Sea Blue Sea: The Creation and Performance of Educational Children's Music

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SEA BLUE SEA
THE CREATION AND PERFORMANCE OF EDUCATIONAL CHILDREN’S MUSIC
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Sea Blue Sea: The Creation and Performance of Educational Children’s Music

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Abstract

The making of *Sea Blue Sea* began in August, 2013 with the creation of the album’s first song ‘Blue Whale’ and was completed in March, 2014. The project’s scope was broad, including a ten-track album about endangered marine wildlife.

I researched endangered marine wildlife, including eleven endangered marine species were chosen as subjects for songs, I began the writing process. I wrote six songs with minimal outside assistance and collaborated with The Whizpops for the remainder of the ten tracks included on the album.

We fundraised through a Kickstarter campaign. In order to do so, we created a short film which served as a tool to engage would-be supporters of the project. When we had raised the necessary funds, we recorded the songs and held a CD release party.

The Whizpops and I experienced many expected and unforeseen challenges throughout this project, including financial obstacles, time constraints and philosophical differences. This paper illustrates ways in which we overcame those challenges to create music that we hope will inspire future generations of artists and conservationists!
Introduction

The Whizpops is an educational band that I cofounded. For nearly six years, we have been writing, performing, and recording music for people of all ages. This paper chronicles the making of The Whizpops’ third album *Sea Blue Sea*. From the crowd-funded fundraising effort to the culminating CD release party at Missoula’s Wilma Theater, this project affected my life as a musician, teacher and amateur conservationist.

Project Intent and Background

Six years ago, I was asked by a friend to accompany him to play music for an upcoming book fair at his school. We are both elementary educators and enjoy playing music to our students in class. I agreed to play the book fair and we began feverishly putting together a set list of traditional children’s songs, musical poems, and contemporary rock songs with child-friendly, rewritten lyrics. Unbeknownst to the two of us, a larger journey into the creation and performance of educational children’s music had begun.

Six years later our two-piece duo has blossomed into a whopping six-piece band with a host of visiting professional musicians called The Whizpops. In addition, we have written over twenty-five original songs spread across three albums. Needless to say, a great deal of change and growth has taken place since the induction of the project. However, our intention throughout the process has remained the same: writing music that is simultaneously fun and engaging while delivering educational content. For our third and most recent album, *Sea Blue Sea,*
we remain true to that intention.

*Sea Blue Sea* is a compilation of songs about marine wildlife, many of which are endangered species whose survival is critical to maintaining healthy marine ecosystems. As the primary writer of many of the songs found on *Sea Blue Sea*, and a wildlife enthusiast, my intention was to address issues facing these creatures through song.

Animals are a natural source of interest to many people, especially children. Because our target audience is children ranging in ages from 5 to 11 years old, each of the ten tracks on the album intentionally focuses on building an understanding of the biological needs of each species. Our focus on the environmental challenges facing these animals (i.e. habitat degradation, climate change, etc.) is less pronounced. The songs are designed to provide listeners with a foundational understanding of each creature’s habitat, physiology, and habits.

My hope and principle intent is that the music piques the listener’s interest and inspires them to discover further information on their own volition. If this is the case, listeners may be more inclined to participate in conservation efforts to protect these critical, vulnerable species.

A secondary intent of this project is to collaborate with wildlife conservation organizations, specifically those working to save endangered marine wildlife. These types of collaborations are mutually beneficial to The Whizpops and the organization involved. The educational nature of our music allows such groups to use the songs to educate people whom are interested in the mission of their organization while simultaneously promoting The Whizpops.
Two examples of such collaborations between The Whizpops and wildlife conservation organizations have been with the Queensland, Australia Department of Natural Resources as well as a current collaboration with the Pacific Northwest Chapter of Trout Unlimited. In the case of the Australian government, we were contacted and asked if they could use a song we had written about bats to imbed into an interpretive sign near a tunnel which houses many bats in a national park in Queensland. In the case of Trout Unlimited, we were commissioned to write a song about endangered Bull Trout for use as educational outreach.

Research

Before beginning the writing process, I approached preliminary research for the project with three guiding questions: ‘Which marine wildlife was most in need of help?’, ‘Which endangered marine animals are children drawn to?’, and ‘Which creatures had I some personal experience with which to draw from?’

I then conducted preliminary research by surveying students and compiling lists of ocean wildlife that met one of the following criteria: The animal is a marine keystone species (a species that plays a critical role in maintaining a healthy ecological community), a species that is critically endangered, or a species that is threatened and of a high degree of interest to children.

Once preliminary research had been conducted, eleven species were selected to focus on in ten songs. The species chosen and subsequently researched were: coral, West Indian manatee, bottlenose dolphin, orca whale, manta ray, whale shark, octopus, starfish, blue whale, sea turtles and anglerfish (Appendix A).
I began conducting research with the assistance of band members, not just on the subjects of our upcoming songs, but also on how much money this project was going to cost to produce. We determined that in order to write, record, mix and master a ten-track album and pay for two side projects, we would need to raise $15,000. The two side projects are illustrating and printing our first children’s book, *Talkin’ Bout Dinosaurs*, and the release of our first fully-animated music video to a song on *Sea Blue Sea*.

We then researched different funding possibilities and in the end, decided to use Kickstarter, an online crowd-funding format to fundraise the money for the making of *Sea Blue Sea* as well as the video and book projects. In order to raise funds using Kickstarter, an artist needs to create an informative video, explaining their project to would-be donors. Once that video has been created, it is posted on a Kickstarter hosted web page.

