

FREE



# Intelligent Life Outside Reykjavík

Goodbye Grand Rokk • Everybody Loves Hot, Sweaty Men

Grendel as an Icelander • Too Horny for Trabant

+ Complete City Guide and Listings: Map, Info, Music, Arts and Events

Issue 13 / 25 August - 8 September 2006

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## SOUR GRAPES

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Dear Bart,  
Thanks to you and your colleagues for the listings in Grapevine's last issue. It sure was a helpful guide in finding our way around Reykjavík although our introduction to Sirkus didn't quite fit the description in The Grapevine...

On Saturday August 5th -after having a great evening at Innipúkinn we decided to spend our last hours in Iceland at Sirkus. It was about one o'clock when we arrived at the club and we were expecting quite a line but there were only 4 French people waiting to enter. The door opened a couple of times to let people out but was closed immediately and without any explanation. We waited patiently and assumed that it was just too full to let people in but after some time the door was opened again and a girl let us know that there were no French people allowed in Sirkus. The reason given: Sirkus did not tolerate French and French people are boring!?!  
Quite a generalization and pretty offending as well- even if you're from Amsterdam! Is this supposed to be one of the best places in Reykjavík? I really did not expect such a hostile approach from a club that is described as an alternative club and promotes itself with the slogan 'welcome to the jungle'. We spent some time in front of the door hoping that it was just a joke but soon found out that while people from Iceland were getting in without any problems, the doors stayed closed for our foreigners. Some people from Reykjavík complained about this door policy but nothing helped and the doors stayed shut. Is Sirkus known for its tourist ban or were we just plain unlucky? Take care,  
Bart & Vivian  
Amsterdam

*Bart and Vivian,  
You were extremely unlucky. There are usually a range of people inside Sirkus. But the line can be a drag - I stand in it sometimes, and it convinces me that sobriety is really the best policy. One more thing, the Welcome to the Jungle slogan was a bad joke on our part. It really isn't their slogan, we just thought it was a really lame way to describe a bar. That irony thing that was big in the 1990s, and that we only just discovered.*

Dear G'Day,  
My name is Karim and I am here in Iceland on holidays all the way from Sydney Australia. I thought I should write to you to congratulate you on an excellent newspaper. I think I learnt more about Iceland and Reykjavík from your newspaper (Issue 12) than any of the popular travel books. I stumbled across your paper on the table at the Subway just down the road from the HI Hostel where I am staying.  
I thought I'd express something of concern that I believe Iceland needs to address. Yesterday on the way home from Jökulsárlón Glacial Lagoon an event occurred that shook the life out of a coach bus full of tourists. I was staring out the window at the moss covered lava grounds listening to Guns N

Roses on my iPod when I heard this scream followed by hard braking and a loud thump. The back of the coach bus reared up momentarily and we then came to a complete stop. The bus had hit and run over a baby lamb that wandered out onto the road. The driver had the horrible task of removing the carcass while the mother sheep watched on, as did everyone on the bus. The travel guide, all shaken up and nearly in tears, explained that this happens on a regular basis and that human fatalities occur.

I really do think that laws need to be introduced to ensure that farm animals are behind fences and not left wandering popular tourist roads. I felt sorry for the lamb but was also grateful that the bus did not go off the road and crash. I would not care so much if the bus handled like a Porsche 911, but at 100km a 10-ton tourist coach full of people does not look good when it crashes. I would hate to think what would happen if a full grown cow wandered onto the road in front of the coach bus.

We passed quite a few cows just grazing freely without fences. I understand that you can't contain wild animals, we have a big problem with people hitting Kangaroos in Australia, but farm animals are another story. I hope that Iceland and the local farmers and communities address this issue, if not for the safety of tourists and Iceland people then for the well being of farm animals and livelihood for farmers.

On a different note ... I loved your articles, your cafe-bar-restaurant guide is awesome, and your article on the Rex nightclub convinced me to give it a try. Are the barmaids really that sexy??

I hope you publish my letter. Keep up the great work!  
See ya,  
Karim  
Sydney Australia

*Karim,  
Glad you enjoyed the issue. Bus drivers really shouldn't crash. I think that's the issue. And they shouldn't hit sheep. Sheep really aren't that sneaky. And they pretty much only wander around in the summer, when it's light out. So crashing into a sheep when you're a professional driver is inexcusable, in my opinion.*

*As someone who enjoys the wildlife of Iceland, I have to say I would prefer it if fences weren't erected throughout the country. This doesn't mean I want more dead sheep. I just think drivers whipping around at unsafe speeds should be held accountable. Not farmers.*

Dear Bart  
Having just spent a few days in your town, it was a pleasure to read an intelligently-written free paper which took in not only things of particular interest to English-speaking tourists but some very interesting articles about life in Iceland for the locals, especially the immigrant issue and the interview you did with the designers of your City Hall.  
The fact that I picked up on your summer concerts and managed to get to see Bela twice in one day was a definite added bonus...  
Low spot - the weather. What

have you guys done to deserve that in summer?!

High spots - the people and the scenery (when I could see it...) Soundtrack to the summer - Bela's Ticket for a train, of course. Sublime!  
Best wishes  
Peter A. Phillips

*Sindri Eldon did the interview with Studio Granda, who designed City Hall—I thought it was an excellent piece. As for the weather, I grew up in Wisconsin. This is good weather. Glad you found Bela. Every foreigner should buy at least three Icelandic CDs on a visit or consider him/herself a failure in life.*

RE: Greetings from Racine  
Greetings and salutations ~ Just wanted to send a friendly hello after seeing the write up on you in the paper the other day -- what a lovely surprise! I've been reading Grapevine for about 2 years or so now, and had the extreme pleasure of spending the best week of my life in Iceland in June '05. It's funny how you mention the similarities between Reykjavík and Racine; I felt at home immediately, but didn't really know why. And I'm still homesick-- yes, for a place I visited for only a week. Who can explain it? That's the beauty of Iceland. I hope to get back in the next year or so. Desperately.  
Cheers! -Julie.

*See, Peter. I told you. I'm from a cold place. My hometown paper in Racine, Wisconsin wrote a far too kind description and interview about the work the Grapevine is doing. Then I realised that a lot of people from Wisconsin read our paper, and never introduced themselves. We've really got to do something about our state motto: Don't speak until spoken to. Please, if you visit Iceland, and you're from Wisconsin, drop a line. (I won't be here, mind you, as this is my last issue, but I'll still be serving as an advising editor, and everybody in the office has specific instructions to be friendly to cheeseheads.)*

RE: Weren't you there?  
I went to Innipúkinn and saw you, disguised with a beard, playing two shows, one as a country band called the Foghorns, and one with an Arcade Fire-type band. Then I read the Innipúkinn review.

How did you manage to actually play a show and have no perspective on what happened? You didn't even manage to get the right genres for your own band.

If you were on stage, and you were in the festival, why didn't you write an insider's article on the thing? Isn't the Grapevine your job?

*A lot of questions here. Was I at Innipúkinn? Yes. Is the Grapevine my job? Yes. Most of my time at the music festival involved local bands yelling at me for giving out negative reviews. Only now do I see how amusing that might have been as an article. Finally, I didn't grow a beard to hide. I grew a beard to have something new on my face to talk about.*

## EDITORIALS

### All Grown Up

Okay, well, for the last time, welcome to Iceland. If this is your first time picking up our paper, or your first time in Reykjavík, let me assure you that you have just discovered a guide that will enhance your visit, and your life. You'll get nothing but honest opinions in this paper, guiding you through a town and a country that isn't all that easy to navigate without us.

In this issue, we present a feature about the loss of one of the key institutions of Reykjavík: Grand Rokk. As musician and journalist Haukur Magnússon explains, a smallish bar/chess club has played a key role in shaping the remarkably competent local scene. And we are losing it in the next few weeks, to older patrons interested in flat-screen TVs.

As it is August, the best time for travel, we also present as much information as we could muster on places to go around Iceland. For hikers, we're proud to present the further endeavours of our own Lonesome Traveller, a man with more testosterone than Floyd Landis and Marian Jones combined.

Beyond that, we bring you an excerpt from the Baron, an excellent work of historical fiction. And then you can read about the cultural goings on about town and country, interpreted by people who care about culture.



Bart Cameron,  
Editor

### The Death of Effort

I am a big fan of punk rock and punk rock values. I like the superficial sense of inclusion it promotes; the sense that you shouldn't have to be the world's greatest instrumentalist just to play some music, the sense that everyone can participate in some way regardless of their abilities, its sense of egalitarianism - that everyone is worth something and that every effort should be celebrated in its own right. I like punk rock and it's mantra of "everything's possible if you set your mind to it - so go out and do something."

Of course, no punk rock scene works like that in reality. They are rightly knit and hierarchal elitist organizations, with leaders and followers and a plethora of rules you have to abide. But that is beside the point. I like the idea of punk rock values and how they present themselves, what they want to be. It's probably better to at least romanticize and strive for a notion of egalitarianism than to ignore it completely.

Now to address long time readers of the Grapevine, the tourists who got addicted, the open-minded locals, the immigrants, and the people abroad who are just curious: the Grapevine is now, officially, an institution, an odd state to reach for an alternative newspaper.

We are no longer a paper that is based on one or two people's effort, ego, or personality, we are something bigger. There are a lot of people to thank for this, among them the people who started the paper, Hilmar Grétarsson and Jón Trausti Sigurðarson, along with the first editor, Valur Gunnarsson. In my time as editor, a few people have made important contributions, especially our photographer, Guðmundur Freyr Vigfússon, our designer, Gunnar Þorvaldsson, and writers like Paul Nikolov, Haukur Már Helgasson, Þórdís Elva Þorvaldsdóttir Bachmann and Sindri Eldon.

Ah wait, this is starting to look like a speech, isn't it? What kind of speech would it be? Well, here's a hint: I ain't getting any awards.

That's right, this is a retirement speech. I'm leaving Iceland to go to America and cover the build-up to the 2008 presidential elections. While I will stay on as an advising editor with this paper, and while I will return in October for our daily Airwaves issues, the people of Iceland

are guaranteed, at the very least, to be rid of my opinions and, even better, my God-forsaken editorial photos, for the next two years.

The Grapevine will be no worse for my departure. In the past year and a half, the paper has grown up. We now have writers, and photographers, and designers, and ways of doing things, and we have an editor with experience, patience, and an established voice taking over, Sveinn Birgir Björnsson.

I am proud of the work I did at the Grapevine, with the newspaper and with our recent book, but the real test of our success, which I believe we will pass with flying colours, will be this transition over the next few weeks. I firmly believe the paper will continue to grow, the Grapevine name will get stronger, and I will be forgotten, and that is the best thing an editor can hope for - to have created a paper that speaks as something bigger than the individual names associated with it. I plan on coming back in two years, pointing at a Grapevine far superior to any product I ever edited, and impressing a local bartender by bragging about how I worked on the paper way back when.

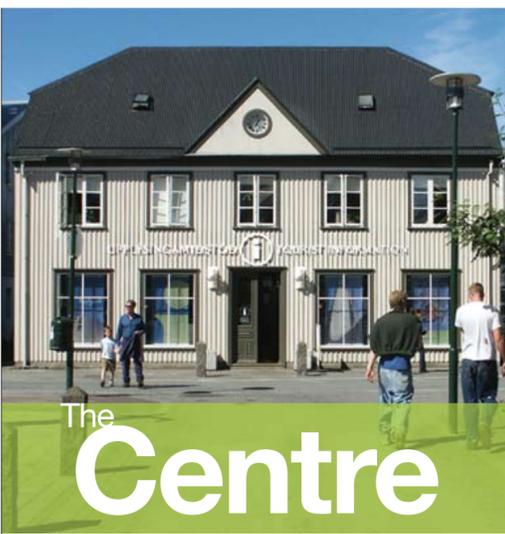
So I subscribe to the thought that everybody should go out and do something without letting impossibly high standards, or a lack of finances or talent hinder them. And that's kind of been the spirit of Reykjavík and even the wider world these past few years, with the advent of internet blog journalism and whatnot. And by all accounts, that should make me happy. But I am not.

There seems to be a fundamental misunderstanding regarding the abandonment of some of the more exclusive and oppressive standards the world has been operating by. Even if it really is always better to do something than nothing, that does not mean that just anything will do. You still have to make an effort. The beauty lies in the effort anyway, rather than action itself.

My generation has been getting active in fields like publishing and writing recently and while I am all for that, I still feel the urge to distance myself from most of their works, mainly

because they seem to suffer from taking the whole 'let's just go out and do something' thing too seriously - or not seriously enough. For instance: if you want to publish a magazine, the main point of that should be what you want and have to say, rather than just the act of publishing itself. That's really beside the point.

You probably can make a lot of money selling ads in a magazine that celebrates that anything can be said, and that's maybe more exciting than the actual making of it. But the punk ethic is not about assuming that readers (or audiences) are idiots that will gladly swallow every piece of poorly written and ill thought out bullshit you spoon-feed them. At least grant readers and audiences a minimum of respect, the other key tenet to the punk aesthetic.



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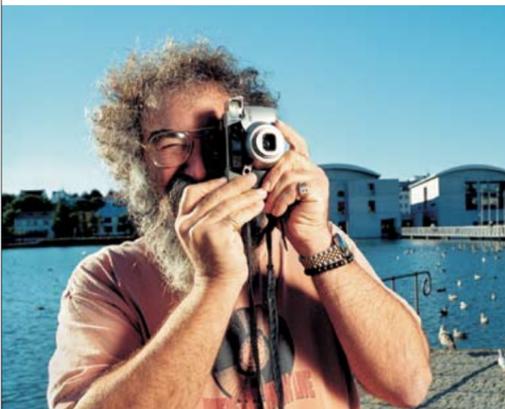
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## The Upstart University Steals the Hearts of Young Iceland

Bifröst earns a following, and saves a small town

BY STEINUNN JAKOBSDÓTTIR

Icelanders have long taken pride in their high level of education. With eight universities and an ever-growing student body, there seems to be legitimate reason to brag. Now it seems that the Bifröst School of Business is witnessing its golden age with the biggest boost in applications since its establishment nearly 90 years ago. While multiplying its student body in only a few years, the school is also transforming a small rural area into a thriving community.

Bifröst is located in Norðurárdalur valley in Borgarfjörður, only 90 minutes away from the capital, and the increase in the number of students this last decade at Bifröst has been truly remarkable. In 1997, 100 students attended the school; in the fall of 2006, the number has risen to around 700.

Bifröst offers accommodation for all the students attending the school, as well as for their families, and today almost 800 people live on the school campus or in nearby summerhouses where they can get tanned, work out, relax in the sauna, play golf or chitchat with fellow students while grabbing a bottle of beer at the Bifröst Café between classes.

The price for all of this is 236,000 ISK per semester, making Bifröst the most expensive school in the country. Still, its popularity is growing and young Reykjavík residents are moving away from their homes in the city to attend. The school is surrounded by towering mountains and dramatic nature, far from the bustling nightlife in the capital, a choice that would have been unheard of a decade ago.

"The establishment of two new faculties can explain the increase in students in some part," Bárður Örn Gunnarsson, a former student and now the marketing manager of Bifröst, explains. Now there is a Faculty of Law, Business and Social Sciences and Economics, offering various programs at the bachelor and master levels. We also have foreign professors teaching classes and taking part in research projects.

"But for the most part, people attend the school because of the quality of study," Bárður adds.

Although the study is the primary reason for all the people at Bifröst, the campus is getting a reputation for its social life, with active political organisations, a gym, hot tub, sauna, nine-hole golf course, a weekly pub quiz and its famous Thursday drinking. Judging from those students I talked to, life at Bifröst seems pretty damn good.

Both the small class sizes and the location rank high in the students' comments about the advantages Bifröst has.

"Because the school based in the countryside the atmosphere is quiet and students have an easier time concentrating," Davíð Klemensson, a third-year business student told the Grapevine. Before he moved to Bifröst, Davíð lived in downtown Reykjavík and was surprised by how much he liked living outside of the city.

"The school's emphasis on interaction in classes, challenging assignments and teamwork is a big plus. Everyone wants to help each other out and you get to know fellow students much better than in large classrooms where students scatter around in different directions after school. Here you get to know people you will probably come across in the work field after graduation," Davíð said.

When asked about the high percentage of graduates who work as executives or administrators in various Reykjavík businesses: "Together with the companionship, what I find most important are all the practical skills you learn when working for example on big research projects, skills that are truly helpful when students flock to the work place."

For that, the school has earned a good reputation in recent years. The research at Bifröst has also gotten an impressive amount of coverage.

When a couple of students in the business department got the idea of putting up a golf course in Viðey, mayoral candidate and Independence Party Golden Boy Gísli Marteinn Baldursson lent his reputation to the endeavor.

Regarding whether or not Iceland, a country of only 300,000, needs another major university, Davíð Klemensson is adamant that

Bifröst is an essential element to the local educational system. "I had looked into all the universities before applying to Bifröst and found this one suited me the best. Bifröst is quite different from the others and in my view, after graduating, students are better prepared for the work place. The other universities don't suit everyone and of course the same applies to Bifröst, so I think it is very important to maintain a good variety in education."

Sonja Yr Þorbergsdóttir, a student of business law, agreed. After moving from Reykjavík while pregnant and starting school at Bifröst, she now lives in an apartment on campus with her one-year-old daughter, husband and dog.

"I started studying law in the University of Iceland, but got bored of having to sit in the stairs of crowded Háskólabíó and found the study both boring and uninteresting. At Bifröst, we have fewer students, which results in a more personal connection between teachers and students as well as among the group itself. That can lead to some lively discussions in and out of the classroom, not to mention the benefits of knowing everyone when you are here with a child. There is always someone ready to babysit and the nursery school is just next door. Being close to nature is also great for the kids."

In a small community like Bifröst, everyone knows each other and, as Klemensson points out, it is a great place for exchange students to study and get to know the locals. Every term a group of foreign students from all over the globe travels to Bifröst, as courses in English are offered in all faculties.

"In a small community like this, the exchange students blend in much more easily. Usually they room with a local and everything is done to make their stay easier," Klemensson explains, which is quite different from what those exchange students attending universities in the capital usually experience, as they often find it hard to mingle with people other than other foreign students during school hours.

Apart from being beneficial to students trying to get a degree, make friends or get to know a different culture, the university also

has caused many new developments in the countryside, as all the new inhabitants have brought a booming business for the neighbouring area. The students use services in Borgarnes, like the bank, supermarket and restaurants. A large group lives at Bifröst all year round, 70 children go to the preschool on campus and the older kids attend the elementary school of Varmaland. Teachers and waiters have jobs year-round, which is not typical for small towns in Iceland. New apartments, a bigger preschool, more teaching facilities, a larger gym and a new service area to meet the growing need of the inhabitants has also opened up new employment possibilities for developers. All this has to be considered as a positive step for the area and a much better industry to build on than we are witnessing in other parts of the country.

"The universities at Bifröst and Hvanneyri have almost become the base market in Borgarfjörður. Hundreds of jobs have been created in the area which has had great effects on Borgarbyggð," Bárður Örn Gunnarsson explains.

Kolfínna Jóhannesdóttir researched this issue for her graduation project at Bifröst. She found that the school played a significant role in population growth in the Borgarbyggð area since the year 1997. With its operation, the school has increased the number of young inhabitants in the area, which has not been the case in comparable municipalities in the country, not to mention raised the level of education in Borgarbyggð. All this strengthens the human capital in the meantime.

While no one can see the end of this boom, students, spouses, children, teachers and staff members will keep living in harmony in this small but growing community that sounds more like a luxury holiday lodge than a school. The development and establishment will continue and the aim is set at having 1,500-2,000 people inhabiting the area in the next ten years. Hopefully achieving this goal won't diminish the school's charm or hurt its personal teaching policy.



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## News in Brief

BY HAUKUR MAGNÚSSON AND VALGERÐUR ÞORODDSDÓTTIR PHOTOS BY SKARI

### Bolungarvík fights waning population with Love Week

The remote Westfjords town of Bolungarvík has a rather unorthodox approach to tackling the Icelandic small town's ever-decreasing population numbers, as their recent "Love Week" indicates.

The week-long celebration is, in the words of key organiser and Bolungarvík elementary school principal Soffía Vagnsdóttir, "... an attempt to get the fine people of Bolungarvík to love more, and to make more love and thus more babies – resulting in more residents for Bolungarvík. We basically wanted to get our town growing again."

A reward is offered for those who show cold hard results of Love Week's effort. According to Vagnsdóttir, those townsfolk who submit a living, breathing infant in the month of May and can prove they were in Bolungarvík for the conception, can expect monetary compensation and various gifts from the town and its inhabitants.

"After the first festival, our very own love princess was born here and her parents were in turn showered with gifts and praise. Last year's festival did not bear any lovin' fruit, but we are confident that this one got our people busy in their bedrooms."

"We have to get more people in town by any means, Love Week is thus also about showing the outside world just how loving and caring us Bolvíkingar are and that Bolungarvík is an excellent place to be," Vagnsdóttir told the Grapevine. She added that Love Week has established itself as an event Bolungarvík's townspeople look forward to each year and steadily attracts more visitors from around the globe.

Numerous erotic events took place throughout the week. The festival commenced with the release of thousands of so-called Love Balloons intended to spread Bolungarvík's message of love and prosperity (not to mention aluminium-based litter) across the

globe to those deserving. Funk band Jagúar played their funky funk in an attempt to warm up those tender country loins, love-based arts and craft courses were held and townspeople paid visits to Bolungarvík's oldest and newest couples. The festival was closed by an erotic aphrodisiac jam-making session.

### Security tightened at Leif Eiríksson on urging of U.S. aviation authorities

In response to an announcement from British authorities on Thursday, August 10, that a terrorist plot to launch a wave of attacks on airplanes flying between Britain and the United States had been thwarted, Leif Eiríksson International Airport issued a statement on their website declaring that restrictions on carry-on items would be implemented for all passengers travelling to the United States of America.

The statement explained that at the urging of United States aviation authorities, passengers travelling to the U.S. would be restricted from bringing any type of liquid on board into passenger cabins of the planes. According to the release, liquids include all beverages including water, liquor, sodas and juices, as well as perfumes and all types of creams (including shampoos, toothpaste, etc.).

However, NFS reported that security restrictions had been amended to include all passengers on international flights. The new rules state that most passengers will be permitted to purchase drinks at the airport's duty-free stores, but that passengers travelling to the United States must pick up their beverages at the departure gate, and that the seal must be broken before boarding.

Small quantities of food and milk will also be permitted for passengers travelling with children, as well as medications not in excess of 240 ml for those with health complications.

Leif Eiríksson has not issued a formal news release regarding this updated security plan.

Icelandair recently announced on their website that because of the "changed conditions", checked baggage restrictions will be loosened to allow each passenger 23 kg, as opposed to the former 20 kg, and the price for each additional kg will be reduced from 1,800 ISK to 750 ISK.

At security check-in, every passenger will be asked to remove their shoes to be X-rayed along with other carry-on items.

Passengers should plan to arrive at the airport at least two hours before scheduled departure, and should expect delays.

### Independence Party ministers crash journalist protest

Saturday, Prime Minister Geir H. Haarde and three Independence Party officials were escorted by local reporter and aviator Ómar Ragnarsson on a day's guided tour and flight over the Kárahnjúkar dam project. Haarde accepted Ragnarsson's public invitation for the trip in a late-night phone conversation earlier that week, Ragnarsson told Morgunblaðið. The ministers Haarde brought along for the ride were Minister of Education Þorgerður Katrín Gunnarsdóttir, Party Chairman Arnþjórg Sveinsdóttir and Chief of Parliament's Environmental Council Guðlaugur Þór Þórðarson.

The invitation to the trip, published in Morgunblaðið earlier this month, called for 11 "influential Icelanders" to accompany Ragnarsson on a day trip around the Kárahnjúkar area in order to allow them witness "with their own eyes, the [dam's] structures and the greatest part of the area affected by it, rather than just a small portion [like the luxurious wine-and-dine tours seemingly offered by other parties of interest do]."

The 11 people Ragnarsson specified in the letter were, along with President Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson, Prime Minister Geir H. Haarde, editor of Morgunblaðið Styrmir

Gunnarsson, editor of Fréttablaðið Björgvin Guðmundsson, editor of Blaðið Sigurjón M. Egilsson, director of Ríkissjónvarpið Páll Magnússon, director of NFS Sigmundur Ernir Rúnarsson, and director of Skjár 1, the three Progressive Party ministers: Minister of Foreign Affairs Valgerður Sverrisdóttir, Minister of Industry and Commerce Jón Sigurðsson, and Minister for the Environment Jónína Bjartmarz.

Reportedly, only four of the 11 invited had responded to the offer in time for the proposed deadline. However, along with Magnússon (Ríkissjónvarpið), Egilsson (Blaðið), and Rúnarsson (NFS), Haarde accepted the offer on behalf of himself and several uninvited officials of the (ostensibly pro-heavy industry) Independence Party.

In his letter, Ragnarsson urged his invitees to consider taking a look at the oft-disputed dam project from a different perspective.

"You've previously taken the time to acquaint yourself quite well with one side of the case [presumably Landsvirkjun's], but not so much the opposing one. I am inviting you to observe both sides with your own eyes in a day, while there's still a chance. [...] I believe it is my duty as a reporter to give you a chance to get to know the area affected by the dam in the aforementioned manner. It is now up to you to decide what you believe your duties to be."

In an interview with Morgunblaðið, Haarde said that while he'd greatly enjoyed the tour, it would not affect the decisions already made concerning the Kárahnjúkar dam.

### 1.5 Billion ISK loss for Dagsbrún this year

Dagsbrún, owner of 365 Publishing, has reported an approximate 1.5 billion ISK net loss so far this year, with approximately 87 percent (1.3 billion ISK) occurring in the second quarter, according to Viðskiptablaðið. The loss is considerably greater than what

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## THE VIKING

ICELAND'S LARGEST SOUVENIR SHOP

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### THE VIKING : INFO

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### NEWS



market analysts predicted, which was between -101 and -328 million ISK for the first half of the year.

365, publisher of daily newspaper Fréttablaðið among others, is now hatching plans to cut costs for their local and foreign press. Ari Edwald, the company's director, told Fréttablaðið that thus far the company had no plans to downsize the size or frequency of any of their papers, as was done with tabloid DV earlier this year.

While sales of the company's stock have increased by 188 percent in the first half of the year, from 13.2 billion ISK to 20.2 billion ISK, the company's losses, according to Viðskiptablaðið, were spurred by many factors, including inflation, new and raised taxes, and the introduction of new investors in the market.

Gunnar Smári Egilsson, director of Dagsbrún, said in a recent company press release that returns for the company should be greater than what the current numbers show, since projects in the second half of the year will work to make up lost profits.

Earlier this year, Dagsbrún founded 365 Media Scandinavia in Denmark with plans to publish Nyhedssavisen, a free daily newspaper scheduled to be distributed to every house in the country starting in the fall. According to a story published in Danish online news service Børsen last week, Dagsbrún is having second thoughts about the publication of the paper, as they announced recently the founding of a separate investment fund, of which the company would be a minor partner, with a 600 million ISK investment.

Former director of Føroya banka in Denmark, Jørn Astrup Hansen, says that the company's decision to create the fund separate from the publication bears witness to the fact that the company is being cautious about their involvement in the Danish free-paper market in light of increasing competition.

When two new free newspapers enter the Danish market in the fall, Mads Dahl Andersen, editor of Søndagsavisen, predicts a "media war".

Andersen says that in the case of such a "war", publishers JP/Politiken, Berlingske and Dagsbrún will incur severe financial losses.

### Teenagers continue to drink at annual Culture Night spectacle

Reykjavik's annual Culture Night festival, Menningarnótt, took place last Saturday, featuring a curious amalgam of the city's finest cultural offerings juxtaposed with cotton-candy stalls, advertising and often heavily drunk attendees.

The festival has been steadily growing since its inception 11 years ago and now consistently draws crowds of up to 100,000 to the small city centre.

Those partaking in the festival could experience various events in and around the city centre, with concerts, art shows or theatrics taking place on nearly every street corner.

Culture Night was opened with an 11 a.m. speech by Reykjavik Mayor Vilhjálmur Þ. Vilhjálmsson. Cultural fun continued throughout the day, with a reportedly disappointing fireworks display at 10:30 p.m. marking the end of official events.

Recent incarnations of Menningarnótt have been heavily criticised for ultimately turning into drunken spectacles and this year's festival certainly wasn't any different in that respect, with a reported 15-20 thousand attendees partying well after the conclusion of official events, according to the Reykjavik police.

A post-Meningarnótt statement confirmed that levels of drunkenness had indeed steadily increased as the night went on, followed by various bouts of fighting and other cultural activities. It went on to say that several gallons of alcohol had been confiscated and that 20 underage teenagers in varying states of intoxication had been escorted to a youth shelter.

In an interview with Morgunblaðið, Reykjavik Police Chief Geirjón Þórisson speculated that in light of the teen drinking, it might be viable to move Culture Night from Saturday to Sunday.

