

Who Was The Elephant Man?



Bradley Cooper in the 2015 Broadway Revival



Merrick 1889



John Hurt in the 1980 film

The play ***The Elephant Man*** is based on both the factual and fictional history of Joseph Carey Merrick (often incorrectly called John Merrick) an English man with very severe deformities who was first exhibited at freak shows as the "Elephant Man", who then went to live at the London Hospital after he met Dr. Frederick Treves, and went on to become the toast of London society.

His story became the basis for the 1979 Tony Award winning Broadway [play](#) as well as the Academy Award nominated 1980 [film](#) by the same name.

Although both the film and the play are based upon Dr. Treves' memoirs, they differ greatly in their approach to representing Merrick. The play calls for the actor playing Merrick to distort his body in order to approximate Merrick's deformities but not to use make-up that might mask the performer's emotions. The result is a challenge to both the actor and the audience that ingeniously reveals the humanity of the character. The film, on the other hand, through elaborate prosthetics approximates Merrick's condition as tangibly for its audience as possible. In fact it is widely believed that the Academy Award category that was established the following year for make-up was due in great part to the work done in this film.

The production you will see at the PAC in April is an original take on the play by PAC Director Bart Lovins. He has incorporated several surrealistic touches as a nod to the Lynch film and as a means to further illuminate the fact and fiction surrounding Merrick. These added segments include a choreographed prologue and dream sequence as well as pantomimed re-enactments of Merrick's life before he met Treves. Bart explains, "When dealing with a story that has one foot planted in reality and another in fable, a director usually has to decide which foot he wishes to stand upon when telling the tale. This is my attempt to share Merrick's story with one foot firmly planted in both fact and fiction since neither alone can do the narration justice by itself."

The PAC ProAm production of ***The Elephant Man*** will be presented April 7-9. For tickets click [HERE](#).

Bart Lovins, Director
Hardin County Schools Performing Arts Center