As an artist using Kickstarter, it is your job to drum-up anticipation and promotion of your project in hopes that fans will visit the site, view your video, and be inspired to pledge to fund your project. For every pledge patrons give, they receive a premium or reward from you, the artist. In our case, donors pledged money to our campaign, simultaneously purchasing one of many premiums. Examples of our premiums included: copies of the forthcoming album, *Sea Blue Sea*, the forthcoming book, *Talkin’ Bout Dinosaurs*, backstage passes to the CD release event and many more.

In order to use Kickstarter as a fundraising platform, we also needed to set a start and end date as well as a fundraising goal. If the goal is not met by your end
date, you are unable to access any of the money previously pledged to your campaign. In the case of not meeting your goal, any individuals that had pledged to your campaign are refunded any money they had pledged. In addition, if you do meet your fundraising goal, Kickstarter takes a percentage of your pledge money.

We decided that because our project revolves around children’s educational entertainment, we would create a child-friendly film. The first order of business was to write the script for that film.

I was determined to write a script that encompassed The Whizpops’ brand of all-ages humor, combined with our specific mission for this album, which focused on endangered marine wildlife. With assistance from Casey Schaefer, another founding member of the band, we penned a hilarious script. The script followed the band itself on a journey to save the ocean from impending doom, not brought on by overfishing or global warming, but by a disgruntled hipster named Dr. Villain. Dr. Villain had a personal vendetta against the ocean after a rogue wave annihilated his childhood sandcastle. The film ends with Dr. Villain turning to the camera and encouraging would-be donors not to support The Whizpops’ mission. But by the close of the film, Dr. Villain and his henchman, a talking owl, are ultimately enticed by the amazing pledge award deals espoused on our Kickstarter fund site.

The film used a variety of mediums, ranging from illustrated animation and stop-motion animation to live-action footage and puppetry. In the end, over 30 local artists worked on the 9-minute film, which was made with a budget of $500. The film was released during an intermission at our Kickstarter kick-off concert at the Top Hat Lounge in Missoula.
Achievements and Accomplishments

Collaboration with Local Artists and Businesses

Within one month, our Kickstarter project was over 100% funded. This allowed us to continue researching the subjects of our songs, writing, rehearsing and begin the recording process. Now, we needed to adhere to the schedule we’d promised our donors. We told these supporters that our album would be ready for pick-up at our CD release party, three months later at Missoula’s Wilma Theater.

We also began holding meetings with local animator Amber Bushnell, as well as illustrators Josh Quick and Glory Lawson, about our vision for the album, music video and children’s book. We first met with video animator Amber Bushnell about illustrating our first-ever children’s music video to the song Anglerfish from the forthcoming album. We discussed our storyboard and a timeline for the completion of the video.

We next met with local illustrator Josh Quick, who we have collaborated with for years, to illustrate the music video for the song Anglerfish and began discussing ideas for the artwork for Sea Blue Sea. This was the first of a series of meetings and correspondences with Josh, who we’ve developed a strong connection with.

Then, we held the first of a series of meetings with local illustrator Glory Lawson about illustrating our first-ever children’s book Talkin’ Bout Dinosaurs, based on the song Dinosaurs from our previous album Science and Wonder. We plotted out a storyboard and text breakdown together before setting a timeline for the project, complete with a wrap-up date to meet our Kickstarter pledge drive delivery-date.
promises.

In addition to collaborating with these local artists to create quality products and meet our project goals, we met with local theater owner and International Wildlife Film Festival director Mike Steinberg about the possibility of a collaborative effort. The Whizpops have been part of IWFF festivities in the past, because of our wildlife-centered, family-friendly approach to music.

However, this year we hoped to have a more central role in the IWFF, and pitched our idea to Mike to hold the release party of our upcoming album about endangered marine wildlife at Missoula’s historic Wilma Theater. Mike was immediately interested and suggested that we hold the album release party on the final night of the festival, combining the concert with the film fest’s awards ceremony and release of two wildlife films! The fruits of these collaborative efforts were among some of the most important achievements during this project.

*The Writing Process*

I had already begun the writing process by this time, writing *Blue Whale* on a rainy Saturday afternoon in September (Appendix A). I had been reflecting on what styles of music I have most fun playing and at the time, that question was easily answered: reggae! I had been playing around with a number of reggae riffs that morning and fell into one that was easy to sing with. From there, I simply hummed out a melody that felt like a natural fit with the chord progression and began plugging words in!

This has always come very naturally to me. I’ve seen people improvise lyrics
on the spot and that still amazes me. When writing songs, my brain doesn’t work that fast. However, it doesn’t work much slower than that either.

Typically, while writing a song, I look for syllabic flow, even if the rhyme pattern doesn’t match from stanza to stanza. If there is a flow, something easy to sing and remember, I keep it. I keep it because that is likely what listeners will remember too. In my case, it is imperative that listeners remember lyrics! When I think about it, the only purpose music behind the lyrics serve in a way, is a vehicle for these lyrics to travel from speaker to memory. In other words, it’s equally imperative that the music is catchy, but only to act as the glue binding the lyrics to the memory.

Not long after writing Blue Whale, I wrote Sea Turtle (Appendix A). I had recently been in Malaysia and spent some time with endangered Green and Hawksbill sea turtles. One evening while watching the sunset on the beach, my wife and I noticed a tiny bluish-green mass crossing the sand. We soon found that it was a just-hatched sea turtle. We followed it on its 100-foot slog through the sand until it reached the sea.

I couldn’t help but notice the relief that the turtle seemed to experience upon reaching what is to me (as an adult, let alone a 2 minute old baby) an extremely vast, frightening place. It, like many other experiences on that trip, reminded me of the countless things I take for granted in this world. Here was a turtle, no more than 2 minutes old, which came into this world completely alone and what did it do? The only thing it knew how to do: make for the ocean and carry out it’s evolutionary destiny. But how did it know what to eat and where to access that food? This may
seem off topic, but it is these experiences that drive my song writing. These experiences are the heart and soul of my writing process.