### Fifty-thousand celebrate Gay Pride downtown

Reykjavik's annual Gay Pride festivities culminated on Saturday, August 12, when an estimated 50,000 marched down Laugavegur, celebrating the gay lifestyle and reminding Icelanders that there is still a long way to go to secure fair and equal treatment of all civilians regardless of their sexual orientation. The parade's final destination was Lækjargata, where a rally featuring various speeches and musical performances went ahead.

The day of the march, an unnamed coalition of Icelandic Christian sects published a full-page ad in Morgunblaðið encouraging homosexuals to "seek out a cure for their disease."

A heavy debate followed, with Icelandic health officials publicly condemning such rehabilitation attempts and the Lutheran state church making sure to distance itself from the coalition.

### Immigration in the spotlight

Immigration concerns have been in the Icelandic media spotlight these past few days, spurred by Morgunblaðið's reports last Sunday that six female immigrants from outside of the EEA zone were seeking legal assistance for work- and residency-related matters after abandoning their Icelandic husbands.

According to the Morgunblaðið piece, the six women – one of whom has already been deported – were all subject to violence by their husbands.

The discussion has seen a growing critique of the Icelandic government's decision to grant EEA citizens priority over others when it comes to handing out work permits, with many claiming that the policy serves as a weapon in the hands of abusive husbands.

"They can indicate that if their wives don't follow their will, they can get them kicked out of the country," one Morgunblaðið correspondent was quoted as saying.

In a statement issued on Monday, the Coalition of Women of Foreign Descent heavily protested the deportation of foreign women "whose only crime was to flee violent husbands that draw their power from unjust laws and a brutal bureaucracy. These acts of deportation send out the message to abusive husbands and their wives that they are free to subordinate them; otherwise they'll simply be denied a work permit and thrown out of the country. No woman should have to dwell a single minute with a man who uses violence against her, and it's not the government's job to hand those men such oppressive tools. It is a matter of justice that the laws take into consideration the situation of foreigners from outside the EEA zone who suffer the hardship of having a violent mate.

"The foreign women's association demands that Alþingi accepts law changes that will stop this abuse and make it safe for women to flee domestic violence, regardless of their origin."

# Inside Reykjavik

## The Grapevine Guide



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## Perfectly Brutal Exports

An interview with Hugleikur Dagsson

BY BART CAMERON PHOTO BY SKARI

Last issue, the Grapevine's own featured cartoonist, Hugleikur Dagsson, gave us an enormous map with Icelandic horses abusing each other with anal dildos. This issue, he informs us he's been signed to Penguin. We met with the next big thing.

**/// So when the hell did you get so famous?**  
– This week. I'm not famous yet. Give it another week.

**/// And you've sold an Icelandic comic collection to an enormous English publisher. I had always thought these comics were meant only for consumption here. Aren't they exploring the Icelandic mentality?**  
– Yeah, I think so. I wasn't really sure at the time, when I first did them. I really didn't do these kind of comics to publish them, I did them without thinking.

**/// How did this all start?**  
– Actually, there was this arts show in Seyðisfjörður in 2001, the summer of 2001, and I was participating in an art show with two other artists and there was like an hour until the show started. I just wanted to put more into my show, and I had these small pieces of paper in front of me, and I drew two little figures, stick figures, and one of them said 'Fuck me' in Icelandic. And then I just got another piece of paper and drew something else, and I did like 30 drawings in 20 minutes, that's the first 30 pages in my first book.

**/// Which isn't Avoid Us?**  
– No, it's Love Us. Which was self-published.

**/// It's a long way from Seyðisfjörður to London, though. What happened after the show?**

– I kept on doing this 'cause I got a really good response at the show, and I graduated in 2002 from art school and started working with like disabled teenagers, artistic teenagers in Garðabær, FG. I had these comics, so, when you graduate from art school you have to do some art, and I had these drawings, and I decided just to print them and staple them together and try to sell them. I put them in stores like Dogma and Eymundsson and 12 Tónar and they got some really good attention.

I did that for three Christmases, next Christmas I did 'Kill us' and then 'Fuck us'.

**/// Nothing says Christmas like Fuck Us.**  
– Then JPV contacted me and I made a deal with him and published AVOID US, Collected Works, and the same year I did Save us.

**/// And you've been with the grapevine since kill us?**

– I think so. The first thing I did for Grapevine was Whaley, I had done Kill Us and was working on Fuck Us by then.

**/// I have to ask, as an artist, isn't it shocking or appalling having these simple sketches be the work that finds success, not the work you trained for?**

– No it's not shocking. I never even considered them sketches, just really simple drawings.

Yeah, I was just happy, actually, because of everything I did, the thing that was the easiest was the one that succeeded. The easiest thing I do is what I live on now. But it's not always easy. Sometimes I have a deadline and I have to do maybe 40 or 50 drawings in one day, and I usually do it when it's late at night. When you're in the middle of that, your mind gets kind of worked into a weird state.

**/// I still want to say, how do you print these works in a place without the social context? These are works of social criticism, right?**

– Well, I went to a Danish comic book convention in April, with 'Avoid us', and you know, people liked it. Americans, British people and like Danish people, and many Danish people said it was very much like the Danish



sense of humour. But I'm not really sure what the Icelandic sense of humour is. I guess it is a cold humour, cold and dark humour, that's what Icelandic sense of humour is. You can see dark humour everywhere.

**/// Yes, there is dark humour everywhere. But here, in a country where the media and public dialogue is required to be positive, then your work functions as social criticism.**

– That's a good point. Yeah, I can see the social commentary in my own work but it was eh, that was almost accidental, when I got my first review, when people started talking about how I was doing this, and I was very pleased because at one point I felt extra pressure, because now I had to keep writing relevant comics.

**/// And in England they'll be as funny but they won't have the same function.**

– That's probably true. Maybe I should move to England and work on my book there, and then move to the States and you know, conquer the world that way.

**/// You could finish up in Japan.**

– Yeah, I'd like that. But they have the sickest shit in Japan.

**/// You mean manga about little schoolgirls.**

– Someone told me, though, because of all the countries I'd really like to be published in, Japan would be the coolest, but people told me they don't have sarcasm there. So I see all the sick comics I read from Japan are not sarcastic, they're just really sincere.

**/// That's gotta be disappointing. They have to have sarcasm, they like Godzilla.**

– Yeah, but maybe the sarcasm is very fine. Almost invisible sometimes.

**/// Let's talk about subject matter. In our last issue, you went crazy over priests. You were once censored for criticising priests. But you've told me that priests love your work.**

– Well, I did that map over two days and spent probably eight to ten consecutive hours on that. And when you're just working for a short time I have to find something to do and don't repeat myself, so there was a lot of priests and a lot of ass on it. One time, there was a priest singing about ass.

>>> CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE

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/// And to think that we didn't get any complaints. I'm alarmed that a newspaper's website censored you. After one complaint. Is that the way things work around here?

/// Yeah, but they don't have to apply reason or logic to their complaint, they just have to...  
- Not always, no. But I think usually priests are very smart people who have a big sense of sarcasm.

/// I would have assumed that as you cover everything from rape, incest, faecal matter nonsense, that there would really be more reactions.  
- Well, you know, reactions so far are to blasphemy and almost nothing at all about these incest jokes. At that convention I mentioned, there was this American couple looking through my book and they said, "You have a lot of incest jokes in this book." I just said I was from Iceland. They just said, "Of course."

/// They can just pretty much do that for every problem that comes up through. "I'm from Iceland."  
- Yeah. "I'm from Iceland. It's cold up there." I think Penguin are

to where the guy who complained was coming from because he got really offended because the fact that I mentioned AIDS in a joke context. So AIDS is something you shouldn't joke about

/// I think he was referring to the 80s pop culture in the U.S. There, derogatory jokes about AIDS got mentioned all the time in pop culture, the most infamous example being Sebastian Bach's Aids: Kills Fags Dead t-shirt. As I am an American, and I present a mix of American and Icelandic culture, I shouldn't have presented something that only works in an Icelandic context.  
- Yeah, you have seen, living in America, a huge wave of AIDS jokes. Living in America and knowing lots of people dying of AIDS, you're going to find it offensive. So, I get it.

/// But the joke is more acceptable in an Icelandic context, because you guys have never had that negative stigma. You had a pretty responsible government when AIDS came in to Iceland, and they educated right away, that was the time the gay rights movement started getting going here.  
- And besides, this is a story about a man who had AIDS and hid it from

That was the joke, making fun of the stick figures. But then later on I read it and published it, I thought it was crap.

/// Are there any that stick in your head as the ones that make you laugh as you look at them?  
- No, well, I don't laugh out loud at my jokes when I think of them, not anymore. I do it sometimes when I'm drawing them. Sure there is a lot of stuff I am pleased with, stuff I've done at the Grapevine, like the elephant, dolphin and the Christmas story.

/// I've got one favourite that is lodged in my brain. A couple on a blind date, and the women says "So that's the worst thing I ever did. What about you?" And the guy says "I once participated in a gang rape."  
- (Laughing.) That's one I had in my head for a really long time. I had it in my head before I started doing this. Because I was reading, I saw it in the newspaper a piece about how many people in ten had participated in a gang rape, something like that. A staggering amount of people had participated in rape, and I was kind of blown away that I could walk out of this coffeehouse right now and pass a rapist at one point. I was thinking that and also OK, what kind of lives do these guys live, do they wake up in the morning and go, "Shit, I can't believe I raped a girl last night, I was soooo drunk." Are they like that? I mean, how do they think? So I thought of this situation, of a rapist on a date and he would just tell her the truth, you know, it's like truth or dare, like "What's the worst thing you've ever done?" "Well, I once participated in gang rape. I guess that's the worst thing I've done." I mean, how do people that do all those horrible things, how do they get through the day? That's a huge mystery to me and a lot of my stories are a way for me to deal with that.

**There was this American couple looking through my book and they said, "You have a lot of incest jokes in this book." I just said I was from Iceland. They just said, "Of course."**

putting some information about Iceland on the back of the book, like Iceland has this many sunny days a year and people like putrefied shark, so that explains the book. So that's what I do, I sit in the darkness and eat putrefied shark and then I make comics. It's almost correct. I eat and I sit.

his girlfriend until they were married and told it to her going away from the church, so it's a story about a very irresponsible human being who had AIDS. And it's what most of the stories are about, like human behaviour gone wrong.

/// If you and I are going to do an interview, then we have to talk about the AIDS comic, whether I should have apologised for printing it.  
- You don't have to apologise to me.

/// And this is why priests like your work so much? Because you focus on the fallibility of man?  
- Yes. I think so. Also, I have God there (in my comics), but I don't really draw God so it's not really blasphemous. I just make his word balloons come out from the air.

/// That's not my intention. I just wonder if you think it was justified?  
- Well, I think it's the only time ever when there's been an apology by you guys, by the Grapevine. Is it the only time? Really?

/// What's the most embarrassing comic you did? One you would be embarrassed to look at while someone else was in the room?  
- One joke in Save Us has these three guys, typical stick figures like I draw them, and one of them says "So I'm an albino, so what. Stop looking at me like that!" And I thought it was really funny when I wrote it because I wrote it because in stick figures everyone's an albino.

/// Yes.  
- Well, that's kind of an honour, in a way. I didn't make an issue out of it, but I was very curious as

## Cobain's Corpse Awakens, Shoots Self Again

Magni and Supernova kick culture in the teeth

BY BART CAMERON

At 8 o'clock Pacific Time, Kurt Cobain's corpse sprang from its grave, sprinted to a local Wal Mart, purchased a shot gun, and blew the last piece of decaying grey matter out of the inch of the skull that still remained on its neck.

An Icelander was responsible for this poor corpse's misery.

In the months that we have covered the reality television show Rockstar: Supernova we've had some laughs. The dorky trio of Supernova are consistently naive and go-lucky, and as they lead a gaggle of hapless wannabes, they are sometimes funny. In fact, living in Iceland, this is probably the only place in the world where one could watch and enjoy Rockstar. We have the advantage over the rest of the world in that we have the only likable contestant not suffering from constant sexual harassment. Up until the recent episode, we also had a contestant who had some degree of integrity.

So we watched as Tommy Lee, who built his rocker reputation by punching out women's teeth and video-taping his wife while he infecting her with Hep C, made word play and pretended to know the value of the domestic life. We watched Gilby Clark, of Heart fame, say casually nice things with the defeated eyes of a man who has been cuckolded many, many times. We even took pleasure in seeing Frankenstein look-alike Jason Newsted, a man with so little character that after playing with Metallica for 20 years he was known as the new guy, grunted out advice on vocal technique. We began to appreciate the show in the way kids might appreciate a local blind, foul-smelling, bad-tempered dog that licks itself while sitting in a prominent front yard.

The bad-tempered mutt licking itself appeal faded this week, when an iconic piece of music was destroyed by Iceland's own Magni—and then the whole genre of rock was obliterated by Supernova. Of all songs, Magni chose to sing Smells Like Teen Spirit, the hypercritical

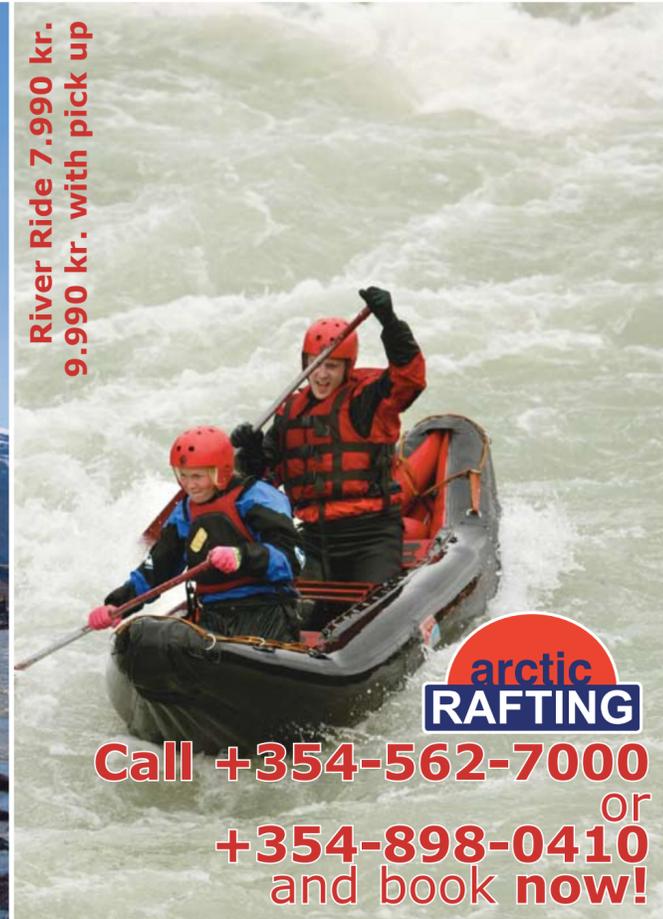
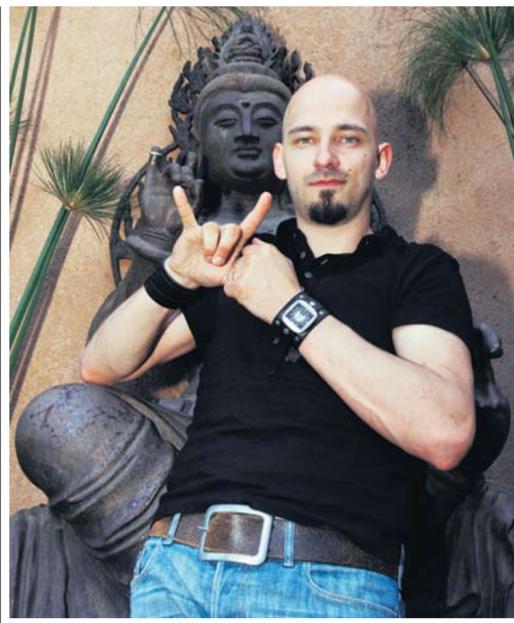
examination of nitwit culture at the beginning of the 1990s. Cobain said, about writing the song, that when he was growing up, kids in Aberdeen Washington were "like Beavis and Buttthead, only not as smart." Cobain's songs chronicled the torture of living in a brain dead, butthead age.

Our own Magni got up on international television, and sang Teen Spirit like he was channelling Creed, that is, he took an intelligent and critical song, and performed it as though it was a vague utterance meant to allow the singer to strain the throat and get that muscle showing, just above the collar, that women might check out.

To then see the cast of Supernova critique it, and ask, brainless as the day they sniffed their first bottle of glue, why Magni hadn't thought to smash a guitar. The whole band really thought Magni did well, but should have smashed something. Magni was followed by the contestant Ryan Star, who, along with Tommy Lee himself, was likely the subject of another Nirvana song, Rape Me. Ryan Star may be brain dead, without charisma, and completely out of fashion, but at least he follows instructions. As he sang an original song that sounded like a Live tune without the pesky grammar, he posed his way through throwing a guitar, to show how rowdy he could be.

It was a sad evening for those of us at the Grapevine. We had wanted to like Rockstar, and Magni. We have dedicated large portions of our magazine to the genre of rock music, and we wanted to keep on liking that genre. That has been taken from us. To hear Nirvana would be to remember the day a neighbour demonstrated that "he likes all our pretty songs but he don't know what it means," as the corpse of Kurt Cobain screamed while waiting for the underpaid Wal Mart checkout girl to okay his ID. To hear rock would be to remember the brain-dead gaze of Ryan Star throwing his guitar.

We are all now dead inside.



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## Reader Response : Why Israel Has No Alternative

BY STEFAN KUBENS

This article refers to the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon. It shows why Israel is only making use of its right to self-defence. The motivation to write something about this conflict has grown continuously the more I read about it in European and Icelandic newspapers. In particular, I was motivated by some lines in the Reykjavík Grapevine, which highlighted a demonstration in Reykjavík of a so-called Icelandic-Palestinian group against so-called Israeli aggression. At the same time I had phone conversations via Skype with friends in Lebanon – whom I know from my studies at the Technion – which were interrupted by sirens, warnings about incoming rockets.

Hezbollah is using guided and unguided artillery rockets against cities with hundreds of thousands of inhabitants, making a normal life north of Haifa impossible. Unfortunately, the majority of European newspapers cover this issue more or less only from the point of view of Lebanese civilians who suffer enormously from this conflict. But by showing only one side, some newspapers even violate their task to deliver objective information and finally support the side that is responsible for this mess.

According to the majority of European media the roles are like this: on one side is the Israeli aggressor invading Lebanon, while on the other side Lebanese civilians are buried by the Israeli Air Force. One reason for this picture is the influence Hezbollah has on photographers and journalists in southern Lebanon. Southern Lebanon under Hezbollah rule is far from being a democracy like Israel. Hezbollah threatens journalists with violence [1] if they don't act in their interest. Several journalists reported that they were only allowed to take pictures of destroyed apartment blocks and civilian casualties [2], while it was not allowed to picture the modern weapon systems or heavily armed fighters of Hezbollah. Furthermore, journalists in southern Lebanon can only move with help from and under the supervision of Hezbollah. Delivering objective information is thereby actually impossible. Under these conditions, it is at least very difficult for Israel to compete in the media war. The imbalance of coverage in this conflict can be seen in the pictures printed in Fréttablaðið, showing long lines of Israeli tanks on the border of Lebanon, while not one single Hezbollah fighter was pictured.

Some other examples of how easily some European media became a fifth column working in the hands of an extremist organisation are the following observations. In this conflict, Israelis are mostly shown as soldiers, whereas Lebanon seems to consist only of women and in particular dead children. No Hezbollah position and Katiusha battery was ever pictured, nor was there broadcasting about the refugees inside Israel.

### The problem on the long run: Iran

After nearly four weeks of news about this conflict, the reason why the IDF is hunting down Hezbollah terrorists in southern Lebanon came a little bit out of sight for readers and listeners of European media. During this time it was nearly forgotten that the conflict was started by Hezbollah and Hamas when they kidnapped three soldiers in a well-prepared and professionally carried-out operation. Even Israeli military members had to admit that this was one of Hezbollah's best planned operations during which eight Israeli soldiers died. Considering that Iran is the major financier and supplier of Hezbollah, it is hard to believe that the kidnapping of the two soldiers was not initiated or at least supported by Iran. Iran needs this conflict to hide behind and is probably just testing the western world as to what extent they give the Israelis a free hand in its actions for self-defence and how far the west would go to support Israel in a serious military conflict.

The real problem will show up in the

future. An Israeli with whom I have spoken knows that Israel cannot win against the idea of Hezbollah, as it is funded and motivated by Iran (and it officially gets military-grade ammunition from Iran and Syria). Israeli intelligence sources reported that in several cases the cargo flights during the help and rescue operation for the victims of the Bam earthquake in Iran (2003) were used on their return flights to transport 302 mm guided rockets from Tehran to Damascus. Even if Hezbollah is completely destroyed after the current Israeli operation "Change of Direction", Iran will pay and nurture a new Hezbollah.

The violence now also draws attention away from the real problem, which is Iran. This allows one to think about what will happen to the western world once Iran completes its atomic bomb. In one way or another they will use it. The logic behind a second strike ability that stabilised the situation between Russia and the U.S. during the Cold War would not hold between the western world and Iran. The current president of Iran served as a volunteer and officer in elite units in the Iranian army during the Iran-Iraq war. He became one of the chief commanders of a very special unit. This unit was called Basitschi-e Mostasafan, the members were all volunteers and had the same approach to life as Hezbollah does today. A speciality of this unit was to send numerous fanatic (and probably drugged) children on suicide missions over mine fields [6 and 7] so that the mines exploded and the area was cleared for the major attack. The children had plastic keys around their necks. These keys were meant to open the door to paradise [7]. Same tactics today: Hezbollah is like one of these children on a suicide mission running through a mine field whereas the commander is watching how far they get and where it can get dangerous. The Basitschies are considered to be "the inventors" of the first modern suicide attack [7], which was carried out in 1982 against the U.S. embassy in Beirut. Even today, the Iranian president is holding his speeches or attending public events in the uniform of the Basitschi-e Mostasafan. [9]

Being aware of these facts, it is absolutely necessary to prevent Iran from getting nuclear first-strike ability.

### Why there are no alternatives

The president of Iran, Mahmud Ahmadinejad, is probably the most powerful man in the region. Due to his control over Hezbollah he is holding the key in his hands to stop this conflict, but it seems as if he is not interested in a stable Middle East where the Jews are living in peace with their neighbours. A peaceful co-existence with Israel is possible; this can be seen on Egypt and Jordan. Both countries have signed peace treaties with Israel. Following an Ahmadinejad speech from October 2005 in which he explained his desire to wipe Israel from the map, and being aware that Hezbollah is supported by Iran, each conflict with Hezbollah is more or less about the sheer existence of the Jewish state. In May 2000, the IDF withdrew from southern Lebanon to the international border, and it was backed and approved by United Nations resolution 1559. The resolution also called Lebanon to send its army to protect the border, but Lebanon did not send the army. The real paradox of this conflict is that the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) are actually doing the job of the Lebanese army.

Another alternative that isn't working, which ended in a tragedy for four UN observers (Khiyam) is the UN mission in southern Lebanon (UNIFIL). UN troops could only observe what was happening and write reports; they were not able to disarm an extremist organisation like Hezbollah. It became even worse for the UN. In the beginning of this conflict, the UN positions were used as shields for Hezbollah against Israeli air strikes. Hezbollah fired from the vicinity of the UN posts. [5]

The weapon systems installed in south-



ern Lebanon by Hezbollah are/were artillery rockets of several types. Hezbollah claims to have approximately 10,000 missiles. Most rockets are modified, so that they cause as many injuries and as much damage possible. For example, in the vests of the suicide bombers, the warhead is covered with small balls from ball bearings. Due to the lack of will or power of the Lebanese army, one had to step into Lebanon to neutralise these missiles.

The balls inside the rockets have enough energy to break the glass of windshields of cars at a distance of 100-200m around the detonation point. These modified rockets, which cannot be intercepted, represent an enormous psychological threat to the civilian population. On some days more than 200 of these rockets were launched against the northern part of Israel including the city of Haifa. Haifa is home to 250,000 inhabitants, members of five different religions, living side by side in harmony, peace and mutual respect. A rich tapestry of contrasts and colours, varying cultures and ethnic groups makes up the fabric of life in Haifa. Secular, religious and ultra-Orthodox Jews live side by side with Christians, Moslems, Baha'i and Druze.

Israel has always tried to spare civilians (i.e. by posting flyers before each raid over Beirut), while on the opposing side Israel's enemies systematically prevent any separation of the militias from the civilian population. And furthermore, they single out every Jew – armed or not – as their target. Finally, Israel is in the difficult situation that it is rather impossible to negotiate with extremists who have the slogan "We love the death". [8]

Israel is seen as the western outpost among the states in the Middle East region. It is the only democracy in the Middle East. The GDP of 7 million Israelis is as high as that of 100 million inhabitants in the neighbouring states, although this country has had to defend its existence since it was founded. For the radicals (jihad) inside Islam, the destruction of this country is their first goal on their way to building a new empire under the Islamic law, sharia. Particularly, in the conflict with Hezbollah, Israel is fighting this war also for values Europe stands for because there is no third way between civilisation and violent

totalitarianism. [8]

What happened between Israel and Hezbollah is, as in some other places, the visible peak of a cultural conflict between western values and the extreme view of a small minority inside Islam. The recent attempt to bomb airplanes between the U.S. and U.K., and the attempt to bomb two commuter trains in Germany (31.07.2006) were two more incidents with this background. Again, Islam itself is a peaceful religion. Only a small group believes in jihad and is thereby destroying the reputation of the whole religion itself. Therefore, the solution can only come from inside Islam and this means a discussion/conflict between the small but violent group of followers of jihad on one side and on the other side the majority who sees the future of Islam in peaceful co-existence with other religions.

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Pictures were provided by PARD Technion (Division of Public Affairs and Resource Development, Technion – Israel Institute of Technology, Haifa) and Lenny Maschkowski, a professional independent photo-journalist from Haifa.

\* The Grapevine has to object to the use of Wikipedia as a source here, at the most pointed section of the response. Wikipedia is for Simpsons' plots, not history.

The above article is a reader response to our internet coverage of the recent Lebanon crisis. We print it in an attempt to show opinions other than those of our own editorial staff. We welcome similar responses to any issues that readers feel we have misrepresented. BC



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BY TOSHIKI TOMA

## Fair Play Needs a Good Referee

Referees and judges in football, baseball and tennis are like shadows, and don't make us strongly aware of their existence. But we sports fans know how important they are in creating great matches. Unfair refereeing in a football game or poor judging of whether the ball is "in" or "out" in tennis can really ruin a game.

Iceland is a democratic republic which is governed by the rule of law. Though we might be imperfect, we do a fairly good job of this. Citizens here are required to follow the rules that the nation decides and provides, as are foreigners who are staying here with a residence permit, and in spite of some exceptions, most of us immigrants respect the laws of the nation and are trying to follow the rules.

There are several things that I want to point out by making an analogy between the immigrant experience and a sports match, but first I will take up the importance of "good refereeing". I mean here, with the word "refereeing," the way that we handle immigrants' need to be shown what to do in order to live and work in Iceland. And the referee here is the Directorate of Immigration (Útlendingastofnun).

My work is all about immigrant life in Iceland. Administrative or judicial matters aren't a direct part of my work, yet I am involved in them every now and then. I have observed some examples of "bad refereeing" by the Directorate of Immigration in the last few years.

Let's take first some examples where the referee has done a bad job of explaining the rules to the players:

1. Two men from an EU nation came to Iceland to work as interns at an institute for a little over six months as part of their university studies. They went to the Directorate of Immigration and filled out the form to apply for a residence permit. After waiting for two hours to speak with someone, they were told that they didn't have to apply because they were only staying for a short time. After they returned to their office, their boss wondered if this was really true, and called the Directorate of Immigration. It turned out that these fellows were in fact supposed to apply for the residence permit after all. They had to go back and repeat the whole process from the beginning.

2. A man from outside the EU lives here under a permanent residence permit. He had to go back home to take care of his sick parents and wound up staying longer than he planned. I cautioned him that he was supposed to tell the Directorate of Immigration if he would be away longer than 18 months. His daughter contacted the Directorate, but was told he didn't need to do anything. My colleague wanted to confirm this, and asked again. It

turned out that he in fact did need to file a statement with the Directorate that he intended to return to Iceland.

3. An Asian student came to Iceland to study for one year. Her residence permit was valid only for the first semester, after which she had to renew it. The Directorate of Immigration's website said that she had to submit information about her "success in her studies." She got a letter from the school saying that she was doing fine. The Directorate of Immigration replied that what "success in her studies" really meant was that she had to submit her first semester grades, which were not ready yet. This was nowhere explained on the website. They also required her to resubmit proof of her finances, even though the bank statement she had originally submitted showed enough funds for the entire year.

