

Plays for Young Audiences

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The Whale Savers

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The Whale Savers

Libretto by Phil Porter

INDEX

PROLOGUE...	page 1
SCENE ONE...	page 4
SCENE TWO...	page 9
SCENE THREE...	page 18
SCENE FOUR...	page 27
SCENE FIVE...	page 31
SCENE SIX...	page 37
EPILOGUE...	page 41

PROLOGUE

Farnaway beach, gloomy daybreak. Maggie Teezle, a crone, is out for her morning walk...

Maggie Teezle:

There's a weather-beated village what the people's all forgot
 Squodged betwixt the briney and a jaggy gnarl of rock.
 But when the wind is willing you'll still hear it's clanging clock
 And it's people as they goes about their day.

Chorus:

Farnaway, Farnaway...

The village of Farnaway comes to life...

Fisherfolk:

We are they, the hardy, frost-knuckled fishfolk,
 Cockle planks and mussel rakes
 When our nets are full of wrasse, bass and mackerel
 We huddle by the fire in The Old Tin Drum.

All onstage:

Farnaway, away, away beyond the headland
 Stoney beach gives way to heavy sea.
 Farnaway, away, our history and future
 Farnaway, away, away, a place we'll never leave

Traders:

We are they, the workaday, tight-purse traders,
 Whelk huts, gift shops, a B & B,

Sweet shops choc-a-bloc with toffee, rock and lollipops,
We've barely made a sale all day.

All onstage:

Farnaway, a grey and long-forgotten cove
Long worn away by unforgiving sea
Farnaway, away, our history and future
Farnaway, away, away, a place we'll never leave

Elders:

We are they, the grey- and grump-faced elders
Muttering, spluttering, buttering scone,
We peer at life with grim suspicion
Feed on myth and superstition,
Our lives and dreams are all but gone.

Forefathers:

Forefathers we,
Long, long dead.
Beards and bloomers.
Prophecies and omens.
Smite thee with a curse upon thy silly modern head.

All onstage:

Farnaway, away, a gathering of hearts
And homes arranged around a ragged quay
Farnaway, away, our history and future,
Farnaway, away, a place we'll never leave.

Youths:

We are they, the bored and blank-faced youths,
Like totally not bothered, yeah?
Farnaway gets well, well boring.
Staring at the sea gets well, well boring.
Waiting 'til we're old enough to leave.

Tutti:

Farnaway, away (and repeating underneath...)

Fisherfolk:

We are they, the frost knuckled fish-folk.

Traders:

We are they, the workaday traders.

Elders:

We are they, the muttering elders.

Youths:

We are they, the blank faced youths.

Tutti Chorus:

Farnaway, away, a way of life to all
 Abiding by this unforgiving sea.
 Farnaway, away, our history and future
 Farnaway, a place we'll never leave.

Farnaway, away, away beyond the headland
 Stoney beach gives way to heavy sea.
 Farnaway, away, our history and future

Maggie Teezle:

Farnaway, away, away, a place we'll never leave.

Danniii:

Look.

Chorus 1:

What is that shape?

Danniii:

Look!

2 Chorus members:

Look!

Look!

Chorus 2:

What is that shape?

Chorus 1:

Oh, oh, oh.

Chorus 2:

There is...

Chorus 1:

Oh, oh, oh.

Chorus 2:

There is a whale...

Chorus 1:

Oh, oh, oh.

Chorus 2:

There is a whale in the harbour!

Chorus 1:

Oh, oh, oh.

Chorus 2:

Stuck in the harbour!

Chorus 1:

How, why, why? How, why, why?

+ Chorus 2:

How, why, why? How, why, why?

Chorus 2:

How is there a whale?

Chorus 1:

Why is there a whale?

Chorus 2:

How is there a whale?

Chorus 1:

Why is there...

Tutti Chorus:

...a whale stuck in the harbour?

SCENE ONE

BBC Reporter Ginny Underdentist has just arrived in Farnaway. She speaks into a microphone.

Ginny Underdentist:

I am joining you live from a quaint fishing village
Of low population and little renown.

Ginny is joined by ITV correspondent Shefali Chakrabati-Smith. They jostle for position...

Shefali Chakrabati-Smith:

But Farnaway finds itself right at the centre
Of quite a hullabaloo.

Ginny and Shefali:

For a whale
Has arrived
And is fighting
For its life.

Ginny and Shefali reluctantly agree to share the limelight. But as they address the nation, more media types are arriving – newspaper people, photographers, radio reporters. The photographers photograph everything while the reporters jostle for

the best spot. The Tourists are beginning to arrive too. They have cameras and picnic hampers...

