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*The Ocean Through The Arts*

**Guests: Jim Toomey, Cartoonist/creator of Sherman's Lagoon; Page 1 of 19  
Larry Graff, The Banana Slug String Band; Cleo Vilett, Model and painter;  
Jodi Lomask, Artistic Director of Capacitor host; Jennifer Stock**

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*Jennifer Stock:* You're listening to Ocean Currents, a podcast brought to you by NOAA's Cordell Bank National Marine Sanctuary. This radio program was originally broadcast on KWMR in Point Reyes Station, California. Thanks for listening!

(Musical Intro)

*Jennifer Stock:* Welcome to another addition of Ocean Currents, I'm your host, Jennifer Stock, and on this show we talk with scientists, educators, explorers, policy makers, ocean enthusiasts, authors, advocates, and today, artists, all uncovering and learning about the mysterious and vital part of our planet, the blue ocean.

I bring this show to you monthly on KWMR from Cordell Bank's National Marine Sanctuary, one of four national marine sanctuaries in California, all working to protect unique and biologically diverse ecosystems.

As an ocean lover I always inspired by things that remind me of my love for the sea. As land dwellers we rely on a diverse suite of arts to learn about the ocean, whether it be film, food, visual arts, writing, cartoon, music, dance and more. So today is dedicated to the arts, and we'll be talking with a few artists who want to communicate something about the ocean.

We'll be talking with Jim Toomey, creator of cartoon strip Sherman's Lagoon, Larry Graff, also known as Airy Larry, from the Banana Slug String Band, Cleo Vilett, another artist in the East Bay of California, in Oakland, and Jodi Lomask, the director of a dance group named Capacitor. So stick with me through the hour to hear from all of them, and we will dive into the arts and the ocean.

(Interlude music)

*Jennifer Stock:* So first on today's show I have Jim Toomey, and Jim is a cartoonist well known for his comic strip Sherman's Lagoon, which feathers Sherman, a talking shark, and a supporting cast of animals. Sherman's Lagoon combines two of Jim's passions, arts and the sea, and he is active in marine conservation, and has received the Environmental Hero awarded by NOAA, twice! So I

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thrilled to welcome Jim to Ocean Currents. Jim you're live on the air with me.

*Jim Toomey:* Hi Jennifer.

*Jennifer Stock:* Which came first—art or your love for the ocean?

*Jim Toomey:* Probably arts. I was a quote, unquote, and “artist” since the day I was able to hold a crayon. Back when I was two or three years old I remember vividly the wall so my bedroom,

*Jennifer Stock:* And so how did you come to the ocean yourself?

*Jim Toomey:* Well I think it started with the family's annual trips to the ocean. Back when I was a kid there weren't that many ocean documentaries, there was Jacques Cousteau kind ruled the roost, but there wasn't a whole lot else, unlike today, when it's kind of 24/7 animal features on Discovery and elsewhere. So for me it was really the annual trips to the shore, and kind of grew up in the mid-Atlantic, so we ended up going to the Jersey shore and the Delaware shore a lot, where I'd have a chance to swim in the ocean and just ponder. You know, walk along the beach and see people catching fish and I remember vividly one summer, I was probably eight or nine when a fisherman had hauled in a good sized shark, it was probably a six or seven footer, and that really made an impression on me, I can still see that shark vividly. He let me touch it, and that was just quite an experience for a nine-year-old boy.

*Jennifer Stock:* So image that had an impression on you, how did Sherman's Lagoon come to be as the strip that is now syndicated across the country and now started a whole new adventure.

*Jim Toomey:* Sure. I was probably 12 when I went on another family trip, this time a little more glamorous—we went to the Bahamas. My dad was a pilot in the navy, and he was retired, but we still flew this tiny rinky-dink plane around now and then. And flew there in our little six seater, very low over the islands, and that's really the trip that changed my mind about the ocean, because with the trips to the beach you really just stood on the sand and saw this blue grey surface and kind of tried to imagine what was going on under there but didn't really have a good picture of that. When you're flying over the Bahamas it's like flying over landscape, a liquid

landscape, the water is so clear, as you know if you've ever been over the islands or seen aerial photos, it really is an amazing experience. And it was on that trip that we flew over a lagoon, maybe at 500 feet, and I saw a shark. I could see sharks, and manta rays, and sea turtles, and I could see all that from such a low altitude, but I do remember seeing the shark in the lagoon and that was the birth of Sherman's Lagoon.