These are just a few examples but the point is clear. One officer says A, and then another officer says B, and the real answer can even be C! Such incidents happen so often that I feel like "Ah, not again..." almost without being surprised. This lax attitude towards giving people

I am not trying to make a personal attack on the Directorate. I hardly know the staff personally and on principle I try to avoid making their acquaintance. I am trying to point out the fact that a lot of undesirable mis-refereeing is really happening, and I want the Directorate to make some effort to reduce those cases.

This doesn't mean at all that the staff in the office is unfriendly or irresponsible. I know that the Directorate is making an effort to bridge the gap between the office and the immigrants, among other ways by hiring staff of foreign origin. I know that the number of cases that the office has to cope with is increasing enormously.

Nevertheless, that should not be an excuse for misguiding immigrants or handling them unfairly.

My broader criticism goes in a different direction from the Directorate itself. It is first to the authorities in the Icelandic government who are charged with the fair and appropriate administration of the laws in this country. If it is obvious that the Directorate of Immigration is under too much of a burden, why haven't these authorities acted to maintain the quantity and quality of the Directorate's

**In every single case of mis-refereeing by the Directorate, it is we immigrants who get yellow cards and even red cards. And then we are "out" of the game.**

the correct information was not a problem a few years ago, when the Directorate of Immigration was very flexible and always willing to consider each immigrant's individual circumstances. Now that the Directorate is stricter, immigrants need to be clearly told the rules of the game.

Another sort of problem arises when the referee does not treat the players with dignity and respect, or forgets how important the referee is as a moral example to the players. At the Directorate of Immigration, there is, for example, an unwilling attitude at reception, and one must stand and talk to the staff through a window rather than sitting down in mutual respect at a table. If you call, you must wait for a long time on the phone and sometimes you get cut off. Surprisingly often, the Directorate loses application forms and supporting documents, including difficult-to-replace originals from the applicant's home country.

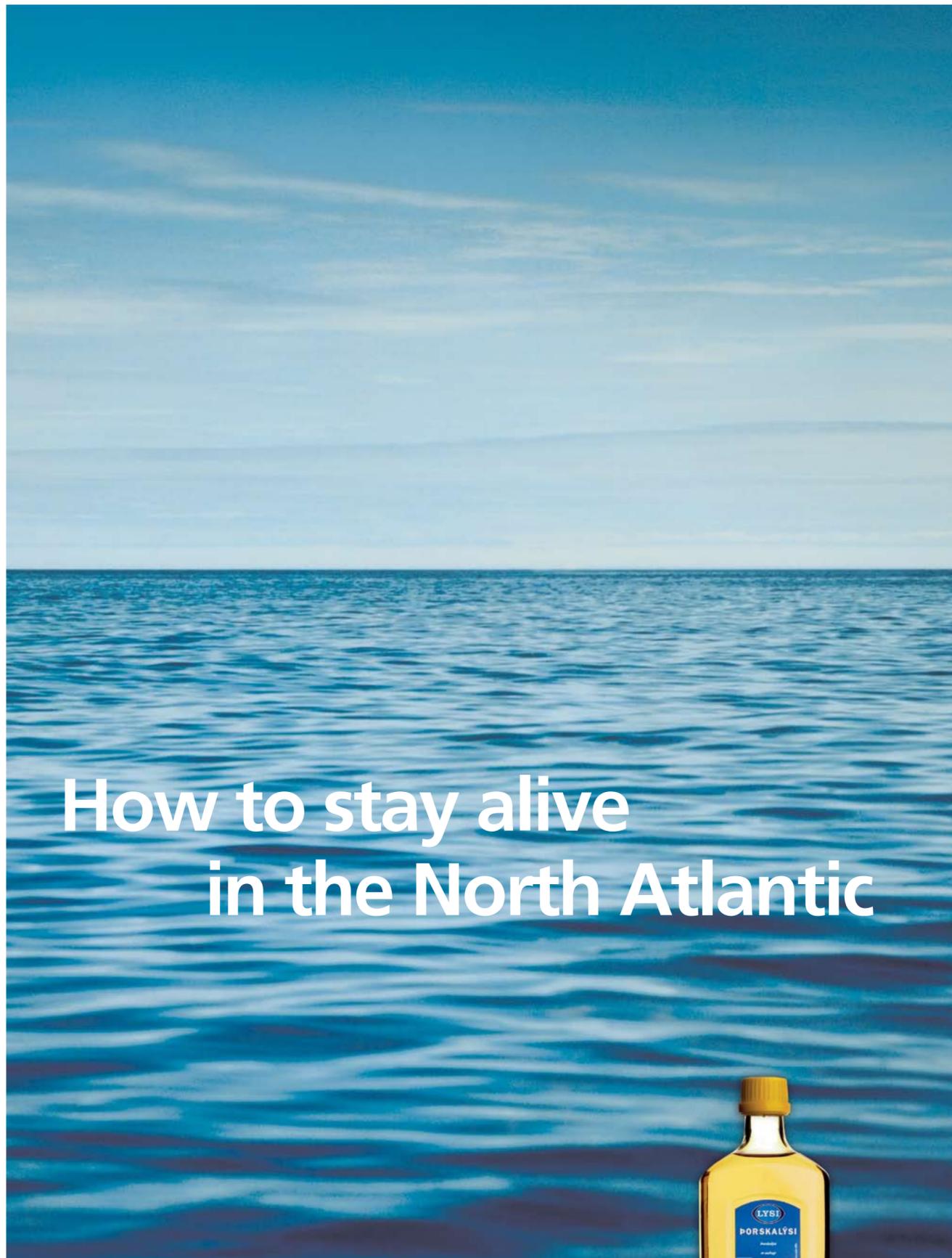
I would like to emphasise this next point very strongly: In every single case of mis-refereeing by the Directorate, it is we immigrants who get yellow cards and even red cards. And then we are "out" of the game.

staff? Maybe in part because they aren't hearing any complaints by immigrants.

And this leads me to a second broader criticism. Why do we never hear complaints about the Directorate of Immigration in any public forum, even though they are in the air all around us? This is because in most of the cases we immigrants are not in a secure enough position to make public complaints free of risk. Who dares to offend the referee who is holding one's destiny in his hands? But this keeps us voiceless. I think the responsible authorities and the public media should pay more attention to the existence of immigrants and should try to dig up what is really in our minds instead of asking the stereotypical questions of "How do you like Iceland?" or "Is Icelandic difficult to learn?"

A good referee is not a gift from Heaven. S/He is created by society and is living proof of that society's democracy, freedom and maturity.

*Toshiki Toma is the pastor for immigrants in Iceland.*



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# The Icelandic Outlaw Sneaks into Beowulf

An interview with Beowulf & Grendel director Sturla Gunnarsson

BY BART CAMERON

In filming Beowulf and Grendel, the director had to deal with a series of hurricane force gales, a shrinking budget, currency fluctuations, and the most imposing text in the history of the English language. He has no regrets whatsoever.

**/// As the name indicates, you are an Ice-lander. When did you leave?**

– I was born in Reykjavik and left Iceland when I was six.

**/// Obviously you returned a few times. Your film demonstrates a lot of familiarity with the Icelandic landscape, especially the Suðurland.**

– All of my family is still in Iceland, except my mother and my aunt live here in Canada. That landscape I know pretty well because after I graduated university I worked on a fish boat for a winter off of Þorlákshöfn. I've always had a strong sort of spiritual feeling about Southern Iceland.

**/// And you do justice to the area. Yours is the first film I've seen that properly documents that area.**

– The landscape and the elements are characters in the film, I think. They're so powerful. Stellan Skarsgård described it like playing every scene with an unwritten character. It creates a sort of spontaneity in the performance. Nothing goes according to plan.

**/// Which brings us to an important aspect of your film. Your misfortune with the weather, which was almost comical. It has even become the subject of a documentary, Wrath of the Gods.**

– The filming was supposed to begin in the summer, but the financing didn't close. It kept delaying the start of the film. We ended up starting the film in September and that pushed us into December, right into the heart of the beast. I'm told it was the worst autumn in 60 years. We had all those hurricanes in the Atlantic and they all worked their way down. (Laughing.)

**/// But you can still laugh about it?**

– Honestly, I think it made for a better film. Although it was very difficult, I've got nothing but good memories about it. We'd come off the mountain every day with an incredible sense of accomplishment. Most film crews would have cut and run.

The truth is no matter how tough it was it was never as tough as working on a fish boat.

**/// Working on a fish boat may be hard, yes. One thing that most people in the world find more difficult, though, is Beowulf itself. You're talking about the point of no return for English majors worldwide, who decide, when they get to Beowulf that literature just isn't worth the trouble. How much fear was there in taking on the most iconic text in the English language?**

– (Laughing.) You're right. Beowulf and Finnegans Wake are the end points for casual study. I have to say that we were a little naïve at the outset. It didn't occur to me that there would be such passion and feeling about the source material.

Our intention right from the start was that we have respect for the source, but we were not doing a literal adaptation. Our intention was to do a riff on it. Beowulf is the root of the hero myth in our culture. And we wanted to look at the hero myth through modern eyes. While the story sticks to the bones of the poem this is quite a subversive take on the poem.

**/// Which, really, becomes the English major's wet dream. Getting to apply modern theory to the old text.**

– I'd like to think that the film works for people who've never read Beowulf. But to get at the deeper understanding, that does require a deeper understanding, because it's revision-



ist. John Gardner's book, Grendel, works on a similar level, and that was a huge influence.

**/// Those who see the movie and are familiar with Icelandic history will see a few huge departures. You've really made this into an Icelandic Beowulf. I saw a lot of draw from the Icelandic folktales and stories dealing with the outcast hero.**

– The inspiration for me, really, in designing our look for Grendel, is that statue near the university, Útlaginn (the outlaw). You're the first person that's picked up on that.

**/// I think there are a lot of things that are very specific for those familiar with Iceland. Your use of St. Brendan, who, according to some sources, landed in Iceland, is particularly specific, I think.**

**“We'd come off the mountain every day with an incredible sense of accomplishment. Most film crews would have cut and run. The truth is no matter how tough it was it was never as tough as working on a fish boat.”**

– On a clear day when we were shooting, you could see Papey. Where Irish monks once landed. The idea was to give a nod to the poem as written, and that's why we introduced the Brendan character, who was loosely modelled on Brendan the Navigator.

You're talking about a period when the influence of Christianity is just starting to feel.

You know Stellan, King Hrothgar, his conversion was very Icelandic and sensible. He doesn't give up his Thor's hammer. The same way Icelanders took to Christianity. If it will avoid a war, we'll do it, but you can do whatever you want at home.

Icelanders are very pragmatic. You have to be in that environment. Pragmatic and fatalistic. It gets back to trying to understand who these people are who live on this landscape, where you have to be so incredibly tough and

driven to survive, but at the same time you have to realise that you have no control over the forces surrounding you. Which is kind of how I felt when I was shooting the movie.

**/// In your use of landscape, were you influenced by Icelandic movies?**

– No, with the exception of the fact that it gave me confidence that the Icelandic horse would look cool. The references were more John Ford and Kurosawa, the wide screen and the placement of character in landscape, was more what we were trying to achieve. Maybe with a little bit of Friðrik's (Dór Friðriksson) droll humour. Everybody in North America has been pointing out that connection with landscape. If you're building a period piece in North America, you're lucky to get 10 degrees to shoot without interference. In

integrity in English. That was why I went there. For me, the idea of making a film on this scale, in Icelandic, there was no possibility of raising the funding. Because Beowulf is one of the most mediated bits of literature in the world, because it was passed down for hundreds of years orally, it becomes the cornerstone of English literature. You've got all your Westerns based on this. You've got so many variations of the tale told so many ways. The DNA is so potent. I thought it allowed us to take liberties that I would. I'm not sure the world would have been ready for a subversive revisionist take on Njáls Saga. Even if you don't know Beowulf, you know the myth that underlies it. Even if you don't know it, you get the subversive take on the hero that we're going after.

**/// I think when I had to teach Beowulf, I brought in Jaws and Jaws 3. It influences some major points of Western culture very obviously.**

– It's a seminal work.

**/// But we should point out, you did keep the bones of the story. In fact, I'm guessing this is the closest thing we'll ever see to a literal interpretation of Beowulf on the screen.**

– Just because it's subversive, there's a lot of respect for the source. There's not a single spoken word that's not Norse-root English; there are no Latin words. Even words like cunt can be traced back to 1200, and it's a Norse root word. So there was a fidelity to the source.

**/// Well, I'd say you were loyal to the source, but Iceland is the star. This watches like as much of a work about the love of Iceland as anything I've seen.**

– Being born in Iceland and having gone back there, I feel very strongly about it. Seeing it play in Iceland has a lot of meaning for me. You never see this on film.

The farmers don't overlook this. In Kerlingardalur, where we shot most of this, the farmer there said he'd been out every single day in this valley, and it's never the same. It's still alive in the process of being formed.



## We Have a Team, Now We Need Some Hooligans

Iceland vs. Spain: August 15

BY STEINUNN JAKOBSDÓTTIR PHOTO BY SKARI

“I just can't believe we didn't lose!” a satisfied football fan said to his friend when trying to walk through the crowd rushing from Laugardalsvöllur, only seconds after the referee had blown his whistle for the last time that night. The Iceland National Football Team had just played Spain in a friendly, ending in a tie. Surprisingly, fans didn't get the pleasure of witnessing any goals this time around, which was great news for Iceland but at the same time a shocking result for Spain.

But why are Icelanders happy about a 0:0 draw? Why do we claim that as a victory? The reason is simple. Icelanders suck at football. No one can deny that fact. We have never made it to the big boys' tournaments, we only have one Class-A player and at this moment the team is experiencing its lowest rating ever, ranking number 106 in FIFA world list, sharing the seat with Azerbaijan and Singapore, just below Cape Verde Islands, Botswana, China PR, Armenia and Benin.

Spain on the other hand is among the world's top football nations with a highly experienced team. Occupying the seventh position on the same FIFA list, fresh from Germany where they played the FIFA World Cup for the eighth time in a row while we haven't even dreamt of an appearance at the World Cup. A football game between these two nations can't be considered an even event, and no one was expecting these results.

When walking towards Laugardalsvöllur, I have to admit I was preparing for the humiliation of a crushing defeat, as were many with whom I talked before the game. One guy told me he wasn't really ready to be humiliated once again; another said that the Icelandic players would probably just align at the goal line with the keeper in front of them, hoping that the ball wouldn't go in. Even though the majority of the nation had doomed the game as a guaranteed slaughter, over 13,000 people

attended to watch a rather uneventful game of bored and frustrated Spaniards trying to run past competitive Icelanders, who sure weren't afraid of kicking some superstar asses.

That might just be the reason for a crowded Laugardalsvöllur. Icelanders love football and the stars of the Spanish team are in many cases better-known than most of the Icelandic players. Raúl, Torres, Reyes, Reina, Ibanez, García, Villa. People wanted to see the idols for themselves, playing in their home country. Never mind the results.

While the Spanish team is filled with top world players from Liverpool, Barcelona and Real Madrid to name a few, Icelanders have one player who could be considered in their range, but to our disappointment our local

ter the first half. They fought well and seemed to enjoy themselves out on the field, while the Spaniards showed us some dramatic tumbling and couldn't really be bothered to take this seriously.

Yes, we didn't lose this time and the media had a field day. A fair draw they said while complimenting the Icelandic players. The Spanish media weren't as satisfied though, expecting beforehand that the team should have wrapped up victory.

“El partido más tonto” or “The Stupidest Game,” one Spanish newspaper headlined. After witnessing Spain's poor effort in Iceland, supporters are now in serious doubt about Aragonés's presence as the coach, but he himself excused the game to the players' low

**“But why are Icelanders happy about a 0:0 draw? Why do we claim that as a victory? The reason is simple. Icelanders suck at football. No one can deny that fact.”**

golden boy Eiður Smári Guðjohnsen didn't show. Our striker and team leader, now playing for Barcelona, pulled out of the team at the last minute because of illness, leaving the pressure on Hermann Hreiðarsson. But while the game went on without Iceland's only football star, who rested at his home in Spain with his teammates Puyol and Xavi, other players finally got the chance to show what they got.

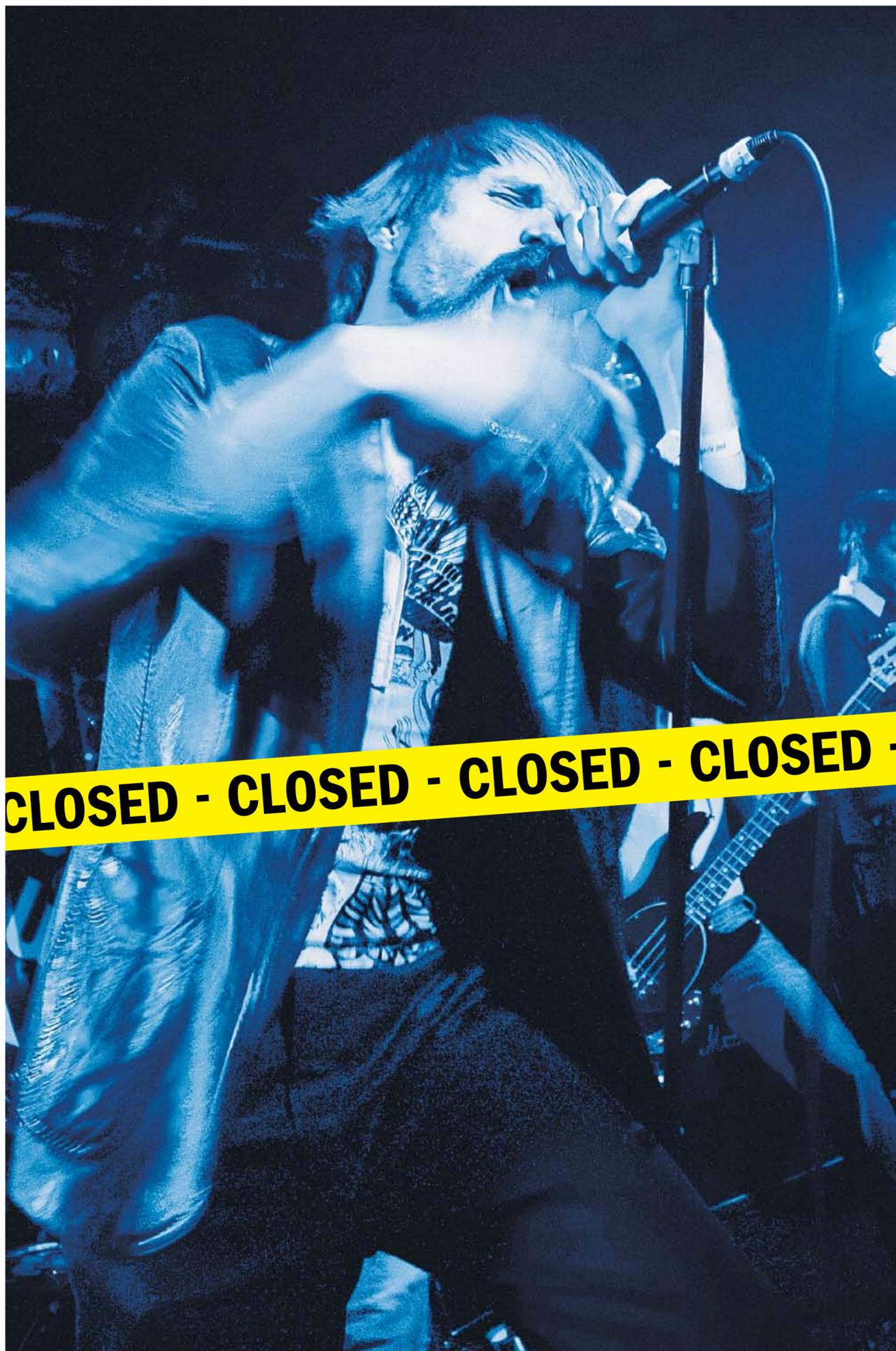
As said before, the majority expected the Spanish players to get the better of the Icelanders, leaving the nation humiliated once again. But hell no! The Icelandic players surprised us, Spain, and anyone paying even the slightest amount of attention to European soccer. The Icelandic team didn't hang in on defence the whole time, they weren't afraid to attack, and they honestly deserved to lead af-

to the real tournaments we need some devoted hooligans (without the violence). The Spaniards were so thrilled, happy and in a good mood, I was considering joining their team.

Surely there were a lot of pooh-poohings when the opponents or the referee did something locals didn't like, and we did manage to let a wave go five rounds at one point of the game, but when a couple of youngsters were trying to do it again a man shushed them and told them to stop the nonsense, leaving the disappointed youngsters speechless. Nonsense? Aren't we at a sporting event? Aren't we supposed to shout, paint our bellies and flash our breasts to the cameras? Not sit there like at a dentist office, all shy and polite, waiting for our turn while trying to let the time pass with some distractions, like say, a big football match. No flares, as they are forbidden, no big flags or painted faces. Only a couple of kids wearing Viking hats and some men with team scarves. Once in a while a choir of fans managed to shout “Áfram Ísland!” loud enough to create some competitiveness in the stands, but that never lasted for long.

With the exception of a small crowd, our fans really have to pep up before the game against Denmark on September 6. We have to stop being a football nation that is thrilled with a 0:0 draw and shocked if we win a game. We can't continue reviling our team if it doesn't live up to our expectations if we can't be bothered to support our players like real fans do. While the Spaniards are disappointed and want to forget this whole extravaganza ever happened, we Icelanders sure shouldn't. Now we just have to work on an attitude change. Stop using the energy in poohing and support the team for real. Then it will be impossible to predict what will happen when we will play Spain again in the Euro 2008 qualifiers.

If we are ever going to win anything and make it



**CLOSED - CLOSED - CLOSED - CLOSED**



## The Heart of Rock in Reykjavík Waves Goodbye

Why Grand Rokk is closing, and what it means for us

BY HAUKUR MAGNÚSSON PHOTOS BY GÚNDI AND SKARI

This spring, about 60 middle-aged Nordic phenomenologists convened in Reykjavík to discuss their (very) particular branch of philosophy and its various conundrums. One of the fun-filled events sandwiched between the featured lectures and seminars was a reception at the city's town hall, where Councilman Stefán Jón Hafstein gave a short speech welcoming them to "[...] enjoy Reykjavík's lively atmosphere, excellent nightlife and vibrant music scene!"

Yeah, nerdy phenomenologists, go see a smelly bar gig in downtown Reykjavík. A drunken Singapore Sling performance will surely enhance your visit.

Funny thing is, they did. And it did.

In promoting Reykjavík as the metropolitan cultural melting pot we like to brag about it being, music is a commodity. There isn't a question in anyone's mind that Björk's career has brought more tourists to the city than the Icelandic pony ever did. Or the state symphony orchestra, for that matter. Hafstein certainly didn't lie; Reykjavík does have a vibrant music scene, one that is at its best extremely exciting to witness and participate in.

Many bands now popular in Iceland took their first steps on the tiny stage of the aforementioned bar Grand Rokk. Hjalmar played their first show there. Singapore Sling, Minus and Brain Police all expanded their following by playing it regularly. In fact, it's safe to say that for the past five years Grand Rokk has been a resource for bands looking to hone their craft in a semi-professional environment free of downtown's now happily forgotten 'pay-to-play' atmosphere (in the past, musicians would have to pay bars a small sum for hosting a concert. The practise has now been mostly abandoned).

Grand Rokk is, then, the heart of Reykjavík's music scene. Imagine how it felt, then, to talk to the manager of Grand Rokk this

week and hear the following: "We are through with hosting concerts, at least in the form we've been doing up until now. The reason is that it simply doesn't pay well enough — doesn't pay shit, in fact. Thus, we decided to embark upon several policy changes, one of them being to focus on music favoured by our older patrons."

This was Grand Rokk's manager since February, Þorsteinn Þorsteinnsson, adding that "an older clientele was more likely to have some money to its name and hence, to spend some."

I ask him if he is turning Grand Rokk into a sports bar.

**"They're always bragging about 'Reykjavík, the culture city', music this and music that — when it finally starts paying off and we get tourists that are interested in checking out the scene, there's nowhere for them to go."**

"Yes, and no. We are currently installing several flat-screen televisions upstairs for that very purpose. We see an opportunity here, as there aren't a lot of sports bars in downtown Reykjavík. That will only be for the second floor, however, Grand Rokk is primarily the bar of our steady customers and we will continue to accommodate them to their liking in our downstairs drinking area. The sound system and stage will still remain on the second floor, so there's always the possibility of hosting concerts. If we indeed decide to do that, they will be few and far between, at most every two weeks and then only by established bands."

Grand Rokk does not have a particularly long history as the city's primary music venue. At its old location (in the building that now houses the famous Sirkus), it was mostly known as being easy for underage drinkers to get into, occasionally playing host to rowdy shows by cover bands. It wasn't until the bar moved to its current Smiðjustigur location that it started making a name for itself as a viable alternative to older venues.

Explains promoter, musician and national state radio personality Freyr Eyjólfsson: "Sometime in 2002 I had grown extremely weary of the whole downtown live music scene and its available venues. Back then, most

concerts took place on Wednesday nights and were rather tame affairs — there weren't even that many, to tell the truth. So I presented some ideas to [Grand Rokk's former owner] Kalli and he in turn gave me freedom and support to try and realise them.

"We started off by fixing up the stage, buying a decent sound system and booking a couple of weekends. The ball started rolling almost immediately after that. People really caught on to the idea of catching a concert at midnight and pretty soon, we were hosting three concerts per week at the very least, a tradition we kept right until the bar was sold. No matter what week of what month, you could always count on seeing something interesting

at Grand Rokk. It was one of the few rules we set ourselves. Another one was to always treat the artists with a minimum of respect; no matter who they were or how big they never had to pay to play and always got access to our sound-guy, drink vouchers and the opportunity to charge admittance."

I ask if he tried to develop the metal scene, as with Minus, or if his focus was more pop, like Mugison.

"Diversity was a point of pride in our booking policy; we tried not to limit ourselves to the standard indie-rock fare and thus had experimental electronic musicians, country balladeers and metalheads playing consecutively. And we went against common conceptions as to what you could and couldn't do as a club — some of our most successful nights featured acts that other venues wouldn't allow within ten feet of their premises. We were really into the idea of providing up-and-coming artists with the opportunity to play in a professional environment of sorts and I can honestly say that we'd give anyone a chance, no matter how inexperienced."

Just as amusing as the local bands, though, were the foreign acts that played the tiny club. From Alabama Thunderpussy to Wedding Present to Bob Log III, the club constantly brought in bizarre and respected bands, from wide-ranging genres, constantly. Eyjólfsson credits liquor for the foreign bands. "We'd try our best to act on every drunken idea we got, and some of them were even rather good. We booked [cult favourite] Stereolab after a night on the binge; somehow, the idea seemed really plausible at 4 a.m. And sure enough, they came and played an extremely sold-out show to an ecstatic audience. This compelled us to occasionally call our favourite bands and see if they were willing to pay us a visit. Sometimes it would even work. We were this close to having the White Stripes perform here a

>>> CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE



couple of years ago. It isn't even that crazy if you think about it, as many of the world's most famous rock clubs are very similar in size to Grand Rokk. New York's CBGB and London's Marquee really aren't any larger."

Like many in the scene, Eyjólfsson, who partook in building Reykjavík's music reputation, sees the end of Grand Rokk as the end of an era. "Now, we must confront the fact that Reykjavík is getting limited in some respects, at least if we want to maintain the stigma of culture and art that has slowly crept around it. There's no gay club and hasn't been for years. And now we are lacking a proper rock venue. Seriously, when I got wind of this, my main thoughts were that this was a sad day for Icelandic music and culture in general. I actually thought there were quite enough hamburger joints here to keep dumb sports idiots occupied. Apparently, I was wrong."

He can't help but point out that the closing of the live music venue seems peculiar:

"Mainly, I'm surprised. The venture never lost money – in fact it was rather the opposite – and there are still opportunities to expand. We get a lot of tourists here that have heard great things about our music and nightlife and are interested in catching a gig. And I now find myself dumbstruck when they stop me on Laugavegur and ask where they can go for that purpose. There really isn't anything now, although Amsterdam shows some promise. Hopefully, someone will spot the opportunity and get something going again. Our city's honour depends on it."

The same month Grand Rokk decided its fate as a sports bar/dive, another key venue in the Reykjavík music scene closed down – one that has in many respects been as important as Grand Rokk in hosting and developing new talent, its larger capacity making it serve as a sort of 'next stop' for bands after they'd conquered Grand Rokk.

In July, Airwaves favourite Gaukurinn filed for bankruptcy after a long struggle with creditors. In an interview with *Blaðið* last week, Gaukurinn's proprietor Sigurður Hólm Jóhannsson stated that the club's downfall could in part be explained by the public's hesitance to pay to attend concerts, as well as frequent visits from Reykjavík's health inspector that were usually accompanied by fines for exceeding the legal decibel limit.

