

YOIKING WITH THE WINGED ONES



Røst AiR
in collaboration with
Ny Musikk
presents:

YOIKING WITH THE WINGED ONES

can be experienced at
Romssa Dáiddásiida / Tromsø Kunstforening
IKT congress preview 22nd-23rd Of May

Yoik and concept by Ande Somby (Sápmi)

Sound recording and six channel spatialisation by Chris Watson (UK)

Light design by Nicolas Horne

Curated and produced by Elin Már, Røst AiR

The installation is based on the album:
Yoiking with the winged ones – Ánde Somby,
Ash International via Touch, 2016

Røst AiR is an artist run, avantgarde AiR program, communal workshop and we arrange, curate and facilitate happenings, workshops, seminars, gatherings and lead botanical walks. We are proud to collaborate with Ánde Somby and Chris Watson, whom we are both great fans off when presenting Yoiking With The Winged Ones as a 6 channel sound installation at Romssa Dáiddásiida/Tromsø Kunstforening.

The sound installation has been curated and planned to take place during the IKT post congress program as a

collaboration between Røst AiR and Ny Musikk.

Yoiking With The Winged Ones is part of Røst AiR ongoing focus on Sámi art, culture and history, and is honouring Tråante 2017, -a celebration marking the 100 years that have passed since the first congress for the Sámi people was held in Trondheim between February 6th and 9th in 1917. Tråante 2017 is both a national celebration in Norway and a jubilee for Sami people from Sweden, Finland and Russia as well.

We wish you all a transforming listening experience.

YOIKING WITH
THE WINGED
ONES – Ánde Somby
(Ash International via Touch)
2016

If one wants to experience something powerfully contemporary and at the same time routed firmly in the fabric of the Sami people, then Ánde Somby's 'Yoiking with the winged ones' is worth hearing.

Recorded in the field by Chris Watson, and also staged as a multi-channel installation, this is the sound of someone pushing themselves ever deeper into the moss and soil of their surroundings. Somby's voice breaks, the yoik becomes fractured – exhaustion arrives and is submerged. Over the course of the 4 pieces we hear a voice stripped of its varnish, Somby's particular approach

of working up to and beyond the edges of his vocal abilities throwing itself out across the landscape. The recording captures, in Chris's usual clarity, the landscape near to Kvalnes on the Lofoten peninsula, with Ánde's voice echoing back and forth, rising above the bird song. One strand of my own work involves intuitive scores for musicians placed within the landscape as an equal element and a mark of the success of such pieces is when the hair on the back of the audiences necks rise up – that moment of intense listening, captivated by each second. A recording of such a piece that is capable of having the same effect by reproducing something of the location and the performer's effect on it is, in my opinion, equally difficult to achieve. On 'Yoiking with the winged ones' Chris has done that. I have no doubt that it isn't the same as standing there with the wind and Ánde's voice coming at you from all angles, but it does capture more than mere documentation.

I spoke to Chris and emailed

with Ánde to discuss the recording of the album, yoik and Sami culture:

CW: well, I knew nothing about yoiking really until I got an invitation from Ánde to go up to where he was living at the time, a place called Kvalnes in Arctic Norway, off the west coast and some way inside the Arctic circle. Ánde is also a law professor at Tromsø University, so literally an advocate for the Sami people. Ánde had, I think, some kind of grant and was given the challenge of further promoting Sami Culture and decided a good way to do this would be to make a record of his yoik in the landscape so invited me up there in 2014. At the time Ánde was living with his then partner A K Dolven, the prolific Norwegian artist (1) near Kvalnes, this tiny fishing community, I'd say less than fifty houses, wedged between huge mountains and the Arctic ocean, amazing place, amazing culture I dropped into. So I stayed with them for a few days and Ánde explained that his idea with yoiking was to go into the

landscape, vocalise and make these sounds, and that the echo that came back wasn't an echo or reverberation as we know it, but was in fact the spirit voices of his ancestors answering him, because the Sami believe that we come from and go back into the landscape. The spirits of the ancestors live inside the landscape and they respond to the yoik by echoing these sounds. Ánde was concerned about several things including that the Norwegian government had granted mining rights to a British company to look for deep coal seams within Sami reindeer herding country, which really upset him. So, he created a yoik so he could speak to his ancestors and say 'look, there are still people up here who respect Sami culture and we know what's happening to the landscape and what might happen. There are people who think of and respect the old ways', which I thought was a very powerful message. So I had great empathy with the whole thing.

