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Reykjavík!

#1

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Steingrímur J. Sigfússon: We're All in it Together • Looking Back at 2006

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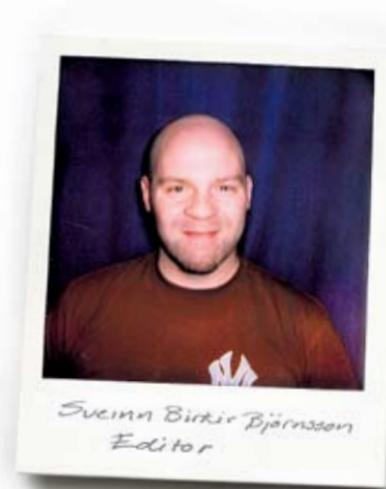
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From the Editor's Chair



It is a new year, a time to wipe the slate clean. A time to start over. There is a full year ahead of us, full of exciting new opportunities and second chances. Chances to right some of the wrongs from the previous year. There were enough of those made last year. We are revisiting some of them in this issue.

The most inexplicable of those may have been the government's decision to resume commercial whaling. I believe everyone has realised by now that this was a wrong decision. The backlash from the international society has been even more than we could have expected, and Icelandic companies abroad as well as the tourist industry at home is suffering. You can argue until you are blue in the face for our rights as a sovereign nation to decide for ourselves whether to hunt whales or not, or quote statistics regarding fish stock, whatever. There is no way around the fact that there is no market for whale meat, thus commercial whaling is economically unviable. Usually, that would be enough to wake authorities from their slumber, but so far, they are hitting the snooze button, reinforcing my belief that the decision

was prompted by foolish pride, against a better judgment, and against our best interest.

Another wrong is the way in which some elements in our society have chosen to approach the discussion of immigrants in Iceland. While there is a lot left to be desired in that department, the discussion is not furthered by pointing out immigrants as a problem and trying to establish a segregation in our society by continuously discussing the "Immigrant problem" from the perspective of us vs. them, instead of shaping the discourse around solutions to the only real problem with immigration in Iceland; our lack of effort in assisting foreigners in integrating in to Icelandic society. The way the discussion of the "immigrant problem" has been directed lately, all that is left is for someone to suggest a "final solution."

The fact is that Icelandic society was, and is, in desperate need for immigrants. There has been a steady need for workforce in the country, and if foreign labour had not been readily available in the recent past, our society would have suffered badly. The idea that Iceland should, or even could, be kept "pure"

and free of foreigners with a stricter immigration policy is not only erroneous; it is anachronistic in a world that is actively shrinking and becoming ever more globalised. And as Trausti Valsson points out in this issue, it might soon be immoral as well, if global warming will rise as predicted, we could soon be faced with the problem of environmental refugees.

Environmental issues is another ball we dropped. A pretty costly turnover in my mind. Despite growing opposition from every corner of our society, the government so far remains undeterred in its commitment to building up heavy industry in this country. Environmental issues are a secondary thought in these parts. We pride ourselves of our beautiful nature, our clean water and our fresh air. If we continue on the path we are on, those words will soon amount to the empty echo of a good memory.

There are many wrongs to right. Thankfully, this is an election year. So, what better place than here? What better time than now?



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Sour Grapes

Say your piece, voice your opinion, send your letters to letters@grapvine.is.

Thank you very, very much Sveinn Birkir Björnsson for the article about the Sugarcubes reunion gig in November. I wasn't aware it had happened and so was devastated to have missed it, but reading the article was great, at least now I know a bit more about what I missed and what a wonderful occasion it must have been. Thank you so much,

Adam, Oxford, UK

Well, that is what we are here for Adam. If you look carefully, you'll see that a panel of music scribes we contacted actually chose this as the best concert in Iceland 2006. Although, that might not make you feel any better. In any case, it was a great concert, and I hope you and other Sugarcubes fans were able to enjoy my review of it.
-Editor

Dear The Grapevine team, I'm a German student, and in summer 2006 I have travelled through Iceland for 4 weeks and I was so delighted to be able to read a newspaper there, which was very informative and just great, I especially enjoyed the series of The Lonesome Traveller and the concert reviews. Also the political issues were really interesting for a foreigner like me.

In the last days I also enjoyed to read your online articles, but it would be so great, if you could send the grapevine to me, in paper or as a pdf or something, as you announce it on the left-bottom side on your webpage.

I've tried several times to subscribe, but everything that happened, was that a new page appeared with the headline "Subscription" and unfortunately nothing but!

So it would be so nice, if you had a service of sending grapevine to Europe or via email; I would really enjoy it!

Jan Dammel
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All back issues are available online in .pdf form. Simply select an is-

sue from the dropdown menu on the left and your view should be of the contents of that issue... Now, this is where things get complicated. On the upper-right side of that page, you will find a link that says, "Download in .pdf," bring the mouse pointer over the link and then click the left button on your mouse (for Mac users, simply clicking the button will bring the same results). I know that this is a lot of lefts and rights, but I cannot stress the importance of the "Download in .pdf" link in this matter.

But naturally, there is nothing that beats the real thing, so for all our international readers: send an email to subscribe@grapvine.is, and we will send you the required information. And that concludes today's lesson.
-Editor

Hi

I am thoroughly enjoying Grapevine on line, and learning and just trying to keep the feeling. Last summer my wife and I visited Iceland for a few weeks and we will be back many times in the future. You may want to look at my website and it is www.jimtubb.com.

I want to thank you for keeping me informed especially about the music and art of Iceland as it is so relevant to the planet and to my own tendencies.

If you want to please send my note anywhere you want to as I try to connect to your country in all ways I can. I hope to develop an exchange programme somehow with Canadian and Local artists in the plans.

Thanks and good luck and peace

Jim Tubb

Hello Jim, As your letter has now been posted in the Grapevine, I am sure your mailbox will be flooded with enthusiastic people from Iceland and around the world who share your interest in our country. This is bound to happen.
-Editor

Hello!

I fell in love with your paper while spending the month of July in Reykjavik this past summer. I was excited to find your paper online so I could get my fix of all things Reykjavik from afar.

I have one complaint regarding your online issue though. I am a graphic designer and like to download the issue in its entirety to see the whole thing, but you do not list the file size of the pdf of each issue. I keep hitting download at work, then realizing the issue is ENORMOUS and have to stop it! A simple "(PDF, xxxMB)" under the link would suffice. Many people out there have very slow connections and a little heads up on the file size could allow them to make a more informed decision as to whether to download or not.

Keep up the great work! I am looking forward to reading this latest issue.

A. Samson
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

I don't want to be rude, but... Considering that you are a graphic designer, should it not be self-evident to you that even a lo-res .pdf edition of a 48-page magazine in a large format is a pretty big file? But, I see where you are going, you are of course looking out for our readership at large. I will make sure this is brought up at our annual staff meeting.
-Editor

Correction:

In the December issue of the Reykjavik Grapevine, Jan Kargulewicz failed to properly credit Kári Gylfason's study of Polish immigrants in Iceland in his article A Short History of Poles in Iceland. Gylfason's study formed the basis of Kargulewicz's writing, although his accreditation did not reflect that clearly. We extend our apologies to Gylfason.

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The Stories That Shaped the Year

Text by Sveinn Birkir Björnsson with reporting from Gunnar Hrafn Jónsson, Haukur S. Magnússon, Paul F. Nikolov and Steinunn Jakobsdóttir.

In the year that passed, these news stories stood out above others.

Heavy Industry to Increase Despite Growing Opposition

The government's plans for continued heavy industrialization drew criticism from the financial sector. Early in the year, Ágúst Guðmundsson, CEO of Bakkavör Group, said in a speech at the Icelandic Business Forum that the government's plans for continued investment in aluminum smelters and power industry was crippling other industries. He claimed that the continued development was putting a lot of pressure on the economical system, causing the exchange rate of the Icelandic Króna to go up steadily, causing other export industries to lose money. Guðmundsson also claimed that the required rate of return from the investment in heavy industry was too low. If the same investment had been made in dynamic start-up companies, the return would have been much higher than could be expected from heavy industry. Around the same time, analysts from KB Bank issued a report stating that the government's position on heavy industry was the main factor pushing up the exchange rate, leading to losses in other export sectors.

According to a February Gallup poll, most Icelanders felt that the government should not focus on trying to build an aluminum smelter in Iceland within the next five years. Over 60%, of the eight-hundred people who responded, were against the building of another aluminum plant - as has been proposed for the north of Iceland - while only 29.6% favoured the idea. While more women than men were against the construction of more heavy industry within the next five years, respondents from all age groups - from 16 to 75 years of age - showed a large majority against recent development proposals.

In May, government officials signed a declaration of intent to explore the possibility of building an aluminum smelter in Húsavík, while Alcan is hoping to more than double the production capabilities of the Straumsvík Aluminum smelter. Meanwhile, Andri Snær Magnason's book against heavy industry, *The Dreamland*, became a best seller, and protesters gathered at an international protester's camp near Kárahnjúkar.

In September, the by-pass tunnel for the Kárahnjúkar Dam was closed, effectively starting the build up of the Hálsalón Lagoon, which will provide the hydroelectric dam with consistent water pressure. Near the end of September, fifteen thousand people marched in support of retiring television reporter and nature enthusiast Ómar Ragnarsson and his call to the Icelandic government to forego with the Kárahnjúkar dam. Ragnarsson called for Icelanders to protest, stating that when

an unjust execution is about to go forth one should continue disputing it until the last day. Protest walks took place on Laugavegur in Reykjavík, in Akureyri, Egilsstaðir and Ísafjörður. In a conversation with the Grapevine right before the march, Ísafjörður organizer and scholar Ólína Þorvarðardóttir reflected public opinion to the latest developments in the dam spectacle. "It was foremost Ómar's call that sparked our interest in marching here in Ísafjörður. He has been very diligent in calling attention to the impending harm to nature and the environment and people are finally starting to realise that it is not too late to do something about it. This is why we will answer his call and march, expressing our sorrow over what is happening." When asked about the effects the Kárahnjúkar endeavour had on the people of Ísafjörður Ólína replied that the scope and effect of the projects is far greater than anyone envisioned. "In environmental and economical terms, the effects are alarming. Here in the West Fjords, we have experienced drawbacks due to the inflation caused by the dam, where greatly needed projects such as improving our dismal road system have been postponed to accommodate it. On another note, the country belongs to all of us; Easterners do not 'possess' the Eastern highlands any more than we possess the West Fjords peninsula. This is our heritage and we have an obligation to pass it on to future generations."

U.S. Defense Forces Leave Keflavík Air Base; Nationwide Scare of Rampant Motorcycle Gangs

In March, word spread that the United States military base in Keflavík was going to be closed, with all aircrafts leaving permanently by September. The majority of personnel stationed were to leave, and relatively new radar installations would be closed. Up to 500 Icelanders would lose their job.

Since 1951, Iceland has had a bi-lateral defense agreement with the USA, for the nation's defenses. The decision to close the base was made uni-laterally by U.S. government officials. Although the decision had been apparent for quite some time, the decision caught much of the nation by surprise - including the government and media.

Steingrímur J. Sigfússon, Left-Green MP and long-time critic of the U.S. military's presence in Iceland, told the Grapevine that this was a historic day. "The dream has certainly been realized, but of course it would have been better if our leaders had shown a little forward thinking and taken the initiative themselves. The way this came about was rude, and ultimately humiliating for the government and those parties that have for over five decades supported foreign occupation of Iceland. When our na-

tion was signed up for the coalition of the willing to invade Iraq, against its will, we were told we had to support our closest allies. Yet this is how they treat their so-called friends, it's a real slap in the face for the government."

Mr. Sigfússon further commented that Iceland's need for armed forces was practically non-existent, and that civilian institutions such as the police and coastguard should be organized in order to provide the needed protection - in the unlikely event of a major disturbance. "I mean, who is going to bomb us? Who is going to invade us? We are not talking about being defenseless. If, for example, a crazed motorcycle gang came here and ran amok, we need to have an organized force that can deal with that. What we don't need is an air force and a base full of soldiers," said Sigfússon. "A long and humiliating chapter in our history is over, we're not a feeble nation and we can and should take responsibility for our own security."

In May, Social Democratic MP Össur Skarphéðinsson, accused the ruling coalition of "hiding from the parliament and the people" the fact that the NATO base was going to leave. Pointing to an article by Valur Ingimundarson for the Icelandic Literary Society, Skarphéðinsson pointed out that US authorities had told the Icelandic government in December 2002 that they intended to leave the country. This announcement was repeated formally about a week before parliamentary elections in 2003, when the US ambassador met with Icelandic government officials.

On September 30, the American flag was lowered at the now former US military base at Keflavík. After a small ceremony, the Icelandic flag was raised alone and the closure of the base and the withdrawal of the Navy's presence in Iceland became official.

Many locals celebrated the turning point by throwing their own little farewell parties and a large group cheered the Navy's departure at a meeting held at Nasa the following day. "I'm still celebrating," Stefán Pálsson, spokesperson for The Campaign Against Military Bases told the Grapevine. Pálsson and a bus full of anti-war protestors went on a guided trip to Reykjanes to explore the area now desolated, but the area is closed for public traffic. "It was all very informative and very unreal to walk around such a ghost village and think about all the waist that strings along such military bases. To think about all the money spent in constructing the buildings, which now are empty. Money, which could have been used for something very different."

U.S. have stated that the defense agreement will be honored, although Iceland's air defenses will be orchestrated from other NATO bases in Europe. The Icelandic government has explored other options in

cooperation with Norway and Denmark. What will become of the air base left behind in Reykjanes remains uncertain.

Whaling Resumes; World Not Amused

In October, the Icelandic government lifted the ban on commercial whaling. The whaler Hvalur 9 was promptly prepared for its first journey in seventeen years. In accordance with the International Whaling Commission's moratorium, Iceland gave up commercial whaling in 1986, although scientific whaling was practiced up until 1989. In 2003, Icelanders returned to whaling for scientific purposes, when a program designed to research the effect of minke whale on commercial fish stock was launched. A press release from the Ministry of Fisheries states that the quota would be nine fin whales and 30 minke whales during the 2006-2007 Icelandic fishing year, in addition to 39 minke whales that will be caught as part of the scientific whaling plan, started in 2003.

"The position of Iceland has always been that whale stocks should be utilised in a sustainable manner like any other living marine resource," stated a press release on the Ministry for Fisheries website. "Icelandic policy on ocean issues is based on maintaining the future health, biodiversity and sustainability of the ocean surrounding Iceland, in order that it may continue to be a resource that supports and promotes the nation's wellbeing. This involves conservation and management of the resources based on scientific knowledge and guided by respect for the marine ecosystem as a whole." The Ministry stated that Iceland had the legal right to resume sustainable whaling and that whale products would likely be consumed both in Iceland as well as internationally. British authorities questioned Iceland's decision.

In an interview with the Grapevine at the time, Magnús Þór Hafsteinsson, Liberal Party MP, stated, "I think we Icelanders should start whaling again, but we have to be sure there is a market for the products." According to a Gallup poll conducted in Iceland in June and July last year, very few Icelanders eat whale meat on regular basis and the market is very limited both locally, as well as globally. Only 1.1% of Icelanders eat whale meat once a week or more, while 82.4% of 16 to 24-year olds never eat whale meat. An international moratorium on commercial trading of whale meat is still in effect.

Icelandic tourist companies, especially in whale-watching industry feared backlash from travellers. A December Gallup poll confirmed that nearly half of Icelanders agreed that commercial whaling would harm Iceland's tourist industry.

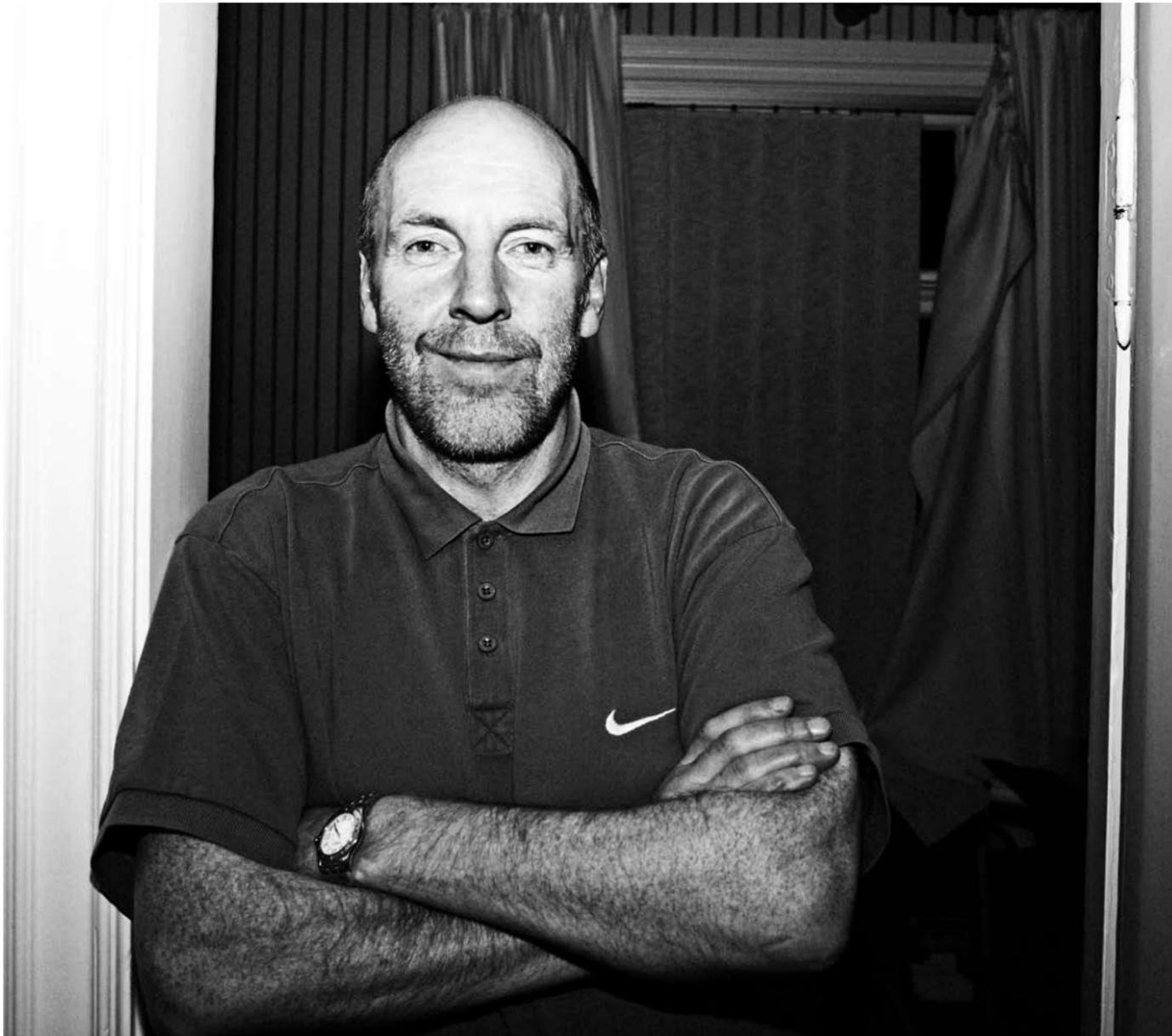
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Defending the Welfare System

Text by Steinunn Jakobsdóttir Photo by Gulli

*Steingrímur J. Sigfússon, leader of political party the Leftist-Green Movement, recently released the book *Við öll – Íslenskt velferðarsamfélag á tímamótum* (All of Us - Icelandic Welfare Society at Crossroads).*

Sigfússon's goal is to encourage people to consider certain fundamental matters facing Icelandic society today, issues like environmental preservation, neoliberalism, privatisation, growing wage differences, EU membership and Iceland's contribution to the international community. Issues, he says, voters should seriously consider in coming elections. The Grapevine met with Sigfússon at his downtown office to learn more about his writing.

What made you decide to write this book?

There are a few main reasons for it. First of all, I feel that party leaders should inform people about what they stand for and clarify their views in a concrete way. Second of all, I think that Icelandic politics are lacking a solid ground for debate, a more extensive one than is made possible by short speeches, articles or news clips. What the book for the most parts does, is freeing me from worrying whether the article is 4,000 characters or the news clip longer than two minutes. In the third place, I find it important that people discuss these big subjects facing us today and in the near future in a wider context. There are even more reasons to do this now than ever, because of how interconnected these subjects have gotten in the globalised world.

You've been working in politics for 24 years. Why release the book now? Is it a coincidence it was released so shortly before the upcoming elections?

I got the idea a few years ago, but I never succeeded in finishing the book earlier. Last fall, I had to decide whether to go forth with the book or forget about it altogether so the timing is a coincidence. But this is a

good period in my political career to tackle subjects like these. I have considerable experience, after 24 years in Parliament and being an active participant in international collaboration. Of course I hope the book will help the party in forthcoming elections. I also feel it can be a good manual for our candidates.

Are you trying to influence undecided voters or maybe turn someone to your side?

I hope that those interested in understanding me and my party members can learn more about our views by reading the book. But I also wrote the book so it would be interesting for people with different opinions, not necessarily thinking I would win them over, but, and this I find very important, for the discourse in general, and so readers can better understand my conclusions. Why I am so deeply opposed to the heavy industry. Why we [The Leftist-Green Party] have fought against the blind privatisation process. Why I am such a firm supporter of the Nordic welfare system, etc. In the book I explain why. People can then choose to agree or disagree with me.

Icelandic politicians have not written such a book recently.

That is true. Unfortunately, this tradition isn't very strong in Iceland, but in the other Nordic countries it is considered almost an inevitable part of every politician's career, if he takes himself seriously and thinks he has something worthwhile to say, to explain his views this way. In my office, I have books written by such different politicians as Anders Fogh Rasmussen, Sten Gade. Högni Hojidal and Kristin Halvorsen. In Iceland, this tradition has been almost nonexistent for the past decades. Of course I would be excited if the unlikely happened that the chairman of the Independence Party or the Progressive Party would write a book. Hopefully I will inspire them to do so.

In the book, you address numerous issues but the underlying theme is

environmental preservation, your sincere belief in the advantage of the Nordic model and that you want Iceland to be an independent and neutral nation...

My dream, and I explain this in the book, is that Iceland continues to be an independent welfare and cultural state with the strength to stand on its own, internationally, without any superpower chauvinism. Therefore I want us to become messengers of disarmament and peaceful solutions. Finally, I feel Icelanders should protect democracy and legitimate international cooperation and see that international organisations and the national right are not boycotted when people see fit. Iceland has nothing in common with militarism for example and it's so ridiculously stupid to group Iceland with military empires like happened with the Iraqi war. This I want to see changed.

When you address environmental issues, taxation, growing inequality and the way the government has dealt with what you claim to be fundamental issues facing Icelandic society today, you aren't hiding your harsh opposition. How have your opponents responded to the book?

Those who have commented about the book have for the most part been satisfied with the project and praised it highly. The Prime Minister even honoured me with his presence at my release party. There have been fewer incidents where people are addressing certain issues. My opponents have rather asked me how I found the time to write the book. That's a question I find hard to answer.

I need to ask about the book title. All of Us - Icelandic Welfare Society at Crossroads. You cover collective responsibility and the welfare of the human kind in general in great length in the book...

At first, I was thinking about the title What Now Iceland? One of my chief objectives in

writing the book was to bring to light the main concerns Icelandic society faces at the moment and then pose the question where we should be heading. What kind of a society do we want, how are we going to treat nature, what role do we want Iceland to play in the international community, etc. When I wrote my conclusions, because of what you mention, my emphasis on the welfare society, the title wrote itself. Then I realised that the underlying theme in the end is all of us. The title highlights my uncompromising opinion, that we should by no means depart from building a welfare society by the likes of what we know from other Nordic countries, which I think is the most developed type of society on earth.

What crossroads are you driving at?

The crossroads, among other things, is our need to take the question [what kind of a society do we want], seriously and debate it. Are we OK with the fact that we are heading away from the equal welfare societies and are we going to continue on that path, etc? The wage gap in the country is increasing in a staggering way and inequality escalating. I am therefore posing this fundamental question with the hope that voters think about it in the coming elections. I think that next spring's ballot is an enormous opportunity to counteract the situation and send out a clear message regarding this fundamental matter.

You seem very convinced that Icelanders want the Nordic model more than anything else.

Yes, I think that the vast majority truly does. However, there has been this urge to undermine the issues. When it gets close to elections, the Progressive Party for example, tries to disguise itself as a socialist party and acts as if it has been in the opposition. The Independence Party starts pretending as well, although it has pushed the country away from the Nordic welfare model, especially regarding taxation, how the state finances are governed and by privatising public service. Now they are trying to change The Icelandic National Broadcasting Service into a limited-liability company. Is that in line with a Nordic cultural, democratic and equal society? No.

A book like this one is of course not free from criticism. It has been pointed out that certain conflicts are evident in your writing, depending on what issue you are tackling. That when criticising the government you paint a dark picture of the situation but when opposing the EU membership, you rank Iceland high in comparison with other nations. That there is a certain struggle between you as a pessimist and optimist depending on what chapter you are writing.

When examined better, I don't think these statements are contradictory. I'm not denying that many things have been going our way, especially in the economical context or creating capital goods, but I am also raising the red flag. I see both the pros and cons in the situation but think we can do much better. We can say that the ship is sailing at high speeds, but not in the right direction regarding environmental, economic and social issues. I feel our ship is sailing too close to the rocks.

I need to ask you one final question regarding its epilogue. There you write: "We can all have it good. We can all feel well. We have enough for everyone, if only we share equally." Aren't you being unrealistic?

No, I don't want to believe that I am. If I lose the dream of a better world I wouldn't have anything to do in politics anymore. I firmly believe we can do considerably better in sharing our goods, reducing poverty and improving the lives of the least advantaged. That is the priority. When writing this, I am referring to Iceland being a rich country, with every means to reach this goal. In my opinion, a society should be structured so everyone can have equal opportunities, and for that, I am willing to fight until my dying breath. That's what the Nordic welfare society does and that's what Iceland should do.

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Is it Time for Iceland to Join the EU and/or Adapt the Euro?

In the build up to the 2007 parliamentary elections, The Reykjavík Grapevine will be asking representatives from each of the political parties to answer questions regarding the most pressing issues.



Sæunn Stefánsdóttir Candidate for the Progressive Party

xB

The Progressive Party has emphasised open and honest debate regarding European matters. At our last national convention, we decided to continue gathering information and working to define our aims in preparation for a possible membership talks with the EU. The outcome will be presented at the next party convention, where the party's policy for the spring elections will be mapped out.

European Union issues are most certainly in the party's limelight, just like in the society. Our stance has been characterised by our belief that it is important to have an open discussion about the pros and cons of the EU. But before we address the question of membership we should focus on

reaching a long-term balance in our economy. We should discuss the pros and cons regarding membership on the basis of our strengths but not be driven by our economic weaknesses.

Membership is not timely in our opinion since it demands such long and thorough preparation. We believe that we are fulfilling the obligations of a responsible political party by watching the Union's development.

We need a straightforward discussion regarding the future of the Icelandic króna and the influences of globalisation and open financial markets in general. There is a certain development in the business sector regardless of political will or the

party's policy. We can't close our eyes to the fact that the króna is a small currency and the development, we have seen among Icelandic companies and in the Iceland Stock Exchange, shows that the question of adapting or connecting us with the Euro or other currencies is relevant. We must watch the progress and have the interests of wage earners and the economy as guidance.

The discussion regarding the European Union and the Euro is an inherent continuance of the European Economic Area membership, which has proven to be good for Iceland. I predict we are closer to a decision in this field than many foresee today.



Ármann Kr. Ólafsson Candidate for the Independence Party

xD

At one time, Icelanders carefully studied whether it was in the nation's best interests to become members of the European Union. The conclusion was that it was not. The main reason was that Icelanders couldn't submit to the EU's joint fishing policy as the nation would lose authority over its fishing grounds. In light of that, it was decided that Iceland would become a member of the EEA treaty and at the same time a part of the Union's inner market. There is no doubt about the fact that the EEA treaty has been an important part of the country's transition in economic and business life in recent years. It also allows us to cooperate in the fields of education, culture and sci-

ence within the European Union. The contract's influences have therefore been manifold in developing the Icelandic society and economy and proven its importance. It includes most of what we need and there is nothing that really calls for membership here and now.

Nonetheless, we can't ignore that the rate of the Icelandic Króna now is totally different from what it was when the EEA contract was made and the same can be said about the fishing industry. The Króna and the fishing industry have in common that their share in the Icelandic economy have decreased in the wake of globalisation. The króna no longer reflects the economy

as it used to. Trading with it now mostly regards betting on its interest rate and foreign exchange listing. Such trading, where there is nothing else underlying than speculation, has great effects on micro-currencies like the Icelandic Króna and causes great currency fluctuations. It is therefore normal to reconsider our status in a changed environment. Whether this means that we adopt the Euro or join the European Union, only time can tell. It is certainly one possibility and probably the most likely one, as long as the Union shows understanding regarding our special position in the fishing industry.



Sigurlín Margrét Sigurðardóttir Candidate for the Liberal Party

xF

No, I don't think it is time to apply for EU membership. I think it is a matter of whether we need to and if the benefits are enough to warrant applying. As the situation is now, we are members of the European Economic Area, and we have done quite well there. We are also a young nation and have had quite a period of growth in recent years, we have done so without being dependent on EU membership. We can easily participate in European affairs without being EU members and do fairly well.

To adopt the Euro is a matter that deserves a closer look. Companies have started to present their financial reports in Euros and that, I think,

is sort of a way for us to see if it is profitable or not. If it is, we will just have to see as time passes. I can well understand that companies began to present their financial reports in Euros when the Icelandic króna is not highly esteemed and the state treasury's credit rating is rapidly decreasing. Many companies are now branching out into foreign markets and need the Euro, since the Euro is apparently the name of the game in trading with other countries at the moment, in Europe at least.

To adopt the Euro as our main currency has to be well considered. We can also learn from other nations who have adopted the Euro. Is everyone

satisfied? For example ordinary people: do they have more money than with their previous currency?