Thus, Reykjavík is lacking an appropriately sized venue for modestly popular local bands and the effects are already being felt. Benedikt Reynisson manages the Smekkleysa record store and is also a local musician and DJ. He has also been known to book gigs for

visiting punk and rock bands. Reynisson tells the Grapevine that he has had some trouble booking shows after the demise of Grand Rokk and Gaukurinn and was forced to cancel what was to be a sort of farewell gig for some of his band members due to the lack of an appropriate venue: "Grand Rokk's policy change has really left a huge gap as far as I'm concerned. For a long time, it was the place you relied on when everything else fell through. And with it and Gaukurinn gone, it's much harder to play shows in Reykjavík, especially if you want to charge admission and maintain some level of professionalism, not settling for a shit sound-system for instance. Grand Rokk was a great resource in that regard."

Speaking about the old venue, he seems to suffer from a bout of nostalgia: "It was sort of like a community centre for musicians and music-lovers in the regard that you could always count on there being something happening. It certainly wasn't as big and fancy as,

**"Even if places like Grand Rokk and Gaukurinn bow out, there's always someone willing to pick up where they left. You know, we've already started seeing places like Amsterdam take over. One of Reykjavík's better aspects, like Airwaves has shown us in the past, is that if no one else is willing to, you can just do things yourself."**

say, Gaukurinn or NASA, but it had a real comfortable feel to it and the fact that you could walk in most nights to check out what local bands had to offer marked it as a vital stop when going out. You'd inevitably meet colleagues, and not just from your neck of the woods – it wasn't segregated in the way that Sirkus and Kaffibarinn are and no one group claimed it as its own. Grand Rokk was a good place to get exposed to new things. With it gone, it's harder to properly follow things."

Morgunblaðið music critic Arnar Eggert Thoroddsen shares some of Reynisson's sentiments regarding Grand Rokk, and has some fond memories of the place. "When The Fall played Grand Rokk I was ecstatic. I was a fairly recent Fall-convert and was very excited about the show, which in hindsight epitomized much of what the whole Grand Rokk experience was about. The show was rowdy and

chaotic, as Fall shows tend to be, and after they finished, I led Mark E. Smith backstage, where we talked and shared some drinks. At one point, I opened him a beer bottle with my teeth, to which he replied by pointing at his toothless grin and telling me I should be careful. A wild night that was."

Although Thoroddsen associates many good memories with the bar and grants it a certain place in the history of Icelandic rock, he isn't worried about the future: "First off, this is something I really don't understand and seems to happen a lot here in Iceland – it's like people are actually trying to shoot themselves in the foot over and over. There's recently been plenty of talk about the excellent shape of Reykjavík's grassroots musicians and these concerts have for the most part been a great success. And now they're through. In the long run, however, I think we are going to be fine. Someone's bound to see an opportunity there and seek to fill the void left by Grand

and music that – when it finally starts paying off and we get tourists that are interested in checking out the scene, there's nowhere for them to go. And at the same time they're building a ridiculously expensive enormous dome for the 'higher' forms of music right in the city centre, a symphony hall that'll probably wind up hosting poorly attended flute concerts most of the time. If you're going to go in that direction, you have to ensure that pop and rock get equal access, which is something they've completely ignored."

Continuing on the theme of righteous indignation at the monstrosity that will be Reykjavík's symphony hall (built in the same spot as the Grapevine's old offices), Thoroddsen offers a legitimate suggestion: "It would have been incredibly easy to design the building so that there'd be a small Grand Rokk-like venue in one of its corners. Now, that would have been forward thinking."

When confronted with these arguments, the city councilman who took so much pride in the local scene, Stefán Jón Hafstein, points out that at least the environment is right for rock. "You're telling me some news here. It's sad to see Grand Rokk and Gaukurinn go, although I am convinced that there isn't going to be a problem in the long run. I am proud of Reykjavík's music scene, and it is still thriving. And the city's current economic and social environment is of the kind that really benefit a prosperous rock scene."

The Social Democratic Councilman offers some laissez-faire advice: "Even if places like Grand Rokk and Gaukurinn bow out, there's always someone willing to pick up where they left off. You know, we've already started seeing places like Amsterdam take over. One of Reykjavík's better aspects, like Airwaves has shown us in the past, is that if no one else is willing to, you can just do things yourself."

A neat suggestion. The city will ignore the local needs, but will take pride that musicians, like poor people, can find their own solutions.

I ask about how the rock scene can last in a downtown that is pricing rock clubs out of the market.

"That's a good point, those places can't really operate in an expensive or 'fancy' environment; it doesn't fit. We probably stand to see them move away from Laugavegur and the city centre to the edges of downtown, Hverfisgata and Hlemmur. Only a small fraction of the area is being renovated anyway. There's still a lot of cheap housing available for these purposes. Our music scene isn't going anywhere."

it's free

the REYKJAVÍK GRAPEVINE

# ◀ INFO ▶

Issue 13, 2006

8 Page Listings Section in Your Pocket



## Matt Freakin' Dillon! Doing Bukowski!

Matt Dillon's and Marissa Tomei's presence at the opening ceremony of the Iceland International Film Festival this year will be a highlight for film in Iceland, but it is only part of what cinephiles can look forward to in the three weeks of IIFF.

Dillon and Tomei both star in the Bent Hamer's film *Factotum*, based on the great working man's saga of the same name by every two-fisted man with a pen's hero, Charles Bukowski.

The films for this year's festival are divided into four categories: World, containing the cream of international

independent films, America, showing a variety of independently-produced films from the States, Documentaries, and finally Gala, which includes carefully selected films that will be premiered in grand ceremonies, like the aforementioned gift from God, *Factotum*.

The line-up up at this point includes, for example, Dave Chapelle's *Block Party* starring the comedian himself and directed by Michel Gondry, the Oscar-nominated documentary *Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room* starring John Beard, George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, Peter Coyote and Kenneth Lay in a film about

the Enron Scandal and the Cohen brothers' *Romance and Cigarettes*, with Sopranos mobster James Gandolfini in the leading role. A film of particular importance for this nation of melting glaciers, *An Inconvenient Truth*, Al Gore's struggle against global warming will also make its Icelandic premier. *SJ*

*The Iceland International Film Festival, August 30 – September 21*

For more info, visit [www.icelandfilmfestival.is](http://www.icelandfilmfestival.is).



A. Hansen restaurant offers  
Good food - Good service - Good music  
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A. Hansen Restaurant  
Steak House & Bar, Vesturgata 4, Hafnarfjörður, tel. 565 1130

Music and nightlife events usually start around 21:00, unless otherwise stated. Pubs close at 01:00 on weekdays and much, much later on weekends. For those just wanting to party, the pubs and clubs don't get crowded until after midnight on weekends, although Thursday is a semi-official night out.  
Compiled by Steinunn Jakobsdóttir  
listings@grapevine.is

## FRIDAY – 25 AUGUST

Franz and Kristó live followed by DJ Kári Prikid

Árni Sveins  
KAFFIBARINN

Misery Loves Company  
RÖSENBERG

The Telepathetics followed by DJ Palli Maus  
BAR 11

DJs Gabriel & Dresden  
BROADWAY

DJ Heimir  
SIRKUS

Mammút in concert  
12 TÓNAR (starts at 17:00)

DJ Gísli Galdur  
BARINN

Hressó Garden Party  
HRESSÓ (starts at 22:00)

DJ Danni Deluxe and Paranoia  
VEGAMÓT

Pants Yell! from Boston in concert. Also playing are Dýróin, The Foghorns and The Way Down  
AMSTERDAM

## SATURDAY – 26 AUGUST

Summerjazz: Final concert in the summer jazz series with KK, Sigurður Flóason, Eyþór Gunnarsson and Valdimar Kolbeinn Sigurjónsson  
JÓMFRÚIN (starts at 16:00)

Alfons X  
KAFFIBARINN

Bylgjan Birthday Celebration: Todmobile among many more  
NASA

DJ Maggi Legó  
BARINN

The Telepathetics, Ókind and Shadow Parade  
AMSTERDAM

Sessý and Sjonni followed by DJ Maggi HRESSÓ (starts at 22:00)

Misery Loves Company  
RÖSENBERG

DJ Jón Atli  
SIRKUS

Release gig with Benni B-Ruff  
PRIKID

DJ Jói  
VEGAMÓT

Gulli Ósóma  
BAR 11

## TUESDAY – 29 AUGUST

DJ Krummi  
SIRKUS

DJ Ernir  
PRIKID

## WEDNESDAY – 30 AUGUST

Madchester.is  
SIRKUS

DJ Celeb  
BARINN

Hljómsveit Söllu jazzband  
RÖSENBERG

DJ Steinarr Lár  
VEGAMÓT

## THURSDAY – 31 AUGUST

Grapevine Bad Taste Summer Series: Reykjavík!  
GALLERY LOBSTER OR FAME, starts at 17:00

Grapevine Bad Taste Summer Series: Reykjavík! + guests  
AMSTERDAM, starts at 21:00

DJ Frosti Gringo  
SIRKUS

DJ Maggi Legó  
PRIKID

Nektar Jazzband in concert  
HRESSÓ

Einar Scheving Jazztrio  
RÖSENBERG

DJ Þór  
BARINN

DJ Adda  
VEGAMÓT

## FRIDAY – 1 SEPTEMBER

Nuno and co.  
KAFFIBARINN

Eyjólfur Kristjánsson in concert  
BORGARLEIKHÚSIÐ

DJ Pétur  
BARINN

Hraun in concert  
RÖSENBERG

Gulli Ósóma  
BAR 11

The German DJ Monika Kruse along with Exox and DJ Frímann  
NASA

## SATURDAY – 2 SEPTEMBER

DJ Nuno  
BARINN

Hraun in concert  
RÖSENBERG

DJ Balli  
KAFFIBARINN

DJ Palli Maus  
BAR 11

DJ Benni  
VEGAMÓT

## TUESDAY – 5 SEPTEMBER

Mannakorn release concert  
BORGARLEIKHÚSIÐ

Bloodhound Gang in concert  
LAUGARDALSHÖLL

Patti Smith in concert  
HÁSKÓLABÍÓ

## WEDNESDAY – 6 SEPTEMBER

Dillon Wednesday Concert Series: The Telepathetics + guests

DILLON

## THURSDAY – 7 SEPTEMBER

Grapevine Bad Taste Summer Series: Benni Hemm Hemm  
GALLERY LOBSTER OR FAME, starts at 17:00

Grapevine Bad Taste Summer Series: Benni Hemm Hemm + guests  
AMSTERDAM, starts at 21:00

Sunna Gunnlaugsdóttir Jazzquartet  
RÖSENBERG

## FRIDAY – 8 SEPTEMBER

Mood Bluesband  
RÖSENBERG

Rockabilly Riot at Bar 11: Kings of Hell and Weapons in concert, followed by DJ Curver and DJ Valdi  
BAR 11

Hörður Torfa in concert  
BORGARLEIKHÚSIÐ

Alfons X

KAFFIBARINN

Sólstafr in concert  
DILLON

## SATURDAY – 9 SEPTEMBER

Mood Bluesband  
RÖSENBERG

Skítamóral in concert  
NASA

Rockabilly Riot at Bar 11: DJ Curver and DJ Gulli  
BAR 11

## SUNDAY – 10 SEPTEMBER

Rockabilly Riot at Bar 11: Kings of Hell in concert  
BAR 11



## Patti Smith

The legendary pioneer Patti Smith fell for the country on her last visit and is on her way to Iceland once again. After crowding NASA last time, leaving many dedicated fans out in the cold, she has now chosen a new venue for the show, namely Háskólabíó movie theatre. Together with guitarist Lenny Kaye she will be playing an unplugged concert on 5 September. Her fierce stage presence and unique voice will undoubtedly reveal a night to remember. Limited tickets are available. For more info visit: [www.midi.is](http://www.midi.is).

Háskólabíó, September 5

**Cafè**  
**Rosenberg**

Live music  
Thu-Sat

Lækjargötu 2, tel. 551-8008



## Reykjavík!

The Grapevine Bad Taste Concert Series will soon be coming to an end, but still enough great performances remain for our many music fans that have been partying hard at Amsterdam every Thursday this summer. On 31 August, Reykjavík!, still celebrating the release of debut album Glacial Landscapes, Religion, Oppression and Alcohol, will be partying at Smekkleysa at 17:00 and at Amsterdam at 22:00 the same night, together with some carefully picked guest appearances.

While the band is known for rumpus behaviour and extremely spicy performances onstage, the atmosphere might be a little quieter this time around as some of the band members are all scrambled after last week's extreme playfulness. According to close sources they will at least try not to trash any guitars this time around.

Those who can't wait until the end of the month, Reykjavík! will be playing a gig at Stúdentakjallarinn tonight, Friday, 25 August, with Sprengjuhöllin and Dóri DNA.  
**Smekkleysa and Amsterdam, August 31**



## Mammút

Once a girls-only trio, now a five-member, mixed-gender group growing in sound as well as fan size, Mammút will be playing inside 12 Tónar record shop on 25 August. In April this year, Mammút released their self-titled debut album, which was described by the Grapevine's critic Sindri Eldon as: "A tight, powerful album blessed with true emotional quality and depth that belies the youth of its creators."

Despite the members' young age (they are all under 20) Mammút have played gigs all around Iceland as well as touring in Europe where critics have praised their performances and emphasised on the band's presumed prosperity in the future.

Taking a stroll down Skólavörðustigur with a stop at the shop is a great opportunity to catch a glimpse of what the praise is all about, and yeah, like all 12 Tónar concerts, it's free, and you might even get to slurp on some red wine in plastic cups while you're there, also free. The concerts start at 17:00.

**12 Tónar, August 25**

## AKUREYRI THEATRICAL COMPANY

Hafnarstræti 57, 600 Akureyri

[www.leikfelag.is](http://www.leikfelag.is)

**Little Shop of Horrors**

Extra shows to be set up in Reykjavik at the Icelandic opera in September. Tickets on sale now.

## BROADWAY

Árnúlla 9

[www.broadway.is](http://www.broadway.is)

**Le Sing**

A combination of dinner and a show; here the waiters are also the performers.

## ICELAND DANCE COMPANY

[www.id.is](http://www.id.is) for an up-to-date list of events by the Iceland Dance Company.

## ICELANDIC OPERA

Ingólfsstræti

[www.opera.is](http://www.opera.is)

Closed for the summer

## ICELAND SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Phone: +354 562 2255

[www.sinfonia.is](http://www.sinfonia.is)

Programme begins in the autumn

## IÐNÓ

Vonarstræti 3

**Best of Light Nights**

**How Do You Like Iceland?**

Iðnó restaurant is offering a special dinner and a show deal.

Between 18:00-20:00 guests can enjoy an Icelandic dinner buffet for 3,800 ISK.

On Mondays and Tuesdays, Iðnó is offering the dinner buffet plus the show Best of Light Nights at 20:30 for 6,000 ISK.

On Wednesdays, dinner and the show How Do You Like Iceland? costs 5,300 ISK.

## Ó. JOHNSON &amp; KAABER HÚSIÐ

Setún 8

**ART-FART THEATRE FESTIVAL**

11.08.2006

**Veggmyndir**

Veggmyndir, 20:00

**Sarent**

RE:RE:RE:RE:RE:RE:RE:RE:RE:No

Subject, 22:00

12.08.2006

**Íslenska hreyfipróunarsamsteypan**

Meyjarheftið, 18:00

**ELA**

Lebanon is a good place for rebirth, 20:00

**B8**

Íslensk myndir LOL djök, 22:30

13.08.2006

**ELA**

Lebanon is a good place for rebirth, 18:00

**Íslenska hreyfipróunarsamsteypan**

Meyjarheftið, 20:00

**Brite Theatre**

Kjöt, 22:00

15.08.2006

**Brite Theatre**

Kjöt, 20:00

16.08.2006

**Sarent**

RE:RE:RE:RE:RE:RE:RE:RE:RE:No

Subject, 18:00

**Íslenska hreyfipróunarsamsteypan**

Meyjarheftið, 20:00

**B8**

Íslensk myndir LOL djök, 22:00

17.08.2006

**Sarent**

RE:RE:RE:RE:RE:RE:RE:RE:RE:No

Subject, 20:00

**Brite Theatre**

Kjöt, 22:00

18.08.2006

**Veggmyndir**

Veggmyndir, 20:00

**B8**

Íslensk myndir LOL djök, 22:00

**ELA**

Lebanon is a good place for rebirth, 24:00

20.08.2006

**ELA**

Lebanon is a good place for rebirth, 20:00

## THE NATIONAL THEATRE

Hverfisgata 19

[www.leikhusid.is](http://www.leikhusid.is)

Closed until August 28

## THE REYKJAVÍK CITY THEATRE

Listabraut 3

[www.borgarleikbus.is](http://www.borgarleikbus.is)

**On the Main Stage**

**Footloose**

**Ronia the Robber's Daughter**

**Who Wants to Find a Million Krónur?**

## THE SETTLEMENT CENTRE (BORGARNES)

[http://landnam.is/tenglar/index\\_en.html](http://landnam.is/tenglar/index_en.html)

**Mr. Skallagrímsson**

Benedikt Erlingsson stars in a funny one-man retelling of the story of Egill Skallagrímsson, the infamous Icelandic Viking.

The final shows are the last Friday, Saturday and Sunday in July at 20:00.

**1 CAFÉ**  
**Café Roma**  
 Laugavegur 118

Roma, at the far end of the main street Laugavegur, is a deli-type coffee house, offering a variety of breads, soup and tempting cookies, cakes and other sweet things. Their special offers around lunch time are always a bargain.

**8 Tíu Dropar**  
 Laugavegur 27

A very nice, old-fashioned café. It's subterranean, as all traditional coffee shops should be, and this place makes you feel warm, both with its atmosphere and the generosity of the coffee refills.

**15 Café Victor**  
 Hafnarstræti 1-3

Spelled with a C rather than the Icelandic K, presumably in an effort to seem more cosmopolitan. This play seems to be working, as the bar has become a hangout for older foreigners. The Viking ship sitting on top of the building might also add to the appeal. The crowd is very mixed, both in origin and age, and so is the music.

**22 Þrúvada**  
 Austurstræti 22

Þrúvada is one of the biggest clubs/bars in downtown Reykjavík, situated in one of the more ideal locations for such an institution in the city. It's divided between two floors, although the distinction between the ambience on the top and bottom floors has faded away in recent times.

**25 Ölstofan**  
 Vegamótstígur

Ölstofan is an unpretentious, comfortable and straightforward place to do just that. It's also known as a hangout for the 'intellectual' circles of Reykjavík, as well as some media types, the opposite of 'intellectual' in this country. Music is almost never played at Ölstofan – so you can actually have a conversation.

**28 Kaffibrennslan**  
 Þórhafstræti 9

Café, bistro, restaurant, bar – whatever you want to call it, Kaffibrennslan is a consistently pleasant place to go for snacks and refreshments of whatever variety you happen to crave. They also have the largest selection of beers in Reykjavík. We recommend the Cobra and Staropramen.

**31 RESTAURANTS**  
**Krua Thai**  
 Tryggvagata 14

This authentic Thai restaurant is one of the better bargains in town. We challenge you to find a better meal for the same price anywhere else. They have their menu outside with numbered colour images. Just say the number and eat the food.

**34 Argentina**  
 Barónsstígur 11a

Perennial favourite, Argentina is a fine dining steak house. For whale-enthusiasts, you can also sample the local Minke, or excellent fish. This restaurant has maintained its reputation with three things: perfect cuts of meat, excellent service, and an excellent wine list.

**37 Tapas**  
 Vesturgata 3b

Those with a bit of money and time on their hands would do well to spend an evening or two at Tapas, having course after course of wonderful miniature dishes served to them. Oddly, it's also a great place to get tasty and affordable lobster. If you don't feel like getting up right away afterwards, there's also a lounge.

**44 Bæjarins Bestu**  
 Tryggvagata

A veritable institution in central Reykjavík, and probably the most consistently successful business the city has seen, Bæjarins Bestu is actually just a simple hot dog stand. Their menu consists of hot dogs and Coke – and nothing else. You don't have to be a Buddhist to ask them to make you one with everything.

**2 Ráðhúskaffi**  
 City Hall

Ráðhúskaffi, situated inside the Reykjavík City Hall, is a comfortable choice for the view over Tjörninn (the pond). It's especially convenient on Iceland's so-called 'window weather' days – the days that are only beautiful if you stay indoors. Coffee, light snacks, art exhibitions, Internet access, a topographic model of Iceland and municipal politics: all conveniently under the same roof.

**9 Kaffitár**  
 Bankastræti 8

This is the downtown store of one of the country's finest coffee importers, and the quality of the product is as excellent as you would expect. While anything here is good, the speciality coffee drinks are truly remarkable: our favourite, the Azteca, an espresso drink with lime and Tabasco.

**16 Vegamót**  
 Vegamótstígur 4

Vegamót (crossroads) has an appealing lunch menu, they serve brunch during the weekends, and the kitchen is open until 22:00 daily. After that the beat goes on, and you can check the end results in photos published the day after on their website www.vegamat.is. If you like Oliver, try Vegamót and vice versa.

**23 Café Cultura**  
 Hverfisgata 18

The trendy Café Cultura is located in the same building as the Intercultural Centre, and has a distinct international flavour. A good-value menu, friendly service and settings that allow you to either sit down and carry on discussions, or dance the night away.

**26 Thorvaldsen**  
 Austurstræti 8

This place is fancy, and it knows it. Civilian attire is looked down upon, so don't expect to get in wearing hiking boots. DJs play on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays. Arrive before 12 if you want to avoid the queue.

**29 Glaumar**  
 Tryggvagata 20

Partly a sports bar, Glaumar is also a popular venue for live bands and DJs, but mostly it's just a good place to get drunk and party. They can host private gatherings before midnight on weekdays, and you would be hard pressed to get a better deal on a keg party than here.

**32 Tveir Fiskar**  
 Geirsgata 9

Located right by the harbour, Tveir Fiskar boasts some of the freshest fish in town – they prefer it to still be moving when they buy it. Their menu also dares to be different, and this just might be your only chance to sample the debatable delights of raw dolphin.

**35 Vin og Skel**  
 Laugavegur 55

If you like fresh seafood and are in the mood for something a little different, this cosy but ambitious restaurant just might fit the bill. Shellfish, salmon, squid, lobster and other creatures of the deep predominate the menu here. There is no smoking in the restaurant, but if you want to have a go at sitting outside there are fleece blankets provided.

**38 Sægreifinn**  
 Geirsgata

Places recommended for their local touch tend to instantly lose any element of the exotic, but Sægreifinn (The Sea Baron) is an exception. It's a combination of a fish store and a... well, not exactly a restaurant but a place that serves prepared food, located in a harbour warehouse. Smell of fish, the view over the harbour, an old man that looks exactly like an Icelandic fisherman should. What's not to love?

**45 Subway**  
 Austurstræti

You know exactly what you get when you walk into a Subway restaurant, and their sub sandwiches are always made from fresh ingredients – right in front of your eyes. Reasonably priced and far healthier than most alternatives – provided you show some restraint when you order.

**3 Grái Kötturrinn**  
 Hverfisgata 16a

Grái Kötturrinn (the grey cat) is a cosy place that's especially popular during the morning hours. Their breakfast is legendary, but they tend not to be open later in the day. A great place to nurse a hangover, or just to start the workday.

**10 Segafredo**  
 By Lækjartorg

Italian coffee chain Segafredo seems to be doing brisk business by Lækjartorg, with locals and tourists alike flocking to sip their espressos at the conveniently placed tables outside. The staff are expert baristas, and, even though Iceland is proud of its coffee, nobody quite tops the Segafredo latte.

**17 B5**  
 Bankastræti 5

B5 is a bistro with a Scandinavian focus on the menu. Don't be fooled by the impressive collection of design classics that you see in the window when passing by – it's neither cold nor overly expensive, but rather a cosy place with friendly service.

**4 Kaffi Hjómaland**  
 Laugavegur 21

Despite hosting the occasional rock concert, Kaffi Hjómaland is a peaceful café with perfect windows for people watching and a lot of daylight. It's run by a non-profit organisation and only serves organic & fair-trade products. It's strictly a non-smoking establishment.

**11 BARS 'N' BISTROS**  
**Sólón**  
 Bankastræti 7a

Sólón is a nightclub on Friday and Saturday nights, but during the daytime it's a café/bistro. On weeknights they're a restaurant with a decent menu as well, and an art exhibition on the walls to finish the package.

**18 Rósenberg**  
 Lækjargata 2

Perhaps the closest thing to a jazz club in town, here old instruments line the walls. People go there for conversation and to listen to music rather than dance. The place tends to have jazz- or blues-type music, and is developing a bluegrass scene.

**5 Mokka**  
 Skólavörðustígur 3a

Kaffi Mokka is one of the oldest cafés in Reykjavík, dating back to the 1950s. Famous for their dark, smoky atmosphere, loyal clientele and some of the best waffles in town.

**12 Litli Ljóti Andarunginn**  
 Lækjargata 6b

Known for its all you can eat fish buffet, this restaurant/guesthouse is also a fine place to sit down and relax with a latte or some beer when suffering from a case of severe hipster-burn.

**19 Grand Rokk**  
 Smiðustígur 6

As the Viking-style garden and logo accurately signal, this hardcore chess hangout is no place for the weak. Yes, chess bars are that tough in Iceland. Even if the downstairs atmosphere can feel a bit ominous at times, it's one of the best venues for live music in town. If you speak Icelandic you can also take part in the pub quiz on Fridays at 17:30. Participation is free and the winner walks away with a case of beer!

**6 Ömmukaffi**  
 Austurstræti

The name literally means "grandma's coffee shop", but here you can find people of all ages and all nationalities. It has a very friendly, down-to-earth feel to it. Affordable prices on coffee, cakes and the lunch menu. Try their speciality, the South African latte.

**13 Kaffibarinn**  
 Bergtáubastræti 1

Kaffibarinn has a reputation as a hangout for artists and others who think they are hip. Friday and Saturday nights serve as the weekly peaks of claustrophobia, while weekdays and afternoons can be comfortable, if banal.

**20 Bar 11**  
 Laugavegur 11

While the place is only open on the weekends, Bar 11 is a popular rock bar on Laugavegur and one of the main late-night party venues in town. You'll feel the floor jumping every Friday and Saturday, and it's neither you nor an earthquake. Live concerts and a nice foosball table upstairs.

**7 Babalú**  
 Skólavörðustígur 22a

One of the youngest coffeehouses in Reykjavík is also the homiest. Almost like a living room away from home, Babalú keeps it simple, quiet and cosy with coffee and the occasional crêpe.

**14 Sirkus**  
 Klappargata 30

Of absolutely no relation to the trashy culture guide, or trashy TV station that stole its name, Sirkus is worshipped like few other locales in Iceland. Elements of the odd and alternative cultural institution include an upstairs that looks and smells like a bus, a garden, a flea market and a queue on weekend nights that looks never-ending.

**21 Hressingarskálinn**  
 Austurstræti 20

The celebrated site of one of the more famous coffeehouses in Iceland, this bar/café/bistro brings a European flair to the city. That is until about 11, when things get to rockin', and you can see the true character of Reykjavík.

**24 Þríkið**  
 Bankastræti 12

Þríkið has changed noticeably in character in recent years, as it used to be an old-fashioned and traditional downtown coffeehouse. Somehow the younger crowd caught on and transformed the place to its present form: a diner during the day and a rowdy nightclub on weekends. You can also borrow board games there, such as backgammon or chess, and it is a popular breakfast spot early in the morning.

**27 Kaffi Amsterdam**  
 Hafnarstræti 5

Kaffi Amsterdam is a cosy tavern located in the centre of Reykjavík. Known mostly for its rambling late-hour drinking crowd, Amsterdam recently established itself as a fresh new venue for the city's music talent.

**30 Dillon**  
 Laugavegur 30

Legendary Icelandic rockers have been known to DJ at this place from time to time, and Þróstur from Mímus has even tended the bar. You can pretty much guarantee this place will be rocking any time you walk in on a Friday or Saturday night.

**33 Hornið**  
 Hafnarstræti 15

Means "the corner" and the place lives up to its name by... well, being on a corner. This is actually the oldest Italian restaurant in town, celebrating its 27th year, and it always seems to be consistently popular. Excellent quality pizza, pasta and salads – all priced affordably.

**36 Tjarnarbakkinn**  
 Vönnarstræti 3

Tjarnarbakkinn is right above the Iðnó theatre, so it's an ideal place to go before shows, or during if you prefer a more quiet atmosphere. If you sit by the window you get nice views of the pond, and in the summers you can enjoy your meal outside. The lamb comes especially recommended; it's one of those rare traditional Icelandic dishes that aren't an acquired taste.