The refrain of *Sea Turtle* goes: “The moment that we reached the sea, we knew exactly where to go. We knew exactly what to eat!” (Appendix A) I like writing in the first person. It gives me a chance to jump into someone else’s shoes (or in this case, flippers) for a moment and, I think, can be more interesting for listeners than describing your subject from the outside. It has its drawbacks, I will admit, but it was perfect for that song.

Next, I wrote Starfish, Manatee, and Whale Shark (Appendix A). These songs were all inspired, instrumentally by favorite music from my distant and not too distant past. I enjoyed writing Starfish because it brought me back to middle school, listening to punk rock and not taking anything seriously. Manatee is the near opposite, a sad song about a gentle, helpless species in a cruel, violent world.

Finally, Whale Shark came out in an hour long writing session. It is full of overarching melodies which create space for a song that isn’t so lyrically crammed. As a band, we played with the timing of the song and in the end, I came up with a time signature that was different than anything we’d done previously and, fortunately, worked for everyone.

Of the three albums produced by the Whizpops, *Sea Blue Sea* saw the best collaborative efforts in my opinion. For example, *Coral Reef* and *Manta Rays* were written in one night by band mates Casey Schaefer and Margie Cates. We retreated to a forest service cabin and built upon chord progressions created by Casey. As we read and learned more about these species, the melodies, even harmonies bubbled
up in a very playful way. A great example of this was the refrain in Coral Reef  
“Eatin’ that zooplankton with their tentacles in the moonlight” (Appendix A) just 
came out of our lips in seeming unison. We didn’t write any of it down right way, 
just played with musical information. In this way, these songs seemed to already be 
there, just waiting for us to find them, together.

Sea Blue Sea

We had recorded the previous two Whizpops albums, The Adventures of 
Stretch McCoy and Science and Wonder with Missoula recording engineer Nathan 
Zevalney and anticipated doing the same for Sea Blue Sea. However, during a 
weekend rehearsal session in November, 2013, Nathan informed us that recording 
our third album with him was not an option for a variety of reasons.

We quickly turned to Ryan Maynes, a Missoula producer who has worked 
with hundreds of Missoula artists. Ryan had the technical ability to help us achieve 
the polished sound we hoped to capture while recording Sea Blue Sea. We found out 
that he was also a very talented musician who helped us record a number of 
instrumental pieces on the album, including accordion and electric guitar.

After trying a full-band approach to recording, we settled into a track-by-
track approach, which took some of the band members outside of their comfort 
zones. However, we soon found a system that worked for our schedules and most 
of our recording preferences.

We began recording at the end of December, 2013 and completed the process 
in mid-March, 2014. We recorded ten tracks, all to a metronome. This was another
aspect of the recording process that took us all out of our comfort zone, but was the
right choice in the end, as it kept us in time throughout each track. We would later
discover the most important benefits of recording to a metronome during the mixing
process. We were also accompanied by eight special guest musicians during the
session, including two children who recorded percussion!

When the recording portion of the process concluded, we began mixing the
album. Like editing, this process consists of listening to the music carefully and
frequently, noting any imperfections for later eradication. We listened to each song
as many times as possible, through as many different types of speakers as possible in
order to catch any and all mistakes or unnecessary sounds. When we completed the
mixing process, we sent the album to Ryan’s colleague, Rich Mouser, for further,
more refined mixing.

When we received the final mixes back from Rich Mouser, we each made our
final notes, the appropriate changes, and sent the album back to Mouser for
mastering. Mastering is the final stage that any audio work passes through during
production. During this process, the sound engineer sets all audio levels so that the
sound quality and volume are consistent throughout each track and from song to
song.

The album was finally complete and ready for local release in mid-April,
2014. This was just in time to autograph and ship CDs to those families who had
purchased autographed, prerelease copies of the album via our Kickstarter
fundraising campaign. Also, this provided us a full week to enjoy the album before
its official local release at Missoula’s Wilma Theater on Friday, April 18th! My sense
of accomplishment when listening to this album exceeded that of the previous two albums.

*Sea Blue Sea Release Party*

The planning and preparation of the CD release party was immense. From coordinating the event with IWFF directors and musicians to the many physical preparations, it was a multiple month long community effort. This effort included all band members, who in addition to rehearsing and spreading the word about the event via word of mouth and social media, delivered posters, wrote and sent press releases and assisted in many other tedious pre-show tasks like inflating 300 blue balloons.

The night of the event, friends and family greeted us backstage. Some came in costume, prepared to act or dance as part of the performance. We greeted other families backstage as well; those who spent their pledge money on meeting the band backstage before the concert during our Kickstarter campaign.

The event was an incredible culminating experience to this project for me personally. In addition to the concert running smoothly, it was an opportunity to celebrate this accomplishment with my father, wife, and many of my students who were present and active in making the party a success.

*Results*

*Expected Results of Project*

It is still too soon to say with complete certainty the effect the album will have
on the greater population, but based upon feedback from students ranging from ages 5 to 11, the album is doing what it was intended to do: teach children about marine wildlife! Already students from both my classroom and my band mate’s classroom have been quoted saying, “I didn’t know coral reefs ate zooplankton!” and “Wow, starfish turn inside out when they eat?” Even my wife, a science teacher and naturalist remarked, “An octopus is an invertebrate?”

Another expected result of the project’s completion is a noticeable improvement in the sound of the band as a unit. Clearly, the more frequently we play shows and rehearse together, the more cohesive we will sound as a band. However, I have noticed that there is connection between the band member listening to a recording of themselves and improving as a result. In other words, I think that the band has improved in part from growing accustomed to the recorded versions of these songs and reproducing the sound they’ve heard on the recording in a live setting.

