

OD Svalr

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Svalr is a collection of sonic reflections and impressions from an artistic research and field recording expedition to the remote Arctic archipelago of Svalbard in the summer of 2024. Built from the sounds of glaciers, fjords, wildlife and human structures, *Svalr* explores the synchronous harmonies of an isolated, extreme and rugged landscape. Each track represents a day of environmental recordings, which present as a sensory field journal of Svalbard's changing climate, sensitive ecologies and unique acoustics.



A black and white photograph of a rugged, rocky landscape. The terrain is composed of large, light-colored rock formations with visible textures and shadows. A semi-transparent dark grey rectangular box is overlaid on the lower-left portion of the image, containing the word "Arrival" in a white, sans-serif font. The background is a solid black, suggesting a dark sky or a shadowed area.

Arrival





Both conventional field recording techniques and unconventional custom DIY microphonic devices were used including:

Hydrophones for underwater sounds, capturing the songs from Beluga whales,

Geophones for subterranean resonances in the ice and permafrost,

electro magnetic interference mic's listening to electronic transmission signals from various human technologies,

and a *36 channel piezo mic sculpture* for capturing sensitive vibrations.





View from Skanskbukta/ Longyearbyen's present economy relies heavily on tourism in the summer months when it can be accessed by boat, and scientific research. Historically, this has been a coal mining and whaling archipelago.

A black and white photograph of a mountain range. The mountains are layered, with the foreground peaks being more detailed and the background peaks fading into a hazy atmosphere. The lighting is soft, creating a sense of depth and texture. In the center of the image, there is a semi-transparent dark rectangular box containing the word "Impermanence" in a white, sans-serif font.

Impermanence

Midnight sun during summer snowfall in Longyearbyen/ We always needed to be fully suited in warm insulating layers and snow gear as exposure is one of the main concerns being outside, even in summer, and always had to be vigilant and take turns on polar bear watch when skirting the perimeter of the settlement.



Reindeers roam the town in search of fresh lichen, and migratory bird colonies breed on the cliffs on either side of the cabins, providing a perpetual loud chatter that descends down into the valley. Most human noises, from the rare car, activity at the port, to an occasional helicopter used for moving local supplies and search and rescue missions are all muffled by it.



The local beach is inhabited by four large walrus that like to spend the day basking in the sun, and as they have no natural predators here and hunting has long since stopped, they do so in confident safety next to the fishing boats on the shore.

Most glacial beaches and shoreline cliffs are teeming with birds such as the arctic tern, skua, guillemots, auks, gulls, kittiwake and puffins. The ptarmigan is the only year round land bird and the snow bunting the only songbird in all of Svalbard.



Although relentless, it has been clear that even the nature here is slowly being impacted by the distant ripples of man-made interference, none so clear than the dramatic shift in ice melt observed during our short two week stay, and in tracing back the phenomenon in local photos, measurements and studies done in the area over the years.

A grayscale photograph of a textured surface, possibly a wall or ceiling, with a semi-transparent rectangular box in the center containing the word "Pale". The texture is composed of small, irregular, light-colored bumps or granules. There are several dark, irregular spots scattered across the surface, particularly on the right side. The overall appearance is that of a rough, aged, or weathered material.

Pale





As the northernmost human settlement on Earth at 78° N, there are no permanent residents here; the average stay spans only the summer months, most avoiding the polar night and perpetual darkness of the winter season, or leaving after 2-3 years.



Shifting sea ice around Borebreen Glacier/
Recording kit on icebreaker consisted of 3 hydrophones, stereo ambient mics and a geophone. Two of the deeper water hydrophones were made using piezo discs encased in bio resin (due to the refraction index which closely matches that of water) and silicone shells for waterproofing and durability. The other was lightly waterproofed using Plastidip and affixed to a magnet so as to attach to ship hulls, metal spikes driven into the ice, etc. The hydrophones are a passive design that are connected to an impedance balancing transformer, before the microphone pre-amp of a Zoom H6 portable recorder. This setup allowed us to capture the songs of a beluga whale pod, sea ice being crushed beneath the hull of the icebreaker, the natural shifting and tearing of ice sheets, as well as other still unidentified hydro acoustic phenomenons.

Wahlenbergreen Glacier coast



A black and white photograph of a layered rock formation, possibly a mountain peak or a large rock face. The rock shows distinct horizontal strata, suggesting sedimentary or metamorphic layering. The top of the formation is jagged and craggy. The word "Crushing" is overlaid in white, sans-serif font in the center of the image. The background is a solid black sky.

