

**A LIFE ON THE OCEAN WAVE**

**BEING A MERRIE EVENING OF GENUINE SEA SHANTY SING-ALONG, AND ALSO  
A HISTORICALLY AND SCIENTIFICALLY ACCURATE ACCOUNT OF A SAILOR'S  
LIFE AT SEA, IN WHICH GHOSTS APPEAR AND HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY**

**Written By Syr Beker  
With  
Nancy Au  
Conrad A. Panganiban  
Nara Dahlbacka**

Production History: A Life on the Ocean Wave was written by Syr Beker with Nancy Au, Conrad Panganiban, and Nara Dahlbacka, and premiered at Exit Theater in 2017, directed by Stuart Bousel.

## THE LAUNCHING CEREMONY

There is only one story, but it looks different to everyone. Today I define it as the story of waiting to come home from a journey only to realize we've been home all along.



INTERVIEWER: If you could only take one thing to read on a deserted island, what would it be?  
MAE WEST: A tattooed sailor.



“Even into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, fishers and related fishing workers still have amongst the most dangerous jobs, with the second highest rate of mortality only after loggers.” – Johnson, David (May 13, 2016), “The Most Dangerous jobs In America,” Time Magazine, retrieved May 23, 2016.



“Blessed are they who go down to the sea in ships.” – Psalm 107-23.



“I soon got used to this singing, for the sailors never touched a rope without it...some sea captains, before shipping a man, always ask him whether he can sing out at a rope.” – Herman Melville, Redburn.



Dear God, be good to me; the sea is so wide, and my boat is so small.



“Borders of salt, the frontier between dreams and reality [is] the only one acceptable.” – Dan Ar Braz, on the seafaring folk of Brittany.

## WANTED IMMEDIATELY: ORDINARY & ABLE SAILORS

**THE CHANTER/SHANTYWOMAN:** A maritime folklorist who leads sailor sing-alongs. She may or may not also be the divine protector of sailors. She's been known by many names over the years: Brizo, Mazu, Palaemon, Dragon Queen, Garditis, Saint Nicholas, Saint Barbara, Saint Christopher, Saint Brendan, the pinup in a Sailor Jerry Tattoo, The Mermaid. Another name for her might be hope. Another name for her might be luck. She is the goddess of homesick teenage-adult boys (and girls) and should take the shape of their fantasy: buoyant bodied, alternatingly maternal and sexy, over the top.

### *The Skeleton Crew*

**POOR THIRSTY**<sup>1</sup> The ghost of all sailors who ever met (or will meet) a dry death at sea – scurvy, dysentery, dehydration, despair, etc. Burnt in the sun. Angry.

**POOR DRIPPY:** The ghost of all sailors ever drowned (or drowning or will-drown) at sea. Salt-watery. Boyish. Sad.

### *Grandma Sailor*, by Nancy Au

**GRANDMA SAILOR:** a woman of color in her 60s or 70s, blind (or is she?) spent her life on the ocean and it shows on her skin and hands, the tumble of her coarse hair. Still wears a sailor suit.

**SAILOR LIN:** A woman of color in her 20s-30s, powerful voice, likes to grumble sometimes, powerful expressions (i.e. she looks directly into the sun, doesn't even squint in the rain or wind).

**SAILOR SONG:** A man or woman in their 30s-40s, powerful storyteller, sees the sun through the clouds, the magic in the stories they tell.

### *The Tail of the Siren*, by Conrad A. Panganiban

**DROKOV,** An older grizzled male shoemaker turned sailor whose heart has grown cold and dark after spending the last 10 years searching for the Siren that stole his lover on the High Seas.

**ANGEL,** A young, stunning, agendered sailor. Angel's join for life is groundless. And the only thing more beautiful than hir looks and spirit is hir voice which can make anyone do what ze wants.

### *The Mid-Sea Tale of Skippercat and Kraken*, by Nara Dahlbacka

**CAPTAIN** - Weather worn. Sea wise. Any race.

**CAPTAINS WIFE** If she's in a movement piece for the song) - Sweet. Any race. Strong tall shaved chest in a dress and barefoot.

**SKIPPERCAT** - Probably a schipperke. She identifies mostly as a cat. Probably a bit magic.

**KRAKEN** - Old woman sea goddess in form kraken. Represents nature, sea life. Everything she sees all captains destroying.