*Jennifer Stock:* Wow. One of the things I always wonder about for cartoonists like yourself, is when you see ocean animals, whether at an aquarium or snorkeling, or diving, does your mind start thinking about characters, and talking and a scene—is that what it's like for you?

*Jim Toomey:* Yeah, and you know, it's so easy with ocean animals, I think so anyway. I think some people find it hard to put anthropomorphize to put a 50 dollar word on it. When I go into an aquarium, O just love the variety, the size of it, the different kinds of animals, be it crustaceans or fish, or jellyfish, or the marine mammals, they all have a different personality that you can really have a lot of fun with as an artist.

*Jennifer Stock:* I know! I can imagine. What is your favorite animal to characterize?

*Jim Toomey:* (Laughs) Well, of course sharks. I've always had a fascination with 'em, since I was a little boy. And what I like about them is they're a little bit like Frankenstein's monster, They're a little misunderstood when you consider their reputation. And I've dived with lots of sharks, and sometimes they're chickens, they're scaredy-cats, they don't want to get near ya, and sometimes they're curious. But I think what strikes me most when I dive with sharks is that the stereotype that continually gets shattered is that they're dumb. When I get close to them, and I was close to one just three weeks ago, and it was just off the coast of North Carolina, and I was eye to eye with a sand tiger, and there is a lot of intelligence in those eyes. They look back and you know, you can tell it's more than just a glassy eyed fish look, they get it, it's like looking in the eye of a lion or a dog or something, it's really.... there's a lot of intelligence there.

*Jennifer Stock:* It's really nice to hear that, I've heard people describe marine mammals under water as well. So when you started out Sherman's

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Lagoon did you know that you'd be such an ambassador for through your art and how has the conservation ethic really taken through with your strip over the years?

*Jim Toomey:*

Oh no. That's been a whole wild ride over the years, just getting into the whole ocean conservation thing. I guess I was taking a kind of conservation approach to the cartoon from the very beginning, and my love for the ocean was, I guess, different than most peoples. So I think I was probably more of an ocean conservationist, at least more than your average bear.

But I became fascinated with using the comic as an outreach tool when I was first contacted by NOAA of all organizations, and it was about 12,13, maybe 14 years ago, and they really wanted to collaborate on a couple of outreach pieces with me for kids. And I mean I was really honored, get a phone call from someone high up at NOAA and they want to have a meeting. So I went in and I was amazed, I mean they were really excited about working with me and at that point I was really excited about working with them and the horizon expanded to other organizations, non profits and so forth, and I started to realize that you can have an entertaining product and be a little bit more informative, and I became fascinated with putting a higher purpose on the comic strip, and making it more than kind of a gag a day that most comic strips are. So I try to strike a fine line between staying entertaining, not all the time, not even half the time, but often enough just put a little e message in there, or even just put a little ocean fact in there, like taking the characters to a strange place, like the mid Atlantic ridge or the Marianas trench, or put a strange creature in there so maybe you don't necessarily take a conservation position, but maybe you're educating people more about the ocean.

*Jennifer Stock:*

Absolutely, just one little picture can speak millions about a habitat or a mystery, or so much more to explore, that's just what I love about it.

*Jim Toomey:*

Absolutely.

*Jennifer Stock:*

We just have another two minutes here. This is just such a quick show today, everything is going to be quick, but what has been one of the most fascinated ocean facts that you've illustrated in Sherman's Lagoon, in your opinion?

*Jim Toomey:* Oh, well really I've done a reoccurring storyline on these senses of marine life and that's a real project as you already know, that's been going on for about ten years, and they've uncovered all kinds of crazy critters, you know, like the Yeti Crab and the Dumbo octopus, and the vampire squid. So, I keep going back to that storyline, because it is so much fun to go to different parts of the world and then just follow that census marine life project, and then feature some of these new characters in the strip. So that's been my favorite go to storyline for the strip from the last few years.

*Jennifer Stock:* Well is there a place on the web where people can catch up on your work? I hear that Sherman's Lagoon also became a musical?

*Jim Toomey:* Yeah, I savor the irony; you know I can't carry a tune in a tin bucket. A couple of talented people, you know this has already been a high school musical a couple years ago, and we're going to take it to a stage this summer, so that's really exciting for me, that's something different.

