

Lolita's song

▼ *A San Juan woman draws on her L.A. connections to organize a musical/video effort aimed at winning the captive orca's freedom.*

By ANN CARLSON
Staff Reporter

It started not so long ago as a simple prayer to bring Lolita home.

It has since been manifested into "Lolita - Essence of Freedom," a major artist CD and video that is not only aimed at getting the orca whale back in Puget Sound waters, but about freedom in general.

First of all, if you don't know, Lolita (native name is Tokitae) was captured in Puget Sound in 1970. Since then she has been performing at the Miami Seaquarium. She is now the oldest orca in captivity.

There's a strong movement to return Lolita to Puget Sound waters, where she can live either in a large pen, or potentially be returned to the wild. Lolita's owner, Arthur Hertz, doesn't want to sell her, and says she'll probably die if she's deprived of her present home and human care.

Anjou MacPherson, like many, was moved when she first heard of Lolita's years away from her natural family of orcas, many of which are still alive. She came to San Juan Island with her husband from Seattle two years ago. A human potential trainer who commuted to Los Angeles to work, she wanted to rest and spend a couple years writing.

Anjou knows now that that wasn't to be her fate. Part of the reason she wanted to live on the island was to be closer to the whales. It was only fitting she become involved in trying to get an orca back home.

It was at a gathering of women on the island several months ago that Anjou and others made the commitment, she explained, "to do whatever they could" for Lolita. This, she said, was the seed for her idea to create and market a CD, with profits to go toward Lolita. She began collaborating with Debra Gottesman of Sundog to create a song, "Lolita, Hold On." On Feb. 24, approximately 30 islanders (with Gottesman doing lead vocals) recorded the song at the Whale Museum. The track was

Orca's plight gains NBC's attention

Lolita's story, until now mostly confined to the Pacific Northwest and south Florida, will be going nationwide next month.

Dateline/NBC is scheduled to air a segment on Lolita and Keiko sometime in mid or late June.

A camera crew, having just finished taping in Newport, Ore. — Keiko's home — was on San Juan Island May 10 to film orcas in Haro Strait and tape interviews with Ken Balcomb, head of the Center for Whale Research. Despite missing ferries, the crew managed to make it to the San Juans in the early evening, just in time to get some sunset shots with orcas on the west side of San Juan Island.

The segment, which has been discussed by Dateline/NBC for months, will look at the plights of both Lolita and Keiko. Keiko, star of Free Willy, is an Icelandic orca who was in captivity in a substandard tank in Mexico City. Keiko is now at the Oregon Coast Aquarium in Newport, where he is being treated for skin maladies. Whether he will ever be released is not known. The Center for Whale Research was also deeply involved in getting Keiko released from his Mexico City tank.

mixed at Full Circle Music, a professional recording studio in Palm Springs, Calif.

Next, Anjou and others here began working on gathering top name artists to contribute music. She has signed commitments from Olivia Newton-John, New Age artist Tim Wether, and is now negotiating with a number of other major recording stars. Haunting music from the Shuar Indian tribe in Ecuador and a

chant by Gyoto (Tibetan) monks which has been set to music are set to be included. In all, Anjou estimated 50 to 60 minutes of music will be on the album when it is released in mid-June.

Anjou has been gathering support for the project through her L.A. connections. The non-profit organization for which she taught, Income Builders International, will be instrumental in getting financial support for the distribution and marketing of the music, she says. But it never would have happened at all without the people here, she adds.

"The island really comes into this," Anjou said. "There are so many talented people here. The only way something this huge is possible is because everyone is so generous and giving. I just don't think this could have happened anywhere else."

Profits from the album will be given directly to the Tokitae Foundation, the organization founded by the local Whale Research Center to bring Lolita home. Anjou sees the fundraising network she's creating as being far-reaching; reuniting Lolita with her family is just a step in the evolution of our awareness about the other creatures with which we share our planet.

A short promotional video on the Lolita cause for the CD is being produced by Sharon Howard, who did an award-winning documentary about Lolita for KOMO-TV. This is one of the first times a television station has taken an advocacy position, Anjou said. Some of the footage will include children singing at last Saturday's Children's Festival at the fairgrounds.

Now, Anjou said, what remains is distributing and marketing the music; she is looking for investors — first, from the island community — to help with the next phase of the operation.

An awareness fund raiser for the Lolita project will be held this Saturday, May 26, 5-9 p.m. at La Ceiba restaurant in Friday Harbor. Those attending will get to learn more about the project, and proceeds from the \$10 dinner will help with funding.



Anjou MacPherson stands behind an orca sculpture by Doug Bison.

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