Unexpected Results of the Project

One unexpected and welcome result of the release of this album is the growing attention The Whizpops are receiving from local organizations with similar missions: to provide youth with science and nature-based educational opportunities through an engaging format like music. We have had a relationship with organizations like SpectrUM and The Children’s Museum for a number of years, but only recently have we connected with other like organizations such as the Montana Natural History Center and The Biomimicry Institute.
Challenges

As I set out to create this album, The Whizpops and I faced many challenges. Some were common obstacles for projects such as these, and others were unique to our project. I have broken these challenges down into three distinct categories: financial obstacles, time constraints and philosophical differences.

Financial Obstacles

Unfortunately, The Whizpops are not yet a moneymaking or even fiscally-neutral enterprise. When we began writing and recording songs for *Sea Blue Sea* we were still collectively in debt from the release of our previous album *Science and Wonder*. In order to make releasing yet another album (let alone a children’s book and music video) fiscally possible, we need to assign some of our collective creativity to fundraising efforts.

For over a year, we were playing with the idea of fundraising through Kickstarter. As mentioned earlier, artists use Kickstarter as a tool to launch a crowd-backed fundraiser. In other words, during a Kickstarter campaign, your current fan base funds your next project by pre-ordering the product you hope to raise enough money to create.

Any time Kickstarter previously came up in conversation as a funding option, we balked at the prospect due to the immense amount of additional time and energy that must go into a successful launch and wrap-up. However, due to being in the red from a previous project, Kickstarter had larger appeal to us this time around and we decided to make a go of it.

The campaign was successful and in the end, fans pledged over the $15,000
necessary to fund our project. This was clearly a welcome gift from fans and supporters; however, we would go on to find that the project would end up costing us around $25,000 as opposed to the originally projected $15,000. When we discovered that we had under-shot the project’s costs, we turned to our own bank accounts, as we had so many times before, to cover the remainder.

Self-funding poses challenges beyond the obvious minor annoyance of having a very expensive hobby. For example, due to this precarious financial situation, we have shifted to accepting only relatively well paying gigs, often turning down opportunities to play fundraising concerts for organizations we support and want to see succeed.

Next, we have always done our best to adequately compensate the band and guest musicians for their time. We are able to do so from our only two income sources: payment for performances from the venues that hire us and merchandise sales.

During periods of debt, we have used merchandise income exclusively to pay down debt, while using gig income to pay musicians. This has gotten us by for the past few years, though in my opinion, is not sustainable for a variety of reasons.

For example, a small business like The Whizpops uses all of its income to invest in the next project and is as a result unable to generate any kind of savings. This may not pose a problem if The Whizpops were a duo. However, since instrumentation is critical to the The Whizpops’ sound, we need a full-band to perform live and thus, pay them for their work. This is increasingly difficult to do when the band goes further into debt. As stated earlier, any extra money from
merchandise sales is used to pay back the debt of those members of the band who are participating in self-funding.

One possible solution to this debt-related positive feedback cycle is for us to attempt to expand our fan base beyond Missoula and Western Montana. Theoretically, doing so would generate an increased amount of record sales and possibly result in other well paying commission jobs like the Trout Unlimited job mentioned earlier. Additionally, we may also receive more frequent live performance opportunities as a result of national promotion.

However, this poses another challenge entirely; no one beyond Western Montana has any idea who The Whizpops are. So, even if a Whizpops album were available to them, why would they purchase it? This is of course, is an unfortunate result of Missoula’s extreme geographic isolation, which, even in today’s shrinking world of interconnected technology, is still an enormous hurdle to jump.

This has led us to correspond with the family-music industry’s most well known publicist, Beth Clucas. Beth represents family-music giants such as Bill Harley. We met Beth at a conference which gave children’s musicians an opportunity to network with other artists, promoters and publicists. After a year of correspondence with Beth, she has agreed to take us on for a national release of *Sea Blue Sea* during the summer of 2014!

*Time Constraints*

I began the writing process for *Sea Blue Sea* in early autumn 2013, assuming that there would be a mid to late spring 2014 release date. It wasn’t until our
meeting with International Wildlife Film Festival director Mike Steinberg to confirm
the date of the release party that we realized just how little time we had to complete
the writing, recording and mixing process.

The concert had been scheduled for Friday, April 18th, 2014; a mere five
months away. This meant that we needed to complete recording in early March;
which was four months away. This was a daunting challenge, but for the most part,
I took it in stride and remained focused on writing.

The tracks *Blue Whale, Sea Turtle, Starfish* and *Manatee* (Appendix A) were
written in the autumn. This allowed the band to begin rehearsing and recording
this first set of songs before many of the album’s other songs had even been written.
Two more tracks, *Dolphin Disco*(Super Pod Party) and *Whale Shark* were completed in
late December along with a number of other tracks, which were largely
collaborations between myself and other band members and subsequently recorded.

When the deadline came, we managed to complete the album in time,
allowing us to follow through with Kickstarter promises of pre-release copies of the
album. However, due to reasons beyond our control, our children’s book and music
video were not completed in time, generating a great deal of stress. Fortunately, our
fans are flexible and patient and happy to wait an extra few weeks for their order.

*Philosophical Differences*

Another challenge, which we faced as a band early on in the recording
process, was a difference in philosophy in relation to the approach we took to
recording. There were a number of opinions within the band, some who felt that it
was best to take a ‘live’ recording approach. In this approach, all musicians play their instruments together, all recording at the same time. On the other hand, some members of the band preferred an approach that allowed each individual band member to record their part individually as many times as necessary in order to achieve an optimal sound.