### NOTES/ PREFERENCES:

We strongly prefer that the actors cast not be trained singers. If they don't sound good, they should sing louder. Likewise, the sailors need never have picked up a guitar. One or two chords clumsily played is most authentic to the spirit of this play.

We are on a very small ship, at the mercy of a pure, cruel, and indifferent ocean. There is no time for subtlety. Everything over-the-top, 0% sarcasm/cynicism/irony/self-consciousness.

**ITEMS:** A guitar or an accordion, if possible; an imaginary octopus, a kraken tentacle.

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<sup>1</sup> We say "Poor Thirsty" because Poor Thirsty has passed on, and we don't want him to pass back. Unless you're also d\*\*d, it would be highly impolite and also risky of you to call him d\*\*d or just Thirsty, therefore please use the honorific.

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### THE PLAY

#### THE SHANTYWOMAN

*Interacting with audience at every opportunity, trying to warm them up to singing along.*

Ahoyyyyyyyyyy Thaaaaarrrrrr

I said, Ahoyyyyyyyyyy Thaaaaarrrr

Yes, you, yes, you, yes, you too. I'm talking to you, Sir. And you, Madam, and you, youngins.

Welcome to your merrie evening of sea shanties and stories. Step right up and let your shantymoman sail you through an evening of songs and stories of her sailor boys. Are you ready to come aboard? Say Aye.

*(audience)*

*Look alive, crew, I said, are you ready to get on board? Saye Aye*

*(audience plants: AYE!)*

Better. You're the Shantymoman's crew now, and I'm going to teach you landlubbers songs and tell you stories.

Tonight I will tell you the story of the boy (not much older'n you, Sir), who fell in love with *a* octopus, and of another one (not you, not you, looked a little like *you*) who ran after a mermaid. He ran right down the ship, leapt over the foc'sle, and dove right down into the blue to follow her, how do you think he ever came back, and was he alone?

And then I'll tell you the story of *The Mary Miss* and the white squall that blew away her paint, her rig, and her captain's whiskers and when all seemed lost, she passed right through the eye of the storm so the wind veered 180 degrees to a black squall that blew all her captain's whiskers her rig, and her paint right back on.

But let's have a song first.

And this song starts out with a predicament.

Figure this:

It's night time on the port. You're on leave. Ya drunk a lot of rum. You stumble on your mate who's passed out drunk on the docks – mind you the docks are practically paved with piss and vomit – you kick him, he doesn't wake up. So you've got a drunken sailor on your hands. And you turn to your friend and you ask him: What shall we do?

Get ready to sing along, crew!

What shall we do with this drunken sailor?

WHAT SHALL WE DO WITH A DRUNKEN SAILOR  
WHAT SHALL WE DO WITH A DRUNKEN SAILOR  
You know it, join in.  
WHAT SHALL WE DO WITH A DRUNKEN SAILOR  
EARL-AYE IN THE MORNING.

POOR DRIPPY

*Ghostlike at first. Gradually more solid. Foggy.  
Faraway. Longing. Almost a moan. Think: Ghost.*

Yo... ho

SHANTYWOMAN

SHAVE HIS BALLS WITH A RUSTY RAZOR  
SHAVE HIS BALLS WITH A RUSTY RAZOR\*

POOR DRIPPY

*Crawling out of the ocean, or the audience,  
or equivalent.*

Yo.... Ho

SHANTYWOMAN

*Acknowledges disruption, continues*

SHAVE HIS BALLS WITH A RUSTY RAZOR  
SHAVE HIS BALLS\*

POOR DRIPPY

Is that you? After all this time? You finally show up? Now?

SHANTYWOMAN

Are you talking to me?

POOR DRIPPY

You're the Shantymoman.

SHANTYWOMAN

Yes, yes! I'm glad you read the program. I'm right here, and so are the lovely theatergoers who paid for this show. Now if you would kindly\*

POOR DRIPPY

\*You're the Shantymoman.

SHANTYWOMAN

I am.

POOR DRIPPY

\*The Shantywoman, also known as Saint Barbara-Protector of Sailors, Saint Christopher-Protector-of-Sailors, Saint Brendan Protector of Sailors. I'm one of the sailors.

SHANTYWOMAN

I'm The Shantywoman, Maritime Storyteller. This is my play. It's a short play. We were singing a song. Maybe you'd like to shut up and join in? It goes:  
GIVE HIM A TASTE OF SALTY WATER GIVE HIM A TASTE OF SALTY

POOR THIRSTY

*Crawling off a ship, or wherever Drippy came from.*

Ahoy there! Water! Water!