Anna Katrine had found a lake which was about an hour's walk up this very steep sided mountain, with no path, through heather, lichens and all sorts of

Arctic flora. This astonishing lake was nestled in an elbow in the mountains, a few hundred metres across, very clear with Arctic char in it, rising and falling. Ánde would stand almost at one side, at a tangent across the lake and yoik and I would record his direct vocalisations from some distance; two or three hundred metres, but then I would get this incredible echo and reverberation coming back off the mountains which were all around us and it really filled the space. It amplified itself, almost like a standing wave. Ánde performed several yoik up there and it was quite an experience. For a start I had to walk up there, for about an hour up this very steep mountain, carrying all the gear. I kept stopping to get him to explain what he was doing, but also to get my breath back. I made a radio programme as well because I thought it was so fascinating. I used DPA's (small personal mics) and just kept chatting to him and that's the basis of a Radio 4 documentary about the trip. So, on the way I learnt a lot more about Sami culture, what he was doing and the reasons why. Ánde performed these pieces at the lake and then we came back

(1) A K Dolven's work, for those readers not already familiar with it, explores the relationships between people and the perception of their environment – again, in a powerful and direct way. I recommend the book 'Please Return' (Art / Books) as an introduction to her work thus far.

down and went to another site where he performed his, quite well known now, wolf yoik.

The Sami believe you can migrate their spirit from humans into animals so Ánde did this amazing thing where he slowly evolves from Sami to wolf and back to Sami during this seventeen minute yoik. A bit like the bushmen in the Kalahari, there's a kind of shamanic sense that they can pass their spirit into animals and become animals, think, feel and behave like them.

At the back of Anna Katrine's house there's a stretch of managed wilderness, not really a garden, which runs down to the shores of the ocean, where she has a boat and would go out each day, fishing for halibut and other fish for us to eat at night. But also there's a lávut, a Sami reindeer herders' tent, that we went in and again I learnt more about the culture as we sat around a traditional hearthstone, which was not only the centre of the heat but also of another aspect of Sami culture. Ánde told me about a goddess who sits in the fire with the hot coals on her lap, it was

remarkable, and he performed some more yoik in there that I recorded, including a mosquito yoik. It was a massive cultural experience for me and I was fascinated by it.

JrF: Indeed. I know when I first started importing Sami recordings into the UK I knew very little about the cultural and political life of the Sami and there is a complex and interesting history. The relationship to the sound of their surroundings is of course of particular interest to us as we both spend a lot of time listening to environments. It's one of the few vocal traditions on the European continent that has retained, fully, its connection to the environments it was created in and from.

CW: as far as I know, Ánde told me it's the oldest vocal tradition in Europe. It's interesting that you mention the political situation. Again I just didn't know about that. Ánde is Sami – he's a Norwegian citizen but he's a Sami and that crosses all political boundaries. They don't mean anything, particularly to a nomadic culture. This was all new to me, including how

suppressed Sami culture has been by Norwegian society. It's still illegal to yoik in Norwegian churches and Sami culture isn't taught at schools, even in the far north.

JrF: Ánde, one of the things we've been discussing is how difficult it is to fully explain exactly what yoik is with the written word, especially in a language other than Sami. From your perspective could you tell us something about what the yoik means to the Sami people and to you personally?

AS: Yoik is basically a way to express oneself and mediate either a factual, poetical esoteric or magical message. The symbolic value of yoik is enormous. Yoik comes from time immemorial, and both the Roman empire, christianity and later different national states have had an ongoing war against yoik, but yoik is the definitive survivor. We used to say that you can burn my drum (when we reference when the shamanic drums were burned) but you can never ever burn the song

that is inside me. Yoik is the stonehenge that is not made of stone.

JrF: Could you explain more about the origins of each of the yoik on the album?

AS: The wolf yoik is traditional. Me and the wolf have been on the road together ever since I started to perform some 40 years ago. The others are 'máttuid cavygleamit' – when our ancestors are giving us a little poke in the form of whispering us a yoik never yoiked before. 'Gufihtar' is a reminder and a praise to the underground people – fairies and elves (2) who gave us these strange wonderful songs in the first place. 'Gádni' is the 'bridge' or the energy between humans and the underground people. Neahkkameahttun is a praise and comfort to those who have lived physically and have stepped out.

