

## **Songs for a Lost Pod – Artist’s Statement**

An orca’s survival depends upon the family pod. The resident, salmon-eating orca, both males and females, stay with their mother’s pod for their entire lives. When a member is in distress, for instance caught in a net or sick, others will take turns diving under water and lifting their kin up to the surface to breathe. The family hunts together and the kill is shared. When a baby orca dies—something that happens more and more frequently due to the build-up of environmental toxins, boat traffic, and dwindling salmon populations— the still-lactating mother is sometimes seen dragging the infant’s body with her for days, refusing to let it go.

If this all sounds human-like, it’s because it is. Orca and human brains share key features like a highly developed limbic system, a part of the brain in charge of emotional processing and the formation of memories. Humans and orcas both have limbic lobes, however the orca's limbic lobe is enlarged compared to those of humans, complete with the kind of cells associated with social organization and empathy. We can't know the exact role of the orca limbic lobe, but scientists speculate that it could be responsible for their incredible group cohesion—almost as if the individual self-extended to include the family unit.

From 1965-1973, groups of killer whales in the Pacific Northwest were regularly rounded up and sold to marine parks. Many died during the process of capture or within a few years of living in captivity. The A5 pod, a family of northern resident salmon-eating orca, lost at least three of their family members to capture on December 11, 1969. Only one of these whales has survived in captivity—Corky—who will likely spend the remainder of her days performing at Seaworld. One year and a day before Corky’s capture, my mother and her parents came to Canada as refugees from communist Czechoslovakia. My grandparents, holocaust survivors and the only remaining members of their families, decided to take my mother and leave everything behind, instead of living in fear again. They settled in Vancouver, where I grew up exploring the beaches of the Pacific Northwest and watching captive orca perform at the Vancouver Aquarium.

The superimposition of these family histories in this project assumes that whales are equal to humans in intelligence and empathic ability. By extension, it also supposes that inter-species communication is possible. These conclusions are the result of several years-worth of research, grief for the dying natural world and my lost family, and contemplation of the impacts of intergenerational trauma.

In humans, trauma can interrupt the connections and relationships we have with one another. Trauma survivors often isolate themselves from friends and family, even though social support and reconnection can be crucial for healing. Trauma can jeopardize even the small pod we have left. In some way, each song in this collection explores communication and collaboration—or the barriers to it—in an effort to reconcile the isolation of past traumas, and perhaps facilitate reconnection. In the largest sense, these songs were written in collaboration with the A5 pod, as I have used field recordings of their vocalizations in the project. Most songs are also collaborations with fellow musicians, who have taken these vocalizations, along with other field recordings, and turned them into beats and tracks that I have used as a backbone for the project. I would like to acknowledge my musical collaborators, J.J. Ipsen, Andrew Lee, Arliss Renwick, Antoine Bedard, Marten Timan, Aidan O'Rourke, Sandro Perri and the Lost Pod Ensemble for their work on this project, as well as the scientists at OrcaLab, who have spent nearly 40 years recording orca vocalizations.