POOR DRIPPY

Thirsty, that you?

SHANTYWOMAN

Who?

POOR THIRSTY

Drippy! You old shellback! God I missed ya. Help me up so I can see ya.

POOR DRIPPY

Look who I found!

POOR THIRSTY

Well blow me down, like the sailors say. It looks like the shantywoman, also known as Brizo, Protector of Sailors, Mazu-Protector-of-Sailors, Palaemon pro-

SHANTYWOMAN

Alright, already.

POOR THIRSTY

Help me, I must be dyin'

POOR DRIPPY

Oh Thirsty, I'd help ya if I could, but right now, you see. I'm drowning.

SHANTYWOMAN

You're not drowning, you're interrupting.  
All right. Who are you, why are you interrupting our singalong?

POOR DRIPPY

I'm Johnny, from Leeds, 15, swab on the Saint Mary. Drowned, 1845. But you can call me Poor Drippy.

SHANTYWOMAN

1845 is a long time ago.

POOR THIRSTY

Good to see ya again, Drippy.

Frank McCallum, 18 years old, Mate on the Quaker Lass died of dehy-de-hadda, diddly-ah-daba– Fuck it. Not Drinking. 1804. But you can call me Poor Thirsty.

SHANTYWOMAN

Why are you *Thirsty* and *Drippy*?

POOR DRIPPY

That's *Poor* Drippy to you. It's very rude for you not to use our titles, being that you're quick and we're-

*(say "dead" or whisper it or don't, but know it's a naughty word)*

POOR THIRSTY

What he means is, you call me *Poor* Thirsty, because I'm also Nan Purdone, Ropemaker on the Victory, died of Dysentery, 1745 (nasty, smelly death, that).

POOR DRIPPY

Aye! And I'm also Brickie, 37, Bosun on the Good Augustine, had a deep sip of the salty drink, drowned in the Atlantic, 1820.

POOR THIRSTY

What we're saying is, you've got a sailor singalong.

DRIPPY

And we're all the sailors drowned-

POOR THIRSTY

Or dead of dry causes -

DRIPPY

At sea -

*This next section should flow quickly back and forth. POOR THIRSTY and DRIPPY trying to out-story or outshout one another. You can overlap sometimes but let their stories be heard.*

POOR DRIPPY	POOR THIRSTY
<p>I'm also Whitey Pete, Able Seaman on The Lady Vivian, went the whale's way.</p> <p>Frankie Vart, Bosun on the Cigar Joe, she capsized and I was still on her.</p> <p>Skip Cantona, armourer, The King Philip, went down in a squall.</p> <p>Patrick Thomas, Captain's Mate, the Queen Mary, knocked overboard.</p> <p>Hercules Palidini, helmsman, The Seagull, drowned bailing the ship.</p> <p>Richard Dana, 2<sup>nd</sup> mate, The Eureka, thrown.</p>	<p>I'm John Masefield, 20, Ropemaker on the Queen Elizabeth, hanged.</p> <p>Marta Sweeney, 40, Cook, The Little Rose, died of infection from a knife wound.</p> <p>Jack, 13, cabin boy, went up in a rope around me neck.</p> <p>Thomas Patrick, Able Seaman, the Lovely Lady, knocked down by plague.</p> <p>Guy McVicar, 22, Bosun's mate, The Flying Dutchman, scurvy.</p> <p>Tony, mate, The Victory, triced up in the rigging and beaten to death with a*</p>

SHANTYWOMAN

STOP! I mean, err, Avast.

POOR DRIPPY

And I'm Bailey Edwards, Able Seaman, The Titanic, drowned in an icy dark sea after the ship hit a\*

SHANTYWOMAN & POOR THIRSTY

We know.

POOR DRIPPY

\*Iceberg, fell into the drink and sunk down low, low, in the green and gold worrrld beneath the sea were time is unknown and the stormy winds won't blow.

POOR THIRSTY

Tarring the rope a bit thick are we?  
What he's trying to say is that we're coming aboard.

SHANTYWOMAN

But this is my singalong.

POOR THIRSTY

We're joining your ship.

POOR DRIPPY

Our ship. It's our ship now.

(End of Excerpt)