

POLAR SUITE

Soundscapes of Alaska
Christel Veraart

Funded by the prestigious Rasmuson Foundation, Polar Suite was conceived high above the Arctic, during a flight from Alaska—over Greenland—to Europe. Looking down from the window, the composer encountered an unbroken field of ice and snow, extending for thousands of miles. In that moment came the realization that much of the world below had rarely if ever known human presence.

What emerged was not merely a sense of isolation, but an encounter with vastness itself—an emptiness so complete that it ceased to feel vacant. Instead, it became a blank canvas: a space of pure potential, where meaning had not yet been assigned, where identity could dissolve and be reimagined. This confrontation with openness and self-reflection became the emotional and philosophical core of the work.

Photographs taken from the plane formed the visual foundation of the project. For the first time, image preceded sound and the music was composed in response, as if listening back to the land itself. From this process first arose *Alyeska*, a word from the Aleut language meaning “great land”.

To give voice to this state of solitary presence, the duduk emerged as a central musical element. Originating in Armenia, this ancient double-reed instrument was chosen for its fragile, deeply human resonance. Its sound does not belong to the Arctic landscape, yet it speaks to the inner life of the solitary figure within it—breathing, wavering, and exposed.

Alongside the duduk, whispered vocalizations appear in a non-existent language. These murmurs do not communicate

meaning through words, but through texture and breath, representing the quiet, incessant activity of the mind itself: Fragments of thought, memory, and intuition that surface in solitude. Together, these sonic elements do not dramatize loneliness; instead, they affirm the capacity to thrive within it. The music does not fill the silence, but listens to it.

Alyeska grew into **Polar Suite**—a meditation on the Arctic as a space of stillness and contemplation, where landscape and inner life mirror one another, and where sound becomes a bridge between the immensity of the world and the quiet interior of the self.

WHAT THE AUDIENCE SAYS

Strong and fluid sounds invite the impulse of movement to be realized
—Choreographer Elisa Monte

Incredibly evocative and well suited for film and dance
—Rasmuson Foundation

You've written the music for the Alaskan landscape that I've always wanted to hear performed. I should say that I've also heard that music in some of the work of John Luther Adams
—Visual Artist Carl Ramm

COMPOSITIONS

ALYESKA (9.58)

is what you hear, see, and feel when everything turns quiet. It is about exploring the outer reaches of inner space and to unveil the vastness of the Polar landscape.

ICE (4.30)

Impetuous rhythmical patterns reflect the impermanence of ice, of life in the Arctic, thus creating an atmosphere of transience that excludes all permanence.

WINTER SOLSTICE (6.39)

captures the intensity of winter, when days are cloaked in darkness and we are inclined to reflect upon our lives. The journey of a lonesome cello who, while surrendering to the elements of the Arctic winter, is reminded of how POLAR much landscape and emotion are intertwined.

MIDWINTER DREAM (1.11)

In the depth of winter a deep yearning for warmer shores is often present. African marimba, piano and latin beats make you dream of days when walking around barefoot.

FAINT (1.34)

illustrates the dim, gentle light of winter while walking through the snow.

POLAR MOON (6.29)

a cosmic play of transformation from darkness into light where wildly varying percussive sounds and soaring strings struggle to find their balance.

WINDHORSES (4.06)

An otherworldly duet of voice and duduk evokes the Arctic vastness where there is no place for words. As the wind passes over the snowy surface of the tundra, the air is purified and sanctified by mantras. Accepting that all beings are part of a greater ongoing cycle, the music concludes in a wild and echoed celebration that embraces the world.

WOLF TOTEM (4.15)

Native drumming, followed by chanting, voice their request for guidance from the animal spirit of the wolf. Following the ancient Polaris star in the heavens, they sing: Home of ancients, shine your light. Totem speak to me! Never forgetting the proper balance within nature - 'Light his trail, his ashen guise', expresses the fear and awe this powerful spirit instills.

SIKU (4.40)

means ice and features the different sounds of it. The first layer of thin ice that forms on puddles in the fall, a skim of ice, but also new ice appearing on the sea and rock surfaces.

AWAKEN (3.45)

Icy piano sounds represent 'break up' time, when snow and ice start to melt. A guitar adds warmth as soon as birds start building their nests, a clear sign of the ending of a long winter to make room for nature's new season.

CELEBRATION OF SPRING (4.11)

A celebration of longer days, budding trees and landscapes that finally are turning green. Exuberant, cheerful and sparkling, with the vibrance and energy of spring.

INUА (3.46)

This incantation captures the Arctic peoples idea that human and animals are equal and all life has the same kind of soul or "life essence".