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## THE PLAY

The year is 1910. On a cold, stormy night, a sick man tosses and turns in his iron hospital bed, unable to sleep. As a haunting tune collides with crashing ocean waves, three familiar ghosts appear to him. For the man known as **Mate** to find rest, he must first tell the stories of the souls he once traveled the ocean with.

He is taken back to 1888, where he joins a high-spirited crew of experienced whalers and a **Captain** nearing his final voyage. They are joined by **Little Brother**, who is seeking adventure, and his **Big Brother**, who has come to bring him home. The whaling industry is dying, but the crew's folk songs create camaraderie between the men as they travel...until a sudden storm strikes.

As the days grow scorchingly hot and the nights even colder, the crew draws closer to the truth of their difficult reality. What will it take for these four men to preserve any hope for the future? How far will they go to survive? And can they live with the consequences?

# ARENA'S PAGE

STUDY GUIDE



# SWEPT AWAY

BOOK BY **JOHN LOGAN**

MUSIC AND LYRICS BY **THE AVETT BROTHERS**

CHOREOGRAPHED BY **DAVID NEUMANN**

DIRECTED BY **MICHAEL MAYER**

**KREEGER THEATER | NOVEMBER 25 – DECEMBER 30, 2023**

BY SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT WITH  
**MATTHEW MASTEN, SEAN HUDOCK, AND MADISON WELLS LIVE**

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**“There’s got to be more in this life I reckon. Anything, everything, let it hit me, let it pummel me to my knees – just let me live!”**

— Little Brother, Swept Away



## MEET THE PLAYWRIGHT: **JOHN LOGAN**

*“The reason that I’m a writer today is because of Shakespeare, and falling in love with Shakespeare when I was eight.” — John Logan*

At an early age, John Logan moved to the US from Canada, where his family introduced him to the power of art and literature as a tool to change the world. He grew up reading poetry first, and soon developed an admiration for cinema. When his father showed him a film version of *Hamlet*, he was blown away by the acting and the text.

He eventually moved to Chicago, where he studied theater at Northwestern University and jump-started his career as a playwright. His most famous works include the hit Broadway musical *Moulin Rouge!* (2018), which has won 10 Tony Awards, five Drama Desk Awards, and two Drama League Awards. His play *Red* (2009) earned him both a Tony Award for Best Play and a Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Play in 2010. His extensive filmography as a screenwriter and producer includes *Gladiator* (2000), *The Aviator* (2004), *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (2007), and *Hugo* (2011), which has also won multiple awards and nominations.

In an interview with Berkeley Repertory Theatre, he shared his approach to writing *Swept Away*. “My process for creating the story and writing the book (script) was straightforward, if time intensive: I listened to every single Avett Brothers song and took notes on all of them. As I listened, characters began to emerge. The story and characters were built as I was choosing the songs for the show. It all came to life organically as the songs started settling into place within the narrative and the characters began to ‘sing.’”

## MUSIC AND LYRICS: **THE AVETT BROTHERS**



Photo by Crackerfarm.

The Avett Brothers are a three-time Grammy Award nominated band originally formed by brothers Scott and Seth Avett. Scott and Seth grew up on a farm in North Carolina, where they dreamed of becoming superstars like their favorite ‘80s music artists. When they were young, they took piano, banjo, and guitar lessons and recorded their own music on cassette tapes. Working in the genres of country, punk, folk, and bluegrass, the brothers began performing as The Avett Brothers. At first, they played in small venues, like local coffee shops and bars. Then Bob Crawford (bass and violin) and, later, Joe Kwon (cello) joined the band. Over time their popularity grew, and they gained a large fan base, playing to huge crowds across the country.

They made mainstream waves with their 2009 major label debut, *I and Love and You*, which landed at #16 on the *Billboard* 200 and garnered critical acclaim. In 2016, the band was inducted into the North Carolina Music Hall of Fame. In 2019, the band released their tenth studio album, *Closer Than Together* featuring the song “High Steppin’,” which reached #1 on the Americana Radio Singles Chart. Their newest album *The Third Gleam* (August 2020) debuted at #1 on *Billboard* Americana/Folk Albums chart, #1 Rock Albums, and #1 Vinyl Albums.