JrF: Ánde is known for working with the edges of his vocal abilities and on this record, during the wolf yoik, you can hear that. As I've said elsewhere, and this goes back

(2) Readers should be aware creatures such as elves and fairies in Sami culture are quite different from other western ideas of them, which, until recently at least, have been somewhat sanitised through their depiction in children's literature.

even to the earliest days of field recording, capturing any kind of performance recorded in the environment is tricky as it either serves as straight documentation or, on rare occasions, does convey something more experiential. Chris, I wondered how it felt to you, as a person – a listener rather than in your role as recordist, when he was pushing himself beyond his limits during the wolf yoik in particular?

CW: I think just experiencing these yoiks in the landscape was really quite moving for me. Several times I when I was recording them I took my headphones off and just listened because I could hardly believe it. First of all with the acoustic up on the lake and then with the wolf yoik. It was explained to me before we even started that this isn't entertainment, it's very purposeful. It was hard listening to it and I could see him as well though I was some distance away because I wanted to include, obviously, the landscape in the recordings as well. Although we went down into this soft sounding acoustic lower down the mountain, the microphone was perhaps 30 or 40 metres

away from Ánde and I was a good 50 metres behind that, it was quite moving, physically, to see someone transformed. He did move from how I had known him an hour or so earlier to this half wolf like persona. All of the yoiks we could only do once – that was it. He did a short percussive whoop as a test for the echoes and for my benefit and then we were into it. The wolf yoik is seventeen minutes and once you start you're in it for the duration. So it becomes quite a visceral experience. Physically and psychologically quite moving seeing someone put themselves through something like that.

JrF: Indeed. When I first started listening to yoik, and indeed when listening to any sound tradition from another culture than one's own, inevitably there's an element of hearing it as simply as music, and it's only after delving deeper that you realise it often goes much deeper than that, that it's not entertainment. Our own culture is largely based around the telling of stories, whether that be in song or spoken word, and music for dancing. Our distant sound traditions are mostly lost

to us, as indeed they are in many countries. Hearing some yoik away from where or whom it was created for means one is only hearing one element of it.

Ánde, I know you have performed your wolf yoik in various locations and I wanted to ask you how you feel the yoik itself is influenced by the place in which it is performed?

AS: The wolf always plays along with the different spaces where we meet. It is so inspiring to hear from the audience that they get something powerful by listening to the wolf.

JrF: Chris, another aspect I wanted to discuss with you is that we are both used to listening very closely to environments for long durations so we're quite good, I think, at picking up on really subtle changes – and I wondered if you could talk about any shifts you perceived in the general soundscape between Ánde's vocalisations?

CW: I'm certain that he created changes within those locations and you can hear them. On the way up he was talking about how sometimes the birds

respond, and they certainly did during the recording. There was a carrion crow and a cuckoo and almost a kind of call and response. Even the Arctic char rising in this unnamed mountain lake seemed to have some sort of rhythm attached to Ánde's yoik. Part of creating this yoik is moving the acoustic of the landscape and when that happens then the things that live within it respond. It didn't happen when we were there but he said that several times, earlier in the season, when he's been up there and there's been snow there has been snow fall, slippage in response to his yoiks, which is why I was convinced it was a special place and why he took the effort to get us all up that mountainside. He believes it's a powerful place and when I heard him yoik in that environment and heard the response I could hear exactly what he meant. It's strange because not only is it outside our culture it's almost outside our understanding.

JrF: Yes, and I think one of the issues in terms of the wider perception of vocal based traditions is that some tend to almost group them all together

as mystical chant rituals, but with a very thin and simple definition of such things. One thing that struck me about yoik is that it is raw and visceral. It certainly isn't meditation music for mass markets!

An obvious question for you Ánde, but what do you hope listeners unfamiliar with yoik will get from hearing the album, given that because of the label it's released on and Chris's involvement does mean that it will reach some audiences totally unfamiliar with Sami sound culture?

AS: I think people in our time need to enjoy their traditions – to look back. They need to be in this moment – to be present in the presence. And they need to think forward – to be ready for the future. I hope people will both enjoy their past, their present and their future, and I think such invitations have to come in remote forms, from remote places and from remote times. I do it with both old and new yoiks and in orchestration

with the wind, local crows, migrating birds and this fantastic sound faerie Chris Watson.

DAT, the Sami label and publishing house, is still active and in fact was cofounded by Ánde Somby. Let's hope that at some point reissues of Valkeapää's 'Goasse Dusse' and Bær's 'Mahkaravju' are possible, helped by the interest of new audiences that Somby's release via Touch can bring.

Jez riley French – January 2016



Ánde Somby

Ánde Somby, born in Buolbmat, Norway, is a traditional Sami joik artist and an associate professor at the Faculty of Law at the University of Tromsø, specializing in Indigenous Rights Law.