*Jennifer Stock:* Great well we'll certainly keep tuned to that. Is there a website for keeping up on your work?

*Jim Toomey:* Well the place to look at the comic strip everyday is just [www.shermanslagoon.com](http://www.shermanslagoon.com) and I'm not as good as I should be about keeping up on the blog there, there's also the facebook page which is easy enough to find as well.

*Jennifer Stock:* Great Jim, well thank you so much for calling in for a few minutes to talk about your cartoon, it's a great, great strip, and I love all your books, and I look forward to seeing the musical next summer,

*Jim Toomey:* Thanks a lot Jennifer, it's been a pleasure.

*Jennifer Stock:* All right, take care.

*Jim Toomey:* Take care, bye bye.

*Jennifer Stock:* All right, we've just been talking with Jim Toomey, who is the creator and cartoonist of Sherman's Lagoon, a cartoon that's been

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syndicated in the U.S., he's got several books out, all focusing on a shark and his family of friends who all live in the same habitat, it's really fun to check out. So check out [www.shermanslagoon.com](http://www.shermanslagoon.com) if you haven't checked out Sherman's Lagoon yet, and see what Jim is up to, and we'll keep posted.

We're going to take a turn now to music. For those of you just tuning in this is Ocean Currents and today we're talking about the ocean and the arts, and we're talking about a couple different artists that are communicators about the ocean through their work, and typically have added in an education aspect to it.

Next we'll be talking with Larry Graff from the Banana Slug String Band. I'm waiting for him to call in, so let's listen to some music from the Banana Slug string band while we wait

(Music plays)

*Jennifer Stock:* It's hard to turn that music down, it's got a great groove, that's the Banana Slug string band, and you're listening to Going Down Down Down, and it's a song about Bathymetry, which struck me as that's one of the big things Jim Toomey mentioned in Sherman's Lagoon, was seeing the sea floor, just coming in from an airplane and just seeing the atoll. So just really fascinating and I have Larry on the phone with me, one of the folks from the Banana Slug string band, on vocals and guitar. And they've recently, well two years ago now, released the album, only one Ocean, and it focuses on the ocean. So Larry, you're on the air.

*Larry Graff:* Well, thank you very much for having me. Thanks for putting out the great message about our oceans.

*Jennifer Stock:* It's a great CD and I'm been having such a good time listening to it, and I know it's been over for two years, but every song is just so educational. You guys have been together for about 25 years now, what brought about an album about the ocean?

*Larry Graff:* Well we were at the National Marine Educators event a couple years ago in Maui, and we were talking with our friend Craig Strain, who's the head of Laurence Hall of Science, and he thought it would be great to do something that fit with the new standards for the docent literacy standards. So with Craig's help, and some

others, we focused on the standards, and began writing songs to fit the ocean literacy curriculum.

*Jennifer Stock:* So when you're writing, or when other band members are writing, was there any "Ah-ha!" Moments or any facts that you really wanted to write on? Or sing about?

*Larry Graff:* Well that song you were just playing, "Going Down Down Down" Every time I hear it I learn something new. Solar Sea wrote that song and you know there is so much content in it that you know, you'd have to listen to it many times to get all the amazing factual content in the song, which I'm still learning. In fact I'm reading the words to the song as I'm talking with you. It's fantastic; Steve did a great job writing this song.

*Jennifer Stock:* Well, it's really fun. What I love about it is that it's a kind of sciencey topic, bathymetry, and most people can't even say the word, and just about the contours of the sea floor and it just makes it kind of fun! And I think when the fun is matched with science it sticks, which is probably I'm guessing is probably your goal.

*Larry Graff:* Yeah, that's what we try to do—make learning fun and funny. Even if it's a serious topic we try to hit it on the light side so that kids will be open to learning, and not get down or depressed. Like on this album we also have a song called, "Too Hot: about global warming, it's kind of upbeat and funny, but it's also serious, it gets the message out too.

*Jennifer Stock:* Yeah, I imagine it must be weird to be dancing and jumping around to topics that are pretty challenging overall, but do you see the kids getting some of the concepts from the songs even when they're pretty tough?

*Larry Graff:* Yeah. We don't hear... we get letters from teachers and parents saying that kids are chanting these words later on after hearing it so it must be sinking in. In concerts we see kids having fun, and we call them on stage and we have them sing Get To Know Your Water Shed, and so we have them get to know what a water shed is. So they're using many of their senses and, you know, kinetic energy to learn some of the stuff that we're trying to teach.