Guðmundur Steingrímsson Candidate for the Social Democratic Alliance

xS

Yes, it is time to apply for a membership. By all means, such an application would be to drag the discussion in this country away from stereotyped propaganda between two blocks – the European-minded ones and the others – where the conflict has often been battled with too many emotions in my view and is stuck in a rut.

In the meantime, the majority of the nation has stood by and scratched their heads in confusion. This nation is in great need to decide its view on the European Union and the Euro. The balance of the Icelandic Króna is the newest example of the need to seriously study, and without prejudice, whether we would be better off within

the EU. High prices and enormous interest rates are another example. The question is simple: What are the real pros and cons? We need this out in the open. The Social Democratic Alliance believes that the benefits of an EU membership and adopting the Euro are far greater than the flaws. We, among other things, point to a good experience with the EEA treaty, despite the opposition it faced at that time. With that, we have gone a good way towards joining the EU. The Social Democratic Alliance alone will not drag the nation into the EU and adopt the Euro though. The subject needs to be discussed. The nation needs to decide.

But to prove the Social Democratic Alliance view that EU membership and the Euro currency is worth it – and to give the others an opportunity to argue their logic against membership – by all means, we need to put the matter on our agenda and apply.



Katrín Jakobsdóttir Candidate for the Left-Green Movement

xU

In the Leftist-Green Party, we have real doubts regarding the European Union. We continue to develop our relations with contracts regarding business and cooperation, among other things in the field of education, labour market and environmental issues. It is clear that Icelanders can have more influence on the European Union than they do now and we can take Norwegians as our role models in those matters.

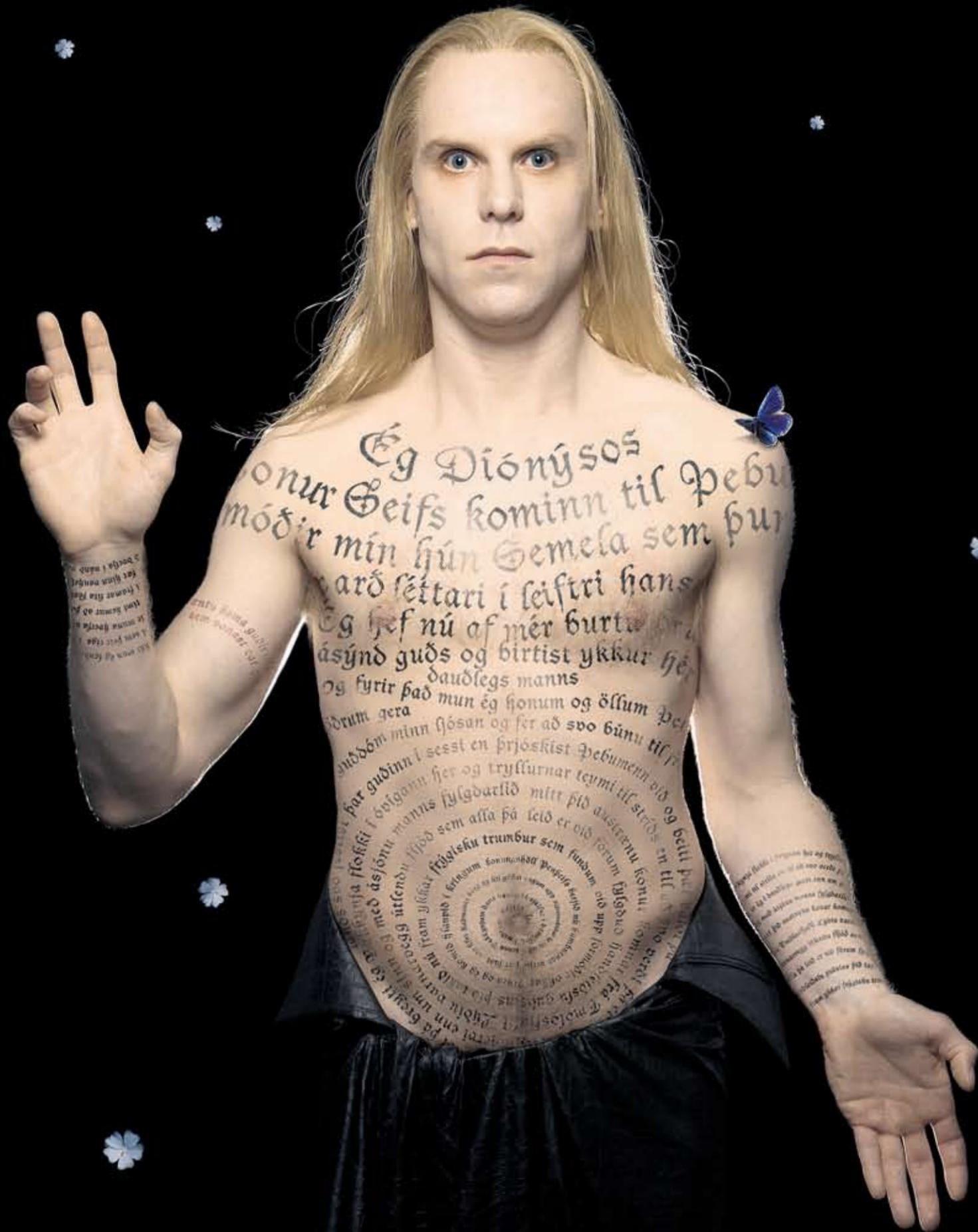
An EU membership of course means for the most part, relinquishing our self-determination to Brussels and possible benefits from the membership doesn't justify that. At present, about 20 percent of Icelandic legislation can trace its roots

to the European Economic Area's legislation so it is clear that an EU membership is a big step, as with it, we would take up all of the Union's legislation. It is therefore not justifiable to argue that as members of EEA we are almost members of the EU.

Finally, we have had doubts regarding the EU's inner organisation, where too much centralisation and bureaucracy are characteristic while democracy is lacking in decision-making. The power lies at the executive and even though the European Union has gained increased power recently, the executive is all the same the most powerful battery in the union. Therefore, it is not surprising that

participation in EU elections is sparse, people just don't see a reason to vote for MPs who work far away and have a blurry domain. This doesn't go hand in hand with our idea of democracy, which is to bring decision-making closer to the people.

Regarding the Euro, I think it is clear that adopting the Euro must be closely related to EU membership if we want to get its benefits. By doing so, the currency control would move out of the country, which some think is good considering existing governance. But we don't think that the blame for irresponsible expansion policy of local authorities in economic matters can be put on the Icelandic Króna!



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ÞJÓÐLEIKHÚSIÐ



A New Worldview

Text by Sveinn Birkir Björnsson Photo by Skari

Discussing the impact of global warming from the perspective of environmental planning with Trausti Valsson

"It seemed that whenever I wanted to discuss global warming, people would start discussing weather changes, or changes in vegetation," says Trausti Valsson, a professor of planning at the University of Iceland. Valsson has recently published a book called *How the World Will Change with Global Warming*. "I am a planner, and I wanted to do see what this meant from the perspective of environmental planning," Valsson says about his book.

There is an increasing agreement among scientists that global warming will force major changes in our way of life. According to the most pessimistic predictions, it is a crisis of apocalyptic proportions. Floods, droughts, hurricanes and other climate-induced disasters will ravage the planet, making large parts of it uninhabitable. Others remain sceptical towards the extent of the effects, and although no one has yet been able to demonstrate with accuracy what specifically those effects will be, the general consensus is that something is about to change. Says Valsson: "We are likely to see droughts in areas that had plenty of water a few years ago, while other areas, such as Central and Eastern Europe will experience much more rain and flooding, a good example is the flooding of Prague, three years ago."

The field of environmental planning will be greatly affected by global warming and surprisingly little has been published on the subject. "As an environmental planner, my work consists of gathering all sorts of data from various scientific fields and incorporating that data into environmental planning. There was a time when natural conditions were not given such a high priority in environmental planning. Now, the goal is to design with nature," He explains when asked what prompted him to write the book, and continues:

"When an area is under development, the first step is to contact a meteorologist to ask for a report on meteorological data for the area. Then you ask geologists to supply data for the area's geology. All this data is then mapped out and you make a decision on where roads should be built, where schools should be placed, etc. based on that data," Valsson explains. "In the book, I try to take the same approach, except I am doing it on a meta-scale."

The problem with this approach is that

the data is mostly based on empirical evidence gathered in the past, while the effects of global warming are still mostly in the future, and therefore, a little less empirical. The book is mostly based on a recent report by the Arctic Council and the International Arctic Science Committee, called the ACIA report (Arctic Climate Impact Assessment Report).

Fundamental Changes

Valsson's interest in climate change was first sparked during his Ph.D. studies at UC Berkeley during the mid-eighties. A professor pointed out that changes in climate might lead to changes in sea level. Valsson has been examining the possibility since.

"Climate change will alter some of the founding principles of planning, not only globally, but also locally," Valsson states. There are areas in downtown Reykjavík that

"There are areas in downtown Reykjavík that are extremely vulnerable to the rising sea level and it is likely that sea will flood some parts of the city on high tides."

are extremely vulnerable to the rising sea level and it is likely that sea will flood some parts of the city on high tides. As the climate gets warmer, more energy builds up in the aerospace, resulting in more energy in the weather, higher wind speeds and more evaporation, causing more rain. "When planning and developing areas near the coastline, this should be taken into account. It is necessary to build flood levees and harbour constructions higher than is commonly done have been doing, as scientists predict that the sea level will rise anywhere from 50-90 centimetres in this century," Valsson offers. In Iceland, some of these precautionary steps have already been taken. According to recent regulation changes, harbour construction must now be built 50 cm higher above sea level than previous requirements.

Bridging the Gap

Frequently, meteorologists and natural scientists warn us about climate change and how it will affect different groups. Mostly, these warnings are directed at politicians. "In some

ways, I am trying to bridge the gap between these two sides," Valsson says. "I am trying to put this vision in plain terms and show what the effects will be. It will help politicians and policymakers to make plans for the future, such as where to build roads or where to build levees."

Valsson does not direct his focus on how we can prevent global warming. "Years ago, when the first reports started to show that the climate was warming, the first reaction from politicians was to stop global warming. They said, 'We will agree to not increase fuel emission,' and several attempts have been made to reach that goal, such as the Kyoto Protocol. A fourth of the world nations have ratified the Kyoto protocol, mostly developed industrial nations that have reached a development level where they can move away from polluting industry. It is easy for them to say this, but it is more difficult to

force less developed countries, such as China and India, to meet these standards. I have reached a point where I say, 'Let's try to reduce the emission of greenhouse gasses as much as possible.' But like many others, I believe that we will not be able to prevent global warming, at least not without a major scientific breakthrough in the energy field," he says. Instead, he has chosen to accept global warming as a fact, and focus on how we should deal with the consequences.

Environmental Refugees

"My starting point is that global warming will continue as predicted or even exceed predictions. Then we will be forced to view this problem in a completely different perspective. That is, we will have to start to prepare for the coming changes." Valsson claims that the immense impact of global warming will change our fundamental ideas about the world. He equates the changes to a "paradigm shift" as explained by the philosopher Thomas Kuhn in his *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, which will force us to adapt a

whole new worldview.

"Climate change is not a new geological phenomenon. There have been warm eras, and cold eras before. In the past, animals, humankind included, have dealt with this change by migration. North or south depending on whether it is getting warmer or cooler. This was not a big problem for a society of hunters and gatherers. In the present however, a climate change induced migration is very difficult because we have adopted a static society. As recently as the end of the 19th century, cold winters forced many people in northern Europe to migrate to America, but then there was no border control. Today, the situation is that most nations try to keep their borders closed." Valsson claims that to deal with this problem we will need to move away from the this static worldview where states are closed off by borders and look at the world in a more integrated way, even going so far to claim that this could be the end of the nation-state.

"We will have 'environmental refugees', something akin to political refugees. What other options will there be for people living in uninhabitable areas, other than migration? If our part of the world is inhabitable, we will have to accept refugees. How else are we going to solve this? John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* is a good example. It is a story of people driven from their homes in Oklahoma by terrible droughts. They move to California in search of a better life, only to find roadblocks and landowners trying to defend their land. It is nothing new that people are forced to move because of climate changes, but the scale we can expect now is unprecedented," Valsson says.

The Hub of the Oil Wheel

According to Valsson, our patterns of habitation are not the only thing we can expect to change. As the polar ice caps melt, new channels of transportation will open, especially in the north. If the arctic ice retreats it would open a substantially shorter shipping lane between the North Atlantic and the Pacific Ocean, through the Bering Strait.

This would put Iceland smack in the middle of what would be one of the most commonly travelled shipping routes in the world, and in Valsson's opinion, it would be a natural selection for a transship and depot harbour for oil tankers to North America and Northern Europe from Siberia's rich oil fields as well as from oil reservoirs in the Arctic Ocean that are considered to become accessible with global warming. The Icelandic Ministry for Foreign Affairs is already exploring this possibility and recently released a report called *North Meets North: Navigation and the Future of the Arctic*, where this option is examined in detail.

While the prospect of huge oil tankers roaming the ocean around Iceland is certainly not a vision everyone endorses, we might not have much say in the matter. Says Valsson: "Anywhere beyond three nautical miles of the coastline is international shipping lanes and beyond our control. But Iceland's location would likely make it the 'hub of the wheel,' a distribution centre."

As contradictory as it sounds, the effects of global warming will make oil, the number one cause of global warming, more easily accessible. "The disappearance of the ice presents danger. It was not presumed possible to access these oil reservoirs before. The belief that the present oil wells will soon run dry is what has been pressuring nations to search for alternative fuels sources. The danger now is that the pressure to find alternative means of energy is not as much," Valsson admits, adding, "This is your future. I'm too old fashioned to like it, but what should you do? Stick your head in the sand?"

Trausti Valsson's book is available at most Icelandic book stores, from Amazon.com and free for download in .pdf form from the author's website: www.howtheworldwill-change.com

*Arctic Climate Impact Assessment Report (ACIA): Available at: www.acia.uaf.edu
North Meets North: Navigation and the Future of the Arctic: Available at: www.utanrikisraduneyti.is/media/Utgafa/North_Meets_North_netutj.pdf*

“What’s the difference between a man and E.T.?
E.T. phoned home.”

- Tommi Thule



Thule / jeh do unnihi

Light beer

Religion by Numbers

By Gabriele R. Guðbjartsson



In 1949 artist Dan Robbins birthed a concept allowing millions of Van Gogh novices into the sacred portal of the creative world. It is called Paint by Number. Each painting kit contains a colourless sketch in which each distinct area of the picture has a specific number. The artist's job is to match each number with an intended colour provided in the kit's instructions. If you follow the numbers, a beautiful image will appear right before your eyes. Practically anyone can be fooled.

Numbers can provide valuable insight on the presentation of an image, the livelihood of a corporation or even the religious standing of a nation. These powerful symbols have been trusted throughout history to represent the truth in the most objective manner possible. However, can the mere vision of numerical data truly reflect the faith of thousands of hearts? Statistically speaking, Iceland carries the title for having the highest percentage of Lutheran Christians of any country in the entire world. On paper this country's inhabitants are almost as religious as the citizens of the Vatican City, the residence of Pope Benedict XVI. Nevertheless, after living here for almost half a year my eyes and ears tell me that religion seems to be playing a game of Hide and Seek. Which leads me to question, where does religion show its face in the life of this society?

Through my own personal investigation it seems that most Icelanders do believe in God, or some form of higher power; however, the practice of that belief is not a top priority. In order to find out what's important in someone's life, two things to examine are their wallets and calendars. Time and money happens to give an incredible amount of insight as to what people rank as imperative in life.

The Sunday before Christmas, my husband and I went to church and the traffic, as it is every Sunday, was nonexistent. At church that day, one of the topics introduced was why church attendance was so low in Iceland and what it would take to get people more active in

their beliefs. The topic stayed on my mind for a while and followed me into the car after we left. After church we headed over to Smáralind to shop for gifts, and as we entered the parking lot I quickly got my answer as to where people spent their time and money. I could have sworn half of the country was present busily shopping for Christmas, you know, that day we honour to celebrate the birth of Christ. Yes, it was a week before Christmas and the crowd was understandable; however, what would those same people be doing on any other Sunday afternoon? Can it be that church is only a thought on the most important events in people's lives; the memorable baptism, that perfect day of wedding bliss and the ceremony that allows them to finally rest in peace.

To understand a bit more about the national church I attended a Lutheran service on the first day of the New Year. As I approached the sanctuary the sign on the door read, "Silence please, service in session." That immediately gave me an inclination of what kind of atmosphere I would be joining. I strategically chose a seat six rows from the front to obtain an observable view of the congregation, the choir and the priest. The church itself was statuesque and quite breathtaking. Regal organ pipes,

Lutheran service. Meanwhile, with all due respect, I can also certainly comprehend why so many people feel that a weekly dose of this quiet Biblical lecture cannot meet their needs as a person living in the 21st century.

In approaching Icelandic people about their rationale for low church attendance, the recurring reasons given were that one, it's just too boring, two, the church has not reached out to embrace modern times and lastly, that the lessons in church are not applied to the way people realistically live their lives. Church is considered to be a sanctuary where all believers should feel welcome. It is a domain where people should leave feeling spiritually fed. Church used to feel like an obligation to me until I found a place that nourished my soul. Each and every time I attended the sermons directly applied to my life because it was delivered in a personal and narrative manner. Now I yearn for church each week and I feel empty without worshipping with others in the presence of God. Fortunately for me, my options were plentiful when I sought out a place of worship. It's unfortunate that a country that's 84 percent Lutheran has a meagre 10 percent church attendance level. Maybe it's because people feel as if their options are limited and they cannot find a

After church we headed over to Smáralind to shop for gifts, and as we entered the parking lot I quickly got my answer as to where people spent their time and money.

high ceilings, luminous candles and archaic statues all gave it a very holy ambiance. During the sermon (spoken solely in Icelandic), the only word I could actually make out was "Jesus," but I could still easily get the sentiment of the priest's effect on the parishioners around me. People were clearly listening and engaged, yet caught in a spiritual methodical process. Everyone did what they were supposed to do, which included sitting very still, listening quietly, standing, sitting again, looking forward as the chorus sang angelically in the rear and reciting their lines at all the correct moments. By nature, the Lutheran sector of Christianity tends to be on the conservative side. The mood is very solemn except for the omnipotent voice of the priest delivering the reading of the sermon. Although, I'm used to a much more "call and response" church setting, where the congregation expresses themselves with alacrity at will, I respected the traditions of this

place that provides purpose and guidance as they evolve and grow in the world.

To put it rather simply, the real evidence of our belief is in the way we act and treat one another. Although it seems arduous to treat everyone as if we were encountering Jesus Himself, it is the only proof we have to be judged upon. If you do say you are a believer, how well do your actions separate you from an unbeliever? Belonging to a church is only one of many ways you can convey your faith. How many times have you done all you can to help someone in need or forgotten yourself to put the needs of others before you? I didn't intend to take us back to numbers, but these are the only ones that really matter. And if we can get these percentages right at the end of the day, we'll create much more than just a pretty picture, we'll mass produce an even greater tomorrow.



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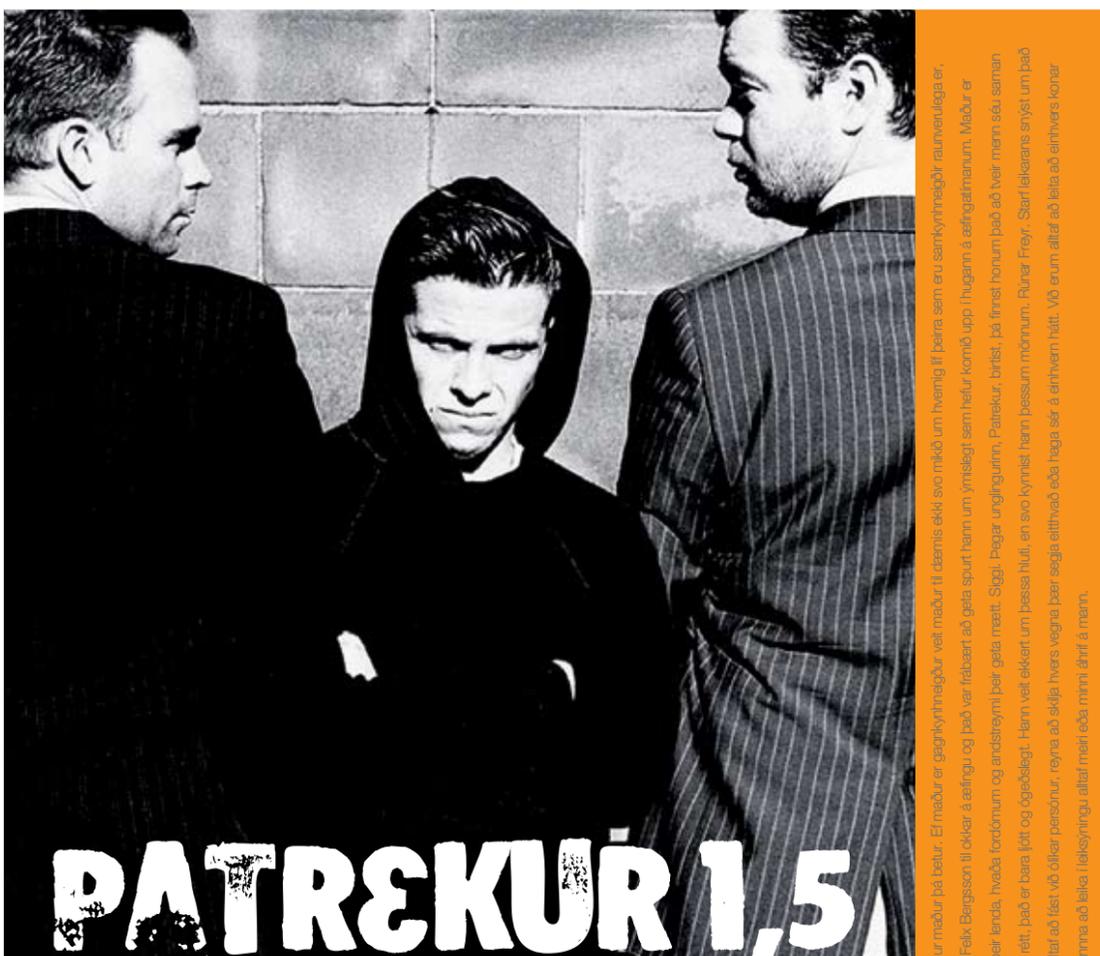
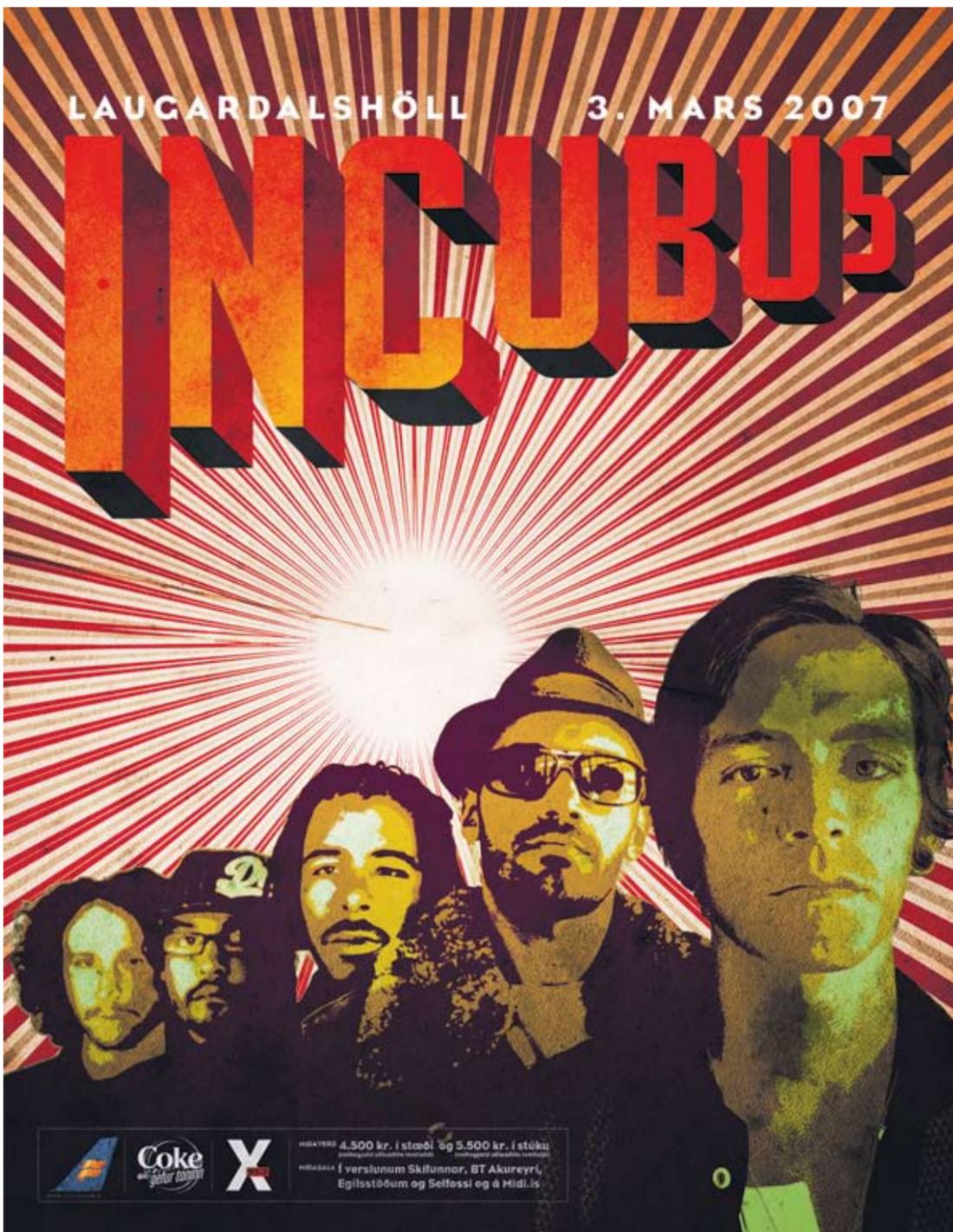
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The Floating World An Extract

Sölvi Björn Sigurðsson

I was frying eggs in the kitchen when the phone rang, just before six on a Friday afternoon. I had grabbed a beer from the fridge, not knowing if there'd be a second, and was in good mood, I suppose, whistling along to Radiohead's Fake Plastic Trees. I turned the stove off and walked into the bedroom.

„Hello.“

„This question might surprise you,“ the person on the phone said without introducing herself, „but I need to know how honest you really are.“

By strict definition this wasn't a question – a question put the verb in front of the pronoun and ended with a question mark: How honest are you? But that was probably not the heart of the matter.

„How honest I am? Rather honest, I suppose. Not that it's any of your business, honestly.“

Gallup, great. They'd been calling me incessantly since I moved in and it was starting to get to me. Maybe I wasn't used to having my opinions appraised by others, but still, I'd had enough. What were these surveys worth anyway if they always called the same people?

„Listen, I really don't have time for this,“ I said. „I was just frying eggs in the kitchen.“

I was going to add, goodbye, but the Woman on the Phone interrupted me.

„Where else would you? What I mean is: what are the odds of you frying your eggs some place else than the kitchen?“

Metaphysics freak, great. I had heard these companies were short of people but still thought they should take more care in who they hired. Wasn't Gallup one of the largest companies in its field?

„I really don't have time for this,“ I said and felt like the good mood would end up in the sink, along with the eggs, if I wouldn't soon be free of this woman. „And if you'd be kind enough to remove me from your list, that would be great.“

„Unfortunately that's not an option, Tomas.“

Tomas. She might as well have casually caressed my genitals as addressed me by name in that way. Your name simply wasn't within the communication frame available to Gallup.

I hung up.

Two minutes later the phone rang again.

„You hung up on me. That's an honest answer, of sorts. But I have to tell you that I'm really hurt that you should treat me this way. I did not expect that, when I wrote the letter.“

The letter, Christ. This must be one of the freaks that had written about the room.

„If this is about the room I'm sorry to tell you that it's already let.“ The truth was that I had decided not the let out the room, but that really wasn't anybody's business but my own.

„I really had great hopes for this relationship. That's something you should think about when you get involved with other people. There will be consequences. You can't just walk away like there's nothing to it, like there are no feelings at stake.“

What was this woman on about? I was afraid that if I didn't get rid of her right away I'd be stuck with her for a long time.

„There are no feelings at stake. The room's been let, I'm being as honest as I possibly can be and now I'm asking you to stop calling me.“

„You can't just walk away from what's already happened. If you go through life that way you'll never be able to live with yourself.“

This was hopeless. I pulled the receiver away from my ear and stared into this little space that contained all the potential nutcases of the world, and listened till I'd had enough.

Brief Synopsis

Tomas is a young university student who has just moved from a small town to the city. He spends his days drinking coffee and reading and is relatively happy with his solitude until one day the beautiful but strange Saiko barges into his life. Half Japanese - half Icelandic Saiko is larger than life and such a mystery that not even she knows the answer. Saiko introduces Tomas to the taste of whisky, the works of Haruki Murakami and the world of the leg model. But Saiko is haunted by terrible nightmares and the enigma reaches its peak when she disappears. Tomas sets out to find her and the lines of reality start to blur. In this fast-paced yet lyrical novel of love and loss, everyday life in contemporary Reykjavik collides with a world where girls can read minds, brainpower is for rent and Workers hunt the Dreamers for their inspirations.

About the author

Sölvi Björn Sigurðsson (b. Oct. 7, 1978) is an Icelandic novelist and poet. His second novel, Floating World was published in 2006 by Edda Publishing.

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The Reykjavík Grapevine Readers Survey



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AIR ICELAND



The Most Bizarre News Stories of 2006

Text by Grapevine Journalists Photos by Skari

In an attempt to bring to light the unbearable lightness of being, we bring you the funniest, oddest and most amazing news stories from our website in 2006.

Friday, January 6, 2006

Giant Goldfish Caught Near Húsavík

A goldfish, measuring 34 cm long and weighing 850 grams, was caught just outside Húsavík early this month. According to Jón Sværnisson, a goldfish expert from Reykjavík, this may very well be the largest goldfish ever caught in Iceland. Giant plastic castle still not found.