Crushing



Abandoned mining equipment being used as resonators in Nybyen, captured by the piezo mic sculpture/ With the ceasing of local operations, equipment is too costly to ship back to the mainland, the settlement hosts a widely varied collection of abandoned historical vehicles and apparatus.





The field recordings revealed an extraordinary acoustic commonality across Svalbard's terrain: the ice, rock, permafrost, human structures, and even wildlife seemed to be resonating in the same key, creating a rich environmental harmony.

A black and white photograph of a dense forest floor. The ground is covered in a thick layer of pine needles and twigs, creating a complex, textured pattern. The lighting is dramatic, with deep shadows and bright highlights. In the center of the image, there is a semi-transparent, light-colored rectangular box containing the word "Permabloom" in a white, sans-serif font.

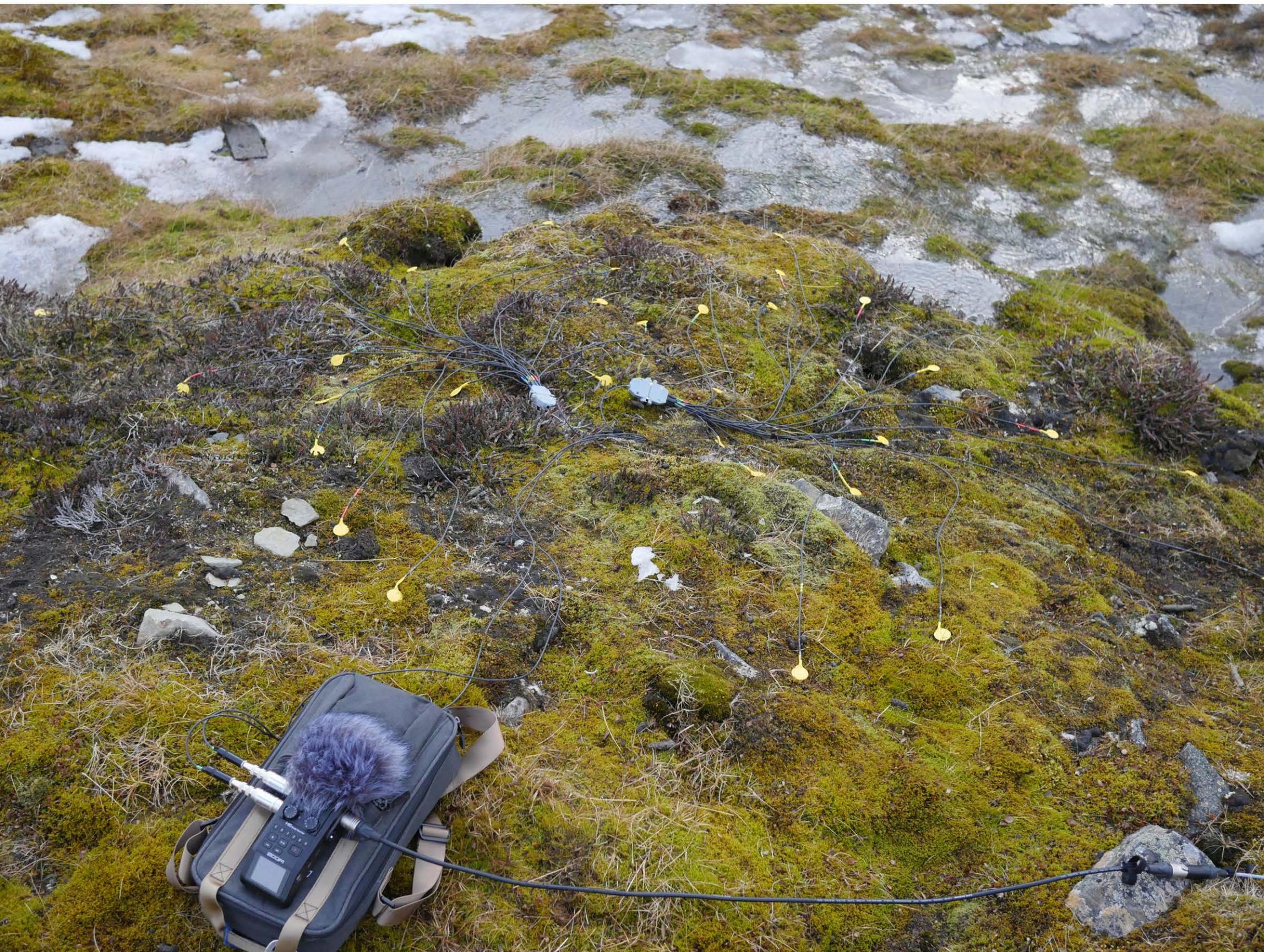
Permabloom



Recording the receding tide and glacial overflow into Adventfjorden/ After the ice melt, lumps of coal from the nearby mines can still be found along the shoreline, brought down by the glacial meltwater.



