

Bullfrog Films presents...

WHALESONG

Produced by Rhombus Media

Teacher's Guide

by Jennifer Reck, Speech Clinician

WHALESONG

2 versions: 29 minutes, or 50 minutes

Synopsis

Whalesong features the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, the Vancouver Bach Choir, opera singers Judith Forst and Mark Pedrotti, and three killer whales: Hyak, Finna and Bjossa. This unlikely combination of performers gathers one day at the Vancouver Aquarium. Beginning as a comedy of errors, the day culminates in a magical concert performance where whales soar gracefully through the air and sing an eerie song to the accompaniment of orchestra and choir.

Whales and Sound

The film WHALESONG gives us the opportunity to observe killer whales delighting themselves to the sounds of music for the first time. It is of no surprise then that acoustic behavior is highly developed in all Cetaceans. Hearing is enhanced underwater because water transmits the pressure waves of sound much more rapidly and effectively than does air, even for extreme distances and depths. Acoustic behavior in Cetaceans involves passive listening, social signaling, and echolocation (to use the echoes of their own signals to determine direction, distance, and size).

Cetaceans emit low pitched sounds (whistles, clicks, and calls of various sorts) to communicate with one another. They often coordinate very complex group activities by such communication. High intensity signals serve largely in discrimination and navigation.

Captive porpoises have been known to mimic human voice signals and artificial sounds. Some sounds have been shaped by training techniques. However, no evidence exists for a human language in any Cetacean.

Killer whales, the largest member of the dolphin group, are the stars of WHALESONG. Underwater vocalizations of killer whales strongly suggest that the animals are always in acoustical communication with one another. Killer whales are very active animals on the surface, often leaping clear out of the water. Killer whales are also known to very inquisitive.

The Music

The music in the film was written for whales, in celebration of whales:

The Whales

John Tavener

A Capella

Alan Hovhaness

Pentatonic Melody

improvised by

Barry Shiffman

And God Created Great Whales Alan Hovhaness

The Whales

Phylum: Chordata

Subphylum: Vertebrata

Class: Mammalia

Order: Cetacea - includes all of the world's whales, dolphins and porpoises.

Suborders: Odontoceti- (toothed whales) includes 70 species: 3 species of sperm whales, 18 species of beaked and bottlenose whales, 32 species of oceanic dolphins, and 2 species of beluga and narwal whales.

Mysticeti- (baleen whales) includes 10 species: 6 species of rorqual whales (the blue whales and humpback whales are most commonly known rorqual whales), 1 species of the gray whale, and 3 species of the right whales.

A great range of adult weight is encompassed by Cetacea, from about 45 kilograms (100 pounds) in small porpoises (Odontoceti) to about 136,000 kilograms (150 tons) in the blue whale (Mysticeti).

Baleen whales range in length from 6 meters (about 20 feet) in the case of the pygmy right whale to about 30 meters (nearly 100 feet) in the largest recorded specimen of the blue whale.

Toothed whales range in length from about 1.3 meters (4.3 feet) in the smallest porpoises to about 18 meters (60 feet) in the male sperm whale.

Behavior in which one animal assists another in trouble is common in both Mysticeti and Odontoceti.

In 1971, the United States declared the commercially exploited whales to be endangered species and prohibited by law the importation of all whale products.

Related Bullfrog Films:

FOR THE WHALES

58 minutes (on 2 reels for schools)

A tribute to whales in many art forms by internationally renowned artists, authors and composers.

WHERE THE BAY BECOMES THE SEA

30 minutes

The marine ecosystem and food chain that supports the right whale in the Bay of Fundy.

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