**43 Bernhöftsbakari**  
 Bergtáubastræti 13

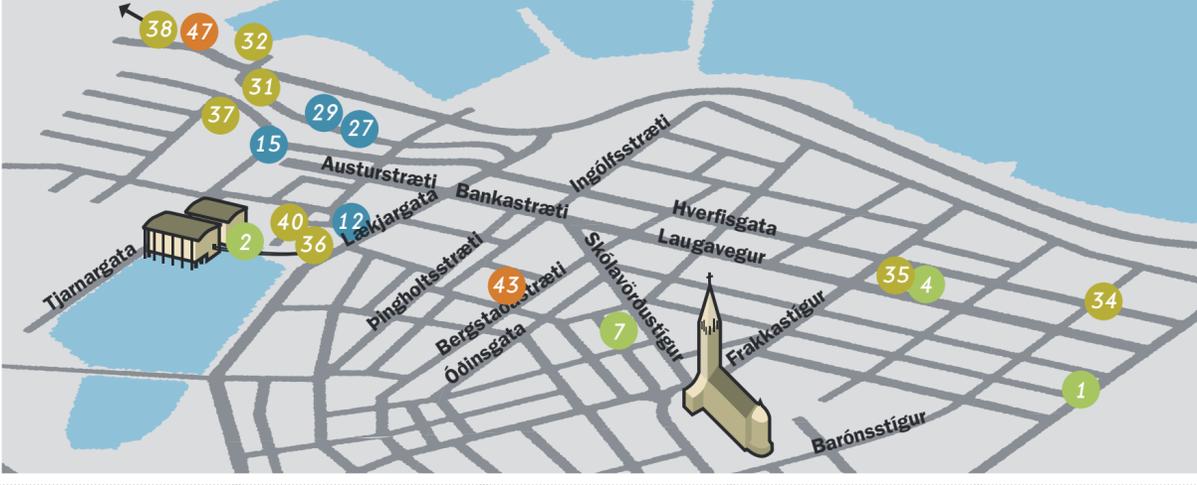
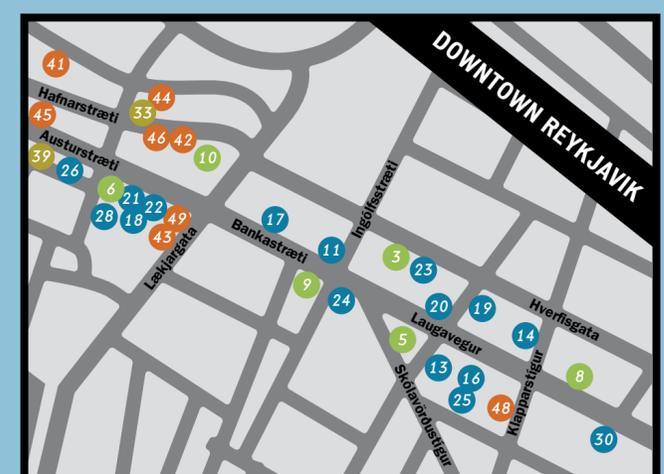
The oldest bakery in Reykjavík, founded in 1834. If you are particular about your bread this is about the best place in central Reykjavík to stock up on a variety of freshly baked loaves – they also do a particularly moist and juicy version of the ever popular vinarbráð pastries. You can even call ahead and have your favourite items reserved, if you're afraid someone else might beat you to that last snúður or kleina.

**50 Vitabar**  
 Bergþórsgata 21

Actually a bar, but best known for its hamburgers. A burger with fries for 500 is one of the best meal deals in town, but special mention must go to the Forget-Me-Not blue cheese and garlic extravaganza.



Recently voted one of seven coolest concept shops in the world by Danish Magazine Eurowoman, fashion shop KRONKRON truly lives up to the honor. Opened in 2004 and recently moved to a roomy and newly renovated location at Laugavegur 63b this young store sells a selection of high-class fashion labels like Vivienne Westwood, Humanoid and Umbro as well as Icelandic design by Eygló Margrét Lárusdóttir.



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 www.galbi.is  
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 Tel: 551 8666  
 E-mail: vidtjornina@simnet.is

**41 FAST FOOD**  
**American Style**  
 Tryggvagata 26

Famous for their burgers and fries, American Style actually serves a variety of American-influenced dishes with a strong local flavour. You get the feeling that you are expected to eat a great deal, so loosen your belt a bit before you dig in.

**42 Pizza King**  
 Hafnarstræti 18

Most people get to know Pizza King after a late-night drinking session leaves them tired and hungry downtown, and it truly is a lifesaver in those situations. The difference between Pizza King and some less savoury fast food options downtown is that you would be happy to go back to eat there while sober, and their special lunch offers make that a very attractive option.

**49 Kebabúsið**  
 Lækjargata 2

Some of the best fish and chips in town can be found at Kebabúsið, and they obviously have a selection of kebabs as well. The falafel comes recommended, despite being a relatively unappreciated menu item in Iceland, and the beef and lamb pitas are quite good as well.

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RADIO

**Rás 1**  
Government radio station often featuring talk shows, radio soap operas, and traditional music.

**Rás 2**  
More progressive government radio station, featuring a variety of music as well as news discussion programmes.

**Bylgjan** (98.9 FM)  
Light pop music.

**Útvarp Saga** (99.4 FM)  
Iceland's oldest station, featuring both Icelandic and foreign music from decades past.

**Talstöðin** (90.9 FM)  
Talk radio station, in Icelandic.

**Létt 96.7** (96.7 FM)  
Office pop, easy listening.

**FM 957** (95.7 FM)  
One of the "hnakkistöðvar," playing pop-rock geared towards urban clubbing youth.

**XFM** (91.9FM)  
Iceland's rock station, often playing cutting-edge releases.

**Lindin** (102.9 FM)  
Christian broadcasting station, available all over the country.

**Rokkland - Rás 2**  
In which radio personality and Bubbi fan Óli Palli translates interviews from the BBC. This is actually one of the few Icelandic radio shows that actively attempt to present new and interesting music, although the show's source of material tends to focus on Coldplay and their ilk, along with the NME's current hype of the month. The interviews are usually informative and they are broadcast in both English and Icelandic. Rás 2 really ought to have a similar show focusing on Icelandic music, however.

**Zúúber - FM 957**  
I really shouldn't write a word about this show. I'm just going to come off as a bitter outcast who doesn't enjoy participating in society's vast pleasures. "Zúúber is a really funny show," they'll say, "You should give it a chance." Well, I did. It was awful. I barely managed to get through their eight-song playlist's rotation, so appalled was I by the presenters' obvious and utter ignorance of everything good and decent in the world. I heard them mispronounce names, both English and Icelandic. I heard them make factual errors, repeatedly. I heard them tell what I can only assume were supposed to be jokes. Mostly I just heard people that obviously couldn't be bothered preparing for their job at all.

TV

**Love Monkey**  
This stupidly titled TV series has been described as Sex in the City for men. I saw an episode the other day and can safely attest that the show is indeed set in a city and does involve some sex. It stars Ed actor Tom Cavanagh as a music scout looking for love and success in the seemingly exciting world of indie-rock. He has some fairly likeable male friends (one of them is actually 90s hunk Jason Priestley!) and they have some problems that need a 40-minute resolution, too. Most involve women. It features some OK music, and the jokes weren't half bad. So, you have what looks like a fine set-up for a comedy series. Too bad they cancelled it almost immediately. Enjoy, while you can.



**Melrose Place**  
Skjár 1 has been re-running the classic Melrose Place after midnight this summer; a veritable godsend if you happen to be an unemployed stoner or working the graveyard shift at a hospital. The show serves as a reminder of just how obnoxious and, well, plain evil humans can be at their worst. It also features some pretty hot babes and dudes with weird haircuts, along with the occasional revelatory plot point. Really, if you're disappointed with your current situation, watching middle-class folk plotting to murder one another over their love lives can really help put things into perspective. Bonus titbit: Generation X author Douglas Coupland has made a point out of complaining that the whole Melrose Place plateau was highly derivative of his famous debut novel. It's kind of weird actually, considering his protagonists just sat around talking the whole time.



The Grapevine lists exhibitions from galleries throughout Iceland. If you would like to be included, free of charge, contact the Grapevine by email at [listings@grapevine.is](mailto:listings@grapevine.is). Compiled by Valgerður Þóroddsdóttir

**101 GALLERY**  
Hverfisgata 18  
Thu.-Sat. 14-17 and by appointment

28.07-02.09.06  
Serge Comte

**THE EINAR JÓNSSON MUSEUM**

Eiríksgrata  
Tue.-Sun. 14-17  
[www.skulptur.is](http://www.skulptur.is)

Permanent exhibition of the work of sculptor Einar Jónsson

**THE CULTURE HOUSE**  
Hverfisgata 15  
Open daily 11-17  
[www.thjodmenning.is](http://www.thjodmenning.is)

29.06.06-27.02.07  
Icelandic Fashion 2006

Permanent Exhibits  
Medieval Manuscripts; The National Museum- as it was; The Library Room

**DWARF GALLERY**  
Grundarstígur 21  
Opening Hours Vary  
<http://this.is/birta>

**GALLERY 100 DEGREES**  
Bæjarháls 1  
Mon.-Fri. 8:30-16  
[www.or.is/Forsida/Gallery100](http://www.or.is/Forsida/Gallery100)

**GALLERÍ ANIMA**  
Ingólfsstræti 8  
Wed.-Sat. 13-17

18.08-09.09.06  
Bára Kristinsdóttir

**GALLERY FOLD**  
Rauðarárstígur 14-16  
Mon.-Fri. 10-18  
Sat. 11-16  
Sun. 14-16  
[www.myndlist.is](http://www.myndlist.is)

**GALLERÍ SÆVARIS KARLS**  
Bankastræti 7  
<http://www.saevarkarl.is>

Current exhibition:  
Rudolf L. Reiter

**GALLERY TURPENTINE**  
Ingólfsstræti 5  
Tue.-Fri. 12-18  
Sat. 11-16  
[www.turpentine.is](http://www.turpentine.is)  
18.08-10.09.06  
Aron Reyrr Sværissón

19.08-05.09.06  
Alistair Macintyre

**GEL GALLERÍ**  
Hverfisgata 37  
Mon.-Fri. 10-19  
Sat. 10-17

01.08- ?  
Aron Bergman

**GERÐUBERG CULTURAL CENTRE**  
Gerðuberg 3-5

08.14-10.09.06  
Sculptures by Guðjón Stefán Kristinsson; Acrylic portraits by Jón Ólafsson; paintings by Ketill Larsen

**GYLLINHÉÐ**  
Laugavegur 23  
Thu.-Sun. 14-18

Students from the second year of the Academy

**IS GALLERY**

Klappartígur 33  
Tue.-Fri. 11-17  
Sat. and by appointment 13-17  
[www.is.is](http://www.is.is)

14.09-21.10.06  
Hildur Bjarnadóttir

**ICELANDIC LABOUR UNION'S ART GALLERY**  
Freyjugata 41  
Tue.-Sun. 13-17  
Free Entrance

19.08-10.09.06  
Alexandra Signer & Tumi Magnússon

**KLING & BANG GALLERY**  
Laugavegur 23  
Thu.- Sun. 14-18  
Free Entrance  
[www.this.is/klingandbang](http://www.this.is/klingandbang)

CLOSED until  
14.10-05.11.06  
Hrafnhildur Arnadóttir & New York artists

**LIVING ART MUSEUM**  
Laugavegur 26  
Wed., Fri.-Sun. 13-17  
Thu. 13-22  
[www.nylo.is](http://www.nylo.is)

12.08-03.09.06  
Pétur Már Gunnarsson, Johann Maheut, Toshinari Sato

**THE NATIONAL GALLERY**  
Frikirkjuvegur  
Tue.-Sun. 11-17  
Free Entrance  
[www listasafn.is](http://www listasafn.is)

08.07-24.09.06  
Landscape and folklore

**THE NATIONAL MUSEUM**  
Suðurgata 41  
Open daily 10-17  
[www.natmus.is/english](http://www.natmus.is/english)

Temporary Exhibitions:  
Photography from Iceland, 1938  
Invisible women in Icelandic art  
Archaeological research and Iceland's new view of history

Permanent Exhibitions:  
The Making of a Nation

**THE NORDIC HOUSE**  
Sturlugata 5  
Tue.-Sun. 12-17  
[www.nordice.is/english](http://www.nordice.is/english)

30.07-30.09.06  
Ilmur Stefánsdóttir & Steinunn Knútsdóttir

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Ingólfsstræti 1a

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**REYKJAVÍK 871 +/- 2 : THE SETTLEMENT EXHIBITION**  
Aðalstræti 16  
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[www.listsafnreykjavikur.is](http://www.listsafnreykjavikur.is)

**HAFNARHÚS**  
Tryggvagata 17  
Open daily 10-17

10.06.06-07.01.07  
The Erró Collection: Graphic Works

**KJARVALSSTAÐIR**  
Flókagata  
Open daily 10-17

08.04-03.12.06  
Let's Look at Art: A series of exhibitions especially designed for children

24.06-17.09.06  
Summer Exhibition from the Permanent Collection

**REYKJAVÍK MUSEUM**  
Kistuhylur 4  
June-August 10-17  
[www.arbaejarsafn.is](http://www.arbaejarsafn.is)

Closed in September.

**THE REYKJAVÍK MUSEUM OF PHOTOGRAPHY**  
Grófarhús, Tryggvagata 15, 6th floor  
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Sat.-Sun. 13-17

01.06-24.09.06  
Photography by Andrés Kolbeinsson

**SAFN**  
Laugavegur 37  
Wed.-Fri. 14-18

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[www.gljufrauseum.is](http://www.gljufrauseum.is)

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12.08-03.09.06  
Sean Shanahan, Alan Johnston, Ragna Róbertsdóttir

Sigurjón Ólafsson Museum  
Laugarnestangi 70  
Tue.-Sun. 14-17

Permanent exhibition of the work of sculptor Sigurjón Ólafsson

**PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE STREETS OF DOWNTOWN REYKJAVÍK**

The Reykjavík Museum of Photography is celebrating its 25th anniversary with a photographic look back at the past century of life in the capital. These retrospectives are on display in Lækjartorg, Austurvöllur and Fögetagarður.

Continues on page 33



**Literary Walking Tour**

Looking for a fun introduction to the literature and history of the city?

Join a critic and an actor in a walk through downtown Reykjavík.

Reykjavik City Library, Tryggvagata 15. Every Thursday in July and August from 5 – 6:30 pm. Free of charge.

Tel.: 563 1717 - [www.borgarbokasafn.is](http://www.borgarbokasafn.is)



**Garfield**

This wittily titled sequel is sure to set Reykjavík's theatres ablaze with the joyful laughter of sugar-fuelled brats, making it an obvious pick for Iceland's famously hung-over brand of "weekend dads". The adventurous people behind this second feature length exploitation of cartoon-cat Garfield somehow came up with the idea of setting it in the U.K. - likely the source of various accent-based jokes and royalty references. Starring the adorable Breckin Meyer and Jennifer Love Hewitt along with the voice talents of Bill Murray, Garfield: A Tail of Two Kitties is definitely a must-see for fans of wooden acting and CGI-based shenanigans. *HM*



**Thank You for Smoking**

A movie portraying the action-packed lives of U.S. alcohol, firearm and tobacco-lobbyists sounds interesting enough, if properly executed. The trailer for this one looks kind of promising and it's reportedly based on some novel, so it might even feature a plot (a rare sight in Iceland's multiplexes these days). This alleged plot revolves around a Big Tobacco spokesman trying to raise a 12-year-old son with integrity while feeding his evil, filthy lies to the public. Directed by Ivan Reitman's son and featuring a performance from the ever-gorgeous Rob Lowe, Thank You for Smoking just might prove to be a worthwhile thing to see on a Sunday night. *HM*

**THE ANT BULLY**

Julia Roberts, Nicolas Cage and Bruce Campbell (!) lend their voices to this CGI-flick about a man who shrinks and has to work in an ant colony.

**THE BREAK UP**

Jennifer Aniston and Vince Vaughn star in this romantic comedy.  
*Háskólabíó*

**CLICK**

Adam Sandler's latest comedic vehicle, telling the story of a man with a remote control that can affect reality itself.  
*Regnboginn*

**GARFIELD: A TAIL OF TWO KITTIES**

Lovable cartoon cat Garfield frolics in England. Some castles are involved.

**FIVE CHILDREN AND IT**

Featuring the voice talent of Eddie Izzard as a Sand Fairy, this English fairytale movie also stars Kenneth Branagh.  
*Sambíóin Kringlunni, Sambíóin Alfabakka, Sambíóin Akureyri*

**HALF LIGHT**

Demi Moore in a supernatural thriller where she plays a writer who runs into all kinds of ghosts while on vacation.  
*Sambíóin Akureyri*

**LADY IN THE WATER**

M. Night Shyamalan's latest film stars Paul Giamatti as a building superintendent determined to save a strange woman he finds in his pool.  
*Sambíóin Kringlunni, Sambíóin Alfabakka, Háskólabíó*

**THE LONG WEEKEND**

Two brothers, one a nerd, the other a playboy, with very different goals in life, spend a weekend together, ending in all kinds of stupidity.  
*Sambíóin Alfabakka*

**MIAMI VICE**

Based on the TV series, undercover cops Crockett and Tubbs return and chase Miami drug dealers around in fancy suits and fast cars. Warning: Colin Farrell is in this movie.  
*Sambíóin Alfabakka, Sambíóin Kringlunni, Smárabíó, Laugarásbíó, Borgarbíó*

**A PRAIRIE HOME COMPANION**

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**THE SENTINEL**

A traitor in the Secret Service stirs things up as the president's life is in danger. Starring Michael Douglas, Kiefer Suth-

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*Smárabíó, Laugarásbíó, Borgarbíó*

**SILENT HILL**

A woman searching for her daughter somehow ends up fighting off a huge army of monsters in a deserted town.  
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Ewan McGregor, Mickey Rourke and Alicia Silverstone together in an adventure film about a teenage super-spy who ends up working for MI6.  
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## My Brother's Environment

In 1970, at the age of 25, Páll S. Kristinsson moved from Iceland to the United States, never to return again. After his death last February, his sister Bára Kristinsdóttir visited and photographed his home and surroundings in Jupiter, Florida, where he spent the greater half of his life. The collection of photographs, titled "My Brother's Environment" documents Bára's unique perspective on a world dramatically distant from her own.  
**Gallerí Anima (Ingólfsstræti 8) Wednesday-Saturday, 13-17. Until September 9**



## Video-instalments

A video instalment titled "Video-instalments" by artists Aleksandra Signer and Tumi Magnússon is on display now in the Ásmund room and the pit at the Icelandic Labour Union's Art Gallery. The exhibition is a collaborative effort between Polish Signer, who will be displaying five pieces that she worked on between 1997-2006, and Icelandic Magnússon, who will be displaying his recent video work on four screens.

In 1973 Signer attended the Art University in Warsaw, and she has worked in Gallen, Swiss since 1977, mainly in video, which often reflects her political sentiments.

Magnússon was born in Reykjavík but studied visual art in Holland. He worked as a professor at the Iceland Academy of the Arts between 1999-2005 before being offered a professorship at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen. After working with painting for most of his career, Magnússon has recently begun experimenting with photography, video and computer technology.

**Icelandic Labour Union's Art Gallery (Freyjugata 41) Tuesday-Sunday, 13-17. Until October 9**

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## Alistair Macintyre

"Drawing has been defined as the archaeology of the act of touching a surface. In recent work I have been trying to push this notion to an extreme, taking scales and speeds of touch – and the location of touch in time – and polarising them out to the limits of their range."

For his large drawings, Reykjavík-based artist Alistair Macintyre utilises time-sensitive mediums such as iron oxide on paper. His sketches become strangely alive as, in taking inspiration both literally and figuratively from the natural environment, they attempt to represent fragments of time and ideas stencilled onto paper like fossils.

After getting a diploma in landscape architecture from Cheltenham College in the U.K., Macintyre switched over to the fine arts, graduating with honours and a major in sculpture eight years later. He then attended Kuvataideakatemia in Helsinki, and the School of Art and Design at Glamorgan University. Currently he lives and works in Reykjavík.

**Gallery Turpentine (Ingólfsstræti 5) Tuesday-Friday, 12-18. Until September 5**



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Artist: Karólína Lárusdóttir

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# DINING, EATING & GRUBBING

Gunnar Hrafn Jónsson on Reykjavík Dining **Photos by Gúndi and Skari**

## SJÁVARKJALLARINN

Ádalstræti 2  
Tel.: 511-1212



Sjávarkjallarinn roughly translates to “the sea cellar”, but don’t let the name fool you – this isn’t a hangout for drunken sailors but surely one of the finest seafood restaurants in Reykjavík. Their two celebrated chefs have each won the ‘Icelandic Chef of the Year’ award and they have two junior champions as apprentices. Arriving on a Sunday evening to find the place packed and customers being turned away, we felt a tinge of guilt but were further reassured that this place would provide us with one of the better dining experiences available in the city.

The staff was attentive, and not afraid to smile. They rose to the challenge of describing the sometimes ridiculously wide variety of fancy-sounding ingredients without missing a beat. The sashimi and nigiri on the starter menu turned out to be a clue to the fact that one of the main influences on the chefs at Sjávarkjallarinn is Asian cuisine. Practically everything was served with (or on) exotic looking leaves and delicate bamboo ornaments. Some of the less recognisable ingredients turned out to be of Asian origin as well. The fusion works unbelievably well. The HUGE lobster platter my dining partner was presented with, for example, contained such things as wasabi and cream sauce. It was truly a feast. My tuna steak with king crab was served tandoori style with satay sauce and god knows what else – the flavours came at me from all directions and I couldn’t have been more satisfied.

The dessert menu arrived in the form of a billboard-sized plaque that looked as comically oversized as those cheques one only sees at award ceremonies and charity events. As unwieldy as the thing was to hold at the table, the sorbet and wild-cacao bean soufflé we picked out from it were both mind-blowing. The wild-cacao bean is a notoriously dangerous creature, and fights to the death when cornered, so it is a testament to the professionalism and dedication of the staff that they risk life and limb to apprehend this elusive but delicious prey. All kidding aside, it was delicious.

Overall, we were greatly impressed with Sjávarkjallarinn and the prices were surprisingly fair, considering the artistry involved in the creation of each dish (eating them really does feel like trashing a masterpiece) – and the obvious demand.



## TVEIR FISKAR

Geirsgata 9  
Tel.: 511-3474



The Grapevine’s food critic was recently challenged, by a clown no less, to find dolphin on the menu of an Icelandic restaurant. His reasoning was that while the locals are nonchalant about eating whale, they might think twice about scarfing down the cuter and sillier sea mammals that most people associate with theme parks and children’s TV. In fact, they are often nicknamed “clowns of the sea.” Not wanting to shrink from the challenge, The Grapevine’s intrepid staff made some phone calls and arranged to take the jester out

for raw dolphin at Tveir Fiskar. As it turns out, raw dolphin carpaccio is really quite good. It was prepared just like the more traditional beef variety, and the combination of flavours was exciting but not as ‘different’ as one might expect. The other starter, a bouillabaisse seafood soup, was good but a bit on the greasy side. This is a definite trend in Icelandic seafood cuisine of late, but excessive oil can sometimes make a soup too demanding to properly serve as a starter.

Our main courses were salted fish (bacalao) in almond and parmigiano crust with tomato vinaigrette, and lobster in garlic, respectively. The fish was quite different from what Icelanders think of when you say salted fish – and that is a very good thing indeed. The dish had a pronounced Mediterranean feel. The lobster, or langoustine for the purists, was served ‘the old way’, according to the

menu. That consists of garlic butter, various unnamed spices, and bread. Considering the ingredients and the class of the restaurant, the result was unsurprisingly delicious.

The chocolate soufflé didn’t seem to contain a lot of skyr, but was still a damn fine dessert. The chocolate soufflé with mango sorbet was equally impressive. The only problem with the restaurant is the way the main dining area is set up. When you first arrive you are seated in an extremely comfortable environment with comfortable couches, a well-stocked bar and even artificial northern lights shining above. You can in fact choose to remain there until your dinner arrives, but once you move into the dining area the contrast becomes apparent. That minor gripe aside, Tveir Fiskar is a great place to get expertly prepared, fresh fish.

## VIÐ TJÖRNINA

Templarásundi 3  
Tel.: 551-8666



As soon as you enter you know this is no ordinary establishment. For one thing, it looks like a fancy version of the stereotypical Icelandic grandma’s house. The furniture and the décor are all more reminiscent of a well-to-do mid-fifties household than a restaurant, but it’s the architecture that really highlights this unique theme. It really did use to be a well-to-do household and rather than totally remodelling and knocking down the walls the owners kept it more or less intact. The result is a uniquely homey feel

and a mix of privacy and intimacy; there are only a couple of tables per room in just a few rooms.

On the subject of the actual food and service, it’s equally hard to comment without having it sound like a sales pitch: they are just that good.

After we were seated and provided with bread that seemed to be right out of the oven, we ordered a starter of seafood soup and smoked guillemot, which is a bird native to Iceland, just as practically all the other items on the menu seemed to be. Suffice to say both were brilliant; I actually slurped the remains of the soup up from the bowl when no one was looking. Just as we were finishing up, the head chef came out with a mischievous grin and two plates, each holding a divine portion of what appeared to be garlic-sautéed lobster and scallop. It went perfectly

with the white wine that the friendly and helpful waiter recommended.

We were already sold on this being one of the best meals of our lives when the main courses arrived – a honey-roasted spotted catfish in red wine sauce and another kind of catfish sautéed in butter. Both were beyond words, cooked to perfection and seasoned by the Gods. The red wine sauce may have been a tad thin for my tastes, but that’s so petty it’s a bit like saying Gandhi is your hero but you don’t like the bald look – a minor detail. Lastly, the dessert didn’t let the rest of the meal down. I ordered the skyr, and much to my delight it was served exactly the way my grandmother in Skagafjörður used to present it for special occasions.



### WE RECOMMEND

## BEZT Í HEIMI



## Traditional Fish, Northern Style

BY BART CAMERON

Across Iceland, there are dozens of legendary establishments that justify lengthy pilgrimages through the most imposing of driving conditions. The first that comes to mind is the storied Við Fjöruborðið, the lobster restaurant in Stokkseyri that has made a lobster and Brennivín addict out of Dave Grohl and the Foo Fighters. Við Fjöruborðið is adored because people throughout southern Iceland know exactly what to expect from the chefs there: good, fresh lobster, prepared in the traditional style. The added bonus is the complete lack of pretension that comes with dining in a working, thriving small town.

In this same league is the Ísafjörður restaurant Tjöruhúsið. Located in the Ísafjörður Maritime Museum, the restaurant does its first job right: it serves traditional local food simply and well. In this case, though, you don’t get lobster, but Iceland’s real staples: haddock and cod, presented best in plökfiskur, the mashed dish that should be the pride of the Icelandic cooking tradition.

If you want to really enjoy fish, and forget about the fact that you’re eating something healthy and that people tell you to eat, then you have to hit up Tjöruhúsið... oh wait, this recommendation doesn’t work for a place located in the most remote major town in Iceland. Fine. But it’s worth scheduling your visit to northern Iceland around this establishment, just as a visit to Reykjavík should make room for a 45-minute drive to Stokkseyri.

Bezt í Heimi is a recommendation we only give to places that are the best of their type in the frigginn world. Honestly, it takes more than just well-prepared fish to earn such a label. The great Ísafjörður summer restaurant has the little extra that the Grapevine staff has to reward: it has a likeable staff, a lack of pretension and an excellent relationship with its community.

Take our visits to Tjöruhúsið in the last week, when we were touring the country. When we first stopped in for plökfiskur, we walked in on a gang of marauding pop punk rockers hanging from the rafters. The band was called Lack of Talent, and the chef, waitress, and quite a few older clientele were enjoying the show over fish and chilled white wine.

To see such an occasion is to assume that Tjöruhúsið is some kind of product of a gourmet hippie commune. But to see it the next night, for a local saltfish celebration, when we were the only visitors without ties, was to realise the flexibility of the staff, and the genuine cool of the restaurant.

In all, in two days in Ísafjörður, the Grapevine consumed three meals at Tjöruhúsið. After two days of constant fish consumption, a healthy pallor started to come through on our skin, and the omega oils began to make us feel, not giddy, but not so hateful. We came to a shocking realisation that if we had this place in Reykjavík, we would move in.

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## Flexible, Greased Up Comedy

Chippendales strip for Icelandic women at Broadway

BY STEINUNN JAKOBSDÓTTIR

"Where are my dirty, horny women!?" a tanned and muscular man wearing only a black G-string, shoes and a collar shouted into a microphone, resulting in treble screaming, shaking bodies and wine glasses flying through the air.

The noise didn't diminish when he continued by telling the girls in the audience they were all virgins again for the night. With no husbands, boyfriends or fiancés, they were told they were also all very single and about to witness something they had never seen before. Getting the crowd ready for a night of contentment and satisfaction he yelled out: "Let's open your hearts, minds and souls for the Chippendales!"

Yup, the world-famous male strippers Chippendales visited Iceland for the first time last week and performed to a full house at Broadway. In the local media the performance was advertised as being better than sex. Seeing the "studs" in their flimsy attire was said to be the girls' World Cup, an opportunity of a lifetime to see the most perfect men in the world strip down and dance around for your pleasure only. The girls could even take part in the dirty fun themselves.

Like many young women in Reykjavík, I decided that this was something I just had to see for myself.