By Paul Fontaine-Nikolov

Tuesday, January 10, 2006

300,000th Icelander Born

Iceland's population officially reached 300,000 yesterday morning with the birth of a boy, son to Erla María Andrésdóttir and Haraldur Arnarson in Landspítali hospital. According to Vísir, Prime Minister Halldór Ásgrímsson will be visiting the baby later today. According to Statistics Iceland, there is one Icelander born every two hours, while five Icelanders die every day. In addition, about 3,700 Icelanders emigrated from Iceland in 2005, which is the highest number to leave the country in many years.

by Paul Fontaine-Nikolov

Friday, January 20, 2006

Skiing in the Dark Leads to Accidents

Grétar Þórisson, manager of the Bláfjall ski slopes, told reporters that safety conditions on the mountain were good, despite two accidents that happened on the slopes last night, one resulting in broken bones. According to Vísir.is, Þórisson explained that both accidents happened when it had already grown dark, when accidents on the slopes are most likely to occur.

by Paul Fontaine-Nikolov

Friday, February 10, 2006

Name Committee's New Picks

The Icelandic Name Committee has released

its latest decisions on what names parents may or may not give their children. In boys names, the committee approved Bill (which would be pronounced "Bidl" in Icelandic) and Tóki while rejecting Mikhael. In girls names, Daley and Naranja were accepted, while Jú-dith, Apríl and Hnikarr were rejected.

by Paul Fontaine-Nikolov

Monday, February 06, 2006

Man Goes Berserk in Tanning Salon

Employees of the tanning salon Ibiza alerted police when one of their clients burst from his tanning booth naked and went berserk. According to Vísir, the man arrived with some friends and apparently fell asleep while getting a tan. When his friends attempted to wake him, the man, who was having a nightmare, sprang from the tanning bed, threw a trash can at employees, knocked over displays of merchandise and ran out the front door. Police were called to the scene and arrested the man.

by Paul Fontaine-Nikolov

Thursday, February 23, 2006

Prisoners Stealing from Within Prison

Four or five different inmates of Litla Hraun prison are believed to have made fraudulent withdrawals totalling a combined 600,000 krónur, most of which has now been recovered. The identity of the alleged culprits was discovered during the course of an investigation into the whereabouts of some funds that had gone missing from the bank account of a company in Reykjavík.

The police investigation, which is now said to be nearing completion, indicated that a series of phone calls were made from the prison by inmates who apparently had all the personal identification and PIN numbers required to access the company's accounts. Erlendur Baldursson, a criminologist with the Department of Prison Services, told the Grapevine that such calls could have been made from literally anywhere and the fact of the suspects' incarceration was incidental to the crime. "They all get access to a telephone at certain times. Most of them use that opportunity to talk to their family

and loved ones, but if they are caught abusing telephone privileges for the purpose of committing a criminal act then that is a matter for the police," said Baldursson. The Litla Hraun telephone system operates on a system of passwords, with each prisoner holding a unique four-digit code needed to activate the phones. Despite this, Baldursson believes it may prove difficult to ascertain exactly who made what call, as "the numbers can be traded or stolen." Asked whether the guilty parties could expect to have their sentences extended, he replied: "That's not for us to decide, this is a separate case from whatever they were initially convicted for. It's the job of the courts to mete out punishment; we just enforce their judgments."

by Paul Fontaine-Nikolov

Thursday, March 09, 2006

Icelandic Consumers Happiest with Soft Drink Companies

According to the results of a survey from IMG Gallup, Icelandic consumers are happiest with soft drink companies, and least satisfied with mobile phone companies. The survey polled about 8,500 people between the ages of 15 and 75, divided into groups of 250 per company. The survey noted an overall drop in customer satisfaction between 2004 and 2005, with 73.5% saying they were happiest with soft drink companies. Coming in second were banks, with 71.6%, followed by insurance companies, with 69.5%. Icelandic consumers were least happy with "corner shops," with 66%; oil companies, with 64.2%; and least of all with mobile phone companies, with 61.9%

by Paul Fontaine-Nikolov

Monday, March 27, 2006

Morgunblaðið and Sunnlenska Fréttablaðið Report a Series of Paranormal Incidents

Morgunblaðið, following a lead from Sunnlenska Fréttablaðið, has revealed that the Sólvangur farm in Eyrarbakki appears to be haunted by one or more ghosts. A young woman, who moved into Sólvangur a few

years ago, is quoted by both publications as saying she immediately noticed unfamiliar sounds and smells when she moved into her new home. Morgunblaðið and Sudurland.is further quote the young woman, Sigríður Þjetursdóttir, as saying she experienced a string of paranormal incidents in the house, ranging from a mysterious broken mirror to the perplexing vehicular induced death of her dog on a nearby road. Furthermore, a young cat belonging to Þjetursdóttir was found dead alongside an adjacent highway; a place that we are told was undoubtedly impossible for the small quadruped to reach under its own locomotion. After a frightening bout with sleep paralysis, Þjetursdóttir is then said to have successfully exorcised the evil spirits from her home with the help of mediums and clairvoyants, who advised her to keep her drapes open during the day to allow sunlight into the house. According to Morgunblaðið and Sunnlenska Fréttablaðið; "These measures worked, and the poltergeist was driven away." The longer version of the story, which was broken by Sudurland.is, includes more detail and the caveat that while the nasty spirits have left, one or more benign entities remain. Thus we can presumably expect further updates, as the evidence continues to stack up.

by Gunnar Hrafn Jónsson

Monday, April 24, 2006

Foreign Worker Arrested after Requesting Glass of Vodka

A man was arrested at a restaurant in Selfoss late yesterday afternoon, after he refused staff's orders to leave the premises. The man, who appeared to be intoxicated, was asked to leave after he ordered a glass of vodka at the bar and was refused service. When the man refused to leave and continued to request his drink, the police were called and they arrived shortly thereafter. After questioning the man briefly they determined that "he could not sufficiently explain himself" and took him into custody for the night. It was later discovered that the reason for the man not being able to make himself understandable was that he was a Lithuanian migrant worker and may not have expected what is a common drink order in his country to arouse such a reaction. Morgunblaðið quotes the restaurant staff as saying they took action out of concern for a group of children who were celebrating a birthday party elsewhere in the establishment.

by Gunnar Hrafn Jónsson

Tuesday, April 25, 2006

Confused Man Apprehended Outside Library

There was a large police presence outside the National University Library of Iceland yesterday, after police were called to apprehend a severely intoxicated man who was caught tampering with computer equipment. According to the police and eyewitness accounts, it was not clear if the man was attempting to steal the computer or if he was simply fumbling about with it in a confused fashion. The man absconded soon after being asked to explain his actions, but police canvassed the area and apprehended him minutes later.

by Gunnar Hrafn Jónsson

Wednesday, May 10, 2006

Iceland Faces Eurovision Expulsion

The Icelandic entry for the Eurovision Song Contest, Silvía Nótt's Congratulations Iceland, has received an official complaint from Svante Stockselius, the executive supervisor of the contest, for foul language. The lyrics to the song make use of the word "fuck". The use of vulgarities is strictly forbidden according to the rules of the contest and the song is considered to be in violation of at least two different rules. Iceland has been given an ultimatum, either comply with the rules or face expulsion from the contest. So far, Silvía Nótt's only response has been through her website, where she maintains that she will "fucking say what [she] fucking wants".

by Sveinn Birkir Björnsson

Friday, June 02, 2006

Hunters Run Afowl of the Law

The Northeastern District Court has sentenced a man to pay a fine of 20,000 ISK for illegally storing a variety of dead birds in his freezer. The published verdict notes that last September police were notified of a cache of firearms, toxic substances and explosives that was said to be readily accessible to anyone passing by. When officers arrived to investigate they discovered poisons, firearms, ammunition, two demised owls, three stiff falcons and a pair of ex-merlins. The verdict further states that two men were questioned in relation to the find, but their stories were convoluted and did not always match. According to the least confusing version police were able to write down, the man who was convicted had originally been asked to store two dead falcons for a colleague of his father's, but his collection of fowl that had shuffled off their mortal coil continued to grow as he shot a merlin soon after. The third falcon was said to have been discovered deceased by the defendant in either 2002 or 2003, and he claimed an unidentified third man had given him an expired owl and a perished merlin around the same time. As luck would have it he then ran over an owl with his car last year, despite the fact that the bird is technically not present in the Icelandic ecosystem and only the occasional specimen winds up here by navigational error from time to time. According to the Icelandic Institute of Natural History, the birds all appeared to have kicked the bucket long ago and subsequently kept frozen for several years. One of the falcons was tagged by them soon before his demise in 1996 or 1997.

by Gunnar Hrafn Jónsson

Friday, June 16, 2006

Man Feeds Decapitated Corpses To Dog

Jóhannes Björnsson, a farmer who owns land in Flekkudalur by Meðalfellsvatn lake, has been feeding his dogs fly-ridden, raw horse flesh that has lain under the burning midday sun for days at a time. Although Chief Veterinary Officer Halldór Runólfsson told Fréttablaðið that this was "highly unusual," Jóhannes told the Grapevine that letting one's dogs rip at the headless and bloody carcasses of slaughtered stallions was done "practically everywhere."

"It's not like I'm leaving the whole thing in there to rot," Jóhannes said. "I give them about 25% of the horse – loin, calves, that kind of thing. And it's clean meat, taken from healthy animals. It would be like dining at a fine restaurant." Although all would seem to be in good order, the plot thickened when the Grapevine discovered that the only other registered phone number in Flekkudalur belongs to a Pet Sematary – sorry, pet cemetery. Although they told the Grapevine they "usually don't bury anything larger than a cat or a dog," the Grapevine is determined to get to the bottom of this web of deceit.

by Sindri Eldon

Thursday, July 13, 2006

All Hell Breaks Loose In Keflavík

Two heavily intoxicated men embarked on a mad, destructive rampage in Keflavík last night, vandalising two cars and picking fights with a girl and a young man with glasses. The boy's glasses were savagely destroyed when the two men punched him in the face. It is unknown what exactly caused the men's overtly hostile behaviour to the boy, but general geekdom and/or wussdom is likely to be the cause. In any case, the two men spent the night in police custody. The Grapevine was shocked to discover that the would-be social commentators had been released. "We just let them go this morning," Keflavík police told the Grapevine, prompting one to ponder if the streets of Keflavík will ever be safe again, or if Keflavík even still exists, and hasn't been utterly destroyed by the time this goes into print.

by Sindri Eldon

Monday, July 17, 2006

False Alarm in Fossárdalur

The police in Árnæssýsla and a large rescue team were called out at 20:00 last night af-

ter the police reported what was suspected to be a mortally wounded man lying in a rock slide beneath Háifoss waterfall. When police arrived at the scene they found no man but in fact a full-sized dummy. It is likely that the human replica was used as a prop in a movie last winter and somehow got lost and ended up floating in the river in Fossárdalur, but the police had received no reports of such an incident before. After realising that no life was in danger, all rescue operations were recalled. The Árnæssýsla police could not inform Grapevine as to which film company the dummy belonged, but told us that the dummy is currently in storage at the police station and will be returned to its owners if claimed.

by Steinunn Jakobsdóttir

Monday, July 17, 2006

Company Sucks Band Into Lawsuit

Nilfisk Advance, a Denmark-based cleaning equipment manufacturer, are threatening Icelandic rock band Nilfisk with a lawsuit on the grounds of copyright infringement, according to Viðskiptablaðið. The band, whose name was greenlighted by Nilfisk Advance in Iceland when the band first chose their name, dropped off a copy of their debut album at the Copenhagen office while there to play concerts, only to receive a letter from Nilfisk Advance's lawyers, who threatened to sue if the band did not change their name and recalled all CDs and merchandise with Nilfisk's name on it. They were also commanded to close their website, nilfisk.valnir.com. In response, the band and their lawyer sent an explanation that they were on good terms with Nilfisk Advance in Iceland, and that their name technically differs from that of Nilfisk advance in that the 'F' in the band's name was capitalised. Although Nilfisk Advance have not replied, and were unavailable for comment due to their executives being on vacation, Sveinn of Nilfisk told the Grapevine that if Nilfisk Advance persist with the lawsuit, the band will most likely change their name to Nilfisk. Also unavailable for comment were French hip-hop band Electroluxe Family and country singer Hoover, who may themselves face lawsuits if this fad continues.

by Sindri Eldon

Thursday, July 27, 2006

Nosebleed Delays Much Hyped Iceland vs. Scotland Soccer Showdown

Due to nose-related injuries incurred by former múm member Gyða Valtýsdóttir on a trampoline last night, the much hyped battle-of-the-bands soccer match between Scottish Belle & Sebastian and Iceland's own múm has been rescheduled from this afternoon for Sunday. The soccer tradition between the bands began three years ago with a match in Japan in which, after pushing into over time, Belle & Sebastian took the Icelanders 10 to 8. While the Icelandic team hopes to make a better showing for itself this year, Gyða told the Grapevine, chance of victory seems slim considering that the team consists mainly of women, children and geeks. Apart from the members of múm and B&S, this year's match, scheduled at a yet undisclosed location, will include Emiliana Torrini, múm member Kristín Valtýsdóttir's twin sister Gyða and nine-year-old brother Jónas, as well as the bands' various entourages. Daniel Bjarnason, who will be playing for the múm team, told the Grapevine that Torrini was originally scheduled to play on the Icelandic side but that they were now considering trading her over since she is half-Italian. Belle & Sebastian's Icelandic tour begins tonight with a sold-out concert at NASA. On Saturday the band will play a sold-out concert at Bræðslan in Borgarfjörður Eystri, but reportedly hope not to tire themselves out too much before their match in Reykjavík the next morning.

by Valgerður Þóroddsdóttir

Wednesday, August 09, 2006

Improper Dynamite Dump Leads to Bomb Scare

Last Thursday, Selfoss police requested the Icelandic Coast Guard's bomb squad to the town's municipal waste area, following calls from a distraught employee who was left in a state of shock after two construction



company workers brought (and left behind) a case containing 30 sticks of dynamite. The employee told the Grapevine that before leaving the dynamite, the construction workers explained that they had discovered it while cleaning around the office. They claimed they were unsure as to where to dispose of it, figuring the town dump the obvious choice. After confirming said explosives were indeed rogue dynamite, the bomb squad duly disposed of them. The dynamite is believed to have been around 30 years old and thus highly volatile. Selfoss police officials went on record as saying that disposing of old explosives is a serious business and those interested in doing so should consider contacting proper authorities beforehand.

by Haukur Magnússon

Tuesday, September 26, 2006

Björgólfur Officially Declared Most Successful Human Ever. Sorta

In a striking turn of events that unfolded his Saturday, an article in one of Britain's premier money mags, The Financial Times, declared Icelandic banking tycoon Björgólfur Þór Björgólfsson the sexiest billionaire alive. Referencing his 'big blue eyes' and 'pleasingly imposing Viking stature', the magazine went on to recount his noble quest of restoring his family name after a 986 business scandal involving his father. Björgólfsson has yet to comment on the accolades, but is surely contemplating his next moves in a diamond-studded, champagne-fuelled private jet somewhere over the Atlantic. The NYU-educated, London-living Björgólfsson made his first millions co-founding Russia's Bravo brewery and now holds stakes in several of Iceland's biggest companies, including national bank Landsbankinn and pharmaceutical giant Actavis. He is currently the world's 350th richest man. Sexy, to boot.

by Haukur Magnússon

Friday, September 29, 2006

Planned Blackout Not So Black As Planned

Last night, 28 September 2006, Reykjavík experienced the world's first [known] planned blackout. The event marked the realisation of its architect, Andri Snær Magnason's, dream to expose urban youth to the dark night skies which have influenced culture around the world for millennia. The Reykjavík City Council agreed to turn off all the city's streetlamps to participate in the event. Unfortunately,

not all privately owned homes and businesses took part, making the event not quite so black as hoped. In an interview with the Grapevine, Magnason said, "We might look at it as a dress rehearsal." As for the fireworks Reykjavík residents may have seen or heard last night, they were unplanned, and perhaps served only to exacerbate the problem of light pollution created by those lights that were left for the half-hour duration of the event. Magnason does not view the incomplete blackness as an indication of failure, however, stating that, "The idea has been going all over the globe in newswires... I've been talking to the BBC and PBS and it was in Italian papers... Lots and lots big writing follow-up." Magnason hopes that if people enjoyed the event and would like to see it repeated, hopefully growing darker with each effort, that they will express their positive opinions to bolster his efforts to make the blackout an annual occurrence. Last night's blackout signalled the beginning of the 3rd annual Reykjavík International Film Festival (RIFF).

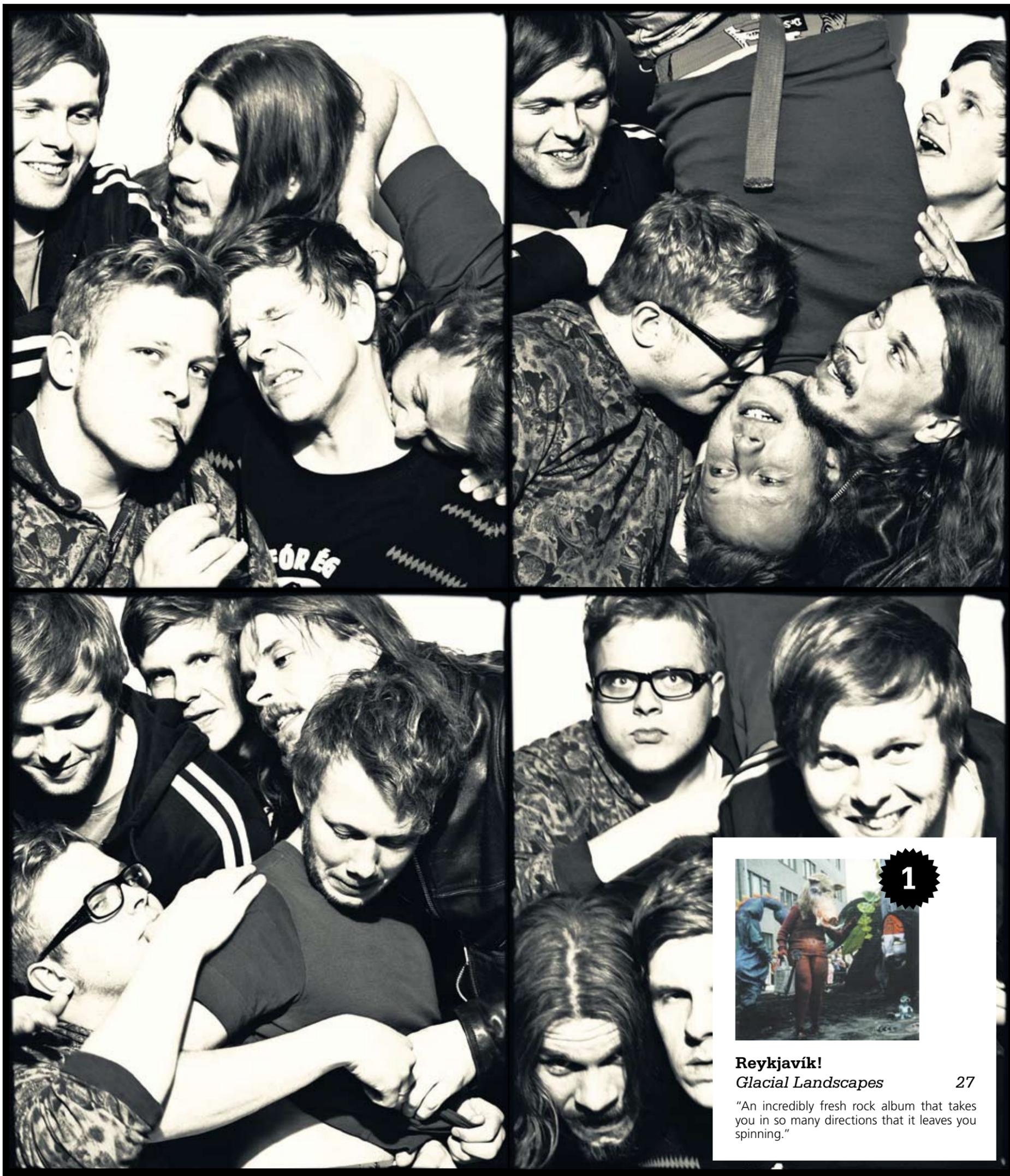
by Virginia Zech

Tuesday, December 19, 2006

Snap Your Arms Say Yeah!

Akureyri's parents and health officials have voiced their concerns in recent days, as it seems like a new fad referred to as "snapping arms" is threatening their children's well being. In their print edition, Morgunblaðið reported that the fad found its legs this fall with Akureyri's teenagers and has been steadily growing in popularity ever since. An interview with school nurse Katrín Friðriksdóttir reveals that the fad entails kids loosening their arm muscles before slapping their limbs out into the air, "as if slapping a wet towel," causing their joints to make a sort of snapping sound. Harmless school fun it seems, but there appears to be a darker side to the phenomenon, as there are reports of kids as young as nine years old suffering arm injuries as a result of the activity. It can reportedly cause joints to fall out of place, as well as bruising and swelling, in the long run even causing impairments. As for how the fad got popular, no one seems to know. An unnamed young source apparently told Morgunblaðið's reporter that "some famous guy" was the one who discovered the pleasing nature of snapping ones arms, although his identity has yet to be confirmed.

by Haukur Magnússon



Reykjavík!
Glacial Landscapes 27

"An incredibly fresh rock album that takes you in so many directions that it leaves you spinning."

The Thirty Best Icelandic Albums of 2006

Text by Sveinn Birkir Björnsson Photos by Gulli

"I was quite pessimistic for the most part of the year, feeling that most domestic releases were quite mediocre, but the last three months of the year have proven a real goldmine, maybe even passing last year's crop in quality. Narrowing the list down to only five albums was not an easy task at all," said one of the many music journalists the Reykjavík Grapevine contacted when selecting the best album of the year 2006. The statement sums up the year in many ways, as a number of releases sailed under the radar.

This could partially be explained by the fact that none of the giants of the Icelandic music scene released an album last year. However, a number of promising artists released their premiere effort. In fact, out of the top ten, six entries are

debut albums, while two more count as sophomore releases. Many of these artists have already garnered praise and attention from international publications. With that in mind, the future of Icelandic music is looking bright indeed. All in all, it was a great year to be a music fan.

When conducting the poll, we also asked the panel to name their favourite concert of the year. Unsurprisingly, the highly anticipated and much discussed Sugarcubes reunion topped the list. A little more surprising was Roger Waters placing third.

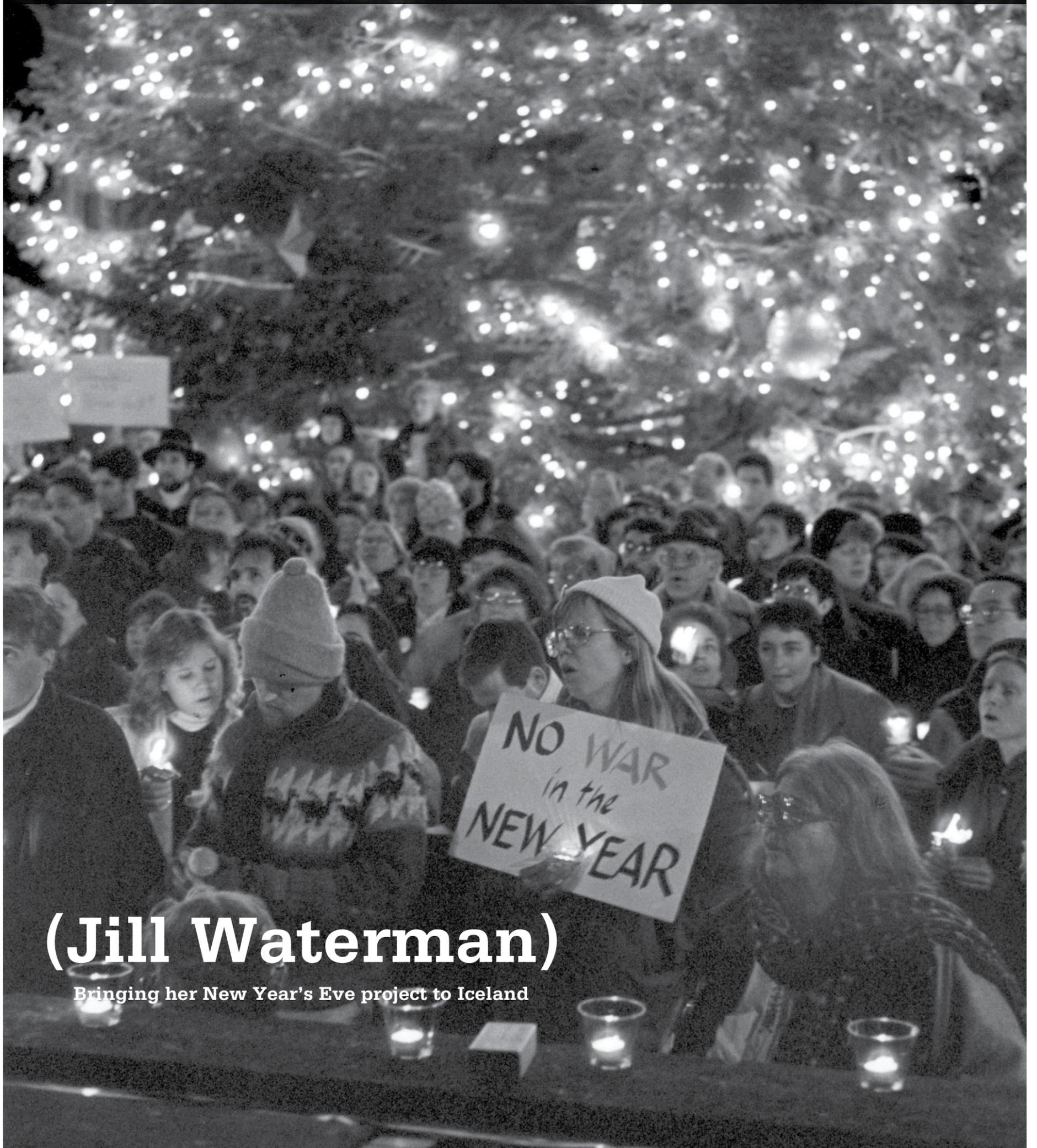
We also asked critics what was the most anticipated release of the year 2007. While *Jakobínarína*, *I Adapt*, and Benny Crespo's *Gang* were repeatedly mentioned respectively,

one band stood out. Apparently, Icelandic music journalists are to a man waiting for the fourth release from rock n' roll giants Mínus. The album is in production, with the band having spent three weeks in November and December recording in Los Angeles with producers Husky Hoskuld and Joe Barresi. Judging from their live performances last year - (two of their performances ranked high on our concert list, *Airwaves Kerrang! Night* and the *Mínus - Entombed* ticket, both great shows) - the fivesome is in a fantastic form.

But, without further ado, here are the thirty best Icelandic albums of 2006 >>>

info.

▲ Grand Concert In Defence Of The Holy Right To Rock *Good Company* *The Swinging Sixties* *No More Empty Walls* *Forgotten Lores* *Political Toys and Dramatic Doors* *Peter, Bjorn and John* *The Ultimate Calendar for Electronic Enthusiasts* *Food Reviews* *Bezt í heimi* *Counting in the New Year Across the Globe* *Music, Art, Films and Events Listings* ▲



(Jill Waterman)

Bringing her New Year's Eve project to Iceland



Reykjavík Art Museum – 13 Jan.

Grand Concert In Defence Of The Holy Right To Rock

Tónlistarþróunarmiðstöðin ("The Music Development Centre"), TPM for short, is a remarkable resource for Reykjavík's young bands, as it grants them access to professional rehearsal spaces (and an attached concert venue) for a reasonable monthly fee. This service has proved essential in the three years since TPM's inception, especially since Reykjavík's prosperous music scene seems to breed bands at bunny-like rates while available garages become scarcer by the year. Publicly funded in part, the private enterprise has recently found itself suffering from a lack of finances, and recently sent out an SOS in a last minute attempt to save the operation from going under. City officials and their ilk apparently haven't seen reason to respond to

TPM's plea (or the Grapevine's interview e-mails and calls regarding the subject, for that matter) – perhaps we should thank them for it, as this is why we're getting a free concert featuring some of Iceland's best live acts.

Conceived to raise awareness of TPM's plea, the six-hour plus "Stál í Stál" concert extravaganza takes place in the enormous Reykjavík Art Museum - Hafnarhús venue in downtown Reykjavík, better known for hosting Airwaves headliners such as The Kaiser Chiefs. A brief introduction of what goes on in TPM and the artists working there is followed by a mass of half-hour sets from long time favourites (I Adapt, My Summer as a Salvation Soldier), chart-toppers (Lay Low), up and comers (Rökkurró, Ólafur

Arnalds) and exciting unknowns (Sudden Weather Change, et al). Starting at 5 PM, one can expect the proceedings to build up to an explosive climax as the night progresses. The closing set by Reykjavík metal gods Changer is likely to drain completely whatever energy the crowd has left at that time.

A full line up is listed right here on these pages. The concert is all-ages and admission free. So you really have no reason not to spend the day acquainting yourself with a fine cause, and some of Iceland's best music.

Reykjavík Art Museum,
Hafnarhúsið, Tryggvagata 17,
Tel.: 590 1200

Hafnarfjörður Theatre – 25 – 26 Jan.

Good Company

The newly founded physical-theatre group Good Company will premiere its first offspring at Hafnarfjörður Theatre, January 25. At 20:00. Entitled Vikings and Jews, four different pieces will be performed, including Strength through Embarrassment, a physical-theatre piece addressing the absurdity regarding terrorism. All performances are in English.

The group consists of four girls, Margrét Bjarnadóttir and Saga Sigurðardóttir from Iceland and Anat Eisenberg and Noa Shadur from Israel, who met when study-

ing together in Holland. "The title, Vikings and Jews, is meant to reflect the stereotypical ideas people try to pin on Icelanders on the one hand and Jews on the other," Saga Sigurðardóttir explains. "These two worlds are totally black and white. Me and Margrét Bjarnadóttir don't have any experience of terrorism for example," she continues. Tickets can be bought at Hafnarfjörður Theatre. The price is 2,000 ISK but 1,200 ISK for students.