There are plenty of pros and cons to both methods, which we all could see and appreciate. We began recording with an attempt to record with the live, full-band approach. This proved to be too difficult for us and especially for our producer, who was not used to recording so many tracks simultaneously. Furthermore, as a result of limited experience with this live approach, he wasn’t technically equipped either.

In the end, we followed the one-musician-at-a-time model which was far from perfect, but worked best for us. It was what our producer felt comfortable with. Also, recording this way allowed us flexibility as to when we could go in to the studio to record. For example, if our drummer needed to come in to record on some songs, he could schedule that time whenever worked for his schedule and no other band members even needed to be present.

**Documentation of the Project**

The making of *Sea Blue Sea* was documented in many ways, including audio, illustration, video, photography (Appendix B) and animation. Of course, the primary form of documentation is the completed album itself. The album consists of 10 tracks in CD form, contained inside of four of Josh Quick’s best Whizpop-related
The entire process, from writing sessions in a fire lookout, to meetings at Missoula coffee shops, living rooms, and studio sessions with guest musicians was documented through photography. In addition to photos taken by individuals involved in the project, we hired a professional photographer to capture the CD release party in photographs (Appendix B). Many of these photos are available via our Facebook site.

The fundraising portion of the project was documented via video. Our nine-minute short film promoting the project provides viewers with our goals to bring this vision to fruition. The film is available for view via our website, which can be found in the bibliography.

Documentation of the project is also found through beautiful illustrations, compliments of both Josh Quick and Glory Lawson. Josh Quick was responsible for the cover art for the album, the CD release party promotional poster, the illustrated aspect of the introductory animation in our Kickstarter video as well as the illustrations used in the animated video for Anglerfish. Josh’s illustrations are attached to this document in the appendices.

Glory Lawson’s work can be seen in the pages of our first children’s book Talkin’ Bout Dinosaurs. Glory’s work focuses on subtle details and is very realistic. Glory illustrated over 24 beautiful landscapes and dozens of dinosaurs to take readers back to the ‘land before time.’ A digital copy of Glory’s work in Talkin’ Bout Dinosaurs is attached to this document in the appendices. Also, typed lyrics of each song found on Sea Blue Sea are attached to this document (Appendix A).
Significance of the Project

This project affected me in a variety of ways. Primarily, it has impacted me as a musician, writer, recording artist and teacher. I feel that a great deal of personal growth has taken place through this process in all of the mentioned areas.

During the recording session, I took a very different approach than I am used to as a musician. Our producer, Ryan, my band mate Casey and I decided that we would go with what sounded best in all situations, even if that meant allowing others to step in and record parts in your place if it was best for the overall end product. As a result of this philosophy, and the fact that I am not comfortable playing guitar with a pick, I requested that another band mate record some of my acoustic guitar parts for me. After experimenting with it, it turned out to be the best choice for the album’s sound. This was a very humbling experience for me. It was also an exercise in letting go of control of my own art, which is not something that has come easily to me.

This new process affected me as a writer as well. Of the ten tracks, I was the primary writer of six songs. Each one was penned with entire band arrangements in mind. I enjoyed bringing these songs to the band and stepping back, allowing them to add their own color and flare to them. Most of the time, the song began to take a very different trajectory than what I had anticipated, and again was an exercise in compromise and letting go.

Next, this project affected my approach to recording. I noticed myself taking a step back and relinquishing much of the executive power to Ryan, our producer. This was likely in part due to the fact that this was what Ryan was used to.
However, it was also a conscious effort in part as it was very different territory in comparison to what I was used to in my previous two recording experiences with a more passive producer. What made me completely uneasy at first was very empowering and refreshing in the end.

Finally, this project affected my teaching as well! While researching these incredible animals, I was reminded that the children I work with could have a very positive impact on the survival and longevity of these species. They could have a positive impact either through direct conservation efforts, policy-related efforts or simply imparting the valuable understanding of our interdependence of all living things upon future generations. I was inspired to find ways to facilitate student-driven service and reflective community-minded projects which challenged them to make their world a better place through meaningful work.

For example, we investigated the work of Jane Goodall, reading both biographies and her autobiography. As readers, we were continually asked by Goodall to take action in our community.

The students responded whole-heartedly, organizing and participating in an amazing variety of community service and conservation efforts within their school and the greater community! One example was researching the effects of pine bark beetles on Western Montana forests and creating artwork inspired by their research for a University of Montana climate change art show. Another example was researching White Nose syndrome (WNS), a disease decimating bat populations, and acting by building and selling bat houses. Students gave this money to a bat conservation organization for further research on WNS. A third example was
researching the importance of pollinators and taking action by writing and illustrating a book explaining which native plants encourage certain local pollinators. Students sold copies of this book to raise money for our school garden. Students collected pennies to adopt a polar bear and organized a school-wide Clark Fork River clean up to raise money for our school garden. Finally, students spoke on the radio and wrote letters to the Missoulian and national policymakers to reach the greater community.

I was most impressed, perhaps, when a number of my students crafted beautiful educational tri-fold displays to accompany them at the Sea Blue Sea CD release party to educate concertgoers about the benefits of bats and pollinators! They managed to raise over $1,300 for bat research and our school garden in this culminating effort. This student service was a tangible and indirect result of my work with The Whizpops.

Concluding Statement/Summary

The creation and performance of Sea Blue Sea proved to be an incredibly positive experience for me and many of the people involved. With help from band members, friends, family, students and community members, our vision was realized. This was achieved through fundraising, songwriting, collaboration on visual arts and finally, an incredible culminating performance. However, as I see it, this project has only begun to fulfill its full potential.