- Jennifer Stock:* Absolutely. Now I noticed that you guys have costumes for all of your albums, do you wear those on stage?
- Larry Graff:* Yeah, we have characters come out for different songs and there are different costumes for each song. So let's say we do Kingdom of the Crab, a giant crab comes out and he sings it, or if we have a song, the Water Cycle Boogie, we'll have Tug the Drop, he's dressed up like a giant rain drop, like a giant psychedelic rain drop, or when we sing Turtle lady Jelly, about trying t use less plastics and keep 'em out of the ocean, a turtle comes out and talks. Yeah, so it's just another way for us to connect with our audience by making it interesting and fun. Trying to get the message out.
- Jennifer Stock:* Super fun. Do play anywhere locally here in the Bay Area; do you come up here at all? Do you play here in the Bay Area?
- Larry Graff:* We've played in over 40 states. So we tour all year round. Our main bread and butter during the school year is Doug and I, Doug Dirt and Airy Larry, go to schools in the Bay Area, and we perform all over the state and a lot in the Bay Area, and then the big band goes all over, wherever people call us, or there's festivals, or libraries, zoos, aquariums... any kind of event like that. So yeah, we've played almost everywhere. Name a city in California and we've probably played it.
- Jennifer Stock:* (Laughs)
- Larry Graff:* And other states too. We do a yearly trip to Ohio, a yearly trip to Hawaii, we've been playing New Mexico a lot, and Oregon a lot, you know, just all over. Whoever needs some Banana Slug energy, to teach about the earth, we usually go.
- Jennifer Stock:* I understand that we actually have a similarity, as the origins of the Banana Slug string band came from working at an environmental educational facility, is that how the band came to be?
- Larry Graff:* Yeah, we were all teaching at San Mateo outdoor education, which is in La Honda, California, in the redwoods. We were all teaching in that area, there were a few outdoor education programs right in the La Honda area, and this is in the early 80s. And then we met, and we met and we started sharing out songs about nature, and we kind of just decide, "Yeah, let's take this on the road and see what

happens a little bit.” And we’ve been together 28 years now. So it’s pretty successful for what we’ve been trying to do, you know? I really appreciate what we get to do, and it’s a pretty need job we get to have, being a banana slug.

*Jennifer Stock:* That’s great, I love it. And the music is really fun. I have a toddler back at home and he really enjoys bouncing around to it but I am looking forward to when those lyrics really stick with him.

*Larry Graff:* Yeah, yeah.

*Jennifer Stock:* So, before we close out here, what website would you recommend for people interested in checking out your CDs, purchase your CDs, and find out where you might be performing?

*Larry Graff:* Well you can go to our site, [www.bananaslugstringband.com](http://www.bananaslugstringband.com) you can get a lot of information, you can download songs, you can find out where we’re playing in the next few months. You can like us on facebook, you can like us on facebook, and you can like us on iTunes and other downloadable sites. So I guess that’s the best way to find us, [www.bananaslugstringband.com](http://www.bananaslugstringband.com), facebook, iTunes, give us a call, and yeah, we love performing wherever we’re needed. School shows, family concerts, teacher workshops, we played the Monterey Bay Aquarium this Saturday and Sunday, we have a big grant with San Mateo County and do concerts for watershed education, at 25 schools in San Mateo county.

*Jennifer Stock:* Wow, that’s so great, such important work, so awesome. What song from the CD would you like us to close out with while we say goodbye?

*Larry Graff:* Too Hot!

*Jennifer Stock:* All right. Well, Larry, thank you for calling in and meeting you on the phone, and sharing the CD and thank you for making it. This is an awesome CD, only one ocean, covering all the principles and concepts about the ocean that we want everyone to know about.

*Larry Graff:* Yeah, thank you so much Jennifer for putting this important message out, and talking with me. I think people will like what they hear from the Banana Slug String Band. We’re really fun.

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When you hear us people love us, it's great to share with the audience out there, so thank you so much.

*Jennifer Stock:* Thanks so much Larry, take care.

(Banana Slug String Band's "Too Hot" plays.)

*Jennifer Stock:* Banana Slug String Band singing Too Hot, their song about climate change, it's got a good beat to it.