'Oh man, what did I get myself into?' was my first thought when I tried to find a good spot inside the packed venue where about 1,000 women of all ages, who were all amazingly well-dressed and gorgeous, had nestled into their seats, queued by the bar or standing on chairs to get a better view of the all-male revue just starting. Many had attended for a friend's birthday or bachelorette party. With the exception of a couple of guys in the audience this was a girls' night out.

Sex wasn't the first thing that came into my mind though as the show went on. This night was more hilarious than I could ever

have expected, and the term "sexy" wouldn't exactly describe what I was about to witness.

After a very long intro in which one guy bounced around in his underwear trying to warm up the crowd before the real deal, the show started with a man wearing a suit walking onto the stage. He was introduced as a normal guy who had just arrived home after a long day at the office. As expected after a difficult workday, he climbed on top of the desk, took his clothes off nice and slow and, with his hand in the crotch of his pants, started humping the air while blasting techno music. As he covered his dick with a towel, the audience started screaming for more. He the Chippendales!"

**Rather than describing it as a peep show, it was an entertaining and ludicrous Broadway comedy with awkward dancing and terrible music, where sweaty and flexible grown-up guys are the stars.**

turned his naked ass to the crowd, picked up his clothes and ran off the stage again.

It is hard to pinpoint what act was the most hilarious, but when a guy wearing pink satin pajamas started simulating a sex act with a bed while his partner was pouring candle wax on his chest I thought I would choke on my drink.

Better yet was when the whole group came out wearing white military uniforms singing "I can be your hero baby" while walking around and throwing their clothes on the floor, finishing the act standing in boxers with the American flag. None of them could even keep up the rhythm in the very simple choreography, but that made the whole event even more absurd. It was like witnessing an ill-rehearsed boy band miming some of the worst songs ever recorded while stripping

down to their thongs and squeezing their buttocks. Incredible.

As mentioned above, the audience got the opportunity to participate in the show and they didn't have to ask the girls twice. Scrambling for a time in the spotlight, the girls rushed on stage for the joy of grabbing some bums and stroking sweaty abs, ready to party hard with the Chippendales – who weren't afraid to grope their breasts.

One moment that summed up the evening was when the Chippendales started their search for the horniest table in the house while begging the women to take some Chippendales back to their homes after the show. At that

point, the audience went insane and everyone was in for it, trying to sound hornier than the next group. I even spotted some women in their sixties standing on chairs slightly hysterical and applauding loudly when the guys walked out into the audience to make better contact with the ladies, and of course earn some tips.

As can be expected, the Chippendales' arrival in Iceland has been the talk of town and not all are satisfied with this kind of amusement. Some find it humiliating, disgusting and are shocked at girls who want to pay to see this kind of disastrous entertainment where the male body is merchandised into a play toy for women. I'm not going to debate that issue. The only thing I have to say about it after seeing the show is that I at least didn't find it humiliating for anyone. Women are di-

verse and while some girls in the crowd found the greased men to be the hottest thing on the planet, others were just in it for a laugh, and those who don't like seeing stripping guys just didn't attend that night. Watching their goofy moves and judging by the feedback I think the majority in the audience was laughing at them and the whole idea instead of being crazy turned on by the show.

The guys seemed to be enjoying themselves pretty well on stage as well as when mingling with locals at Sirkus attending the Minus concert the next night (wearing clothes). I don't see the harm in that.

Aside from the fact that many detest these kinds of women-aimed strip shows, it was a memorable night for those attending. I'm not the least bit ashamed to admit that I had a great time and can now understand pretty well the reason for the Chippendales' longevity. Entertaining millions of women worldwide every year, the show was never boring, even though the guys never got naked, and I never saw a sour face in the crowd. Watching guys wriggle in their G-strings, socks and shoes is just indescribable fun, although they will never be my idea of sexy. Rather than describing it as a peep show, it was an entertaining and ludicrous Broadway comedy with awkward dancing and terrible music, where sweaty and flexible grown-up guys are the stars. Nothing more and nothing less.

After standing on a chair for almost three hours, I left Broadway when the now extremely frisky audience got the chance to take their picture with the group. Some women couldn't get enough of their muscular and sweaty bodies at that time (maybe the trips to the bar had something to do with that). Whether the Chippendales left home alone that night is hard to say but they undoubtedly sent a group of horny and tipsy women out into the night.

## Nýhil Poetry in the Grapevine:

Haukur Már Helgason

Haukur Már Helgason is no stranger to the Grapevine – he was the first Icelandic writer I hired after taking over as editor, and he wrote a scathing critique of the arts scene in Iceland called Screaming Masterpiece for my second issue.

When he isn't shaping debate on the arts in local magazines, he teaches around the country, and he publishes poetry with the group he helped found, Nýhil. Instead of submitting a translation of his poetry, Helgason has instead constructed... something else entirely. All in keeping with a man who once served as the Grapevine's Existentialist Restaurant Reviewer. *BC*

**A fragment from La Dolce fucking Vita**

So, right after a successful suicide attack on your office, in your safe absence, you will feel very free. It will be a magnificent and glorious feeling, but that feeling, on its own, only lasts a while, a very short while, indeed, a while that will be on the verge of a moment, after which you will hardly realise a while has lasted and gone at all and after which you will nonetheless have to shake your head, and take action to secure your lasting freedom. For that purpose you have two options. Either you can pretend that you actually were in your office at the time the incident took place and thus leave the world entirely, starting anew in another continent. This will, of course, limit your actions a bit, a lot, even, what with the internet and everything; as you are, in all likelihood, too lazy, too decent and/or too disconnected from the most advanced criminal and/or subversive underground to forge new ID, you will have to suffice with laying low in the public arena, for decades, or until you, for some reason or another, might desire to actually return to your first life, your life as you now know it, at great cost, emotional and otherwise.

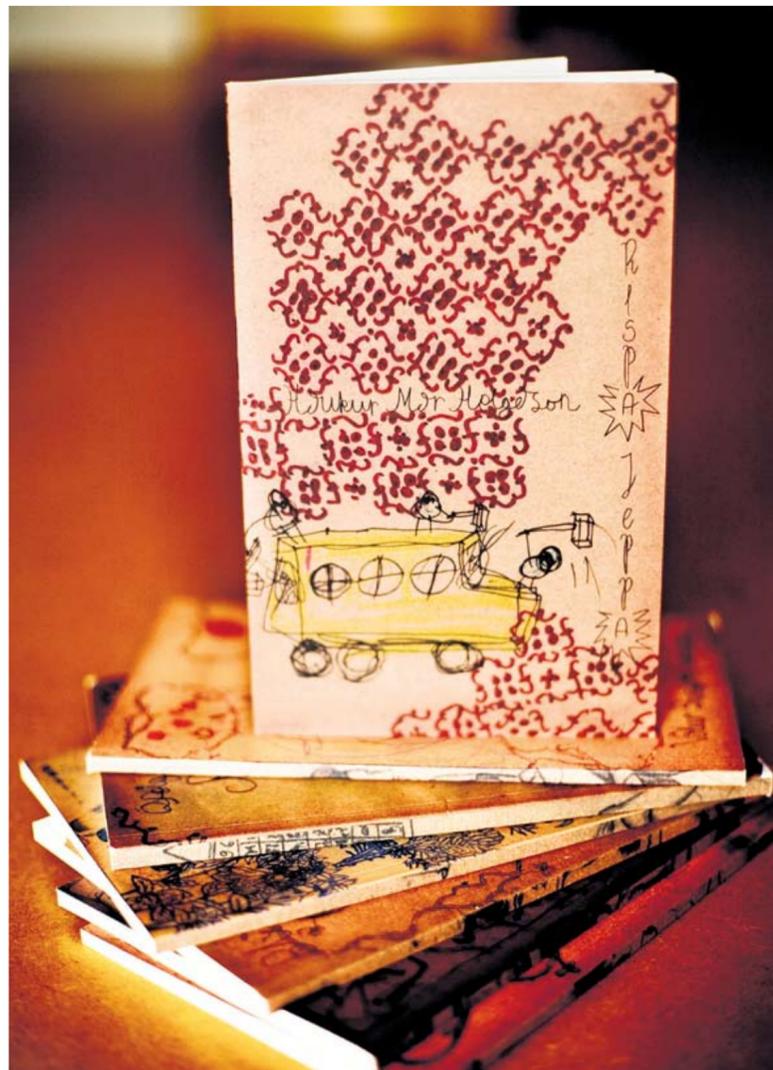
(Don't mind about me, I love you but it will be all right.)

Either you do that or you have the patience to collect all the sympathy and benefits offered you from others, from your neighbours, friends and family, your commune, your country, your foreign allies, and then make use of that sympathy and those benefits, to start anew, with the extreme advantage of a budget and a passport. Those two things do make life easier, in as far as despair is not the issue.

If you despair to the point of losing your soul there is nothing I can do for you, but life is probably easier and more enjoyable without a soul anyway so there should be nothing to regret.

If you don't mind me saying so, I'll recommend you go to Iceland. It is miraculously easy to start bank accounts there, and the locals are known to be quite promiscuous.

*The text was written in English, for one on one performances in small spaces, cosy or claustrophobic.*



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<b>Mondays:</b>	<b>Thursdays:</b>
• Minced steak with onions	• Lamb and broth
• Lamb cutlets	• Lamb cutlets
• Fishballs	<b>Fridays:</b>
<b>Tuesdays:</b>	• Lamb chops
• Gratinated fish	• Lamb cutlets
• Lamb cutlets	• Lamb cutlets
• Meatballs	• Roast pork
<b>Wednesdays:</b>	<b>Saturdays:</b>
• Salted lamb and pea soup	• Fried fish fillets
• Lamb cutlets	• Lamb cutlets
	• Roast pork
	<b>Sundays:</b>
	• Lamb cutlets

Homelike food  
International buffet  
Grilled chicken  
Sheep's head and Coke  
Fish dishes  
Hamburgers  
Salat bar  
Sandwich bar  
Coffee and cakes

**FLJÓTT OG GOTT**

BSI BUS TERMINAL  
AT HRINGBRAUT  
RESTAURANT OPEN 7-23.30 AND TAKE AWAY ROUND THE CLOCK

# One Spring near the Close of the Century

BY ÞÓRARINN ELDJÁRN

It was spring when the baron arrived in Iceland. Spring in the air and spring on the way for the nation. And we welcomed him. Although we never knew, in fact, who he was. Nor do we know even now. One day he was just there, all of a sudden, like the migrating birds. No one expected he would stay any longer than the birds did, at the most until autumn came. In that respect he was not so very different from those foreign travellers who made their way to Iceland ever more frequently. Most of them queer ducks, with unusual avocations. Perhaps he was one of those who were apparently tired of always heading south. But the difference between this fellow and most of the others was obvious in his much more aristocratic and clearly noble bearing, a rare enough sight in the colourless local scene. It was evident right from that day in late April 1898, when he and his kinsman set out to pick their way gingerly along the morass of Reykjavík's streets. The man in fact was scarcely of this world. At least not of the world as manifest at that time in the reality of Reykjavík, capital of Iceland. His kinsman was somehow much closer to what could be called a mortal being. So the otherworldly quality was probably not a family trait.

But who was he and what did he want? There were some people who claimed at first that the man had something to do with the merchant Björn Kristjánsson. He had been rowed ashore from the Laura with Björn, in the merchant's boat, and landed at the iron jetty down by his store, at the near end of the street Vesturgata. But it was apparently only a coincidence that they had travelled aboard the same vessel to Iceland, and made the acquaintance of one another en route. With the result that Björn helped him out with a few things to start with, and later on as well, in fact. He had not known him previously.

Only three days after they came ashore, for example, Björn advertised in the weekly Þjóðólfur for two good riding horses, available for purchase "at a fair price". When horse-owners began to put in an appearance, eager to sell their mounts, word soon got around that they were intended for this fellow. This increased the supply even more. It seemed clear to everyone that the foreigner intended to stay longer than just a month, since he was not satisfied with merely renting the horses. They found it rather unusual that he should inspect the horses and try them out himself. With Björn's assistance as interpreter, he asked about the animals' flaws and good points, apparently with a fair degree of knowledge, although some of the questions referred to things people had never heard mentioned before where horses were concerned. He spoke German to Björn. The foreigner also knew how to ride, and had soon chosen the two best horses, a white and a light dun. He paid for both mounts in cash, without dickering over the price asked, and the horse mongers sorely regretted afterwards that they had not ventured even higher. They said they were certain that the man would have agreed to whatever sum was asked.

-And where is he going to find pasture for them? He hasn't given a thought to that, of course. Does he think maybe that horses can live on air, or can go snatching a few bites here and there around town?

Nobody could answer this and it gave rise to long discussions.

- Who does this man think he is, anyway?

- Well, it seems he's no more or less than a baron.

The word spread at astonishing speed and caused no small stir, although it naturally did not settle the question of pasture. He had apparently signed under this title in Hotel Reykjavík's guest book. No one saw any reason to challenge this, as the man himself bore all the signs of being some sort of nobleman. And it was also written on his steamer trunks, said those who had seen it. No one denied that. If anything, there was suspicion that he was of even higher rank; on the trunks there was actually a coat of arms with a crown.

This only created even more astonishment when it became common knowledge in Reykjavík that he claimed he was determined to settle here. And when people also learned, not least as a result of his horse dealings, that he was someone used to an expensive lifestyle and clearly very wealthy, their interest was stirred even more. What could there be in Iceland that had caught his attention? Had the time actually come for the country's luck to turn, and for something to happen? Well-off citizens and aspiring businessmen were quick to show an interest, and seek to get to know him better, but this was no easy task. He did not reply to greetings made in passing and when addressed, he acted as if he could not understand a word of whatever language they attempted to use.

What drove a man like this up here, with his pockets full of money? Couldn't he just as easily be a hardened criminal? Why didn't he say a word to anyone? Wasn't that a sure sign that he had something to hide?

But if this caused tongues to wag and became the subject of speculation, it was nothing compared to the astonishment which gripped the town only a short while later. Most people could not believe their ears when news spread like wildfire about the capital, and all of the western districts around

Borgarfjörður, late in May 1898, that this regal nobleman intended to become a farmer in the Icelandic countryside. He had purchased one of the farms in the wide-reaching uplands of the Borgarfjörður region, Hvítárvellir, in the district Andakill, for a princely sum. It would be the Baron's seat. In the inland valleys and coastal flats the response was the same: even when the news had been repeated more than once, people hardly dared to tell the story to the next person they met.

The price paid was reportedly no more and no less than thirty-six thousand crowns. It was unheard of, naturally, even allowing for the two other farms Heggstaðir and Fossatún, which were included in the price.

People simply could not believe the news, although it had long been common knowledge that the owner of the farm Hvítárvellir, Andrés Fjeldsted, wanted to sell the property, since it was clear none of his sons wished to take over the farm. And everyone knew, too, that such a fine piece of land would hardly sell for a song. But a good price was one thing and thirty-six thousand krónur another. It was six times the annual salary of the country's governor or bishop.

Fjeldsted must have known how to bargain, to push the price up to those heights? A hard bargainer he'd always been. But no, that had not been the case at all. Just like the horse dealers, he had mentioned this price sort of as a starting point for discussion. Had thought it likely enough that he'd have to come down a good bit, if he did manage to get a deal at all. It was hard to know how serious a fellow like this could be. Just have to see whether he shies off or wants to get down to serious business. But the baron had extended his pale and refined hand, without hesitating or uttering a word of protest, and sealed the deal.

Those present were taken aback by it, and began exchanging glances with one another, but the baron appeared not to notice. Neither did he show any emotion when he spoke up to say that he was accustomed to letting a handshake suffice where gentlemen of honour were involved. They would naturally complete the necessary formalities and make a note of the conditions on paper, just like any other memorandum, but to his mind that made little difference to their real agreement which was naturally the oral one.

The next news of him came not quite a week later, on May 27, in the newly built Craftsmen's Hall by the lake in Reykjavík. Here this high-ranking man of wealth and business, soon to be master of his estate in Borgarfjörður and the most influential man of his district, turned out to be a musician, who held a concert. He had taken his seat on stage with a gigantic violin between his legs, playing away on this fantastic instrument with such skill that people, whether they had seen a thing or two or not, declared they had never heard the like of it. The story went that when the baron began playing, Steini the ironworker had put down his homemade fiddle and had to grip the edge of the stage to keep from fainting.

Who was he, actually, this baron? Where did he come from, and what was his family background? More and more versions of the story began circulating, as is usually the case when no one knows anything. At the Gossip Corner on Skólavörðustígur, a veritable seminar was held on the subject. Each morning the situation was assessed, and in the afternoon an attempt made to fill in the missing details. As it turned out, the outlines grew ever hazier, instead of the details gradually being filled in and the picture becoming clearer.

Some people called him Baron Bollow, others Baron Bojlo. A drunken Danish mason declared he was named Baron Bullion, and the locals in Borgarfjörður soon adapted this to Bull John. Some claimed he was a Frenchman, judging from his name and appearance, while others were convinced that he must be German, as until recently he had lived in Munich in Bavaria. This had been printed in Ísafold, when the concert was advertised and there were plenty of witnesses who could confirm that he spoke German fluently. But it didn't stop there. Still others maintained that there was no doubt that the man must be English.

- He arrived here aboard the Laura last month, and I'm told he boarded in Scotland, in other words he didn't come all the way from the continent.

- Well, if that's the case, then isn't he a Scotsman? Maybe goes around in a skirt?

- No, according to the father and sons at Hvítárvellir he speaks perfect English. And with an accent like a real nobleman, they say, just like the queen herself and royalty. They say the Scots speak completely differently, more like Icelanders.

- Hardly have the Hvítárvellir farmer and his sons had much to do with the queen or any other royalty for that matter?

- Well, no, maybe not. But they do often have English lords come to go salmon fishing up there in the summer and they can chat like natives. Strange fellows they are, who would rather hook a fish or two with a rod and reel than do the sensible thing and lay nets for them. More than one man among them

has put in an appearance at the palace now and again. And the boys and their father were involved with that Ritchie a couple of years ago, canning salmon. He was a Scotsman through and through, even though he naturally didn't go about in a skirt, at least not in the wind and rain here. So they should be able to recognise him from his accent, the Fjeldsteds should.

- Do you mean to say that English is not just English?

French, German, Scottish, English ... as if that were not enough, a reputable man in Reykjavík was also reported to have said this Baron was an American. This statement was also brought up for discussion at the Corner, where men expressed serious doubts.

- An American? An American Baron? A likely story. Out west they did their best to get rid of all such titles and ranks long ago when they declared their independence from the English. There simply are no barons there, but on the other hand, any man can easily become as wealthy as a baron if he has the drive in him to do so. Isn't that just what the emigration agents are always telling us?

- Yes, that's true enough, or at least it's supposed to be like that in the States of America. Do you remember the poem Jón Ólafsson wrote, when he was agitating for people to desert the country and make the trip westward:

Any man who would be wealthy  
to America should go,  
where his wallet can grow healthy;  
work and God can make it so.

- Strange isn't it, how few of them who emigrated from Iceland seemed to have taken advantage of this. Wonder if it was the work or the Lord's help that was lacking?

- Or maybe both. I've heard, though, that it's actually the custom in America to call people barons who are wealthy or influential in one way or another. I'm told they talk of oil barons and beef barons.

- Well, he'll at least have enough pasture for his horses up there at Hvítárvellir. He's maybe a horse baron?

And what did he want with a baron's estate in Iceland? How in the world did the man think he could be a baron, far north of all civilisation where no one knows the front of a nobleman from the back, or could tell who ranked higher than who?

- To start up like that here, as if being a baron is a job like any other? What do barons do, anyway?

But even those who were the most vocal in expressing their doubts had to admit that if anywhere in Iceland there was a prime spot for a baron's estate, it was at Hvítárvellir, a fine farm with expansive, flat hayfields and meadows, rights to coastline resources and salmon fishing.

It might sound like a fairy tale but they had no choice but to accept it. Nor did the visitor let it suffice to purchase the farm itself. He took possession of it immediately, along with all the livestock. Big plans were said to be in the offing. The hayfields were to be levelled and the usable land increased. All sorts of innovations were planned. There was talk of mechanical mowers and rakes and no end of other modern inventions. Whoever he was and wherever he came from, this baron, he was at least a progressive thinker.

It was Flitting Days in the country, the time of year when people could change their residence, and everything was a bustle of disorganisation. Andrés Fjeldsted and his household moved across the river to the farm Ferjukot, with the exception of his son Sigurður, who had been engaged as the baron's overseer. In addition, an agricultural college graduate from Reykjavík, Gísli Þorbjarnarson, known as Gísli agri, was expected to direct operations that summer. He placed an announcement in Þjóðólfur early in July, informing anyone who needed to write to him that he would be spending the next three months at Hvítárvellir.

The locals in Borgarfjörður watched all the goings on with astonishment. At Hvítárvellir there was action everywhere. The baron immediately had the construction of a new building begun, to house all his newly hired employees. It was an impressive wooden structure. He also had the existing farm house extensively renovated. It had been built some time ago, of stone, with a later wood frame addition, by the former Andrés Fjeldsted. There the baron himself intended to reside with his kinsman. The old turf farmhouse was also touched up. It was to house the domestic servants and farm workers of long standing.

A fresh new breeze seemed to be sweeping through the rural districts of Borgarfjörður. Some people even said that these were the first signs of a new age dawning. More than one person found a pretext to pay a visit to Hvítárvellir, to see the splendours with their own eyes and place a finger on the pulse of progress. Reports spread quickly all over the region, which could almost be said to have become one great Gossip Corner.

Many a young maiden's heart beat quicker at the sight of the two kinsmen, on their estate or at public gatherings. The baron, however, appeared to take scant notice of them. Could they perhaps expect the arrival of a baroness from abroad one day, when the farm and facilities had become more fitting? On this and so many other questions there was no end of discussion and

speculation. Soon the news got round, however, that there was no hope of a baroness in the near future. Baron Bollow was a bachelor, at least for the time being, whatever his situation would be in the future. Which made it not at all impossible for one of the country's daughters to end up in the role of baroness. Whatever the future held in store in this regard, it was clear that no flighty ninny would fit the bill. The baron was said to be highly respectful and disciplined in his treatment of his hired help. He requested that they doff their caps for him on the farm and treat him with the utmost respect at all times. Although he was neither arrogant nor haughty, his reticence bordered on obliviousness.

The younger man, his kinsman, appeared to be a different story altogether. He was cheerful and talkative, always had his eye on the girls and enjoyed teasing them, especially if the baron was absent or out of sight. He soon made an effort to get along in Icelandic, asked plenty of questions about the language and in a short time could speak passably. The baron could as well, some people claimed, he just did so much less talking and with much fewer people. No, the kinsmen were not much alike. It was not quite clear how they were actually related. The lad, whose name was Richard Lechner, never replied to questions in this regard except to say that they were kin. If he was asked for more details of the family, he did not seem to think it could matter. He was generally referred to by the Icelandic name Leiknir, but some people called him the count, to distinguish him from the baron.

On one occasion that first summer, a few carpenters and farm workers were joking out in the homefield when one of the farm girls, who made up for what she lacked in wits by being especially impudent, came by. As was so often the case, the baron was the subject of their conversation. At about the same time, they noticed the baron come out of the house and walk about the yard.

The lads dared this servant girl, Gunna was her name, to walk up to the baron and ask him straight out about his family background. And she took up the challenge, walked straight over to him. This scared the lads to no end, so they all busied themselves at some task to make it less obvious that they were the ones to send her on this errand and were waiting expectantly for the result.

Once Gunna reached the baron, she wasted no time in asking him straight to his face:

- Who are you anyway, and why did you come here?

He gazed at her for some time with a stern look, then replied in perfectly correct Icelandic:

- Don't you know that it's rude to ask questions?

He then went back into the house, and that was the end of it, there were no repercussions or anything.

Old Ingimundur of the farm Fossatún was the baron's tenant and pleased as punch with his new landlord. People would tease him about whether he did not resent being sold off all of a sudden, like any other part of the farm. To be practically a serf in bondage to some nobleman. How much had Fjeldsted been paid for him?

But Ingimundur did not let their taunts irk him this time any more than usual. He answered that there was noble and there was ignoble and in his case, he felt honoured by the nobility. Instead of regarding himself as having been made a serf, he maintained that as things now stood, he was just like any other landholder who held a fief from an earl or monarch. The baron was a new settler of a family just as noble as Iceland's original settlers, heroes descended from kings and princes. It was high time that leaders worthy of the name took over the reins in the region. They had hardly seen the likes of him since the days of Snorri Sturluson.

He himself wanted to honour the baron with a poem:

Hail to you, Baron of Borgarfjörð  
who settles here to reign as lord.  
We welcome you from worlds scarce known  
to wake our folk so long alone,  
to challenge the North with hero's heart  
inspiring friends to make a start  
and settle the shores of Arctic seas  
with friendship and faith the land to free.  
Thus Frank and Viking, hand in hand,  
shall drive the Danish from our land.  
May we long enjoy your kin  
and shape our future from within  
as dawns a brighter day this morn  
for Iceland's sons, so used to scorn.  
We ask you, then, to lend a hand,  
against the foe to take a stand  
and wrestle with our common fate,  
united strength can make us great.

*The preceding is an excerpt from the novel The Baron. Translated by Keneva Kunz.*

LIVE MUSIC  
REVIEWS

WHO  
Trabant and  
Stuðmenn

WHERE  
Ölfushöll

WHEN  
August 12th  
2006



**The Night Horny Electronica Lost to the Horny Countryside**

By Valgerður Þoróddsdóttir Photo Skari

"You know you're at a Sveitaball when someone is vomiting outside and the show hasn't even started yet," a friend and veteran country boy informed me around 11:30 p.m., 30 minutes after Trabant were supposed to take the stage.

Surprisingly enough, though, nothing was happening. The concert space, a massive "riding palace" for horse competitions, was empty and freezing cold. We sat in brown leather chairs at one of the 20 long wooden tables set up beside the stage where small Christmas candles, along with the stage and the bar's refrigerators, provided the only light in the dusty grey air. So far, I had counted more bouncers than people, all dressed in black t-shirts of varying degrees of tightness, stationed at every door and corner of the building, including a nook at the far end of the barn where the stage lights couldn't reach.

The Selfoss locals slowly spilled in, and a few stragglers wandering in alone headed straight for the topmost rows of the benches standing ten metres above the ground along the wall opposite the stage. There, they sombrely surveyed the room until a familiar face, or group of faces, loudly arrived. Hovering around the tables in tipsy excitement, these familiar faces collected people from all directions like magnets until the 50 or so kids in attendance had been consolidated into four or five groups. It felt just like a school dance.

As the bouncers dutifully reminded us at every turn, exiting the building was highly frowned upon, since re-entry would not be granted once you had come in contact with fresh air. Yet between trips to the bar, the bathroom and the aforementioned dark abyss past the stage, people kept busy. They sat, sang songs, enjoyed being drunk. In the background catchy eighties dance hits shuffled on a short repeating list. An older couple, in their 30s, got up to do an awkward back-and-forth shuffle as the last notes of the climactic "Morning Train" by Sheena Easton banged through the speakers. After the song ended, they continued on blissfully in the silence as the playlist hesitated, searching for its next one-hit wonder, then deciding suddenly to abandon its eighties theme and burst out with Silvia Night's "Congratulations Iceland" before beginning the list over again.

It was as my two Reykjavík-local friends, returning from the crowd now accumulating in the lobby, enthusiastically reported to me that they had just met the coolest local guys, "They knew every Raggi Bjarna (eternally youthful 70-year-old 'country' entertainer) hit ever made!", that the show began.

Sprinklings of electronic synths began floating from the stage, singing out like trumpets announcing the band's imminent arrival. About three people recognised the overture for what it was and stumbled towards the stage just as the five members of the band strutted into the barn each waving sparkling firework fuses in the air with one hand, looking up at the golden lines they painted in the dark, seemingly in tune to the synthetic waves raining down all around them. It was the majestic entrance, and even more

triumphant return, of Trabant.

"Welcome all you horse people," singer Ragnar began onstage, drawing confusedly enthused cheers from a few in the crowd. He exuded an irresistibly amusing confidence, swaying slightly before the microphone with a bewildered smile on his face. The crowd was spread thinly over the large floor, keeping a safe distance from the stage. "Yes..." he laughed and looked around him at his bandmates with a mischievous smile, "Welcome horse enthusiasts and, well, Jesus, this is just like a David Lynch film."

He chuckled. The audience muttered. Ragnar fell to the floor of the stage in an exaggerated fit of laughter, as his bandmates grinned behind him. Half-apathetic, half-confused, the 30 audience members in the front stared at him blankly.

Close by, huddled around the tables, a hundred kids were eagerly and inebriatedly engrossed in each other. In the lobby, a slightly smaller chorus of men held the attention of dozens more kids as they sobbed their way through a series of Raggi Bjarna songs a capella. About five metres from the stage a pair of women in their 40s quit talking to each other and looked up at the man dressed in white from head to toe.

The smile had not left Ragnar's face. Not half as confused as he was entertained, he continued, "Indeed, thank you all for being a part of this David Lynch film. Now we're going to play a song about love."