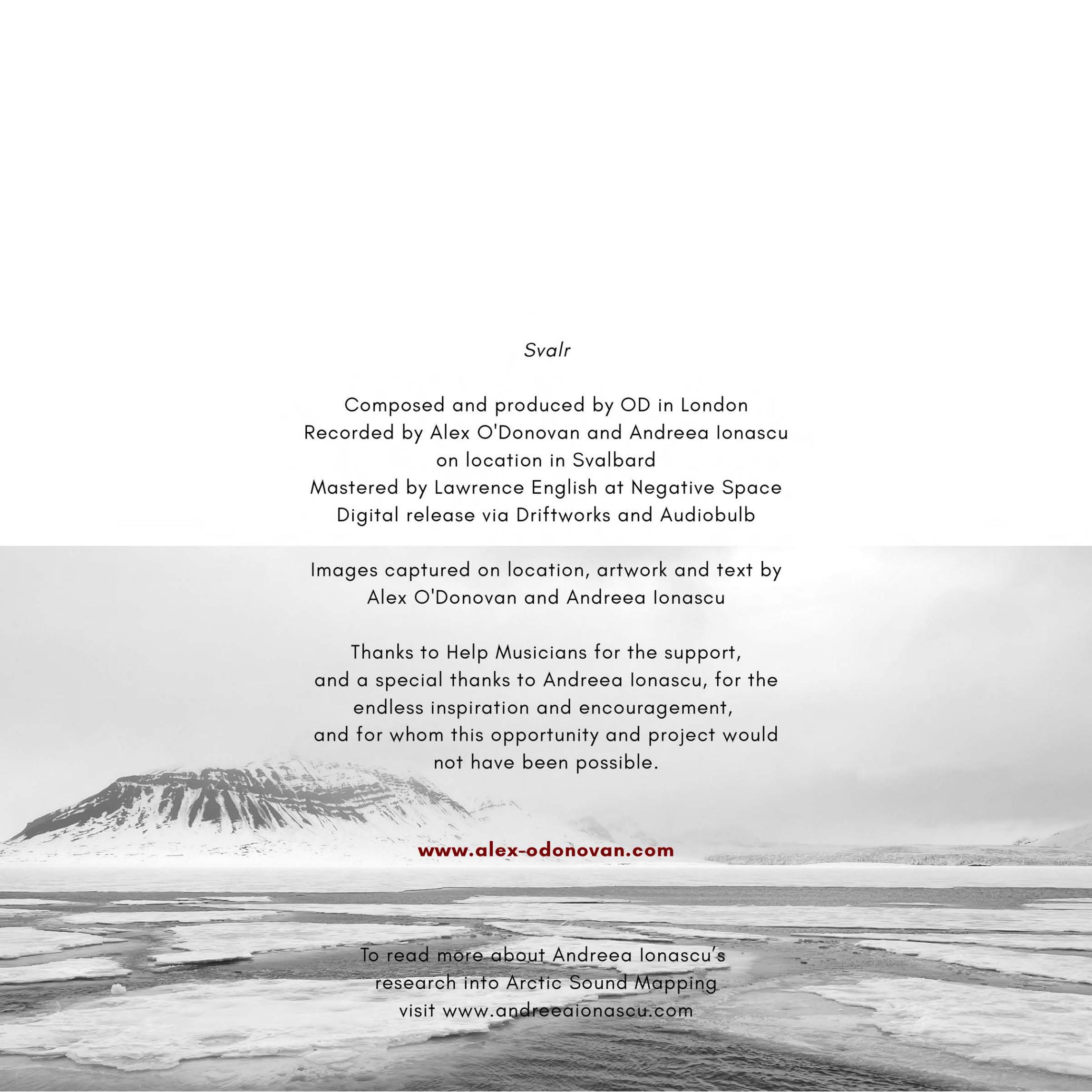
Svalr flows between soft and minimal textures, to angular atonal noise, to melodic ambience, with a minimalist approach to electronic composition, reflecting OD's experience as an emotional observer of this remote environment, and is inspired by the history of the human connection and disconnection to the land that, despite its remoteness, critically absorbs the global impact of humans in the Anthropocene.