You're tuned to KWMR, 91.5 Point Reyes station, 89.9 Bolinas, and line on the web at [www.kwmr.org](http://www.kwmr.org) You're tuned to Ocean Currents, and we are here today talking about the ocean and the arts, and I'm pleased to have another artist on the phone and full disclosure, Cleo is a friend of mine as well.

Cleo is a visual artist, she has a degree in marine biology and advanced training and certificate in scientific illustration, and she is a muralist, illustrator, exhibits fabricator, including model making, and has a strong focus in ocean habitats through her work. She's worked in the American Museum of Natural History in the renovation of the Hall of Ocean Life, and most recently she's with the Oakland Museum of California, where she's recently worked on the brand new permanent exhibit on non other than Cordell Bank. So Cleo, welcome, you're live on the air.

*Cleo Vilett:* Hi, thanks for having me.

*Jennifer Stock:* So, I asked this to Jim Jimmy earlier, but I am curious, from the artist's perspective, was it marine science first or art fist that brought you into your career?

*Cleo Vilett:* I think it was probably marine science and it made me start paying attention in high school when we got into biology, and I think I had a side interest in art all along, but not a very serious on until after I had my degree in marine biology.

*Jennifer Stock:* One of the other things I was thinking about as I was talking to some of the other folks and researching is your work is very much the behind the scenes type of work in terms of art, and the results of your work have a very long lasting impact with education and

awareness. Can you talk about how you combine the aesthetics and also the long-term impact of people seeing your work?

*Cleo Vilett:*

Sure, that's actually one of the driving forces of it for me is that, "Can I create art that has a purpose?" And with my background in marine science that was a very clear purpose of a career to pursue. And so obviously I went for scientific illustration as a career path, because it combines those two interests, usually for some educational outcome. And from that I branched out into three-dimensional work in fabricating models for museum exhibits that focus on marine life.

*Jennifer Stock:*

That part I find really interesting, because so much of your background is in the illustrating of these things, and then how do you transfer that skill into physically modeling something, and it's so much more three dimensional and tactile, how do you transfer those skills?

*Cleo Vilett:*

Well I think what's important is having an interest in making something as accurate as you can. So right off the bat, having a background in marine science and having that knowledge about how things are made from the inside out, that's important in illustration as well as model making. And I was lucky to get hired at the Museum of Natural History when I did, because you were working on the Hall of Ocean Life, and they were looking for people who had a background in both art and marine science. So I would actually say I got trained for a lot of the processes for making models there, when really the strongest background I had was in 2 dimensional illustration. And there, like here in California, they have all these piles of different materials, and you just start to get to know them, and then it's just problem solving. Like, "What is the quickest fastest, cleanest way that I can make this? How many do I need, how far away is it going to be from the viewer, and you kind of put all those kinds of things into an equation and hope for the best."

*Jennifer Stock:*

Well, you're really good at it. I just got a chance to see the most recent model that you made, and again, I am blown away by it. Can you tell listeners a little more about the Cordell Bank Gallery at the museum? The Oakland Museum of California, and what did you just create?

*Cleo Vilett:* Well we created sort of a slice of the Cordell Bank reef. It's about four feet across and about seven feet high, and it allows the public to look up close at the rock surface and the kinds of things you might find there if you could go there. And for me one of the most amazing parts of this project was to create something for an exhibit that had never been exhibited before, and in terms of natural science exhibits that's pretty rare these days. Most places that we've discovered have been shown somewhere, somehow, and this is the first time Cordell got spotlighted in an exhibit. And we see that, when people come through the gallery, a lot of them have never heard of this place and so we know that we're successful because we're bringing attention to this place that's right off our coast, and people are learning all about it. And they are learning to look at it in a way that most people would never be able to do because they can't go scuba diving there. And there's none of it sticking out of the water (laughs) so. It's unique in so many ways and it's a pleasure to be part of that project.

*Jennifer Stock:* That's so fun. What are some of the audience reactions, I remember being there once and hearing someone saying they just didn't believe it existed, here.

*Cleo Vilett:* (Laughs) Yeah, "That can't be real, they must have made this up." And it is absolutely extraordinary, and the colors, it does have a candy quality to it, (laughing) but you know we worked for very high-resolution photos, excellent photos and videos. And most of the species there are found in other places, so we were able to look at live specimens. So yeah, it's real.

