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Disecting the Liberal Propaganda • A Literary Discussion (of Epic Propotions)

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From the Editor's Chair

As the holiday spirit consumes me, let me present my early Christmas present to you: Dear Readers, an all new look to your favorite magazine, The Reykjavík Grapevine. With the publication standing at a juncture, this being our 51st issue, we thought this would be an excellent time to change things up a bit.

I am also proud to announce: An aluminium smelting plant, a heavily disputed dam-project (built to power said aluminium smelting plant), and the Icelandic northwest's capital are among the places that The Reykjavík Grapevine will claim as its own as of this issue and onwards. I am of course talking about the Kárahnjúkar dam-site, Reyðarfjörður smelting plant Fjarðará, and legendary home to Mugison and the Mudball tournament alike, Ísafjörður.

The issue of immigration has weighed heavily on people in the last few weeks. The Liberal party has responded to their own political bank-

ruptcy by blaming foreigners for every conceivable future problem the country might eventually run into. Their discourse does nothing but show-off their complete moral and ideological bankruptcy. As much as the Liberal Party has tried to deny it, they have firmly placed themselves in the company of Jean-Marie Le Pen, Jurg Haider and Christoph Blocher. We now have our very own, Guðjón Arnar Kristinsson.

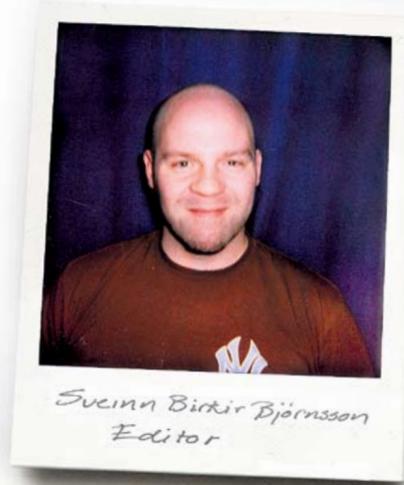
This issue's feature reveals some of the most blatant propaganda in the Liberal Party's discourse. As much as this should be an unnecessary act, serious attempts by the Icelandic media to call the Liberal Party on their B.S. have been lacking or unsuccessful.

On a lighter note, and in spirit of the season, we also bring you a how-to guide for all things Christmas, from eating out, gift shopping and decorations, to the most in-depth discussion of this year's Christmas book titles.

We also put you on the scene of the third EVE Online Fanfest, a nerdy gathering of epic proportions, on the scene of the Sugarcubes's reunion, on the scene with Sufjan Stevens, and bring you all the right reasons for why teenagers should be locked up between the age of 16 to 21.

Other cool stuff we did last month? We swam naked in Helsinki, and danced with the Christmas Cat. Yes, we live dangerously and, curiously enough, live to tell the tale – over and over again – for your amusement.

Drink, be merry, and enjoy the festivities. We'll see you all again in the New Year (those of you using the Gregorian calendar at least, after all, we are a multicultural magazine). And Happy Holidays to you all.



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Dear Grapevine Readers,
The past weeks media reports have been overwhelmed by the immigration issue in Iceland. So far the only beneficiary of this talk is the "Liberal Party" which gained a noticeable rise of supporters in the recent poll conducted for Fréttablaðið (it's worth mentioning that according to the previous poll from last August the party could count on merely 2% of votes). The discussion is on the move, however very little concerning the foreigners policy in Iceland has been done apart from an unfortunate wave of xenophobia and racism (especially towards the Polish minority) flooded over the Icelandic society. The dreadful headlines or major articles about foreigners have been adding fuel to the fire.

The opponents of free labour movement are concerned that such a big influx of foreigners can endanger jobs of Icelanders, since the foreigners are untruly thought to agree to work underpaid. Here it is – something I do not actually understand. Why do those people want to put the whole responsibility for this on foreigners? How can they think that the foreigners who are applying for a job in Iceland from their home countries know about minimal wages, workers' rights and union agreements? They take what they have been offered, supposing they like it. Another group are people who come here to look for work. Without a proper knowledge of the native language and your rights how you can know if you are not being cheated or used by your employer? And the circle closes. Is not it the responsibility of the local and government authorities, the workers' unions to control the labour laws and workers' rights? Especially of those who are most vulnerable, that is the foreigners?

Another point I want to focus on is the free movement of people and labour within the EU and EFTA countries. 8 of 10 new members of the EU were granted that freedom in Iceland on May 1st 2006. I am not sure if Icelanders realise what it practically means for us – people from those countries. Basically it means less bureaucracy, both for employees and employers. Now we are not bound to work for the same employer until the end of the contract, we can quit and change a job for a better offer, we can apply for the first work and residence permit while being here and receive them in a shorter time. It takes less formalities for the employer and what is most important it reduces a need for often dishonest employment agents or illegal work. The Polish minority has been the largest group of immigrants in Iceland for the past years, still is, and it's growing. I am writing in particular about the Polish, as for many in Iceland it is synonymous to the new EU members which is also their biggest fear. At the same time the unemployment rate in Iceland has been constantly dropping or being at the minimum. This gives me and many others non-economists an obvious message: the Icelandic economy is growing, allowing more investments, it creates more jobs and at the end a need for immigrants that can support this rising trend. In conclusion to this matter I want to highlight that it is not my Polish national pride or high self-esteem that tells me that Polish people must be reliable, hard-working and professional workers but the number of Polish nationals working in Iceland (it is said about 10 thousand) and the number of Icelandic employers that are satisfied with the work and want to employ even more Polish people.

I hope that any further discussion about foreigners, immigrants, New Icelanders will not change a very positive perception of foreigners in Iceland that has been so far among Icelanders. I hope everyone agrees that Iceland needs foreigners to sustain its economic status. I hope Icelanders like thinking of themselves as a multicultural society. I hope the government understands that some steps have to be taken soon to accommodate the natural need of the society to integrate immigrants with Icelanders. I hope that the recent outburst of xenophobia and racism is only a momentary side effect of the "Liberal Party" aggressive campaign.

With a lot of hope,
Joanna Dominiczak

We hope so too.

Good Lord Grapevine! I've died and gone to heaven. There is a black woman writing columns on her life as a new Iclander! I'm so out of sorts that I am using excessive exclamation marks! You see, I was in Iceland once too. It has always been a place of interest to me. But, I found in my preparation for the journey, there was NOTHING on what to expect as a black woman (only that whole bit about black servicemen being banned from the base in Keflavik back in the day). So, I was sick with nervous energy as my plane landed in Keflavik—not knowing if I would be gawked at or given hostile stares. I can say that my vi-

sit in Iceland was with without incident. There was only one person who remarked how much they loved black people's teeth because they were so white. As this statement was made in a way that was meant to be a compliment, I wasn't offended – though it did make me feel like a horse, and I did refrain from smiling with my lips parted. But, that's beside the whole point. Thank God for Gabriele. Please keep her on board.

April Dobbins
Visit me at:
www.myspace.com/april_the_artist or www.aprilheartist.blogspot.com

We are quite pleased with her as well, and her teeth.

To whom it may concern:
My name is Laura de la Garza and I'm writing to you all the way from Mexico, to respectfully urge to stop the cruel massacre of whales in your country. Your country, in addition with Norway is the only country that openly hunts whales for commercial purposes.

Although the mails you are sending in response to our protest say that you will not kill endangered species, that is not true. Already 7 Fin Whales have been murdered, and this IS an endangered species.

I know that killing whales is not necessary for the survival of any of the citizens in your country, and many times their meat is only used as fertilizer or pet food.

There is a significant difference between commercial whaling and the aboriginal hunting of whales for strictly subsistence purposes.

It is shameful that a beautiful country as Iceland, considered for us as one of the cradles of civilization, would choose to join Japan or Norway in wastefully exploiting the great whales.

What kind of world are we going to leave for our children. Please, act up to the country you've been and stop this shameful killing.

Respectfully,
Laura de la Garza and family
Mexico City

You have a point there – consider it passed on. Killing whales isn't cool. We hope you also have active letter writing campaigns opposing wars and such. Maquiladoras, too.

News in Brief

Text by Haukur Magnússon, Sveinn Birkir Björnsson, Steinunn Jakobsdóttir and Virginia Zech

Pilots To Bypass Iceland

The Sea Shepherd Conservation Society is asking pilots and owners of private jets to consider by-passing Iceland as a fuel stop until Iceland agrees to cease illegal whaling activities.

According to Captain Paul Watson, President of Sea Shepherd, the idea to come from Sea Shepherd supporter and former eBay President Jeff Skoll. "Many private planes refuel in Iceland on their way to Europe. It is a fairly sizeable business for Iceland. I have already notified Icelandic authorities that I will not be stopping there anymore unless they renounce their new whaling policy and I have been reaching out to others with private planes to do the same," said Skoll.

Other notable names that have accepted Sea Shepherd's challenge include film producer Bob Yari, whose film Crash recently won an Academy Award for Best Picture. Yari said he is involved with aviation and other jet pilots, and will promote this stance any chance he gets.

Shell's manager for jet fuel sales, Þorsteinn Þétursson, had not heard of the initiative when the Grapevine contacted him. He said the company had yet to detect any reduction in fuel sales. However, he feared that if the initiative would be successful, there was a good reason to assume that a reduction would follow.

"I do take the threat seriously, but I guess only time can tell how successful the initiative will be. There is not much we can do as sellers. We are simply being affected by a larger effort to bypass Iceland in a kind of unofficial trade sanction."

Peace Movement Calls for Injunction Against Icelandic Government

Friday November 24, Icelandic peace movement Campaign Against Military Bases ("Samtök Herstöðvaandstæðinga") presented Reykjavik police authorities with a claim for an injunction on Icelandic Prime Minister Geir Haarde and Minister of Foreign Affairs Valgerður Sverrisdóttir's participation in a NATO Head of State and Government summit set to take place in Riga, Latvia, next week.

A statement issued by the movement claims that such an injunction is completely justified since the summit will, among other topics, deal with further military actions in Afghanistan, which the movement feels are in violation of several international treaties that Iceland has committed to. Furthermore, the movement claims that NATO's military actions are said to be in violation of [...] the foundation for basic human rights, the right to life, secured by the Icelandic constitution.

Along with several international treaties, the injunction claim is supported by Icelandic law, Scandinavian legal precedents and reports from various respected human rights organisations, according to the movement.

CAMB's statement closes by saying that it is the movement's sincere hope that their requests will be met with the fullest regard "[...] so as to avoid Icelandic government officials participation in a meeting that will presumably be used to plan criminal activities."

'Liberal Party' Pushes Immigration Issues to the Forefront

November saw an onslaught of political debate in Iceland regarding remarks made by members of "The Liberal Party" on the explosive issue of immigration. In an article published in Blaðið entitled 'Iceland for Icelanders?', the struggling party's latest addition, Supreme Court lawyer Jón Magnússon, voiced his concerns about what he perceives to be a 'relentless stream of foreigners' to Iceland and calls for a tougher immigration law.

In the piece, Magnússon emphasises that he has "[...] nothing against Poles or other Christians from our part of the world. For example, I really like Danes, Swedes and Norwegians [...]. If you try and fight the increased stream of immigrants to the country, that has nothing to do with disrespecting other nations or racial prejudice." He goes on to say that he would not want to see Muslims immigrate to Iceland, and that the country now faces "[...] the greatest threat an independent Icelandic nation and Icelandic culture has thus far seen."

The party's Vice President, Magnús Þór Hafsteinsson, followed Magnússon's lead and continues to echo similar sentiments in talk shows and blog posts, stating that he is concerned with increased unemployment, faltering wages and a rise in crime and poverty following unregulated immigration. In a recent blog post, he stated that he had received tremendous support from Icelanders since the debate started.

"The Liberal Party", formed in 1998, currently has three MPs and has thus far mostly been known for its stance against Icelandic fishing regulations. In a statement, the party's manager, Margrét K. Sverrisdóttir, emphasised that the party is mostly concerned with how the Icelandic governmental system is prepared to handle the increased flow of immigrants, and the effects unhindered immigration will have on the nation's native work force. This should be discussed without outcries of racism, she said. "I furthermore repeat that The Liberal Party does not approve of people being discriminated against because of their religious beliefs. Therefore, those who say that only Christians should get a visa here and not people that belong to other religions do not have a place in our party. The notion that The Liberal Party would support such religious discrimination is preposterous."

Many responded furiously to Magnússon's article, including the Icelandic Muslim Association, whose statement read: "The association hopes that this worthy project will

not be used to spread fear, distrust and racism in our society. We have seen many examples from abroad where racists have used a worthy cause or concern to catch a few votes. All negative discourse on a religion or race harms our society and adds to division within it."

Morgunblaðið has since the discussion arose reported that about 7,000 foreigners have entered the Icelandic job market this year and that a majority of Icelanders is in favour of a multicultural society. Another report citing the Reykjavik police department stated that there are no indications of a rise in foreigners' criminal activities.

Iceland Has Second Most Developed Humans! Highly Indebted, Too

Iceland comes in a close second to Norway in the field of "High human development" in the recently released 2006 edition of The United Nations Human Development Report. Various factors are taken into account when deciding the rank, among those the prevalence of AIDS, tuberculosis, smoking and condom use. The report defines "Human development" as being "[...] first and foremost about allowing people to lead a life that they value and enabling them to realise their potential as human beings," and it's goals as "[...] reducing extreme poverty, extending gender equality and advancing opportunities for health and education." After Iceland, the top five reads: Australia, Ireland and Sweden, respectively.

An altogether less-pleasing report was released by international credit rating agency Fitch Ratings yesterday, in which the company affirmed the Icelandic national treasury's positive credit rating while warning that outlook for Iceland's credit rating was bleak. Pointing out that Iceland was the most heavily indebted sovereign nation that Fitch had rated, and that, along with heavy industry projects that upset the country's social stability and changes in the local housing market, gave cause for future concern.

The report adds that unstable financial markets made the local economy vulnerable to outside effects, such as a change in foreign interest rates, and that a rise in foreign investment fuelled by foreign short-term market loans added to the problem. Therefore it should be concluded that a stable economy for Iceland is still a while away from being realised. However, political stability, the strong status of government finances and a floating exchange rate weighed against the fact in the sovereign rating balance.

Icelanders Protest Israeli Attacks on Beit Hanoun

Several dozen protestors convened outside the Icelandic Ministry for Foreign Affairs Tuesday November 14, where Israeli ambassador Miryam Shomr was scheduled to arrive at 10:45 to meet with Minister of Foreign Affairs Valgerður Sverrisdóttir. Although it

soon became apparent that Shomr's visit had been rushed in anticipation of the protest, the hundred or so (as estimated by Reykjavik police) peaceful protestors were in good spirits, sporting banners and signs bearing slogans such as "Free Palestine", "Israel = Terrorist State" and "Down With The Wall" as the diplomats conversed inside. After her meeting with Sverrisdóttir, Shomr reportedly exited out the ministry's back entrance and thus avoided facing the angry crowd.

According to a Morgunblaðið report, Sverrisdóttir handed a formal letter of protest to the Israeli ambassador, which she is meant to deliver to Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs Tzipi Livni. The letter supposedly condemns the attacks on Beit Hanoun while acknowledging Israel's right to defend themselves. Morgunblaðið quotes Sverrisdóttir as saying that while further action on the Icelandic government's behalf were possible, severing political ties with the state was out of the question.

Hydro Planning a Super Smelter?

Jón Sigurðsson, the Minister of Industry and Commerce in Iceland, met with representatives of the Norwegian energy and aluminium company, Norsk Hydro, last month, where the company's new North Atlantic office in Reykjavik was the subject for discussion.

Norsk Hydro is among the largest integrated aluminium suppliers in the world and was one of the companies that took part in planning the aluminium smelter in Reyðarfjörður. Hydro later on withdrew their interest in the smelter, but after yesterday's visit in Iceland, the company seems to be showing interest in even bigger aluminium projects in Iceland in the future.

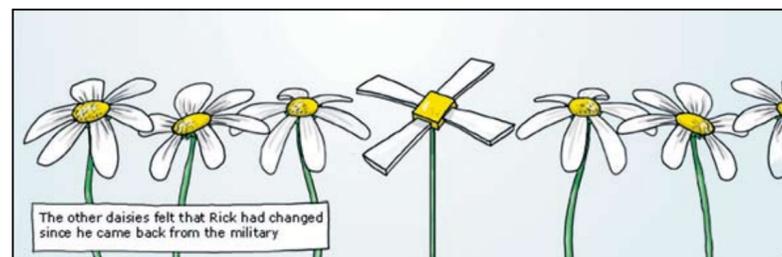
In an interview with RÚV yesterday, Torsten Dal Sjøtveit, the executive vice president of Norsk Hydro, stated that the company was interested in building a new aluminium smelter with an output of 600,000 tons in Iceland, 250,000 tons larger than Alcoa's smelter in Reyðarfjörður.

As a result of news coverage, the Ministry of Industry and Commerce saw fit to issue a press release in which all plans for Hydro's possible smelter are denied, adding that no impending projects were discussed at the meeting.

Reykjavik Celebrates Buy Nothing Day

November 25 marked the opening of Reykjavik's only known "free shop" – the odd type of store that does not accept currency of any kind – which will be operated until Christmas. Located in the basement of Laugavegur café Kaffi Hljómáland, the store is meant to be "[...] a place of free exchange, where everyone can bring and take what they want, free of charge" according to a press release. The opening coincided with the annual 'Buy nothing day', which was celebrated by consumers worldwide.

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There is no Such Thing as a Safe Bet in Filmmaking

Text by Sveinn Birgir Björnsson Photo by Skari

Director Baltasar Kormákur is one of Iceland's most successful filmmakers. His earlier achievements include movies such as: 101 Reykjavík, The Sea and A Little Trip to Heaven. His latest addition, Jar City, based on Arnaldur Indriðason's best selling crime novel by the same name, has been a box office hit. Baltasar Kormákur sat down to talk about his latest movie, which is now being screened in Icelandic cinemas with English subtitles.

Arnaldur Indriðason, Iceland's best-selling contemporary author; Ingvar E. Sigurðsson, Iceland's most successful and popular actor; and Baltasar Kormákur, Iceland's most successful director. With the three of you being behind the movie (Mýrin), this must have been as safe a bet as you could hope for in the movie industry?

When I bought the movie rights to the book back in 2000, Arnaldur Indriðason was not a very well-known author. Betting on me is what my company is about. To call a movie a safe bet... I mean, this is what I do for a living. There is nothing safe in this industry. There has never been a successful Icelandic crime film before. It has never worked. Plus, many people doubted that Ingvar E Sigurðsson was the right man for the leading role. It would probably have been a safer bet to get someone older to portray the main character, someone who was a little more like the character in the book. So, I think within what you are calling a safe bet, we were taking risks on all these fronts, except perhaps that I was directing, but that was obvious since I am making the movie. I also think that the adaptation of the story to the screen was not a very safe bet. The narration of the adaptation is very different from the narration of the book in many ways. So I don't think we approached it in a very safe manner.

You mentioned that Icelandic crime films have never been successful. This is how-

ever not really a crime film. It is the story of a father who is trying to improve his relationship with his daughter who has a drug problem.

Yes, that is true, this is not a hardcore thriller, this is a dramatic thriller, much like Mystic River. It is not the action or the chase that drives these movies; it is the inner tension, the tension in the characters' relationships, and events that advance the story. That is the emphasis I wanted to place on the movie. I did not want to make it into a thriller that the storyline could not have supported.

That might be the difference between this movie and other attempts at Icelandic crime movies.

Yes. I am not saying that one approach is better than the other, I am just saying that you don't see any dramatic thrillers in Icelandic movies, so making a dramatic thriller here was no safe bet. Like I said, it happened when I took the bet in 2000 when the book came out and I bought the movie rights to it. Perhaps I have a nose for this since Arnaldur then became a very popular author. But then again, it can also be very dangerous to turn such a popular book into a movie. It can so easily turn on you.

What made you decide to buy the rights to the book?

I thought it was the first Icelandic crime novel where the story was realistic and everything added up and it had social references that appealed to me. That is why I decided to make it into a movie.

There is a sort of Scandinavian tradition for dramatic crime thrillers, both books and movies, did you try to work within this tradition?

No, I do not really know this tradition. I do not read a lot of Nordic crime literature. I was mostly trying to move as far away from the TV film genre as possible. I tried to approach it more from the language of the cinema, by opening it up, giving space to the landscape,

allowing the pace to slowly gather steam, using a double timeline, the mystery is a little complex and so on. This is something you cannot really do in TV because the audience is not nearly as patient as the cinema audience.