He has been active yoiker from 1974. He has been performing with yoiks since he was 16 years old. A 'yoiker' is a person who yoiks (a type of singing) people, animals and landscapes within Sami culture and context. He has been performing both

overseas and in many countries in Europe.

His characteristic as a yoiker is firstly that he is deeply rooted in the yoik tradition. Somby comes from the reindeer herder yoik tradition from the tundra. That yoik tradition has an emphasis on pretty technical skills for example javzan. His father Aslak Somby was reindeer herder. Ánde Somby also comes from the yoik tradition from the villages of the eastern part of the north sámi. That tradition has its emphasis on melodic

Jez riley French is an artist and field recordist based in East Yorkshire. He has created pieces for Tate Modern and Tate Britain along with galleries and arts organisations around the world. He also lectures and tutors on field recording, including alongside Chris Watson on workshops in the UK and Iceland. As well as numerous releases on the engraved glass label, early 2016 will see a new release via Touch records.

Photo by A. K. Dolven

yoiking and yoiks that can carry narratives. His mother Karen Kristine Porsanger Somby resided in the village Sirkma. She practised as an arctic farmer and also as a professional in duodji. Ánde Somby's second characteristic as a yoiker is that he further developed the traditional joik techniques. He has expressive performances. The wolf yoik is a signature joik in this respect.

Somby is only one of few Sami with Ph.D in law (dr. juris). Somby's PhD is titled "Juss som retorikk". In that thesis he reconnected the Nordic jurisprudence to the classical rhetorical tradition which dates back to Plato and Aristotle. In 2009, Somby was working on a project titled "Is the legal medium the legal message?", in which he attempted to apply Marshall McLuhan's mantra on the medium being the message to jurisprudence. He has also been producing records with other yoikers. In 1985 he produced the LP record and MC cassette "Ean Mássan" with his father Aslak Somby (1913–2008) and mother Karen Kristine Porsanger Somby born

1920. In 1991 he produced the record Ravddas Ravdii with Inga Juuso. In 2000 he produced the record "Deh" and in 2003 Deh2 with his uncle Ivvár Niillas.

Somby is also one of the cofounders of the sámi publishing house and recordlabel Dat. Somby has also worked within band contexts as well as been a soloist for a symphony orchestra. Together with the band Boknakaran from Tromsø and the accapella group Rosynka from Petrozavodsk in Russia Somby participated in the project "moya på Tvoja" (1998–2002). His album Yoiking with the Winged Ones was released on Y in 2016.



Chris Watson

Chris Watson is one of the world's leading recorders of wildlife and natural phenomena, and for Touch he edits his field recordings into a filmic narrative. For example, the unearthly groaning of ice in an Icelandic glacier is a classic example of, in Watson's words, putting a microphone where you can't put your ears. He was born in Sheffield where he attended Rowlinson School and Stannington College (now part of Sheffield College). In 1971 he was a founding member of the influential Sheffield-based experimental music group Cabaret Voltaire. His sound recording career began in 1981 when he joined Tyne Tees Television. Since then he has developed a particular and passionate interest in recording

the wildlife sounds of animals, habitats and atmospheres from around the world. As a freelance recordist for film, tv & radio, Chris Watson specialises in natural history and documentary location sound together with track assembly and sound design in post production.

www.chriswatson.net

RØST AiR

RØST AiR is a non-profit, multi-disciplinary, artist-in-residence and artist-run association. We are based on Skomvær island in the RØST archipelago, Northern Norway/Sápmi, (67°North), a stones throw from Nykan nature reserve, home to one of Northern Europe's largest pelagic seabird colonies.

Our focus and interests include but are not limited to : The ecological transition, geo-politics, diversity, self-sufficiency, race, gender and intersections between ecology, decolonization, post-colonial feminism and queer theory. Site-specific projects, process-work and interdisciplinary meetings are encouraged.

Photo by Kate Humble

Having said this we would like to underline that we are open to an infinite number of singular or communal expressions of artistic practices.

Røst AiR is working on alternative ways of navigating, creating and being in this world, exploring for instance the post-fossil fuel potential. We are inspired by the coastal Sámi and Northern Norwegian fisherman-farmer tradition, and we are slowly restoring the old lighthouse vegetable and herb gardens.

Røst AiR is run by the RøstAiR working group: Elin Már Øyen Vister, Jason Rosenberg and Marie Kaada Hovden.

www.rostair.com

Nicolas Horne

Nicolas Horne is based in Romssa/Tromsø and does light and video design for theatre and dance. He also works with colour grading of film, and live visuals for a wide variety of events.

