

## Ocean Gazing: Episode 21 Ocean Voices

*Halsey Burgund: Musician and sound artist*

<begin intro music>

**Ari:** I'm Ari Daniel Shapiro, and this is Ocean Gazing, the podcast where we wade, then swim, and then dive far down into the deep blue sea.

**Burgund:** I am fascinated by the spoken human voice: the way people communicate with each other using their voice. It's actually something that's quite, quite musical if you listen to it in that way.

**Ari:** That's Halsey Burgund. He's a musician and sound artist living just outside of Boston in Bedford, Mass. Not sure what all this could possibly have to do with the ocean? Stay tuned.

<fade up music and sustain until it ends>

**Ari:** When Halsey Burgund creates a piece of music, he uses human voices as one of his raw materials.

**Burgund:** Yes, the voice is my most significant raw material. The other raw materials are traditional instruments, electronic instruments. I don't process the voices in the sense of making the voices sound different. The point is to capture the essence of these individual people who have spoken.

**Ari:** Remember last week's sonic stumper? <fade up "Impostors of Memory" and play for a few moments; then fade down and sustain under the next graf, occasionally fading up> Burgund calls it "Impostors of Memory," and it was the first piece he wrote incorporating spoken human voices.

**Burgund:** The story behind that is actually there are two voices in that piece only, and those voices are of my mom and my dad. And I don't even remember why I asked them to do this, but I had written a poem, and I asked them to recite the poem while I recorded them. And then I sort of put it away and a couple weeks later or something came back to it, started listening, and I spent, like, hours just listening to these two voices that were the most prominent voices throughout my entire life saying these words that I had written. And I knew immediately I had to write a piece of music. And then once I was done with it, I felt that it, that it, that I'd hit upon something that was exciting to me, and something that I really wanted to keep on exploring more.

**Ari:** "Impostors of Memory" was an important beginning for Burgund. <fade out "Impostors of Memory"> He moved pretty quickly beyond getting voices from just

his mom and dad, and he started collecting voices everywhere he could. These voices have become essential fibers in the weave of his musical compositions. Take Burgund's current project as an example of his process: it's called "Ocean Voices."

**Burgund:** I thought it would be very interesting to collect voices from people all around the world talking about how the ocean affects them or what experiences they've had with the ocean, and it does affect everybody, every human being on the planet in one way or another. And I think that there's an extremely wide variety of ways that people interact with or have had experiences with the ocean.

**Ari:** Once Burgund got this idea, he came up with a short list of questions for people to answer about the ocean.

**Burgund:** I like to ask open-ended questions, questions that are certainly not yes-no answers. Questions like, "What does it feel like to be in the ocean?"

**Ari:** Burgund's been gathering responses by visiting classrooms and communities with his recording gear. By partnering with other groups, like us. He's writing an iPhone app. And he's even got a website where you can record your own voice.

**Burgund:** Called [oceanvoices.org](http://oceanvoices.org). I would like to be able to collect the voice of everybody in the world. If I could, that's what I would do. But obviously I can't, and I have to try to virtually travel and the Internet is certainly a good way to do that.

**Ari:** You should visit [oceanvoices.org](http://oceanvoices.org), all one word, and record your voice for Burgund to use. It's really easy.

**Burgund:** The most important thing is for you to be yourself and have fun.

**Ari:** The website's pretty self-explanatory, and there's even the option for *you* to mix some of the other voice recordings with music. Burgund's also in the process of taking these voices and composing a musical piece for World Ocean Day in June. It'll be performed at the California Academy of Sciences.

Now, over the past few months here on Ocean Gazing, we've also been making requests for your stories about the ocean. Here's some of what we received. First up, students from JoAnn Cantoni's 5<sup>th</sup> grade class in Vineland, New Jersey, and Laura Dunbar's 7<sup>th</sup> grade class in Sea Girt, New Jersey.

**Carly:** The first time I tasted saltwater, it wasn't that good. It wasn't, it didn't taste like juice, it tasted like salt.

**Vanessa:** I got caught in a rip current, gasping for air. While struggling, the lifeguard was paddling his way toward me. After he gave me the torpedo and we swam back, I looked back at the fierce, menacing ocean that lay behind me.

**Gyannie:** The first time I ever got sand in my toes, it felt really weird because you never, like, feel something like that. Also because it's, like, kind of like shells going in between your toes and stuff.

**Will:** And I was surfing, and this huuuuuge wave came, and it hit me. And I fell and sand got everywhere. And I felt like I was going to die and drown. Then I stood up in knee-deep water. It was crazy.

**Kayla:** When we were walking down the beach, we had a small bag of chips and a whole flock of seagulls came after us, about maybe 20-30 seagulls were after us until we had to throw the bags, run, and then go back to pick up the trash cause we didn't like to litter.

**Ari:** That was Carly, Vanessa, Gyannie, Will and Kayla. Next, here's part of a story written by listener Randall Williams.

**Williams:** The Spanish coast guard sent a search helicopter to all the islands where the young German could possibly be marooned. When the Coast Guard returned empty handed, the Swedes made the phone call that no one ever wants to make: to Stefan's parents in Germany. They couldn't tell his parents that he was dead, only that he never arrived at his intended destination. The phrase "lost at sea" gives no comfort to loved ones who will forever be waiting for a sailor's return.

**Ari:** Halsey Burgund is still in the very early phases of the Ocean Voices project, but he agreed to share some of the music he's been working on. The kids you're about to hear responded to the prompt, "Describe a world without oceans."

<fade up music clip, and then fade under next grafs>

**Ari:** You know, one of the things that strikes me about "Ocean Voices" is it's almost like the voices are bobbing in the water. You know, that there's this sea of things: different things appear and disappear. I don't know, there's something sonically appropriate in terms of the oceans.

**Burgund:** I love that idea. I hadn't thought of that, but I love that idea of voices bobbing up and down. I think a lot about waves in the broadest sense of the tides and that kind of things, and of course the smaller, more chaotic ones, the swells and the ripples and all of that. And I do think a lot about how those undulate up and down, and it for sure is incredibly musical.

<fade up music, and then back down>

**Ari:** What do you hope the outcome of "Ocean Voices" is?

**Burgund:** The most important outcome, honestly, is I collect enough voices that have inspirational moments in them for me so I can create a cohesive piece of music

that is musically interesting and satisfying to me, but also communicates to people who experience it some sense of urgency and importance of conserving the oceans. So that would be success if I get there.

<fade up music until it ends>

**Ari:** I kinda wish I could just end the podcast there. In fact, maybe I'll do just that, in a sec. First, the next sonic stumper. <fade up sonic stumper, and then under next graf transition back to Burgund's "Ocean Voices" music>

Tell us your guess by visiting us online at [coseenow.net/category/ocean](http://coseenow.net/category/ocean). You'll also find Randall Williams' full story, and audio clips of Halsey Burgund talking about a couple of his other projects.

Thanks to my good friend Elesheva Soloff who told me about Halsey Burgund in the first place, and to Lindsay Moss, Sage Lichtenwalner, Janice McDonnell and Jim Yoder.

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Okay, here's that ending I was looking for.

<fade up music and sustain until it ends>