You have said before that you would like to get closer to your Catalan roots in your filmmaking. Is this something you are still aiming for?

I think it would be interesting to do something with my Catalan roots. I have often thought about it. I still have not found the right angle. It is hard to go into a different country to make a film in another language. It is hard enough to make a film in Icelandic. Foreign language films are difficult, and to go from one language to another one within that genre is very difficult, so you have to find the right angle. Foreign language films are mostly financed through public funds and it can be difficult to get financing from them. Just like it would probably not be easy for a Serbian filmmaker to get funding from the Icelandic Film Fund.

Do you speak Spanish?

Well... I used to, but I am probably more than a little rusty. I directed once in Spain. I put on a theatre production of the musical Hair in Barcelona; it was actually done in Catalanian.

Ah yes, the theatre. You were a very successful stage performer and director before moving on to films. What made you decide to make the switch from a relatively secure career in the theatre and go into filmmaking?

Maybe that was just it, I did not want to feel to secure. I had been in a few films as an actor and I wanted to try it myself to see if I could handle this medium. That is when I made 101 Reykjavík. After that, filmmaking rather took over. The movie went all around the world, and I can simply say that no Icelandic movie has ever been screened in as

many countries. So, in a way the success of 101 Reykjavík dragged me into this field. But recently I have been going back into the theatre, although I am doing it on different terms.

You are pretty well-established as a filmmaker now and your production company is doing well; do you find that it is easier to take chances with a project now?

Yes, I think the next movie project I am doing will be very different from what I am doing now. I will probably be taking a big chance with that one. It is more of an experimental project and I cannot really rely on the audience's acceptance with that so a successful film, like Mýrin, gives me an opportunity to take more chances with a film like that. You obviously cannot make many movies with a bankrupt production company and maybe this thought has been lacking here, that companies actually have to turn a profit like every other company.

What is the next project for you?

In January, I'll start working on a project that is a combination of a theatre production and a movie where I intend to take a play by Anton Chekhov called Ivanov and turn it into a movie, while producing it on stage simultaneously with the same cast. I am a big fan of Chekhov's plays. I like the humanity in his plays; they are stories of people and their aloneness. This is a funny comedy. I do not want to make a silly comedy; I am not interested in slapstick. I like humour that is based on the human element in us, strange situations or something like that. I have no interest in making a Jim Carrey movie.

Do you look at a successful film like Mýrin as a way to bankroll more experimental projects like this one?

It is very clear that most Icelandic movies are not a financial success. People are always running into financial troubles with their movies. When I made 101 Reykjavík, I put everything I had on the line. And even if it was a successful movie, it did not make me a lot of money because it was poorly financed. I have made five or six films and out of those, only The Sea and Mýrin have been a financial success. Like I said earlier, when I chose the book, it was just a book I liked, it wasn't even very popular at the time, so I couldn't really think about it in those terms then, although it looks different today, with the attendance it has gotten. We have seen sequels to successful Icelandic movies flop badly, nothing is given in this industry. Take the script for Mýrin for example; I was working on the script for years, without finding a way to make it work. But now, afterwards, it looks like it was a really natural and easy adaptation, but it never looked like that when I was sitting alone at my desk, pulling my hair and thinking how the hell I could make this work. But of course, when you have success it is good to be able to build on that, but one thing is clear, my goal is not to film the next book in the series, and then the next book. That is not the point, even if I might do that at some point in time.

Do you own the movie rights to the other books in the series?

No, I have not bought the rights to the other books. That is just something to think about later. It is not the next project on my list. If that were my only goal, you know, to make money, I would do something else than make movies or work in theatre.

You have decided to screen the movie with English subtitles now, why?

Well, 70,000 people have seen the movie in the last month. It is the biggest movie of the year, and it looks like it will be the biggest Icelandic movie of all time. I just think it would be good to be able to offer all these immigrants the opportunity to see the movie as well. Imagine if 70,000 people, an active third of the nation, has already seen the movie and are talking about it, then it is difficult to be a foreigner and to be shut out of this discussion. This is a part of connecting to the society and taking part in what is happening. My father is a Spanish immigrant as well, so I think it is very good to be able to do this.

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A Short History of Poles in Iceland

Text by Jan Kargulewicz Photo by Skari

The term 'jet-set' conjures up fairly vivid images of things like champagne, guitar amps, geisha girls, breakfast on the Concord or, naturally, whatever the present equivalent may be... but certainly not Polish blacksmiths. Yet, the 'here, there, and everywhere' feeling of Poles in Iceland and all over Europe sort of fits the 'jet-set' criteria.

To be fair, there is no great exodus from Poland at the moment. It's more of a constant ebb and flow, where many of the participants are constantly recycling careers all over Europe and returning home every two-to-six months. It's interesting because somehow, almost overnight it seems, Poles have come to make up the single largest minority group in Iceland.

Not too long ago I was sitting in a bar in Reykjavik with an Icelandic friend.

"Kurwa," he said in disgust at something.

Now, when in Iceland, Reykjavik especially, one gets a feeling of slight disconnect with the ills of the world. That's why I was particularly taken aback when Tandri managed to know, remember, and properly use the filthiest word one can say in Polish.

"Yeah, it's true. They're good workers. Nice people. There's a lot of them here now," my friend said.

Although the Polish population in Iceland seems relatively new, to be fair, one must begin to consider the Polish and Icelandic connection in the 1970s. During this time it seems like a lot of Icelandic fishing companies had their vessels built in Polish shipyards. Naturally, though quite slowly, through these connections the Poles managed to find their way into jobs in the Icelandic fishing industry. Also at the time there seemed to be a shortage of blacksmiths in Iceland. Polish blacksmiths filled the shortage by working in short stints on specific projects then returning home. For most of the 1970s and 80s

it may have seemed like there were a lot of Poles living and working in Iceland. But then, they were all just coming and going. In truth, the number in the 80s never really exceeded more than a total of 70 people. In fact, throughout the 80s only 1.4 percent of the total population of Iceland was foreign. This tiny percentage was from the Anglophone (the U.K., Australia, etc.) world and decidedly distant from Poland. Historically, labour unions, as in the case with the blacksmiths, and also the Ministry

teresting statement. In a study done by Kári Gylfason (one of only a handful of people who have done any real in-depth research on this topic) he notes, "Many Icelandic employers I talked to, noted that Poles were easy to employ as they had similar culture and values to Icelanders."

I guess I fail to see this and, being Polish myself, think Icelanders would be baffled by Polish culture and news headlines (example: "Roof Caves in at Indoor Pigeon Race, Dozens Injured").

Now, when in Iceland, Reykjavik especially, one gets a feeling of slight disconnect with the ills of the world. That's why I was particularly taken aback when Tandri managed to know, remember, and properly use the filthiest word one can say in Polish.

of Social Affairs have both seen immigrant labour as a temporary shortage solution. Only recently have work permits been granted for more than a few months. Even then, in Iceland, the permits have always been granted to the employer, never the worker. Lastly, the Icelandic government reserved the ability to revoke the permit (see the EEA in 1993). There's no graceful misunderstanding here. All of this was a recipe for constant but deliberately short-term work and an overall protection of the Icelandic labour market.

Then something interesting happened. Sometime after the mid-90s Icelandic unemployment fell dramatically. Icelanders had begun to leave the fishing industry and the Poles happened to be there to fill the gaps.

[This is often the case with immigrant labourers. They do not "steal" jobs, rather, they take the jobs that aren't already taken.] When the employment situation changed again after the mid-90s the Poles returned in greater numbers. So much so that their population increased from a seemingly insignificant 70 to over 500 in 1995.

I've been warned, more than once, that there is no real reliable information about the scale of Polish migration. All research seems to indicate that there are about 800,000 Poles working all over Europe and the number of them working in Iceland is approaching 4,000. Of course, with numbers like these new cottage industries are unavoidable. The first Polish market in Iceland opened recently (Stokrotka in Hafnarfjörður). Astonishingly, every week about 250 flights (most on cheaper airlines) leave Poland bound for the United Kingdom. Most remain there. Of the 800,000, roughly half are working in either the U.K. or Ireland, but, more and more often Poles are choosing Iceland.

Again, it's both reassuring and surprising to find that the Icelanders are embracing the Poles. At the tail end of September a Polish culture festival, the first one in Iceland, was held in Reykjavik. The president of Iceland was in attendance and the whole affair was well received. It seems as though this was a public validation of a long journey. A journey that began over 30 years ago in the shipyards of Poland. It goes to show that one of the great equalisers in this world is an open labour market. If only because, when forced together, two entirely different cultures can find similarity, shake hands, share a drink and, if they dare, anecdotes about the short and imagined distance between people.

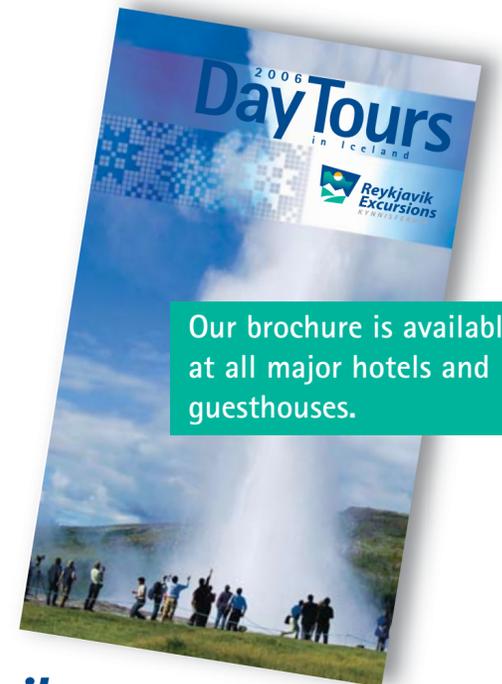
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Youth is Wasted on the Young

Text by Haukur Magnússon Photo by Pallih

The first thing that greeted my companions and myself when we entered the sometime concert venue Broadway on that fateful Tuesday night (after being dutifully frisked by the security staff, of course) was the sight of a dead-drunk 17-year-old boy vomiting furiously on the table he lay on. A colourful mixture of vodka and Red Bull, half-digested pizza slices and god knows what else flowed relentlessly from his young gullet while his vacant eyes betrayed signs of confusion and embarrassment. After a short while the not-much-older-than-him security officers (of which there were plenty) noticed the troubled youngster and proceeded to manhandle him out of our sight. Hopefully, they took good care of him, although the behaviour those self-important boys were to display later that night (and the rough, rough way they grabbed him) doesn't give much merit to the theory.

Several metres to the vomiting boy's right was a drunk, crying teenage girl, mascara stained and sobbing over something that probably seemed important at the time, panties and cleavage prominently displayed. Close by, a fight was breaking out between two bleach-blond boys wearing extremely tight white t-shirts. These sights would repeat themselves in exceedingly short intervals as the night went on.

There was also a stall selling pizza slices and energy drinks, 300 ISK for the slice, 200 for the drink (I sampled both, and while the drink was warm and the pizza was not, they made for a strangely satisfying meal, completely befitting of the surroundings). And then there was some sort of coin-operated dance-off machine that seemed really fun in a perversely wholesome kind of way. And there was, of course, a plethora of advertisements. And then there was the concert that drew them all there. And that seemed fun too, if not wholesome. But wholesome is not the catchphrase of the young. After all, teenagers live forever.

The spectacle in question was a concert by Sweden's latest techno-pop export, the dumbfoundingly named Basshunter. Supporting were lapsed Icelandic hip-hop pioneers XXX Rottweiler and some "Very special guests!" This was the second concert of the night, lasting from 22:00 'til 01:00, and was meant to accommodate 16 to 20 year olds (the night's earlier show served the younger breed of teen). Aside from what

state law implies, the socially accepted drinking age in Iceland has been, and always will be, 16, and this is regularly mirrored in this age group's social functions: people in the process of finding their drinking legs are usually prone to fall down a lot, just like those who have utilised them for too long.

Making our way through a crowded stairway that led to the dance floor below we could hear the intro tape to XXX Rottweiler's impending blast-off. I quite looked forward to the show, as XXXR used to be one of the most exciting live acts operating in Iceland: however, this was not the case that night. The reasons were all too apparent, even through the murk of lasers, smoke machines and the kind of bass that rumbles your insides they simply weren't into what they were doing. And that is always a sad sight.

"Which brings us to the last act of the night, the 'Very special guests!' Those were, predictably, the current kings of exploiting base needs, animal urges and no restraint whatsoever: Dr. Mister and Mr. Handsome."

The only time the band members seemed to truly enjoy themselves was when presenting songs off their respective solo endeavours.

And then there was Basshunter. The glorious reason we were all there, Basshunter makes music for people who really don't care about music all that much – but do care about impossibly contagious hooks and incessant dancing. And that is fine by me, those folks need entertaining too, and entertain he did. Taking the stage after two of the most annoying presenters ever to grace a stage had finished their shtick, Basshunter appeared to the roaring applause of a crowd revelling in the sultry decadence of teenage drinklust and disposable pop.

Basshunter is a scrawny 22-year-old Swede, a self-proclaimed computer nerd, although not of the pimply, Jolt Cola drinking variety, but rather the looks of a model and a sculpted ass to boot variety. He reportedly started making music on his home computer back in 1999 and released his debut album through his webpage in 2004

– a DIY move if there ever was one. Warner music quickly snapped him up, however, and it was through that respective label that he released his sophomore effort, LOL <(^.^)>, this summer, scoring a huge hit throughout Scandinavia with the first single – Boten Anna – a catchy ditty whose lyrics supposedly pay tribute to an IRC-bot. Basshunter was to dispel this myth that night: before he played it for the first time he explained that it was actually about some girl named Anna and her butt, as far as I could tell. The crowd loved it. They would have.

Two so-called Bassgirls accompanied Basshunter; low-cleaved teenage girls who shook their titties in appropriate fashion to the music. As far as I could tell, their dancing wasn't really synchronised, a fact that would reinforce my belief that they were

simply a couple of attendees who had been hand-picked to strut their stuff on stage. And it must be said, Basshunter is an extraordinarily polite and pleasant young man. He repeatedly asked the crowd to cheer the Bassgirls on, stating that they were the most beautiful women he had ever seen and that attendants should be grateful for their presence. Really, he treated those girls with the utmost respect. Then, when the first fistfight of the night broke out in the crowd, resulting in flood-lights being turned on and security rushing the mass of people, the computer nerd seemed genuinely upset at the fact, pleading: "Please. It's much better to love than to fight! Why this rage? Why not enjoy yourself and hug your partner?"

The main attraction was only to perform five songs that night, although he did play two of them twice (his big hit Boten Anna was actually played twice in a row – the crowd went wild both times). I had some very conflicted feelings about the show in general. On one hand, I was appalled that

these kids were being tricked out of their money just to take part in a spectacle that was more reminiscent of the donkey-carnival in Pinocchio (with ads!) than any wholesome youth gathering I've witnessed, and I've been to more than a few. They were all strapped with their cell phones, designer jeans and alcohol, all those things the powers that be try and convince us we need to have in order to properly enjoy ourselves. I was appalled at the low amount of respect the promoters showed the kids, appalled that this was what our extravagant consumer-culture has tricked us into believing substitutes for a good, meaningful time, appalled that many of the kids didn't really seem like they were even enjoying themselves all that much, rather giving off the impression of screaming temper-tantrum kids that finally receive the desired lollipops they only think they want. I was appalled at a lot of things.

On the other hand, the sight of a group of teenagers dancing to their favourite song, boasting exuberant smiles and just being happy to participate in such a social event made me think otherwise. Witnessing such clear and unbridled joy in action reminded me that I should never be the one to judge if anyone is having a good time or not – and kids need their good times. Being one is hard enough as is, and if this is what they want, then by all means, let's give it to them. The providers of such entertainment should, however, try and treat their target-market with a modicum of respect and dignity, like actual persons maybe. Appealing to ones baser needs may often be necessary, but exploiting them to this extent is just plain tasteless.

Which brings us to the last act, of the night, the "Very special guests!" Those were, predictably, the current kings of exploiting base needs, animal urges and no restraint whatsoever: Dr. Mister and Mr. Handsome. Introduced to great applause by the inane presenter duo, Dr. Mister stumbled to the stage to his very own Dr. Mister theme song. He introduced the rest of the band. "Where's Mr. Handsome? Oh, I guess he's backstage, fucking. Well, it's me! The most famous junkie in Iceland. It's true!" Handsome showed up minutes later, hitching up his pants. And Mister continued introducing his band.

Dr. Mister and Mr. Handsome are mean looking dudes and all their songs are about various combinations of cocaine and fucking. I've seen them put on some great, scary shows, oozing attitude and self-destructive cool, dancing relentlessly around on broken glass to broken beats, proudly proclaiming their violent love for all things shiny coke.

That night, they just sucked. It soon became apparent that Dr. Mister had lost his voice. And the band members were, for the most part, wasted out of their minds – in no state to perform in front of a paying audience. While stumbling drunks are often entertaining to watch, it is not very fun to dance to – which was the general idea. Naturally, the dance floor cleared up pretty quickly after they started playing, only briefly regaining its former glory when they played super-hit Is It Love?

Then a fight broke out and the bouncers rushed in and some girls started crying and another teenage boy threw up and some dude climbed up on the stage to dance with his heroes but was promptly kicked off by the very security that was supposed to protect him but instead opted to brutalise him to a shocking degree before dragging him backstage, perhaps for some more brutalising. It just sucked.

One of the lessons this dreary night provided is that the problem with coolness is that once its thin veil drops, and it will, it's just laughable. Attitude and 'cool' are always laughable in the end. They are what we resort to when we get uncomfortable with who we are, or concerned with our status or standing in a social hierarchy. And, as anyone of any markable wit or wisdom has attested to – and this whole night certainly did – those are empty, unsatisfying and in the end futile pursuits. Here's hoping that there's more to life than the animal urge to conquer or prevail.

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12_RVK_GV_18_2006_OPINION

Immigrants – Pandora’s Box in Iceland

Text by Toshiki Toma



I am really tired of a whole range of arguments that surround the debate on immigrants these days. Everybody knows the story of Pandora’s Box in Greek mythology. Zeus gave Pandora, the first woman of mankind, a box full of treasures forbidding her to open it. But Pandora couldn’t resist the temptation to have a look in the box. When she opened it, all sorts of evils and disasters came out of the box and spread into the world...

This may be the situation around the debate on immigrants in Iceland now. The Liberal Party opened the box and all sorts of “in-nflytjendavandamál” – immigrants’ problems – came flooding out into our society. Many Icelanders must have been waiting for the opportunity to say something about immigrants in this country – something negative. So, “Hurray! Everybody, hurry! Throw in everything all.”

It is astonishing to see what a problem we immigrants are for Icelanders and for this society. As a part of the “problem”, I feel ashamed of having been so ignorant of this until now. Let me show you some examples of what has come out in the recent debate:

– There are too many immigrants. Soon there will be more of them than the Icelanders!

– Immigrant workers are cheaper labour in the Icelandic labour market. Their existence pushes the wage level down for all.

– Immigrant workers deprive Icelanders of job opportunities.

– Icelandic language courses consume huge expenses, which are basically taxes from Icelanders.

– Some immigrants insist on the importance of education in their mother tongue and ask for support from the government and the municipalities. Why should Icelanders take care of that?

– Icelanders cannot communicate in Icelandic when they meet foreign workers at shops, institutes or other places. Why do they have to face such a situation in their own country?

– Immigrants cannot understand anything in Icelandic, yet they vote in municipal elections.

– Immigrants don’t respect the laws in Iceland. They try to import their own laws. Many Eastern Eu-

ropeans drive while they are intoxicated, cause car accidents or get arrested.

– Immigrants bring organised crime into Iceland, including drugs and human trafficking.

– They also commit crimes as individuals, such as robbery and rape.

– Immigrants don’t respect Icelandic culture and traditions. They belong to different churches and even believe in different gods. They don’t have the same values as Icelanders.

– If the number of Muslims increases in this society, it will be a total disaster for Iceland. They stick together, respect only their own laws, mistreat women and break the order of the society.....

There must be more, but I think this is enough for now. All of the above statements are discussed now as a part of the “immigrant problem”. This is like a buffet at Christmastime. People can pick whatever they like from the varied menu of “The Immigrant Problem”.

When this one word “immigrants” is uttered, it includes immigrant workers who have recently come from the EEA, it includes wives from Asia or Africa who have Icelandic husbands, former refugees who have settled, their children and those who have already obtained citizenship. And it includes everything, everyone and all therein, namely all those who are not native here. No wonder the discussion cannot go forward or make any sense. This is much too vague for constructive talk.