*Jennifer Stock:* That's neat. Well, so for Cordell Bank, you've done some beautiful murals in the past, like at Catalina Island Institute, or at the San Simian Exploration Center, those are habitats that you've been in yourself, with snorkeling, so what was it like to do this big, real immersive piece about a place you'd never been to in person.

*Cleo Vilett:* Right. Well again, we were very lucky to have amazing references from the sanctuary, and also because one of the most prominent species in there is the strawberry anemone, and those are found all over California, and so I was able to look at actual animals, and I was familiar with the particular animal, and it's gathering references from anywhere you can, going to the different

aquariums, going to aquariums so I could see the things alive... but part of that for me was going there in my head, hoping that I could facilitate other people's journeys to the same environment without having physically to go there.

*Jennifer Stock:* Yeah, I bet that's happening right now. I know there are kids groups going around, getting a chance to peek in and learn about the different animals interactions, which is super fun. Is there a habitat or a species in the ocean that you would really like to illustrate or model in the future?

*Cleo Vilett:* Oh, that's an interesting question. I've thought a lot about the different deep sea specimens getting into more clear castings and maybe lights (laughs)... that would be a fun project to do, a deep sea exhibit.

*Jennifer Stock:* How about a website, I know you're involved in, you do your own plein air painting, you have that on the side, in addition to the murals and exhibit work. Is there a website where people can go to see examples of your work?

*Cleo Vilett:* Sure. I have a website for my fine art practice, which does include some of my marine work, and also there's a page for my murals, samples of my marine education educational murals. And my website is [www.cleovilett.com](http://www.cleovilett.com)

*Jennifer Stock:* Fantastic, and how about the Oakland Museum website, what's there website?

*Cleo Vilett:* Oh, that's a very good question (laughs)

*Jennifer Stock:* I have that one here.

*Cleo Vilett:* OK, good (laughing)

*Jennifer Stock:* [www.museumca.org](http://www.museumca.org) I know all the info for visiting the museum is online and you can check that out. Cleo it's been so fun to work with you on that project and thanks so much for your work, I find that people like you just have this incredible sensibility that helps other people see what most of us can't in such an accurate way, it's such a fine skill, so thanks so much for your work.

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*Cleo Vilett:* Well, thank you. Thanks very much.

*Jennifer Stock:* Thanks for joining me today on the show

*Cleo Vilett:* My pleasure. Bye

*Jennifer Stock:* Talk to you soon. Bye

We were just talking with Cleo Vilett, a visual artist in Oakland and she a multifaceted, talented person who does murals, exhibit fabrication with detailed modeling, and is also an excellent painter. And you can see her work online, her own personal website, at [www.cleovilett.com](http://www.cleovilett.com), but also the work at the museum, the Oakland museum of California, where she's working right now, and has done this exhibit on Cordell Bank, at [www.museumca.org](http://www.museumca.org).

For this last segment I have an interview that I did with the artistic director Jodi Lomask, is Capacitor, it's a dance-cirq group in San Francisco, and there's a new show out called "Okeanos" and it's a; about the ocean. I am really excited to go see this show this fall, but it was really wonderful talking with her and hearing about her process and how they're interpreting the ocean through dance.

(Interlude music)

*Jennifer Stock:* I'm here with Jodi Lomask the artistic director and founder of capacitor, and I am thrilled to be out here on a beautiful sunny afternoon in Sausalito right on the waterfront, which is so appropriate for our conversation. Jodi, thanks for joining me today.

*Jodi Lomask:* Thanks for having me here.

*Jennifer Stock:* Tell me a little bit, how did Capacitor come to be, and what is it?

*Jodi Lomask:* Capacitor is a dance-cirq performance group that I founded about 15 years ago. I started working with scientists about 10 years ago to create shows that are inspired by the natural world and basically the idea was simple—if I wanted a long career as a choreographer/director I wouldn't want to create the same show over and over again, so in order to avoid that tendency I need to be continuing to be learning, and that the artwork I create is basically a side effect of learning. As I learn new information and learn

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about the world, my mind generates images and idea for performance works that we then perform,

*Jennifer Stock:* Tell me a little bit about your background in science or natural history or conservation in the environment, and how and how much of that influences all that you do in dance.