Ginny Underdentist & Shefali Chakrabati-Smith:

At six o'clock just yesterday evening,
A whale was seen, yards from the shore,
By local tearaway Danielle Nunchuck
Who's never, never, never been helpful before.

The Media People:

The species of the whale has not yet been confirmed.
Neither do we know from whence or why it came.
All we can confirm is it's very, very big
And it's blowing through its blowhole now and then.

Ginny and Shefali:

See the hordes of tourists arriving for a glimpse of the whale..

The Media People:

We'll be bringing you more on the whale
Throughout the day and as long as it stays
Stranded upon the shingle and shale
Of sweet little Farnaway's shore.

Ginny Underdentist:

I believe we can hear now from dear little Danniii Nunchuck.

Shefali Chakrabati-Smith:

By whom the whale was first seen.

The Media People scribble notes and point cameras and microphones at Danniii.

Danniii Nunchuck:

I was texting my sister
When I see this massive blob
So I turn 'round and shout like
'Oh my God!'
But like no-one's even looking
So I like shout again
And they're like 'Woah!
Dude, that's totally a whale!'

Ginny and Shefali:

Fascinating!

They swing round to interview Ebenezer Fellingtree.

Ebenezer Fellingtree
Oldest living resident.

Ebenezer Fellingtree:

In one hundred and seven long years
 Never have I seen such a thing.
 It's a whale, you say?
 No, we've never had a whale
 In one hundred and seven long years.

Ginny and Shefali:

Canasta Spark.
 Local butcher.

Canasta Spark:

On this momentous day
 With a very heavy heart
 I would hereby like to publicly declare
 That I have a special offer
 On chops and chipolatas
 And a batch of streaky bacon going cheap.

The Media People:

Octavia Plant
 Assistant Curator at the Farnaway museum.

Octavia Plant:

This is a grave situation
 We must take the best advice
 Act speedily and sensibly
 To give the whale a chance.
 This is a grave situation
 And one, I hope, the media
 Won't cheapen.

Ginny and Shefali:

And now, it's the time for which you've all been waiting:
 The results of our phone-in whale naming contest.

Ginny (spoken):

In third, with her suggestion...

Shefali (spoken):

...of Willy-Wally-Woggle-Wump,

Ginny (spoken):

It's Wendy Wagg from Wichenford near Worcester.

Shefali (spoken):

In second place, with Marmalade, it's David Slade from Biggleswade.

Ginny and Shefali (spoken):

But in first place...

Ginny (spoken):

The unanimous decision of all the judges

Shefali (spoken):

And a popular choice, I'm sure,

Ginny (spoken):

It's Moira Mee...

Shefali (spoken):

...from Ashton-under-Lyme

Ginny and Shefali (spoken):

With...

(annoyingly long and not very dramatic pause)

Pomeroy!

All present:

Pomeroy,

Pomeroy

Pomeroy the whale.

Hooray.

Romilly Clarke:

Please, pray, silence

For Her Majesty The Queen.

The Queen appears with corgies and addresses the gathering throng.

Her Majesty The Queen:

One does not like

To see an animal in distress,

Now does one?

No. No, one doesn't. No.

One's family's prayers

Are with poor Pomeroy

At this difficult time

Horribilis (corgy yaps)

Horribilis (corgy yaps)

One does not like

To see an animal in distress,

Horribilis (corgy yaps)

Horribilis (corgy yaps)

The Prime Minister appears accompanied by his assistant Mimi Quacksalver.

Romilly Clarke:

Please, pray, silence

For the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister:

My love of whales goes back to childhood.
I'd sit alone and gaze at pictures...

Mimi Quacksalver:

Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister:

Sorry.
...pictures of minkes, killers, fins and humpbacks.
Balaenoptera Acuturostrata...

Mimi Quacksalver:

Prime Minister, please...

The Prime Minister:

...Phyester Macrocephalus...?

Mimi Quacksalver (spoken):

PM, get on with it!

The PM pulls herself together and becomes serious.

The Prime Minister:

As Prime Minister...

Villagers:

As Prime Minister...

The Prime Minister:

I hereby call upon the people of this town...

Villagers:

She calls upon us.

The Prime Minister:

...to be swift.

Villagers:

Swift!

The Prime Minister:

And humane.

Villagers:

Yes!

The Prime Minister:

In delivering this whale to deeper waters.
As Prime Minister...

Villagers:

As Prime Minister...

The Prime Minister:

I hereby make available to this town...

All present:

She makes available...