Ny Musikk

Ny Musikk is Norway's centre for new music and sound art with over 75 years experience in commissioning, producing, curating and presenting new music and sound-based work. Through live music, screenings, installations, readings and lectures we arrange events exploring sound and music's relationship with other art forms such as performance, film, literature, dance and visual art.

www.nymusikk.no

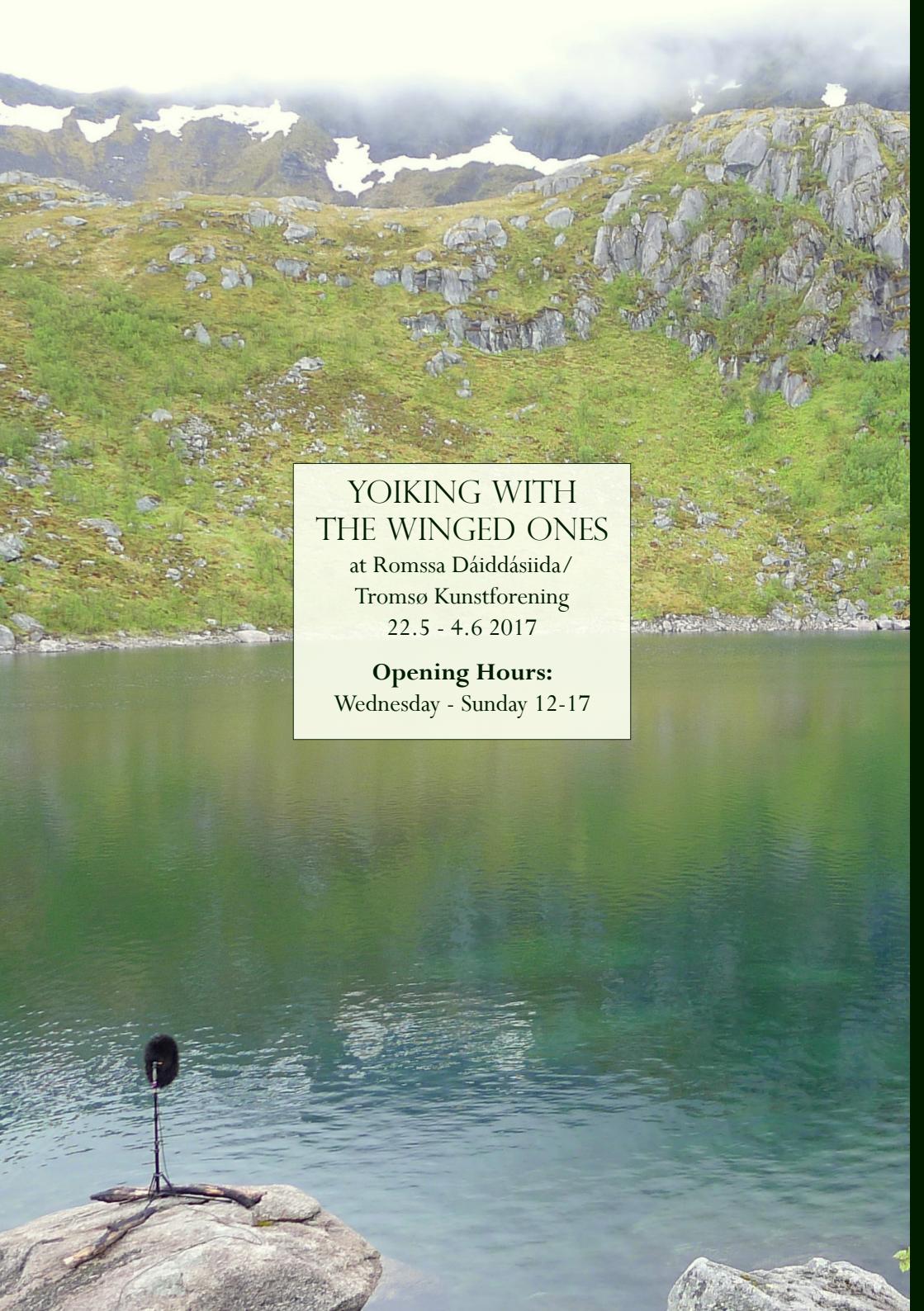


RØST AiR



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YOIKING WITH THE WINGED ONES

at Romssa Dáiddásiida/

Tromsø Kunstforening

22.5 - 4.6 2017

Opening Hours:

Wednesday - Sunday 12-17