*Jodi Lomask:* My formal education is really as an artist, a performer, dancer, choreographer, but I grew up around a lot of scientists and a lot of scientists and visual artists, and these worlds have always influenced my work. Basically I always follow my curiosity and I think it's great place to create from. When you're open and interested and learning it puts your mind in the right space to generate interesting, creative ideas. I ended up finding environmentalism by working with scientists who studied the natural world. For instance, when I was working on our show Biome, with Dr. Nalini Nadkarni, she was the lead scientific advisor teaching us about the forests and the trees and she also happens to be a strong advocate for forests and trees, so learning what she knew influenced us and we eventually felt like this show really, it would be wonderful if we could help our audience connect more deeply with the forest and care more for the trees, and that pattern continues through our current production, Okeanos.

*Jennifer Stock:* So there's a big process that goes into putting on this piece, a lot of research, tell us about the approach towards that.

*Jodi Lomask:* In 2000 I formalized my process with the scientists, and I began to call the process the "Capacitor Lab" and we meet monthly with scientists and artists over the course of six months. We have one or two scientists present about subjects that they are passionate about and we have someone from the creative team present about what they are making, and it's also an opportunity for us to try out new ideas and get feedback from these two groups immediately. And we found that every time I create a show it involves at least 20 artists, so in order to create kind of a unity of design and connect the set designer with the costumer designer with the choreography with the performers. If we were all working with the same body of knowledge the shows would be more cohesive, and I've found that it's been effective for that. Not only does it inspire us to generate unique and fresh ideas, but also it binds the creative team.

*Jennifer Stock:* Tell us how you got to this most recent show, Okeanos. What was it that inspired you to focus on the ocean?

*Jodi Lomask:* Sometimes my initial impulse is super vague, I had been working on a show called "The Perfect Flower" for a while and I was exploring flower reproduce and I just felt like I wanted to go deep, and I wanted to go into the water, and I had gone to an artist colony and I had met an artist who was singing duets with whales, and her story sparked my curiosity and I thought, "Wow, how is it that whales can hear each other from such great distances?" And then I started to learn more about the ocean and I eventually interviewed my father because he had done a deep dive in the **Baffa Scaf** in 1957, he had gone 10 thousand feet into the ocean, and I found out interestingly enough, that he was in the research vessel with a machine he had designed for studying sound waves at different depths of the ocean, and I thought, "Wow, that is really a strange coincidence." But I was interested in deep ocean sound, and here that that's what he had been studying in 1957. And I eventually met Dr. Tierney Thys, who became our lead advisor, and Dr. Sylvia Earl, and Dr. Healy Hamilton, and a whole host of these amazing oceanographers and marine biologists who fed our process. And, in a sense, just by sharing what they know the show was writing itself, and we just had to follow through.

*Jennifer Stock:* I can't wait to see it. (Laughs) How quickly did you realize that the ocean is in a dire state? And how much did that come through in the show?

*Jodi Lomask:* I think Dr. Tierney Thys really brought that home for us, because she's very passionate about ocean health and it's hard to talk to any ocean researcher without eventually touching on the challenges that the ocean is facing right now. And we made an intentional decision to structure the show to bring the audience into the ocean to remind them of how wonderful the ocean is; the vitality, the excitement, the textures, the interactions, and then at the end share with them what is threatening that, and all of that life. And I think what we've ended up with is a performance experience that takes the audience on a journey and leaves them in a place that really care, and they really want to help, and they really want to be a part of the fixing of the damage.

*Jennifer Stock:* So the performance starts with, well there's the abstract tones and themes that the viewer can absorb and then at the end there's a little more concrete information to be shared.

*Jodi Lomask:* Yeah, even though we are using abstract structures, the narrative is more expressive than abstract, so they know that that's a seahorse, and that's an octopus exploring an object but we do have some heavier reality that comes in the end, and then it ends on a hopeful note because the people working in the ocean science you know, Silvia Earl is such an amazing ambassador for we can still do we leave people with the, "OK, this is how we're going to work together, rebuild some of our resources, and discontinue some of our harmful behaviors."

*Jennifer Stock:* How has the audience been receiving this?

*Jodi Lomask:* We've been having a really great response; the audiences love the show in general, and we've had a lot of people coming up to us afterwards saying, "I'm excited. I really want to help. I want to be involved." So we added to our program 10 simple things that you can do for the ocean, because so many of our audiences really wanted that. So I really feel like it's working.