Based on the feedback we’ve received, Sea Blue Sea is exceeding some of the goals set for it as it reaches families here in western Montana. It appears that it is
indeed educating families about the wonders of ocean creatures and the many challenges they face. While this is hopeful, my focus is on reaching a much wider audience here in the U.S. The Whizpops look forward to working with a national publicist to promote *Sea Blue Sea* on a larger scale with a nation-wide album release during the summer of 2014!
Bibliography


Websites

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http://www.thewhizpops.com/

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Missoulian review of The ‘Sea Blue Sea’ Kickstarter video:

Missoulian review of ‘Sea Blue Sea’:

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http://missoulanews.bigskypress.com/missoula/the-whizpops/Content?oid=1970338
Appendices

Appendix A: Song Lyrics

Blue Whales
Kevin Cashman

Intro: Oh oh oh oh oh oh!

Verse 1:
A-ho, a stream of water blows
But not from faucet or from hose
But up from the deep below
Oh oh oh oh oh oh!

Verse 2:
I know that current warm and current cold
Flowin west east south and north
Will take you where you need to go
Oh oh oh oh oh oh!

Verse 3: (Blue-la-la’s in the background!!!!)
Blue whales, blowholes, dorsal fins and tails
That you call flukes with long throat grooves
And Bayleen to filter food
Oh oh oh oh oh!

Bridge:
You’re the largest animal to roam the air the land or sea
And you may look like a fish but you’re a mammal,
j ust like meeeeeeetttttt (crescendo) 4 layer harmony KEEP DRUMS GOING

Solo:
Casey guitar GC 4X Am C D G C
Keaton GC 4x into BRIDGE

BRIDGE:

After bridge:
Acapella breakdown w/just bass and vocs and snaps (REPEAT 4X)

Margi and Kevin sing “oh oh oh’s” and Casey sing blue whale in the background

Drums kick it back in full gear on the Am, then play

Oh oh oh oh!
End song
Coral Reef Song
By The Whizpops
All the creatures living in the shallow sea
Depend on the coral reef eventually
Makin their home in the photic zone
(what’s the photic zone?)
An aquatic biome!

Reprodacin over and over again,
They’ve got millions of clones,
they’ve got millions of friends

Polyp calicals connect to one another
Like a colony of relatives,
Sisters and brothers

Eatin that Zoooo-Plaaaaankton,
With their tentacles in the moonlight!
Eatin zoooo-plankton
To help em digest the light!
DRUMS ENTER HERE!

Yo, the coral-they got
These creatures-inside em
Growin in clear water
So the sunlight can find em
They help the change colors
And turn sunlight into food

Zooxanthellae are some incredible dudes!

Please don’t stress them out with pollution and heat
Coral bleaching kills the colony so they can’t eat!
It’s where a quarter of the Earth’s sea life can meet
Without the coral reef the ocean ain’t complete!

Eatin Zoooo-Plaaaaankton,
With their tentacles in the moonlight!
Eatin zoooo-plankton
To help em digest the light! (2x)

(Verse)
A synchronous spawing in the light of the moon
Now their larvae will be settling soon!
Eatin up by Parrot Fish in the lagoon
Lookin like brains and cabbages too!

Related to jellyfish, sea anemones
We’re talkin’ bout the rain forests of the sea!
Crustaceans, molusks, fish and worms
We depend on them, they’re our concern!

(Chorus-Margi)
Eatin Zoooo-Plaaaaankton,
With their tentacles in the moonlight!
Eatin zoooo-plankton
To help em digest the light! (2x)

They feed in the night… by the moonlight…
Catchin plankton with tentacles is quite a sight (build up)

Chorus 3x w/both raps in the background…
Dolphin Disco
by The Whizpops!

Dive, dip, dash, duck
Plunge, spring, rise, jump
Race, wade, glide, and bathe
Slide, skim, sail, skate

**Speeding through the sea with renewed smooth skin**

**Steering yourself with a horizontal fin**

**With small dermal ridges to reduce friction**

**This is the wild world of cetaceans**

Margi Chorus:

*Swimmin in a pod, a super pod*
*All the tursiops*
*Swimmin in a super pod partay!*

Click, squeek, Pop-creak
squawk, Bark that’s how you speak
Pulse, whistle, chirps, screams,
echolocate so the ocean can be seen

Detect, discover, unearth, uncover
A Teeny tiny mackeral, or a mammal made of blubber
Hunt, herd, and hydroplane
To snap some supper, you gotta use your big brain

*Swimmin in a pod, a super pod*
*All the orcinus*
*Swimmin in a super pod partay!*
Manatee
By: Kevin Cashman

Well this warm water’s just right
For me, for me

Beneath the mangrove trees swingin side to side
For me for me

Down here swimmin with my friends
We kinda look like cows with no legs
Shallow sea is the only place to be, a manatee

Is there still room for me to live with you
Can it be, can it be

Must my species fade away so soon
Can it be, can it be?

Down here swimmin with my friends
We kinda look like cows with no legs
Shallow sea is the only place to be, a manatee (the only place to see me)

SOLO OVER VERSE:

BRIDGE: (Bm C#m A D)
And we adapt to fresh and saltwater habitats
We’re just gentle mammals just lookin to munch some grass
But we can’t turn our heads to see what’s above left right or below
Or swim fast so if your boats in shallow water you’d better go real slow

The shallow sea, is the only place to be,
The shallow sea is the only place for me
The shallow sea is the only place to be, a manatee
Manta Rays
By: The Whizpops!