And so Trabant launched unabashedly into their electronic hurricane of a set. Instantly juiced up by their music, everything about their presence onstage was heightened, every move dramatised, every glance eroticised. Through their exaggerated heartthrob pouts, the five of them practically glowed with bliss.

Trabant's delivery is so self-indulgent and drenched in enthusiasm that, even as their stage antics border on embarrassing and downright pervy, every minute of it is enthralling. Half-naked and soaked in glitter and confidence, the five members of Trabant have found their element onstage where, performing as if their every note had been hand-picked from the mouth of God, they effectively exploit the importance of a passionate stage performance, amazingly enough, without looking or sounding cheesy.

Ragnar steadily lost articles of clothing, champagne was sprayed and spit, tubes filled with confetti exploded, lewd gestures were made, and for the most part, the small crowd was loving it. When it came time for Ragnar, by now wearing nothing but a gold-sequined Speedo and white tube socks, to mimic oral intercourse on band member Gisli Galdur, the ridiculousness was almost too much for them to handle, and, for a moment, both they and the audience hesitated. As Ragnar, now on his knees, drew closer to Gisli, the two performers couldn't help but laugh. The audience opened up their eyes wide.

If David Lynch had been there, I think he might have stifled a tear.

After managing to translate the silky radiance of their catchy electropop into an equally radiant band performance, the band spit out their last glittery note. The dance had nearly tripled in attendance since the beginning of their set, but the audience on the actual dance floor had remained humbly fewer than 40 people. Still, the set was, quite literally, golden. Once

they realised just what level of seriousness the show best deserved, the audience, and, as it seemed, the band members themselves, started to remember just how alive a live show could be.

The rest of the population of the barn was far away, about ten metres in fact, from that realisation. In the sitting area, most had much preferred socialising to taking part in the concert, and a few, I found, had instead taken to writing in my notebook. Among other things, including a short poem about a bunny rabbit, I found the following note scribbled in sloppy handwriting with my blue pen: "Mummi Þjöl (a bouncy country-dance-type song about a man who owns a mandolin and becomes a fisherman) is the most genius creation known to man. Take a record with Hemma Gunn with you when you go home, wherever that is in the world."

When Stuðmenn took the stage, the crowd reacted immediately. "Welcome lesbians, welcome gays," lead singer Egill Ólafsson began, making obscure reference to the fact that today was the beginning of Different Days (or Gay Pride) in Reykjavík. He then mumbled something about how this was a remarkable day, and how much Iceland is improving itself, "Now Halldór (Ásgrímsson, former Prime Minister and Progressive Party member) has quit, and soon Guðni (Ágústsson, Minister of Agriculture and Progressive Party member) will be gone and things will get even better!"

But people weren't listening. In drunken bliss they scrambled towards the stage, falling over themselves and each other at every opportunity. Egill continued rambling, every once in a while stumbling into comprehensible territory with interjections like, "It's best to be hot and sweaty!", spoken with a poetry-slam-type dramatic pause between every word. Meanwhile, the crowd had formed a giant pit. And somehow, in the midst of this excitement and burst of poetic and political creativity, Stuðmenn began their set.

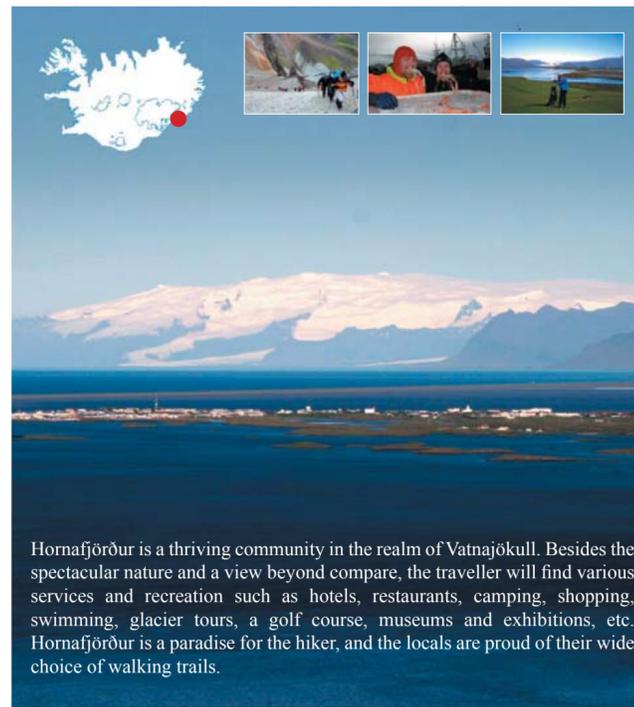
It seemed almost embarrassing that what Trabant had half-mocked, Stuðmenn embraced wholeheartedly. Looking at them, I had no doubt in my mind that they thought they were gods, but somehow, when Trabant had acted that way, it had been enjoyable.

"I feel like suicide," my friend from Reykjavík said as he stared in horror at the scene unfolding. I looked at Birgitta Haukdal onstage with a permanent look of delighted surprise on her face as she clapped her hands and shook her shiny maracas at random intervals, smiling so wide I could count all her molars. Something was wrong here.

Noticing my distress, my country boy informant jumped in, "You have to realise that this is a meat market, everyone in here is just looking to meet someone, the rest is just, whatever."

Apart from the four of us, not a single person was sitting at the tables. Right in front of us, not able to make their way into the mob of people in front of the stage, a few older women were dancing, moving their hips quickly from side to side while mouthing all the words with a look of serious concentration. Maybe the point was that everyone knew the words. Maybe they couldn't help it.

"For those of you tonight, out there looking," Egill shouted into the microphone, "aren't things coming along?" And the crowd cheered.



Hornafjörður is a thriving community in the realm of Vatnajökull. Besides the spectacular nature and a view beyond compare, the traveller will find various services and recreation such as hotels, restaurants, camping, shopping, swimming, glacier tours, a golf course, museums and exhibitions, etc. Hornafjörður is a paradise for the hiker, and the locals are proud of their wide choice of walking trails.

The Glacier Exhibition in Höfn was reopened after significant renovations in June 2005. The aim of the Exhibition is to communicate knowledge in various ways about the country's nature as well as offering tourists interesting recreation all year around. The Exhibition is open on weekdays from October to April. From the beginning of May until the end of September it's open every day. Apart from regular opening hours the Exhibition can be opened on request.



by the sea  
and a delicious lobster  
at Fjörubordid in Stokkseyri.



At the seashore the giant lobster makes appointments with mermaids and landlubbers. He waves his large claws, attracting those desiring to be in the company of starfish and lumpfish.



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## Outside Reykjavík

### Hringvegurinn



## Things You Should Do in Iceland Before You Die... or Turn 31

One last trip around the Ring Road

BY BART CAMERON PHOTO BY SKARI

I've been in Iceland three years, and have published about 250,000 words on the culture and tourism industry here. You name a personality, politician, fjord or puffin, and I figured I'd covered it. As I got ready to leave, though, I looked through my notes and found a few places that I'd never gotten out to. These last few destinations that I'd missed reminded me of everything I love about this island. In fact, I came to the sad realisation that, after 250,000 words, I hadn't covered that much, and after three years, I was only just catching on to the charm of Iceland.

It all starts in a Toyota Camry, the back seat full of large, menacing Icelanders, and Valdi, lead singer of the Nine Elevens, driving 130 km an hour down a dirt road in the West Fjords towards his home, Ísafjörður. Through miraculous gift of gab, Valdi had recruited us to drive him home and join his Mýrabolti – or Mud Ball – team for the annual competition in the most remote large town in Iceland. He insisted that Ísafjörður was only five hours away, and that Mýrabolti was the safest sport in the history of man. So somehow, despite the fact that only minutes before he invited us, he had explained his prodigious achievements in fighting hygiene, among them touring for three weeks wearing the same pair of boots and never taking them off, we had agreed to come along.

Ísafjörður is not five hours from Reykjavík. For a normal driver, in ideal conditions, you're talking about seven hours. Hence

Valdi taking over the wheel in frustration after I had driven the speed limit for the first few hours.

Highway 61, which takes you through the West Fjords is an attraction in and of itself. Somehow always balanced on a mountain's edge, it lends gorgeous views of a more ancient-looking landscape than you can see in the rest of Iceland.

Driving along at unsuitable speeds, I couldn't help but point out that this would not be a good road to drive in the dark. Or in rain. Or even cloudy weather. My companions, all native to Reykjavík except Valdi, agreed quickly.

As it happened, we made it to Ísafjörður in a little over five hours, our stomachs wrecked from nerves. Valdi did the only conscientious thing a native of Ísafjörður can do. He brought us straight to the most homey, relaxed, and wholesome fish restaurant in the world, Tjörúhúsið. You can read more about it elsewhere in this issue, but I can only say that, from the moment we walked in and saw the band Lack of Talent hanging from the rafters, while the restaurant owners cleared a spot and served up heaping bowls of plokkskútur, we knew we'd found happiness. Or four of us had. The heartiest of us, a man who worked fishing boats regularly, was forced to call it an evening, still suffering from motion sickness after Valdi's driving.

On that first night, Ísafjörður felt like a hippie commune. As a few of us got up

to play some songs on the makeshift stage at Tjörúhúsið, the club filled with assorted 20-somethings from around Iceland who had come out to the country to enjoy summer the way it should be. As we went to bed, we were told that the poet Eiríkur Norðdahl was hosting an enormous party, and the whole town's elite would be there. This, it would turn out, is a nightly thing in town. Yes, there is a town in the world where poets are rock stars.

We were in Ísafjörður to compete, though, not to hold conversations with the intelligent-sia. For this reason, we passed out just after midnight, woke up early, and set out trying to find liquor, our team's captain, Valdi, and shoes—yes, we'd forgotten shoes.

Mercifully, it took us longer than expected to round up these items, and we arrived just after the 10 am start time for Mýrabolti. This meant that our "team" didn't get to the first match, and substitutes filled in for us. Good substitutes. Who won. It would be our only victory.

Mýrabolti (a direct translation is swamp ball) is the brain child of some fun-loving Finns, but it has truly found a home in Ísafjörður. I have never seen such a collection of oddballs, all local products, in my life. This is a town where two 19-year-olds were elected to city council after promising to import moose to the area. This is a town where the mayor is highly regarded for his excellent whale jerky, the home not just to Mugison, but to Reykjavík! the Nine Elevens,

the President of Iceland, (not the band, but the guy, Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson). The City of Reykjavík markets itself as "Pure Energy". Ísafjörður outdoes Reykjavík not only in the energy department, but also in the more important department of CHANNELING it.

Thus we watched 12 young men dressed in shorts that barely concealed their darkest secrets, screaming "Team Hot Pants" and running into the mud to do battle against more athletic types. We saw various takes on the superhero wardrobe by teams of bold, often straight-faced women. We saw 200 competitors, all one step more absurd than the next, in a town of 5,000.

I should move on to discuss the game itself. Mýrabolti is soccer, played in mud, sometimes mud of up to two feet thickness. The mud makes players look silly, even the most skilled athlete looks drunk on the field. As for drunks, they too look silly.

So our team prepared for our second game by sipping liquor and enjoying the view on a crisp summer morning. During our first real game, I discovered the reason nobody ever tried to market an alcoholic version of Gato-raid. Running in the mud proved difficult. Running in the mud with stomach turning, and head spinning, proved embarrassing.

I know we lost. I don't know by how much. When we finished, a few of us switched to water, and the experience got much more pleasant. Social lubricant isn't necessity when you're talking to 12 men in ventilation suits

and thong underwear who have spent the night partying with the local poet.

The rest of the games, which lasted another eight hours, passed in a pleasant blur for most of us. Unfortunately, our captain, Valdi, had tempted fate by bragging about how safe Mýrabolti was, and he broke his leg in an early game. Disturbing as the injury sounds, it seemed fine to those of us who weren't injured. At day's end, the visitors from Reykjavík had sworn to return and avenge our many defeats.

There are likely better ways to describe Ísafjörður. I discussed them with Eiríkur Norðdahl when he showed up at the competition, and when the evening came, and somehow Norðdahl was going to host another party, and we talked about the lack of pretension, of how overall good humour made Ísafjörður the kind of place to live where you could be proud of your town, and not in the postmodern sense. He also pointed out that Ísafjörður acted a bit like an opiate on people who had spent too much time in the city.

His favourite example was a recent visit from former prime minister, Halldór Ásgrímsson. The conservative politician had taken in too much Ísafjörður air, accosted Norðdahl, told him "You are my children. You are the future of this country," and then gave him his personal cell phone number, in case anything should come up.

#### Joining the Masses

We left Ísafjörður on a quiet Sunday morning and set off for the Ring Road for one last trip around Iceland. The bad weather we had feared encountering on Highway 61 greeted us, but driving at the posted speed limit was comfortable enough. In four hours, we were on the road to Akureyri, with bumper to bumper SUV traffic.

For all the travelling done for the Grapevine, I had never set out on a traditional travelling weekend. At such a time, the uniformly single-lane highway slows, as campers, trailers, and enormous tires aren't great for speed. We lasted just under an hour on the Ring Road, before pulling off and changing our destination from Mývatn to Siglufjörður.

You won't likely believe this, but Siglufjörður boasts the best museum in Iceland, and it's devoted to Iceland's herring boom. I had heard about the Herring Museum, which is spread out over three buildings and covers everything from boat culture to the industrialisation of Iceland, but to see it was to see a new art form. The flights of fancy in creating this over-the-top museum are jaw-dropping. Were everything not so authentic and respectful to actual history, it would call to mind the grandeur of a Disney exhibit.

A day at the Herring Museum felt like a day engaged in the best kind of novel, in which you learn, live someone else's life, and eventually step out dazed but more attuned than you were before.

Beyond the Herring Museum, the town offers a Museum of Icelandic Folk Music, which is a more standard, tasteful museum. For my Icelandic travel partner, the Folk

Music Museum was fascinating—for someone less connected to the language and who didn't grow up with Icelandic folk songs being sung to me, it was not quite as impressive.

Even had the Herring Museum not proved so compelling, (I still have the video they showed on the Iceland presentation at the 1939 World's Fair in New York, in which Siglufjörður and its gorgeous herring girls were featured prominently, in my head), the brief journey off the Ring Road offered respite from tourists and travellers. For every kilometre you go from the main road, you seem to reduce traffic by 10%.

When we got back on the Ring Road, life was fine enough. We set out for Mývatn, where we hoped to hit up a pizza stand we used to like, only to find that Mývatn had modernised a little: the pizza stand now holds an enormous, and busy, tourist information centre. Instead, I chewed the world's worst hot dog, and we made our way off the Ring Road to Dettifoss.

Dettifoss is the most powerful waterfall in Europe. Located an uncomfortable 90-minute drive from Mývatn, but it can be done in any vehicle for a few months in the summer. We drove it in bad weather, in a sedan, and spent two happy hours dazed by the waterfall – much as I've written about natural wonders, for something like Dettifoss, description isn't

## "I have never seen such a collection of oddballs, all local products, in my life. This is a town where two 19-year-olds were elected to city council after promising to import moose to the area. This is a town where the mayor is highly regarded for his excellent whale jerky..."

that necessary. Watching a 100 metre wide waterfall discharge of glacial material at 500 cubic metres a second... it's like watching God's truck stop toilet flush.

#### Popular in the 30s... in Germany

We returned to the Ring Road, through the desert of the Northeast, where, for my first time as a driver, I saw no reindeer. From the desert, we came upon Egilsstaðir, which seems to have doubled in only 12 months, due to the huge amount of money passing through the area for the forthcoming aluminium smelter.

Considering the town was currently hosting protestors from throughout Europe, everybody in the area seemed at ease. When I bought gas, I was briefly confused for someone who was heading to Kárhánjúkar. The question from the brooding local: "Are there going to be any more concerts up there?"

At another brooding local's suggestion, Grapevine co-editor Sveinn Birgir Björnsson, we chose not to spend the night in Egilsstaðir, but in the nearby forest, Hallormsstaðaskógur. There we found trees. Again, fascinating to my Icelandic compan-

ion, who grew up without trees, but not so fascinating, somehow, to Wisconsin-raised me.

A short drive from Hallormsstaðaskógur is Skriðuklaustur, the arts centre created from the one-time home of celebrated Icelandic novelist Gunnar Gunnarsson. It is hard to discuss the Gunnar Gunnarsson Institute, housed in Skriðuklaustur, without blushing. The home was designed by celebrated German architect Johann Höger, in 1939. And it looks... well, it looks like Hitler's dream bungalow.

If you aren't wincing yet, then you would if you toured the Gunnar Gunnarsson Institute and saw the praise for the writers celebrity in the Nordic countries and especially Germany in the 1930s, "the best-selling author behind Goethe" one sign told guests.

Our tour guide, a robust blonde, was ecstatic about Gunnarsson's popularity, even today, with German tourists. And she repeatedly offered to give us more information about the writer.

Eventually, it is quite likely that an urban magazine will stop at this museum and mock it for ignoring history the way it does, and that will be a sad moment. Gunnarsson seems to have been well-intentioned, he left his home to Iceland for use as a hospital, if need be, for example. But it is hard to

passed away? That was inconceivable. For even though sheep are but sheep, they are still creatures of flesh and blood - flesh, blood and soul. Or was Eitil perhaps a soulless being? - Or Leo? - Or Faxe? Was their innocence and trust of lesser value than the fickle faith of human beings? Benedikt shook his head. Whomever might take his place, he could not wish any better companions. Whoever has such friends is not alone in this world."

Depressed over Gunnarsson's bad writing and his likely confused good intentions, I decided to finish up my drive around the Ring Road Valdi-style. We made only two more major stops. First, we went to the always shockingly beautiful Jökulsárlón, the glacial lagoon. I found the chunks of ice calving, the seals playing in the sun picturesque, and the tourists to be a pretty decent bunch. My companion saw only the Arctic Terns, bitter about childhood encounters with the territorial birds.

The drive across Suðurland, a route we at the Grapevine take monthly, yielded a few surprises. Instead of seeing dozens of Toyota Yaris rental cars, we saw dozens of bicyclists, tents and packs carried in saddle bags or bike trailers. In addition to these new tourists who likely connect with Iceland better than the rest, we saw a new group of tourists who take oblivion to a new level. At Skaftafell National Park, the largest park in Europe, we found a women hiking with her attention devoted not to Vatnajökull glacier, but to her glacial white iPod. She was power-walking. A few kilometres later, we saw a similar tourist doing Yoga with a CD player.

We stayed our last night in Kirkjubæjarklaustur, the active small town that produced Iceland's most famous living artist, Erró, and that looks, with its rolling hills and Technicolor green moss, much like the Shire. Kirkjubæjarklaustur is an attraction mainly because of its view of Vatnajökull and Mýrdalsjökull glaciers, but for me, as a traveller, I have always been impressed, most of all, with the accommodations in the area – this is easily the least expensive, and most professional place to sleep in Southern Iceland.

Then the trip was over. The drive from Kirkjubæjarklaustur to Reykjavík is gentle and unimposing. My last seven hours in the Icelandic countryside were peaceful. I was lucky enough to get sun and warmth when driving past Hveragerði, a favourite local jaunt. And then we were done. My three years, all used up. My girlfriend's 27 years here, done. It was the worst way to say goodbye to Iceland. Tired, happy, and staring out at the most peaceful landscape in the world.

Mercifully, we hit rain just outside Reykjavík, and we got stuck in a massive traffic jam that reminded us that life in Iceland isn't always as it is during the holidays.

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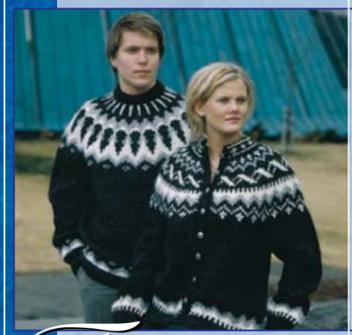
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# LIVE MUSIC REVIEWS

**WHO**  
Morrissey

**WHERE**  
Laugardalshöll

**WHEN**  
August 12th 2006



**The Ringleader Refuses to Fail**

By Helgi Valur Photo by Ingó

For me, *You Are the Quarry*, by Morrissey, is one of the best comeback albums ever. Up there with Bob Dylan's *Blood on the Tracks*. The chance to see him after the comeback was a dream, though I was nervous: I'd not yet heard *Ringleader of the Tormentors*, his newest release, and I was a little worried that I might be in store for a night of something as bad as Dylan's failed comeback *Street Legal*. Truthfully, for many in attendance, the hope was to see a *Street Legal*-level performance, a perfect flop. Morrissey just has that personality – people have been waiting and watching with baited breath for him to fail.

From the first notes of the show, when, out of nowhere a rock orchestra started roaring, drums started pounding and a beautiful voice filled the air, it was obvious that this wouldn't be a failure. When you start a concert with *How Soon Is Now*, you're guaranteed success – even the lame-o witch soap opera *Charmed* got by, for a little while, by using a cover of it.

For those of you reading and doubting, thinking anyone can succeed on the power of the Smiths, you would have had to see the next number from *You Are the Quarry*. As he jumped into *You Have Never Been in Love*, I became a groupie, appropriate on that day especially, Iceland's Gay Pride Day. And he was somehow expecting this reaction, I think. He stood there, throwing

his mic cord around like a lion tamer, his yellow shirt tied at the bottom so that we could see his stomach.

He announced that he was going to play a few of his new songs. Now I became worried. After a bright day, there's always a dark night. So, after genius like *You Are the Quarry* there must follow some mediocre crap. But his new songs were as good as his previous albums and even the Smiths songs. My favourite song that night was *Life is a Pigsty*, maybe because the lyrics rang so true.

Morrissey played four Smiths songs, which is more than his usual. Still, some of the old Smiths fans were unhappy. They bitched enough that I was forced to tell them this was a Morrissey concert so show some goddamn respect. I was pissed that he only played three songs from *You Are the Quarry*, but then every song was good so how could I complain?

Beyond the performance, and the few moaning Smiths fans, there was one problem: The sound was rubbish. I wanted to hear more singing and less feedback, not an enormous request. It was loud enough, but I credit Morrissey's band for that.

After changing shirts three times, Morrissey sang *Panic*. I, like many of the people at the show, jumped out of my chair and ran towards the stage. Morrissey there played the role of messiah. A lot of people were touching Morrissey's hand. I held back. After seeing such a show, I had a moment of intense self-doubt: What have I done to deserve to even kiss Morrissey's feet?

# LIVE MUSIC REVIEWS

**WHO**  
Roger Hodgson and KK

**WHERE**  
Broadway

**WHEN**  
August 11th 2006



**Are You Ready to Eat Fiber!!!**

By Helgi Valur Photo by Skari

The suburb of Grafarvogur was quiet the night Roger Hodgson, former leading man of Supertramp, performed at Broadway in Reykjavik. All the middle-aged men and women in southern Iceland had gathered, after all, to listen to the corniest singer of all time – I was genuinely surprised my mother wasn't there.

Roger Hodgson, the man who penned *Breakfast in America* and *Logical Song*, is the guy who made corny cool. Before this tour, though, Hodgson hadn't performed in 20 years, since he quit Supertramp to raise a family (which is very corny). In addition to 20 years' downtime, Hodgson had the added obstacle that he was presenting his music solo, with just a piano. For those of you who don't know Supertramp, it is an overproduced pop band with a unique, cheesy yet wonderfully happy sound. So take that sound away and what is left? I was about to find out.

First, though, I would watch KK. Every time middle-aged people get together to listen to music in Iceland, concert promoters call KK and check if he's available.

KK walked onstage, played a beautiful song and then a crowd favourite. Then he enlightened us about the origins of blues. He told us Icelandic folk musicians had travelled and taught black men the blues. We Icelanders may have the most blues per capita, but I doubt we invented it. I hoped he would talk more about what Icelanders gave black people because then I could call him KKK. KK started to sing a cappella without a mic the way we did it back in the day. Compliments to him on a brilliant performance.

I was getting quite annoyed by the giggling of middle-aged men when Hodgson walked onstage. He started to play his little piano and I just thought this could get so lame. But his first song was *Take the Long Way Home* and I started smiling and couldn't help but sing along. You'd think that 20 years of aging would have deepened Hodgson's rather high-pitched tone a little; it hadn't. His voice was beautiful as ever. I got chills and happiness was just flying all around like a bumblebee sucking up honey from all the flowers. Oh how sweet it was sitting there just listening to a terrific songwriter who could sing like a fat lady on fire.

Hodgson wasn't solo. His partner in crime was called Aaron. He played the clarinet and saxophone beautifully and harmonised well whenever backing vocals were needed. Hodgson addressed the crowd

and it was clear he was a performer. He knew just what to say and when to say it. He told us that our only job as a crowd was to enjoy ourselves, which was easy. The Grapevine's cameraman was taking a lot of pictures, as were the other locals, so Hodgson decided just to walk onstage and pose. Then I guess he told them all to sod off because after that they left.

There was never a dull moment. Every song he played took you on a journey through his most intimate emotional life, but it remained entertaining. He then started with his new material, an expected low point. But there was to be no low point, only highs. He who says "what comes up must come down" has never gone to a Rodger Hodgson concert.

Strike that. There was the crowd. Why do drunken middle-aged men and women have the power to make you want to drink detergent while hanging in a noose while slitting your wrists with a razor? People kept yelling requests and even asking for songs he didn't even write. You wouldn't go to a Pearl Jam concert and ask for a Creed song. Would you? But even this wasn't enough to rattle me.

Roger Hodgson, who many people thought was a has-been, (or, as was often the case that night, a different person entirely), was performing like a genius or savant if you will. After the show he got a standing ovation and did three encores.

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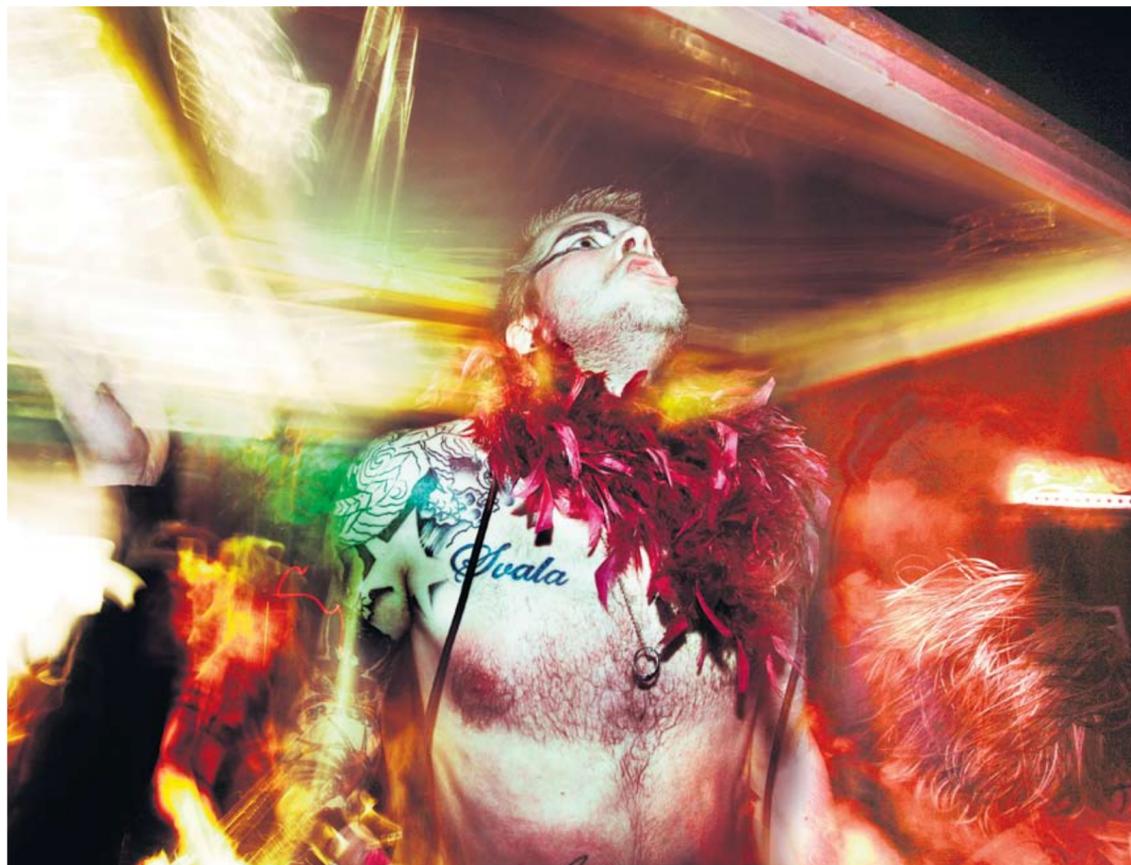


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**Return to Form**

By Haukur Magnússon Photo by Skari

Feminist philosopher Sandra Harding is perhaps best known for her critique on Western science's claim to complete and utter objectivity and "universal reason". According to her, true math-like objectivity can never be had, as any- and everyone's view of the world is ultimately dependent (and thus tainted) by his/her viewpoint. Unlike many so-called post-modernists, however, Harding's answer to this conundrum isn't that we should abandon our search for objective truth; although it may indeed be unattainable, some forms of discourse are clearly more objective than others. Her solution comes in the form of a method she calls 'Standpoint-epistemology' and entails that those engaging in any form of discourse examine and divulge factors in their values and viewpoint that may affect the conclusions they draw. She claims that by embracing these 'stronger standards' for objectivity, we're that much closer to drawing truthful and unoppressive conclusions about our subjects.

