



# MOBY DICK

YNGVILD ASPELI / PLEXUS POLAIRE

INSPIRÉ DU ROMAN  
D'HERMAN MELVILLE



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# MOBY DICK

Directed by Yngvild Aspeli

Inspired by Herman Melville's novel

**Theater / Puppet / Live music / Video**

**From 14 years old / Estimated Length / Estimated audience 500 persons**

## LETTER OF INTENTION

*"My grandfather was a sailor. He had a naked woman tattooed on his upper arm, and I remember him as a smell of tar and tobacco. He came from an island on the west-coast of Norway, a tiny harbor filled with foreign ships and languages, fishermen, sailors and children waiting for fathers who never came home from the sea. A landscape of wind, vast ocean and women standing looking out at the horizon. Weathered faces, sore hands and churches with boats hanging from the ceiling in hope of protection. My ancestors were buried in Portuguese soil, because the churchyard on this island didn't have enough earth to bury their own dead.*

*I like how the sea somehow draws invisible lines between the different corners of the world, how it creates points of connection. How, facing this force of nature, we are all the same. And no-one captures the battle between man and nature like Herman Melville in "Moby Dick". An ancient white whale, a captain steering his ship into destruction and the inner storms of the human heart.*

*Moby Dick is the tale of a whaling expedition, but also the story of an obsession or an investigation into the unexplained mysteries of life. To quote Melville : " It is the image of the ungraspable phantom of life; and this is the key to it all".*

*So, with seven actors, fifty puppets, video-projections, a drowned orchestra and a whale-sized whale, I am currently working on a visual adaptation of this wonderful beast of a book."*

**Yngvild Aspeli**

*« With Moby Dick, I pursue this research on how acting and puppets, music and video, text and images, can meet, overlap, tell a story, mix and create an extended language or a physical experience where "the whole" speaks.»*

**Yngvild Aspeli**

## ACTORS, PUPPETEERS AND PUPPETS

*«Methinks we have hugely mistaken this matter of Life and Death. Methinks that what they call my shadow here on earth is my true substance. Methinks that in looking at things spiritual, we are too much like oysters observing the sun through the water, and thinking that thick water the thinnest of air. Methinks my body is but the lees of my better being. In fact take my body who will, take it I say, it is not me. Why all the living so strive to hush all the dead? »*

Extracts, Moby Dick

Melville's language is magnificent, rich and complex. Everything he writes has a metaphysical aspect. With his language, he transforms this ordinary travelogue into a vertiginous odyssey on human nature.

The text will be partly delivered by the puppets as the diversity of languages that makes up the artistic team will recreate on stage this floating Babel tower. The character of Ishmael, the narrator and sole survivor of this whale hunt, will be played by an actor, Pierre Devérines. To give the audience access to the metaphysical dimension of the novel, his part will be played in the language of the country hosting the show. This will allow us to work in direct contact with the audience, to question the relation to fiction, to explore the pure force of the story and the magic of theater, to find the place where we get carried away...

The choir of six actor-puppeteers will be composed of three men (Aitor Sanz-Juanez, Andreu Martinez Costa, Viktor Lukawski), and three women (Alice Chéné, Sarah Lascar and Maja Kunsic). They will have a crucial presence : shadows, ghosts or all the men and women who disappeared in the dark infinity of the sea and reappeared from the depths to tell this story; weavers of the threads of life or goddesses of fate.

The role of the actor-puppeteers will be decisive in the enigmatic relationship between Captain Ahab and Fedallah, one of the five clandestine passengers secretly invited aboard by Ahab. Fedallah is described as "*such a creature as civilized, domestic people in the temperate zone only see in their dreams, and that but dimly*". There is a rumor between the sailors on board that he may be the Devil and that Ahab has sold his soul to him... Melville describes their tortuous relationship. Although Ahab is the free master and Fedallah only his slave, it seems that Ahab sees his own shadow in Fedallah who sees his substance abandoned in the captain.

*"What is it, what nameless, inscrutable, unearthly thing is it; what cozening, hidden lord and master, and cruel, remorseless emperor commands me; that against all natural lovings and longings, I so keep pushing, and crowding, and jamming myself on all the time; recklessly making me ready to do what in my own proper, natural heart, I durst not so much as dare? Is Ahab, Ahab? Is it I, God, or who, that lifts this arm?"*

This feeling of being controlled by something outside oneself, Destiny, Providence or "the invisible policeman of the Three Sisters" is a very present element in Melville's text and will be highlighted in the show.

The characters of the novel will be mainly represented by puppets through six different scales among which a very small one in order to experience how small man is when facing the awe-inspiring whale but also to confuse perspectives and see at the same time above and under the sea. Captain Ahab - the man "*who has greatness in him, blasphemy and the divine*" will be represented in a scale larger than human.

Moby Dick, known on all seas for its absolute beauty and its daring cruelty, will also be represented in different sizes : in a reduced version, the equivalent of the size of a car, and in real size - these great whales can measure up to 20 meters long - in order to physically experience the greatness of this animal. Imagine the eye passing, the jaw suddenly appearing in the dark, the tail striking with the force of a mythical animal ...