Hafnarfjörður Theatre,
Strandgata 8, Tel: 555 2222



National Museum of Iceland – 12 Jan.

The Swinging Sixties

On January 12, a new photo exhibition will open at the National Museum of Iceland. Twins Kristján Magnússon and Ingimundur Magnússon display their work of photos, all shot during the sixties, where teenagers, with beehive hairdos and chilled-out lifestyles are the subject. It was a decade when teens spent their free time listening to music, obsessing about fashion and hanging around on street corners or in the neighbourhood kiosks to meet other frisky teens.

Couples danced the Twist and the Beatles-band Hljómar were at their peak in popularity, surrounded by screaming fans and crying schoolgirls. The exhibition portrays these vibrant times in the local community and its nostalgic moments. A good opportunity to recollect old memories, or for the younger generation, understand the past.

The National Museum of Iceland,
Suðurgata 41, www.natmus.is

If you would like to be included in the Grapevine listings, free of charge, contact the Grapevine by email at listings@grapevine.is.

Music

Bar 11

Laugavegur 11

A popular hangout for Reykjavík's rockers and their young idolaters with DJ's playing classic rock'n'roll hitters.

Fri 12.01 DJ Óli Dóri

Sat 13.01 DJ Gulli Ósóma

Fri 19.01 Grapevine gig: Mammút and Slugs followed by DJ Gulli Ósóma

Sat 20.01 DJ Óli Dóri

Fri 26.01 DJ Óli Dóri

Sat 27.01 DJ Gulli Ósóma

Fri 02.02 DJ Palli MAus

Sat 03.02 DJ Gulli Ósóma

Broadway

Ármúli 9

13.01 Dr. Mister and Mr. Handsome final show. Starts at 23:00.

Café Amsterdam

Hafnarstræti 5

Fri 12.01 10:30 Noise and Coburn with guests, DJ master

Sat 13.01 DJ Master

Thu 18.01 Grapevine gig: Mammút and Slugs

Fri 19.01 Perfect Disorder + Guests followed by DJ Fúsi

Sat 20.01 DJ Fúsi

Fri 26.01 Party

Sat 27.01 Party

Café Cultura

Hverfisgata 18

Music from the world's four corners.

12.01 Grapevine Party. FM Belfast and Terrordisco. Starts at 21:00.

Café Rósenberg

Lækjargata 2

A true jazz club featuring live gigs with some of Iceland's finest jazzists almost every night of the week.

Fri 12.01 Krummafótur playing djangojazz

Sat 13.01 Gítarpakkið djangojamm

Thu 18.01 Siggí Sig. and Björggi Gísla bluesnight

Fri 19.01 Helgi Valur troubadour

Sat 20.01 Helgi Valur troubadour

Thu 25.01 Sviðin jörð play melancholic country

Fri 26.01 Andri Þór + Jazzband

Sat 27.01 Mímósa djangojazzband in concert

Gaukurinn

Tryggvagata 22

Fri 19.01 Party Zone presents: Booka Shade, Hairdoctor, FM Belfast, Jack Schidt DJ set, Djuna Barnes DJ set, Darren C DJ set and more.

Reykjavík Art Museum

Tryggvagata 17

13.01 TPM Megaconcerts, open for all ages: Rökkurró, Ólafur Arnalds, Lay Low, Mongo Lidoz, Kannski NEi, kannski Já?, Sudden Weather Change, Who Knew, South Coast Killing Company, Transsexual Daycare, My Summer as a Salvation Soldier, Atómstöðin, Benny Crespo's Gang, I Adapt, Severed Croth and Changer. Introductions about TPM at 16:30, concerts from 17-22:30.

Háskólabíó

Hagatorg

Thu 18.01 The Icelandic Symphony Orchestra: Bartok & Bruckner

Thu 25.01 The Icelandic Symphony Orchestra: Dark Music Days

Hressó

Austurstræti 20

Here, troubadours play sing-along hitters until midnight followed by DJs playing whatever the crowd is aching for at the moment.

Fri 12.01 Helgi Valur troubadour followed by DJ Jhonny

Sat 13.01 Touch in concert followed by DJ Jhonny

Fri 19.01 Menn ársins in concert followed by DJ Maggi

Sat 20.01 Gotti and Eisi followed by DJ Jhonny

Fri 26.01 Touch in concert followed by DJ Maggi

Sat 27.01 Pub-lic in concert followed by DJ Maggi

Kaffibarinn

Bergstaðastræti 1

With a mixture of techno, reggae, hip-hop and classic dance hitters, the DJs are usually capable of crowding the dance floor each weekend and getting the regulars frisky at weekdays.

Fri 12.01 DJ Jón Atli

Sat 13.01 Don Balli Funk

Wed 17.01 Don Balli Funk

Thu 18.01 DJ Pétur

Fri 19.01 DJ Árni Sveins

Sat 20.01 DJ Jón Atli

Wed 24.01 DJ Pétur

Thu 25.01 DJ Jón Atli

Fri 26.01 Don Balli Funk

Sat 27.01 DJ Alfons X

Kaffi Hljómalind

Fri 12.01 Disconvenience from Sweden, along with Morðingjarnir, The Best Hardcore Band in the World and Deathmetal Supersquad. Starts at 19:00.

Nasa

Thorvaldsenstræti 2

Sat 27.01 Peter, Bjorn and John in concert

Sat 03.02 Flex Music presents DJ duo S.O.S

Prikið

Bankastræti 12

This old coffeehouse turns into a hip-hop mania at weekends where not only DJs but also drummers and bassists create a crazy pit at the dancefloor.

Fri 12.01 Frískó followed by DJ Gísli Galdur

Sat 13.01 Kacoon and DJ B-Ruff

Wed 17.01 DJ Kári

Thu 18.01 DJ Gísli Galdur

Fri 19.01 Franz and Kristó followed by DJ Playmobile

Sat 20.01 DJ Andri and DJ Gunnir Stef.

Wed 24.01 DJ Kvikindi

Thu 25.01 DJ Gulli Ósóma

Fri 26.01 Frískó followed by DJ Danni Deluxe

Sat 27.01 DJ Gulli, Bloodgroup in concert and DJ B-Ruff

Wed 31.01 DJ Kocoon

Sirkus

Klapparstígur 30

Playing reggae, country and usually hosting at least one live gig at

weekdays, Sirkus's veteran techno DJs keep the party going until morning at weekends.

Fri 12.01 Sirkus DJ

Sat 13.01 DJ Jón Atli

Thu 18.01 DJ Ívar Árni

Fri 19.01 DJ Árni Sveins

Sat 20.01 Sirkus DJ

Thu 25.01 Sirkus DJ

Fri 26.01 Sirkus DJ

Sat 27.01 DJ Árni Sveins

Stúdentakjallarinn

Hringbraut

The University students' former hangout spot, now a diverse concert venue, attracting, still, a lot of students.

Fri 12.01 Evil Madness, Fabrizio Modenese Palumbo and Paul Beachamp

Sat 13.01 Forgotten Lores, Bent and Dóri DNA in concert

Thu 18.01 Touch in concert

Thu 25.01 Nyhil Poetry Night

Vegamót

Vegamótartígur 4

A weekly anticipation for its trendy clientele, always dressed for the occasion, the party starts at midnight and ends early in the morning.

Fri 12.01 DJ Anna Rakel and Hjalti

Sat 13.01 DJ Kári

Fri 19.01 Vegamót DJ

Sat 20.01 Vegamót DJ

Fri 26.01 Vegamót DJ

Sat 27.01 Vegamót DJ

Art

101 Gallery

The Nordic House and Reykjavík City Library

No More Empty Walls

There are two places to go if your apartment walls and wallet are empty. First, the Nordic House library in Reykjavík. The library lends out three artworks free of charge for up to three months at a time. All that is needed is a library card and a kennitala, the personal identification number. Well known graphic artists from all Nordic countries are represented in their big collection. When the three months have passed, return the pictures and select new ones. It can be an ongoing exhibition in your home.

Another option is to go down to the city library in Reykjavík. Look

for the sign "Artotek" before you start taking pictures down from the wall though. The City Library in Reykjavík, in cooperation with the Association of Icelandic Visual Artists, SIM, has chosen about 250 artworks from modern Icelandic artists to be lent out, and maybe eventually sold. If the picture cost 30 000 ISK, you can pay a monthly fee at 1000 ISK, and the money goes directly to the artist. After 30 payments this painting is yours. EMF

Reykjavík City Library, Tryggvagata 15
The Nordic House, Sturlugötu 5.



The Student Basement – 13 Jan.

Forgotten Lores

No one should be betrayed by a Forgotten Lores concert. After releasing their second album, Frá heimsenda, last month, playing a top-notch release concert shortly after, the hip-hop group invades the Student Basement, January 13, along with hip-hop friends Bent and Dóri DNA. With Addi Intro and Benni B-Ruff behind the

turntables and Byrkir, Class B and Diddi Fel on the mics, the fivesome almost without exception gets the crowd grooving the minute the uncrowned Icelandic hip-hop kings jump onstage. Definitely a concert worth checking out.

The Student Basement, Hringbraut, Tel.: 511 0905

Hverfisgata 18
Thu.-Sat. 14-17 and by appointment
www.101hotel.is/101hotel/101gallery/
■ **Artotek**
Tryggvagata 15
Mon. 10-21, Tue.-Thu. 10-19, Fri. 11-19, Sat. and Sun. 13-17
www.sim.is/Index/Islenska/Artotek
Until 18 Feb
Guðrún Öyahals exhibition
■ **Aurum**
Bankastræti 4
Mon.-Fri. 10-18
Sat. 11-16
■ **The Einar Jónsson Museum**
Eiríksgrata
Tue.-Sun. 14-17
www.skulptur.is
Permanent exhibition
Work of sculptor Einar Jónsson
■ **The Culture House**
Hverfisgata 15
Open daily 11-17
www.thjodmenning.is
Until 27 Feb
Icelandic Fashion 2006
Permanent Exhibits
Medieval Manuscripts; The National Museum- as it was; The Library Room
■ **Dwarf Gallery**
Grundarstígur 21
Opening Hours: Fri. and Sat. 18-20
this.is/birta
■ **Gallery 100 Degrees**
Bæjarháls 1
Mon.-Fri. 8:30-16
www.or.is/Forsida/Gallery100
■ **Gallery Anima**
Ingólfsstræti 8

Tue.-Sat. 13-17
www.animagalleri.is
■ **Gallery Fold**
Rauðarárstígur 14-16
Mon.-Fri. 10-18
Sat. 11-16
Sun. 14-16
www.myndlist.is
■ **Gallerí Sævars Karls**
Bankastræti 7
Mon.-Fri. 10-18
Sat. 10-16
www.saevarkarl.is
■ **Gallery Tukt**
Pósthússtræti 3-5
www.hitthusid.is
■ **Gallery Turpentine**
Ingólfsstræti 5
Tue.-Fri. 12-18
Sat. 11-16
www.turpentine.is
Halla Gunnarsdóttir exhibition
■ **Gel Gallerí**
Hverfisgata 37
Mon.-Fri. 10-19
Sat. 10-17
From 6 Jan.
Toggi exhibition
■ **Gerðuberg Cultural Centre**
Gerðuberg 3-5
Mon.-Thu. 11-17
Wed. 11-21
Thu.-Fri. 11-17
Sun-Sat. 13-16
www.gerduberg.is
■ **Gyllinhæð**
Laugavegur 23
Thu.-Sun. 14-18
Students from the second year of the



ASÍ Art Museum

Political Toys and Dramatic Doors

ASÍ Art Museum opened two new contemporary art exhibitions last weekend. In Ásmundasalur showroom, Jóhann Ludvig Torfason, a respected digital artist, displays his paintings of fictionalised toys, designed for, what he likes to call, the conscious young generation. Entitled New Toys, the exhibition consists of digital dolls with all kinds of entertainment purposes. His approach to the subject is strongly political, whether it's gender roles, diseases, ethnic provinciality, famine, violence, fashion consciousness or the short human life, as can be seen in the photo above. Torfason is not only concerned about Icelandic consumer society though. He also addresses issues that do not touch locals in a direct way, like the death penalty for example. One

toy is named the killing doll, with which children can have fun by frying prisoners in the electric chair. They can even collect a whole gang of crooks and exterminate it. With all sorts of political messages like these, Torfason is trying to answer questions regarding human existence, and it has to be said that his presentation is both critical and thought provoking and makes you wonder where the world is heading.

Artist Hlynur Helgason, takes on a different task in his project 63 Doors of Landspítalinn University Hospital at Hringbraut, where he interprets the hospital's history in photos and movie clips of 63 different entrance doors. In explaining the idea, he says that the Landspítalinn University Hospital is a

place most Icelanders have stepped a foot into, when they were born, died, injured or sick and that people have both joyful and painful memories about the large building. Helgason decided to document 63 doors in the hospital, doors that guests, patients and staff members walk in and out of over and over again. Since its construction in 1930, the hospital has changed, grown and developed. With the exhibition, which consists of video clips, photos, paintings and drawings, Helgason hopes to capture the change as well as the diverse-

ASÍ Art Museum,
Freyjugata 41, Tel.: 511 5353.

Art Academy
■ **Hún og Hún Gallery**
Skólavörðustígur 17b
■ **i8 Gallery**
Klapparstígur 33
Tue.-Fri. 11-17
Sat. and by appointment 13-17
www.i8.is
■ **Icelandic Labour Union's Art Gallery**
Freyjugata 41
Tue.-Sun. 13-17
Free Entrance
From 6 Jan
Ný leikföng/New Toys
Jóhann Ludvig Torfason exhibition
From 6 Jan
63 doors of Landspítalinn
Hlynur Helgason photo exhibit
■ **Kling & Bang Gallery**
Laugavegur 23
Thu.-Sun. 14-18
Free Entrance
www.this.is/klingandbang
22 Dec – 28 Jan
Twilight Zone - Kling & Bang's Christmas show
Ásdís Sif Gunnarsdóttir, Daniel Björnsson, Hekla Dögg Jónsdóttir and sirra Sigrón Sigurðardóttir
■ **Living Art Museum**
Laugavegur 26
Wed., Fri.-Sun. 13-17
Thur 13-22
www.nylo.is/
13 Jan – 31 Jan
Still Drinking About You
Kolbeinn Hugvi Höskuldsson exhibition
■ **The National Gallery**

Fríkirkjuvegur
Tue.-Sun. 11-17
Free Entrance
listasafn.is
15 Dec – 25 Feb
Un Regard Fauve
French Expressionism
■ **The National Museum**
Suðurgata 41
Open daily 10-17
natmus.is/
Until 29 Apr
With a Silverneedle
Elsa E. Guðjónsson textile designer
Until 12 Mar
Guðni Þórðarson photo exhibition
Ingimundur Magnússon and Kristján Magnússon photo exhibit
Permanent Exhibitions:
The Making of a Nation
■ **The Nordic House**
Sturlugata 5
Tue.-Sun. 12-17
www.nordice.is/
■ **Reykjavík 871 +/- 2 : The Settlement Exhibition**
Aðalstræti 16
Open daily 10-17
■ **Reykjavík Art Museum – Ásmundur Sveinsson Sculpture Museum**
Sigtún
Open daily 10-16
Admission ticket is valid on the same day
for all three museums.
www listasafnreykjavikur.is
■ **Reykjavík Art Museum – Hafnarhúsið**

Tryggvagata 17
Open daily 10-17
Until 21 Jan
Uncertain States of America
American contemporary art by 45 young artists
■ **Reykjavík Art Museum – Kjarvalsstaðið**
Flókagata
Closed in January
■ **Reykjavík Museum**
Kistuhylur 4
www.arbaejarsafn.is
■ **The Reykjavík Museum of Photography**
Grófarhús, Tryggvagata 15, 6th floor
Weekdays 12-19
Sat.-Sun. 13-17
Free Entrance
www.ljosmyndasafnreykjavikur.is
Until 28 Jan
Analog - Dialog
Mogens S. Koch
11 Jan – 20 Feb
Síssu photo exhibit
■ **Safn**
Laugavegur 37
Wed.-Fri. 14-18
Sat.-Sun. 14-17
Free Entrance
www.safn.is
■ **Sigurjón Ólafsson Museum**
Laugarnestangi 70
Tue.-Sun. 14-17
Permanent exhibition
Work of sculptor Sigurjón Ólafsson

>>>OUTSIDE REYKJAVÍK
■ **Hveragerði Library**

Nasa – 27 Jan.

Peter, Bjorn and John

The Swedish indiepop trio Peter, Bjorn and John plays Nasa, January 27 at 21:00. Named after its three members, the band, formed in 2000, released its self titled debut in 2002 followed by *Falling Out* in 2004 and their highly praised latest album, *Writer's Block*, last year, where they for the first time join forces as songwriters and lead singers. This edgy and experimental album has received glowing reviews, and is, according to many critics, one of the best pop albums of last year. Everyone caught one to the catchy summer-hitter *Young Folks*, (It's the whistle song), a song that finally familiarized Icelanders with the group, as it has been echoing in the heads of every other one for the past months. And the hype only continues.

PB & J's perky melodies and singalong songs with all the proper amount of maraca, harmonica, bongo drums and of course the whistle, fans can expect some craziness by the end of the month. Opening acts are Pétur Ben and Sprengjuhöllinn.

Price for a ticket is 2.500 ISK and available from midi.is, nasa.is, Skifan and BT.

Nasa, Thorvaldsenstræti 2, Tel.: 511 1313.



Austurmörk 2, Hveragerði
Mon.-Fri. 15-19

■ Skaftfell

Austurvegur 42, Seyðisfjörður
www.skaftfell.is

2 Dec – 20 Jan 2007

Haraldur Jónsson exhibition

■ Hafnarborg

Strandgata 34, Hafnarfjörður
Mon.-Sun. 11-17

www.hafnarborg.is

11 Jan – 4 Feb

Faroese Paintings

Edward Fuglø, Astri Luihn, Sigrún Gunnarsdóttir, Torbjörn Olsen, Eyðun av Reyni and Ingálvur av Reyni

■ Suðsudvestur

Hafnargata 22, Keflavík
Thu.-Fri. 16-18

Sat.-Sun. 14-17

www.sudsudvestur.is

■ DaLi gallerí

Brekkgata 9, Akureyri
Mon.-Sat. 14-18

■ Gallerí+

Brekkgata 35, Akureyri

6 Jan – 22 Jan

Joris Rademaker exhibition

■ Jónas Viðar Gallery Akureyri

Fri.-Sat. 13-18

■ Akureyri Art Museum

Kaupvangsstræti 12

Tue.-Sun. 12-17

www listasafn.akureyri.is

From 13 Jan

Adam Bateman exhibition



Films

■ Köld Slóð

An Icelandic thriller about detective Baldur, played by Þróstur Leó Gunnarsson, who finds himself in a risky chase when investigating the death of a man near an isolated dam site. *Smárabíó, Regnboginn, Háskólabíó, Borgarbíó.*

■ Employee of the Month

From the producers of *Wedding Crashers*, this comic dwells on a box boy chasing after the cashier in a bulk-dis-

count retailer, played by ultra-blondie Jessica Simpson. To get the girl, the boy has to become the employee of the month! *Laugarásbíó, Sambíóin Álfabakka, Nýja Bíó Keflavík.*

■ Stranger than Fiction

An author, played by Emma Thompson, is writing her latest novel. The story takes a sudden twist when she finds out her fictional character, Harold Crick, an IRS agent played by Will Ferrell, is as real as one man gets. Crick of course panics when realising he is the centre of the narration. *Sambíóin Álfabakka, Sambíóin Kringlunni, Nýja Bíó Akureyri.*

■ Little Miss Sunshine

Pure brilliance! A low-budget independent movie the likes of *Sideways*, about a highly dysfunctional American family travelling across the country in a yellow mini-bus to get the youngest daughter to a beauty pageant. One of the more interesting films of last year. *Smárabíó, Regnboginn.*

■ Happy Feet

Singing penguins plus a tap-dancing penguin chick, who becomes an outcast from penguin society due to his off-key voice. *Sambíóin Álfabakka, Sambíóin Kringlunni, Háskólabíó, Nýja Bíó Akureyri, Nýja Bíó Keflavík.*

■ Tenacious D

Jack Black's new real-life movie is said to be the greatest cinematic piece of our time (according to him at least). Two dudes, played by Black and Kyle Gass, in an epic mission of becoming the greatest rock stars ever. What could possibly go wrong? *Regnboginn, Laugarásbíó, Borgarbíó.*

■ Flags of Our Fathers

Clint Eastwood's newest blockbuster tells the story of five Marines in the battle for the island Iwo Jima in the Second World War. A typical Hollywood war movie with all the proper bombings and special effects overload. *Sambíóin Álfabakka, Háskólabíó, Nýja Bíó Akureyri, Nýja Bíó Keflavík.*

■ Children of Men

From the Mexican director Alfonso Cuarón, starring Clive Owen, Julianne Moore and Michael Caine comes a dystopia, set in 2027, which centres on the quest to save humankind from an

inevitable apocalypse as women have become infertile and no child has been born for 18 years. *Sambíóin Álfabakka, Háskólabíó, Kringlubíó.*

■ Infamous

Gay writer Truman Capote earns the trust of rich New York women and enjoys living the fancy Manhattan lifestyle until a mysterious murder changes everything. But beware, a little more of Sandra Bullock than might be recommended. *(January 12)*

■ The Black Dahlia

Directed by Brian De Palma and inspired by the notorious murder of young actress Elizabeth Short, the film, set in the 1940s, follows two LA cops who get mixed up in corruption and misdeeds when trying to solve the mystery. *(January 12)*

■ The Prestige

A flick on the battle between two magicians whose rivalry leads to a dangerous obsession with the ultimate last trick. Starring Christian Bale, Hugh Jackman and Scarlett Johansson. *(January 12)*

■ Trust the Man

A romantic comedy about relationships falling to pieces starring David Duchovny, Billy Crudup, Julianne Moore and Maggie Gyllenhaal as couples in big trouble. *(January 12)*

■ Breaking and Entering

Set in London's King's Cross, this drama deals with the life of a landscape architect, played by Jude Law, who gets pulled into a world of crime and poverty after a break-in at his trendy firm. *(January 19)*

■ Blood Diamond

In the middle of a bloody civil war in Sierra Leone, the lives of a local fisherman, American journalist and a South African smuggler intersect as they take on a dangerous journey to find a cursed diamond everyone cherishes. *(January 26)*

■ Charlotte's Web

Wilbur the pig gets friendly with other farm animals and a talking spider named Charlotte who helps him await the destiny of becoming the Sunday dinner. Based on the popular children's book. *(January 26)*

■ Home of the Brave

Starring Samuel L. Jackson, Jessica Biel, 50 Cent and Brian Presley as four US soldiers in Iraq, anxious to get home, after completing one last mission that will change their lives. *(January 26)*

■ Dreamgirls

Beyoncé Knowles, Eddie Murphy and Jamie Foxx, in a 1960s-style adaptation of a popular Broadway musical. *(February 2)*

■ Perfume: The Story of a Murderer

Tom Tykwer takes on the tough task of filming the best-selling novel by German author Patrick Suskind, *Das Perfume*. Starring Ben Whishaw as the young killing perfumer Jean-Baptiste Grenouille who was born with a unique olfactory sense, the movie, set in 18th century Paris, follows the story of Grenouille, and his search for the perfect perfume. *(2 February)*

■ Regnboginn, Hverfisgata 54

101 Reykjavík, Tel. 551-9000

■ Sambíóin, Álfabakka 8

109 Reykjavík, Tel. 575-8900

■ Smárabíó, Smáralind

201 Kópavogur, Tel. 564-0000

■ Háskólabíó, Hagatorgi

107 Reykjavík, Tel. 525-5400

■ Kringlubíó, Kringlunni 4-12

103 Reykjavík, Tel. 575-8900

■ Selfossbíó, Eyravegur 2

800 Selfoss, Tel. 482-3007

■ Laugarásbíó, Laugarási

104 Reykjavík, Tel. 565-0118

■ Sambíóin Akureyri, Ráðhústorgi

600 Akureyri, Tel. 461-4666

■ Nýja-Bíó, Hafnargata 33

230 Reykjanesbær, Tel. 421-1170

Events

■ Cooperation in Environmental Policy: A Spatial Approach

12.01 Professor Ronald Davies lectures about inefficient competition in emissions taxes. Room 101 at Oddi, open for all.

The University of Iceland, Oddi, Dunhagi 5, starts at 12:15.

■ Au Revoir, Les Enfants by Louis Malle

13.01 The National Film Archive of Iceland in Hafnarfjörður continues its screening of old classics with Louis

Malle's 1987 masterpiece *Au Revoir, Les Enfants*. Set in France during WWII, the movie tells the tale of a young student in a French boarding school who befriends a Jewish student who is hiding from the Nazis.

The National Film Archive of Iceland, Hvaleyrarbraut 13, starts at 20:00.

■ Humanitarian Law and War on Terror

19.01 Reykjavík University and the Icelandic Human Rights Centre invite all interested to attend a lunch lecture in room 101 at Reykjavík University, January 19.

John P. Cerone, an associate professor at New England School of Law in Boston and Director of Center for International Law and Policy will talk about recent developments in the application of humanitarian law in US courts in the context of the 'war on terror'.

Reykjavík University, Ofanleiti 2, starts at 12:00.

■ Vikings and Jews

25.01 and 26.01 Good Company's performance of four physical-theatre pieces at Hafnarfjörður Theatre. *Hafnarfjörður Theatre, Strandgata 8, starts at 20:00.*

■ The Icelandic Music Awards

31.01 The annual Icelandic Music awards will be given out at a grand ceremony taking place at the Reykjavík City Theatre on January 31. Also broadcast live at RUU.

Reykjavík City Theatre, Listabraut 3, starts at 20:00.

■ Tango at Iðnó Theatre

06.02 Every first Tuesday each winter month, teachers Þórdís and Daði show guests how to dance the Tango, step-by-step.

Iðnó Theatre, Vonarstræti 3, starts at 20:00.

■ Choreographic Workshop by Steve Lorenz

24.01 The Icelandic Dance Company presents: Dancer and choreographer Steve Lorenz premieres his work in progress in Reykjavík City Theatre, January 24. Tickets are sold at the entrance.

Reykjavík City Theatre, Listabraut 3, starts at 20:00



12 tónar

The Ultimate Calendar for Electronic Enthusiasts

If we could still be recommending Christmas gift purchases in January, the 12 Tónar music calendar for 2007 would surely have been on top of the list. Not only does the calendar tell you all the essentials on how the days pass by, it also features 12 extremely cool pictures of local electronic musicians in various settings and different ambience.

The record store and independent music label 12 Tónar is responsible for releasing the calendar. Last year's, 12 Tónar calendar was dedicated to bassists, so as to equalize their share in the music scene. As that concept was a huge success, it was inevitable to make it an annual project, and keep on promoting local musicians in an innovative way. This year, electronic musicians, who have been prominent in Iceland's music scene, got to strike a pose and represent all 12 months of the year 2007.

The energetic Icelandic electronic scene supplied plentiful photographic options. We have Johnny Sexual

posing as Mr. June, the legendary party-group GusGus representing July and soloist Unsound, surrounded by a stack of old vinyl's, bringing the Christmas spirit in December. In addition to these models, the calendar also includes Ghostigital, Hildur Guðnadóttir, múm, Hairdoctor, Stilluppsteypa, Mr. Silla, Kira Kira, Biogen and Borkó.

Photographer Bjarni Grímsson and art director and stylist, Hrafnhildur Hólmgeirsdóttir, put endless hours of work into capturing the different styles of each musician. Some dressed up in crazy costumes, others representing their dark side by sitting in a pile of bloody bones, the pictures are both ambitious and creative and make the calendar a stylish decoration on any wall. Graphic designer Gunnar Þorvaldsson handled all the artwork.

Only 2000 copies are available and can be bought at the 12 Tónar record store at Skólavörðustígur 15, for 650 ISK. That's only 54 ISK per month! SJ



The Reykjavík Grapevine presents

Mammút and Slugs

LIVE AT:

Thursday January 18th at 21:00

Café Amsterdam, Hafnarstræti 5

Friday January 19th at 23:00

Bar 11, Laugavegur 11



1 CAFÉS

Café Roma

Laugavegur



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 specials 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

Pravda

Austurstræti 22

Pravda 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 ambiance on the top and bottom floors has faded away in recent times.

25

Ölstofan

Vegamótastígur

Ölstofan is an unpretentious, comfortable and straightforward place to relax. 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

Kaffibúðin

Pósthúsið

Café, bistro, restaurant. If you want to call it, consistently pleasant snacks and refreshments variety you happen to have the largest selection in Reykjavík. We recommend Staroprammen.

2

Ráðhúskaffi

City Hall



Ráðhúskaffi, situated inside the Reykjavík City Hall, is a comfortable choice for the view over Tjörnin (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

Vegamótastígur 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.vegमत.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

Deco

Austurstræti 12



Located in a former drugstore, Deco is an upper-middle priced bar/bistro catering to those who prefer elegant surroundings. A good choice for a light lunch or an afternoon glass of red wine. Features an above average whiskey selection.

29

Glaumbúðin

Tryggvabraut

Partly a sports bar, popular venue for live music, mostly it's just a good and party. They can be noisy before midnight and you would be better off getting a better deal on a kebab.

3

Grái Kötturinn

Hverfisgata 16a

Grái Kötturinn (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 Hjómáland

Laugavegur 21



Despite hosting the occasional rock concert, Kaffi Hjómáland 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

Sólun

Bankastræti 7a



Sólun 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 latté or some beer when suffering from a case of severe hipster-burn.

19

Grand Rokk

Smiðjustígur 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

Bergstaðastræti 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

Klappartígur 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

Hressó

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

Prikið

Bankastræti 12



Prikið 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

Legendary Icelandic DJ at this time, and Þróstur founded the bar. You can guarantee this place will be a party when you walk in on a Friday.