Being cynical and only standing aloof is not to my taste. So I would like to make a small effort to put things back in order. It is not only negative things that people have thrown in. A small common ground can be a place to start. Now let’s look at the buffet table of the “Immigrant Problem”. Which part of the “problem” really concerns us immigrants?

– First of all, immigrants are not just increasing in numbers by themselves. The main factor that calls them to Iceland is big industrial projects, such as Kárahnjúkar.

While people are shouting about too many foreign workers, Norsk Hydro is showing interest in building another aluminium plant. These projects are made in the name of the government and affirmed by the Icelandic people. If Icelanders think they see too many guest workers here, shouldn’t they stop these huge projects? The increase in numbers of foreign workers is not in the hands of immigrants. It is in the hands of the Icelandic government.

– The same thing can be said about EEA. The free movement of labour within the EEA is a mutual obligation for all the EEA members. Again, the origin of the stream of guest workers is located within the purview of the Icelandic authorities, and by Iceland’s decision to belong to the EEA.

– Immigrants cannot steal jobs from Icelanders when there is only one percent unemployment.

– Icelanders, not immigrants, decide the wages that immigrants are paid. The wage issue belongs to the Icelanders and the native employers.

– True, lessons in the Icelandic language cost a lot. Tax money is needed to pay for that. But who pays the taxes? Is it just the Icelanders? No, it is also us immigrants who pay the taxes.

– Most Icelanders have no idea how much they are gaining from immigrants’ families and their bilingual children! The negative view on educational possibilities in one’s mother tongue is nothing but ignorance.

– As far as I know, the Icelandic police see organised crime as a sort of “cooperation” between Icelandic and foreign criminals. The other crimes such as rape, burglary or drunk driving are, of course, issues. But those crimes concern criminals, not nationality or people’s origins.

– True, Muslims live here, but why is this potentially part of a problem? We cannot just import international propaganda and use it as a weapon to attack immigrants who are here now.

– I have much to contradict the assertion that immigrants have a different system of values than Icelanders, and that they therefore cannot live with Icelanders and their culture. I will wait for another opportunity to express myself about this.

I am not saying that everything is fine with immigrants’ issues in Iceland. There are certainly things that we have to think through, discuss and work on. In order to do so, however, we need to follow the facts, specify the issues, analyse them and discuss each one objectively. It is also important that we explain our own philosophy regarding how we want our society to develop and how we want to live. Dear readers, that is a natural procedure in how to handle these issues. But sometimes people don’t follow the most natural and fair procedure. They may even forget it and fall into chaos. Soon it will be time for us to leave this chaotic situation and begin to work on real issues.

I remember the end of the story of Pandora’s Box. After all the evils have come out into human society, only “hope” remains in the hands of Pandora. Hope was Pandora’s only tool to work with, but it in the end it was enough to start with. I want to believe the same. We have “hope” for a better future in our hands, both Icelanders and immigrants, and that’s where we have to start working together.

Toshiki Toma is a pastor for immigrants and political scientist.

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14_RVK_GV_18_2006_OPINION

Simply Speaking

Text by Gabriele R. Guðbjartsson



Silence is golden; however, living in a world with nothing but that can be the antithesis of anything bright and shiny. Inhabiting a nation where the native language is miles away from your mother tongue can seem quite lonely at times. When surrounded by native speakers you usually find yourself faced with two options: become invisible or find something really pretty to stare at until someone realises that you have no idea what's going on.

However, fear not my fellow newcomers, there is a third option. You can bite the bullet and actually learn the language. As we all know, mastering any new language can be a daunting task. Moreover, the idea of learning Icelandic can mirror the concept of a person trying to climb Mount Everest wearing a wetsuit with a surfboard strapped to their back. The motivation is there, but everything you've come

being able to read the newspapers and understand the news leaves you in an empty and isolated state. You also aren't as interested in investigating major domestic issues when they aren't as readily accessible.

At present the Icelandic government has also felt a push in assisting foreigners with becoming acclimated language-wise. In 2007 the Icelandic Ministry of Education will spearhead a project offering free Icelandic lessons for up to 2,000 foreigners over the next three years. The 100 million krónur provided for the program is said to be utilised for the education of teachers, developing materials and curriculum. To be honest, I'm a little sceptical about government-run projects for foreigners that do not incorporate the perspectives and experiences of those they purport to be helping. Many government programs focused on immigration are established with good intentions but oftentimes fail to meet the standards of a high-quality program. I could be wrong and the program could go off without a hitch; however, based on my first experience in taking an Icelandic course in this country, the government is going to need all the help it can get.

Last month I endured a ten-week course conveniently named "Icelandic for Beginners." Although I did not assume I'd walk out of the class with a level comparable to that of the Son of Iceland, Leifur Eiríksson, I did want to at least be able to engage in simple

"Based on the complex grammar and the forever changing pronunciation of each word, learning Icelandic is not an easy course to run."

with is all wrong. The entire process can be even more discouraging if you're like me and your native language is grammatically and verbally on a different planet from this seasoned vernacular.

As English is one of the most widely used languages in the world, it hasn't been too difficult to communicate and get around in Iceland. Nevertheless, it does not negate the fact that Icelanders always prefer to speak Icelandic and that there are myriad setbacks if you cannot converse in the local language. For example, having three separate degrees of higher education does not qualify me for a job above cleaning a school kitchen. Initially I was offended, but it quickly forced me to come to terms with the reality of my limited language skills. An additional hindrance is the wall that separates you from getting to know Icelandic people intimately. Individuals are more likely to reveal who they are when they can express themselves in their own language. Despite the notion that most Icelanders would rather go streaking in the middle of winter than openly express how they feel, connections are more apt to form with a mutual understanding of one another.

Furthermore, when you dwell in any place you want to have your ear on the street and a sense of what's happening around you. Not

conversation. Unfortunately, I was (sadly) too optimistic. Not only can I not even ask my husband to turn the soccer game off in his own language (because clearly he conveniently refuses to understand English at these times), I walked out of the class feeling as if I should have been paid for those ten weeks. Yes, it does take two to tango and I could have put in many hours of practise, however, one of the major problems was the actual method in which the language was taught.

As a former educator myself I do know a few things about how to convey material to a class of beginners and it does not commence with the telling the class, "You just have to get a feeling for it." Are you kidding me? How do you just acquire a feeling for sounds and words that have never grazed your tongue before? Based on the complex grammar and the forever changing pronunciation of each word, learning Icelandic is not an easy course to run, which means it needs to be taught by skilled professionals trained in the discipline of linguistics. So my caveat to the government is that they spend their money wisely so that students walk away feeling motivated and satisfied with their decision to no longer sit in silence.



The Reykjavík Grapevine Readers Survey



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You Can Take My Life, But You'll Never Take My Freedom!

Text by Steinunn Jakobsdóttir Photos by Skari

"There are a bunch of crazy fanatics inside, but don't worry, they're all very friendly," a young man tells me as I stand in front of the Nordica hotel one Saturday in November. "Myself? Well, I've been playing six hours a day for the last two years, so I guess I'm a fanatic," he adds.

Feeling like a fish on dry land as I stood in the entrance hall of the high-class hotel, I really couldn't understand what makes 400 people from countries as far as New Zealand fly all the way to Iceland and attend a computer game convention to talk about space-ships, 3D environment, role-play and graphics for three days. After leaving the festival seven glorious hours later, with a promise of billions of ISK and a membership in a couple of corporations, I understood it all too well.

This year's event was the third annual EVE Fanfest. Due to the steadily growing fan base the convention sold out three weeks before the event. Roughly 400 foreign players, along with 100 Icelandic players and 170 staff members occupied the ground floor of Nordica for the purpose of celebrating the success of the multiplayer online game created by Icelandic company CCP. The game was launched in 2003 and today it boasts the largest virtual universe in the world. It has its own currency, ISK, and a unique relationship between the EVE staff and the players. Together they keep the game on the front line and interact in real time with each other. During these three days, they all finally got the chance to bond in the real world and the Devs (developers) had the opportunity to tell the enthusiastic attendees about the cool new stuff being added to the game as well as announcing CCP's merger with Atlanta-based role-play-game company White Wolf (greeted with booming applause and multiple questions). With this entire event, CCP has proved it self as an established company, with the goal of conquering the world.

EVE's social experiment

Set in a galaxy tens of thousands of years in the future, the persistent world of EVE is a capitalist society featuring a massive player-controlled economy. When you start as a newbie, you choose a character, race and looks, get a spaceship and minimum equipment to start the journey through the giant universe. There you can interact in multiple ways, build companies and space stations and gather resources. You bond with other players and form ties with people from around the world by taking part in PvP combats or forming alliances with various groups. To satisfy the need for action your alliance can go to war with other corporations while trying to gain sovereignty over colonies, fight for recourse or seek revenge, whether the other group likes it or not. Just like in reality.

Today, this large virtual universe has roughly 150,000 active subscribers logged onto the same Tranquility server and EVE has been breaking world records in number of players playing simultaneously in the same game world. Over 90 percent of players are male although the rate between male and female characters is quite even. Since we're on the subject of statistics, it's interesting to note that the man-years that have been spent playing EVE are around 121,000, which is half of the man-years it took 20,000 workers to build the pyramid of Giza for example. And that pyramid is huge!

To become a good player takes time. You have to earn money to buy basic skills, weapons, bigger ships and form alliances, so you can get bigger, richer, more powerful and most important of all, earn respect. It takes stamina and strategic thinking. It takes money spent on monthly subscriptions and buying ISK from other players, risking losing everything in a world that is constantly evolving and renewing. Empires go to war and relationships are just waiting to explode with

devastating consequences for ill-protected players who collide with the more ruthless ones. Moral principles are disregarded, trust is taken advantage of, friendship is betrayed and scams have become a regular thing to avoid where not only common sense but drastic measures have to be taken to survive. It is a world where you can let your more devious sides can break loose. And once you log on, there's no turning back.

"Yes, I'm a certified nerd"

Nordica was crowded with some of the most hardcore players of them all. I was even told that there were some celebrities present, although there were no gala dresses, red carpet or paparazzi mania. I wouldn't have been able to spot the major general in the group, unless he had had some spaced-out uniform on.

The majority of guests were male, late 20s, and nerdy looking. Some were buying t-shirts, cards and limited addition posters at the EVE store, others smoking, chatting and drinking beer in the lounge room. The biggest fanatics were busy playing in the Second Genesis Tournament and the round table sessions or cheering their friends on in the competition. Most of the people who came to the Fanfest were there to meet their friends though, see what they look like, hug their alliances, and backbite the enemies. What united them all was the excitement of being there, the discourse awaiting them and of obviously the EVE Online party later that night. By then, the amount of empty beer bottles was enormous.

I soon learned that the players proudly call themselves nerds. Daniela Bregman (Netherlands) even described her husband as one. They were first timers at the Fanfest, but had long dreamt of attending.

"Yes, I'm a certified nerd," said Mr. Bregman, playing by the name of Zaior Teilong

and a director in DarkStar1 (a corporation within the biggest alliance in EVE). "It's a corporation, with a little over 120 accounts, which has a primary goal to build the big stuff. The biggest dive ships in EVE Online for example," he proudly adds.

But what's so fascinating about EVE? "The game has so many aspects of real life. It's not like you're playing against a computer. You are playing with and against thousands of people from all over the world. And there is so much freedom," he added, a statement I would be hearing over and over from various players.

As the EVE developers realised, the player's freedom creates incredible dynamics within the game, so they granted players near total freedom (some basic rules are enforced) to let every player to influence the game and create opportunities for the other players. In EVE, you have the freedom to choose what you want to be. You can be a spaceship pilot cruising around solar systems, exploring the galaxy and enjoying the graphics along the way, you can be a corporate spy, a manager in a company, or a scared little rat who never has the courage to leave the secure space. You can seek fame and fortune in an aggressive solar system, become the leader of a giant corporation, bossing thousands of people around who are willing to risk their life for the sake of some awards and respect in the virtual world. In EVE, you can fulfil all the dreams that never came true in reality. And as you get closer to the ultimate goal, the addiction grows bigger and it becomes harder to let go of the mouse.

"Sometimes it is scary to see players, which you know, being online 8-16 hours a day. Some players who are unemployed have the time to do that. Then it is just EVE and sleep. EVE becomes their real life. Most of the people I play with actually have a real life though, which sometimes can be a problem



because you make a commitment and then something in real life comes up. You can feel guilty," Bregman tells me. His wife Daniela is not an EVE player herself, not yet at least. "I don't play but I am going to. It's much about self-control. Not playing all day and I have been a little scared of becoming addicted to it," she says. Her man has been hooked on EVE for two and a half years now, spending too much time in front of the computer, Daniela says, adding "Indeed you have to put a lot of time in it to get somewhere. I understand that, as I play other online games as well."

Does it affect your social life? "Well, sometimes we sit side by side in the same room, playing online games. Then we start talking together through the game's chat-rooms, and not face-to-face. That's a bit silly, I guess."

High-tech hotline
"In this game you are actually making friends," I heard repeatedly at the Fanfest. Playing and friendship gets intertwined and some players even meet their real life friends mostly through in-game chatting and message boards, even if the friend only lives two blocks away. You also meet people from different countries although you've never seen them, and that is what the Fanfest is all about, putting a face to months of plotting and chatting.

"We talk with people from Brazil or Denmark," Bregman explains. Daniela adds: "In my opinion, online games expand your social life because you can get to know people from the other side of the world. These guys over there are for example from his corp!" she says and points to the table behind us, where three 30-something guys sit, engaged in what seems to be a very serious conversation. "We've never met them before the festival. I just recognised them from their voices!"

"In the game, you get to know the players better than many of your friends and family. When you are on a three-hour mission, transporting cargo for example, you start chatting with someone to kill time. After a while you even know the name of the other guys' high school sweetheart!" a Brit explained to me before excusing himself as he spotted a corp member he desperately needed to talk to.

"There have even been online weddings," another player said.

Not all messages are friendly though.

Assaulting comments and online threats are common. One player told me about sexual messages he had received and even offers of erotic online chat in exchange for money.

How people see the game also varies quite a bit. Some are playing to mine asteroids in their nice little vessels, others aspire to build the biggest corporation possible while more spend most of their time completing missions, trading and transporting cargo. Then there is the group that gets high by ruining it all for the aforementioned. They love nothing more than fighting, going to war and serving as pirates or bounty hunters in the galaxy, with the aim of the highest success ratio.

Steini, a.k.a djammz and Kári, a.k.a Radiogaga belong to that group. Playing since the beta-tests started, months before the game first launched, they've been to all the

game. If a player pays to get off, you better respect that, as the only thing you have in the game is your reputation. People warn other players if someone bombs his ship up after getting the money and puts the pirate on the Name and Shame list. And that, apparently, sucks.

Are you being scammed?

Although some see the pirates as a group of cold-hearted bastards who attack innocent miners, multiple other threats face EVE players. Devious scams and deliberate stunts are an unavoidable part of the game. Some dodgy players have even been known to spend many, many months working their way up the corporation ladder, gaining the trust of the corp members, only to eventually destroy the whole thing, steal the money and some-

"Our entertainment in the game is to kill people and our political answer to all stupid political debates in the game is 'Fuck off!!!'"

Fanfests yet. The lectures, finding out what will happen in the future and meeting other players, is the reason, they attend. "My corporation has even met up in London two times, to grab some beers and chat," Steini says.

"I'm a mercenary at the moment but usually a pirate. I kill everyone that I see. For the last couple of months we've just been killing everything we can," Steini says.

"Same here. I categorise as a fighter," Kári adds

"We're not the bad guys though. We just want to have the most fun. Too bad for other players who end up getting killed in the meantime," Steini says: "Our entertainment in the game is to kill people and our political answer to all stupid political debates in the game is 'Fuck off!!!'"

Are there any enemies here at the Fanfest?

Sure. You can see people in t-shirts with their name or corporation on it and I have spotted a couple I have killed," Steini says. "Some more than once," Kári adds but explains that you have to show some respect in

cruel and vicious world indeed.

"We allow this kind of fraud because we want to have as much freedom as possible in the game," Nathan Richardsson, CCP Senior Producer tells me after the formal schedule at the Fanfest was over. "What we have seen happening, is exactly the same as has been happening in the real world for the last 50 years. The EIB scam for example was first pulled off in the 1940s, called the Ponzi scheme. This player was just doing the same investment fraud online. The players paid him money, thought they would double their profit but then saw him ditch the whole thing and fly off with all the investment."

Fanfest attendees had mixed feelings about the incident. Some thought it hilarious while others took it quite seriously, saying that it ruined the fun in the game while underlining the importance of trust and cooperation, a crucial factor in the virtual world. But where there is trust there is betrayal and when earning money is a status symbol, elaborate scams will always exist.

And EVE has money. Lots of it. Enough to buy a fleet of spaceships or fancy Cadillacs, multiple times over. With more cash in your account, you earn respect, power and reputation. This is something greedy individuals are fully aware of.

Although players who take money out of the game run the risk of being banned from playing, its real-life reward is worth the gamble. These virtual game currencies are worth a lot out in the real world where some players will always be willing to pay hard cash for the virtual gold. The business is blooming and while the black market is growing bigger, incidents like the bank scam can have some unpredictable consequences. The price to pay for 100 million ISK at the webpage ige.com is 11.55 US dollars and there are many other Internet sites fully designed for ISK transactions. You do the math. 7,000,000,000 x 11.55, anyone?

"It is a neverending chase and it is impossible to follow every move," one Dev told me and Richardsson agreed:

"We see a lot of this happening, and yes, it is a problem. It is hard to trace the transactions though. We don't like it, because we don't want players to be able to get rich in the real world just by getting wealthy in EVE. We have to find some balance and stop the urge for these grossly abused transactions," he adds.

I've heard some rumours about sweatshops operating, like in Eastern Europe, where people are employed to play computer games for hours, cashing in virtual money selling it to other players who don't mind paying cash for some online skills or better-equipped spaceships.

"These are not rumours but facts," Richardson says. "In some countries, people have kids working for them playing online games and earning them money. It's modern-day slavery and absolutely terrible. Other countries, like China, have people doing the same job of creating virtual money, but they are getting paid for their work. A really good salary compared to labour in their country. But the possibility of doing this creates the need to earn more money and you'll always find people willing to operate companies like that. It's part of the human nature. We don't like it, but it's really hard to stop it," Richardson adds.

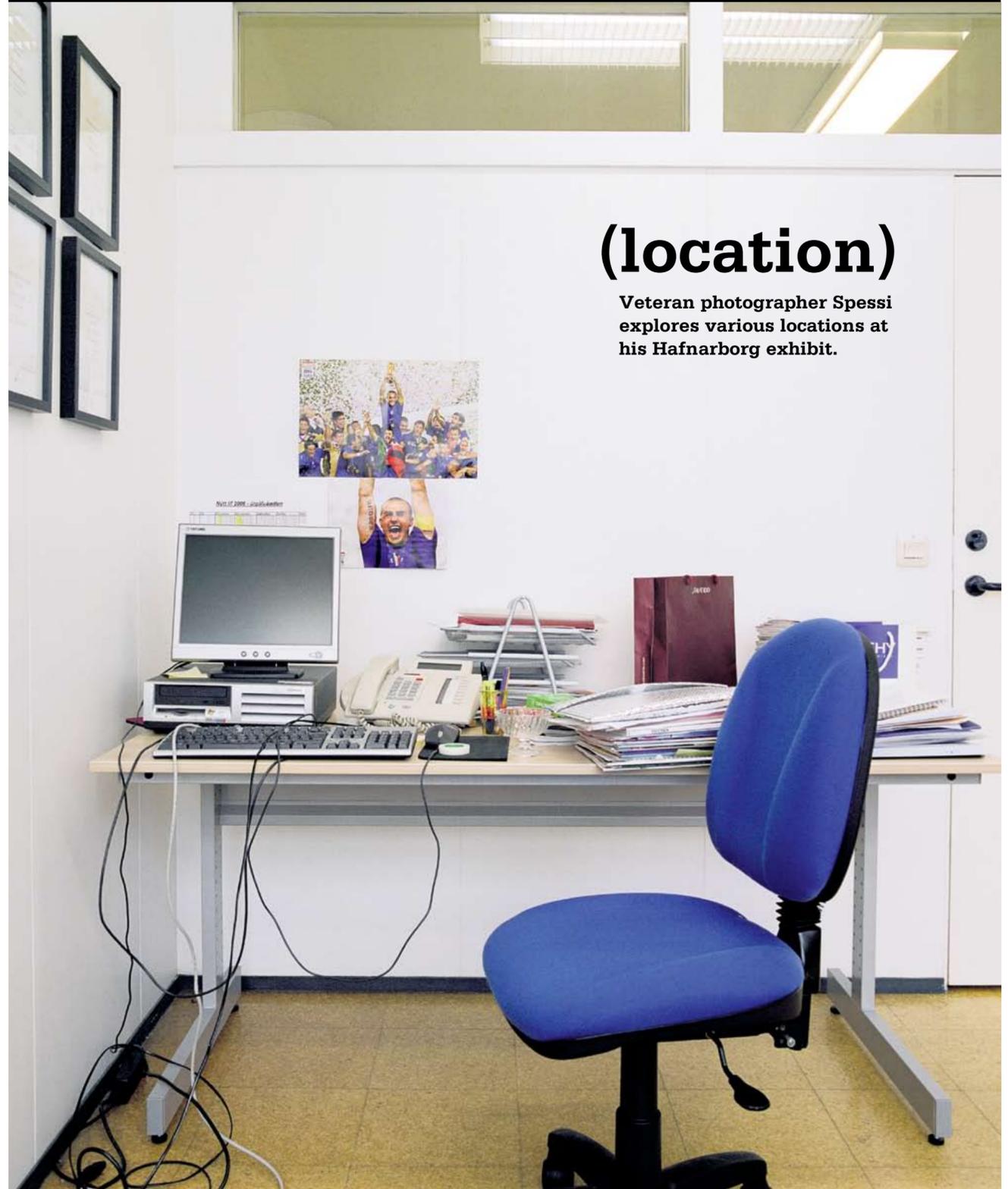
It is time to run back to the party. The ceremony was about to start and the Dev band was getting ready to get the party going and the players were showing off their intergalactic moves on the dance floor. There was no more time for serious talks or sweatshop labour speculations. Even though you can lose everything in a heartbeat while playing EVE, worries about scams or enemies didn't seem to stop the players from having a blast. The overall joy of having hundreds of people to talk to who share your own hobby seemed to be the best reward for all of them. Whether, when or how, the online rage and in-game threats start breaking out in the real world, it was at least not this weekend. CCP sure knows how to throw a great party, and by doing so, the company is steadily getting closer to their goal of world domination.



