



110 Ossi Nils-Aslak Valkeapää lodegovain.
A selection of Nils-Aslak Valkeapää's photographs of birds.







Singing along to Whooper Swans – Talking with Rocks

Goase dušše Revisited

by Elin Már Øyen Vister

We were nomadic Sámi, meaning Sámi who had a summer place and a winter place, and we were always on the move. This was the best time of my life, because I was alone. But it's completely wrong to say it was only me there.... There was nature: the birds and the forest, the wind and the sky. I was by the waterfalls, amongst mountains and rocks. It was a very exciting time....

Nature is my master.¹

Day 1 – A listener's home Lásságámmi, Ivgobahta, Monday, March 12, 2018

Dear Listener!

The soft almost comforting yellow to blue pastel light over Ittugáissáid/Lyngsalpan welcomes me to Lásságámmi as the day, bringing a longed-for glimpse of spring, comes to an end. A few hours

later, I turn off all the lights in Lásságámmi and I walk outside and look out up at the night sky. That deep space-time of the cosmos is greeting me. In the Sámi tradition, a hunting scene is playing out in the sky, from the beginning of the night until the end; the skilled hunting brothers Gállábártnit's knife, spear, and cooking pan (Orion's Belt), are

shining bright. I don't think I have ever experienced anything like this; stars so bright they mirror in the ocean. I take it as a sign. You have all the tools you need, which carries a strong message for me as I am about to stitch together this text from a multitude of conversations. In the dark starlit night, Lásságámmi turns into a ship floating through the cosmos, and I am on board. Everything is always on the move.

And then I hear the bird sounds.... I left *Goase dušše* (Loddesinfonija / *The Bird Symphony*) playing on the stereo in Lásságámmi, and now it's seeping out through the windows. *Goase dušše* returns to the poet's home and listening outpost. The sounds moving through the glass are those of a busy spring soundscape. I hear them like *vardøgr*; they will be sounding in the valleys and mountains surrounding Lásságámmi and Áillohaš's Sápmi in a month or so.

Nils-Aslak Valkeapää, a.k.a. Áillohaš, created *Goase dušše* on a commission from the Music Drama Group/Swedish Broadcasting Corporation. It premiered on Swedish radio on October 22, 1992, and the following year it won the prestigious *Prix Italia* radio award for "the imagination, poetry and technical excellence of the programme." The close to one-hour-long symphony of nature consists of field recordings from Sápmi, and thirty or so minutes into the composition we come across Áillohaš's joik amid the busy soundscape of a reindeer herd. The bird symphony was mixed in Áillohaš's little cottage in Beattet/Páttikká, Northern Sápmi, together with the Swedish sound engineer Mikal Brodin. The work was produced by Gunilla Gustafsson (later Bresky) and Sven Åke Landström from the Swedish Broadcasting Corporation, Luleå. *Goase dušše* was released as a CD by DAT in 1994.

Áillohaš spent his lifetime listening to and being at one with nature. From the mid-1970s onwards, he released several albums where he would mix in both his own recorded material as well as archival material. And probably around the same time, he invested in some high-quality sound

recording equipment of his own. First he bought a Nagra analogue tape recorder. Kristina Utsi, his friend and publisher, remember it as being bought in Romsa/Tromsø, and then in the late 1980s he bought a digital audio tape (DAT) recorder on one of his trips to Japan. He began placing this recording technology out in nature; capturing the soundscapes of his Sápmi:

The bird symphony we are about to hear is a composition consisting of nature's own sounds. From the first snowflake that melts in March until the final song of the Whooper swan in the autumn before it makes its way back south. It follows the reindeer herding Sámi's sonic world, from spring in the mountains down to summers by the sea, and back up again to the mountains in the autumn. It is a journey undertaken with the sun, in the world of birds, from March to October. All recorded by Áilu and completed in his house by the waterfall, with the wind, snow and reindeer outside the door.²

Where did he listen and record?

Áillohaš takes us through his ancestral lands ancient soundscapes which has become more silent. We listen to the soundscapes surrounding his cabin in Beattet, the close by lake of Máhtejávri, Ádjagorsa, a few hours walking distance from Beattet, and as Kristina Utsi tells me, he also walked across the road into the mountains on the "Norwegian side" of Sápmi, close to Gilbbesjávri/Kilpisjávri.