SPOT THIS: Boston

Laugavegur 28b, 101 Reykjavík, Tel.: 517 7816

Opening its doors on New Year's Eve, Boston is a fresh addition to the Reykjavík bar scene. Old-school yet stylish interiors, and enough tables to create a good vibe, the

chilled-out music makes the place a comfy café as well as a laid-back tavern. Open until 1am on weekdays and 3am on weekends.



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Kaffibrennslan
Austurstræti 9

ant, bar – whatever
Kaffibrennslan is a
nt place to go for
ments of whatever
to crave. They also
lection of beers in
omment the Cobra

Bar
gata 20

Glaumbar is also a
e bands and DJs, but
d place to get drunk
n host private gath-
night on weekdays,
hard pressed to get
reg party than here.



Horn
gata 30

rockers have been
s place from time to
om Minus has even
an pretty much guar-
be rocking any time
ay or Saturday night.

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.

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.

34 Argentina
Barónsstígur 11a
Perennial favourite, Argentina is a fine dining steak house. For whale-etarians, 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.

35 Vín 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.

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.

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?

39 Shalimar
Austurstræti 4
Prides itself on being the northernmost Indian/Pakistani restaurant in the world. Their cooks know exactly what they are doing with the spices and as a result we have given them two glowing reviews and a 'Bezt í Heimi' recommendation in the past. You can still see the latter article hanging in their window – and we stand by it.

40 Við tjörnina
Templarasund 3
If you're looking for high-quality food in a unique but cosy setting it doesn't get much better than Við Tjörnina (literally, By the Pond). They're known for their traditional living room décor and innovative fish dishes made from a variety of fresh catches. The ambiance is something you have to experience to truly appreciate.

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.

43 Bernhöftsbakarí
Bergstaðastræti 13
The oldest bakery in Reykjavik, founded in 1834. If you are particular about your bread this is about the best place in central Reykjavik to stock up on a variety of freshly baked loaves – they also do a particularly moist and juicy version of the ever popular vinarbrauð 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.

44 Bæjarins Bestu
Tryggvagata
A veritable institution in central Reykjavik, 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.

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.

46 Nonnabiti
Hafnarstræti 11
Almost certainly the best junk food in the Greater Reykjavik area, and extremely popular with drunken youths on weekends. This place has none of that Subway commitment to healthy living, and they probably contribute significantly to the ever-increasing "size" of the nation. They also serve burgers and sandwiches, and have lunchtime offers.

47 Hamborgarabúlla Tómasar (Búllan)
Geirsgata 1
Tómas originally popularised the hamburger in Iceland when he opened his famous Tomaborgarar shop. A couple of decades and business ventures later he has gone back to the basics and now has one of the most popular fast food restaurants downtown – affectionately known as Búllan (the joint).

48 First Vegetarian (Á næstu grösum)
Laugavegur 20b
One of the first places in Reykjavik to specialise in vegetarian and vegan dishes. Despite having changed owners a couple of years back, the quality has remained consistent and you almost get the feeling that the place is being run on sheer principle as much as anything else.

49 Kebabhúsið
Lækjargata 2
Some of the best fish and chips in town can be found at Kebabhúsið, 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.

50 Vitabar
Bergþórugata 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.



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Icelandic Fish Chips

Tryggvagata 8, 101 Reykjavík, Tel.: 511 1118

The newest addition to the Reykjavík restaurant scene is a cosy little place located right next to the old harbour. The name, Icelandic Fish Chips, gives a hint what kind of menu to expect, but actually, the food has nothing in common with the traditional British dish, except for the fish. It's a healthy organic restaurant using only organic vegetables, quality fish products and no wheat or white sugar in its kitchen.

One of the owners, Erna Kaaber, welcomed my two dining partners and me as we arrived during lunch hours and informed us what a healthy treat was awaiting us. After serving us white wine as well as freshly made lemonade and orange juice we were offered a selection of all they have. As starters, we got spelt bread with hummus and a creamy broccoli soup. Then crunchy potato chips and onion rings. Instead of fattening sauces like mayo we were served "Skyrónnes" on the side to dip the chips into. Made out of Skyr (a popular fat-free Icelandic milk product) and flavoured with all sorts of spices it was much tastier, not to mention healthier, than the classic calorie-rich dressing.

Three fillets of deep-fried plaice, cod and haddock came as our main dish, served with two types of potatoes and the aforementioned Skyrónnes. The fish, wrapped in a dough made out of spelt instead of white wheat and deep-fried in vegetable oil, was delicious; as were the organic potatoes oven-baked in olive oil, flavoured with Maldon salt and parsley. As we had been told this restaurant was especially child-friendly, my companion brought along her six-month-old daughter, who wasn't left out of the feast. Served homemade liquidy paste made out of organic carrots and coconut oil, she was quite happy with the dinner as well as the toys that kept her occupied for most of our time there.

As the restaurant is quite small, every table was filled, but to meet the growing popularity, the restaurant also offers takeaway, a good and not so pricy choice if you need to grab a meal when heading home after work. For 1,450 ISK you can pick the fish of your choice and combine it with side dishes like potatoes and various sauces, and the portions are large enough to satisfy.

Reviewed by Steinunn Jakobsdóttir



Deco

Austurstræti 12, 101 Reykjavík, Tel.: 578 7900

Deco, a newly opened café and wine bar has all the potential to become a popular lunch café, right in the city centre. Its modern and stylish interiors, varied menu and impressive selection of whiskey, not to mention the location, should be an attraction, but when arriving during weekly lunch hour, my companion and I were, surprisingly, the only customers there.

Our waiter welcomed us with an impressive menu of classic dishes – sandwiches, salads, pasta, meat and various starters. After debating whether to have the fish of the day (monkfish) with baked potato, or try the warm chicken salad with pine nuts, bacon and African sauce, I chose the latter option. I regretted that decision minutes later. For the price (1,390 ISK), the portion wasn't very rich and although everything tasted nicely, there was nothing over the top about the dish. My dining companion was more impressed with his grilled tenderloin of beef, finely cooked, although the baked potato served with the meat was a little too mushy for his taste.

After the salad, there was still plenty of room for coffee and dessert. The cup of Americano was excellent and while slurping it down, we had to decide whether to pick a warm apple pie, chocolate cake or fruit parfait with mango sauce. As it is my sincere belief that every good meal should end with chocolate cake, the decision wasn't too difficult. And Deco's liquid chocolate cake with fruit and ice cream is just to die for. Served as the centre of a huge stained glass plate, decorated with strawberries, blueberries, redcurrants, coconut ice cream and raspberry sauce, I almost didn't want to ruin the classy design. But I did, and the cake was perfect. Crunchy on the outside, melting on the inside. It will definitely draw me back again soon.

Later on I was told that Deco usually gets quite crowded during the evening, when it turns into more of a wine bar than a coffeehouse, serving cocktails, champagne, the aforementioned whiskey and wine to locals looking for a pleasant night out. Open until 01:00 on weekdays and 03:00 on weekends, its relaxed vibe and conversation-friendly atmosphere makes it a good pick for exactly that occasion.

Reviewed by Steinunn Jakobsdóttir



Vor

Laugavegur 24, 101 Reykjavík, Tel.: 562 2322

As anyone who spends much time in downtown Reykjavík will attest, finding a good, affordable place to have lunch can be a gruelling task. After a while, all those sun-dried tomato pastas, chicken breast tandooris and mushroom soups lose their charm; what started as an inventive addition to Reykjavík's diner kitchens soon became redundant.

It was thus refreshing to encounter new Laugavegur restaurant Vor's menu, which is at most times far removed from what's being served in comparable places. With a few exceptions, the restaurant provides an original approach to feeding downtowners, leaning heavily on French and Mediterranean styles.

The "Rich carrot soup with ginger" seemed the obvious choice for a starter. The soup was fine in the taste department, but sorely lacked the richness indicated by its name. A disappointment that was, but the soup still merits a second chance.

We next sampled the three salads on offer at Vor. The house speciality Spring Salad contrasted nicely with January's subzero temperatures, and the rucola salad was considerably boosted by soft Parmesan cheese. A green salad seemed like the perfect idea post Christmas bingeing, and exceeded itself with a fine lemon vinaigrette.

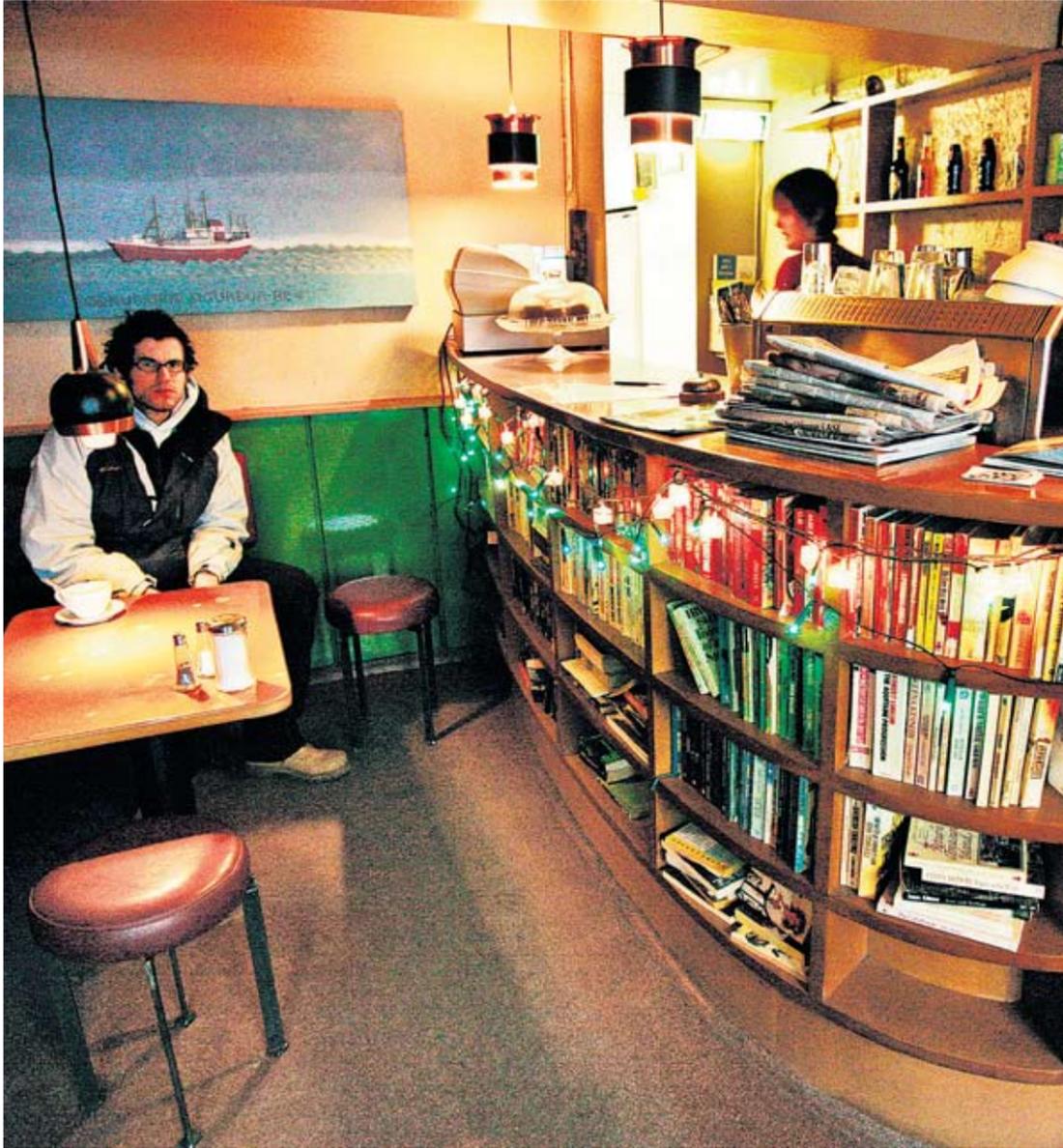
The Sweet Chilli Omelette was satisfyingly simple in composition; a nice consistency was further enhanced by a homemade chilli jam. Our favourite course of the meal was without a doubt the Mediterranean-style grilled lamb pepper steak. A good selection of cooked vegetables, including tomatoes and black olives, provided a fine tableau for the very properly handled steak. Not as satisfying was the tuna and its accompanying cannellini bean salad. While some pieces of tuna were near-perfectly fried, others weren't, and such an inconsistency managed to ensure the course didn't fully live up to its potential.

With affordable pricing, food that's well above average and a comfortable atmosphere, Vor is an excellent choice for lunch in the 101 area. The coffee was pretty good, too.

Reviewed by Haukur Magnússon



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MUNID LÍKA EFTIR SUSHI TAKEAWAY BÖKKUNUM !



BEZT Í HEIMI: Grái kötturinn

Hverfisgata 16a, 101 Reykjavík, Tel.: 551 1544

Grái Kötturinn (The Grey Cat) a tiny and dark coffee place in the City Centre, takes you back decades in time. Somewhat of a refuge away from the bustling city, it's located in a basement at Hverfisgata, right opposite the National Theatre of Iceland. With its antique furniture, and loads of books lining the shelves, the homelike, relaxed atmosphere and the opening hours being from seven in the morning, makes Grái Kötturinn the early bird's favourite. Serving the breakfast special until 10:00, including home-baked bread, bagels and toast and various versions of European and American brunch until afternoon. If you're especially hungry, order The Truck, a rich portion of eggs, bacon and American pancakes with fried potatoes, tomatoes, butter, syrup and toast and of course a strong cup of coffee or tea and orange juice. That should provide plentiful energy to last almost the whole day.

Nothing really beats sitting by the window of Grái Kötturinn with a strong espresso, a fine bagel and all three, or wait, four newspapers, at your table, watching the traffic start to flow up and down Hverfisgata in the morning. Mostly due to its location, it is extremely popular among actors working at the National Theatre, but bohemians, filmmakers, students and office

workers are all amongst regulars as well. Even hungry party people arriving in groups on weekends, making the coffee place with its legendary breakfast a final destination before heading home after a night out. Note, it is good advice to arrive early if you are in desperate need for morning fuel, as the place fills up pretty quickly early on.

It truly is a coffeehouse like no other in Reykjavík. First of all, it opens its doors to all its regulars when a large portion of the city is still fast asleep. Second, with only six tables, it is most likely you won't be disturbed by too many customers when it's almost too early in the morning to function and you just want to drink your morning coffee and read the newspapers in peace and quiet. And, this is the main reason it gets the honour of being Best í Heimi, it serves the best freakin' tuna salad bagel in the whole country. I challenge everyone who disagrees to recommend a better place for a tuna bagel, or better yet, bring one to our office any time!

Opening hours: Monday to Sunday 7-15.

Text by Steinunn Jakobsdóttir

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MOZART AND BRUCKNER

Conductor :: Petri Sakari
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W. A. Mozart :: Violin Concerto no. 5
Anton Bruckner :: Symphony no. 7

THURSDAY, JANUARY 25TH @ 7:30

DARK MUSIC DAYS

Conductor :: Roland Kluttig
Soloists :: Guðrún Birgisdóttir,
Martial Nardeau
Örlygur Benediktsson :: A new piece
Karólína Eiríksdóttir :: Concerto f. two flutes
Erik Mogensen :: Rendez-vous
Herbert H. Agústsson :: Concerto breve

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 8TH @ 7:30PM

NORDIC MUSIC

Conductor :: Rumon Gamba
Soloist :: Lilya Zilberstein
Jón Leifs :: Galdra Loftur, Overture
Edvard Grieg :: Piano Concerto
Jean Sibelius :: Symphony no. 2

THURSDAY, MARCH 1ST @ 7:30PM

BEETHOVENS' EROICA

Conductor :: Lawrence Renes
Soloist :: Gunnar Kvaran
Hector Berlioz :: Le Corsair, overture
John Speight :: Cello Concerto
Ludwig van Beethoven :: Symphony no. 3

SATURDAY, MARCH 10TH @ 3:00PM

FAMILY CONCERT

Conductor :: Berharður Wilkinson
Benjamin Britten :: Young Persons' Guide to the Orchestra

THURSDAY, MARCH 15TH @ 7:30PM

RUSSIAN GIANTS

Conductor :: Rumon Gamba
Soloists :: Tatiana Monogarova
Sir John Tomlinson
Igor Stravinsky :: Fireworks
Sergei Rachmaninov :: Isle of Death
Dimitri Shostakovich :: Symphony no. 14

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Medical help: 1770

Dental emergency: 575 0505

AA: 551 2010

Information: 118

Telegrams: 146

■ **Tax Free Refund**

Iceland Refund,

Aðalstræti 2, Tel: 564 6400

www.icelandrefund.com

■ **Laundry Service**

HI Hostel, Sundlaugarvegur 34,

Tel: 553 8110, www.hostel.is

Úðafoss, Vítastígur 13,

Tel: 551 2301, www.udafoss.is

■ **Post Office**

Post offices are located around the city as well as in the countryside.

The downtown post office is at Pósthússtræti 3-5. For a full list and info on opening hours visit www.posturinn.is.

Stamps are also sold in bookstores, gas stations, some grocery stores and tourist shops.

■ **Embassies and Consulates in Iceland**

United States, Laufásvegur 21,

Tel: 562 9100

United Kingdom, Laufásvegur 31,

Tel: 550 5100

Russia, Garðastræti 33,

Tel: 551 5156

China, Víðimelur 29,

Tel: 552 6751

For a full list visit Ministry for Foreign Affairs: www.mfa.is/diplomatic-missions/icelandic-missions/

■ **Internet Access**

Most coffeehouses have wireless Internet access.

Computers with Internet connections are available at:

Ráðhúskaffi City Hall, Tjarnargata 11

BSÍ Bus Terminal,

Vatnsmýrarvegur 10

Ground Zero, Vallarstræti 10

The Reykjavík City Library,

Tryggvagata 15

The National and University Library, Arngrímstígur 3

Tourist Information Centre,

Aðalstræti 2

Icelandic Travel Market: Bankastræti 2

■ **Opening hours**

Bars and clubs: According to regulations bars may be open until 01:00 on weekdays and 05:30 on weekends.

Shops: Mon-Fri 10-18, Sat 10-16, Sun closed. The shopping centres Kringlan and Smáralind as well as most supermarkets and tourist shops have longer opening hours.

Swimming pools: weekdays 06:30-22:30, weekends 08:00-20:30 although some may be open an hour longer.

The State owned ÁTVR liquor stores: Mon-Thu 11-18, Fri 11-19, Sat 11-18.

Banks in the centre are open Mon-Fri 09-16.

Getting Around

■ **Public transport**

The only public transport system in Reykjavík is the bus. Most busses run every 20 minutes and price per fare is 250 ISK for adults and 75 ISK for children. Complete route map at: www.bus.is. Tel: 540 2700

Busses run from 07:00-24:00 on weekdays and 10:00-24:00 on weekends

■ **Rent a bike**

Borgarhjól, Hverfisgata 50,

Tel: 551 5653, www.borgarhjol.net

HI Hostel, Sundlaugarvegur 34,

Tel: 553 8110, www.hostel.is

Tourist Information Centre,

Aðalstræti 2, Tel: 590 1550,

www.visitreykjavik.is

■ **Taxi**

Hreyfill-Bæjarleiðir,

Tel: 553 3500 or 588 5522

BSR, Tel: 561 0000

■ **For disabled travellers**

Reykjavik Group Travel Service,

Brunastaðir 3, Tel: 587 8030, www.randburg.com/is/reykjavik_group_travel_service/

A useful brochure, Accessible Reykjavík, can be found at tourist offices.

■ **Car rentals**

Átak Car Rental, Smiðjuvegur 1,

Tel: 554 6040

ALP, Dugguvogur 10, Tel: 562 6060

Avis, Knarravogi 2, Tel: 591 4000

Eurocar, Hjallahraun 9, Tel: 565 3800

A.G Car Rental, Tangarhöfði 8-12,

Tel: 587 5544

Atlas Car Rental, Dalshraun 9,

Tel: 565 3800

Berg Car Rental, Tangarhöfða 8,

Tel: 577 6050

Hertz, Flugvallavegur, Tel: 505 0600

■ **Airlines**

Air Iceland, Reykjavíkflugvöllur,

Tel: 570 3030, www.flugfelag.is

Air Vestmannaeyjar, Tel: 481 3255,

www.eyjaflug.is

■ **Bus Terminal**

BSÍ, Vatnsmýrarvegur 10,

Tel: 562 1011, www.bsi.is

■ **Samferda.net**

A reasonable choice for the budget traveller. You log on to the website www.samferda.net, choose your destination and hopefully find a travel buddy to share the cost.

Cultural Centres and Tourist Offices

The Intercultural Centre

The Intercultural Centre throws occasional cultural events and conferences but its main purpose is to be an information and counselling centre and serve as an advocate for the rights of immigrants in Iceland.

Hverfisgata 18, Tel: 530 9300

www.ahus.is

Icelandic Travel Market

Bankastræti 2, Tel: 510 5700,

www.kleif.is

Information on day tours, accommodations, car rental and everything else you need to know when travelling in Iceland.

Iceland Visitor

Lækjargata 2, Tel: 511 2442,

www.icelandvisitor.com

A travel agency offering travelling package trips and custom-made tours as well as car rental, day tours and accommodations for visitors.

Tourist Information Centre

Aðalstræti 2, Tel: 590 1550,

www.visitreykjavik.is

Offers information for tourists as well as providing internet access, booking service, a phone centre, money exchange service, tax refund and selling the Reykjavik Tourist Card. The Reykjavik Tourist Card gives admission to city busses, various museums, Reykjavik swimming pools, The Family Park and Reykjavik Zoo, The Culture House and the National and University Library.

The Icelandic Tourist Board

Lækjargata 3, Tel: 535 5500,

www.visiticeland.com

All information needed before travelling in Iceland.

Goethe Institute

Túngata 14, Tel: 561 5921,

www.goethe.de/island

A cultural institute that offers movie screenings, lectures and German language courses.

Nordic House

Sturlugata 5, Tel: 551 7030,

www.nordice.is

The Nordic cultural centre organises various cultural events, conferences and exhibitions.

All major tourist spots in Reykjavik also offer brochures, maps and information for travellers.

Useful Information

■ **Where to learn Icelandic as a foreign language**

Icelandic on the Internet,

www.vefskoli.is

Mimir Continuing Education,

Skeifán 8, Tel: 580 1800, www.mimir.is

Námsflokkar Reykjavíkur,

Frikkirkjuvegur 1, Tel: 551 2992

Fjölmenning, Laugavegur 59,

Tel: 511 1319, www.fjolmenning.is

The Icelandic College of Engineering and Technology,

Höfðabakki 9, Tel: 577 1400, www.thi.is

Iðnskólinn í Reykjavík,

Skólavörðuholti, Tel: 552 6240,

www.ir.is

The University of Iceland – Department of Continuing Education,

Dunhagi 7, Tel: 525 4924,

www.endurmenntun.is

■ **Religious movements**

The national church in Iceland is the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Masses are generally held on Sundays at 11:00 in churches all around the capital.

Service in English is at Hallgrímskirkja every last Saturday each month, starting at 14:00. The Roman Catholic Church also has masses in English and Polish.

Other religious movements in Reykjavik are for example:

The Muslim Association of Iceland, Ármúli 38

Ásatrú Association, Grandagarði 8

Bahá'í, Álfabakka 12

The Church of Evangelism,

Hlíðasmári 9

The Icelandic Buddhist Movement,

Víghólastígur 21

Reykjavik Free Lutheran Church,

Frikkirkjuvegur 5

Pentecostal Assembly, Hátún 2

Roman Catholic Church,

Hávallagata 14

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Ásabraud 2

Jehovah's Witnesses, Sogavegur 71

Seventh-Day Adventists,

Suðurlíð 36

Zen Buddhism in Iceland,

Reykjavíkurvegur 31

Independent Church,

Háteigsvegur 101

The Russian Orthodox Church in Iceland, Sólvallagata 10

The Cross, Hlíðasmári 5-7

■ **Trade Unions**

The Icelandic Federation of Labour,

Sætún 1, Tel: 535 5600, www.asi.is

The Federation of State and Municipal employees, Grettisgata 89,

Tel: 525 8300, www.bsr.is

The Association of Academics, Borgartún 6,

Tel: 581 2090, www.bhm.is

Efling, Sætún 1, Tel: 510 7500,

www.efling.is

The Commercial Workers' Union,

Kringlan 7, Tel: 510 1700, www.vr.is

Union of Public Servants, Grettisgata 89,

Tel: 525 8340, www.sfr.is

■ **Useful Websites**

www.visitreykjavik.is (The official tourist website of Reykjavik)

www.gayice.is (Information about the gay scene in Iceland)

www.fjolmenningarsetur.is (The Multicultural Centre)

www.hostel.is

(Hostel International in Iceland)

www.vinnumalastofnun.is (Public employment services)

www.gulalinan.is (The yellow pages)

www.leigulistinn.is (Rent a flat)

www.simaskra.is

(Icelandic telephone directory)

■ **Where to get ...**

Work and residence permit: The Directorate of Immigration, Skógarhlíð 6, Tel: 510 5400, www.utl.is.

Insurance and benefits: The State Social Security Institute, Laugavegur 114-116, Tel: 560 4400, www.tr.is

Icelandic citizenship: Unless you come from a Nordic country, foreign citizens have to have had an unrestricted residence permit in Iceland for at least seven years in order to get an

Icelandic citizenship although some exceptions exist to that general rule. Applications are at the Ministry of Justice and Ecclesiastical Affairs, Skuggasund, Tel: 545 9000, www.domsmalaraduneyti.is

Unemployment benefits: Directorate of Labour, Public Employment Service, Tryggvagata 17, Tel: 515 4800, www.vinnumalastofnun.is

Icelandic social security number (kennitala): National Register, Borgartún 30, Tel: 560 9800, www.hagstofa.is

Driver's license: Those who have a foreign license don't need an Icelandic one for the first six months. After that time you have one month to apply for an Icelandic driver's license. Applications are at police stations.

Tax card: Tax office, Laugavegur 166, Tel: 563 1100, www.rsk.is

Rent subsidies: Social Service Office, Tryggvagata 17, Tel: 411 9000 www.felagsthjonustan.is

Facts on Iceland

■ Iceland is a constitutional republic with slightly more than 300,000 inhabitants. Reykjavik has been the country's capital since 1786 and today almost two-thirds of the population live in the greater capital area.

■ The 17th of June 1944 Iceland became an independent republic. That day is the national holiday and is celebrated all around the country.

■ Alþingi, the national parliament, is the oldest assembly in the world, established at Þingvellir in 930 but restored in Reykjavik in 1844. The parliament is comprised of 63 members, who are elected by popular vote every four years. Icelandic citizens over 18 years of age have the legal right to vote.

■ Parliamentary elections were last held in 2003 with 33.7 percent of votes going to the Independence Party. The Social Democratic Alliance got 31 percent, the Progressive Party 17.7 percent, the Leftist-Greens 8.8 percent and the Liberal Party 7.4 percent. The Independence Party and the Progressive Party formed a coalition and together lead the government.

■ Iceland has 12 ministers with the prime minister and head of government being Geir H. Haarde, who is also chairman of the Independence Party. The President of Iceland is Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson, who has been in office since 1996. He is the Chief of State although his duties are mostly ceremonial.

■ Time Zone: GMT 0

■ Currency: Íslensk króna (ISK).

■ International Dialling Code: +354

■ Weather: Average temperature during summer is around 10°C and winter 0°C. For information on weather in Iceland visit www.vedur.is or Tel: 902 0600.

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Counting in the New Year Across the Globe

Text by Steinunn Jakobsdóttir Photos by Jill Waterman

Jill Waterman, a New York-based photographer, hasn't exactly been out of ideas for what to do on New Year's Eve for the past 23 years. Since 1983, she has travelled to various cities all over the world to document different New Year's celebrations. Focusing on intense activities in the streets, public parties and private family gatherings. A project that started in Paris has led her on a journey around the world of firecrackers, gala dresses and party hats. The result: a truckload of photos capturing ceremonies and social gatherings on this old international holiday. She has witnessed various traditions and chaotic moments. A World War III-like fireworks display in Berlin, a religious festival at Copacabana Beach, a roaring crowd at New York's Time Square, Pasadena's famous Rose Parade and vibrant parties in cities including Amsterdam, Paris, Edinburgh, Shanghai and San Francisco.

After reading about Reykjavik being a big party destination, her trip led her to Iceland's capital where, among other things, she partied at NASA, witnessed the turn of the year at Hallgrímskirkja Church and attended a gala dinner at the Pearl and the Hótel Borg. The Grapevine met with Waterman on January 2 after the whole big shebang was over, when she finally had time to relax after a psychotic night out.

"This project has been an amazing experience. I started it without planning how long I would do it, where I would go or knowing very much about New Year's celebrations in different countries. At that time I was living

in Paris and didn't have any plans on New Year's Eve. I was also new to photography and thought it would be a good way to track my progress in photography and sort of keep an annual check on things. After that first year I decided to make it an annual event," Waterman says.

"New Year's Eve is the only true international holiday, celebrated everywhere in the world regardless of religion or whether the culture actually believes January 1 to be the beginning of the new year. It's also a time that people actually want to be photographed and seen," she adds.

During the first few years the plan was to work on the project for a quarter of a century, but as Waterman's list is long and only keeps growing, it has become almost a never-ending challenge. In the meantime, she has made herself an expert on New Year's celebrations. She has noticed certain changes over the years: "When I started, New Year's Eve was much more casual. There wasn't as wide a range of activities as there has gotten to be in the past ten years due to the coming of the millennium." Waterman spent the millennium in Israel, an area where the Gregorian calendar would least likely be celebrated. "It was interesting because that year fell on a Saturday, the Jewish holy day. In Jerusalem, a segment of the population wanted to squelch the celebration in honour of Sabbath. But there were also charismatic Christians who were very involved in celebrations. I spent midnight in Bethlehem, where they held a large celebration called "A Night

of Peace". That was really special."

One of the more interesting New Year's celebrations she photographed was in Philadelphia. On New Year's Day, an age-old tradition dating back to the Celts and ancient Romans has been transformed into the Mummers Parade, where people dress up in costumes, march in the streets and play pranks.