## MEET THE CREW

### MATE:

Accustomed to life on a ship, he is second-mate to the captain and has a troubled history.

“He’s a man who looks on clean things and wants them dirty, because he can’t even remember what clean is.” — *Big Brother*

### LITTLE BROTHER:

A country boy, he runs off to the whaler ship to escape the mundane routine of living on a farm.

“I was him, once upon a time. All life’s wonders ahead of me.” — *Captain*

### BIG BROTHER:

A responsible man, who follows his Little Brother to the sea to keep him focused on God and away from trouble on the ship.

“...sacrificing yourself for your family, for those you hold close, that’s what love is.” — *Little Brother*

### CAPTAIN:

Angry and mysterious, he understands a captain must be ready to go down with his ship.

“He was a whaler past his time. A man past his time. So, don’t wonder at his anger.” — *Mate*



played by  
**JOHN GALLAGHER, JR.**



played by  
**ADRIAN BLAKE ENSCOE**



played by  
**STARK SANDS**



played by  
**WAYNE DUVALL**

# COSTUME SPOTLIGHT

## THE CREW BEHIND THE SHIP

**“A costume is a story that you wear.”**

**— Joseph Salasovich, Arena Stage’s Costume Director**

Costumes are a form of visual storytelling. They can tell us who a character is—their lifestyle, their personality traits, their history, and their hopes. They can also help show what has happened to a character.

Arena Stage’s Costume Director, Joseph Salasovich says, “A message of the play is ‘the sea has its own rules.’” The sea impacts the lives and clothing of the characters. For example, some sailors on the ship are experienced, so their costumes are more worn and have repairs that are done perfectly because sailors were expert stitchers (see “A Sailor’s Work”). Little Brother and Big Brother, however, came from a farm and are new to the sea. How could this be reflected in their costumes?

For this production of *Swept Away*, the costume team is using original pieces from the production at Berkeley Repertory Theatre in California and creating some new costume pieces for the cast. The costumes were designed by Susan Hilferty.

### AGING AND DISTRESSING COSTUMES

How do you make clothes look like they have spent months or even years at sea? This process of making something look old is called “aging and distressing.” Here is how Deborah Nash, the craftsperson in Arena’s costume shop, achieves this effect: “Lots of watercolor, textile paint, and water goes into changing the color and appearance of costumes for *Swept Away*,” Deborah says. “Paint is used to add



the effect of saltwater on costumes for sailors working closer to the edge of the boat. For costumes worn post-shipwreck, sandpaper is used to distress the edges of the clothes.”



Deborah uses a range of surprising tools to distress garments. Here she uses a rasp that is usually used to give shoes traction.

### DUPLICATING WITH DYE

Actors have morning and evening shows which require the same costume. Because there isn’t always enough time for the wardrobe team to wash and iron the same shirt, duplicates are made. Duplicates allow actors to have a fresh costume without having to worry about sweat from the last performance. Duplicate costumes are also needed for understudies (actors ready to perform a role if the usual actor cannot). *continued* ▶



Deborah compares swatches to check her progress.

## A SAILOR’S WORK

Careful research is critical to a costume telling its story. The designer and costume shop team researched the play’s time period and the lives of sailors and applied this research to their work.

Here are two images: a quote from a book about sailors and an example of a sail that a sailor repaired. How would you apply this research to designing a costume for the show?

There is an old saying, that “when a sailor sews on a button it is on for the life of the garment.” It is an adage worth remembering, for it typifies the competence, the craftsmanship and the painstaking care with which the sailor of old approached the task at hand. With him nothing was ever “good enough,” it had to be right. In

Excerpt from *The Arts of the Sailor: Knotting, Splicing and Ropework* by Hervey Garrett Smith. Dover Maritime, 2012.



Shoes also help tell a character’s story.