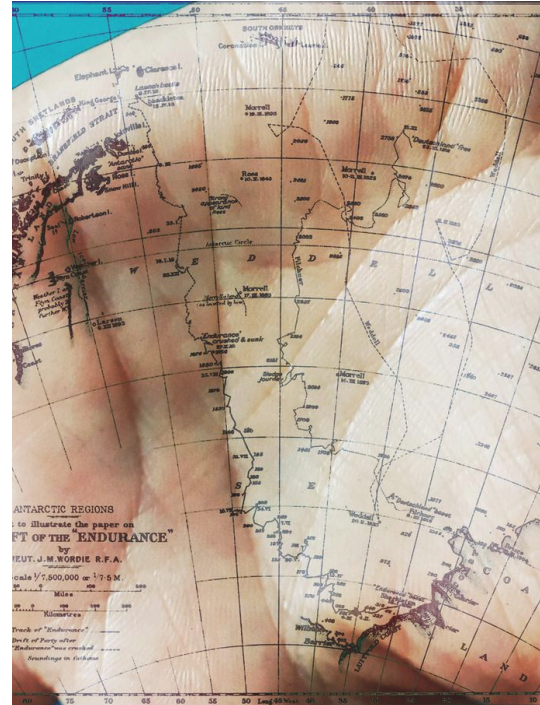


## SCENOGRAPHY, VIDEO AND LIGHT

The scenographer Elisabeth Holager Lund, the duo of light creators, Xavier Lescat and Vincent Loubière and the video creator David Lejard-Ruffet will design a timeless space, as if this story came out of the sand fog at the bottom of the sea, as if the wrecks and the bones hiding there were summoned to tell this story.

A ship that is composed and decomposed, pieces of reality that arise from the shadows and then disappear. Video projections that blur the lines between truth and illusion. Wires, ropes, maps, lines to follow to lose yourself in a mental map and find yourself in the heart of Captain Ahab's madness.

The scenography, the light and the video will make it possible to reverse perspectives to give the audience the feeling of looking into the depths of the sea.



*"It is not down in any map; true places never are."*

There is this magnificent scene in the book in which the sailors hunt a very large number of sperm whales. Imagine hundreds of whales swimming in a circle. And the Pequod suddenly finds itself right in the middle of this circle. The bloody chase continues all around them, but where they are, there is absolute peace. They look into the water and discover that they are above a large group of females with their babies, they are breastfeeding newborn babies still tied with their umbilical cord and at the bottom young sperm whales are making love ..

*"One serene and moonlight night, when all the waves rolled by like scrolls of silver ; and, by their soft, suffusing seethings, made what seemed a silvery silence, not a solitude."*

## MUSIC

In the novel, Melville often talks about the many men and women who found their graves at the bottom of the sea. And I would like to summon this drowned choir, this long lost orchestra to hear the story of those who disappeared, to hear these voices coming from the other side.

A work of voices and choral singing with the 6 actor-puppeteers on stage will be a central element of the show. The rest of the drowned orchestra will be integrated into the scenography through video projections, to create confusion, and confuse the boundaries between illusion and reality, between the dead and the living.

For the larger stages, three musicians will be in the back of the stage, on a platform evoking a sunken wreck or the cathedral of a whale skeleton. We will find there: Guro Skumsnes Moe, singer and bass player who has always composed the music for Plexus Polaire shows, Ane Marthe Sorlien Holen percussionist who also shares the stage on the show *Chambre Noire*, and Håvard Skaset, guitarist and multi-instrumentalist.

This orchestra will be made up of string instruments, brass, percussion and an octobass. This instrument, bigger than a double bass, with a height of almost 3.4 meters and which produces sounds bordering on what the human ear can hear.

*"A sound so strange, long drawn, and musically wild and unearthly, that the ball of free will dropped from my hand"*

The music will therefore be intimately linked to the form, as well as to the underlying theme of the show. A narrative element in its own right.





## BIOGRAPHY - Yngvild Aspeli



Artistic director of Plexus Polaire, Yngvild Aspeli, develops a visual world that brings to life our most buried feelings. The use of life-sized puppets is at the center of her work, but the play of the actor, the presence of the music, the use of light and video, are all equal elements in communicating the story.

Director, actress and puppet-maker, Yngvild Aspeli, studied at Ecole Jacques Lecoq in Paris (2003-2005) and at ESNAM (Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts de la Marionnette) in Charleville-Mézières (2005-2008).

Within her French-Norwegian company Plexus Polaire, she has directed four shows: *Signals* (2011), *Opera Opaque* (2013), *Ashes* (2014) and *Chambre noire* (2017). She is currently working on an adaptation of *Moby Dick* that will premiere in 2020.