"The parade has been going on for over a hundred years. Today, it's mainly composed of blue-collar workers who plan for the event all year long. It's very elaborate. In fact, I think it's Philadelphia's best kept secret," Waterman says.

When asked where the best party is, she tells me it's hard to qualify. "There is something wonderful about every place, and they are so very different. In Rio it's a religious event where the followers of Iemanjá make a pilgrimage to the beach to worship the goddess of the sea. Regarding parties, I would say Reykjavik is high on that list. It's pretty crazy and reminded me a lot of the year I was in Miami Beach. There are so many clubs and parties there wasn't enough time to get around to all of them. Here in Reykjavik, we were out until 6:30 in the morning, and there were a couple of places I had wanted to go that we didn't get to. We started early, with visits to the firework stores to photograph the preparations. We went to the bonfire at Aegisdá and spent midnight at Hallgrímskirkja Church. That was crazy with so much going on. After that we went to the clubs, Hressó, Sirkus, and Café Oliver and then to

a liborious party at a new place called Boston. We ended up at NASA at around 3:30, and it was pretty insane. There was a couple pressed against the stage, and the guy was all over the girl. Then there was a fairly heavy woman who was very interested in having her picture taken. At one point she got up on the stage and was go-go dancing to Sir Mix-a-Lot's "Baby Got Back" while the bouncer was trying to get her down. It ended up in a little dance between them. There were good picture opportunities all over the place." Any surprises?

"Well, I was expecting even more craziness. I didn't see any horrific sights. Aside from a few people who threw bottles here and there, I would say that people in Reykjavik were crazy in an orderly way."

Waterman's New Year's Eve Project is sort of a cultural phenomenon. With 23 cities done and still counting, she is far from running out of ideas for where to go. Aside from considering trips to Australia next year and Cuba in 2009, all the glittering party people in Russia, Japan, and Spain may also expect to pose for Waterman in years to come.

To view more of Jill Waterman's pictures and learn about New Year traditions and stories from around the world visit her Web site at: www.newyearphotos.com. To get a sneak peak at some of her pictures from Reykjavik visit: www.photoserve.com and search for her name.



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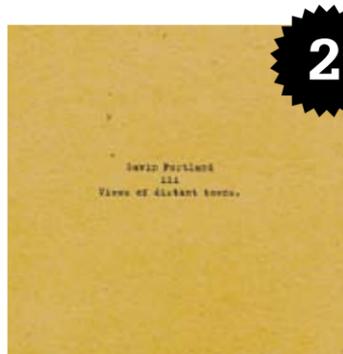
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AIR ICELAND



2

Gavin Portland
Views of Distant Towns 18

"Using a combination of hardcore, punk and alternative rock, Gavin Portland is the band of the future."



3

Pétur Ben
Wine For My Weakness 17

"Wine For My Weakness met my standards and then some. Pétur Ben shows his talent in many areas and does a thorough job. Hopefully we won't have to wait as long for the next album."



4

Brain Police
Beyond the Wasteland 13

"Brain Police have been a favorite with the Icelandic public for a long time, no wonder, since this band has it all, good vocals, groove tunes and on the plus side, it rocks!"



5

Lay Low
Please Don't Hate Me 12

"A very sincere record. She is re-inventing blues-country."



6

Eberg
Voff Voff 11

"Pure pop made by somebody who is ready to experiment with sounds and arrangements. The tunes are catchy and the sounds are atmospheric and imaginative."



7-8

Benni Hemm Hemm
Kajak 10

"Benni Hemm Hemm's latest outing is stronger than his first, even though it's not as fresh a listen."



7-8

Skakkamanage
Lab of Love 10

"I expected a cute and entertaining album from Skakkamanage, but this still surprised me. It is surely cute, but it is also much better than I expected. Really entertaining songs and well performed."



9-13

Jónas Sigurðsson
Þar sem malbikið svífur 7

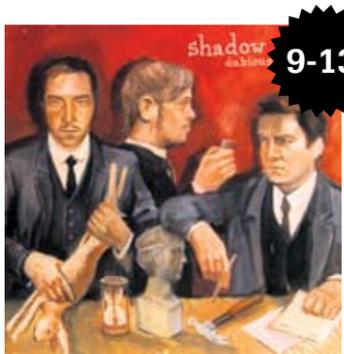
"I never expected that a solo album from the leader of the band Sólstrandargæjarnir would arouse my interest. But life is full of surprise and this album is great. Finally we have an Icelandic Beck."



9-13

Jóhann Jóhannsson
IBM 1401, A Users Manual 7

"Irrepressible beauty."



9-13

Shadow Parade
Dubious Intentions 7

"Dark and gruesome ghostship that stands strong the whole time."



9-13

Ghostigital
In Cod We Trust 7

"A big improvement over their debut album. Wicked beats, arresting sounds and crazy lyrics. Good morning to you! And it features Mark E. Smith on vocals on the dirty disco single Not Clean. Truly great stuff!"



9-13

Skúli Sverrisson
Sería 7

"Skúli Sverrisson's Sería came out of nowhere and refused to leave my head for days."

- | | | | |
|---------|--------------------------|------------------------------------|---|
| 14.-15. | Future Future | <i>Insight</i> | 6 |
| 14.-15. | The Telepathetics | <i>Ambulance</i> | 6 |
| 16.-20. | Red Motor Dog | <i>Rock Machine</i> | 5 |
| 16.-20. | Æla | <i>Sýnið tillit, ég er frávik</i> | 5 |
| 16.-20. | Forgotten Lores | <i>Frá heimsenda</i> | 5 |
| 16.-20. | Changer | <i>Breed the Lies</i> | 5 |
| 16.-20. | Ben Frost | <i>Theory of Machines</i> | 5 |
| 21.-23. | Nico Muhly | <i>Speaks Volumes</i> | 4 |
| 21.-23. | Biggi | <i>ID</i> | 4 |
| 21.-23. | Fjölur | <i>Sonur neyklusamfélagsins...</i> | 4 |
| 24.-29. | Foghorns | <i>A New Low</i> | 3 |
| 24.-29. | Fræ | <i>Eyðileggðu þig smá</i> | 3 |
| 24.-29. | Megas | <i>Passíusálmur í Skálholti</i> | 3 |
| 24.-29. | Ókind | <i>Hvar í Hvergilandi</i> | 3 |
| 24.-29. | Bubbi | <i>06.06.06</i> | 3 |
| 24.-29. | Momentum | <i>Requiem</i> | 3 |
| 30. | Hafðis Huld | <i>Dirty Paper Cup</i> | 2 |

Concert of the Year		
Artist	Venue	Points
Sykurmolarnir	<i>Laugardalshöll</i>	24
Sufjan Stevens	<i>Frikirkjan</i>	17
Roger Waters	<i>Egilshöll</i>	14
Airwaves		
Kerrang! Night	<i>Nasa</i>	11
The Stooges	<i>Listasafn</i>	10
Morrisey	<i>Laugardalshöll</i>	10
Entombed - Mínus	<i>Nasa</i>	10
Brian Jonestown		
Massacre	<i>Nasa</i>	8
Belle and Sebastian	<i>Bræðslunni</i>	8
Sigur rós	<i>Miklatún</i>	8

Disclaimer:
As editor of the Reykjavik Grapevine, I should mention that Haukur S. Magnússon, staff journalist for the Grapevine, is a member of the band Reykjavík!, which the magazine is rewarding for releasing the best Icelandic album of the year 2006.
When selecting the album of the year The Grapevine contacted a total of 17 music critics from

various Icelandic publications and radiostations and asked them to rank the five best albums of the year, with the best album receiving five points and the fifth best receiving one point. The result was that Reykjavík! received 27 points, while Gavin Portland, the number two entry, finished with 18. This is the result of an independent panel, not a selection by the Grapevine's staff.

It was however an editorial decision to put the band, and said journalist on the cover. In making that decision, I came to the conclusion that the band should not suffer for Magnússon's work for the paper, as the decision to put the first placed band on the cover would have been automatic if it were any other band.
-Editor.

The Panel:
Ágúst Bogason, Rás 2, Andrea Jónsdóttir, Rás 2, Arnar Eggert Thoroddsen, Morgunblaðið, Árni Matt, Morgunblaðið, Atli Bollason, Morgunblaðið, Atli Fannar Bjarkason, Blaðið, Búi Bendtsen, XFM, Freyr Bjarnason, Fréttablaðið, Gunnar L. Hjálmarsson, Fréttablaðið, Hildur Maral Hamíðsdóttir, Rjóminn.is, Ólafur Páll Gunnarsson, Rás 2, Ómar Eypósson,

XFM, Páll Hilmarrson, The Reykjavik Grapevine, Snorri Sturluson, XFM, Steinþór Helgi Arnsteins-son, Fréttablaðið/X-íð 977, Trausti Júlíusson, Fréttablaðið, Valli, Dordingull.com



Jóhann Jóhannsson: A User's Manual

Text by Haukur Magnússon Photo by Skari

He used to play in some pretty rough rock bands. These days, Jóhann Jóhannsson doesn't employ loud, distorted guitars to get his points across, yet reaches more ears than ever before. The following interview details the story of a certain transformation, one that's more subtle than you might assume.

It would be fair to say that Jóhann Jóhannsson is catching many of us by surprise. Although he has been an active participant in the Icelandic music scene since the early 90s, when his shoegaze/drone band Daisy Hill Puppy Farm made a small dent in the wall of death-metal that then amounted to the Reykjavik underground, he has mostly worked behind the scenes or within the confines of bands until recently. A glance at his biography will reveal that he has been a driving force within progressive Icelandic music for the last decade; his co-founding of the Kitchen Motors collective/label and the Ap-

parat Organ Quartet speaks volumes in and of itself, as anyone remotely familiar with modern Icelandic music can tell you. Nonetheless, the nature of his work has ensured that his name hasn't exactly rolled off the tongues of the discriminating public.

This has been slowly changing since the 2002 release of his solo debut, a score for Icelandic play *Englabörn*. The piece garnered international critical and public acclaim, which has increased at steady rate with each of his subsequent projects. Reviews of his latest release, the concept piece *IBM 1401*, a *User's Manual*, are almost uniformly sprinkled with the types of positive superlatives and exclamation marks usually reserved for Iceland's top cultural exports, Björk and Sigur Rós.

The Grapevine briefly convened with Jóhannsson over cups of coffee the day after the much-anticipated *Sugarcubes* reunion. His discussion of the *Sugarcubes* show and

its opening acts ("múm were a lot of fun, many new things going on... I was expecting more new material from *Rass*, but they preferred to stick with the classics and did a good job of it") betrays him as an obvious music enthusiast, one who still keeps the fan's perspective on his own profession. Our conversation slowly turns to the classic topic of the motivation behind making music, and if and why people should prefer their musicians to be of an honest and sincere persuasion.

"The music I like certainly possesses more of those qualities. On the other hand selling records is no sin, and I think there are many artists that are actually brilliant in serving both masters, artistically unmatched however commercial they may be. I really respect those artists, people like *Abba* and *The Pet Shop Boys*. Those who pander to the market while maintaining their artistic integrity and avoiding lowest common denominators.

Such peaks in the pop landscape are very rare however, and it's hard to spot something of the sort today, although I admittedly don't really follow that scene. The latest to surface might perhaps be someone like *Michael Jackson* or *George Michael*. Or maybe *El Perro Del Mar*"

Throughout our conversation, Jóhannsson comes off as a soft-spoken and thoughtful type, one who wishes to be taken seriously, but actually warrants the notion, unlike many of his peers. When asked if he enjoys hip-hop, he ponders the question for quite a while before answering that he mostly parted ways with the style in 1990, when he lost most of his interest in the genre: "The first batch of *Public Enemy* records seemed holy to me, their music managed to stretch into a wide array of style, electro, concrete music, punk, but I kind of stopped following it all after that. There have of course been certain artists within hip-hop that have moved me since, but I suppose most of it remains underground and I haven't really had the time to properly acquaint myself with it."

A Movement in the Air

Popular on-line music database *allmusic.com* lists Jóhannsson in the *Electronica* category. It might befit him, as most of his work is done through a computer. However, although his music contains some elements of what Americans refer to as *Electronica* (and Icelanders refer to as "electronic music"), it is at times far removed from some of the canons of that style. Egged on by a reporter, he ponders what making electronic music entails.

"You might say that everyone is an electronic musician these days, even the little kid with an acoustic guitar who records all his strumming on a laptop. Everybody's using the same instruments, except for maybe a few retroheads like *Devendra Banhart*, who's an analogue freak that records everything on tape. I feel that the "electronic musician" tag really relates to anyone recording music today, and that the term itself is both outdated and degenerate. Not a definition at all, rather a superficial label. When you're working on a computer, as most people do these days, then it all winds up in the same digital form and it's only for academics to argue what the source of the sound was, if it found form as a movement in the air or as a movement in the oscillator of some synth."

So you're not an "analogue freak", you don't think it matters if music is recorded in analogue or digital form, something many of your colleagues feel strongly about?

"I don't think it matters at all. For me, it's the end result. I really use a lot of analogue instruments and all sorts of old relics, I get the sound I am looking for through those units but it's not a religion. First and foremost, the tools are a means to a specific end, and I mainly use computers because... well, they're here. Of course they give tremendous opportunities for manipulation. But in any case, I view them just the same as I view instruments, whether its an orchestra, an electric guitar or a Hammond organ. They're all just colours in a palette, tools to build with."

Conceptual Backbones

As well as building a successful solo career, Jóhannsson is also a constant collaborator to artists in other fields. As mentioned above, his solo debut was in fact a score for the play *Englabörn*, although not his first; he has made various forays into writing music for the theatre and film since the mid-nineties. He has also lent his talent to other art forms, in fact the aforementioned *IBM 1401* was originally written as an accompaniment to a dance piece by renowned choreographer *Erna Ómarsdóttir*, who cooperated with him on forming the conceptual basis behind the piece (for more info and behind the scenes, visit: www.ausersmanual.com).

According to Jóhannsson, a conceptual backbone of sorts is important to his works. It provides structure and an underlying idea that connects the dots and provides a wholeness. "I have problems sitting down and just creating an "absolute" or "pure" music, the kind that isn't connected to anything but itself. That's one of the things I find difficult, and that's probably why I've been attracted to creating music for films and the-

atre. As soon as the music echoes to some ideological structure or thought pattern a certain context is created and things flow better, more smoothly. It happened with Virðulegu Forsetar, and also IBM. The concept evolved along with the music, and time. It's music I've been working on since 2001 and collaborating on with Erna.

In many ways I think I work more like a visual artist than a composer; I am not educated in the craft and I think that makes me approach things in a more abstract, ideological way than I perhaps I should. I think I work more from the standpoint of ideological connections and visual wholes than any musicological ideas or things generally attributed to composition. Writing the music isn't an intellectual process for me, however, it's instinctual and unconscious in ways, it happens on a lower plane of consciousness, so to speak."

Was there a specific category of listener he had in mind while making IBM 1401?

"It is made purely for myself. I wrote it for myself and it's just really... the kind of music I want to hear. Even though it's a cliché to say that you have to be true to

not that far removed from some of the ideas of Virðulegu Forsetar and IBM. We took inspiration from bands such as Suicide, The Jesus & Mary Chain, The Stooges, as well as a bunch of electronic music and Philip Glass. Really, when I think about it I am really working with the same elements in a bigger context. There is more, of course, and most people who'd play the albums back to back would be hard pressed to find a connection, but for me it's there.

I really think it took a long time for me to find a voice for myself; that probably didn't happen until we founded Kitchen Motors. A lot of things start happening around that time, that's when the organ quartet is formed and that's when I started to focus on a lot of things that perhaps blossomed in a certain way with Englabörn, my first solo album."

A lot of the early influences he mentions for Daisy Hill Puppy Farm emphasise textures and ambience over melodies, something he seem to stick to even today. Perhaps the connection isn't far fetched.

"That was what we were trying, we weren't particularly punk at all. I think of Daisy Hill more as

"You might say that everyone is an electronic musician these days, even the little kid with an acoustic guitar who records all his strumming on a laptop. Everybody's using the same instruments, except for maybe a few retroheads like Devendra Banhart, who's an analogue freak..."

yourself, I think it rings true. That's the standard I've always gone by, if I like something, if something touches me, then there's a chance it might also touch someone else. That's basically how I determine if something works: does it move me? Is this something I would like to hear, that I would play in my living room? It's that simple. When I wanted to hear albums by an organ quartet, I called up three organ players and asked them to make music with me. It isn't really complicated."

Juvenilia

Jóhannsson's musical roots seem decidedly "rock", serving as guitarist/organ player for local metal legends HAM following the demise of the aforementioned Daisy Hill Puppy Farm. We speak of his progression from a teenager in a rock band towards the man who's Virðulegu Forsetar was described by Stylus Magazine as "an album that seemed to epitomise the uptick in interest that contemporary classical music was enjoying at the time."

He tells me he took a long time discovering what he really wanted to create, that his solo albums are the most personal things he's crafted since Daisy Hill, where he at 18 years old, wrote music for the three piece to play and record, resulting in a record he refers to with the word "juvenilia". He says he has problems connecting with the works of his first musical outlet, before refraining as he remembers that band's later output. "We actually recorded an entire album that was never released, very drone-y, heavy stuff. The music got simpler and simpler, in the end it was ultra basic and minimalistic, really

a psychedelic band than a punk one, but of course there was that primal punk drive behind what we did. The Ramones were a huge influence as well.

If you delve into Virðulegu Forsetar, for instance, you'll see that it's a very simple piece at its core, none more complicated than a Daisy Hill song, or a Ramones one. It's just stretched out and expanded, blown up to... gigantic proportions, and made to be more monumental. That specific piece is all about expanding on some very simple elements, its structure was written in about five minutes although I took a long time to expand and explore on the idea - where that little piece of fabric is viewed in every possible lights, through a number of media such as a brass band, two church organs, Matthías Hemstock drumming and Skúli Sverrisson on bass. They all enable me to examine all the different possibilities that lie within it."

He claims it was written in five minutes, which might come as a surprise to any of the enthusiastic listeners that have embraced Virðulegu Forsetar since it's initial release. He speaks more of the possible connections between his young, rockin' self and the person he is today, the one who accompanied his latest release with a four page manifesto detailing the ideological structure and philosophical quest behind it.

"I think I'm always kind of aiming for the same objective, I'm really just trying to reach a direct connection with people's emotions. I want to write music that touches people in a very direct way, and then simplify it down to a specific core. A pure essence."



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Amiina: The Word for the Female Soul

Text by Helgi Valur Photo by Skari

Who: Amiina
Where: Tjarnarbíó
When: December 7, 2006

There was a nice cosy atmosphere when I stepped into Tjarnarbíó. Candles were burning, lamps were lit and foreign exchange students, who looked like philosophy majors, gave the place a cool underground vibe. I had been told that this concert was a "woollen sweater thing". When people mention the woollen sweater my brain projects a blinking neon sign that reads pretentiousness. I own a woollen sweater so I was pretty excited.

The place wasn't packed, which painfully reminded me of the fact that Icelanders' idea of culture is to watch the X-Factor. If it isn't Mugison or Sigur Rós we don't give a shit. But Amiina have long played with Sigur Rós, so as those thoughts sprang to my head people kept streaming in. Apparently, like during most of my sexual encounters, I had come too early.

Ólöf Arnalds stepped onstage and apologised for forgetting one of her guitars. She ran offstage and in a flash was ready to play. Not a guitar but the Hawaiian national instrument, the ukulele. I've always dreamt of seeing a woman playing guitar well and singing. My dreams were fulfilled. The closeness that Ólöf generated was so intense I felt she was in my bed. I whispered in her ear "keep playing and I'll love you". If there are any feminists reading this who take offence and consider me gender biased

I'll have you know I would review Pétur Ben the same way.

At one point Ólöf forgot her lines and asked Kjartan, Sigur Rós's keyboard player, if he remembered the lyrics. He wasn't paying attention but Ólöf came through at last minute. It was things like these that made this experience feel intimate. I felt at home. And that is what concerts should feel like. Families should be like a great concert and great concerts should feel like family.

Amiina started with quirkiness fitting of members of the Icelandic cultural elite. Noise some would say. Others would call it music. To me it was just foreplay. Soon the noise turned into joy and out of chaos came harmony. The tree huggers and I were feeling it. An electric cello, violins and instruments I didn't even have names for, formed a coalition. mixed with glasses of water and even a saw made it a night to remember.

I was starting to think that the girls weren't gonna sing, but soon the small mythical creatures started to harmonise perfectly. Being a feminist myself, I loved the fact that I was watching a world-class concert and both the acts were performed solely by women. At one point the four Amiinas were all playing violin family instruments and I was loving it. I don't know what "amiina" means but from now on, "amiina" will be a female word for soul to me. I think the word amiina kind of sums up the experience.



You Could Have Had It So Much Better

Text by Haukur S. Magnússon Photo by Katla Gunnarsdóttir

Who: The Brian Jonestown Massacre,
Where: NASA
When: November 29, 2006

I had been looking forward to seeing The Brian Jonestown Massacre perform for the longest time. Throughout the years, their albums have given me hours of enjoyment and some of their songs have touched me in a way most rock songs do not.

What I did not look forward to, however, was the sight of a dead-drunk dude wandering around a stage, crying out for bottles of vodka while his bemused band members tried to seem less embarrassed than they obviously were (save for recently returned tambourine-man Joel Gion, who managed to look completely disinterested at all times). Sadly, this was exactly what the main part of BJM's set amounted to. Endless disappointment.

After what seemed like an eternity of the band plugging in and tuning up, and eventually tuning out, Newcombe handed out salt pastilles to the adoring crowd before a familiar drone sounded and the show commenced. And for a good 20 minutes, all went according to plan. They played classics, and they played them well, the crowd danced and folks sang along. At its best their music grabs you by the nerve endings and drags you along.

Then Newcombe wanted some vodka. The intervals between songs got increasingly longer as the show went on. Various requests for drinks, tuning up, handing out salt

pastilles, and looking bored while the crowd got increasingly thin, dragged on for all too long. While every BJM fan knows that the band has a reputation for rowdy onstage behaviour, fighting among themselves, baiting the audience, I refuse to believe that's what they all came to see. That would be underestimating the music – which is good at its worst, enchanting at its best – and its fans.

Maybe BJM were just moving in on a five-hour set, something that would have evened the bullshit/music balance to a nice equilibrium. That was not to be, however, for the venue closed at one and pulled the plug as BJM prepared to go into their next song. Alas, no one had apparently informed them of Iceland's drinking laws, so they never managed to play the evening's purported set. Too fucking bad.

Decadence has for long been a staple of rock music. It's part of the reasons it's good. Drinking, drugs, fighting and unprotected sex probably amount to about 75 percent of why people like certain types of rock 'n' roll; watching someone live out hedonistic, self-destructive fantasies can provide catharsis and a sense of cool essential to the type of rock BJM play. But, goddammit, they need to play it too. It's not enough to stand around onstage, drinking and looking cool. If that was all the audience were after, they could just as well have saved some money by going to Kaffi Stigur to watch the local bums cavort.

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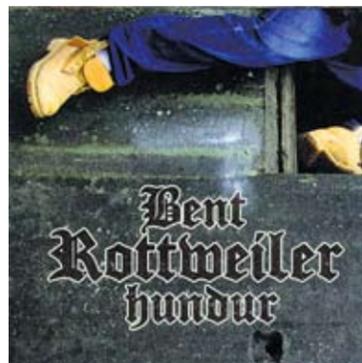
Gavin Portland
Views of Distant Towns

Gavin Portland released two short EPs in 2006, which gave clear hints to what one could expect from their first album. So, it was not really a surprise to learn that Gavin Portland released the best album of 2006. Period. Hardcore influenced indie rock that sounds like no other Icelandic band. It is music that sounds international, as if Gavin Portland could hold their own anywhere in the world and against anybody. It is music that is well thought out and performed with passion. It is music that catches you on the first listen but every listen adds something new. It is in short: fucking great. Its only shortcoming is that it is too short. The best thing to happen to Icelandic rock in a long time.



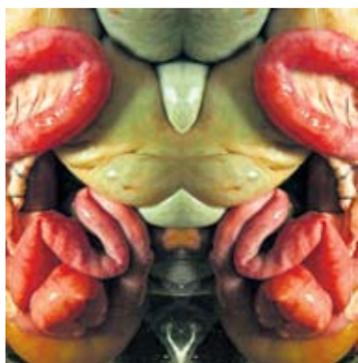
5ta herdeildin
Skipið siglir

5ta herdeildin make playful folk-punk with a big dash of country. Articulate and funny Icelandic lyrics accompany the songs, which are well thought out and performed with a skill that can only be acquired by someone who truly enjoys what he is doing. It is the group's third album, 14 tracks running for a whole hour. There are not many Icelandic bands that venture into this kind of folk-rock for some reason. 5ta herdeildin do it well. It is not very original music but it is never pretentious or boring. A highly enjoyable album. The lyrics are printed in Icelandic and Russian – the Russian label Manchester releases the album. On their website you can listen to three tracks but you are best off buying it. You will not be disappointed (unless you actually prefer Basshunter to Neil Young).



Bent
Rottweilerhundur

Back in 2001, XXX Rottweilerhundur changed (or maybe created) Icelandic rap. One of their members, Bent, is now back with a solo album. Internationally, rap is for the most part in a sorry state. Endless rhymes about bitches and guns, Escalades and expensive champagne. Bent's album is free of this. He rhymes about his personal life (alcoholism) and the society (capitalistic injustice apparent in the number of Escalades on Reykjavik streets). The beats flow nicely and Bent is a great rapper. It is an album that brings hope to Icelandic hip-hop and rap, a well-crafted CD that is highly enjoyable. Intelligent and good rap. I am into that and so should you be.



Future Future
Insight

Future Future were born from the metalcore band Snafu who had a sizeable following and influence in Icelandic underground rock a few years back. Future Future ventures into traditional rock with its first release. It is polished and well played, the recording and mixing is good, but there is something missing to make it stand out. It's never bad but never great either. At times, as in the track Code Civil or the 7 minute long Passion Of Penguins, the band sounds as if this kind of rock really is their niche, but there are moments when one wonders if they would be better off exploring other roads.



Pétur Ben
Wine For My Weakness

Pétur Ben is best known for being the accompanying guitarist to Mugison. On his first solo album, he steps out of Mugison's shadow with his own songs and lyrics. It is a slow, introspective album for the most parts – citing Dylan, Neil Young and Radiohead as influences. It is at always well done but never exceptional – the opening track Look in the Fire is excellent and so is the last one, Make Way for the Flood. Overall, this is a good album, certainly a great debut, but it never manages to reach great heights. Pétur has proven he's a great songwriter and guitar player. If he continues on this track, the next album will be great. Wine For My Weakness is not quite there yet.



Dýrðin
Dýrðin

January is a fucking grim month. After that, we get the even grimmer February. And after that, it does not really get any better for a long time. I am dreading it already. Dýrðin arrive to the rescue with the most sugarcoated summer feeling indie rock I have heard since I do not know when. It is almost like stepping into a time machine, back to the glory years of indie pop. Before the Strokes destroyed it all. Dýrðin has a long history, originally formed in 1994 but lay dormant until 2002. Dýrðin's members were active in various underground groups in the last century (Vonbrigði, Risaeðlan, Bellatrix). 11 songs that for the most part all follow the same formula, but fortunately, it is a great formula. Bubbly-indie-pop that makes you want to drink cheap white wine and dance. This is what is needed in January.

All reviews by Páll Hilmarsson

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Bread Cakes & Heartbreaks

Text by Haukur Magnússon Photo by Skari

A pleasant surprise at last fall's Reykjavík International Film Festival was the screening of Icelandic filmmaker Ísold Uggadóttir's debut short, Family Reunion

The bilingual flick tells the tale of Katrín, a young Icelandic artist in New York who travels back home to attend her grandfather's 70th birthday and faces the task of coming out to her seemingly square family. It features a clever plot, as well as some distinctly "Icelandic" moments that are far removed from the traditional tourist/landscape fare. It has been very favourably received, and was recently selected to appear at the 2007 Sundance Film Festival. Uggadóttir took the time to answer some of the Grapevine's questions.

Family Reunion is shot in two separate locations, with New York represented as a sunny haven for the mild mannered protagonist, where she revels in being in love amidst the atmosphere of a bustling city in springtime. Your Reykjavík, on the other hand, has a gloomy feel to it. You've lived in both places; does the film represent your views on the cities, or is the contrast in how they are portrayed meant to indicate the feelings of dread Katrín has for coming out and facing her family?

It was a very conscious decision to portray these two places as complete opposites. The portrayal is not necessarily a true representation of New York versus Reykjavík, but precisely an expression of how our lead character experiences her own environment. In order to convey this, we processed the film for the New York scenes using a process called "skip bleach", which resulted in a more grainy and grungy look. The colours

turned out a bit more saturated than in the Icelandic scenes. We also shot handheld in New York while in Iceland the camera was often in a fixed position. Iceland was made to look more boring and traditional, in order to get in the head of our lead character and view it through her eyes.

There is a scene where Katrín faces her excruciatingly dull family in their new jeep on the way from Keflavík, unremarkable news blaring from the speakers, surrounded by a bland landscape. It is extremely funny. I'd think anyone returning to a mundane life after a period of adventure could relate. Is it, and other parts of Family Reunion, based on personal experience?

Well, just like any artist, you take moments that you have lived or heard about and build upon them. To start with the landscape in Keflavík is just so incredibly odd; when I was younger I always felt a bit sorry for the poor foreigners that were under the impression that they had landed on the moon, when they had actually expected this hip and cool hotspot of the north. I was drawn to creating an environment to which the lead character could not relate at all, and have her be very at odds with everyone around her. But most of the film is fiction. My father doesn't actually know anything about cars, nor does my mother talk about potential dates. She is an artist, so we can relate on the struggling artist front. She is currently selling the DVD of Family Reunion at her store Kirsuberjatréð, Vesturgata 4, for her indebted filmmaker daughter.

Is there a message or a topic that you're especially interested in conveying?

