

A TASTE OF WHALE

A FILM BY

VINCENT KELNER



WARBOYS FILMS PRESENTS « A TASTE OF WHALE » MUSIC BY MERRYN JEANN EDITED BY OLIVIER MARZIN
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A TASTE OF WHALE

A Film by VINCENT KELNER

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INTERNATIONAL SALES

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THU 31 MAR 19:00 Det Færøske Hus

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Logline

Every year, 700 pilot whales are slaughtered on the Faroe Islands despite the protests of animal rights activists.

Synopsis

Every year, hundreds of pilot whales are hunted in the fjords of the Faroe Islands. It's locally known as the "Grind", a spectacular and bloody tradition. International activists would like to put an end to it, so that these mammals will stop suffering. But the Faroese whalers denounce the hypocrisy of those who eat meat without looking at what is happening in slaughterhouses and at the industries polluting our planet.

Full Description

Faroe Islands, North Atlantic.

The fjord's water, surrounded by stunning green mountains, is turning blood red. Every year, 700 pilot whales are slaughtered in the isolated archipelago. The Faroese people even have a name for this traditional hunting season: the *Grindadráp*, or the "Grind".

A TASTE OF WHALE offers a rare insight into a Grind season, following two proud Faeroese whalers on one side and two young and passionate Sea Shepherd activists on the other.

Sea Shepherd activists have landed in the calm and serene archipelago to request the immediate ending of these brutal killings. Among them are Lamya and Antoine: young and determined, they are ready to do anything to stop the Grind. And they will prove it. For them, this so-called tradition is little more than gratuitous animal cruelty. What used to be the only means of survival on once-desolate islands is now no longer justifiable in this modern, wealthy nation. As the Faroese Islanders bring their children to watch a particularly bloody Grind from the beach, Antoine is devastated. Together with Lamya, Antoine invites us to reflect on our individual and collective responsibility to protect the world we live in as well as on the kind of society we want to build and pass on to our descendants.

Meanwhile, Jens and Torik, two respected Faroese whalers, would never miss a Grind. One can't say they are looking forward to it, but the killing is a 'part of the job' as Jens puts it. It is a simple, yet cruel reality: there can be no meat without somebody willing to kill for it. The whalers argue that the meat from the Grind is shared equally among the community. They don't stand to profit from it, either, as pilot whale meat is considered too polluted for export. Jens and Torik both know that their tradition is not going to last forever. But they are not ready to abandon it just yet—especially when foreigners, like Lamya and Antoine, disembark on their quiet island and aggressively campaign against it, decrying the whalers as savage butchers. The Faroese people might eventually abandon the Grind, but it won't be on Sea Shepherd's terms.

The tension has already escalated between the Faroese whalers and Sea Shepherd when the first pod of pilot whales is seen near the shores...

But there is more at stake than this open-air slaughterhouse that some are celebrating, and others are trying to prevent at all costs. A TASTE OF WHALE invites you to see past the preconceived positions and past the blood to question what the practice of eating meat really implies.

The "Grind" forces us to re-evaluate our relationship to eating meat, and to consider: if this ritualized, shocking killing is happening out in the open, on the beaches of the Faroe Islands where hundreds of dead pilot whales are out on display, what similar brutalities are hidden behind the closed doors of slaughterhouses, everywhere else in the world?

Using beautiful, haunting, and rare footage, A TASTE OF WHALE relies on the specific circumstances of the Faroe Islands to reflect on a significant, global issue of our time. In presenting the perspectives of whalers and activists through four relatable and passionate

characters the film invites the audience to bear witness to the “Grind” and to confront a practice too often taken for granted.



The team

A journalist and DOP, Vincent Kelner has worked for TV productions in France and around the world over the last 20 years. A TASTE OF WHALE is the second documentary feature he has written and directed.

