

Fake Music Re-Anticipations

The Sperm Whaling Industry – The Spermaceti Organ

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Whale song is produced nasally. A sperm whale's nose – the largest on earth – is mostly given over to two barrel-shaped structures filled with fat and wax, around which the whale's two nasal passages are wound. The right nasal channel expands and contracts into a series of air-filled sacs that work to amplify the sound of air forced through the passage. The whale controls the size of the two large fatty structures as a means to aim and further amplify their sounds.

Sperm whales primarily produce clicks – thus not the melodic wails familiar from the 1970 LP *Songs of the Humpback Whale* (included as well on the Golden Records aboard the Voyager spacecraft). Nevertheless, sperm whale clicks demonstrate similar song-y characteristics as humpbacks or blue whales: repetitive structures that are locally specific and evolve incrementally. Within groups, individual whales make slight variations on local "codas."

English speakers have termed the two fatty structures in the sperm whale's nose the spermaceti organ and the junk, the latter named for its uselessness to whalers who were primarily after the waxy substancespermaceti found in the eponymous organ. Spermaceti and the products of its refinement, spermaceti wax and sperm oil, were used widely in candles, soap, cosmetics, lubricants, and lamp oil. Driven by industrial demand, modern sperm whaling picked up in the early 18th century and tapered in the late 19th as spermaceti was supplanted by petroleum.

While we suppose some important musical compositions were penned under the light of whale oil lamps, our view is not toward what was produced, but what wasn't – and thus we must consider the effects of a whaling industry focused (unknowingly but nevertheless) on the capture of a critical instrument in the propagation of cetacean song. Sperm whales were not made extinct, but insofar as each group and each whale broadcasts particular codas, the loss of individual variations and perhaps entire clicky lineages are certain. Whale song of course is not intended for nor able to be understood by humanity – and this alone would be grounds for an announcement that we cannot reissue this music; but the whaling industry's instrumentalization of instrument has us considering the more basic organs of instruments and instruments of organs.

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