Manta rays swimming in tropical waters
They like it there cuz it’s hotter
Where they find their food

Manta rays, mouths on top of their head
Filtering water for plankton is how they’re fed
Seems to work pretty good
Livin in the ocean just like they should

Chorus:
Fast through the sea you glide
I wish you could take me for a ride
Camouflaged in the shadows you hide
Oh blanket fish mysterious is your life

Manta rays spendin some of your days
Avoiding sharks that prey
You disappear in the dark

Manta rays soaring through the blue
mucus membrane shields you from bacteria too
Seems to work pretty good
Livin in the ocean just like you should

Chorus:
Fast through the sea you glide
I wish you could take me for a ride
Camouflaged in the shadows you hide
Oh blanket fish mysterious is your life

Manta rays, mouths on top of their head
Filtering water for plankton is how they’re fed
Seems to work pretty good
Livin in the ocean just like they should

Chorus:
Fast through the sea you glide
I wish you could take me for a ride
Camouflaged in the shadows you hide
Oh blanket fish mysterious is your life (Margi goes higher on life)
blanket fish mysterious is your life
Octopus
The Whizpops

I’m an octopus with 8 arms on my body
Which would come in handy if I practiced karate
But I don’t practice karate because I’m an invertebrate
I’m spineless, but I’ve got ink and I don’t mind squirting it.

I’m an octopus, swimming through the water
Just a cephalapod, swimming through the sea

I’m an octopus and I hang mostly on the sea floor
I just ate some scallops, and now I want to eat more
When I eat I use my beak and fill them up with my saliva
I suck em down, each one I’ve found, it helps me stay alive-a

I’m an octopus and I’m a funky cephalopod
If I loose an arm I’ll grow it back right where it was on my bod.
My pigment cells are there to change my skin with camoflauge.
IF a moray eel comes I’m elusive as a mirage!

I’m an octopus, swimming through the water
Just a cephalapod, swimming through the sea REPEAT 2X
Building on ‘sea’…. (D D D7 D7) explode into salsa breakdown lick da da da da…

Salsa breakdown!
Livin in a den, a crevice on the sea floor
Diggin under big rocks, I use them as a front door!
No eatin for two months, I really really don’t mind,
Cause protecting my eggs is how I need to spend all of my time!
(retards into choruses that end the song)

Drum fill transition-thing
I’m an octopus, swimming through the water
Just a cephalapod, swimming through the sea REPEAT 2X
Sea Turtle Song
By Kevin Cashman

We reptiles move in our own ways
Sometimes I wish I could climb like an iguana
Or slither around like a snake!

Down below the ocean green and blue,
We have lived 100 million years, our ancestors left so many clues

The moment that I reached the sea I knew exactly where to go
(echo harmony)
I knew exactly what to eat
(echo harmony)

What I’ve got inside my carapace you see
Is a tail and 4 flipper like legs
It’s totally tubular to be...
A sea turtle like me!

I only climb upon the shore to lay my eggs in sandy burrows

In 3 year cycles sometimes more...
Searching for sponges and sea grass upon sea floors

The ocean needs us too
To help it’s coral grow!

The moment that we reached the sea
We knew exactly where to go
We knew exactly what to eat

What we’ve got inside our carapace, you see...
Is a tail and 4 flipper like legs,
It’s totally tubular to be,
A sea turtle like me!

Solo (guitar solo over Verse (2x) and Bridge progression)

BRIDGE: coral
And we’ll follow the flowing currents
Just like our friends and our families
You know we’re not in any kind of hurry
To return to our birth places
We’ll make it back eventually! (Slide up E into F#)

The moment that we reached the sea (margi leads 1st time)
We knew exactly where to go (keving leads 2nd time) (both 3rd)
We knew exactly what to eat

What we’ve got inside our carapace, you see...
Is a tail and 4 flipper like legs,
It’s totally tubular to be,
A sea turtle like me! (over chorus progression)

OUTRO JAM: (vocal oh oh’s w/call and response)
Steve uses bow, and builds up w/keys and drums while margi sings light ooh’s in the background

B   B   A   E   C#m   D#m
8x  8x  8x  4x  2x  2x
Starfish Song
By Kevin Cashman

Never had a need for teeth or a toes
Never had use for ears or nose
There’s not many creatures on cold sea floors
Movin around as slow as I go
Hook 1x?

Well tide come in and tide go out
Using my tube feet to move about
If I lose one of my arms I won’t cry or pout
But grow another one and go on my route

You may spot us underneath a dock,
Clinging to the side of a rock
Or turning inside out like a sock
When we’re eatin!
Hook 4x

Some have 40 arms, some just have 5
At the end of each one is a hole for an eye
To sense the dark, and sense the light
For 400 million years we’ve been alive

You may spot us underneath a dock,
Clinging to the side of a rock
Or turning inside out like a sock
(BASS DROP)
When they’re eatin

Reggae section

Starfish, I’ve been tryin to find
You hidin in the low low tide
When it comes in, you’re outta sight
I’ll be wading around for you
Starfish, you movin so slow
I think it’s time, I ought to go
The tide pool’s fillin up you know!

I’ve been wading around for you  Repeat 2x and build on D and then hook
Whale Shark
By: Kevin Cashman

G          C
Alone inside tropical seas
G
swims a giant spotted and friend-ly
C
At home at the surface of warm water we can see
G
you swimming by swaying your entire body
B7 (stop)   C (stop)   G
guitar builds with drum fill
It’s funny you don’t seem like a shark to me

G          C
With 300 rows of tiny teeth
G
Feeding upon plankton and algae by the reef
C
Just because you’re the largest fish in the sea
G
It don’t make ya vicious, ruthless, or bloodthirsty
B7         C         G (stop on the 2nd time)
It’s funny, you don’t seem like a shark to me x2

**Instrumental over verse progression**
SONG GETS BIG HERE! BANJO ENTERS AND RIPS! Jeff hits long sustained notes too

B7         C         G
It’s funny, you don’t seem like a shark to me

Em  Am  Bm  C  G
It’s funny, you don’t seem like a shark to me
**Angler Fish** by The Whizpops!