SVALBARD
GLOBAL
SEED VAULT



Svalr

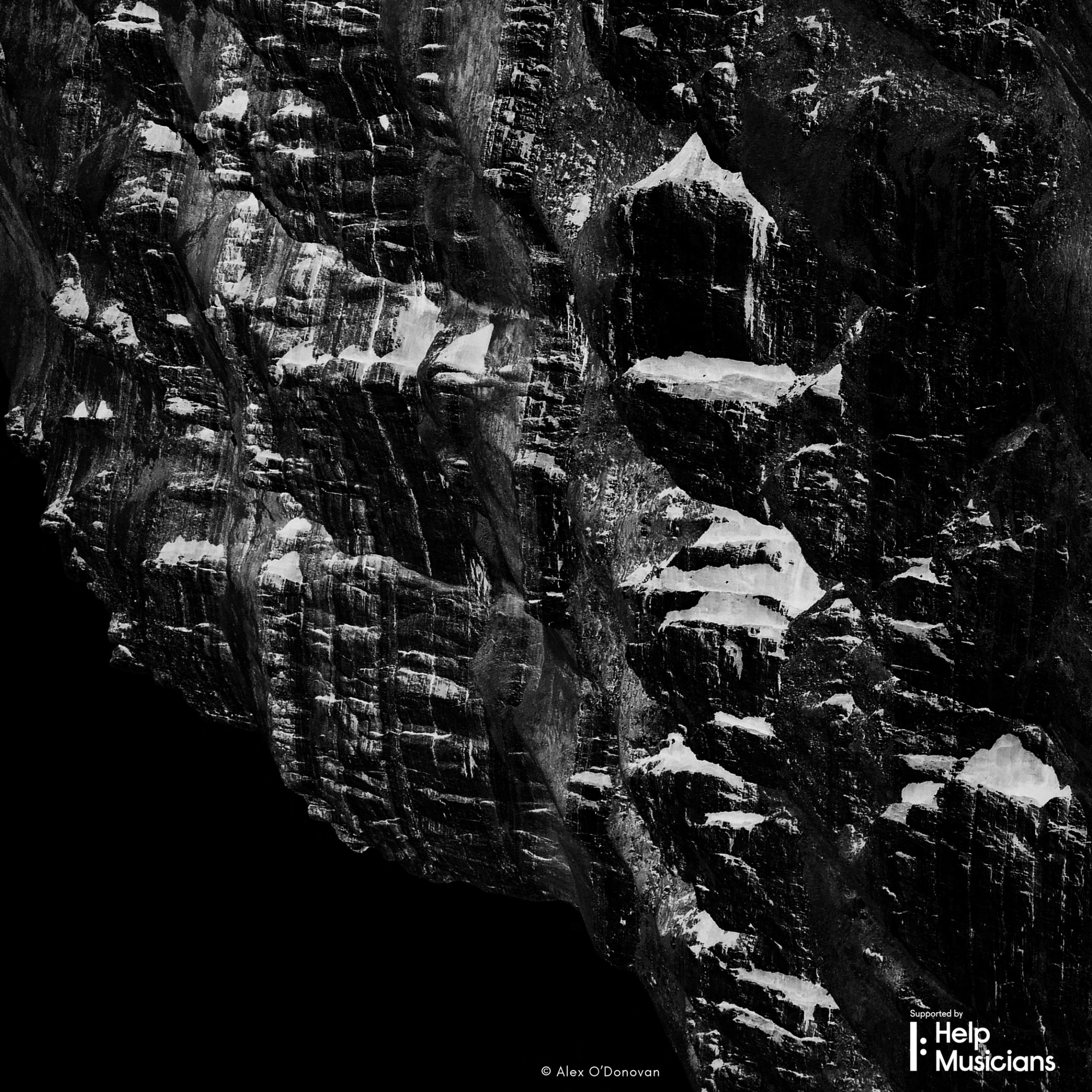
Composed and produced by OD in London
Recorded by Alex O'Donovan and Andreea Ionascu
on location in Svalbard
Mastered by Lawrence English at Negative Space
Digital release via Driftworks and Audiobulb

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Thanks to Help Musicians for the support,
and a special thanks to Andreea Ionascu, for the
endless inspiration and encouragement,
and for whom this opportunity and project would
not have been possible.

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To read more about Andreea Ionascu's
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