The Liberal Party stance has particularly been directed towards the working class, while breeding ignorance, half-truths, prejudice, and the mentality of us vs. them.

info.

▲ Spessi's Locations Ice "oh" lation Breaks Loose Jar City 16 Days for the 16th Time Greenland in the Spotlight Ice Skating at Ingólfstorg A Very Special Benni Hemm Hemm Release Concert Jimi Tenor at Sirkus Grapevine Guide to Jazz ▶



(location)

Veteran photographer Spessi explores various locations at his Hafnarborg exhibit.



Hafnarborg – 11 Nov. until Christmas

Spessi's Locations

In the main hall at Hafnarborg, the art and cultural institute of Hafnarfjörður, Spessi is displaying his latest series of photographs, entitled Locations. As the name suggests, the subjects are various locations from all around the country. During a two-year period, Spessi, a leading Icelandic photographer, hit the road with only his camera as company and scouted for things that caught his eye.

"These pictures are snapshots of all sorts of locations. Basic photos that could be seen as short stories" Spessi explains. A main characteristic of Spessi's photos is the way they reject any exaggeration or idealization, instead managing

to show a given place just the way it is, regardless of whether it's fascinating and exciting to look at or not. The small pub at Kárahnjúkar dam and the workers living conditions, Örn Clausen's legal office, empty kitchens, jam-packed storages, a tiny gas station at Borðeyri village as well as farms, meadows and mountains criss-crossing around the country are a few examples of locations Spessi found on the way. Mixing man made environment and unspoiled nature, the exhibition gives its viewers a chance to imagine what interesting stories each spot has to tell. Spessi is currently busy planning the publishing of a new book, also

entitled Locations, which will feature photos from the exhibition as well as almost 200 more there weren't room for on Hafnarborg's walls. The book is being designed by world renowned artists in New York who have years' long experience in working for certain notable companies (designing shoes for Puma and animating for MTV). The book will hit the shelves in Iceland shortly after Christmas.

Hafnarborg, Strandgata 34. Open 11-17 every day of the week, except Tuesdays closed. Entrance free on Fridays.

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 Reykjavik's rockers and their young idolaters with DJ's playing classic rock'n'roll hitters.
01.12 DJ Gulli Ósoma
02.12 DJ Palli Maus
08.12 DJ Óli Weapons
09.12 DJ Gulli Ósoma
15.12 DJ Óli Weapons
16.12 Force Beyond Faith and Full Speed Power Party in concert, followed by DJ Palli Maus
22.12 DJ Óli Weapons
23.12 DJ Gulli Ósoma
29.12 DJ Gulli Ósoma
30.12 DJ Óli Weapons
Café Cultura
Hverfisgata 18
Music from the world's four corners.
14.12 DJ Buzby plays African jazz, tango Nuevo, Asian dub, Japanese pop and Indian drum n bass.
Café Rösenberg
Lækjargata 2
A true jazz club featuring live gigs with some of Iceland's finest jazzists almost every night of the week.
01.12 Halli Reynis release concert
02.12 Halli Reynis in concert
03.12 Ingó corporation: FIH graduation concert
06.12 Kristjana Stefánsdóttir quartet

07.12 Misery Loves Company in concert
08.12 Swedish Jazz band Laser in concert
09.12 Swedish Jazz band Laser in concert
10.12 FIH jazzrehearsal with Ingó corporation
12.12 Rom Tom Tom with Tómas R. Einarsson
13.12 Polli Bluesband
14.12 Björn Thoroddsen plus band and Andrea Gylfadóttir
17.12 Eric Quick Jazzband
19.12 Atlantshafsbandalagið release concert
20.12 Krummafótur Christmas concert
21.12 Misery Loves Company Christmas concert
22.12 Hraun Christmas concert
23.12 Þorláksmessa Choir
Dillon
Laugavegur 30
Legendary rock pub featuring concerts every Wednesday night and rock DJ's every weekend.
01.12 DJ Mikko
02.12 DJ Andrea Jóns
06.12 Royal Fortune in concert
08.12 DJ Rod & Stuard
09.12 DJ Andrea Jóns
13.12 Benny Crespo's Gang
15.12 Party with Canora followed by DJ Andri
16.12 DJ Andrea Jóns
20.12 Perla in concert
22.12 DJ Andri
23.12 DJ Andrea Jóns
27.12 Weapons in concert

29.12 DJ Rod & Stuard
30.12 DJ Andrea Jóns
Domo Bar
Þingholtsstræti 5
The newest addition to the concert venue flora, emphasizing on jazz, blues and relaxing vibe.
07.12 Scott McLemore Trio
14.12 Varp – Jóel Pálsson Quinted
16.12 Vínir Dóra Christmas concert
19.12 Borgardætur Christmas concert
Frikirkjan Church
Laufásvegur 13
07.12 KK and Ellen's Christmas Concert
Hallgrímskirkja Church
Skólavörðuholt
03.12 Monica Group and The Motet Choir of Hallgrímskirkja Church
04.12 Monica Group and The Motet Choir of Hallgrímskirkja Church
07.12 Festival of Christmas Music
10.12 Festival of Christmas Music: Christmas with Bach
31.12 Festive sounds for the new year
Háskólabíó
Hagatorg
01.12 Lennon and the Icelandic Symphony Orchestra (Tribute concert)
02.12 Lennon and the Icelandic Symphony Orchestra (Tribute concert)
02.12 Lennon and the Icelandic Symphony Orchestra (Tribute concert)
07.12 The Icelandic Symphony Orchestra: Gala Concert
16.12 The Icelandic Symphony Orchestra: Christmas Concert
Hressó
Austurstræti 20
Here, troubadours play sing-along

Music Art Films Events

Klassiski Listdansskólinn – Dec. 9th at 19:00

Ice“oh”lotion Breaks Loose

A new contemporary ballet piece, Ice“oh”lotion, that springs from choreographer Andreas Constantinou, will premiere at Klassiski Listdansskólinn (The Classic Dance School Academy) on 9 December. It is a full length solo performance created for Guðrún Óskarsdóttir, a modern and classical ballet graduate from The Royal Ballet School of Stockholm and now a dancer with the Icelandic dance company. Exploring the themes of human isolation and fragmentation, the piece is

described as a strange and absurd work, which displays the artist's innovative, individualistic and uncompromising approach to dance theatre and installation art. This is a one-time event in Iceland, as after its premiere, Ice“oh”lotion will be performed at The Robin Howard Dance Theatre in London.

Klassiski Listdansskólinn, Grensásvegur 14. For tickets visit: www.ballet.is.



Cinemas around Reykjavik

Jar City

Based on one of Iceland's best selling crime novels by Arnaldur Indriðason, Jar City (Mýrin) a film by Baltasar Kormákur is well on its way to shattering all Icelandic attendance records. Taking in a little over 70,000 viewers in the first few weeks of screening, this flick has been the topic of water cooler discussions around the country.

Jar City finds Erlendur Sveinsson, a lonely, middle aged police detective, chasing down clues to solve a murder case in downtown Reykjavik, while dealing with his junkie daughter Eva Lind and the

seedy underworld from which she emerges.

Director Baltasar Kormákur, who made a name for him self based on movies such as 101 Reykjavik, The Sea and A Little Trip To Heaven, delivers an exciting dramatic thriller, starring Ingvar E. Sigurðsson, Agustía Eva Erlendsdóttir, Björn Hlynur Haraldsson and Olafía Hrönn Jónsdóttir. The movie is now being screened with English subtitles, a rare opportunity to experience Icelandic cinema, and actually understand it.

hitters until midnight followed by DJs playing whatever the crowd is aching for at the moment.
01.12 Touch in concert followed by DJ Maggi
02.12 Troubadours Alexander and Orvar followed by DJ Maggi
08.12 Touch in concert followed by DJ Jhonny
09.12 Troubadours Gotti and Eisi followed by DJ Jhonny
15.12 Helgi Valur troubadour followed by DJ Maggi
16.12 Troubadours Gotti and Eisi followed by DJ Maggi
22.12 Touch in concert followed by DJ Jhonny
23.12 Helgi Valur troubadour followed by DJ Jhonny
29.12 Touch in concert followed by DJ Maggi
30.12 Pub-lic in concert followed by DJ Maggi
31.12 Hressó New Years celebration.
Iðnó Theatre
Vonarstæti 3
15.12 Elisabet Eyþórsdóttir release concert.
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.
01.12 DJ Lazer
02.12 DJ Kári
03.12 DJ Vala
06.12 Don Balli Funk

07.12 DJ Pan
08.12 DJ Kári
09.12 DJ Tommy White
13.12 DJ Ingi Þór
14.12 DJ Lazer
15.12 Don Balli Funk
16.12 DJ Árni Sveins
19.12 DJ Davíð
20.12 DJ Davíð
21.12 Don Balli Funk
22.12 Steinunn and Silja
23.12 Don Balli Funk
28.12 DJ Ingi Þór
29.12 DJ Benni
30.12 Don Balli Funk
Langholtiškirkja Church
Sólheimar 13
10.12 Advent concert – Philharmonia Choral Society
12.12 Advent concert – Philharmonia Choral Society
15.12 Advent concert – Philharmonia Choral Society
16.12 Christmas carols with the Langholtiškirkja choir
Laugardalshöllin
Engjavegur 8
01.12 Rock Star concerts with Magni, Dilana, Toby, Storm and the majestic Supernova houseband.
05.12 Frostroses in concert
Nasa
Thorvaldsenstræti 2
01.12 DJ Desyn Masiello (a mix of house, funk, tech and dance music)
02.12 í svörtum fötum in concert
09.12 Papar in concert
15.12 Sálín in concert
23.12 Bubbi in concert

Music Art Films Events

Various Locations – Until 10 Dec.

16 Days for the 16th Time

Now being held for the 16th time this year, the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence is an international campaign aiming at raising awareness about gender-based violence and human rights violations around the world. Under this year's heading, Advance Human Rights – End Violence Against Women, dozens of groups and institutes in Iceland participate in the project by organizing protests, drawing attention to gender-based violence by writing in the media. A programme has also been planned consisting of lectures, short films, and symposiums over the 16 day event.

Tracing its roots back to 1991, the campaign originated at the first Women's Global Leadership Institute. Participants chose the dates,

25 November, the International Day Against Violence Against Women and December 10, the International Human Rights Day, to mark the 16 day period while highlighting other significant dates like 1 December, World AIDS Day. At 10 December the program will be wrapped up with an Advent concert at Neskirka Church organised by Amnesty International in Iceland. Earlier that day, Amnesty has planed a letter-writing marathon at the restaurant Hornið, in which guests will have the opportunity to write Christmas cards to victims of gender-based violence in Congo, Guatemala, Zimbabwe and Darfur.

For a full schedule visit the Icelandic Human Rights Centre at www.humanrights.is.

Reykjavik Museum of Photography – Until 28 Jan.

Greenland in the Spotlight

Entitled Analog / Dialog, Mogens S. Koch's exhibition is on display at Reykjavik Museum of Photography. Koch, a well renowned Danish photographer, traveled multiple times to Greenland during the period between 1965 to 1980 and shot over 100.000 pictures featuring Greenland's majestic landscape, its

inhabitants and their homes in the barren, yet fetching surroundings. The photos not only document the country's history in a unique and graphic way, but also intertwine rugged nature with daily life in a manner that feels like storytelling. *The Reykjavik Museum of Photography, Tryggvagata 15.*

Ingólfstorg Square – 7 Dec. - 29 Dec.

Ice Skating at Ingólfstorg

Downtown pedestrians have probably noticed the construction at Ingólfstorg Square, where a ice skating rink is in the making. With this new manmade skating rink the Square will become a mini-version of New York's Rockefeller Center for three weeks.

To celebrate the fiftieth anni-

versary of insurance company Tryggingamiðstöðin, the ice rink will open 7 December. Welcoming all those who want to enjoy outdoor fun and winter sports, ice-skates can be rented for the occasion. Various happenings are scheduled, like concerts, Christmas choirs and sporting events.

26.12 Bubbi in concert
■ 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.
01.12 Rap-fest with Gunni Stef
02.12 DJ Anna Brá
07.12 DJ Kári
08.12 DJ Benni B-ruff
09.12 House DJ
13.12 DJ Óli Hjörtur
14.12 DJ Gulli Ósoma
15.12 Gisli Galdur, Guðni the bassist and Addi the drummer.
16.12 Singstar-night with Jón Mýrdal followed by DJ Benni B-ruff
20.12 House DJ
21.12 DJ Óli hjörtur
22.12 Trubadours Franz and Kristó followed by DJ Anna Rakel and Sara
23.12 Rap-fest with Gunni Stef
29.12 DJ Gisli Galdur
31.12 New Years Rap-fest with Danni Deluxe, Dóri DNA, Bent and Rottweiler
■ Sirkus
Klappartígur 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.
01.12 DJ Curver
08.12 Jimi Tenor and President Bongo
09.12 DJ Árni Sveins
13.12 Ghostigital in concert
15.12 DJ Nuno

20.12 Marzipan
28.12 Benni Hemm Hemm in concert
■ Stúdentakjallarinn
Hringbraut
The University students' former hangout spot, now a diverse concert venue, attracting, still, a lot of students.
02.12 Ghostigital, Stilluppsteypa and FM Belfast in concert
21.12 Benni Hemm Hemm and Sprengjuhöllin in concert
22.12 R.A.M.S.E.S. release party
■ Tjarnarbíó
Tjarnargata 12
15.12 Benni Hemm Hemm release concert. Accompanied by Retro Stefson, Hjaltalin and Skakkamanage
■ 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.
01.12 DJ Kári
02.12 Tommi White
07.12 DJ Simon
08.12 DJ Dóri
09.12 Gisli Galdur and DJ Benni
14.12 DJ Adda
15.12 DJ Simon
16.12 DJ Jói
21.12 DJ Simon
22.12 DJ Anna Rakel and Hjalti
23.12 DJ Kári
28.12 DJ Adda
29.12 Gullfoss and Geysir
30.12 Gisli Galdur and DJ Benni
15.12 DJ Nuno



Tjarnarbíó – 15 Dec. at 21:00

A Very Special Benni Hemm Hemm Release Concert

Grapevine favourite Benni Hemm Hemm has done it again with his brand spanking new record, Kajak ("Kayak"), released domestically on Benni's own "Smákökurnar" imprint on November 24. Thirteen tracks of honest, exuberant and perfectly executed expression (and horn sections), the album will likely rank among the year's best and is sure to travel far. A vinyl version of the album even contains an extra track, Benni's duet with Sweden's lovable troubadour Jens Lekman – singing in Icelandic, no less.

Infamous electronic music label Morr Music is set to unleash the Kajak on Europe in January, and American audiences can acquire it from the same label as of February. Around the same time, Japan's P-

vine records will make it available for Asian Hemm Hemm enthusiasts. All of those foreigners will have to study Icelandic to get what Benni's trying to say on the album, however, since his lyrics are all in Icelandic. However, Benni might be able to teach them a thing or two, as he will soon embark upon a tour of Japan (along with the Apparat Organ Quartet, Kira Kira and Paul Lydon, Flis, Hilmar Jenson and DJ Apfelblut of múm fame) and the U.S., following which he has a European sojourn planned next March.

To celebrate Kajak's release, Benni has gotten together some of his favourite Reykjavik bands to play at his release concert, due to take place at the elegant Tjarnar-

bió (by the downtown pond) on the eve of Friday, December 15. Appearing alongside the full Benni Hemm Hemm orchestra is a line-up guaranteed to provide a fine night out. Teen hipsters Retro Stefson, the ever pleasant Hjaltalin and non-smokers Skakkamanage will all play their playful tunes to warm up for Benni's triumphant return.

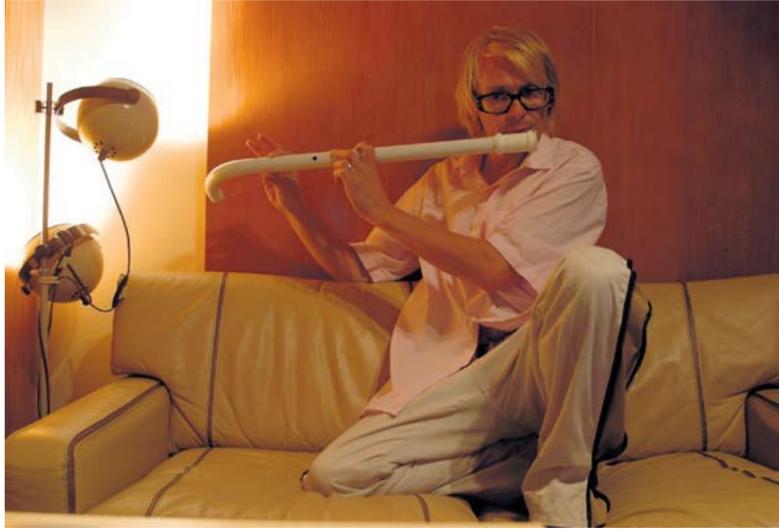
Those interested in attending the concert would do good to fetch tickets as soon as possible, since there are only 200 of them up for grabs. They will set you back 2,500 ISK and can be obtained at the 12 Tónar record store, on Skólavörðustígur 15.