◀ Duplicating With Dye continued from front

Deborah's challenge was to create a duplicate shirt based on the shirt worn in the original Berkeley Rep production in 2022. The shirts that are pictured were specifically made for the understudies in the show. Here was her process:

Because the fabric for the original shirt couldn't be found, Deborah started with brand new shirts that had a similar color, texture, and design.

Stripping is the process of removing dye from fabric using products such as soda ash to lighten and fade its appearance. To prepare the new shirts, she stripped them of their color and used Rit (a brand of household dye) to overdy and create the desired color of the new shirts.

Deborah keeps a binder of tester fabric to help identify how different dye colors affect different fabrics, like wool vs. cotton or silk vs. nylon. Because these shirts were cotton, she had to try different color combinations or "recipes" to reach the desired effect.

Deborah used a vat made specifically for dying clothes. To track her progress, she used a fabric swatch from the original shirt to compare the color accuracy of the new shirt duplicates. When a shirt didn't match the original color, she would try a different dye recipe. This process of non-stop changes is what builds the final look for costumes.

## THE TALE OF THE MIGNONETTE...



The lyrics and music for *Swept Away* were pulled from the album *Mignonette* (min-yuh-net) released in 2004 by The Avett Brothers. The album is inspired by the shipwreck and survival story of the British yacht.

On May 19, 1884, four professional sailors left Southampton, England to deliver their yacht to Sydney, Australia. The captain and two of the crew members were experienced seafarers, while the youngest on the trip, Richard Parker, was making his first voyage. Hundreds of miles from the land, the yacht was overcome by a giant ocean wave and sank in less than five minutes. After three weeks on a lifeboat without food or clean water, the captain decided to engage in "a custom of the sea."

### (SPOILER ALERT!)

Scan here to learn more about the *Mignonette*:



In an interview at Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Bob Crawford of The Avett Brothers shared how the album came to be:

"When the album *Mignonette* was being written, we were early in our touring life, and Scott Avett was reading about the shipwreck and events that loosely inspired the album. The big conversation in the tour van was about this ship captain who said, 'When we get back to shore, there's the custom of the sea, and we didn't really follow it, but we didn't follow it because it wasn't practical at the time. When we get back to shore, we're going to tell the truth. And if it hangs us, it hangs us.' And that was kind of our attitude, in those years. The songs spoke a certain truth, and if we could stand behind the songs, we would always be okay, come success or failure."

## VOCABULARY

**SHIPWRECK:** a wrecked ship or its parts, the destruction or loss of a ship, or an irretrievable loss or failure.

**SALVATION:** to be saved from sin. Protestants believe that salvation is a gift of God, granted by faith alone.

**TRIPLE-MASTER:** a sailing ship with three masts.

**HARBOR PILOT:** a mariner who maneuvers ships through dangerous waters, such as harbors or river mouths; an adviser to the captain and crew when a ship is coming into a port.

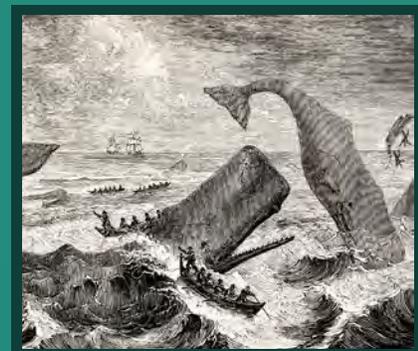
**FO'CASTLE:** a structure beneath the bow of a boat used as a shelter for stores, machinery, etc., or as quarters for sailors.

**HARDTACK:** a type of dense biscuit or cracker made from flour, water, and sometimes salt.

**DOCKSIDE:** the area next to a dock where goods can be stored before being put onto or taken off ships.

**ABATTOIR:** a slaughterhouse.

**LEVIATHANS:** (in biblical use) a sea monster, identified in different passages with the whale, the crocodile, and the Devil. It can also be described as a very large and powerful ship or aquatic creature like a whale.