Rémi Grellety is an Academy Award-nominee and Emmy and BAFTA-winning producer. He has been producing Raoul Peck’s feature films and documentary films (including I AM NOT YOUR NEGRO and HBO’s EXTERMINATE ALL THE BRUTES) for the past 14 years and has also produced films for many first-time documentary filmmakers.

The starting point

Vincent Kelner: Back in 2014, I was witnessing more and more people around me who were trying to reduce how much meat they were eating or becoming vegetarian altogether. I was myself starting to question my diet and also the animal suffering caused by what I was eating. That is also the time when I learned that Sea Shepherd was setting up a large-scale campaign in

the Faroe Islands to not only counter the Faroe Islanders' ritual slaughter of pilot whales (known as the "Grind") but to try and end it permanently.

The initial project

The Sea Shepherd campaign was announced to last all summer long – the peak of the Grind season – and 500 activists from Paul Watson's organization from around the world (mainly Europe and the U.S.) will take shifts to prevent the killings of whales.

After several weeks of trying to contact them, I succeed in meeting some French Sea Shepherd members. Their big campaign will start from Paris, with numerous cars, RVs and boats travelling from there to Denmark and then the Faroe Islands.

Along with my camera, I eventually succeed in being accepted in the Sea Shepherd team and especially by Lamya Essemlali, the chairperson of Sea Shepherd France, who is co-heading the big mission.

While starting the journey with Sea Shepherd from Paris, I ready myself to meet with the barbaric Faroe whale killers and to film many Grinds, those open-air slaughterhouses – with the sea turning blood red.

But what started as an embedded journey on a highly publicized two-month Sea Shepherd campaign eventually ended up being a four-year shooting with many trips to the Faroe Islands, not only along Sea Shepherd members but also along several Faroe whalers and local anti-whaler activists.

An unexpected meeting... and question

Once in the Faroe Islands, I get to spend time with the Sea Shepherd team: they organize press conferences; patrol at sea and on land; set up their base camps; etc.

And then, soon enough, I feel the need to go and talk to the Faroese people. They are not so very pleased with the massive presence of Sea Shepherd and the bad publicity for their islands. But much to my surprise, all Faroese persons I talk to agree to say that pilot whale hunting in the Faroe Islands is one of the bloodiest traditions in the world. They understand the criticisms they are receiving. But they do not accept what they feel is a moral lesson.

Intrigued by this unexpected reaction from the Faroese people, I try to learn more. And I'm immediately told to go and talk to Jens Mortan, a Faroe teacher and whaler.

I meet a man who reflects rationally and honestly on what the Grind is; someone who wants to establish dialogue with Sea Shepherd rather than be treated like a monster.

And then, Jens confronts me to this question: is the life of a pilot whale worth more than the life of a sheep or an ox? And are other animal rights organizations setting up such large-scale, publicized campaign against meat eating in France, in the U.S., etc. like Sea Shepherd does here in the Faroe Islands?

The Sea Shepherd activists I follow have their own answer to this: there is no need for the Faroe people to kill whales nowadays. What used to be the only means of survival on once-desolate islands is now no longer justifiable in this modern, wealthy nation where you can buy frozen Australian Kangaroo meat in the supermarket! It's a tradition from another age, especially when the killing is so cruel.

Jens takes this argument further: do we seriously believe the killings in slaughterhouses around the world are not as cruel?

As Sir Paul McCartney said, in a famous PETA campaign: "If slaughterhouses had glass walls, everyone would be vegetarian."

And that is actually what the Sea Shepherd members are answering: they are all vegetarian or vegan and that is the one real, lasting solution to save our planet!

A film and some surprise along the way

Having listened to the Faroese point of view, it became clear that there was a film to be made with an unprecedented approach: confronting the point of view and motivation of both sides.

The challenge became how to try and get rid of a simplistic good guys vs. bad guys approach, to try and *see past the blood*.

And, along the way, to try to be neither naïve nor militant.