*Jennifer Stock:* That's so cool. It's local! People in the Bay area can see this in the next few months; tell us how people can see it and where they can get tickets.

*Jodi Lomask:* So people can see Okeanos performed at the Aquarium of the Bay there's a great theater there called The Bay Theater, and that's on pier 39, and you can get tickets through our website, [www.capacitor.org](http://www.capacitor.org) or on the aquarium website. We will be running the show through the end of the year, and potentially beyond, we'll see how it goes. Thank you so much Jodi, it is great to meet you.

*Jennifer Stock:* Thank you Jennifer.

*Jodi Lomask:* We've been talking about the different arts that focus on the ocean as part of our theme or how the ocean has influence their art, and there are so many, so many different artists, I wish I could focus on it all year long. And it is just a wonderful way for us to access information and the aesthetics of the ocean, helping to build our

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*The Ocean Through The Arts*

*Guests: Jim Toomey, Cartoonist/creator of Sherman's Lagoon; Page 18 of 19  
Larry Graff, The Banana Slug String Band; Cleo Vilett, Model and painter;  
Jodi Lomask, Artistic Director of Capacitor host; Jennifer Stock*

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stewardship of it and engage more people in appreciating the ocean and understanding its role in our lives. So definitely check out some of these artists, the Banana slug String Band, Jim Toomey, Capacitor, this dance performance in San Francisco right now, Okeanos, the exhibits at the Oakland Museum of California, all the aquariums, and oh, there are just so many different art shows that have the ocean as part of their themes, So thanks for tuning in today to listen to that.

I just have one announcement to share with you, especially for those of us who use the coast here in Point Reyes, and on the outskirts, there is an issue going on on the coast called sea star wasting syndrome and there are sea stars that are appearing with lesions and decay around the tissues around those lesions, eventually this leads to the fragmentation of these sea stars, and death. There's a little bit of research going on up and down the coast, trying to understand what is going on and the extent of this, and so far it's showing all the way from Alaska all the way through to southern California, and typically it is from a bacteria which we are familiar with here in **Tamalis** bay called vibrio, because of the impact it has on the oyster growers but at this point they're not entirely sure if it is associated with this bacterium or not. So there is research happening up and down the coast trying to document it. I thought if anybody is out on the coast and notices this you might want to document your observation.

There is a website you can go to through UC Santa Cruz, The Pacific Rocky Intertidal Monitoring Program, and they are taking in data for people who are documenting it, all the information is on the website, and I am going to give you the website now, [www.pacificrockyintertidal.org](http://www.pacificrockyintertidal.org) You can go to that website for background information on this and also how to track and document any observation that you have. If you're out in the Tomales bay, or out in the rocky shores and notice this, or out on the beaches of Point Reyes get online and check it out. I haven't heard of any reports in Point Reyes, I also haven't been talking to too many people about it, so this is fairly new information, just within the last month, so we'll see what this all about and bring you some more information in the future about it.

We have been focusing on arts today and I really appreciate you supporting us here during the pledge drive at KWMR,

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*Jennifer Stock:*

Thanks for listening to Ocean Currents, we are the first Monday of every month, and this is part of the West Marin Matter Series, where every Monday at one you can tune in to learn about another topic of environmental focus. And Ocean Currents has a podcast, you can go to iTunes and search for Ocean Currents there, or go to [www.cordellbank.noaa.gov](http://www.cordellbank.noaa.gov) to get past episodes. And I really love to hear from the listeners, if you have a chance to send an email, I love to hear feedback about the show. If you have any suggestions or any stories you want to share or potential people to interview, please do email me, [Jennifer.stock@noaa.gov](mailto:Jennifer.stock@noaa.gov) and I'll do what I can to get it on the program. My next program in December will be about seaweed harvesting, so that will be a really interesting program, hope you'll tune in then. Until then, take care!

(Musical outro)

*Jennifer Stock:*

Thanks for listening to Ocean Currents. This show is brought to you by NOAA's Cordell Bank National Marine Sanctuary, on West Marin community radio, KWMR. Views expressed by guests you can go to [www.cordellbank.noaa.gov](http://www.cordellbank.noaa.gov) to get all the past episodes on this program may or may not be that of the national Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and are meant to be educational in nature. To learn more about Cordell Bank National Marine Sanctuary go to [www.cordellbank.noaa.gov](http://www.cordellbank.noaa.gov)