Tjarnarbíó, Tjarnargata 12, 101 Reykjavik

Art
■ 101 Gallery
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 Dec 31
Anna Hallin exhibition
■ Aurum
Bankastræti 4
Mon.-Fri. 10-18
Sat. 11-16
■ The Einar Jónsson Museum
Eiríksgata
Tue.-Sun. 14-17
www.skulptur.is
Permanent exhibition
The work of sculptor Einar Jónsson
■ The Culture House
Hverfisgata 15
Open daily 11-17
www.thjodmenning.is
29 June 2006 – 27 Feb 2007
Icelandic Fashion 2006
Permanent Exhibits
Medieval Manuscripts; The National Museum- as it was; The Library Room
■ Dwarf Gallery
Grundartígur 21
Opening Hours: Fri. and Sat 18-20
this.is/birta
Until Dec 9
Der
Kristján Zaklynsky and Lina Larsen video and installation exhibit

■ Gallery 100 Degrees
Bæjarháls 1
Mon.-Fri. 8:30-16
www.or.is/Forsida/Gallery100
■ Galleri Anima
Ingólfsstræti 8
Tue.-Sat. 13-17
www.animagalleri.is
08 Dec – 23 Dec
Jón Óskar, Kristinn Már and Bjarni Sigurbjörnsson
■ Gallery Fold
Rauðarárstígur 14-16
Mon.-Fri. 10-18
Sat. 11-16
Sun. 14-16
www.myndlist.is
■ Galleri Sævars Karls
Bankastræti 7
www.saevarkarl.is
Mon.-Fri. 10-18
Sat. 10-16
■ Gallery Tukt
Pósthússtræti 3-5
www.hitthusid.is
25 Nov – 9 Dec
Steinnun Harðardóttir and Sindri Freyr Steinsson art exhibition
■ Gallery Turpentine
Ingólfsstræti 5
Tue.-Fri. 12-18
Sat. 11-16
www.turpentine.is
■ Gel Galleri
Hverfisgata 37
Mon.-Fri. 10-19
Sat. 10-17
■ 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 Art Academy
■ Hún og Hún Gallery
Skólavörðustígur 17b
■ i8 Gallery
Klappartígur 33
Tue.-Fri. 11-17
Sat. and by appointment 13-17
www.i8.is
09 Nov – 23 Dec NEW
Stíg/
Katrín Sigurðardóttir
09 Nov – 23 Dec NEW
Pétur Már Gunnarsson, poets and installations
■ Icelandic Labour Union's Art Gallery
Freyjugata 41
Tue.-Sun. 13-17
Free Entrance
■ Kling & Bang Gallery
Laugavegur 23
Thur - Sun 14-18
Free Entrance
www.this.is/klingandbang
19 Nov – 10 Dec
Myndlistardreifing/Art distribution
Helga Óskarsdóttir
19 Nov – 10 Dec
Kling & Bang & Slang
Kristinn Már Pálmason



■ **Living Art Museum**
Laugavegur 26
Wed., Fri.-Sun. 13-17
Thur 13-22
www.nylo.is/
18 Nov – 17 Dec
Grasrótt 2006/Grassroot 2006
Hulda Vilhjálmsdóttir
■ **The National Gallery**
Frikirkjuvegur
Tue.-Sun. 11-17
Free Entrance
listasafn.is
7 Oct – 12 Dec
Málverkíð eftir 1980/Icelandic Painting after 1980
15 Dec 2006 – 25 Jan 2007
Un Regard Fauve
French Expressionism
■ **The National Museum**
Suðurgata 41
Open daily 10-17
natmus.is/
Temporary Exhibitions:
Photography from Iceland, 1938
Invisible women in Icelandic art
Archaeological research and Iceland's new view of history
Permanent Exhibitions:
The Making of a Nation
■ **The Nordic House**
Sturlugata 5
Tue.-Sun. 12-17
www.nordice.is/
■ **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**
– **Hafnarhús**
Tryggvagata 17
Open daily 10-17
10 Jun 2006 – 07 Jan 2007
The Erró Collection: Graphic Works
■ **Reykjavík Art Museum**
– **Kjarvalsstaðir**
Flókagata
Closed in December
■ **Reykjavík Museum**
Kistuhylur 4
www.arbaejaarsafn.is
■ **The Reykjavík Museum of Photography**
Grófarhús, Tryggvagata 15, 6th floor
Weekdays 12-19
Sat.-Sun. 13-17
Free Entrance
www.ljosmyndasafnreykjavikur.is
24 Nov 2006 – 28 Jan 2007
Analog - Dialog
Mogens S. Koch
23 Nov 2006 – 3 Jan 2007

The Orange Island & Perfect Dream and Life
Elisabeth Smolarz exhibition
■ **Safn**
Laugavegur 37
Wed.-Fri. 14-18
Sat.-Sun. 14-17
Free Entrance
www.safn.is
Until Dec 31
Hildur Bjarnadóttir textile exhibition
■ **Sigurjón Ólafsson Museum**
Laugarnestangi 70
Tue.-Sun. 14-17
Permanent exhibition
The work of sculptor Sigurjón Ólafsson

>>>OUTSIDE REYKJAVÍK

■ **Hveragerði Library**
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
Until Dec 30
Location
Spessi photo exhibition
■ **Suðuðvestur**
Hafnargata 22, Keflavík
Thu.-Fri. 16-18
Sat.-Sun. 14-17
www.suduvestur.is
2 Dec – 31 Dec
Gunnhildur Þórðardóttir exhibition
■ **Dalí Gallery**
Brekkgata 9, Akureyri
Friday and Saturday 14-18.
www.daligallery.blogspot.com
02 Dec – 17 Dec
Magdalena Margrét Kjartansdóttir exhibition
■ **Galleri+**
Brekkgata 35, Akureyri
■ **Jónas Viðar Gallery**
Fri.-Sat. 13-18
■ **Akureyri Art Museum**
Kaupvangsstræti 12, Akureyri
Tue.-Sun. 12-17
www listasafn.akureyri.is
28 Oct – 17 Dec
Dröfn Friðfinnsdóttir retrospective

Films
■ **Casino Royale**
Zorro director Martin Campbell returns with a James Bond flick starring Daniel Craig as the secret agent spy fleeing from assassinations and other dilemmas. *Smárabíó, Laugarásbíó, Sambíóin*

Music Art Films Events

Sirkus – 8 Dec. at 21:00

Jimi Tenor at Sirkus

The Pineapple Records concert nights at Sirkus continues its draw of a mixed crowd in December, now featuring the Finnish multi-instrumentalist, singer and composer Jimi Tenor.

GusGus record label, Pineapple Records, in cooperation with Uncle Siggí and Desire Loveschool have organised multiple shows at Sirkus since early summer where among performances have been Petter Winnberg, Khan of Finland, Helmus and Dalli and Kid Carpet.

Playing a strong-beat mix of jazz, funk, soul and techno, Jimi Tenor's first solo album, *Sáhkómies*, was released in 1994 and the second one, *Europe*, a year later. Now counting ten solo records, his newest LP, *Beyond the Stars* is described as a joyful showcase

of pure musical happiness. His forthcoming album, *Joystone*, is awaited with anticipation. *Sunrise*, a three-track EP released in October this year, is said to be unlike everything else Tenor has been known to do, where he is accompanied by West African percussion group Kabu Kabu, afrobeat master Nicholas Addo Nettey, and a group of young stars of the Finnish jazz scene. What Sirkus's attendees can expect to witness will unfold in just a week. Followed by the legendary President Bongo and Casanova DJ Set, the show starts at 21:00 and is, like always, free of charge.

Sirkus, Klapparstigur 30.
Photo by Jimi Tenor.

arts video game *Dead or Alive*. Lots of fighting Ninjas. *(Dec 8)*

■ **Eragon**
Based on the best-selling fantasy novel, the movie centres on the farm boy from Alagaesia and his dragon friend who together have to save their homeland from an evil king. *(Dec 8)*

■ **Deja Vu**
Time travelling, love affair and vicious murderers in an action movie starring Denzel Washington as an ATF agent who has to save hundreds of people from the past. *(Dec 15)*

■ **Happy Feet**
Singing penguins plus a tap-dancing penguin chick, who becomes an out-cast from the penguin society due to his off-key voice. *(Dec 26)*

■ **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. *(Dec 26)*

■ **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? *(Dec 26)*

■ **Children of Men**
Starring Clive Owen and Julianne Moore, this dystopia, set in 2027, 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. *(Dec 29)*

■ **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

■ **Cultures of Landscape**
Seminar organised by the Department of Geology and Geography and the Nordic Landscape Research Network. *The University of Iceland, Sæmundargata 6, 1 December from 10:00 to 15:15.*
■ **Lights are lit at Austurvöllur Christmas Tree**

The annual lighting of the Oslo Christmas tree at Austurvöllur takes place 3 December at 16:00. The Reykjavík Brass Band will be playing popular Christmas tunes and the Choir of the Reykjavík Cathedral sings Christmas carols. A few Santas might even show up.

Austurvöllur, 3 December at 16:00.

■ **Best í Heimi in Theatre**
Icelandic play with English subtitles by Hávar Sigurjónsson and María Reyndal. *Iðnó Theatre, Vonarstræti 3, until 9 December. For tickets call 562 9700.*

■ **Salsa Night with Carlos Sanchez**
The one and only Carlos Sanchez shows guests the basic Salsa steps, free of charge.

Café Cultura, Hverfisgata 18, 9 December at 10:30.

■ **International Campaign: 16 days of activism against gender violence**
01.12 International AIDS-day. Seminar: Human rights, young women and AIDS in Uganda.

Kaffi Viktor from 20:00-22:00.
02.12 Screening of two short films, *It's in Our Hands* and *Lives Blown Apart*. Both films address Amnesty International's struggle against the violation of women. Discussions after the show. *Café Cultura, Hverfisgata 18, starts at 18:00 and 20:00.*

05.12 Dorit Otzen, talks about the blind eye of democracy. *The Nordic House, Sturlugata 5, at 17:00.*
07.12 The Icelandic Human Rights Centre presents a documentary on domestic violence in Latin America. *Café Sólun, Bankastræti 7a, at 20:00.*

■ **European movie icons**
The National Film Archive of Iceland continues with its screening of old movie masterpieces.

5 and 9 December: La città delle donne by Federico Fellini
12 and 16 December: La femme d'à Côté by François Truffaut
National Film Archive of Iceland, Hvaleyrarbraut 13.

■ **Gingerbread cookies for The Future of Iceland**
To raise awareness as well as for fundraising, Framtíðarlandið (The Future Country) a cross-political organisation protesting heavy industry and destruction of the country's nature, is organising a gingerbread baking marathon the 2, 5, 7 and 9 December under the careful guidance of Sigfús the baker. Those interested in participating are asked to contact Sigfús via e-mail: braudhus@isl.is.

■ **Eat for Peace**
01.12 Fundraising dinner organized by the Campaign Against Military Bases at Friðarhús (The Peace Center). An impressive Christmas buffet for only 1.500 ISK.

Friðarhús, Njálsgata 87, starts at 19:00. For more info visit: www.fridur.is.

Music Art Films Events



Reykjavík – Dec. 2006

Grapevine Guide to Jazz

Text by Andrew Clarke

Reykjavík has a small but pretty good jazz scene. It can be hard to track down, as gigs aren't always well publicised but once you do, it is easy to get into. A regular gig-goer will soon start to recognise the musicians who play different styles in different combos. I've seen some excellent gigs, as well as one or two that were a bit stiff and wooden.

If foreigners have come across any Icelandic jazz at all, it is likely to be Björk's 1990 album *Gling-Gló*. The bigger names in Icelandic jazz are little known elsewhere. They include the keyboard player Sunna Gunnlaugsdóttir, the saxophonists Jól Pálsson and Sigurður Flosason, the bass player Tómas R. Einarsson and the singer Ragnheiður Gröndal.

In the winter, the scene centres on the Múlinn jazz club and in summer on the courtyard behind Jómfrúin, the Danish sandwich bar. Café Rosenberg on Lækjargata is also worth keeping an eye on. Múlinn has just moved from Sunday nights at the Þjóðleikhúskjallarrun (the basement bar under the National Theatre) to Thursday nights at Domo at Þingholtstræti 5. In a way it's a shame, because the National Theatre basement is such a lovely venue. For the musicians, though, it is an improvement. The acoustics are better and the owners are actually into jazz. Domo's fine and at least there is a regular jazz night again. It kicked off with Tómas R. Einarsson with most of the jazz-funk band Jagúar in tow, promoting his new album *Romm*

Tomm Tomm.

Gigs start at nine and the line-up for the rest of the year is:

7 December. Scott McLemore – Frisell Projekt, a guitarless set of the guitarist's music. Scott McLemore is an American drummer but a staple of the Reykjavík jazz scene. The line-up features the talented Sunna Gunnlaugsdóttir.

14 December. The Jól Pálsson Quintet, promoting the forthcoming album, *Varp*. This promises to be a good gig. I've seen Pálsson play a few times and he was good enough to keep company with the electrifying pianist Kjartan Valde- marsson (who is sadly missing from this season) last May.

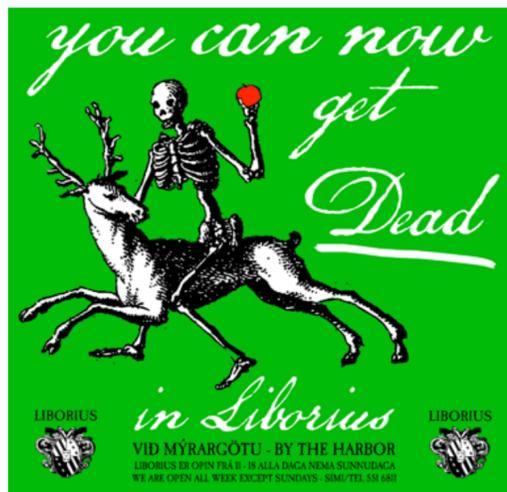
Last year, Múlinn ran until mid-May, so hopefully it will pick up again in the new year.

For Icelandic jazz CDs, check out Skífan on Laugavegur or 12 Tónar on Skólavörðustigur. Both will let you listen to CDs. Skífan is a bit like a Virgin or HMV and is fine for what it is. 12 Tónar is small, cosy, very friendly and hands out cups of espresso to browsers.

There are quite a few decent Icelandic jazz CDs around but two really stand out. Flís's self-titled album is a lovely collection. It's a warm, lyrical and very likeable set of old-time Icelandic songs given jazz arrangements. Some tracks are mournful, others jaunty. Davíð Þór Jónsson's piano is thoughtful, assured, never dull and combines

beautifully with the bass and drums that make up the trio.

Tómas R. Einarsson's *Let Jazz be Bestowed on the Huts* is a wildly diverse collection of songs partly inspired by the poetry of WH Auden (the original friend of Iceland?). The nine tracks are sung by eight different singers, including KK and former Sugarcube Einar Örn (whose singing certainly won't appeal to everyone). If I were forced to pick one song, it would probably be Ellen Kristjánsdóttir's rendition of Guðbergur Bergsson's poem *Spring Rain* in Njarðvíkur but really, the whole album is a quirky mix of styles that work perfectly.



Reykjavík 871 ±2

Step into the Viking Age

Landnámssýningin The Settlement Exhibition

How did it all begin?

Multimedia techniques bring Reykjavík's past to life, providing visitors with insights into how people lived in the Viking Age, and what the Reykjavík environment looked like to the first settlers.

The Settlement Exhibition 871±2 is located at Aðalstræti 16

Reykjavík City Museum
www.reykjavik871.is

City of Reykjavík

1 CAFÉS

Café Roma
Laugavegur 27

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 Þrúvalla
Austurstræti 22

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

25 Ölstofan
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 Kaffibrennslan
Pósthússtræti 9

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

31 RESTAURANTS

Krua Thai
Tryggvagata 14

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

34 Argentina
Barónsstígur 11a

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

37 Tapas
Vesturgata 3b

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

44 Bæjarins Bestu
Tryggvagata

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

2 Ráðhúskaffi
City Hall

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

9 Kaffitár
Bankastræti 8

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

16 Vegamót
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.vegamot.is. If you like Oliver, try Vegamót and vice versa.

23 Café Cultura
Hverfisgata 18

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

26 Thorvaldsen
Austurstræti 8

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

29 Glaumbar
Tryggvagata 20

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

32 Tveir Fiskar
Geirsgata 9

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

35 Vin og Skel
Laugavegur 55

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

38 Sægreifinn
Geirsgata

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

45 Subway
Austurstræti

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

3 Grái 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.

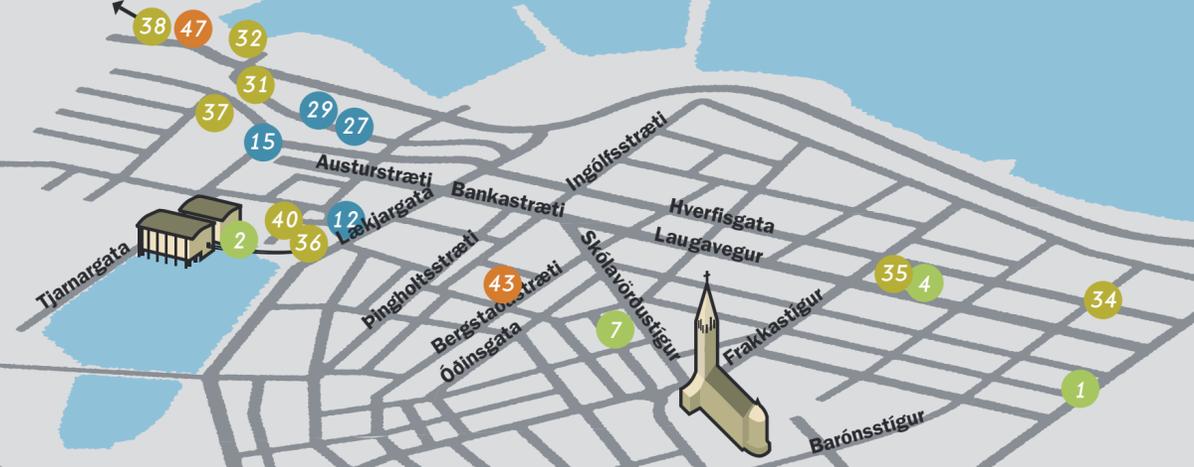
17 B5
Bankastræti 5

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.



SPOT THIS: Jólahúsið
Skólavörðustígur 21a, 101 Reykjavík, Tel: 568 8181

Iceland's House of Christmas is the Christmas fanatic's Disneyland. This true gateway to the colourful world of Christmas offers hand painted Icelandic handicrafts as well as ornaments from around the world. Guaranteed to get you in the holiday spirit.



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

Sólón
Bankastræti 7a

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

18 Rósenberg
Lækjargata 2

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

5 Mokka
Skólavörðustígur 3a

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

12 Litli Ljótí
Andarunginn
Lækjargata 6b

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

19 Grand Rokk
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
Bergsstaðastræti 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 Prikíð
Bankastræti 12

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

27 Kaffi Amsterdam
Hafnarstræti 5

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

30 Dillon
Laugavegur 30

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

33 Hornið
Hafnarstræti 15

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

36 Tjarnarbakkinn
Vonarstræti 3

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

43 Bernhöftsbakari
Bergsstaðastræti 13

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

50 Vitabar
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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Argentina Steakhouse Perlan

Barónsstígur 11a, 101 Reykjavík, Tel.: 551 9555

Although mostly famous for its tender Argentinian grilled beef steaks, Argentina's Christmas buffet this year is American style with the featured item being turkey in all its variations.

The atmosphere at Argentina has little to do with America though, but everything to do with the southern charm. Seated next to the dancing flames at the fireplace where my companion and I were served Christmas beers as appetizers, we felt a need to finishing our drinks as fast as possible and get right to the good stuff, as we witnessed one guest after another walk to their tables holding hearty dishes with all sorts of delicacies.

After serving us turkey cappuccino (yes, that is right) with pumpkin foam as a starter our waiter enlightened us on the wines we could choose from, carefully selected by the restaurant's sommelier and specially recommended to suit the feast. Our waiter chose a bottle of Argentinian red wine, which was an excellent pick and made a perfect combo with all the diverse dishes.

Guiding us to the elaborate buffet he told us it was divided into four sections. As entrées we could choose from pickled salmon, beef carpaccio with rucola and parmigiano, turkey salad, marinated beef with horseradish sauce, reindeer pâté and marinated shellfish. The cold main course section was more traditional, featuring the classic holiday dish, smoked fillet of pork with red cabbage and corn, smoked turkey breast, turkey galiane, and all sorts of side dishes. The tender lamb fillet and juicy turkey breast served with stuffing, sweet potatoes and at least three tasty sauces, was no less inviting than the previous courses.

A special note has to be taken to the service, which was friendly and relaxed. Our waiter took good care of the wine and the used plates were always gone when we arrived back to our booth.

Although absolutely full after round three we couldn't say no to the appetising chocolate cake that had stared at us every time we walked from the buffet to the table. Various other cholesterol-bombs filled up the dessert table and the irresistible cake, served with caramel sauce, tasted as good as it looked.

Reviewed by Steinunn Jakobsdóttir



Siggi Hall

Pórsgrata 1, 101 Reykjavík, Tel.: 511 6677

First off, Siggi Hall does not offer a traditional style buffet. Rather, the various dishes from the buffet are grouped together on tray according to tradition; starting with fish courses, moving on to cold meat dishes, then hot meat dishes and finally the desert table. It was certainly nothing I had expected, but I can honestly say that this method of presenting the Christmas buffet exceeds the more traditional buffet style. The only drawback is that you cannot see what you have to look forward to, so restraint in the first two rounds is hard to muster, leaving you full by the time you get to the main courses.

