorn look over the world, while Starbuck bemoans Ahab's madness.

**Three months later** Without a single whale hunt, Stubb jokes with the cabin boy Pip about the sharks circling the ship. The song ignites a dance amidst the crew, but rising tensions erupt in a fight. When Greenhorn sights a pod of whales, Starbuck persuades Ahab to let the men hunt. Starbuck and Stubb harpoon whales, but Flask's boat is capsized and Pip is lost at sea.

A whale is being butchered on the Pequod. Flask tells Ahab that the search for Pip is under way but explains to Starbuck that many oil barrels are leaking. Starbuck tells Ahab they must find a port for repairs, but Ahab's only concern is the white whale. Starbuck refuses to leave and Ahab grabs a gun, ordering him to his knees. On deck, Greenhorn shouts that Pip has been found. Ahab orders Starbuck away.

The crew listens to Greenhorn describe how Queequeg rescued Pip and pleads with Starbuck to get help; the first mate ignores him. Greenhorn observes how life really works on the ship and decides to befriend Queequeg.

Starbuck finds Ahab asleep in his cabin. He picks up Ahab's gun and contemplates whether he should pull the trigger and perhaps survive to see his wife and child again. When Ahab cries out in his sleep, Starbuck replaces the gun and leaves the cabin.

## Act II

**One year later** A storm is approaching but the crew sings a jolly work song. From the mastheads, Greenhorn and Queequeg talk of going to Queequeg's island when the harpooner suddenly collapses. The crew gets him below deck, and Queequeg tells Greenhorn that he is dying and asks for a coffin to be built. The storm surrounds the Pequod and bolts of lightning engulf the ship. The masts glow with St. Elmo's Fire and Ahab promises them it is a sign from heaven guiding them to the white whale.

**The next morning** The ship has survived the storm. From afar, the voice of Gardiner, captain of the Rachel, pleads with Ahab to help him search for his son lost in the storm. Pip, who has gone mad, shouts to Gardiner of the Pequod's own lost boy. Pip cuts himself and gets blood on Ahab's clothes. Ahab refuses Gardiner and orders the ship to sail on, contemplating the heartless God who devastates so many lives.

Below deck, Greenhorn contemplates the coffin being built for Queequeg and muses on the nature of human madness. On deck, Ahab tells Starbuck of his forty years at sea and all he has left behind.

He sees in Starbuck's eye a human soul, touching him deeply, and Starbuck persuades Ahab that they should return to the wives and sons who wait for them. As Ahab appears to relent, he sights Moby Dick on the horizon. The whale boats are lowered and during the chase, Moby Dick destroys two whaleboats and then rams and sinks the Pequod, killing all aboard. Ahab's boat is attacked and all but the captain jump or fall off. Finally alone with the white whale, Ahab stabs at Moby Dick before being dragged down into the sea.

**Many days later** Barely alive, Greenhorn floats on Queequeg's coffin. Gardiner calls from afar, thinking he has found his missing son. Instead he learns that the Pequod's crew have all drowned, except for this lone survivor.