Gather in close and I’ll tell you the most
fishy tale of a fishy fishing fish!
her teeth clear as glass, doesn’t swim very fast
Slightly larger than a teacup on a dish

*If only, if only
It wasn’t so lonely
At the lightless base of the sea*

*The only friends that will meet me
Beg ’Please don’t eat me!’
Tis a fishy fishing life for me!*

from the right angle,
a luminescent rod dangles
like a pale lantern deep in the fog
I’ll lure you in with my spark
And out of the dark
Swallow you whole with my jaw

*If only, if only
It wasn’t so lonely
At the lightless base of the sea*

*The only friends that will meet me
Beg ’Please don’t eat me!’
Tis a fishy fishing life for me!*

Someday you see
mates comes lookin for me
they can smell me from far far away
they latch onto my skin
Then the fusion begins   Em (everyone except Kevin holds this chord)
And our species will be here to stay

Kevin Jams   D   G over and over
3 part vocal harmonies

**Carrying the weight**
Of my mate, of my mate,
What a very strange fate oh oh
Photos
Appendices

Appendix B: Photos

The Whizpops Sea Blue Sea
Wilma Theater
Friday, April 18th
Missoula, Montana
Appendices

Appendix C: Press

The Whizpops!
Sea Blue Sea
by Skylar Browning

A parent's strategy for listening to music with their children usually falls into two categories: finding the right time to introduce them to stuff you like (Is it too early for Beggars Banquet?) and finding any way to avoid the gratingly repetitive crap they tend to pick up from pop culture (Exhibit A: the Frozen soundtrack). Very rarely do parent and child fall into favor with an artist that naturally caters to both of their tastes. The Whizpops, however, have nestled their way into that sweet spot, helping to make the ambitious Missoula band one of the most popular draws in the local music scene. (Well, at least before 8 p.m.)

The Whizpops' third and most polished effort yet, Sea Blue Sea, will be a welcome addition to minivans across the valley. Like their first two albums, this one showcases whip-smart educational lyrics and adroit musicianship. The underwater theme offers plenty of descriptive opportunity, like when a manatee is said to look "like a cow with no legs." And the song styles veer from full-on disco to lilting ukulele ballad to indie rock. It's a credit to Keaton Wilson (keys), Casey Schaefer (guitar), Steve Kalling (upright bass), Daniel Kiely (drums) and Kevin Cashman (guitar), as well as special guests like Grace Decker (fiddle) and Matt Cornette (banjo), that each track fits seamlessly despite crisscrossing so many different genres.

But if there's a breakout star on Sea Blue Sea, it's Margi Cates. The sextet's lone woman demonstrates some serious pipes whether she's lead vocals or providing backup, and delivers some of the album's best moments. There's no other way to say it: Anyone who makes zooplankton sound sultry deserves major props.

The Whizpops plays a CD release show at the Wilma Fri., April 18, at 6 PM as part of the International Wildlife Film Festival. $5 adults. Kids free.
The Whizpops

The Whizpops will hold a CD release party at 6 p.m., Friday, April 18, as part of the International Wildlife Film Festival awards night at the Wilma Theatre in downtown Missoula.

April 18, 2014 6:15 am • By Cory Walsh

For their “ocean” album, the Whizpops have put an island lilt on their educational and whimsical children’s music. Missoula teachers, singers and songwriters Casey Schaefer and Kevin Cashman dive into reggae, dancehall, disco and all sorts of sand-and-sun genres on “Sea Blue Sea,” their follow-up to 2012’s “Science and Wonder.”

While these new genres are party-friendly, the two stick to their mission of writing educational songs about the natural world for their 7-and-younger audience. The subject matter includes numerous animals that pique the curiosity of youngsters: manatees, dolphins, manta rays, sea turtles, blue whales and starfish.

The album was also produced courtesy of a successful $25,000 Kickstarter campaign. Part of the money is going toward a series of illustrated children’s books and music videos that Schaefer said will be ready in the coming weeks. Backing Schaefer and Cashman, who both play guitar as well, are a talented group of local musicians: vocalist Margi Cates, upright bassist Steve Kalling, Daniel Kiely on drums and timbales.

The special guests are numerous as well: Grace Decker on fiddle, Jeff Stickney on trumpet and flugelhorn, Joel Rainbeau on harp and Phil Hamilton on saxophone.

Having the most overall effect on their sound from the previous Whizpops efforts is Ryan “Shmed” Maynes, the lead singer and songwriter for Missoula rock group Secret Powers. Maynes has produced numerous albums at his studio in town and brought his arsenal of keyboards to “Sea Blue Sea.”

On “Dolphin Disco (Super Pod Party),” he brings a sleek, ’70s production sensibility, complete with disco-ball strings and horn lines, and he contributes a synth solo that recalls Bernie Worrell’s days with Funkadelic. Cates adds the high-end vocals any respectable disco anthem needs, while Schaefer and Cashman relay the purpose of pods.

“Octopus” best displays the Whizpops’ mission. After a reggae verse that sneaks the unlikely phrase “funky cephalopod” into the world, there’s a calypso breakdown and a slew of hummable facts for the target audience: “Living in a crevice on the sea floor, “Digging under big rocks, “I use them as a front door, “No eating for two months, “I really, really don’t mind, “Because protecting my eggs is how I need to spend all of my time.”

It’s a lot of information wedged into a short space, without ever giving off the impression that its “educational.” It’s a skill Cashman and Schaefer learned on the job. They are teachers, after all.

The Whizpops will hold a CD release party at 6 p.m., Friday, April 18, as part of the International Wildlife Film Festival awards night at the Wilma Theatre in downtown Missoula.

After the group’s performance starting at 7:30, the IWFF will hold its awards ceremony and there will be a screening of two IMAX documentary film productions: “Journey to the South Pacific,” and “Island of Lemurs: Madagascar.” Admission is $5. Children are free.