For me, the key to a good Christmas buffet lies in the essentials. Several dishes are imperative, while others could be regarded as interchangeable. The first real test is the herring. With six different varieties on offer, the standout was the herring with mustard sauce, with the very Icelandic Brennivinsild, or Black Death marinated herring a close runner up. However, the curry herring was not very exciting, while the other varieties fell somewhere in between. The traditional Icelandic salmon was also a highpoint.

The most essential of the essential Christmas foods, Icelandic hangikjöt, or smoked lamb along with the second most essential dish, the smoked pork fillet, were both featured on the second tray. The hangikjöt is prepared in every Icelandic home around Christmas, with each family preparing the meat according to traditions passed on through generation. Obviously, with such a dish, everyone has their own idea on how the meat should taste, look and feel. I realise that there is never a single right way to prepare hangikjöt, but to my taste the meat was a tad to smoked and the flavour a little to strong. The smoked pork fillet, a main course for my family on Christmas Eve, was cooked exactly to my liking.

Although a word must be reserved for the excellent reindeer steak and the exquisite potato gratin, I must mention the superb desert table. While the crème brûlée and the tiramisu tasted heavenly, it was the pavlova with berries and vanilla sauce that made my day.

With his firm grip on the Christmas essentials, and delicious augmentations in the "interchangeables," Siggi Hall's Christmas buffet is a delicious treat, easily recommended for all.

Reviewed by Sveinn Birkir Björnsson



BEZT Í HEIMI: Thorvaldsens Bazar

Austurstræti 4, 101 Reykjavík, Tel.: 551 3509

Located inside a dignified wooden building on the corner of Austurstræti and Veltusund, Thorvaldsen's Bazar is among the oldest shops in Reykjavík. Opening its doors in 1901, the Bazar has from day one specialised in selling souvenirs, handicrafts and wooden products, mostly hand-knitted by Icelandic women who needed a place to sell their products. Thorvaldsen's Bazar has been located at the same downtown spot since 1905 and through the years its business has evolved with changed shopping habits. Still run by the same organisation that opened the store in the beginning of the last century, the Thorvaldsen Society, a women's charity organisation established on 19 November 1875, counts approximately 80 members today.

The women working in the store each day serve voluntarily, and all profits are donated to charity work. Particularly supporting children in need, the Thorvaldsen Society has bought equipment and sponsored facilities at the children's hospital, supported the psychiatric ward BUGL for adolescents, the organisation Save the Children Iceland and the movement Young and Sober for example. Recently, the society started a 10 million ISK fund for diabetic children. In light of all this, the Bazar has to be noted as a store well worth the desirable title Best í Heimi.

When browsing through all the shop has to offer, the friendly service is instantly noticeable. Greeted by Sigríður Sigurbergisdóttir, the Thorvaldsen Society's chairwoman, she tells the Grapevine that the women love the downtown atmosphere and that the shop is still as well appreciated as it was over a hundred years ago. "We have a range of women who have been knitting

for us for many years, but in addition to that, we buy clothes from wholesale firms. The children's clothes and the woollen underclothes, available for men, women and children, have been very popular and the woollen sweaters as well." Not surprisingly, as these are quality products. In addition to the good selection of the traditional Icelandic woollen sweaters (lopapeysa), socks, gloves, hats and other hand-knitted warm clothing for the winter can be bought for a reasonable price.

As Christmas draws closer, their classic Christmas stamps and Christmas cards now fill the shelves next to the counter. There they get renowned Icelandic artists to paint the pictures: Kjarval, Bertel Thorvaldsen and Nina Tryggvadóttir to name a few. The stamps have been for sale since 1913 and collectors from all around the world wait with anticipation every year for the newest addition.

Sigurbergisdóttir tells me that their largest clientele are tourists who want to buy something special to take back home. And the variety is distinct. In addition to the clothes and Christmas stuff, Icelandic jewellery like necklaces decorated with lava, runic letters, Thor's hammer or other ancient Icelandic symbols as well as the large variety of Icelandic souvenirs, toys and quality handmade products make up a list of nice Christmas presents to send to friends abroad as well as the family at home.

Opening hours: Monday to Friday 9-18, Saturday and Sunday 10-14.

Text by Steinunn Jakobsdóttir

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SATURDAY, DECEMBER 16TH @ 2:00PM SATURDAY, DECEMBER 16TH @ 5:00PM FAMILY CHRISTMAS CONCERT Conductor :: Bernharður Wilkinsson Soloist :: Hulda Jónsdóttir Choir :: Gradualekór Langholtskirkju Leroy Anderson :: A Christmas Festival Mendelssohn :: Violin Concerto, 1st mvt. Tchaikovsky :: The Nutcracker, 4 mvt.	THURSDAY, JANUARY 18TH @ 7:30 Conductor :: Petri Sakari Soloist :: Reka Szvay Béla Bartók :: Violin Concerto no. 2 Anton Bruckner :: Symphony no. 7
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 3RD @ 7:30PM THURSDAY, JANUARY 4TH @ 7:30PM FRIDAY, JANUARY 5TH @ 7:30PM SATURDAY, JANUARY 6TH @ 5:00PM VIENNA CONCERTS Conductor :: Christopher Warren-Green Soloist :: Þóra Einarsdóttir Music by Johan Strauss Jr.	THURSDAY, JANUARY 25TH @ 7:30 DARK MUSIC DAYS Conductor :: Roland Kluttig Soloists :: Guðrún Birgisdóttir, Martini Nardau Órlygur Benediktsson :: A new piece Karlína Eiríksdóttir :: Concerto f. two flutes Erik Mogensen :: Rendez-vous Herbert H. Agústsson :: Concerto breve

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Aðalstræti 2, Tel: 564 6400

www.icelandrefund.com

■ Laundry Service**HI Hostel,** Sundlaugarvegur 34,

Tel: 553 8110, www.hostel.is

Úófoss, 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-mis-

sions/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 Reykjavik City Library,**

Tryggvagata 15

The National and University Li-**brary,** Arngrimgata 3**Tourist Information Centre,**

Aðalstræti 2

Icelandic Travel Market: Bankastræti 2

■ Opening hours**Bars and clubs:** According to regula-

tions 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 super-

markets 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

Reykjavik is the bus. Most busses run

every 20 minutes and price per fare is

250 ISK for adults and 75 ISK for chil-

dren. 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 week-

ends

■ 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_trav-

el_service/

A useful brochure, Accessible Reykja-

vik, 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,** Hjallalhraun 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,** Reykjavikflugvöllur,

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

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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 oc-

casional cultural events and confer-

ences 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, accommo-

dations, 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 ex-

change service, tax refund and selling

the Reykjavik Tourist Card. The Reykja-

vik 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 travel-

ling 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: 511 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 informa-

tion for travellers.

Useful Information**■ Where to learn Icelandic as a****foreign language****Icelandic on the Internet,**

www.vfeskoli.is

Mimir Continuing Education,

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

Námsflokkar Reykjavíkur,

Frikirkjuvegur 1, Tel: 551 2992

Fjölmenning, Laugavegur 59,

Tel: 511 1319, www.fjolmenning.is

The Icelandic College of Engineer-**ing and Technology,** Höfðabakki 9,

Tel: 577 1400, www.thi.is

lðnskólinn í Reykjavík,

Skólavörðuholti, Tel: 552 6240,

www.ir.is

The University of Iceland – Depart-**ment 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, start-

ing at 14:00. The Roman Catholic

Church also has masses in English and

Polish.

Other religious movements in Reykja-

vik are for example:

The Muslim Association of Iceland,

Armúli 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,

Frikirkjuvegur 5

Pentecostal Assembly, Hátún 2**Roman Catholic Church,**

Hávallagata 14

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-**Day Saints,** Ásaborg 2**Jehovah's Witnesses,** Sogavegur 71**Seventh-Day Adventists,**

Suðurlíð 36

Zen Buddhism in Iceland,

Reykjavíkurgvegur 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 Mu-**nicipal employees,** Grettisgata 89,

Tel: 525 8300, www.bsrb.is

The Association of Academics, Bor-

gartún 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, Grettis-

gata 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.gulalinn.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, Skogarhlíð

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 unre-

stricted 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.domsmlaraduneyti.is

Unemployment benefits: Director-

ate of Labour, Public Employment

Service, Tryggvagata 17, Tel: 515 4800,

www.vinnumalastofnun.is

Icelandic social security number**(kennitala):** National Register, Bor-

gartún 30, Tel: 560 9800,

www.hagstofa.is

Driver's license: Those who have a

foreign license don't need an Icelandic

Inside Reykjavík

The Grapevine Guide



The only guide that tells you the talk of the swimming pools, how to find the best cafes, how to recover from all night parties, an A to Z of Icelandic music and what "Viltu kaffi?" can really mean.

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Faulty Logic, Half-truths and Innuendos – The Liberal Party Fans the Flames of Xenophobia

Text by Sveinn Birgir Björnsson Photo by Gulli

"The issue of immigration as such needs to be discussed. We need to decide how we prepare Icelandic society to welcome immigrants. In a way, the government has opened the debate by not taking the initiative in this discussion. But the way the discourse has been presented lately by the Liberal Party, it is coming from an entirely different direction."

-Úlfar Hauksson, Assistant Professor of Political Science, University of Iceland

Last month, Liberal Party member and former reserve-MP Jón Magnússon, brought up the topic of immigration in Iceland in a column in the daily newspaper *Blaðið*, titled 'Iceland for Icelanders?'. Despite the obvious reference to racism in the title, Magnússon has maintained that the core argument of his column is that "the system is obviously not prepared to deal with the growing influx of foreigners."

Displaying incredible lack of respect for the rules of logic, Magnússon claimed that "if the influx of foreigners continues to grow at the current rate, Icelanders will number 400,000 (currently 300,000) by the year 2015, and immigrants will number 80,000." Choosing to completely ignore the difference between permanent immigrants to the country and the migrant work force who are temporarily employed and make up the majority of foreign residents in the country, in order to pad the weight of his argument, Magnússon also makes the erroneous assumption that the need for such a migrant work force will continue to increase at the same rate for the next decade.

As faulty as his logic is, there is a good reason to discuss the "system's" preparedness to deal with the recent influx of immigrants, particularly how we assist them in their assimilation to Iceland. Magnússon however is calling for a stricter immigration policy and shuns all attempts to critically discuss an important issue, revealing his true motives when he goes on to say, "If I was an out-of-work Pole, I would not think twice before moving to Iceland. Nobody should understand my words so that I have anything against Poles or other Christians from our part of the world."

That is, although Magnússon has concerns over immigration, there are certain immigrants that are more desirable than others. He goes on to especially mention his fondness for people from Denmark, Sweden and Norway (why he simply didn't use the term "of Aryan descent" is beyond me), while especially sorting out the more undesirable ones, "I don't want to bring in people from the brotherhood of Muhammad who have their own laws and don't respect minimum rights and offend women."

Circling the Wagons

As easy as it would have been for all concerned – leaders of the Liberal Party included, to dismiss Magnússon's diatribe as the ramblings of one disgruntled member, the party's vice chairman, Magnús Þór Hafsteinnsson appeared on the TV talk show *Silfur Egils*, where he voiced his support for the views expressed in Magnússon's article. Soon enough, other leading proponents of the party, including the Chairman Guðjón Arnar Kristjánsson and the party's MP Sigurjón Þórðarson, circled the wagons and defended Magnússon and his calls for stricter immigration policy, lending him credence as a party spokesman on the issue.

In an attempt to play damage control for the racial innuendos appearing in Magnússon's column, the Liberal Party has focused their fight for stricter immigration policies by trying to focus the discussion on two different topics.

1) The decision the Icelandic government made in 2006 regarding the EU's regulations of free flow of workforce between member states (and the EEA countries, such as Iceland) after the enlargement of the EU in 2004, al-

lowing workers from more disadvantaged countries such as Poland, Slovakia and the Baltic states to freely apply for work in Iceland without applying for a special work permit.

Despite being a member of the EEA, and therefore obligated to ratify EU regulation, Iceland could have postponed the decision for as long as seven years instead of two. The Liberal Party claims that a gross mistake was made on behalf of the Icelandic government by not fully extending the adaptation period until the year 2011, thus allowing a flood of foreigners to Iceland who would do one of two things, be willing to work for lower wages than Icelanders, thereby undercutting the wage market and rob Icelanders of their jobs or they would come here to claim social benefits and undercut our social welfare system.

2) The fear of a cultural clash by pointing to immigration problems in other Nordic countries.

The Liberal Party stance has particularly been directed towards the working class, while breeding ignorance, half-truths, prejudice, and the mentality of us vs. them. One example, and by no means the only one, of how their discourse has been conducted can be found in a blog post by Liberal Party MP Sigurjón Þórðarson from Nov. 5 where he said, "The unlimited influx [of foreign workers] endangers the wages of a large group of the working class, even if it does little to threaten the educated experts who often control the discourse in Iceland."

The Liberal Party's position was met with mixed reactions. While other parties were quick to condemn the party for their position and the general public felt insulted by their blatant use of propaganda, Icelandic media jumped at the chance to stir the controversy and misguided Icelandic nationalists soon found themselves filling out entry forms to the Party, with a recent poll showing a substantial increase in its support.

Meeting the Demand

The emergence of a semi-nationalistic anti-immigration party in Icelandic politics should perhaps not come as a surprise. As recently as last spring, former MP Ásgeir Hannes Eiríksson commissioned IMG Gallup to conduct a poll on his behalf, gauging the attitude of Icelanders towards a party with an anti-immigration / nationalistic platform. According to the poll, one-third of Icelanders said they would consider voting for such a party. For a political party on the verge of elimination, that is a lot of potential votes.

In a conversation with the Grapevine, Úlfar Hauksson, Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Iceland said, "The Liberal Party is clearly moving in the direction of the Danish People's Party (Folkpartiet). They are appealing to people's nationalistic tendencies and the discourse is similar, warnings about how "these people will change our society." This is a very typical reaction for a political party that is on the defensive. The party has based their campaigns on one issue in the past and it is not enough anymore. They were likely to be wiped out in the next election, so they grab this issue to attract voters when polls show that up to 30 percent of Icelandic voters would consider supporting a party with an anti-immigration platform."

The theory that the Liberal Party is reaching for the immigration issue in order to get the disgruntled vote is given added weight by the words of Vice-Party Chairman, Magnús Þór Hafsteinnsson, who went on record in this year's April 23 edition of the newspaper daily *Fréttablaðið* in reply to the question of whether immigrants were causing problems in Iceland. "I don't see any problem here. Foreigners do well here and have brought a lot of good things to Icelandic society. I see no need to create a special platform regarding foreign citizens," Hafsteinnsson said.

Former Grapevine journalist Paul F. Nikolov, who launched a political movement called the New Icelandic Party to bring political attention to the immigrant community, before running in the parliamentary primaries for the Leftist-Green Party in the upcoming election agrees with Hauksson, saying about the Liberal Party, "They are becoming a carbon copy of the Danish People's Party, and there is no question they are doing it to drum up support. I agree that the immigrant issue needs to be discussed, but it is not right to get people worked up based on rumours. The facts are squarely against them. Unemployment in Iceland is less than one percent. Instead of discussing the issue, they only want to talk about how the party is being flooded with new people. You cannot blame immigrants for being paid less than Icelanders any more than you can blame women for being paid less than men. It's not like women are demanding lower wages."

Nikolov touches on the subject of wage differences between Icelanders and immigrants. The difference has mainly been explained by two factors. Immigrants have filled jobs where Icelanders have failed to meet the demand in basic service industries and low-level healthcare for example. Immigrants, or more accurately, foreign workers have also been frequent victims of infraction to their worker's rights and legally binding contracts for minimum wages. The Liberal Party's tactic of placing the responsibility of these infractions on the shoulder of the workers is obviously erroneous and misleading, and the party members have been curiously reluctant to discuss unemployment numbers along with the number of foreign workers in the country.

The Truth About Foreign Work Force

According to numbers from the Icelandic Labour Union and the Directorate of Employment, the employment situation in Iceland is exceptionally good. Current unemployment in Iceland is one percent, which means there is virtually no unemployment, but rather an excessive demand for work force. According to statistics from the Directorate of Employment and the Directorate of Immigration, the number of foreigners who have sought residence permits in Iceland this year totals 10,000, bringing the total foreign work force in Iceland to an expected 15,000. The Icelandic Labour Union maintains that the increase is due to heavy demand for work force stemming from the build up of heavy industry in Eastern Iceland.

In an interview with the Grapevine, Guðmundur Hilmarrson from the Icelandic Labour Union said, "The foreign work force has not been taking any employment away from Icelanders. They have been asked to come here to meet the added demand for work force in the country. I cannot understand this discussion by the Liberals. It is totally based on false presumptions and does nothing but fuel animosity against foreigners. It is completely impossible to blame foreign workers for being offered lower wages. It is against the law to offer wages under the minimum wage barrier, and if that is being done, then that is a criminal act by the employer, not the employee. People who are coming in from Poland or China have no good way of knowing their rights or what the minimum wage is, and even if they are being offered something that is beyond minimum wage in Iceland, it may still be a good wage compared to their home country."

Úlfar Hauksson agrees, "If you look at different groups of immigrants, you will see that people come to Iceland for different reasons than to the other Nordic countries. The majority of the immigrants in the rest of Scandinavia are seeking refuge from poverty or war and in many cases they go straight to the social welfare system and do not enter the em-

ployment market until some years later and in some cases not at all. The people who are coming to Iceland are coming here to work. This is a migrant work force that has come here because the economy has been calling for it and they are likely to leave and look for work somewhere else when the economy slows down."

In a lengthy discussion with the Grapevine, Ragnar Arnason, head of labour market division of the Confederation of Icelandic Employers said that it would be best to forget this discussion as soon as possible. He blamed the Liberal Party for blatantly over-simplifying the economic factors of the immigrant issue. "With the current level of construction in this country, we could never have met the demand for work force with domestic workforce only. So, obviously, the wage drift in Iceland would have been much greater if it was not for the foreigners and companies would have been forced to enter a bidding war for Icelandic workers. The wage drift between years has been 10-11 percent, which is much more than in the surrounding countries, that number would have been substantially higher without foreign workers. We would have been forced to ration developments to diminish the level of operation, especially with private investment. People would have had to apply for permits from authorities to build a roof over their head."

With the inflation level in Iceland hovering above eight percent in recent months, further increase in wage drift would surely have pushed inflation marks higher. That exact development took place in the late 90's when demand for workers far exceeded supply and as a result, inflation soared. Back then there was no tradition for bringing in foreign workers to alleviate tension in the labour market.

"Looking ahead, you might even say that the addition of foreign workers is protecting Icelandic jobs. It is obvious that if you have a workplace that needs 100 people to run as an efficient unit, and you can only supply it with 70 people, you only have two options, either you fold the operation or you move the operation to another country," Arnason continues. In either case, that is 70 Icelandic jobs lost, instead of the 30 created for foreigners, who do, after all, pay their taxes in Iceland.

Arnason also brings up the subject of foreign temporary contractor agencies. These agencies, located in countries like Poland or Lithuania for example, were used extensively by Icelandic building contractors to supply workers on salaries far below the Icelandic minimum wage, only legally, for the workers were employed by the agency, not the building contractor. "One positive thing to come out of the change that was made March 1 is that companies are now able to hire employees directly instead of going through foreign temporary contractor agencies, which are a lot more difficult to supervise. Magnús Hafsteinnsson ought to know better. The adaptation period that we were offered and decided to use from 2004-2006 did not extend to the free flow of service companies, like the temporary contractor agencies, within the EU. This is something the Liberal Party conveniently forgets to mention."

But perhaps, all this is over-explains a rather simple issue. The Labour Union's Guðmundur Hilmarrson thinks we might be well-served by looking closer to home. "I think when we are discussing these issues, we should keep in mind how Icelanders have in large numbers sought work in other Nordic countries, such as Sweden, every time unemployment increases and the economy has been slow here. We regard this as basic survival instinct on our behalf, but when a Pole decides to do the same then suddenly it is something completely different. They are doing this out of the same basic survival instinct as we are."



How to Conduct Your Icelandic Christmas

Text by Haukur Magnússon Photo by Reykjavík Museum of Photography

Even though most western nations are by all accounts becoming more mind-numbingly culturally uniform by the minute, there are still some vast regional differences as to how we go about living our lives and the various customs and traditions that entails. Take Christmas for instance. Most Christian countries (and some non-Christian ones as well) have their own special version of the festivities that December brings, even though themes of celebration, charity, love towards mankind and consumerism are widespread. Iceland is no different in this respect and has many Christmas customs and ceremonies you will not find anywhere else. The following is an attempt to give outsiders some insight into how the average Icelander will experience and celebrate the holidays in light of traditional folklore and long standing customs, as well as some new ones.