As I have no interest in writing oppressive lies, here are some things to bear in mind while reading the following concert review of local legends Minus and Langi Seli & Skuggarnir:

-I am a member of a band that shares a practice space with Minus.  
-I have been a big fan of Minus ever since they released their first album. The only five-star review I've ever written was for their last album, Halldór Laxness. In that review, I used many exclamation marks.  
-Minus kind of scare me. No, not kind of, they just plain scare me. I am afraid they will beat my ass if I give them a negative review.

That said, Minus's Culture Night show at Sirkus was in most respects fucking awesome. And opening band Langi Seli & Skuggarnir were pretty awesome too. Yeah, it was a good night.

The annual Culture Night festival has in the decade or so since its inception evolved into some kind of monster, with many of its guests reportedly leaving out the whole 'culture' bit in lieu of drunkenly wandering through downtown, taking in the occasional happening or concert here and there. This year's festival wasn't any different and I was confronted by quite many drunken wanderers as I made my way to Sirkus's back yard at 8 p.m. to catch the much-hyped appearance of Minus and Langi Seli & Skuggarnir. In retrospect, that whole atmosphere contributed greatly to the show, as both bands play a kind of music that invites and encourages drunken stumbling, vomiting, bathroom encounters and various other forms of debauchery.

Langi Seli & Skuggarnir are a rockabilly quartet that released their sole LP more than 15 years ago and have risen to near mythical status since on account of their supposedly legendary live shows. They took the stage to the applause of an interestingly mixed crowd of teenagers waiting for Minus, wandering children and their intoxicated, middle-aged parents. Shade-wearing, leather-jacketed singer/guitarist Langi Seli certainly had the whole rockabilly look down to a T, while the bass player sported an electric upright bass that fully made up for what he may have lacked in the style department. The type of music LSS specialise in all sounds rather similar to my untrained ears; the main difference between bands in that genre being that for whatever reason, some simply suck while others do not. And LSS made it clear early on that they belonged to the latter camp. Technically proficient, rhythmic and driving, the music was meant to sound like music played by people wearing leather jackets and shades – and they did a fine job of it. My only real complaint about LSS's show is that the fading daylight didn't really become them, their songs really sound like they'd work that much better in a dark, smoke-filled environment.

Oh, of course, the show sounded awful, a problem that would remain throughout the night. Depending on your position, you would either hear only the bass or the vocals with some guitars creeping in if one tilted one's ears at a certain degree. But it didn't really matter. After all, this was Culture Night. And that's not about sounding fine or even being audible. It's about shaking, bumping and grinding – acts to which LSS provide a fine soundtrack.

After a brief encore, Minus singer Krummi took the stage to announce that on account of some unforeseen problems, their show was delayed for a couple of hours and would take place after the evening's fireworks display. Some people with acoustic guitars appeared and looked like they were about to play what I guessed would amount to some kind of hippie noodling. Wanting to preserve the atmosphere of decadence LSS had installed in me, I decided to flee Sirkus and check out what was happening downtown.

I am incredibly bored by hippies, noodling and Jeff Buckley, but no matter what those furry folk played at the Sirkus stage during Minus's delay, it couldn't have been worse than what I was faced with downtown. I found myself stuck in hell, crushed, Roskilde-style, between groups of senior citizens and baby-carrying suburbanites, all the while being forced to listen to Mezzoforte's absolutely awful take on elevator-jazz. In all fairness, the sound quality was good and they probably didn't hit a false note. Problem was, they didn't manage to hit a remotely interesting one either. Soul-less, technically shiny scale-driven garbage, Mezzoforte actually sounds like

music written for robots, by robots. Satanic paedophile robots. In hell. The only positive thing about the whole spectacle was that it was kind of decadent, in a suburban way: amongst other things, I saw a man in his fifties spew a mixture of beer and cotton candy in front of his adoring family.

After a drab fireworks display, I somehow finally made my way back to Sirkus, just in time for Minus's second song. By that time, it was completely dark out and the crowd filling Sirkus's back yard had grown considerably. In front of the stage, a small mosh pit was throbbing in time with the furious grind-attack of a Jesus Christ Bobby number whose name I forget. A squeal of feedback punched me in the back of the neck and all of the sudden I remembered just how much I used to get from watching Minus perform.

This was indeed an important show for Minus, with them returning to the stage after a year of recuperation and inactivity. Before their leave of absence, they had played some pretty bad shows, displaying a lack of imagination and passion with both their annoying cock-rock-like demeanour and new songs that didn't seem to go anywhere. I walked out on them last year, appalled by an act that used to leave me inspired. As the show went on, however, it became apparent that the show was a much-needed and longed-for return to form for a band that had swayed off course.

As far as I could tell through the muddled sound, their playing was incredibly tight. Minus is composed of some skilled instrumentalists who have played together for a very long time, bouncing off each other with a renewed vigour and energy. Their set list was a mix of songs off their last two albums interspersed with new tracks. While not exactly inventive, the new songs display a return to the more cacophonous sounds of JCB, blending melodic choruses with confusingly aggressive verses in a manner reminiscent of Laxness favourite Romantic Exorcism. The final outcome of their recent songwriting efforts will of course depend on the way they manage to present themselves in the studio without the aid of longtime collaborator Curver, by all accounts a big contributor to their sound.

The mosh pit up front got increasingly aggressive and reached a kind of climax in the midst of the furious and seldom heard Miso. A group of bare-chested hooligans that included Messrs Handsome and Mista took to climbing onto the clear plastic sheeting that served to guard the stage from the possibility of rain. It looked unsafe and scary and for a second I was worried that the whole thing would collapse and kill the band, thereby preventing me from hearing how some studio time would benefit its new songs. For whatever reason, the plastic held up fine, but the threat seemed to hasten the night's descent into noisy chaos.



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# How to drive in Iceland

This is an advertisement

A relatively large percentage of foreign tourists in Iceland travel around the country by car. Conditions in Iceland are in many ways unusual, and often quite unlike that which foreign drivers are accustomed. It is therefore very important to find out how to drive in this country. We know that the landscapes are beautiful, which naturally draws the attention of driver away from the road. But in order to reach your destination safely, you must keep your full attention on driving.

This article is intended to point out the main dangers when driving in Iceland, especially the unusual ones that may come as a complete surprise to foreign drivers.

## What are the speed limits?

The speed limit in urban areas is usually 50 km/hr. Speed limit signs are usually not posted unless it is other than 50 km/hr. The speed limit is often 60 km/hr on thruways, but in residential areas it is usually only 30 km/hr. The main rule on highways is that gravel roads have a speed limit of 80 km/hr, and paved roads 90 km/hr. Signs indicate if other speed limits apply.

## Gravel roads, blind hills & blind curves

A common place for accidents to occur on urban roads is where a paved road suddenly changes to gravel. The main reason is that drivers do not reduce speed before the changeover to gravel, and consequently lose control. Loose gravel on road shoulders has also caused a great number of accidents. When driving on gravel roads—which are often quite narrow—it is important to show caution when approaching another car coming from the opposite direction by moving as far to the right as is safely possible.



Blind hills—where lanes are not separate—can be very dangerous, and should be approached with caution. There are also many blind curves in Iceland that test a driver's skill.

## Single-lane bridges

There are many single-lane bridges on the Ring Road. The actual rule is that the car closer to the bridge has the right-of-way. However, it is wise to stop and assess the situation, i.e. attempt to see what the other driver plans to do. This sign indicates that a single-lane bridge is ahead.



## Livestock on the road

In Iceland, you can expect livestock to be on or alongside the road. It is usually sheep, but sometimes horses and even cows can be in your path. This is common all over the country, and can be very dangerous. Sometimes a sheep is on one side of the road and her lambs

on the other side. Under these conditions—which are common—it is a good rule to expect the lambs or the sheep to run to the other side.

## Seatbelts are required by law

In Iceland, drivers and passengers are required by law to wear seatbelts, regardless of the type of vehicle or where they are seated. Investigations of fatal accidents in recent years have shown that a large majority of those who died did not have their seatbelts fastened. Wearing seatbelts is especially important because of the nature of accidents in Iceland: many of them involve vehicles driving off the road and rolling over. In such accidents, seatbelts often mean the difference between life and death. It should be noted that children must either wear seatbelts, or be in car safety seats, depending on their age and maturity.

## Necessary to bear in mind

It is against the law to operate a vehicle in Iceland after having consumed alcohol, and the punishment for violating this law is rather stiff.

Iceland requires that vehicle headlights be on at all times, day and night, when driving.

It is strictly forbidden to drive off-road. Such driving results in serious damage to sensitive vegetation, which may take nature decades to repair.

Foreign travellers requiring information regarding road and driving conditions should visit the Public Road Administration's website at [www.vegagerdin.is](http://www.vegagerdin.is)

It should be noted that the Road Traffic Directorate has produced a video for foreign drivers, which covers all the points that have been mentioned here. The video can be viewed on the Directorate's website, [www.us.is](http://www.us.is) (under the English version).



ROAD TRAFFIC DIRECTORATE

TRAVEL

## Outside Reykjavík

### Kerlingarfjöll



## The Lonesome Traveller: Kerlingarfjöll

The Truly Enchanted Landscape of the Witches' Mountain

BY FABRIZIO FRASCAROLI PHOTOS BY FABRIZIO FRASCAROLI

"So, are you ready?"

"Well, not exactly. But are there alternatives?"

The fifth day, I spend in uttermost solitude after leaving the tourist hub Gullfoss on a Saturday morning. It's not so surprising that I have picked the habit of posing questions to myself. Perhaps more bizarre is the fact that I even bother to answer. But now it is time for the final climb, the last stage of the journey, something I have been planning, looking forward to – and yet postponing – for the last three years, and finally I am about to see it accomplished.

I have four days of walking behind me, roughly 100 km. Four days to cross from west to east the sector of the highlands contained between the rivers Hvítá and Þjórsá, two of Iceland's mightiest rivers.

The walk officially started at Gullfoss, which I admired for the first time from a privileged spot on the eastern side. In the traveller's loneliness, the geography of memories often follows strange courses. Maybe you are hiking known grounds, territories you've visited before and should be charged with remembrances. Yet, nothing happens: you remember, of course, but not as a disturbance, you remain anchored to the moment, focused on and enjoying each step you take.

A few days ago, I was there, on the rather anonymous pastures that stretch east from Gullfoss. And then, for some reason, a tight web of associative thoughts could not be prevented from enveloping my attention: a sinuous and insidious chain of memories and reflections dragging me away from the present trail and the fragrant smell of moss that enriched the air. The weather probably did not help: not a single breath of breeze, humid and rainy at night, and warm as is seldom experienced in Iceland.

I constantly waited for a downpour, a sudden storm. A flood. This is not what you hope for when you are alone in the highlands of the interior. I felt it was also me: I was nervous, not at ease.

And then there is Monday, a new week and a heavy set of changes. The wind turned and grew in intensity,

becoming a serious obstacle to every footstep. I realized it at once, early in the morning, as I shyly peeped out my tent and saw the clouds running fast across the sky. As it happened, the trail was to raise the day the weather fully hit me, up to a steady 700 metre rise, where the grassy pastures have to leave way to barren and deserted lands.

But the wind and the climb had a reward. In the afternoon, I stared at the green and rough waters of the small lake Rjúpnafellsvatn, the wind had wiped out the last wisp of clouds and blown down the walls of haze, freeing the view of the great glaciers in the far distance. Even in their mildest form, the highlands of the interior make you taste the authentic flavour of remoteness and forbiddingness, and when the horizon discloses the sight of Vatnajökull and its snow-clad peaks, then you become aware that you are experiencing the country at its very best. No roads nor tracks, not even footprints: only a desert stormed by the winds and an apparently unlimited vastness in every direction. The exhilarating sensation to perhaps be the first person to ever tread the land in that exact point, the first one to ever be following that precise route on the highland.

The next day – the fourth – the wind continued, merciless in its attempts at dissuasion. I followed my own shadow cast on the arid soil, and a strangely bittersweet sensation invaded me: a sense of old-time exploration, when something still actually had yet to be discovered, and gaps in a map had yet to be filled. Eventually, after wading the fast-streaming waters of the river Kisá, the impression that I was following an invisible but clear route across the wild dissolved, melted into the seemingly never-ending sequence of black dunes that lay before my feet. The contours of the territory moved into its most surreal.

It was a bitter disappointment to find a closed hut and only dry rivers when I finally arrived to Setur. Dizzy and thirsty, the search for drinkable water became the dominant headache of the evening – and yet around me I had the scenery of a triumphant sunset above the nearby Hofsjökull glacier and wild oasis of Þjórsárver.

Icelandic topography sometimes presents you names of terrible omen. Kerlingarfjöll – "the mountains of the witch" – is among these. Not surprisingly, the place was dreaded by the inhabitants of Iceland, who carefully avoided it and did not dare to enter it for exploration until the 1850s, in the conviction that the area was infested by supernatural forces of every sort. I was here once before in 2003, when a violent storm with thick rains and 80 km/h winds surprised me on the mountains.

Still, in spite of the ominous aura, Kerlingarfjöll remains a miracle in Icelandic nature, by far one of the most fascinating destinations the country can boast. Remember when – as a child – you used to draw mountains as a stripe of snow-covered pyramids? If you had the imagination to add green, yellow, black and red colours to the shapes, then you would already have a fair picture of what Kerlingarfjöll looks like from a distance. Alpine in look, and still volcanic in genesis, these mountains used to host the only summer ski resort in Iceland, as well as a legendary ski school – one which has left an indelible legacy in the memory of many Icelanders – founded in 1963 by sport-guru Valdimar Órnólfsson.

**"Icelandic topography sometimes presents you names of terrible omen. Kerlingarfjöll – the 'the mountains of the witch' – is among these. Not surprisingly, the place was dreaded by the inhabitants of Iceland, who carefully avoided it and did not dare to enter it for exploration until the 1850s, convinced that the area was infested by supernatural forces of every sort."**

Even though the skiing facilities had to be definitively shut down late in the 1990s, following the disappearance of the glaciers and of the perpetual snows, Kerlingarfjöll still has a lot to offer to the visitor: the sight of one of the largest and most vibrant areas of geothermal activity in all of Iceland, the possibility of most rewarding one-day and multi-day hikes, and – last but not least – the comfort and warmth provided by the most welcoming and best equipped hut you will encounter in all the Highlands.

Kerlingarfjöll is like a castle, a sorceress's one, with tall pinnacles, thick and impassable walls, snares and deep moats. A necromantic fortress that steals the hori-

zon. As my GPS reads slightly more than 1000 m of altitude, the first climb of the day is just at my back: a steep ascent on a stony and unstable ground, but nothing prohibitive. A pungent smell of sulphur already reaches me here, on the outer walls: witchcrafts of the land in the distance. But this is merely the beginning.

Many are the traps set on the way to the core of the mountains, and it does not take long before I pass from a first taste of triumph to desperation. The ravine created by the springs of the river Kisá is deep and inaccessible, much more than I expected by studying the map – the waters run fast almost 200 m underneath my current position, a precipitous fall along sheer, steep climbable walls. I falter. Retreating and arriving at my destination by the flat and undemanding way around the mountains would feel like a defeat – the second one on this trip. Descending into the ravine, on the other hand, looked like madness – the waters are tumultuous, and still partly covered by unstable snow bridges: a web of complications.

Unfortunately, in my present state of mind, madness and recklessness feel like the right policy. Reaching the

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»» CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE



does not allow a firm grip, and the 17 kilos of my backpack feel like an incumbent threat, ready to catapult me backwards into a hopeless tumble. It is while I wonder why on earth the masochist in me is so often prevailing, that I see a slight sliver of hope: almost a natural stair, not so many metres away from my post, leading up towards less steep ground. I start scrambling my way in that direction, partly sustaining my steps with the trekking poles, partly with the help of my bare hands. I find hold in a huge block of pumice, but the treacherous rock breaks like clay under my grip, falling down the precipice into the water with great roar.

The cigarette I smoke once on top again, finally out of that nightmare, is among the best in many months. I have reached the other side of the ravine, and I am at 1000 m ASL again.

The peaks of Kerlingarfjöll encircle a volcanic plateau, which will astound any observer. Here, earth and water are perennially at work on strange alchemies. For around 5 km it is all an endless sequence of fumaroles, hot springs, bubbling mud, steaming pools, green ice-cold lakes, gorges and ravines continually carved by ever-running waters – painful scars of the land. And the shades and the colours! Anything in the range of orange, lava black, white, emerald green, pale yellow, crimson red... There is a confusing and blurred boundary, beyond which the beauty of nature suddenly becomes horrid. It

is a matter of proportion: at a certain stage, the creative powers of the forces of the Earth feel so overwhelming, that the sense of wonder gives way to dread and fear. In Kerlingarfjöll, that subtle border seems often crossed.

There is an abundance of snow left up here – the most in the last ten years, I found out later. I let myself go to an exuberant sense of intoxication: I have just accomplished something terribly dangerous (which – for honesty's sake – I should not even have dared), after three years of wait I am about to finally defeat these mountains, and I am gazing at one of the most impressive spectacles of Icelandic landscape in a weather-blessed day. Nowhere else in Iceland – not even in the much-celebrated Landmannalaugar – had I the possibility to arrive this close to the heart of geothermal activity.

But the day and the trail are not over yet, and there is still sweat and pain on the road to final achievement. The route I drew from the map and stored in my GPS is proving accurate and comfortable, except for the second massive gorge ploughed by fast-streaming waters. And still more scrambling along slopes of mud and fragile rock, and steep descents on snow mantles suddenly collapsing into the void of a frightening precipice.

It is a chain of challenges – especially to the nerves, as the day is growing late – but that intoxicating feeling that captured

me before has set loose my boldness and diluted my fears. I let myself go through all this with strange confidence and serenity.

When I reach the pass at the west of Hverdalahnúkur, I know that it is over. My past defeat is avenged: with the blessing of the weather, I have conquered the mountains. The many souls of the highlands seem captured in my smell: the stench of swamp, dust, mud and sulphur have mixed with my own sweat in an exotic blend – I reckon great potentialities for the market. The rest of the trail is like a Wagnerian symphony in footsteps: a swift nosedive towards the base camp of Ásgarður, the sun still warm and high in the sky. Exaltation.

When I arrive at the hut – after 12 hours and 25 km of walking – I find no dreadful “kerling” (frump, witch) greeting me. Rather, it is three girls in their twenties, basically the same age as me, one Polish and two Icelandic – a sign of the times.

“Yes, we run this thing” confirms Magnea, proudly pointing out that the hut is managed by the fairer sex.

Ruffled hair, muddy clothes, hands stained by black grease – the signs of hard work in the outdoors, I am shown around. The whole resort and its facilities (indoor accommodation in different houses, restaurant, campsite, showers and wonderful hot tubs) are powered by a small plant down the river: an old crock from the 1930s.

>>> CONTINUES ON PAGE 52



## ICELANDIC FASHION 2006

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JOHANNA B. LINDVALL • 11.11 • SÍA Photo: Steinn/Svein/Íslandsmenningaráskjalir.com/Steinn/Svein/Svein

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# FOREX

MEIRI GJALDEYRIR FYRIR PENINGANA





"We expect it to break down from one day to the other" explains Þóra, who seems to be almost emotionally connected to the power plant, and to enjoy especially the roughness of her summer occupation.

I am guided through the menu. The focus is on traditional Icelandic food. Home-made bread is baked everyday in the hot springs on the plateau up there, five km from here. The more I get entangled in the magic of the place, the less I can believe what I see and hear. And again that bittersweet sensation of old-times something. Here you have one of the most charming places in Iceland, three young women who deliberately bother to make food as their grandparents did, exploiting the energy from a cracking dam and power plant built in the 1930s... and probably, at this very moment, even on a day like this - 20° outside and bright sky above - 80% of Reykjavik population are numbing their brains with such TV anaesthetics as Rockstar: Supernova, or sinking into a nightlife that all too often nears the profundities of a Mexican brothel.

"We are very ambitious" is the crystal-clear explanation I am offered. Of course. Blessed youth.

The night is a joyful one. I start boozing around in the hot tubs. People hand me a can of beer. I feel I am going completely native: what's more Icelandic than drinking beer inside a pool of hot water? Professional deformation: after all, this paper I keep somewhere at home states that I am an anthropologist. And then it is endless chatting and more drinking until late in the night. It is a diversified socialscape: members of the Icelandic Glaciological Society (lovely people, who still talk of the old days at the ski school with heartfelt and touching passion), a hardcore feminist mountain guide, a German artist in search for inspiration, two volunteers from the rescue team. The necromantic fortress turns out to hold a core of fairy tale.

I spend the next day in Kerlingarfjöll, relaxing, enjoying further nice weather, exploring the highest peaks and the amazing horizons they disclose in a sunny day, and getting lectured about moraines (Magda has come to Iceland from Krakow in the context of a study program in geological sciences).

As soon as I take my seat on the bus that will drive me back to Reykjavik on Friday afternoon, a sudden sense of tearing melancholy assails me. I go through all the stages of the journey - my uneasiness the first days, the heaviness of the weather, the omens in the unnatural stillness and then the warnings in the wind - and I am finally given to understand. As I leave this place, I am not unchanged.

## Inside Reykjavík

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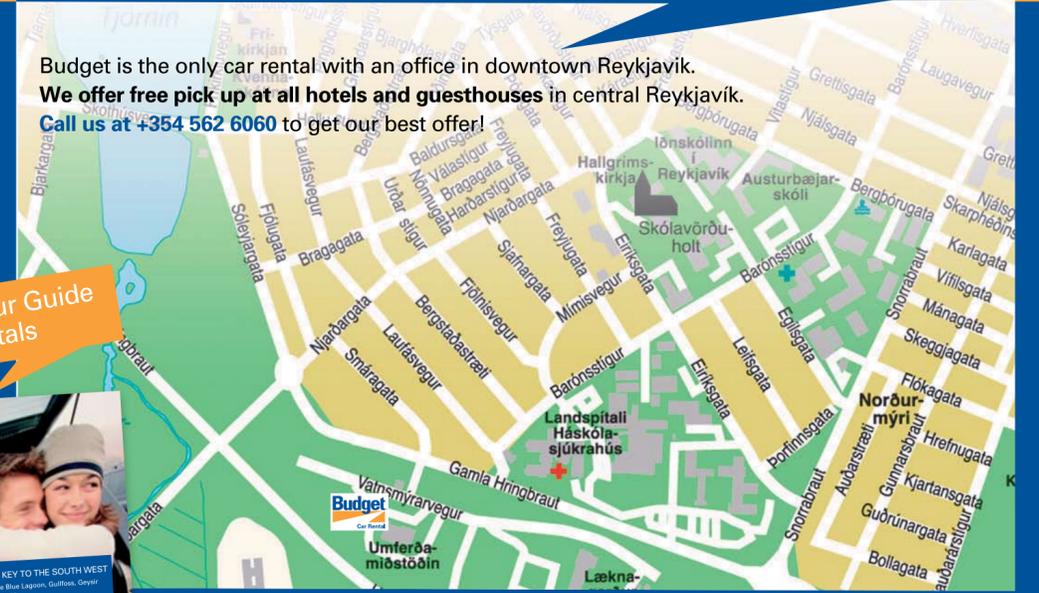
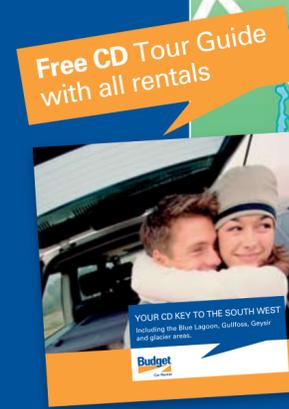
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Hugleikur Dagsson deals with his new international following.  
**Page 12.**

**“One of Reykjavík’s better aspects, like Airwaves has shown us in the past, is that if no one else is willing to, you can just do things yourself.”**

Social Democratic Councilman Stefán Jón Hafstein, demonstrating the logic that lost his party their governing position, in his explanation of why the city shouldn’t worry about losing its rock venues.

**Page 24.**

**“He continued by telling the girls in the audience they were all virgins again for the night. With no husbands, boyfriends or fiancés, they were told they were also all very single and about to witness something they had never seen before.”**

Steinunn Jakobsdóttir preparing to get wowed at a Chippendales performance.

**Page 36.**

**“Welcome horse enthusiasts and, well, Jesus, this is just like a David Lynch film.”**

Ragnar Kjartans of Trabant, speaking to a befuddled country crowd.

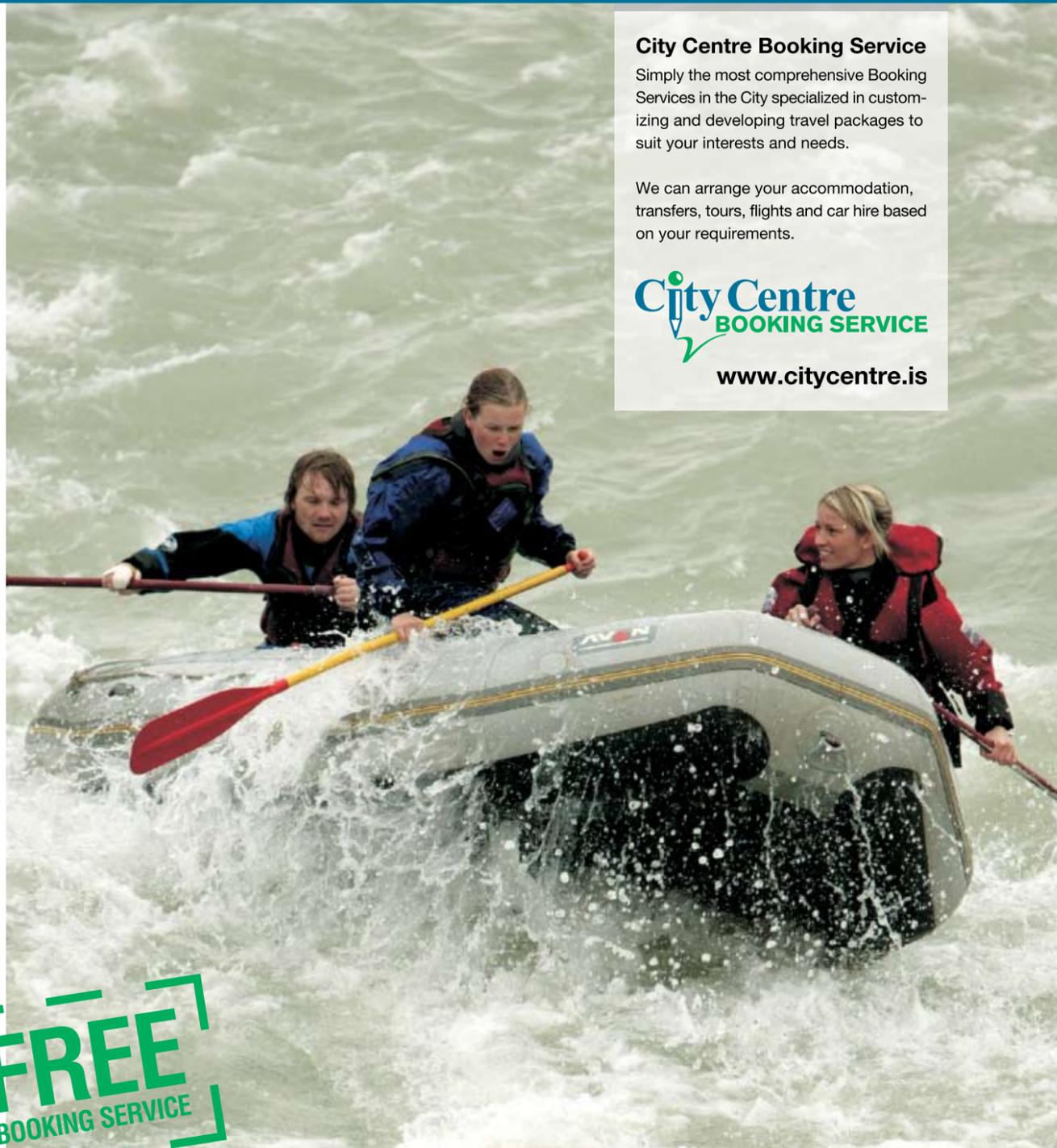
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**“Soulless, technically shiny scale-driven garbage, Mezzoforte actually sounds like music written for robots, by robots. Satanic paedophile robots. In hell. The only positive thing about the whole spectacle was that it was kind of decadent, in a suburban way...”**

Haukur Magnússon evaluates Iceland’s most revered jazz fusion band at Mennin-garnótt.

**Page 46.**

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