

# Theater: PigPen Return With The Old Man to New Victory Theater

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**THE OLD MAN AND THE OLD MOON** \*\*\* 1/2 out of \*\*\*\*  
**NEW VICTORY THEATER**

I'm crazy about [PigPen](#) and soon you will be too. They're a great rock band that also happens to put on delightful theatrical shows. Or they're a great theatrical troupe that also happens to release terrific albums. Take your pick.

The guys met at Carnegie Mellon and formed their troupe in 2007. Since then, they've been crafting unique and wonderful shows built around folk tales, puppetry of all sorts, great songs and their skill as actors. They play with imagination and flair to create an entire world on stage with the simplest of tools, like a mop head, a milk jug and a bolt of blue cloth. The guys usually play multiple roles in every show, trade off lead vocals and generally have a blast.

Seven years on and they're just hitting their stride. Their debut album [Bremen was one of the best of 2012](#). And they've toured the country both as a rock band and with their show [The Old Man and The Old Moon](#). I reviewed it when the show debuted here and it was a delight to see it again because it revealed another skill of this group: they know how to get better. It's very hard to have perspective with your own work, especially after you've shared it with the world.

But [PigPen](#) has edited and tweaked and simply grown more confident in their skills. And now this newly tightened and trimmed show is yare, as only the best sailing vessels you've grown comfortable with can be. They've eliminated the intermission, focused the storytelling in ways large and small and made a very good show even better. If you saw it before, you'll want to see it again. If you haven't, now's the time.

Here's a video of the song "Bremen," which is a highlight of the show and [the title track on their debut CD](#). It's not footage from the show, but the playful puppetry on display gives an idea of their sensibility and the visual look of the show.

The story is an original folk tale, in this case one that explains why the moon waxes and wanes. Turns out it didn't always do so, thanks to an old man who lived on a cliff near the moon. Every day the moon leaked a bit of liquid light, the old man caught it in a bucket and topped off the celestial orb every night so its brightness would never dim. But the old man's wife grew bored with their unchanging routine and his unwillingness to head to town or spend even a day away from his charge. So she took off in a boat, he took off after her and there hangs a tale.

It begins simply with the men on stage playing instruments, jamming casually with one another and then slowly slipping into a full-bodied number as a little boy near me wondered, "Has it started?" Yes it has. The story is full of pirates, sea creatures, mythical cities on the horizon, fabled sailors, simple bravery (which is never that simple), lies that help, truth that hurts, balloonists and much more. It's rousing, silly, sweet and bursting with good songs, ranging from folk ballads to one awesome Tom Waits-like number that feels like an electric jolt to the evening.

I haven't singled out any of the [PigPen](#) members, because they truly feel like such an ensemble. Oh sure, you'll have your favorites. But as each member dives into a new role, as three or four of them playfully jump together and declare they're a ship! and you think, yes of course, a ship! and they move little cut-out characters behind a lit-up scrim to illustrate a character walking on a journey, you'll laugh with each and every one of them at some point. And as they raise their voices in song, you'll think this or that fellow has an especially lovely voice but always, always they sound better, stronger and more special when their voices join in unison.

Prior to this production, I'd seen them in funky venues in Brooklyn or Off Broadway settings. Now here they are at the [New Victory Theater](#), a jewel box of a house that is devoted to fare for family audiences. As anyone who's had the pleasure to see a show at New Victory, it's a great space and their best shows would appeal to anyone. That's certainly true of this show, which runs through October 13.

But just because kids can have fun, don't confuse this with a children's show that adults can enjoy too. (Not that there's anything wrong with that.) You might say the same of the Tony-winning show *Peter and the Starcatcher*, which had a similarly playful tone. *The Old Man and the Old Moon* makes perfect sense here, but it would also fit right in at the high art stages of the Brooklyn Academy of Music or with an open run on Broadway. The only thing that doesn't make sense is missing these talented performers in action.

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[Hard Times](#) \*\* 1/2

[Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead](#) \*\*

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[Machinal](#) \*\*\*

[Outside Mullingar](#) \*\*\*

[A Man's A Man](#) \* 1/2

[The Tribute Artist](#) \*\* 1/2

[Transport](#) \*\*

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[Kung Fu \(at Signature\)](#) \*\*

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[Antony and Cleopatra at the Public](#) \*\*

[All The Way](#) \*\* 1/2

[The Open House \(Will Eno at Signature\)](#) \*\* 1/2

[Wozzeck \(at Met w Deborah Voigt and Thomas Hampson and Simon O'Neill\)](#)

[Hand To God](#) \*\*\*

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