The presents themselves and the various traditions surrounding them (such as the median price-range) vary between households, although there are some constants. Books, expensive as they may be in Iceland, have for long ranked as the most popular gift-items; the publishing industry and book stores virtually revolve around the holiday season – the months leading up to it see the majority of the year’s releases being published and bought. Of course, condensing the book market and literary discussion this way has some strange effects on Icelandic literary culture, as is discussed elsewhere in this issue.

The Icelandic music industry faced similar concerns a while back, with the majority of each respective year’s releases and purchases being made during its last quarter. Lately the sales have become more constant, however, although the gift of music is still a popular one. Beside cultural products, other popular gift items include decorative objects, board games, electronic equipment and the like.

Calling All Shoppers!
Consumerism is just as rampant in Iceland as the rest of the world. Thus it should come as no surprise that each year, the first signs of the impending holidays stem from Iceland’s shopping malls and advertising agencies; as early as October one may witness Santa or one of his minions run amok in the media, reminding shoppers that the Christmas season has indeed arrived and it is time to stock up on gifts and pleasures. Soon after, the larger stores will start decorating in a Christ-massy sort of style, giving nods to the festivities with the use of Christmas trees, blinking light sets and inflatable Santas.

“In folk tales, Christmas Eve is a dangerous night that should be approached with extreme caution.”

However, most of the shopping occurs in the month of December itself, culminating at December 23 – known here as Þorláksmessa – when the stores stay open ‘til late and midtown Reykjavík along with the shopping malls experience their most crowded day of the year. The large mass of people that congregate downtown to do some last minute shopping and drink cups of cocoa is truly a sight to behold and is to some one of the season’s high points.

Deck the Halls
Icelanders usually commence giving their homes the holiday treatment in late November/early December, with the start of Advent (which occurs the fourth Sunday before Christmas) usually marking the official ‘OK time’ for decorating. Decorations are similar to what may be found in the rest

of the Christmas-celebrating world: pine branches, light sets, Santa-related effigies and various knick-knacks and doodads are common in Icelandic households during the month of December. A four-candle Advent wreath, with one candle to be lit on each Advent Sunday to mark its passing, may be found in most homes, as may so-called Christmas-calendars, boxes of chocolates to be dispensed every day leading up to December 24.

A decorative object somewhat unique to Iceland, although the phenomenon may be found in some Nordic countries, is the so-called Advent light, a seven-armed electric

candlestick found in at least one window of almost every Icelandic house throughout the holiday season. It is reportedly quite common for those who visit Reykjavík in December to get in touch with the National Museum and inquire about the objects, and as to whether Judaism is widespread in the country.

The story behind the Advent lights’ popularity in Iceland is surprisingly mundane and in most cases it is thought of as any other decoration, even though the seven-armed candlestick is laden with symbolism elsewhere. The story goes that a certain Reykjavík businessman encountered the object on a standard shopping trip to Sweden sometime in the mid-sixties. He thought they’d make excellent gifts to his aunts back home and bought several for that purpose. Word of mouth popularity ensued, and soon

the businessman was importing boatloads of the decorative lights, as no respectable Icelandic home could bear to be without them.

A Pretty Horrible Family
Iceland has some strange and violent folklore connected to the month of Advent, and Christmas in particular, although later years have seen some of its harsher tales considerably revised and edited to make them more “child-friendly”. As with most Western nations, Christmas in Iceland involves several mythical creatures dating back to the middle ages, but what may set ours apart is their bleak nature and often-scary undertones.

In folk tales, Christmas Eve is a dangerous night that should be approached with extreme caution. It is the time when every supernatural creature in Iceland’s collective consciousness comes out to play, often luring innocent peasants into their dens, killing them or trapping them forever. For instance, elves will tempt with their riches and beauty, trapping whoever falls for their shtick into an eternity of living inside rocks, or worse. And those who dare play cards or games of any nature on Christmas Eve may expect horrible things to come their way – a famous folk tale speaks of a Church that was engulfed into the earth by Satan himself after its patrons partook in a midnight game of cards.

And then there are the gift-bringers: the Jólásveinar (or Yuletide Lads), a motley group of bogeymen descended from trolls. Originally used to scare children into submission, it is only in later years that they have warmed to the task of bringing them presents instead of harassing their families with pranks and misdemeanours. Little is known of the Jólásveinar’s origins, but they do get mentioned in writing as early as the 17th century. Their number and habits varied from region to region (the East Fjords even had some that lived

at sea as opposed to on mountains), and there are as many as 80 recorded names for them. Jón Arnason, Iceland’s answer to the Brothers Grimm, published their names in his widely read folklore collection in 1862 and thus contributed to a still remaining consensus that there are exactly 13 active Jólásveinar.

The Jólásveinar have come a long way since their salad days of terrifying young kids. As the centuries passed, they seem to have taken a shine to the little ones and sometime around 1960 they found a purpose in leaving small gifts in kids’ shoes left on window sills (although there are reports of this behaviour as early as 1930). The first one, Stekkjarstaur (Gully Oaf) comes to town on the eve of December 12. They keep on coming leading up to December 24, when the infamous Kertasnikir (Candle Beggar – he usually leaves the greatest presents behind) makes his arrival. Some interesting ones that show up in the interim include Þvörusleikir (Spoon-licker), Hurðaskellir (Door-slammer) and Gluggagægir (Peeping Tom). The gifts they leave behind range from small toys and Christmas decorations to books and CDs (that would be Kertasnikir), but if a child has behaved foully, he can count on getting a potato in lieu of the common pleasures.

As mentioned earlier, the Jólásveinar are descended from common trolls, and in fact they come from a pretty horrid family. Their mother is the most infamous Icelandic troll of all – the deadly Grýla. She is mainly known for taking great pleasure in devouring naughty children, sometimes cooked but often raw, and it is believed that her sons’ original purpose was to bring her fresh meat when the hunger struck. Not as devious but still pretty mean is Grýla’s husband, Leppalúði, who partakes in all the nastiness but is a more passive figure.

However, the most vicious and weird family member is in all likelihood the deceptively named Jólaköttur (Christmas Cat). This feline is said to be of gargantuan proportions (for a cat), and he has the sole purpose of eating disadvantaged children. Not necessarily naughty ones, something that would, in a way, be understandable; rather, the Christmas Cat chooses to feast on kids who fail to get a new clothes for Christmas. Luckily, Iceland’s trusty welfare system has ensured that he rarely finds motive to visit these days.

Devouring Christmas

Food plays a large part in Icelandic Christmas festivities and there are several local culinary traditions to be honoured over the holidays. The fun starts in early December, when families congregate to bake several types of Christmas-cookies to be eaten over the course of the coming month. An average household will usually produce around three to ten different sorts of cookies, although later years have seen an increase in the circulation of store-bought ones. More productive households will also bake and freeze layer cakes and raisin-laced Christmas cakes.

From the northern parts of Iceland comes the December tradition of baking Laufabrauð (Leaf-bread), a very thin, deep-fried sort of bread that has decorations carved in it and goes tremendously well with butter. Another regional delicacy that has in later years spread throughout Iceland is the annual devouring of kæst skata (rotten skate) on Þorláksmessa (December 23). Originating in the West Fjords, the skate-feast generally takes place at noon.

The skate has at this point been rotting by itself at room temperature for about three weeks, giving it a harsh and cleansing taste. By most accounts, cooking skate will really stink up a house, although many profess a great love for the dish and its accompanying tallow, cooked rye bread and whole milk. Certainly an acquired taste, but one that’s well worth exploring.

There aren’t many specifically Icelandic Christmas-style drinks to speak of. The Scandinavian custom of gathering to drink the so-called Jólalöggi (Christmas-drops) in the weekends leading up to Christmas is often practiced, although its popularity has waned somewhat in recent years. Jólalöggi is a sickly sweet sort of drink that’s usually made by heating red wine spiced with cinnamon, ginger, raisins and lemon peel – and some will add spirits for added bite.

Alcohol consumption around Christmas itself is less popular than one would assume from Icelanders’ usual drinking habits – folks would rather stay warm with a cup of hot chocolate or a combination of alcohol-free Malt ale (Maltöl) and Icelandic orange soda (Appelsín). Combined, the two drinks form what’s commonly referred to as Jólal (Christmas ale). The blending of the two has been common practice in Iceland since around 1960 and most families have their own special ways of determining the correct proportions between them (some even go as far as adding cola to the mix).

(Nothing to Fear But) Christmas Itself

The first thing you should know about the actual celebrating of Christmas in Iceland is that it culminates on December 24 rather than the 25th, which is the common Western date to celebrate the birth of Christ. This is in keeping with the original Christian chronology, taken up from Judaism, which deems that a new day starts at sunset, or six p.m. outside of the original Jewish areas. Thus it is deemed that Christmas day starts at six p.m. in Iceland, signalled in by National Radio’s broadcasting of church bells. This is followed by a traditionally extravagant Christmas meal, often comprised of smoked pork or wild game such as ptarmigan or reindeer. Large families like to gather for this occasion and there will often be as many as 20 people eating at the same table. Many families will conclude the meal by eating a Christmas porridge in which an almond has been hidden – whoever gets the almond wins a fun prize. Leading up to this is an always-unbearable wait, at least if you’re a kid. While parents spend the day putting last-minute touches on decorations, preparing the meals and wrapping up presents, children will watch some of the local TV stations all-day broadcasts of Christmas-themed cartoons. Many will suffer uncontrollable sugar-induced temper tantrums throughout the day.

What they are looking forward to is of course the much-coveted opening of presents, an activity that reigns supreme over the rest of the evening. A family member will often take the task upon himself of fetching the presents from under the Christmas tree and distributing them according to their tags. This can go on for hours in large families, and it’s usually not until well after midnight that people make their way to bed, often reading newly acquired books well into the small hours of Christmas Day.

Christmas products



German quality chocolates



Various products available



German chocolate balls



Belgian Galler chocolate roses



Belgian chocolates with liquor



Belgian chocolates with liquor



Belgian chocolates with liquor

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Smokkur fyrir okkur!

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Sexually transmitted diseases are more common than you think.

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Hressingarskálinn (Hressó) is a Classical Bistro, located in the heart of the city at Austurstræti 20.

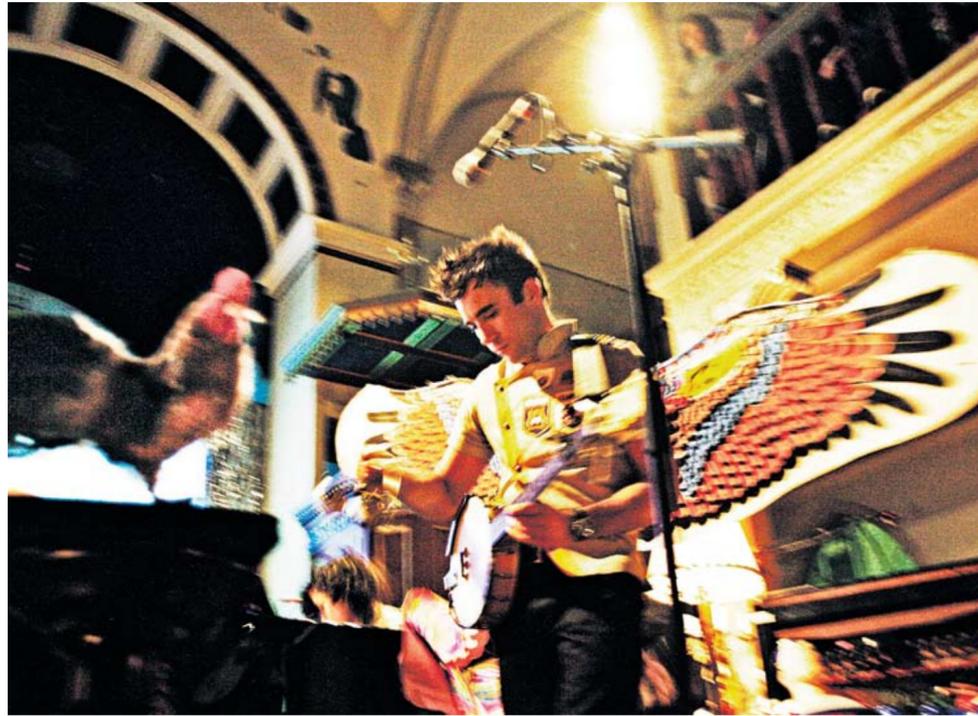
Food is served from 10 until 22 every day. On Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights, after the kitchen closes Hressó heats up with live music. Weekends, DJs keep the party going until morning, with no cover charge.

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An Appreciated Invasion of Flying Stars and Inflated Santas

Text by Steinunn Jakobsdóttir Photo by Skari

Who: Sufjan Stevens
Where: Frikkirkjan Church
When: November 18, 2006

Detroit native Sufjan Stevens has built quite a fan base in Iceland, so it was not surprising that his two shows last month sold out in a matter of minutes and more dates would surely have been appreciated. Those lucky devotees who got a ticket in time flocked with anticipation to Frikkirkjan Church to see his European tour climaxing in Reykjavik in a god-like manner.

Frikkirkjan Church, usually holding approximately 500 people, was overfilled when opening act St. Vincent, started her set. With every seat on the church benches taken, some late arrivals had to settle for a place on the floor. That didn't diminish the cosy feel inside the church that night, where candles lit up the stage and Jesus hovered above it. Every bit of decoration was in total harmony with Stevens' music, underlining how perfect a small-scale venue was for this kind of a

show.

St. Vincent, a moniker of the multi-talented singer and songwriter Annie Clark, blew everyone away with her first tune. She has been supporting Stevens during his European tour, deservedly earning attention for her solo project. Her dynamic voice, heartfelt performance, complex melodies and unusual instrumentation, like stomping her foot to the ground to create an intense drum sound while playing the guitar, got every single soul in the audience gazing at the stage, almost forgetting that there was more to come. (Check out her MySpace page for songs *Marry Me* and *Paris is Burning*, in particular.) After her set, I wasn't only excited about the following act but equally thrilled by the fact I had now discovered another genius. That was just a bonus.

The instrument-packed stage indicated that Stevens's supporting band included quite a few members. The inflated Santa Clauses lying on top of the piano gave no indication at all. Also mysteriously lying on the piano were several inflated Supermen,

an obvious reference to the fracas over the original cover of Illinois album, which sports Superman. Only a few albums exist with the original cover. Stupid copyright laws.

Sufjan Stevens is not only a unique musician, a brilliant writer and composer but also a creative performer. It was soon evident that the props on the piano had a purpose when Stevens and the Band of Butterflies entered one after another, wearing feathered masks and butterfly wings. Stevens himself had eagle wings tied to his back and told the crowd he was the chief eagle in the majestic snowbird tour where the theme was flying objects. When the Supermen and Santa Clauses started bouncing like colourful marionettes inside Frikkirkjan after Stevens threw them in the crowd I understood what he meant.

After introducing his band as the Magical Butterfly Brigade and he himself the Majesty Songbird, the whole crew, consisting of a brass band, drummer and a string set, started off with the theme song *Majesty Snowbird*.

Stevens's instrumental talents were no secret, but seeing him switch between the piano, guitar, banjo and occasional cow bell, was amazing, as was the supporting brass section and aforementioned St. Vincent, who had re-entered the stage, now wearing butterfly wings, playing the guitar, sometimes the piano and singing back-up vocals on a couple of the songs.

Although the songs were all familiar to the audience and the set mostly consisted of tracks from the albums *Seven Swans* and *Illinois* (the second piece in the 50 States puzzle), the compositions were so much more imposing and sensational than on the albums, as *Seven Swans*, *Sister* and two of my favourites, *To Be Alone With You* and *The Man of Metropolis Steals Our Hearts*, bore witness to. In keeping with the evening and the season, Stevens also played a Christmas song, *That Was the Worst Christmas Ever!* from his *Songs for Christmas* album.

It would be impossible to talk about the show without mentioning Stevens' lyrics and stories. His narrative skills were also displayed as he delivered historical facts and stories about notable people, mixed with religious views and weird jokes in songs with ridiculously long titles that stressed his strong feelings towards fellow countrymen and complex emotions and childhood memories.

His performance of *A Good Man Is Hard To Find*, based on a short story about a serial killer written by American novelist Flannery O'Connor, who he paid tribute to before playing the song, was received with booming applause. Another breathtaking performance was his rendition of John Wayne Gacy, Jr (also about a serial killer). As sad as this story of the serial killer from Chicago dressed in a clown suit is, when he delivered lines like: "His father was a drinker/and his mother cried in bed" with his delicate voice Stevens almost made you feel sympathy for the man.

After an almost two-hour show and several spine-chilling moments, Stevens and his winged friends said goodnight, only to return to the stage after a lengthy applause and outcries from the crowd. "I can't believe he's not gonna play Chicago," the guy sitting next to me had said to his friend when Stevens didn't seem to be coming back again. But the audience didn't crack, and kept on clapping and stomping until now humble and almost watery-eyed Stevens returned, alone, taking his good time thanking the guests for the warm welcome, before kicking off with *Chicago*. For the last two songs, the whole band came back for support with the concert culminating in *Concerning The UFO Sighting Near Highland, Illinois*.

Everything clicked perfectly. Stevens and his Butterfly band were more energetic, passionate, magical even, than I had dared to hope for, leaving the audience in a daze. Taking their time thanking the band for its staggering performance that night, the crowd slowly scattered away, some carrying an inflated Santa under their arm, a memorable souvenir of a concert no one in the church would forget about in the near future.



Sugarcubes Reconnect and Eventually Triumph

Text by Sveinn Birgir Björnsson Photo by Skari

Who: The Sugarcubes
Where: Laugardalshöll
When: November 17, 2006

Some artists are only discovered posthumously. So it seems to have been with the Sugarcubes who returned to perform a concert last Friday in celebration of the 20th anniversary of their first single, *Birthday*, despite the band announcing its death in 1992.

At a press conference two days before the concert, with nearly 5,000 tickets sold in advance, the Sugarcubes' bass player, Bragi Ólafsson told me: "This is very new to us. We are not exactly used to be playing in front of large crowds here in Iceland. We are used to playing small clubs." The sentiment was echoed by Sugarcubes front man, Einar Órn Benediktsson, when I asked him if he was surprised that the show had not already sold out. "Not so much, we were never really a success in Iceland."

Despite a meagre following in Iceland during their heyday, the combination of their well-documented and somewhat aberrant quirkiness, their timeless songwriting, and the fact that they are Björk's former band has

secured the Sugarcubes an almost mythical status in Iceland's musical history. The Sugarcubes decided to use this opportunity cash in on this fact in order to bankroll further operation of their own record label, *Bad Taste*, founded the same day as the band and still a productive and daring label, despite the band's demise. Although I am not a big fan of bands reuniting in order to cash in on former fame, the Sugarcubes lapse was easily forgiven in light of their altruistic reasoning.

While much of the older audience that night was there for the rare second chance to fulfil something that perhaps they ought to have done circa 1989, many of the younger audience was barely old enough to remember the times when the Sugarcubes were still a band. Overall, attendees were not so much nostalgic as they were curious to see the return of the now legendary and much-hyped Sugarcubes.

Despite the anticipation filling the stadium, the show got off to a rather slow start as the band opened with the song *Traitor*, the first song from their first album. In the early moments of the show I could not escape the feeling of the band being out of place and time, playing in front of 5,000-plus discon-

nected patrons, 15 years after their prime. This feeling was not lost on the band either as they strained to find their comfort level and create a connection with the audience in the large stadium. It was not altogether pleasant to witness and for a moment I feared that the Sugarcubes reunion would prove to be as disastrous as Michael Jordan's second comeback.

Nevertheless, the night was kicked into gear with the rock solid delivery of *Regina and Cold Sweat*, both early highlights. From that point on, crowd and band were in unison, equally at home with one another as the band blazed through their hit singles one by one. Other notable highlights were *Deus*, *Motorcrash*, and the obvious *Birthday*. It was pleasant to hear how well their songs have withstood the test of time. The gist of songs sounds just as fresh today as they did when they first came out.

Despite the long lay-off, there was little rust to be found in their performance. Band members resumed their duties without effort and quickly fell into their roles. More or less motionless in the background stood guitarist Þór Eldon and bassist Bragi Ólafsson, with Margrét Órnólfssdóttir standing behind

a keyboard to the side. Their calm demeanor stood in stark contrast to the bantering and spastic twitches of singer Einar Órn, who at times conjured images of the Mad Hatter as he joked around with the band's other vocalist, Björk, and danced around with a red trumpet.

