

*The Law of the Tongue* is inspired by the unique history of whaling in the town of Eden on the New South Wales south coast. Around in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, this industry was based on the extraordinary collaboration of people and orcas – otherwise known as killer whales – in the hunting of baleen whales.

The particulars of the hunt are in themselves fascinating. The orcas would herd and harass a baleen into the deep waters of Eden's Twofold Bay, blocking its escape. An individual killer then alerted the whalers by beating the water with its tail just outside their homes. Consequently, orcas and people would join forces, the former continuing their attacks and the latter in row boats going in with harpoon and lance for the kill. The spoils were then divvied up along very specific lines. While the bulk of the carcass went to the whalers, the killers took as their share the much sought-after lips and tongue. This bargain was known by the locals as 'the law of the tongue.'

The wonders of this story, however, go beyond just the hunt and its aftermath. For one, Eden's whaling grew out of a pre-existing relationship between the orcas and the area's indigenous Yuin people. Not only did the Yuin work alongside the settlers in the new industry, their cultural attitudes – such as considering killer whales blood relatives – were adopted as well. And yet, as amazingly rich as it was, this symbiosis was also gory and cruel, as is apparent from eyewitness accounts. The moral quandaries it raises so clearly in today's social context were not lost on those who experienced it firsthand.

*The Law of the Tongue* explores both the history and practices of Eden's whaling industry and the complex web of emotions they evoke. Many thanks to Acacia Quartet for encouraging the expansion of this work from its original one-movement form, and for tackling the whole so marvellously. The piece is dedicated to the memory of Peter Sculthorpe, without whose creative legacy it could not have existed. P