The Prime Minister:

...Her Majesty's army.

All present:

The army!

Her Majesty The Queen:

My army?

The Prime Minister:

And Her navy.

All present:

Yes!

Her Majesty The Queen:

My navy.

The Prime Minister:

To take the whale into safer waters.
In the serious matter of Pomeroy,
Something must be done!

SCENE TWO

The Council Chamber.

Romilly Clarke:

Ladies and gentlemen,
Farnaway residents,
Members of the press.
Please, pray, silence
For the Lady Mayoress.

The Media People:

Cameras rolling.

Dictaphones on.
Pencils at the ready.

Gillian Gumpstock:
I am Gillian Gumpstock,
Mayoress of Farnaway.

Tutti Chorus (divisi):
Farnaway. Farnaway. (What about the whale?)

The Council:
We are the council:
Elected, one and all.

Tutti Chorus (divisi):
Farnaway. Farnaway. (What about the whale?)

Gillian Gumpstock:
First we offer thanks
To Prime Minister and Queen.

Tutti Chorus (divisi):
Thankyou. Thankyou. (What about the whale?)

The Council:
A thousand thousand thankyou
For your messages of support.

Tutti Chorus (divisi):
Thankyou. Thankyou. Thankyou. (What about the whale?)

Gillian Gumpstock:
But let us be clear.
We, the people of Farnaway,
Will solve this problem.

Gillian and Council:
We know our waters best.

Gillian Gumpstock:
The rescue bid
Will be led
By Lembitina Scratchpole

Tutti Chorus:
Who?

Gillian and Council:
Lembitina Scratchpole

Tutti Chorus:

Who?

Gillian Gumpstock:

The Curator of the Farnaway Museum.
With a second class degree...

The Council:

No less!

Gillian Gumpstock:

...in Oceanography.

The Council:

Oh, yes!

Gillian Gumpstock:

Miss Scratchpole is well-suited to the role.

The Council:

Miss Scratchpole is supported
By Miss Octavia Plant,
Her assistant at the Farnaway Museum.

Gillian Gumpstock:

Miss Scratchpole,
Miss Plant,
Please take the stage.

Gillian and Council:

Miss Scratchpole,
Miss Plant,
Please take the stage.

Lembitina and Octavia take the stage.

The Media People:

Miss Scratchpole.
Miss Scratchpole.
Just what do you intend?

Villagers:

Miss Scratchpole.
Miss Scratchpole.
Just what do you intend?

Tutti Chorus:

Miss Scratchpole.
Miss Scratchpole.
Just what do you intend?

Lembitina raises a reassuring hand. The chamber is suddenly silent.

Lembitina Scratchpole:

Please rest assured
That Pomeroy is in the safest hands.
Our planning is already underway.
We're confident
That Pomeroy will soon be safe from harm.
Tomorrow on the
Quayside we'll carry out our plan.
Please rest assured
That Pomeroy is in the safest hands.
The council knows exactly what to do.

The Media People and Villagers are reluctantly ushered out...

The Media People:

Miss Scratchpole, a word for our viewers?
Lembitina, our listeners, our readers!
Miss Scratchpole, Miss Scratchpole, please!

...leaving just the Council. A flipchart is brought into The Council Chamber.

Lembitina Scratchpole:

Does anybody know what to do?

Gillian Gumpstock:

Fetch the flipchart.

Romilly Clarke fetches the flipchart.

Lembitina Scratchpole:

Does anybody know what to do?

Gillian Gumpstock:

Not entirely.

The Council thinks. Romilly Clarke takes notes on the flipchart as members of The Council make suggestions...

Delilah Treacle:

We could make an explosion and scare it into action.

The Council:

Not safe!

Maud Rankle:

Or hang a giant fish before its eyes.

The Council:

Ha-ha-ha-ha, no!

Sandy Snimm:

We could hire a helicopter and lift it from the ocean.

The Council:

Rather costly.

Cherryblossom Bootlace:

Or shove a skateboard under it and roll.

The Council:

Don't be silly.

Lembitina Scratchpole:

So nobody knows what to do?

The Traders arrive in the council chamber, full of purpose. They place a futuristic model of Farnaway somewhere prominent.

The Council:

What is the meaning of this interruption?

The Traders:

We would like to make a suggestion.

May we speak, please?

The Council:

You may...

Gillian Gumpstock gestures for the Traders to continue. Canasta Spark takes the floor.

Canasta Spark:

Since the coming of the whale,

By our latest calculation,

Our profits have increased eleven-fold.

The Traders:

Eleven fold.