I am not sure I ever set out to convey a specific message. If so, I would hope to have done

it in a subtle way. I don't really like to tell people how to be or what to think, unless they are in grammar school. But if people take something from the film and perhaps think about it the day after, then I am happy. The original purpose of the film was to make a film. I had wanted to make a film for years, but never took the full step until now. I did want to make a bit fun of typical Icelandic birthday parties, ideas of homophobia, racism, materialism, etc. – just not in a preachy way. Perhaps I was inspired by the fact that Iceland has become the aforementioned hip and cool hotspot of the north, and wanted to show foreigners another side of Iceland.

One of the things that surprised me about the movie is how you managed to cram a lot of different aspects into a 20-minute short. On one hand it's quite comedic, but there is a much wider spectrum of emotion involved. Was there ever an instance where you thought about expanding the short, perhaps to further explore some of the sentiment it evokes?

The strange thing with films is that either they are "short films" – often defined as 30 minutes and under. Or they are "feature films" – defined as 90 minutes and over. There is really nothing in-between. In order to expand the film I would have had to add 70 minutes to it, and with my limited funding and resources, it would never have been possible. But I also really just wanted to make a short film. I wanted to practice, see if I could do this, and if I enjoyed it.

There were times when I realised that I might have material that could potentially work for a feature film. I have heard these types of comments at screenings in the past few months, and some people have encour-

aged me to take the plunge and redo the short into a feature. I am flattered to hear these comments, but right now I would like to make something completely different and take a break from the Icelandic sing-alongs, "bread-cakes" and dozens and dozens of extras. But it is not out of the question that I revisit the topic in the future.

Being a writer/director, are you more interested in the technical aspects of filmmaking, or plain storytelling?

Everything about filmmaking interests me. I am a complete nerd. I have books on everything from directing to budgeting to screenwriting to lighting to editing to camera assisting to film-festival guidance. In my perfect world, I could try every job on the set once. But unless I am happy with the story, I wouldn't want to direct a film. It's true what they say; the only things that really matter in a film are the script and the acting. Anything else is just a bonus.

Could you name some of your influences?

I think everything in my environment unconsciously influences me. But I am conscious of my appreciation of Susan Bier's *Elske Dig* for Evigt, Mike Leigh's *Secrets and Lies*, Lukas Moodysson's *Tilsammans*, Noah Baumbach's *The Squid and the Whale*, Thomas Vinterberg's *Festen* and Phil Morrison's *Junebug*. These are movies that make me want to make one too.

Family Reunion comes off as a very DIY project. Was putting it together much of a hassle, was it difficult to finance; would you do it again?

Oh, it was a complete hassle. It's neverending. At this point, I've probably become obsessive and can't quit. Getting the film onto 35mm prints has been latest endeavour and involved many sleepless nights. But I think I secretly like to be swamped over my head. It makes me feel like things are happening, that there is progress. Sleepless nights are really the story of my life. I seem to be drawn to them. Knowing me, I will do this all over again. Many times.

What can you tell us about your next project?

I believe my next film will also be a short. This time I hope to have more real funding and less chaos. Although I do believe that filmmaking will always involve some sense of chaos. There is really no way around it. I promised myself to start shooting the next project in the year 2007. That is all I will say for now. Oh, and there will be fewer extras and no sing-along songs.

Family Reunion was recently selected for Sundance Film festival, which is essentially a showcase for independent filmmakers. How important do you perceive the opportunity as being in terms of your career and the film's distribution? Are there many breaks at such a festival? And is there anything in particular you would like to accomplish by taking your film to Sundance?

To be quite honest, being selected for Sundance is a dream come true. Although I don't think it will "make" the career of a short filmmaker, I believe it can provide one with the credibility needed to fund upcoming projects. Sundance will also help with finding distribution for a short film, but short films are actually never made as a means to make money. Their primary function is to act as a "calling card" of a director or the production company behind it. By going to Sundance I hope to get a better understanding of how this business works, meet interesting people and promote my film. I'd love to sell it all over the world.

Is there anything in particular you would like to accomplish as a filmmaker? And any specific topics you would like to tackle?

I think I will always be drawn to topics involving everyday life. Relationships, aging, happiness and struggles are themes that I see myself working with. I also like to see the humorous side to topics involving unhappiness.

Finally, do you see yourself as operating as a filmmaker in Iceland?

I see myself operating as a filmmaker in Iceland, New York and hopefully all over.



Filling the Klink & Bank Gap

Text by Ellen Marie Fodstad Photo by Skari

With 140 artists working under the same roof for almost two years, Klink & Bank was 5,000 square metres of artistic energy. Later, the house was sold. What happens now?

On the second day of my first visit to Reykjavík, I visited the house at Brautarholt 1. Somebody had told me there was a free concert there. I opened the door and to my surprise there was no concert hall or bar in sight. I walked through room after room, went up and down floors, saw drawings, pictures, music gear and graffiti, costumes and empty cups. Then a guitar started playing somewhere far away. I have no sense of direction but I let my ears guide me. Finally I made it into a big room where people were sitting in couches listening to a solo guitar player on a stage. He had long hair and a pained expression. Later I started talking to somebody, a Finnish couple gave me some vodka, and a girl invited me to a birthday party and there was some dancing. Back home I would tell my friends that everyone in Reykjavík was an artist.

In 2003, Landsbanki Íslands offered young artists in Reykjavík the use of a big and unused industrial building the bank had acquired in downtown Reykjavík. The bank contacted a group of young artists who had recently opened a gallery on Laugavegur by the name Klink & Bang. They offered the use of the building, free of charge, for one year. Together they decided to put ads in every newspaper in the country for two days, offering people studio space. Out of 500 replies 140 artists, designers, filmmakers and musicians were chosen. Klink & Bank opened in March 2004, housing art studios, rehearsal

rooms, gallery and performance spaces, recording studios and construction workshops on three floors. The only rule was that the space should not be used commercially.

When I returned to Reykjavík a year ago I went to the same address. The doors were locked. The artists at Klink & Bank were only offered the space for a limited time. First it was a year, later extended for six more months. The last people left their studios in November 2005.

I met Erling Klingenberg, one of the eight

Klink & Bank opened in March 2004, housing art studios, rehearsal rooms, gallery and performance spaces, recording studios and construction workshops on three floors. The only rule was that the space should not be used commercially.

artists behind the Klink & Bang gallery that was responsible for Klink & Bank, to hear what happened to all this artistic energy when the house was sold and all the artists had moved out.

"We needed to breathe after it was all over. To digest. During the nearly two years of residence there were many exhibitions, touring concerts, theatre and dance, a rough average of three events per week. There was a crazy energy and productivity, which might not have been as intense if we would have had the place on a permanent basis.

Erling says there was little organisation

involved in Klink & Bank. Almost half the time no one even knew who had the key to the building and practical matters like who should take out the garbage started to become a problem. But from the anarchy and chaos, a genuine artistic experiment was born.

"What happened in Klink & Bank was that people from different fields like music, visual art and dance got to know each other and it influenced their artistic work. One could see all kinds of art working in the same

"We are working on a book about the two years of the house. But there are 5-6,000 images to go through, and it takes time. There has been a lot of international interest, several documentaries about the development of it has been aired abroad. I'm going to Brussels in a few days, to speak about Klink & Bank actually. We have also been a part of exhibitions in other countries and lately there has been talk about a gypsy train."

A train? That will be a challenge.

"No, I mean a train of busses and trucks of artists, designers, musicians, dancers and actors that will perform and have exhibitions through Europe. People can join or get off where ever they like to. We have already started to organise it, but at the same time we are still breathing out after the craziness of the house. Hopefully the gypsy train will happen by 2010."

As I sit and write this, I can picture an old rusty ship full of busses and trucks, leaving Iceland and crossing the Atlantic Ocean. On the deck some people dressed in white are dancing. Others have started to spray paint the trucks in different colours. At the front deck there is a band playing and a man in a cowboy hat is working on a canvas, naked. A woman is filming the sky. The captain of the ship is scratching his ear, with a look on his face that expresses dismay and his hope that their trip will be a short one.

Look out; the Klink & Bank gypsy train might soon arrive in a town close to you.

Despite the relative success of the project, there are no plans to repeat the experiment in the same manner, but the people involved are still reaping the benefits.



The Optimistic Serb

Text by Ásgeir H. Ingólfsson Photos by Leó Stefánsson

The Reykjavík Grapevine met with the Serbian film director Goran Paskaljević in a cosy downtown hotel in Reykjavík. The surroundings are a world away from his most recent films, a trilogy of sorts about Serbia during and after the war. The two latest ones are *Midwinter Night's Dream* (*San zimske noci*) and *The Optimists* (*Optimisti*). The name of the third one, *Bure baruta* in Serbian, *The Powder Keg* and sometimes *Cabaret Balkan* in English.

"It was originally a theatre play written by Dejan Dukovski, a young Macedonian writer. I worked with him on the screenplay and we changed it a lot but the title always remained *The Powder Keg* and that was the title when it opened in Venice. Then Paramount Classics bought it to distribute in America and a couple of months later they called and said we couldn't use that title because Kevin Costner had registered the title for a new film of his, that incidentally never happened. It was absurd, there were already articles and reviews about *The Powder Keg* in *Variety* and other places, but Costner didn't want to give it up and we had to change the title. I hated Costner at that time," he adds with a grin.

The Stepfather's Cinematheque

Paskaljević was born in Belgrade but at the age of two his parents separated and he moved to his grandparents' home in Niš, in the south of what is now Serbia. As a teenager he returned to live in the capital. He had ambitions of becoming a writer and at the age of 15 wrote a book of poetry, but admits that reading the verses now he sees he didn't have the talent for it.

"My grandmother was sick so I went back to Belgrade to live with my mother and my stepfather. My stepfather made the programs for the cinematheque. He had been a journalist earlier but had problems with the authorities so he ended up working there, but that suited him fine. He knew film history perfectly and it was his passion. I myself had no money and no friends in Belgrade so I went to the cinematheque all the time. He gave me a small job there, to collect the tickets at the entrance, and after collecting the

tickets I went inside and watched the films. Some I watched five or six times. I watched the masterpieces of Jean Renoir and many other great masters. That's where I fell in love with films and decided to become a director because I found that through films I could express myself much better than through literature. I remember De Sica's *The Bicycle Thief* (*Ladri di biciclette*), I remember crying and being so moved by it. But I wonder if anyone in Iceland can relate to the title?" he adds. I assure him that even if it's not a common profession here due to lack of bicycles we do have some thieves like that. "

After that I wanted to study film and my stepfather, being knowledgeable about the matter, told me about FAMU, the film school in Prague, is. But it was hard to get into. Out of between 100 and 150 applicants they choose maybe ten. But I got in." For those readers who do not recognise FAMU, the school's alumni also includes such distinguished filmmakers as Milos Forman, Paskaljević's fellow Serb Emir Kusturica, Icelandic director Þórkur Gunnarsson and many more.

Autistic Nation

The second film of the trilogy, *Midwinter Night's Dream*, is a very different from the others despite being part of the same trilogy. Not least because of Lazar's speech, a tale of a soldier who has witnessed scenes so horrible in the Serbian-Croatian war, they have driven him mad. Mad and out of the army. When the film starts, ten years have passed and he is a changed man, out of prison, a gentle soul that for the twists of fate finds a woman and her autistic daughter in his home when he returns. The speech is Lazar's dark night of the soul, and while nothing is really shown, the dialogue and Lazar Ristovski's delivery of it is tense enough to make it an unforgettable cinematic experience.

But it is also a love story, a story of a man that finds a woman to love and a little girl to fight for. While dancing with Jovana, Marija's autistic daughter, he desperately whispers into her ear: "Wake up, wake up!" But we feel it's not only for her, it's also for himself,

and ultimately a desperate plea by Paskaljević himself to his nation.

"When doing *The Powder Keg* I wanted to express the violence that surrounded us when Milosevic was in power. The war had just finished and he started to make aggressions in Kosovo. After Milosevic fell from power and was sent to Hague many of us that had immigrated returned. Most of us came back to our country full of hope, but it didn't last. In 2003 the Prime Minister, Zoran Djindjic, was killed. He had sent Milosevic to the Hague and the war profiteers who had started to buy their way back into Serbia were responsible for the assassination. They are still there. When Djindjic, who was also a very dear friend of mine, was killed I started to lose hope. How can you live freely in this country if they kill the Prime Minister in the street? I felt that as a society we are going through a kind of autism, metaphorically speaking. Then I started thinking about real autism and went to the hospital and met this little girl and fell absolutely in love (Jovana Mitic, who plays the autistic girl in the film), she's adorable. Then I met her parents and spent a couple of months with them and then decided to do the film."

How did the Serbians react to being characterised as autistic? "It wasn't easy, you know. At the premiere there was a big applause, but at the premiere you have your friends present, even if you also sell some tickets. And when we went outside a couple of people shouted at me: "Traitor! Traitor!" It wasn't just that I made a metaphoric film about autism. It's when Lazar delivers the speech about what happened to him in the war, why he left. It was the first time that a Serbian director or artist said: let's admit it, we committed horrible crimes in the war. The story Lazar narrates is a true story. I had wanted to do something about the war and I interviewed people about it while preparing another movie, one that never got made. And I got this story from a man who had lost both his legs. While running away after deserting the army, having fled the scene described in the movie, he paused for a breath and stepped on a mine, losing both legs.

They tell me, "It's not true, how can you say that? What will the world think about us when they see the movie?" I reply: "What is the world thinking about what we have done?" So I'm always attacked for not showing Serbia the way they want us to show it."

The Actor

The Serbian actor Lazar Ristovski plays a big role in all these films. Ristovski, most famous for his role in Emir Kusturica's *Underground*, is a charismatic actor, possibly the most recognizable of Serbian actors, armed with a menacing glare and a kind heart. "He's a very strong actor so you have to really hold him back sometimes. It probably worked better in *Midwinter Night's Dream*, because he was so completely dedicated to that film and we spent a lot of time working with the actors. When you are in the presence of this girl (Jovana Mitic) you never know what she's gonna do, so it's a very special atmosphere. I knew how she was going to act from time to time because I started to know her very well and she had complete confidence in me but you cannot communicate with her. You can't say do this or do that. You just have to put the camera on her and suppose what she is going to do and then catch these fantastic moments when she is completely spontaneous."

It wasn't easy for Ristovski either. "I actually said to Lazar: "Listen, you don't have to meet the girl now, you're going to meet her in front of the camera. And the scene when he enters the apartment and they meet for the first time is really authentic. And after that I was shooting some other scenes while I gave him seven days to know Jovana, the girl, better. It was hard work and a challenging experiment for him. In *The Optimists* I had to hold him back more, because he is so strong and I need to give all the other characters some space, there are some 45 actors in the film. So it's always a fight with Lazar, because he's strong and he can be even more strong than necessary and that has happened sometimes. But I think his best work is *Midwinter's Night Dream*. He absolutely entered into the character and it was a fantastic period for us. It's more than just a film, it was a human experience."

Candid Optimism

His most recent film, *The Optimists* (*Optimisti*) opened this fall. It takes place in recent-day Serbia but much of the inspiration came from a 250-year-old French novel, Voltaire's *Candide*. "I stated that I didn't believe in fake optimism. We have elections in Serbia in December, and there and everywhere in the world, politicians are trumpeting fake optimism, everything must be positive. Filip David, a writer I often work with, told me that if I wanted to do something with that I should read *Candide* again. So I started to think about the theme. I read *Candide* and was completely amazed by how modern it was. That somebody in Serbia is ready to use it as an inspiration for a modern film, 250 years after it was written, that shows a really strong spirit for a book. Then I imagined the film with a hypnotist travelling to Serbia, helping depressed people to get out of their depression. But the script quickly became very complicated and with the first draft it would have been far too expensive. I was pretty downcast about it but then Vladimir, my son, told me to read his unfinished book. He had a lot of similar themes there, even a story called *The Optimists*. So I read his unfinished book of nine short stories and he really became a good writer, you know. Then I proposed to him that we'd make a screenplay together and make the film episodic, an omnibus that Ristovski later tied together playing different characters in each episode."

The connection between literature and film is interesting in the Paskaljević family. Goran's father was a writer, he himself wanted to become a writer but became a director and for the son it was the other way around. "He did a couple of shorts and he couldn't get the money for his first feature and I wasn't sure he had a very good script. I told him that your first film must be something great. It doesn't matter if you are 30 or 35 when doing your first film, don't rush. You need to have a cheap project, but at the same time an excellent project. And then he

started to write because he's really a good writer, for me writing is... my father was a writer. And me and my son went through the father and son period when we didn't speak for a year, it's normal, you have to kill your father." He lets out a hearty laugh, somewhere in there is that strange mix of affection and conflict that seems to characterise not only his films but his nation. "And then he came back to me and we worked together very closely on this script and he's very proud of it, he's fighting for the film even more than me."

But while inspired by *Candide*, *The Optimists* is far from being an adaptation. It comprises five stories, the first and the last episode having the strongest ties to Voltaire's novel. In the first story a hypnotist travels to a flooded town and tries to hypnotise the entire village from their depression, often paraphrasing the mantra of *Candide's* tutor Pangloss: "All is for the best in the best of all possible worlds." Then there is the final episode that features a bus full of people that are either blind, deaf, crippled or have some other affliction that faith healers see as a marketing opportunity. Travelling to a lake that is supposed to heal all their ills they are abandoned by their guide and go on foot, searching for the magical lake, finding a pool of mud. And they are happy in the mud, blissful even."

In Toronto they asked his son Vladimir, the writer, how a young man could be so dark. The 31-year-old Vladimir told them: "Listen, in my generation, my friends, five percent were killed in the war and sometimes it feels all the rest moved abroad." He echoes his father, who has stated that his films never have happy endings because they don't have happy endings in his country. "You can not live in Serbia with all these troubles and not reflect on what's going on." It wasn't always thus, he even made one comedy before the war when Serbia was still just one part of old Yugoslavia. But this war changed everybody, created new borders and a new kind of film.

Radical Nationalism

We continue to connect the dots between our two respective countries. "Serbia is a pretty aggressive country. The people are not happy. But there is something in their character that has been there for centuries I feel, the reaction that if somebody is successful they want to push him down to the same level everybody else is on. "How can this guy do better than us?" they think and do whatever they can to pull him down. Here it seems to be the opposite. If somebody is doing well, everybody is supportive."

He continues: "I think jealousy and hate have in a way become an illness in Serbia because we are so poor and isolated now. We were much richer before but after all the conflicts the economy and the infrastructure has been destroyed. So the new generation just wants to go out. And we can hardly travel because getting a visa is an enormous problem. At four o'clock in the morning you'll see people waiting in front of embassies just to be able to see their relatives. And even if those young people get the visas they don't have the money to travel because the



average salary is around 300 Euros. So it's very hard for them. I read a study that stated that only about 20 percent of them, even less, had been abroad. Even counting neighbouring countries like Hungary. So we have a generation that has never travelled, that can not compare our way of life to anything else. It's hard for them to see through all the propaganda."

I ask him if this generation consider themselves more Serbian than the ones before them. "Yes, the nationalism is deeper now, that's what scares me. Because they listen to the radio and the television all day telling them that we're not guilty, that it was the western world that put us in this position. And they start to believe it. They are simply apathetic. They don't vote, which scares me a lot. That's why the radical party, which is aligned with Milosevic's party and are ultra-nationalist, has around 35 percent support at the polls. Why? Because only 40 percent of the population is likely to vote. The others just say: "I don't care, they are all the same." This radical party and those ex-Milosevic forces still control the secret police to a large degree. And those that do go usually don't return. Ten years ago a big wave of educated young people left the country, mostly for Canada, because they didn't have any opportunities in Serbia. That's great for the radical party because they deal very well with the uneducated people, they don't need the educated people to wake the country up." The time to wake up, to see the world and change their world, is now. Perhaps something Paskaljević's films can help with?

And then there is the unresolved conflict, a little place called Kosovo. "When *The Powder Keg* opened in Venice I was interviewed there and openly criticised the policy in Kosovo. I felt it was completely wrong and that Milosevic was leading us into a whole new war. For that they attacked me on the front pages of all the newspapers that were controlled by Milosevic at the time, they called me a traitor and said that if I was not in jail I should shoot myself if I had any honour. Some intellectuals were just shot like that in the streets after similar articles. So I stayed abroad for awhile, first in France and then I got the opportunity to make a film in Ireland." The situation in Kosovo is still fragile. "We did horrible things in Kosovo, but after the bombing campaign, when they signed some sort of a peace treaty, the Albanians in Kosovo did horrible things to the Serbs also. But the Serbs are officially guilty so it will be problematic. It will create a big Albania on the map. They are against big Serbia, or Croatia, and they will give Kosovo independence and in 10, 20 years they'll unite. But I think the hope for all Balkan countries is Europe, the EU. Once when all these borders, which belong to the 19th century, don't matter anymore a lot of problems will be solved. Serbia without Kosovo is already strong enough to enter the EU. But it will need another generation. Maybe in 30, 40 years."

He misses the old Yugoslavia and the freedom and prosperity they once had. "Serbia was a leader in the region, the whole of Yugoslavia. A beautiful country full of diversities, my generation was proud to be Yugoslavian, to

be able to travel around both in the east and the west. We were never a hardline communist country. Tito was very clever, he held the country together without killing people. They put some people in jail and you were not completely free to do as you pleased but it's not like now when war criminals are millionaires. You don't need a political party in Serbia. If you have 100,000,000 Euros in the bank you are a very powerful man. You can buy power and bribe people."

And it's a hard cycle to break. "Those that go abroad are hard workers, good workers. I was amazed in Toronto when they told me that they had 80,000 Serbian expatriates, mostly young educated people. I met this girl who is a secretary. She has her diploma and is much more clever than any secretary I know, but she said: "Listen, it's a big company, a film distribution company. If I do well I will progress very fast here. So she's ready to do the work. If you'd ask her to be a secretary in Belgrade she'd never accept it because she knows that there she would stay a secretary forever. You must see some hope. But how can you have hope in Serbia if your salary is 300 Euros and you have to pay 400 Euros for an apartment? Most young people still live with their parents. I believe everybody in their twenties should leave their parents' house, but they simply can not afford it."

Despite all this, Goran Paskaljević is quietly optimistic. He keeps on struggling, making honest films about his homeland, stories about all their contradictory traits, what is that but hope? Optimism even.

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An Eclectic Visit to the Lapland & Tallinn

Text by Virginia Zech Photos by Sari Peltonen

Finland has a lot to offer adventurous tourists willing to ride some of the country's trains, ferries, and busses in search of attractions outside Helsinki. As Europe's third most sparsely populated country, getting off the beaten path in Finland isn't difficult and options abound.

Between the Suomenlinna Islands off Helsinki's shores, a lengthier trip to Santa's Post Office, or to Finland's other major cities and cultural centres – Oulu, Turku and Tampere: planning a trip to this northeastern corner of Europe will not leave visitors short on options. For those seeking a vacation with an international escape hatch, Sweden, Estonia and Russia are all a short sea voyage away from Helsinki as well.

My personal quest for excitement outside the country's largest city first led me north, far into the Finnish Lapland and well above the Arctic Circle, to the ski village of Levi. My second search took me south, across the Gulf of Finland, to the medieval Estonian capital of Tallinn. Cheap, beautiful old town Tallinn offers an aesthetic step back in time without sacrificing any of the services one would expect from a small modern city.

The endless train ride that began my journey took 13 hours and transported me

from Helsinki to Kolari, the end of the line. Passengers' options on the overnight train were sleeping compartments, seated transport, and the bar car. This being a special train bound towards the Alpine Skiing World Cup, there was also a disco complete with DJ. Having befriended some Finns on the platform who were carrying skis, I spent the evening in the bar of the disco car partaking in a Finnish favourite, hard apple cider, before sleeping my way into some tremendous neck pain in my small assigned seat.

Skis in hand, I transferred to the second leg of my journey in the morning. The bath-roomless bus that bore me from Kolari the rest of the way to Levi wove its way down snow-covered roads at a blistering pace. Being as the Lapland hosts a World Cup race, I have to say that the scenery getting there is shockingly flat. This is not to say that those who can won't enjoy the passing view. Adorable wooden houses, reindeer, the occasional folks snowshoeing and Nordic skiing, and snow-covered evergreens compose more or less the entirety of the landscape.

Pristine Lapland

According to the locals, competition for travel to destinations elsewhere in Scandinavia and mainland Europe, while none ex-

ists for domestic transport, has kept tickets to the Lapland comparatively high. Because of this, and somewhat to the chagrin of Finns – some of whom have explored relatively little of their native country's wilderness – the Lapland has remained pristine through its relative costliness to reach. The region is also home to Finland's indigenous people, the Sami or Lappish (though the latter term is not always considered favourable). The Sami people are spread to the west across Norway and Sweden and to the east all the way into Russia. In Finland there are spoken in small numbers three different native Sami languages, none of which are considered nationally official.

Levi was host to this year's Alpine Skiing World Cup opener. The entire town was booked out for the event this November. Snow sport enthusiasts from all over the world make the trek to Levi for, well, snow. Its reliability is a perk, particularly early in the season when cold enough weather can be unreliable in the Alps. Levi's reputation as the "best après ski in Finland" certainly can't hurt its prospects as a winter getaway.

I found that booking lodging in advance can make it absurdly affordable for a ski town. Besides the hostel run by the Hulu

Poro (a major hotel in Levi whose name translates from the Finnish as Crazy Reindeer), apartment-style accommodations that sleep four can be found next door and come with washer and kitchen, run around 80 Euros. I can only assume that my sans-heat experience in such accommodations is not the norm, and hope that the same goes for the hotel giving a copy of my room key to a confused young man who arrived in the middle of the night claiming he lived there. Both these rooms and many in the hotels come with the added bonus of (what else?) an in-room sauna.

As it turns out, and perhaps not all that surprisingly, there isn't much to do in Levi, except for skiing, both alpine and Nordic, and engaging in the après ski life that goes into the wee hours. For the posh, the Spa Hotel offers a variety of ways to pamper oneself in the harsh climate if sauna alone fails to satisfy. Though I realise my bias as a ski fanatic may be a handicap in reviewing, I can't see what else anyone could want from such a village.

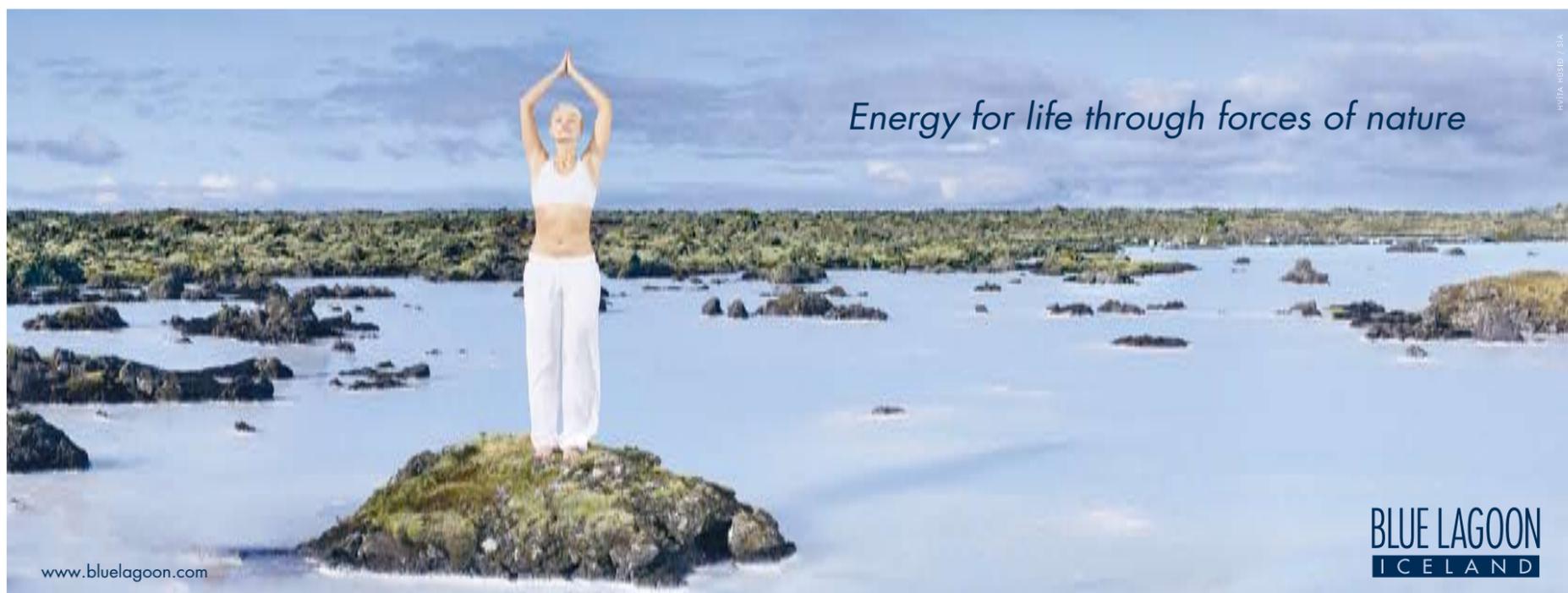
I spent my two days there attempting to accomplish the two things there are to do. My first day on the slopes I explored those closest to my hotel. Ticket prices are under 20 Euros per day, a rock-bottom price when compared to those charged by major resorts in the Alps.

Of course, I lost one of my poles on my first ride up, though luckily, it was the only time. Something about the weather conditions in Levi had made the recently fallen snow harden in picturesque clumps on all of the trees. The extension of white from the ground up into the surreal shapes of foliage lining the ski hills and lifts was nothing short of incredible. Now, if only it weren't for those damn billboards lining the sides of the first lift (admittedly, many of which had also been whited-out), the view would have been spectacular.

My second day I made my way to the steeper side of Levi's ski slopes. A gondola services the top of the mountain here and the run used for the World Cup, the Levi Black. On an icy day, like the one I had, the steep terrain warrants some finely tuned edges. For anyone toting a pair of sharp race skis Levi might offer near-perfect training conditions. For the rest of the ski community, there is certainly terrain in one place or another suitable for most levels of skiers, though those with a penchant for dropping off anything that could be qualified as a cliff might find it wanting.