*“The use of life-sized puppets is at the center of my work, but the play of the actor, the presence of the music, the use of light and video, are all equal elements in communicating the story. I'm interested in the expanded language that is formed in the meeting point of these different expressions, and how it creates a multisensorial narration. A story can be told by words, but it can also be understood through a visual and physical perception. The choice of materials and colors can communicate a mood, sound can make you feel an underlying atmosphere and the quality of a gesture can express an emotion. Puppetry is a form that constantly is re-inventing itself. It goes beyond “genre”, and fearlessly crosses the borders of other artistic expressions. Puppetry is not only a form, it is a way of seeing the world, a language, a state of mind.*

*When making a performance I work on how to translate the text into a visual language; to transform the story into a physical experience, where everything recounts. To create an expanded reality, where the story is told on several parallel levels. Somehow create a vertical dramaturgy composed by superposed layers, rather than a horizontal line. Enter into a situation, or a specific state, and use it as a prism; it is a single story, and it is all stories. It is told that only seven basic plots exist, and that all stories are variations of these seven. What alters, and makes the story personal and current, is who tells the story, in which social context, and most importantly; how the story is told. It is important to have access to alternative stories. To be exposed to different points of view and other ways of telling a story.*

*The mix of different artistic expressions is central in my work. With its live drawings, my first show Signals was inspired by visual art. The use of video-projections the show Ashes creates strong cinematographic references, and my latest show Chambre Noire is something in between a theatre performance and a concert. The blurry space between fact and fiction fascinates me. It allows the story to be anchored in reality, but still leave space for the public to be co-creator, to see and understand their own version of the story. The relation with the public is precious, also in the process of finalizing the show. I continue to make changes and develop the show long after the premier, as the reactions and encounters with the public is necessary for the show to find its final form. It is this space between the stage and the public that carries the fragile force of the performing arts. Also, in the themes, it is these spaces “in between” that interests me; the imperceptible transitions, the irreversible borders, the blurred areas. The fact that there is no fixed answer, no ultimate truth, but only the complexity of life; of being human. It is in the impossible blend of strength and weakness a story is recognizable, and true.*

*The play between the actor and the puppet, and this dual presence of the actor-puppeteer, allows a communication on several levels simultaneously. By the means of the puppet being a stylized human representation, we can make an attempt of looking at ourselves with a bit of distance. And by using the confusion that appears when the roles are reversed, the center is replaced, and we no longer know who controls who, we can visualize complex themes. A work that tries to make you feel rather than explain. That opens up for larger questions instead of giving fixed answers. Searching for an expression for those things that we cannot necessarily see, or explain, but that we still can feel, and understand.”*

**Yngvild Aspeli**

## CREATIVE TEAM

**Director** – Yngvild Aspeli  
**Assistant director** – Pierre Tual  
**Dramaturge** – Pauline Thimonnier  
**Actors and puppeteers** – Pierre Devérines, Sarah Lascar, Aitor Sanz Juanes, Alice Chéné, Viktor Lukawski, Maja Kunsic et Andreu Martinez Costa  
**Music composers** – Guro Skumsnes Moe and Ane Marthe Sørlien Holen  
**Puppet makers** – Polina Borisova, Yngvild Aspeli, Manon Leblanc, Sebastien Puech, Elise Nicod  
**Scenographer** – Elisabeth Holager Lund  
**Light designers** – Xavier Lescat et Vincent Loubière  
**Video designer** – David Lejard-Ruffet  
**Costume designer** - Benjamin Moreau  
**Sound** - Raphael Barani  
**Outside eye** - Paola Rizza  
**Tour Booking** - Claire Costa  
**Administration** - Anne-Laure Doucet et Gaedig Bonabesse

## FINANCIAL AND TECHNICAL INFOS

Please contact us for all financial or technical information.

## CREDITS

**Coproductions** : Nordland Teater, Mo I Rana (NO) - Figurteatret i Nordland (Nordland Visual Theatre), Stamsund (NO) - Le Groupe des 20 (IDF) - Puppet Theatre Ljubljana (SL) - Comédie de Caen CDN (14-FR) - EPCC Bords 2 scènes, Vitry-le-François (51-FR) -TJP CDN Strasbourg- Grand Est (67-FR) - Festival Mondial des théâtres de Marionnettes de Charleville-Mézières (08-FR) - Le Manège, Scène Nationale - Reims (51-FR) - Le Théâtre – Scène conventionnée d'Auxerre (89-FR) Le Mouffetard, Théâtre des arts de la Marionnette, Paris (75-FR) - Les 2 Scènes, Scène Nationale de Besançon (25-FR) - MA Scène nationale de Montbéliard (25-FR) - Le Sablier, Iffs (14-FR) - Le Théâtre Jean Arp de Clamart (92-FR), La Maison MCNA Nevers (58-FR) - Théâtre Romain Rolland, scène conventionnée d'intérêt national de Villejuif (94-FR) - Le Bateau Feu, Scène nationale de Dunkerque (59-FR) - With a support for multilingual diversity by Theatre de Choisy-le-Roi/Scène Conventionnée d'intérêt national art et création pour la diversité linguistique, in co-operation with PANTHEA (FR-94), Teater Innlandet, Hamar (NO), POC, Alfortville (94-FR)

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