Mikael Brodin, the sound engineer who assisted Áillohaš in mixing *Goase dušše*, explains that early on in the process, Áillohaš had told him that with the making of *Goase dušše* he: "*wanted to save the soundscapes for the coming generations, as some sort of an act to conserve the environment,*" and "*that a hundred years ago, you could hear these sounds in the Stockholm region, but not anymore. Today (1991) we can still hear them up in the mountains, but they are disappearing there too. And in another 100 years from now, these sounds will not be heard anymore.*"³

Goase dušše lets you listen to the soundscapes

that Áillohaš and his ancestors were born into, amid which they lived and died, and knew by heart. We listen to the cycle of seasons: wind/weather, ocean, waves, melting ice, bird song, reindeer herding, and the Sámi spiritual song—the joik. Falling asleep listening to a busy spring-summer night in June through the thin walls of a *lávvu* will never be the same as sleeping in an insulated wooden or concrete house. In a *lávvu* you are in the midst of it all. *Goase dušše* is furthermore a sonic love letter to his winged soulmates; the ptarmigan, the willow ptarmigan, the European golden plover, the Eurasian dotterel, the wren, the grey-headed chickadees, and other small birds, the rough-legged buzzard, the whimbrel, the common snipe, the great snipe, the black-throated loon, the long-tailed duck, the black grouse, the common gull, the European herring gull, the black-backed gull, the kittiwake, the gannet, the razorbill, the Eurasian eagle-owl, Arctic terns and their soundings. Áillohaš, who named himself *lot-tiid mánná*, child of the birds, has often wondered why he was not born with wings himself.

Mixing *Goase dušše* with Mikael Brodin

Áillohaš wanted to mix *Goase dušše* in a professional manner, close to nature in his home in Beattet, and not in a studio in Stockholm. The Swedish Broadcasting Corporation in Luleå therefore engaged Mikael Brodin who drove up to Áillohaš's cabin with a house van and took with him two new state-of-the-art digital Yamaha mixers, worth 500,000 Swedish kroners at the time. They installed the desks in Áillohaš's cabin, and once they got started he just asked Mikael Brodin to "forget about clocks and watches and let nature and our own feelings tell us what to do." For three weeks they just slept, ate, and worked on the mix. Prior to Mikael Brodin's arrival, Áillohaš had drawn up a score, which even had notes. Mikael Brodin remembers that Áillohaš was very accurate with regard to what he wanted to do, and that he had created a framework of the composition in his imagination. He had a bookcase full of labelled digital audio tapes, and

he would bring Mikael small tapes and tell him that "we are about to take this journey through sound," and "take this tape and here you fast forward 10 minutes,"⁴ which Mikael did, and they recorded a short part from that tape, and then he brought him a new tape and they recorded thirty-two minutes from that. After that, he went back to his notes/graphic score and so on. They spent time listening to and testing which recordings worked and which did not. The digital mixing desk had good EQs, and Mikael remembers putting a lot of work into removing noise with low and high-pass filters, homing in on the particular sounds they wanted to use. After weeks of putting the sonic pieces together, a final stereo mix was ready, which was later mastered in Stockholm with both Mikael Brodin and Áillohaš present. The working relationship between Áillohaš/DAT Records and Mikael Brodin was to continue for years to come.

I am not sure if nature still exists

What can only be described as a double bow or rounded strikes of permanent magnetism of Northern Light hang in the sky north above Lásságámmi, and I in my body memory, I am drawn home to my own home on Grimsøya, in the Røst archipelago, where I often see this Aurora bow above my house. Røst brings us to another winged soundscape and a natural symphony—the one I and all the other Røst beings listen to each spring and summer—that of the seabirds of the Røst archipelago. The coming and going of breeding seabirds and other migrant birds, is a cyclic event that has been taking place as far back in history as we can imagine. The first peoples to arrive here came to these striking ocean lands that had ice-free shores and plentiful fish, whales, shells, seals, birds, sea birds, and all kinds of edible marine plants and animal life. An ancient myth tells a tale of Lofuohta/Lofoten as the home of the gods. And what reminds me of the Sámi wind god Bieggolmáá reigns amongst the cave paintings of Helvete (English: Hell), a cave inside the Trentyken bird mountain.

The Sea gulls and Kittiwakes return in February, as the dark time comes to an end. They hover loudly around their dedicated nests sites, as the eagles' curiosity is aroused, staking out potential prey from small rock tops, and flying about more regularly. In April, the Puffins, Guillemots, Razorbills, and other pelagic seabirds return to the shores of the bird mountains, and a new breeding season begins. But many of these seabirds have not managed to create any surviving offspring in more than ten years, so the breeding colony is doomed for silence and oblivion within another twenty-five years, unless things change for the better.