I was not aware then that I would film a unique moment in whaling history when a whaler would save a crew of Sea Shepherd activists on a broken-down boat drifting at sea; or a passionate Pamela Anderson having to face the sharp arguments of Faroese people.

And while I did film a massive Grind of 135 pilot whales, I didn't want to offer crude images of tens of dead whales... It was clear to me that placing this footage of slaughter only after two thirds of the film in the edit would allow the audience to have a real reflection on this issue rather than just be overwhelmed by the emotion of those terrible images.

That's why I decided to reveal the brutality of the killing only gradually, throughout the film: first at the very beginning only with the sound of the Grind, then indirectly through the pictures from the Go Pro of one of the whalers, then by showing a frozen pilot-whale being cut in front of some curious tourists, etc.

The promise of a grand duel and how to eventually see beyond it

The set-up was promising: with the massive presence of Sea Shepherd on the islands, I was guaranteed to witness a grand duel between the whalers and the foreign activists.

The tension has already escalated between the Faroese whalers and Sea Shepherd when the first pod of pilot whales of the season is seen near the shores...

I came to realize though, that it would be too easy to accept an almost romantic opposition between psychopathic barbarians on one side and big-hearted pirates on the other.

On the other hand, not bluntly condemning from the start the Faroese whalers might well disturb a large part of the audience – including me, sometimes. And I realize giving voice to the “barbarians” is inconceivable for many people. This film, though, is there to destabilize, to shake up. Our preconceived ideas should be questioned, as well as our psychological and moral comfort that prevents us from questioning our own beliefs and personal practices.

The purpose of this film is clearly to challenge bias and prejudice on whaling by avoiding a sensationalist approach focusing on the bloodshed. It questions the way we humans across the world generate our food, and more particularly our meat consumption. With a clear bias: to eat whatever kind of meat is not trivial.

Nearly 200 million land animals and 7 billion fish are killed daily for human consumption (those are an average of all the scientific data we gathered while researching for the film). Those are frightening figures for our planet. And we are all responsible.

Of course, showing a Grind with tens of dead whales and a blood red sea is shocking. But then, what about the hidden part of the iceberg that is meat-eating?

At the same time, showing the Grind is to show the reality of what we do not want to see, what we do not want to accept in our industrialized societies. As consumers, we are not aware, nor do we think about the animal suffering behind the tasty hamburger we enjoy eating.

“While it is always possible to wake a person who's sleeping, no amount of noise will wake a person who is pretending to be asleep.”

— Jonathan Safran Foer in *Eating Animals*

An even more topical issue

In September 2021, after the end of our film production, a “super-pod” of 1,428 white-sided dolphins have been killed in the Faroe Islands, in what is thought to be the largest ever single hunt of dolphins or pilot whales in the country’s history. It sparked outrage among local people and attracted international criticism over the legitimacy of such large-scale hunts – especially since white-sided dolphins hunting have largely decreased those past 10 years.

Today a large majority of Faroese defends the “grind” and the killing of pilot whales, but 53% of them are opposed to white-sided dolphin hunting.

The Faroese government has decided to review the regulations on Atlantic white-sided dolphins hunting which could lead to some future surprising resolution. What if the Faroese stop killing white-sided dolphins but not pilot-whales? Would it be a step towards the end of the Grind?

On a more global scale, in the aftermath of the September 2021 killings of white-sided dolphins, numerous petitions were started to call for the ban of hunting and killing of dolphins and small whales as well as boycott of Faroese products.

One of those petitions has already gathered 939,000 signatories:

https://secure.avaaz.org/campaign/en/end_the_dolphin_grind_loc/?slideshow





Credits

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Vincent Kelner

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Produced by
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Vincent Kelner

Sound Editing and Mixing

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Guillaume D'ham
Simon Poupard
Pierre-Jean Labrusse

Quote

“If slaughterhouses had glass walls, everyone would be vegetarian”

By Sir Paul McCartney

From a 2010 PETA video

By courtesy of Dan Mathews, SVP, PETA

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