# WHALING

Whaling is the process of hunting whales to use their bodies for meat and other materials. Whalers used harpoons to capture, slaughter, and pull whales to shore for stripping and processing. Once on shore, the blubber of a whale was boiled in large vats of water called “try pots” to create whale oil for lamps and machines, soaps, and perfumes. Other parts of the whale were used for clothing (like hoop skirts), fishing hooks, or meat for eating.



According to *National Geographic*, “Whaling was a multi-million dollar industry, and some scientists estimate that more whales were hunted in the early 1900s than in the previous four centuries combined.”

When *Swept Away* begins, the whaling industry is declining because many whales have been killed, and people have found other sources of oil for lights. Today, commercial whaling is recognized as an exploitative process and it was banned in 1986 by the International Whaling Commission.

## THE LIFE OF A WHALER



The life of a whaler was difficult, gruesome, and dangerous. Most people who decided to become whalers were young men who were considered unskilled laborers.

Much as described in the play, a whaler’s lifestyle consisted of stretches of boredom, homesickness, fighting back exhilarating seas, rationing food, and trying to maintain hope for the future. The living conditions on the ship included seasickness, lack of nourishing foods, cramped living quarters, high disease rates, poor pay, and terrible weather. The lack of healthy food on a voyage could cause scurvy, or “the plague of the sea,” a disease that comes from a lack of vitamin C that killed over 2 million sailors in the 16th through 18th centuries. Other common shipboard illnesses included alcoholism and tuberculosis.

## KEEPING SPIRITS HIGH: SAILOR SONGS AND SHANTIES



It is fitting for a show about a sea voyage to be a musical. Historically, music has played an important role on ships. A “sea shanty” is a call-and-response song that is sung to keep sailors focused on completing their tasks to a steady beat. These tasks could include raising the anchor or setting a sail. The leader of these songs would be called a “shanty man,” who would set the tone, rhythm, and even change some of the lyrics in the song.

Other songs were created to help pass time or to encourage the crew. When times were hard on the ship, it was common for sailors to sing uplifting songs and sea shanties to keep spirits high. Some sailors also sang hymns or religious songs. Protestantism was a widespread form of Christianity in the 19th century and spiritually grounded some sailors on their journeys.

## TUBERCULOSIS

We meet Mate suffering in a tuberculosis ward. Tuberculosis is a respiratory disease that affects the brain, lungs, kidneys, and spine. It develops through the spread of bacteria. The disease spread quickly in the 18th and 19th centuries due to overcrowded and unsanitary living conditions. It caused hacking coughs that produced blood, fatigue, and intense pain in the lungs. People with serious cases of the disease were quarantined with other tuberculosis patients in public hospitals. Due to lack of knowledge, staffing, and a reasonable cure, tuberculosis was considered a fatal disease that took the lives of many people during the time of *Swept Away*.



# THREE BIG QUESTIONS

1

Why do we share stories of survival?

2

What does it take to forgive?

3

How does music help to tell a story?

## RESOURCES

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Production photos from Berkeley Rep's world premier production of *Swept Away*. Photos by Kevin Berne/Berkeley Repertory Theatre.

## HELPFUL HINTS FOR THEATER AUDIENCES

As an audience member at the theater, YOU are part of the show! Just as you see and hear the actors onstage, they can see and hear you in the audience.

To help the performers do their best, please remember the following:

- Arrive early.
- Visit the restroom before the show starts.
- Sit in the seat indicated on your ticket.
- Ushers are there to help you!
- Before the show begins, turn off your phone, watch alarms, and any other electronic devices. If anything rings by accident, turn it off immediately.
- Do not use your phone for texts, calls, games, pictures or recording.
- There is no food allowed in the theater.
- Intermission is the time to discuss the show and visit the restroom.
- If you must leave, during the show, wait for a scene change and exit quietly and quickly.
- Respond to the show; you can laugh, cry, and gasp. However, don't distract the performers on stage.
- Be sure to applaud at the end! During a musical, audiences sometimes clap after a song or dance. If you love the show or a performer, you can give a standing ovation. The actors bow to thank you.



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Visit [www.arenastage.org](http://www.arenastage.org) for more information on Arena Stage productions and educational opportunities.

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