The reason why I decided to move to Røst in 2014, and not just keep visiting, was to be able to be more present. To bear witness to the silencing of these ancient seabird mountains. To linger, and slowly get to know these landscapes and their human and non-human inhabitants, and to make sound recordings of these wonderfully rich and vibrant seabird colonies and surrounding landscapes, before it's too late. I began the work in 2009, and just nine years later, Vedøya, one of the bird mountains, is almost silent. What was once the most numerous seabird colony in Northern Europe is undergoing an acute crisis. And this is the "ecocide" Áillohaš was already aware of, heard coming, and was mourning when he created *Goase dušše* in 1993:

Regarding this programme... I am so often there that I almost know, hour by hour, the ongoing in nature. I know when certain birds are singing. I know where to find them. And I can take this technique with me... Sadly, this is no longer right. You know, the last five years... the world is changing... It was completely different only four years ago... Today you do not know where to find the birds. For example 20th March or 20th October, what you will find...? The world has changed so severely and I almost think... there is no way back... I am not sure if nature still exists. I mean, the birds are dying, they will become extinct, I mean nature will die... Very, very ready to die too, yes, because I do not want to live in a nature that is not a

nature... I have done something like a final grouping. If you listen you will help. Not me, but nature.⁶

With *Goase dušše*, Áillohaš wished to bring us the joy of listening to a symphony of the natural world, but at the same time he is reaching out with a severe warning. Close to twenty years later, we know that Mother Earth had already entered her sixth extinction event when he spoke of dark times to come. And sadly, it's not only on Røst that the situation for seabirds is critical. There has been a steady decline in most circumpolar seabird colonies in Norway/Sápmi (and globally) as far back as from the 1950s, and increasingly so throughout the twenty-first century. The situation for the Kittiwakes is dire. They are now listed as critically endangered on the Norwegian red list, and the Kittiwake colony of Ihkkot/Ekkerøy in Várjaját/Varanger has had a heavy decline since Áillohaš recorded there. What the future will hold for the earth's biodiversity is more uncertain than ever. Climate change, pollution, food shortages, habitat pressure, and a growing number of sea eagles (as they became protected 1968, their population have grown and are now in some areas "out numbering" other species), are all part of the reasons why Kittiwakes and other seabird species on Røst are struggling. The Gannets of Storstappan, in Máhkarávju/Magerøya, North Cape, which you can hear vocalise on *Goase dušše*, are the only exception, and their numbers have increased to 1,450 pairs in 2016 since the colony's establishment here in 1987/88. The Gannets are a newcomer breeding species to the shores of Sápmi and Norway.

Day 2-6 – Lásságámmi, Ivgobahta, Sápmi – Some kind of nature

I take a stroll along the rocky beach of Lásságámmi. A flock of purple sandpipers come flying in like a synchronized bird brigade and begin feasting on some tiny crustaceans, sounding just like their onomatopoeic Julevsámi name *fiervvátjoav-tjoj*. Crows and ravens spy on me, asking what I am

doing there, reporting back to each other. And early yesterday morning, I was awoken by the loud sounds of eagle flirtation as two sea eagles were basking just under Lásságámmi; getting ready to mate. I could hardly believe my ears for how loud they were as they eventually flew off in elegant swirls, chasing each other along the ice-clad, rocky beach. Some kind of nature is alive here.

I have been spending the last year beginning to trace the story of "the making of Áillohaš's *Goase dušše*." Why? I wanted to spend time with dedicated listening to the rich sonic world of the *The Bird Symphony* as part of a process of getting to know Áillohaš's interdisciplinary artistic practice and his use of nature sound in his compositions and music. I also wanted to ponder the question: How is nature doing today some twenty-six years after *Goase dušše* first was premiered on Swedish radio? With an immense sense of sadness I am reminded of what we already know, but what many of us humans continue to ignore: the state of nature is critical. And so I find it particularly urgent and important to speak about *Goase dušše* and spread the key message it contains: Listen and tune into the soundscapes of the natural world while they still are around—nature is dying! The sounds of the natural world have been the soundtrack to humanoid lives for millions of years. It is only in the past 150 years or so that the soundscape of an industrialised and urban world has become predominant in many people's lives. The global noise level on planet Earth is increasing by approximately 1 dB every year. International studies show that industrial noise affects the release of stress hormones in our bodies. Stress and trauma, as we are learning, are the cause of many health issues that lead to sickness and early death among people and all living beings. The sound of the natural world has an innate calming and healing effects on us. It links us all to Mother Earth, *Máttaráhkku*, our known and unknown ancestors, and our common pasts. We begin and end together. As Áillohaš himself wrote:

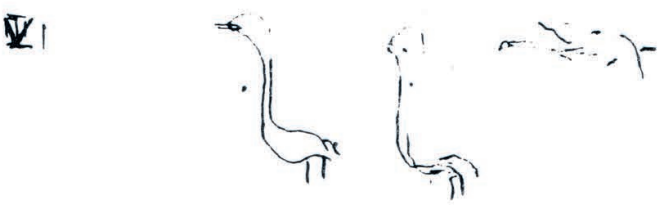
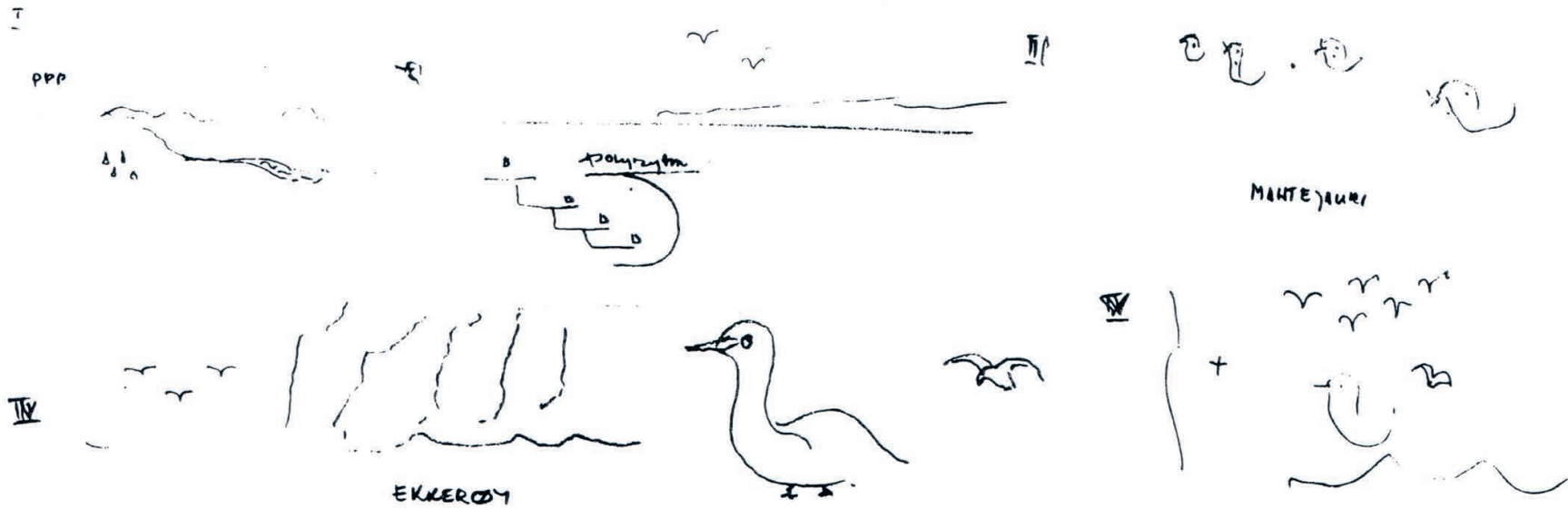
*Can you hear the sound of life
in the roaring of the creek
in the blowing of the wind
That is all I want to say
that is all⁷*

Elin Már Øyen Vister is a multidisciplinary artist and forager based on Røst, Lofoten/Lofuohta. For more info on her work on listening to Áillohaš go to: <http://elinmar.com/portfolio3.php>

Elin Már was never introduced to Áillohaš and his listening poetics throughout their "Western art education," so when they got to know *Goase dušše* they wanted to learn all about the composition and pay tribute to Áillohaš's Sámi aesthetics combining field recordings, composition, and joik.

This is an edited and abbreviated version of a text that was first published in relation to Elin Már Øyen Vister's work *Goase dušše revisited*—a listening kit and sensory forest walk, created in collaboration with Sámi literary scholar Hanna Mattila and composer Ánndaris Rimpi. The work was commissioned by Office of Contemporary Art Norway for the exhibition *Let the River Flow. The Sovereign Will and the Making of a New Worldliness* in 2018.

- 1 From the radio introduction to *Goase dušše*, broadcasted by Sveriges Radio on April 17, 1993. Gunilla Gustafsson (later Bresky) in conversation with Nils-Aslak Valkeapää. Transcribed and translated from Swedish to English by Elin Már Øyen Vister.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Mikael Brodin interviewed by Elin Már Øyen Vister in Ljudbang Studios, Stockholm, spring 2017.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 From the radio introduction to *Goase dušše*, broadcasted by Sveriges Radio on April 17, 1993. Gunilla Gustafsson (later Bresky) in conversation with Nils-Aslak Valkeapää. Transcribed and translated from Swedish to English by Elin Már Øyen Vister.
- 7 Nils-Aslak Valkeapää, *Trekways of the Wind*, trans. Ralph Salisbury, Lars Nordström and Harald Gaski (Guovdageaidnu/Kautokeino: DAT, 1994) 119.



VII

ECHO POLYRYTHM < NATURAL PERCUSSION

< MÄNMISKA :

vuoidaan	
deasyaan	
muurat	
čuollen	

-107K