Après Ski Extravaganza

Dedicated to the idea of finding the infamous nightlife, I started my last evening in Levi late and rested, after a long nap.. I had seen a dozen or so revellers stumbling up the the Hulu Poro Arena driveway on my way to the Cantina. To say that it was much larger inside than it appeared from the parking lot would be a major understatement. Two levels, multiple bars, and dance floor the size of a roller skating rink, were filled by a live DJ and a couple hundred enthusiastic dancers and debauchees, in the aptly



named Arena. I spent a few hours enjoying the karaoke-free sound system, reasonably priced Finnish beer, and company of the incredibly friendly ski-enthusiastic Finns, before the bar closed around 2 and I had to go "home" to pack.

There were no trains leaving Kolari during the three-day window I had given the attendant when I bought my tickets in Helsinki. I had to settle for a longer bus ride to Rovaniemi, where I laid over and ate a reindeer pizza, before beginning the rail portion of my return to the capital. Many Finns will tell the inquisitive visitor that going over to Estonia is one of the best things to do while in Finland. So, after a night's layover in Helsinki, I was off to Tallinn by "ferry".

Aboard the ferry, estaurants catering to several price ranges, smoky onboard bars, dance floors, airport-size duty-free shops, a pool and sauna complex, grocery store, and mini casino, among other attractions, filled the space that wasn't taken up by reserved rooms. Why a boat ride that lasts only three and a half hours would require so many private compartments is beyond me, but they proved quite popular. Through every open door music, conversation, and the clinking of glasses could be heard and many swaggered out of the compact suites, carrying their parties into the narrow hallways.

When we came into port in Tallinn I reclaimed my luggage early from the baggage check and waited for the doors to open, afraid of missing whatever transport lay ahead in the mob of eager weekend tourists. While I waited, an elderly gentleman came and placed his suitcase on the floor next to me, looking haggard. After unzipping the front pocket he took out a flask, drank deeply, and came up looking much refreshed. On the gangplank off the ship I saw a woman lying on the ground with two security officers standing over her, apparently unable to make it from ship to shore. Clearly, my compatriots were here to party: hard, inexpensively and, so far, sloppily.

The cheery mob was nowhere to be found when I stepped into the brisk air outside the ferry terminal and I had no trouble finding a cab into the old town where I was staying. Following the lead of one of my hostel-mates in Helsinki, I elected to book a bed at the OldHouse hostel in Tallinn. Enough good things cannot possibly be said about this hostel.

Hungry and thirsty, I headed to an establishment named the Hell's Hunt with a small group of other like-minded hostel patrons. Reportedly the first bar in independent Estonia (meaning since 1991, after the fall of the Soviet Union), the Hell's Hunt serves local as well as house brews and delicious food. The meatballs drew us back for another round two days later.

The Kiek in de Kok

I woke late on my first full day in Tallinn. My room was empty save for a sleeping Russian tourist. It took the girl working the front desk about half an hour of poking and exclaiming in Russian to rouse him. Given the history, it may not be surprising that though



Russian is widely spoken and understood at a basic level in Estonia, it is not always welcome. The man woke loudly, quickly began yelling about the unavailability of beds for the coming night (Tallinn often books out on weekends) and, after banging around for several minutes, took his one piece of luggage – a beer – and departed.

I found my companions from the previous evening in the lounge downstairs and we took to the street in an effort to capitalise on the few daylight hours we had left for tourism. We found signs to a place called the Kiek in de Kok Museum which, based on the name, sounded more interesting to us than anything else. A branch of the Tallinn city museum displaying cannons and other artefacts from Estonia's medieval past, Kiek in de Kok proved worth the walk and small entry fee. A highly informative video on the tower that houses the museum and its displays is available on request and has English subtitles. Its amusingly costumed narrator says "Kiek in de Kok" a gratifying number of times. In the museum's basement we found photos taken by an Estonian journalist of Moscow's final days of communism that were definitely worth a look.

Next we wandered up the narrow cobbled streets to get a view of whole city from higher ground. The stark contrast of Tallinn's medieval old city, and the high rise skyline of the Radisson and other new edifices being constructed not two kilometres away from where I stood was a confusing sight. Tallinn's old town has been a UNESCO protected World Heritage Site since 1997, meaning that the shining example of preserved medieval architecture will not meet the same glass and steel fate of the city's newer developments.

In the quickly dwindling daylight we made for Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, a large Russian Orthodox church that was completed at the turn of the 20th century when the country was a part of the Russian Em-

pire. Though controversial as a reminder of Russian influence, the cathedral has been restored to all its shining, gilded glory since Estonian independence from the USSR. A rather gruesome painting of John the Baptist's head on a platter, hung obscurely above eye level and off to one side, held my attention for a couple of minutes. Otherwise I was generally, as always, overwhelmed by the glittering gold surfaces and the smell of incense and candles found in Russian and Eastern Orthodox churches.

Party Like a Local, Party 'til You Drop

Tallinn by night, keeping in mind this was a weekend, was as raucous as the day was quiet. Not yet sick of karaoke after Finland, our group found a table at one of several bars catering to the favourite evening activity. Shortly before one of our company, a student from Toronto, gave a rendition of Country Roads to much local applause, my beer was stolen from its spot on the table in front of me. Baffled but not deterred, I bought another just in time to clap along to She'll Be Comin' Round the Mountain. The frenzied enthusiasm for this song, I need hardly mention, I found a bit mysterious.

Our group ended the evening at the impressive club Hollywood, housed in a pillared marble edifice. I found that Estonians are, perhaps reasonably, indifferent or even annoyed by the presence of tourists, as Tallinn is flooded each weekend with a new batch of European vacationers eager to enjoy a weekend away without the expense of many other destinations. If this is the reason that Hollywood has a second VIP level that you can't talk or buy your way into, I don't know but, after running up the stairs to check it out when security walked briefly in another direction, I didn't find any difference there from the first floor except the vantage point and lack of dance floor. And, speaking of dance floors, Hollywood had

one of those mythical spreads with beautiful girls dancing all night long on platforms for all to behold. If you ever make it to this club be sure to check out the ladies room (if applicable). The sinks in there were actually set on a large fish tank.

We spent much of the following afternoon loitering in the village square admiring the gigantic, unlit Christmas tree and watching the children crawling around behind the branches at the base. Petite, portable sheds selling everything from honey to handicrafts to Julglogg were already, in mid November, filling the square for the Christmas season. Among these charming huts was what may be the world's tiniest Indian food restaurant. Having no idea what Julglogg tasted like, and feeling it was my duty to try it, I bought a cup and almost choked on the raisins and almond slivers I swallowed on my first gulp of the warm, spiced wine.

The following morning was my last in Estonia, despite a strong reluctance to leave. I spent my day doing reruns of my favourites in the town: grabbing another plate of those irresistible meatballs from the Hell's Hunt, wandering the streets of the old city until I was satisfied that they were indeed all beautiful. Bidding goodbye to my new friends, I made for the bus terminal.

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What are you doing after work?



Exploring the Historic Sights of Grettissaga

Text by Fabrizio Frascaroli Photo by Fabrizio Frascaroli

"It's not the destination, it's the journey", have you ever heard that one? Even upon arrival at Keflavík International Airport the traveller is reminded of the Chatwinesque saying, as it stands out on the Hertz Car Rental ads along the corridors. And yet, in the case of Icelandic winter, that same statement could be taken as a warning or witty advice, rather than a philosophical outlook on the experience of visiting places. Even when travelling by car, sudden waves of cold and bad weather can actually play havoc with the plans of the most intrepid and systematic journeyman: as the snow and the ice sever all communication, access to (and escape from!) entire localities becomes indeterminately forbidden, until conditions get favourable for the Road Administration's snowploughs to do their job. In this sense, a well-architected trip is not necessarily the one relying on accurate and defined plans, but rather entailing no plans at all. Being ready to change route at any time in order to avoid the blizzard, lending space to flexibility and improvisation, privileging the fact of moving around over reaching prefixed destinations, being content with what discoveries the course of events will lead to – under particular circumstances, these represent the founding pillars of organisational wisdom.

I became most acutely aware of this simple truth – and of the joys offered by roaming without actual goals – on the occasion of my last escape from Reykjavík. I had set out with the intention to reach Látravík in the Northwest Fjords, and stand on Europe's westernmost point; I found myself drifting from farm to farm somewhere else, in an almost archaeological quest, a few hundred kilometres away from my original destination.

Challenging the Weather Gods

As I left town, the forecast was not ominous. But, as occasionally happens, simply inaccurate. By the time I reached Búðardalur – almost a midway point on the way to the Northwest Fjords – in the afternoon premature darkness, large flakes of snow had started descending, already covering all stripes of asphalt in an impenetrable mantle. The storm had reached the western coast a couple of days ahead of expectations. I called the Road Administration switchboard for advice – "It is difficult to make predictions," they told me, "but if you go forth, be prepared for the eventuality of being stuck in the most remote parts of the fjords quite longer than you wish." I pulled eastwards:

the forecast – if it still was to be trusted – was giving fair weather over the north-central part of the country for the next few days. An initial sense of malaise accompanied me as my plans went up in the air.

As one travels in the midst of Icelandic winter, erratic and sometimes prohibitive weather conditions represent only one of the possible sources of surprises – generally, the least welcome. Another class of unforeseen events can be brought along by other factors and circumstances, such as, the facts that the tourist flow is nearly null at this time of the year, and that Iceland remains a country characterised by a very high and diffused sense of trust. As I reached the Sæberg youth hostel in Hrótafjörður, what I found was – not so unexpectedly – an utterly unlit white building, almost camouflaged in the snowy surroundings. No sign of life. A note on the door suggested contacting the warden by phone.

"Good evening. I am travelling around, would it be possible to get sleeping bag accommodation at the hostel for tonight?"

"Sure, just go in and pick your room. The door is open. Have a good sleep."

If I was amazed to find the door unlocked – I hadn't tried the chance myself – I was even more amazed by being let alone the whole time: nobody showed up, neither to make sure all was in order, nor to collect payment for my overnight stay.

In the Country of Grettir

The bays of Hrótafjörður, Miðfjörður, Húnaþing, and Skagafjörður follow one another in a peaceful and almost lazy succession, so different from the jagged and nervous inlets of the northwestern coast. They are the maritime border of a vast agricultural area, renowned for its horses, its farms and its history. While most foreign visitors tend to traverse the region without lingering – a sort of rush-through between Reykjavík and Akureyri – Skagafjörður in particular has become a favourite with the locals, in virtue of the many possibilities for hiking, horseback riding, and especially river rafting that a largely unspoiled nature offers in summertime. Quite evidently, none of these activities go well with the winter harshness, and my visit had to be limited to sightseeing and digging into the area's historical heritage.

A few kilometres from the main road, lies the farm Bjarg, birth- and resting place of Grettir Ásmundsson, the hero/antihero protagonist of the Saga of Grettir the Strong.

The exploration of the Icelandic past and its remains is largely an immersion into the cruel and inspiring world of the sagas, an in-between territory where myth and historical truth find themselves inextricably blended. National history here seems inscribed into the evocative power of the toponyms, as they recall the deeds of a hero, the refuge of an outlaw, the occurrence of a prodigy... In such a context, the visitor is not summoned to stand in awe before monumental vestiges of a glorious past, but rather to fill in the gaps in the landscape, drawing from their own knowledge and imagination.

The territory between Bjarg and Sauðárkrúkur – the largest settlement in the whole region – is all a dense collection of similar locations, backdrops to Grettir's roaming and violent deeds. All the way to Drangey, in the middle of the Skagafjörður fjord, the inaccessible islet where the saga hero found first refuge and eventually his doom, betrayed by witchcraft and by his untrustworthy slave.

While the island of Drangey can be reached by ferry only during summer, it offers – together with its sheer, impregnable cliffs – a most spectacular sight throughout the winter months, as it appears frighteningly close in the cold arctic light. It first revealed its presence to me as I drove my way around the perimeter of the Skagi peninsula – a highly scenic road, along low but menacing cliffs, solitary lighthouses, and scattered farms. Sculptures of ice adorning the fences, and a surreal whiteness spread over the land. The car thermometer read, a not so indulgent, -7° outside. It is probably true: when traversing similar scenery, the pleasure of simply being there can be such, that any thoughts about direction and getting somewhere become basically irrelevant. Not that I expect to have been so keen on these considerations, on those very moments: more likely, I was dwelling on concern for the thick layer of ice covering the steep track, or on the violent wind drifting the snow towards the North; possibly, on a warm sense of thankfulness for having a 4WD at my disposal.

Sauðárkrúkur may well be the most populated settlement in the area – and even the second-largest town in North Iceland, for accuracy's sake. As I saw it in the dwindling, blue-hued light of the afternoon, all gathered around its church, however, it just looked cutely sleepy as a small crib under a bell glass. With a certain disappointment I found the entrance to Kaffi Krúkur shut

– the somehow celebrated one and only local bar, occasionally hosting remarkable live music events – and I had to feel content with the rather discomfiting coffee one is usually served at any gas station.

Although the island of Drangey keeps stealing the horizon away from the coast, Sauðárkrúkur's real landmark is represented by Tindastóll, the mighty massif towering straight above the Ocean's waters, only a few kilometres north of the town. And at its root, Grettislaug, the hot spring pool where Grettir the Strong supposedly bathed, after swimming the four miles of sea that separated the coast from his refuge on the islet of Drangey. Immersion into the pool's water felt comfortably warm, but the idea of an oceanic swim could only evoke cold thoughts.

I found overnight accommodation at a farmhouse in Hegranes, a short way east of Sauðárkrúkur. Again, I didn't really have to struggle for space with fellow visitors, finding myself as the only guest in an overly comfortable six-person cottage. And again, further historical reminders around me: for some three centuries, Hegranes used to be an assembly site, where the chieftainships of Skagafjörður met to hold festivities, as well as settle feuds and legal cases. One of these assemblies was also the occasion for one of Grettir's most infamous exploits.

Waking up to a glorious dawn the next day convinced me that pulling eastwards and avoiding the blizzard had actually been a wise decision. Staring at a morning sun raising among conically-shaped mountains, piercing the clouds, and casting its warmth over a white-clad country can be a most fulfilling sight (especially after a pleasant sleep): it'll be an uncomfortable season, but winter at these latitudes can definitely have its moments.

Heading Home

Pingeyrar is referred to as one of the fundamental historical locations in Iceland. Once the site of an important monastery, today only a 19th-century church is left on the spot, inspiring in its solitude as it stands out in the magnificent surroundings: on the eastern side the imposing Viðíðalsfjall massif, on the western one the Hóp lagoon, flat and smooth like a mirror in a windless day.

Even more fascinating I found the visit to Borgarvirki, a mysterious fortress-like natural enclosure, formed by tall columns of basalt. Despite being an established archaeological site (traces of human activity have been certified) its purpose is still obscure. As often in Iceland, legend and history intertwine, and tradition from the saga wants Borgarvirki to have been a military defence post – the only castle in the country, as the information plate at the parking lot proudly recites. Whatever the case, the place holds a strong, arcane charm, and on such a clear day as the one I was luckily given to enjoy, the view from the top can be utterly stunning, as the gaze effortlessly reaches the highlands of Kjölur, and the great Langjökull and Eiríksjökull glaciers.

The completely still weather and starlit sky I enjoyed on the way to Reykjavík felt like ironic counterpoints to the strong snow-storm warning that forced me to change the course of my trip, just a few days before. And yet, as I thought back, I found no actual reason for complaining about the final outcome. After all, there had been something highly revealing to this casual and totally improvised itinerary. As a trekker and outdoor enthusiast, I had never felt much attraction for the investigation of historical Iceland: I always thought that more about the place is told by its nature than by its past. And I will not claim that my outlook has been entirely modified, in the wake of this last experience – at least enriched, however, yes: that's no overstatement. Especially in the short days of winter, sightseeing and bedtime stories make up for a most healthy mix, one that by no means should be underrated.

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A Tale Of Two New Year's

Text by Haukur Magnússon Photo by Skari

In which a Grapevine staff journalist swaps apartments with a NY couple in time for 2006's passing. Both parties end up enjoying themselves and learning some new things, despite the alien surroundings.

New York City famously outlawed smoking in bars a few years back, a trend that seems very in vogue these days. Indeed, enjoying a cigarette with your beer in any of Iceland's bars or restaurants will be illegal come June.

So no one smokes in New York bars or clubs, and there are no ashtrays visible. A little over two hours into 2007, standing on the edge of a crowded dance floor in the Royal Oak bar of Williamsburg, Brooklyn, this is evident, although some rebellious nicotine addicts seem to be sneaking drags here and there. They do an OK job of hiding it, but what's interesting in all of this to touristy-Icelander me is the fact that a lot of people - and I mean a lot - don't seem at all concerned with hiding the act of shovelling what I can only assume is Cocaine up their noses. Colour me shocked!

A case in point is a 28-year-old sculptor whose name I can't remember. Midway through our conversation, he drags out an insanely large bottle of the white stuff and forms a little hole between his thumb and the back of his hand, pours some of the white stuff in and snorts it up, old Icelandic sailor style. He then pauses for a second before telling me more of how he'd like to visit Reykjavík. And that he thinks the music sucks. And that Björk hasn't done a single worthwhile thing since The Sugarcubes. A couple sitting a few feet away from us proceeded to do some bumps.

Royal Oak is by no means a seedy bar. It is described by the Brooklyn Bar Guide as "classic and intimate [...] a great place to unwind". And it was, although the trendy DJ spinning hipster tracks made it kind of hard to unwind should one want to do so on New

Year's Eve. I briefly wonder if Iceland's imminent ban on smoking will bring further drug indulgence to Reykjavík's bars before I move on to some dancing.

5 Hours Later, 4205 km Away

While this was transpiring, Reykjavík's New Year's parties had for the most part wound down to a halt given the five-hour time difference. Noah and Kim, a lovely Brooklyn couple in their mid- to late twenties who I had traded apartments with for New Year's, were polishing off their last drinks at a house party they unexpectedly got invited to while on the way home at their 2 AM. "We stopped a group of people on Laugavegur to see if they would take our picture and they invited us to go along with them, which of course we accepted. We wound up going to a couple of house parties, one was at the apartment of some artist guy who's name translates as "assfart", I'm told" says Noah.

They enjoyed celebrating the New Year in Reykjavík, to the extent of professing a desire to keep coming back, if not moving to Iceland entirely. My own New Year's celebration started with me inviting a group of friends (and their friends) over to Noah and Kim's apartment, next to the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, for champagne and take-out Italian food. The party was fun and enlightening; the sincere way the Americans proclaimed their belief that 2007 would be a great year after a toast struck me as something I would never catch an Icelander doing. We then headed to a club party, described by New York magazine as "the ultimate year-end destination for indie-rock scenesters" (!). Noah and Kim, however, opted for dinner at 101 restaurant Café Opera followed by a sojourn to Perlan, from whence they observed Reykjavík's attempts at blowing up the ozone layer with fireworks.

"It was the craziest thing we've seen, like a war zone" offers Kim, opting for an oft

used analogy. "There were explosions everywhere," continues Noah, "the quality of the fireworks was actually a lot higher than we had expected. Except for this one little kid who had a crappy firework, a little thing you light up." Not surprisingly, the couple found it weird that little kids were setting off explosives all around town, "three year-olds running around with sparklers". Probably, the custom of exposing little kids to fireworks isn't the healthiest, although public numbers indicate that no more than three or four dozen suffer firework related injuries each year.

Walking back to town from Perlan exposed them to even more little kids with fireworks, they tell me, and they were happy to observe the local families enjoying themselves. "We went to Kaffibarinn, which disappointingly wasn't open at all. Sirkús' 30\$ admission fee seemed like a ploy to get money from tourists. So we walked around for a while before ending up at this place called Celtic Cross. They were playing some really shitty Beatles covers, which we enjoyed making fun of. After a while we decided to go home and get some rest, and that was actually when the fun started, as we got invited to parties on the way."

Business card fervour!

Back in Brooklyn, New York, a group, containing myself, stepped out of a taxi in front of the Williamsburg White Room, where a little indie-rock scenester celebration called "Return of the 12 hour party people" was supposedly filling up with indie-rock scenesters. The cab ride there was an interesting one. Our driver, an Iranian immigrant in his mid-forties, told us in detail how he was enjoying his life in the U.S., and why he had come there. He also told us that "it's gotten a lot harder since 9/11".

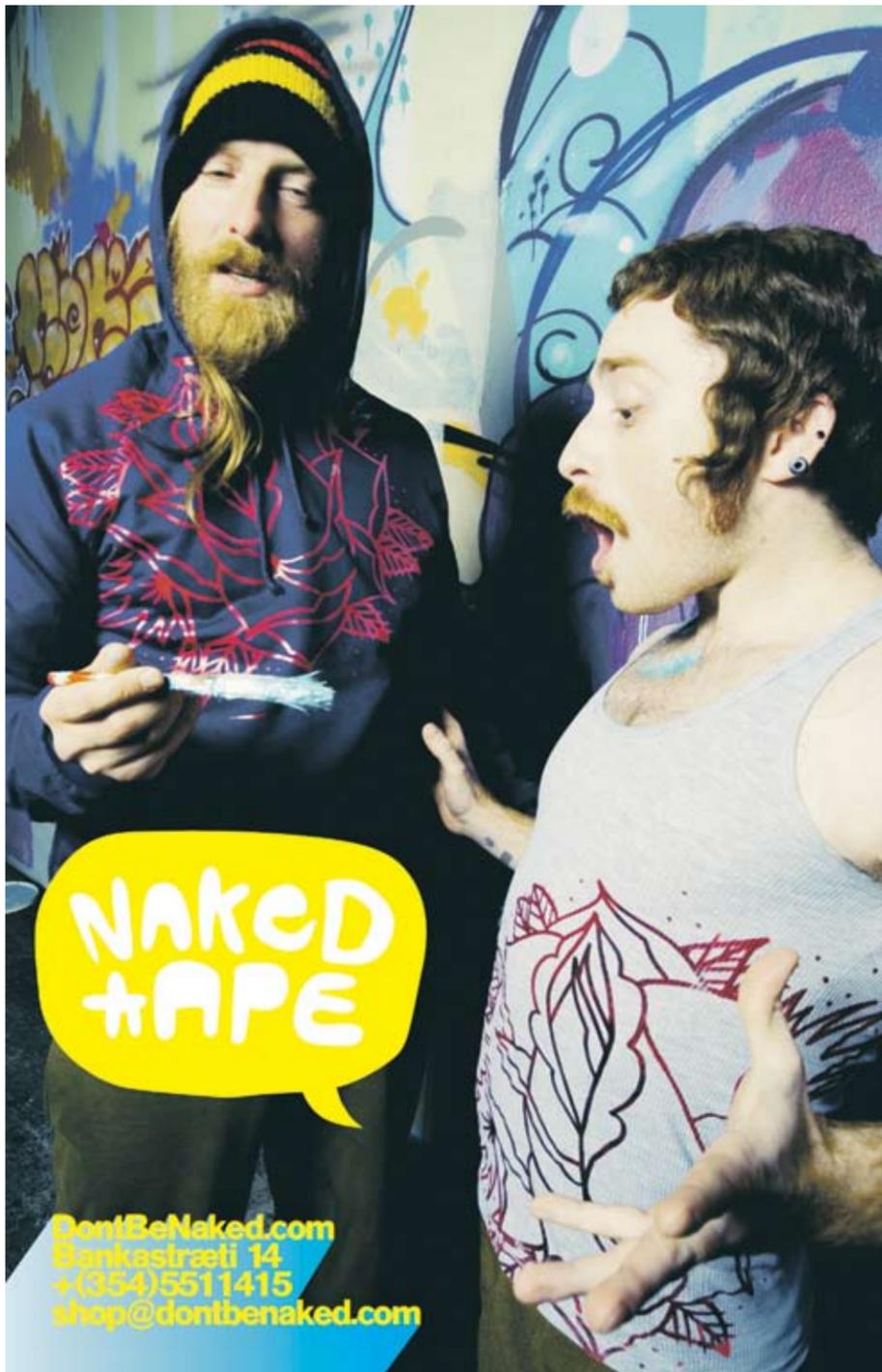
A group of people enjoying their cigarettes (no coke) outside of the party greeted us. Sarah, a 22-year-old philosophy student

at New York University, told us that things were off to a slow start inside, but they were looking better by the minute. Her friend told me that my jacket was cool. I was amused, as people normally don't say such things to strangers where I come from.

Williamsburg White Room seemed ill fit for a party. As we entered what amounted to a sort of empty cavern, an old Smiths tune bounced between the few who had made it there by 10 PM. Drinks were cheap, the music was fine but somehow things never got off the ground. And people kept exchanging business cards in the drink line. After performing, female rap-group Northern State counted down to midnight and the following orgy of French kissing ("So THIS is how Americans celebrate New Year's!"), we decided to venture to the Royal Oak bar. On the way there it started raining heavily. And we got in, and drank some, danced some and smoked none.

Noah tells me the couple now prefers Reykjavík New Year's celebrations. It struck them as more fun. "Like, people having fun and just enjoying each other's company. In the States, New Year's is more of an excuse to make out more than anything, while over there it seemed everybody was having a good time. Also, no one did a countdown, which is huge back home."

My New York New Year's was a fine one, I met some great people, saw some strange things and, refreshingly enough, the alcohol was cheap. And although I did miss the fireworks and annual comedic round-up, Áramótaskaupið, I might even conclude that I prefer it to the Reykjavík manner of ringing in a new year. But it had nothing on the Ísafjörður-style I've experienced.



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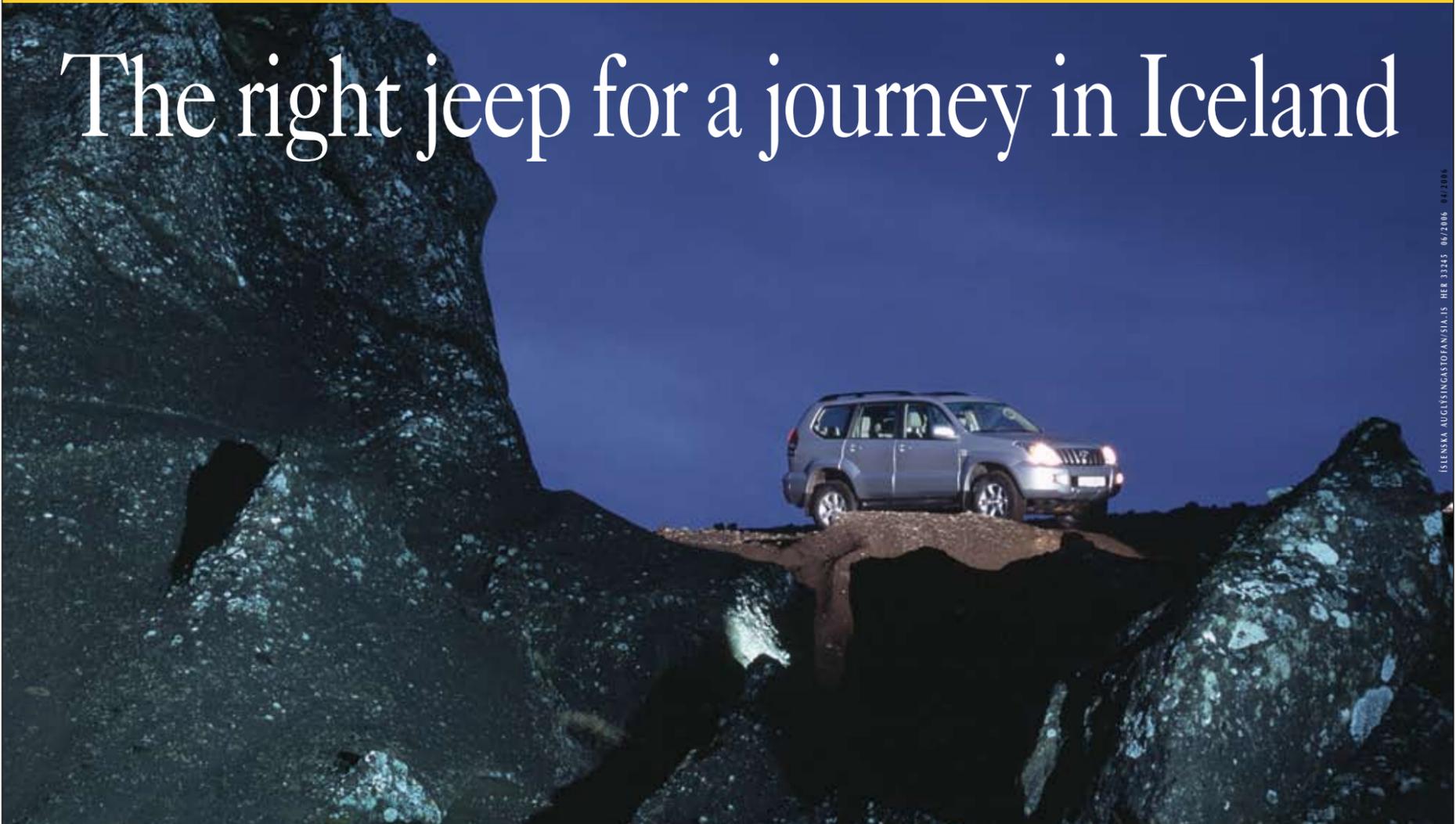


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Stuffed with stuff

“After Milosevic fell from power and was sent to Hague many of us that had immigrated returned. Most of us came back to our country full of hope, but it didn't last.”

Serbian filmmaker Goran Paskaljevic discusses filmmaking in Serbia.

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“We will have “environmental refugees”, something akin to political refugees. What other options will there be for people living in uninhabitable areas, other than migration? If our part of the world is inhabitable, we will have to accept refugees.”

Professor of planning Trausti Valsson discusses global warming.

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“I spent the evening in the bar of the disco car partaking in a Finnish favourite, hard apple cider, before sleeping my way into some tremendous neck pain in my small assigned seat.”

Virginia Zech travels with trains.

Page 44.

“The intervals between songs got increasingly longer as the show went on. Various requests for drinks, tuning up, handing out salt pastilles, and looking bored while the crowd got increasingly thinner, dragged on for all too long.”

Haukur S. Magnússon attends a Brian Jonestown Massacre show.

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