Canasta Spark:

And so, with all due respect,

We wish to suggest

That you put your little rescue plan

On hold.

The Traders:

With the money that we make

We could build a shopping centre
 With a roof, warm air,
 And a splendid water feature,
 And security for keeping out the youths.

Canasta Spark:

In a nutshell, we propose...

The Traders:

Ever so slowly,
 We let the whale die.
 To make the village richer,
 That's what we propose.

The Elders arrive in the Council chamber full of purpose. They place a massive dusty book somewhere prominent.

The Council:

What is the meaning of this interruption?

The Elders:

We would like to make a suggestion.
 May we speak, please?

The Council:

You may...

Gillian Gumpstock gestures for the Elders to continue. Ebenezer Fellingtree takes the floor.

Ebenezer Fellingtree:

One hundred and seven long years ago
 When I was just a suckling babe

The Elders:

What a babe.

Ebenezer Fellingtree:

A whale came but the village let him go

The Elders:

And the people were ravaged by a plague.

Ebenezer Fellingtree:

Meanwhile in Yornaway
 Ten miles down the coast

The Elders:

They ate their whale's flesh, they say,
 And stayed in rudest health.

Murder the whale, we say,
With a big harpoon!

Ebenezer Fellingtree:

To save us all from pestilence and death.
That's what we propose.

Gillian Gumpstock:

Let us consider
The proposals you have made.

The Council consider the proposals.

The Council:

No, no!
Shame on you!
This is nothing short of madness.
Your proposals are unspeakable,
Despicable, contemptible and inhumane.
But we are uncorruptable
Our morals unimpeachable
Beyond reproach.
No, no!

The Traders:

Very well,

The Elders:

Very well.

The Traders:

That is your choice.

The Elders:

Very well,

The Traders:

Very well.

The Elders:

We respect your views.

The Elders and Traders:

But bear in mind.
From here on in.

Canasta Spark:

The sausages you get for free,

Lara Runkhound:

Pints and pasties on the house,

Gracelyn Brunt:

Chelsea bun and sticky willy,

Saffron Drabble:

Chutney, chilli, piccalilli,

Safari Quince:

Late night pick-up...

The Traders:

Free of charge!

Shaynaz Magoffin:

Engine tune-up...

The Traders:

Free of charge!

The sweeteners and benefits

Of which you're all so fond

Shall forthwith be withdrawn.

The Elders:

And we shall put a curse upon your souls,

Yes we will!

We shall put a curse upon your souls!

Romilly Clarke:

Let us reconsider

In the light of these new facts.

The Council:

Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes,

Yes! You are quite right!

We see nothing to condemn here.

Your proposals are responsible,

Intelligent, agreeable and no bad thing.

We seek to be adaptable

To the community at large.

We'll leave the whale to die.

The Traders:

Slowly, slowly catchy monkey.

Slowly, slowly...

The Council:

And then you'll eat its flesh?

The Elders:

Fried in butter, salt and pepper.

The Council:

Yes, yes, yes, yes...

The Council & The Traders & The Elders:

Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes!

Lembitina Scratchpole:

No!!

Just stop right there!

You can't be serious!

You aren't expecting me to front this wicked plan?

So very cruel.

It's truly monstrous.

I'll tell the world the scheme that you've concocted here today.

The Traders:

But Lembitina...

The Elders:

Lembitina...

The Traders:

Lembitina...

The Elders:

Lembitina...

Canasta Spark:

Are you sure we can't come to some arrangement,
Lembitina?

The Elders:

What would you say, Lembitina,
Once the whale has been devoured...

The Traders:

You could take away its bones
And display them, Lembitina?

The Council:

My, what a centrepiece!
The skeleton of Pomeroy.

The Elders:

Think of all the visitors...

The Traders:

Pouring through your doors.

Gillian Gumpstock:

What would you say, Lembitina?

What would you say?

Lembitina Scratchpole:

Well, that would be

An altogether

Different kettle of fish.

The Council, Traders and Elders:

All rise.

SCENE THREE

People are gathering on Farnaway Quay. The Media People are preparing to report on a widely publicised rescue effort. The Fisherfolk and The Tourist are there to watch...

Ginny Underdentist:

On a bright, brisk and beautiful morning

The Media People:

At Farnaway Quay.

The Villagers:

On Farnaway Quay.

Shefali Chakrabati-Smith:

People gather, expecting a spectacle

The Tourists:

Here at Farnaway Quay.

The Media People:

For today

Is the day

That Pomeroy

Will be saved

Ginny Underdentist:

From far and wide on this beautiful morning

The Media People:

At Farnaway Quay.