As much as everyone tried to ignore it, the star of the show was still Björk Guðmundsdóttir. Her command over her instrument is quite amazing, and it is hard to imagine the Sugarcubes having reached their level of success without her unique vocal lines. Although her mates onstage were all accomplished, seasoned musical veterans – (with the exception of bass player/writer Bragi Ólafsson, who had earlier told me that even if he had not played bass in years, his lines were simple and really, it was just like driving a car, you don't forget) – she is the only international star, able to attract audiences from afar. Which she did.

On location that night were over 1,000 foreigners who flew in exclusively to watch the night's show. You wonder how many would have shown up if Björk had not been present. She fell seamlessly in line with the band, and at times she looked so at home on that stage, you could almost forget that they had disbanded and she had moved on to bigger and better things.

More than anything, it was drummer Sigtryggur Baldursson who caught my attention. Even if this talented drummer has been involved with various projects recently, witnessing him in his element that night, truly made it clear how much fun it is to watch him play. His constant smile and jovial spirit also underscored another detail that was lost on no one that night; just how much fun these people were having, sharing a stage again for the first time since 1992.

After they had performed 18 songs, the Sugarcubes finally retreated under the feverish salute of the crowd. After a few minutes of the stomping, clapping and yelling, they returned to perform an encore, including their most successful single, *Hit*, off the 1992 *Stick Around For Joy*. After the band left the stage for the second time, the crowd was still hungry for more and brought them out for yet another encore.

For the final act, the 'Cubes brought out a special guest in none other than Johnny Triumph, the only man alive who could justifiably demote Björk to a back-up singer. Joining him onstage were two young teens, Einar Órn's and Þór's and Margrét's sons, who joined the family in performing *Luftgitar*, a collaboration project from Johnny Triumph's own album. Even if Triumph's return was a welcome sight for many Icelanders, I have a feeling the joke may have been lost on the majority of the foreign guests, as his album was never released outside Iceland.

As Triumph brought the night to an end by smashing his invisible *Luftgitar* against the amplifiers and eventually tossing it into the audience, the night was brought to a memorable pinnacle and ultimately, a close.

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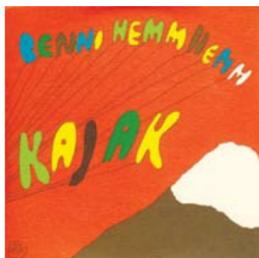
Briet Sunna
Bara ef þú kemur með

Sena, the biggest record label on the market, seems to have an endless supply of former Icelandic Idol contestants to put in front of a microphone, covering old songs like Always on My Mind, all yielding the same results. For the most part these are pretty girls who can hold a tune somewhat decently. Briet Sunna delivers for her part, singing pretty when told to, but devoid of feeling or emotion. The hired session players trudge through the songs and surely earn the money the record label paid them. This sounds like karaoke and that is what it is. Better than your average drunk-on-a-Saturday night karaoke, but still karaoke. Some of the Icelandic lyrics are so embarrassingly bad that they almost justify buying the album for a short laugh but, probably, it will just depress you in the end. Stay clear of this.



Biggi
id

Maus were a popular, great and influential indie band back in the late 1990s. Frontman and singer Biggi was charismatic in a weird way, sometimes out of tune and not really cut out to be a singer. He even acknowledged this in a great Maus song, Maðurinn með Stálróddina (The man with the steel voice). His singing worked with Maus, backed by the traditional guitar, bass and drums. This solo album is much more low key than rock'n'roll and this is not good for Biggi. The songs could have made up for this but they are unoriginal electro-pop, never catching your attention. The compositions still sound like they could have been made into some good Maus songs. The production is good and the booklet is not hideously ugly. Included are liner notes instead of lyrics, which feel awkward at times. This album is not excellent or original, just mediocre, which is a letdown coming from Biggi. I expected more.



Benni Hemm Hemm
Kajak

Benni Hemm Hemm has been named Golden Boy of Icelandic pop in this publication. Judging by his self-titled debut, released last year, the title isn't far off, winning two awards at last year's Icelandic Music Awards. The music sounds something like indie big-band pop, with trumpets, acoustic guitar and horns playing a big part, at times reminiscent of the ever-influential Belle and Sebastian. Benni is a good songwriter, the melodies are interesting but the album suffers from Benni's singing, which really isn't strong enough. I struggle to imagine a time when I would put this CD on, maybe as a prelude to some heavy drinking and dancing with some party people of the cute generation – it sounds as if it would be a lot of fun to see performed live – but isn't really suited for the home stereo. Benni proves that he's a talented songwriter and the band performs well. It's simply not the follow-up I was anticipating.



Magga Stína
syngur Megas

Megas, a cultural icon around these parts, sure seems popular this year. Two albums have surfaced where artists try to put their mark on his songs and lyrics. Magga Stína, a talented and sometimes quirky musician, backed by some of the best musicians in the country, offers 11 songs by Megas on this album, three of which are new. It's hard to make an old song your own, especially songs by such a unique artist as Megas. Magga Stína succeeds on some tracks, especially Filahirðirinn frá Súrin, which is the greatest Icelandic love song of all time and her version hits the target perfectly. Although she doesn't manage to make you forget Megas's originals she provides a pleasing album and by far the best cover album of his songs the world has seen.



Jóhann Jóhannsson
IBM 1401, A User's Manual

An album inspired by recordings of electromagnetic waves emitting from an obsolete computer the size of a large refrigerator. Sounds fun? Not really but this actually is a highly enjoyable CD. Originally composed for a string quartet as the soundtrack to a dance piece, this is eerie and haunting symphonic stuff with sounds from the computer sampled. Each of the five tracks slowly builds up to a peak with strings and weird sounds – after all this is built on electromagnetic sounds. The computer plays a big part and its various accessories like the IBM 1403 printer or the IBM 1402 Card Read-Punch. The album is big and powerful and cinematic. It has a remorseful sound, somehow sounding like a eulogy or an homage to an obsolete machine. A great and beautiful piece of modern composition.



The Foghorns
New Low

The Foghorns have been pretty active in the music scene the past couple of years, playing numerous shows but never drawing a big crowd. The brainchild of former Grapevine editor, Bart Cameron, this release was partly recorded live in Reykjavik and partly in some (I imagine) seedy locations in Brooklyn and Wisconsin. The sound is rough and lo-fi but perfectly fitting the Bruce Springsteen folk-punk rock (think Nebraska, not Born To Run). Lyrically it's an album of sorrow, sadness and longing – the bitterness shines through. It sounds honest and raw with a feeling of intensity; as if the band has a point to make and really, really wants the listener to get it; as if they care about their work, getting the music out just to get it out and not because they think it will make them lots of money. It won't. So throw all the money you can spare at them because this is a fucking great CD.

All reviews by Páll Hilmarsson

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The Ambassador

An excerpt

By Bragi Ólafsson Translated by Victoria Cribb

Brief synopsis

Icelandic poet Sturla Jon Jonsson attends an international poetry festival in Lithuania - but this is no ordinary poetry trip. As the poetic ambassador of his country, Sturla Jon shrugs off his official duties, deciding to become the ambassador to his own feelings instead.

In Vilnius he meets a female white-Russian poet by the name of Liliya Boguinskaia, who introduces him to the non-so-poetic aspects of reality.

Part one, Reykjavik, Bankastræti

It was made of particularly hard-wearing material, one hundred per cent cotton, which gave the impression, when touched, of being waxed. And as for the seams – they were guaranteed for life. Because the finish was similar to that of some book jackets, like lamination – “you would know all about that, as a poet” – it was resistant to all moisture, which made it ideal for the climate of this country, or whatever country you cared to name; after all, even when the day greeted you with cloudless skies, you could never be sure that by the time it had ended dust would be the only thing to have fallen on you. The colour, too, was one of its main advantages; it never demanded attention as a colour, but drew it anyway in the form of silent admiration, and – “though of course we shouldn’t let ourselves think that way” – envy. The mere fact of its being made in Italy was a form of insurance that the sum you paid for it would go straight into your own pocket, so to speak. And talking of pockets, this nifty little inside pocket on the right did nothing to detract from the appeal; it was especially fitted there to accommodate a mobile phone. Or a packet of cigarettes, that’s to say if the owner doesn’t use a mobile phone but belongs instead to that select group of people who still insist on ruining their health by smoking. Oh, and it was worth mentioning that in the other inside pocket, intended to hold a wallet, there was a small, dark-blue velvet bag – one of the features that made this particular design so unique: a bag made of velvet – and in this neat little bag, which you closed by pulling a yellow silk cord, there were two spare buttons to use in the unlikely event that one of the original buttons came off and was lost. Of course there wasn’t much risk of that happening, because, as already mentioned, the stitching was guaranteed to last a lifetime.

It was with these words – more or less – that the sales assistant in the gentleman’s outfitters on Bankastræti described the Aquascutum duster coat to Sturla Jón; the coat that Sturla had long ago set his heart on and asked to have reordered for him when it sold out. The assistant had no idea that it was Sturla Jón who had requested the order since Sturla hadn’t spoken to this salesman before; he seemed to be new. So it took him pleasantly by surprise – though perhaps he should have expected it of a man whose job is to pay attention to people’s taste in clothes, and thus to people themselves – that the assistant should recognise him. But of course it was conceivable that one of his colleagues had tipped him off when Sturla came into the shop that this was Sturla Jón, the poet; maybe even adding: the one who published freedom from freedom.

Sturla had first spotted the coat in the shop back in February. The weather had been rather too cold at the time to justify purchasing an unlined duster coat, and he couldn’t have afforded it then anyway. But when he thought of taking another look at the coat in June, when his finances were looking up, the three or four coats that had been there in February had vanished from the rail; they had been sold. “There was a man in here the other day who I reckon must have tried on every suit in the shop,” said the assistant. Sturla was not sure how to interpret this information. He himself had not tried anything on yet; perhaps he reminded the assistant of this man.

“You might know him,” continued the assistant. “I think he’s a painter or some kind of artist.”

“And did he buy a suit?” asked Sturla.

“I’m in the visual arts line myself,” the assistant chipped in, making it sound as if he didn’t want the news to get out. Sturla repeated his question.

“None of the suits were modish enough for him,” answered the assistant with a smile. “He couldn’t find any with dried mustard on the lapels.”

For a moment Sturla reflected how unusual it was to hear a man as young as the one in front of him use the word modish.

“He had a crusty old stain on the jacket he was wearing,” continued the latter, and when he added that the man had an Adolf Hitler moustache and was wearing a yellow shirt, though one couldn’t immediately tell whether the colour was original or had been acquired over time, Sturla thought it had probably been N. Pietur, the artist and improvisational composer, an old friend of his father’s, and he wondered if it was appropriate for an assistant in a shop such as this to gossip about other customers. When the assistant added that of course it wasn’t just anyone who bought “expensive, quality apparel like this”, as he put it – meaning the apparel stocked by the shop – Sturla felt convinced that if anyone had the right to express an opinion to complete strangers about the delicate process involved in the relations between the one who is offering the goods and the one who is faced with the choice of choosing or rejecting, it should be the customer, not the salesman. He felt it was uncalled for of the young assistant to make conversation with a prospective buyer about his experience of the shop’s other customers, even if the person in question had put him to considerable trouble without actually buying anything – and perhaps most of all for that reason.

Yet despite his thoughtlessness, the assistant was right in saying that of course not everyone could afford to purchase the clothing stocked by the shop, least of all the garment that Sturla had his eye on. Because it was safe to say that these English coats, made in Italy, were expensive, fiendishly expensive. But Sturla Jón, who did not as a rule spend much money on clothes for himself, had at some point many years ago seen a garment like this, a cross between a duster coat and mackintosh, and permitted himself the thought that perhaps he should go a little against the grain and his clothes-buying habits, and set himself the goal of acquiring such an overcoat, almost regardless of cost; allowing himself for once to spend money on a sartorial luxury, something he knew would give him more pleasure to wear than any of his other clothes that had cost not a penny more than necessary.

As Sturla announced that he would take the coat, he realised he had a smile on his face, an innocent smile that was of course nothing wrong in itself, but he was afraid that to other people it might look as if he were irrepressibly proud of himself, like a child or teenager who is about to have his greatest dream come true. “I’ll take it,” he said decisively, trying to wipe the smile off his face.

The assistant nodded solemnly, as if he himself had come to an important decision, and said:

“Good choice.”

Sturla misheard this as “Gotcha”, and stared at the assistant in mild surprise as the man folded the garment. It made a crackling noise, not unlike thick paper, due to the stiffness of the cotton.

“Might there be anything else?” was the assistant’s reaction to the questioning look in Sturla’s eyes.

“No, thank you,” replied Sturla.

“Right you are,” said the assistant, and they went over to the cash register which, unlike in most shops, was located in the middle of the room, by a square pillar. On a table beside the cash desk stood a shiny coffee machine – from the same country as the coat – and an artistic arrangement of white coffee cups.

“Do have an espresso while we’re processing the transaction,” invited the assistant, unfolding the coat in order to fold it up again.

Sturla placed one of the white cups under the nozzle

where he knew the coffee was supposed to spurt out and fumbled at the machine until the salesman came to his rescue by pressing a small button, the same colour as the machine, marked with the picture of a coffee cup. While the coffee was brewing, Sturla took out his wallet and counted out thirteen five-thousand kronur notes.

“We don’t often see that much cash,” said the man, and Sturla answered by asking if there was a discount for a down payment.

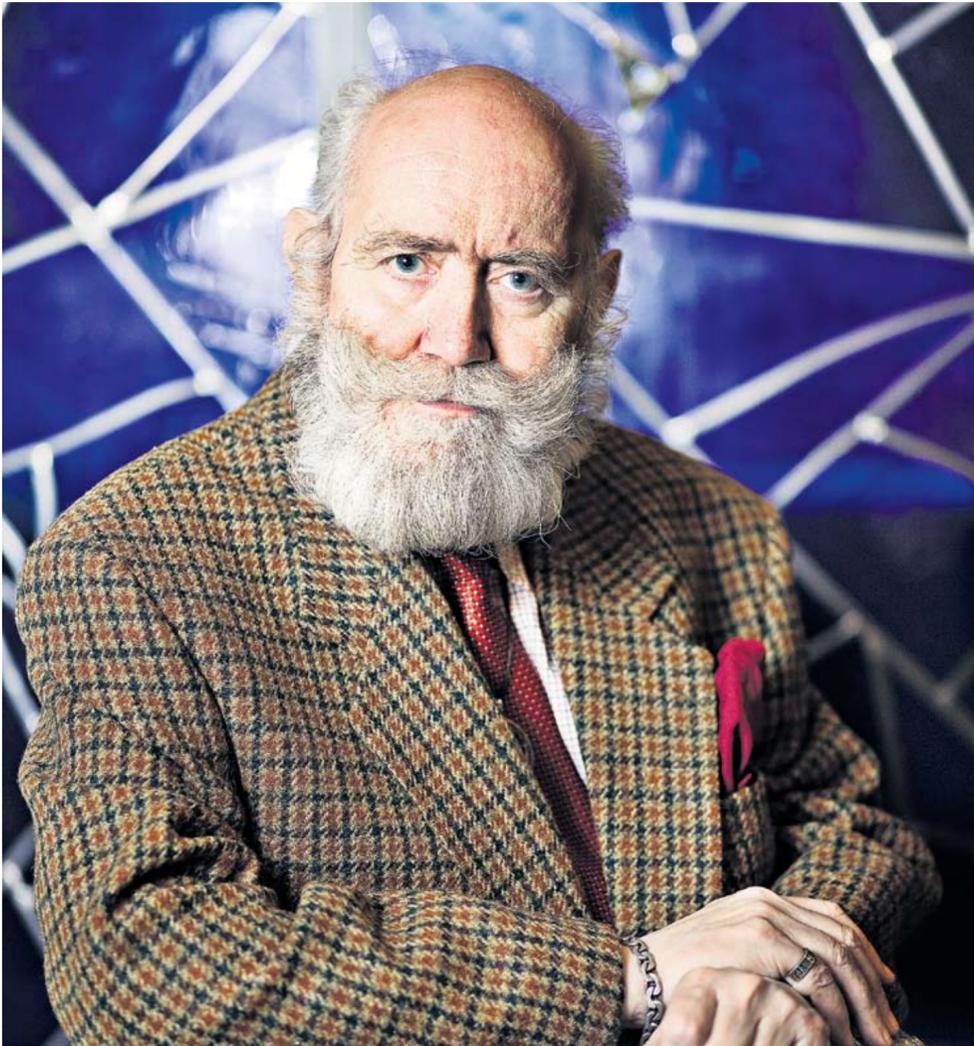
“Not if you pay in cash. But there’s a five per cent discount if you pay by plastic.” The assistant took the notes from Sturla’s hand, laying the coat on the table beside the coffee cups. He licked his thumb several times while counting the notes, and was forced to start over when his attention was suddenly distracted by Sturla taking off his anorak and smoothing out the coat in order to slip it on. He put the notes away in the cash register and smilingly watched the new customer’s clumsy attempts to struggle into the coat. Then he handed Sturla a bag branded with the shop’s name in which to place his anorak – a bag so beautifully produced that Sturla was momentarily afraid he would have to pay for it; it was a rich brown colour, made of thick, waxed paper, with a finish not unlike that of the coat and a handle of orange cord.

While Sturla was stuffing his anorak into the bag, the assistant was called away by a colleague; someone was needed to serve a young couple whom Sturla had noticed enter the shop, a well-known theatrical pair of whom he had recently heard his father’s friend, Örn Featherby, talk in rather slighting terms. It had been in connection with a play that either she, the wife, or he, the husband, had sold to one of the two big professional theatre companies in town. While Sturla was drinking his espresso he watched the couple and the assistant out of the corner of his eye; they all seemed to know one another and had immediately launched into a discussion of something that made them all laugh. Judging by the husband’s gesticulations the subject of the conversation was probably some project the couple were currently involved in. Sturla Jón glanced around, then sneaked his hand into the white bowl containing light-brown, cylindrical paper packets of sugar and fished out several. He examined them in his open palm, counted them, then slipped them into one of his side pockets.

It had begun to rain when he left the shop. Cold rain, one level up from sleet. Sturla buttoned up the coat and reflected on the things the sales assistant had come out with in connection with the garment and its prospective buyer; he, that is to say the buyer, Sturla Jón, did not use a mobile phone but smoked all the more for that. As if to demonstrate to passers-by that he was precisely the type who didn’t care to be hassled by phones ringing in the open air but instead underlined his independence by allowing himself the forbidden pleasure of smoking, he stopped on the pavement in Bankastræti after leaving the shop, drew a packet of Royale from his breast pocket, tapped out a cigarette and then pushed the packet back into the little inside pocket after lighting the cigarette – the pocket was so tight that it only just fitted.

About the author

Bragi Olafsson has long been established as one of Iceland’s greatest authors and poets. When he published his first volume of poetry in 1986, he struck a very particular note, which has since evolved and deepened into that unmmistakable voice that is his own. He has also inadvertently gained quite a reputation for himself as a playwright, and his play Belgian Congo ran at the City Theatre for almost 2 years and enjoyed great popularity. His novels Time Off (1999), The Pets (2001) and Party Games (2004) are undoubtedly among the most original and remarkable Icelandic novels of recent years



Nordic Gods Alive in Reykjavik

Text by Greg Bocquet Photo by Skari

Jörmundur Ingi, a real-life modern druid, is head of the Reykjavikur Goðar, one of two officially recognized Pagan associations in Iceland. In his position as Goði, he performs marriage and funeral services, and spreads the word of the naturalistic beliefs of ancient Iceland. The Grapevine sat down with Jörmundur Ingi to discuss the influence of ancient beliefs on Icelandic identity, politics, and the resurgence of the gods in Reykjavik.

Paganism, in many ways, is a universal belief system. What makes Icelandic Paganism unique?

In Icelandic stories, you have tales of what happens if you disturb the Mother of the salmon, or the Mother of the flounder, a fish about ten times bigger than any whale. She lets you hunt the flounder unless you get greedy and take too much. Then she will destroy the ship, because you have become to greedy. I see the beginning of the Nordic religion in shamanism. Shamans were simply very strong personalities who were the strong leaders who knew about the sun, the moon, the winds, the changing seasons, connected to nature. Nature was the enemy of primitive people – you always needed to pacify nature.

Where is Paganism most popular in Iceland?

Strangely enough it splits exactly in two. In small, what you would call primitive fishing communities, and mostly in the Westfjords where they have been, until recently, sustained by the seals. There, people are Pagan without being members of any organization, they just know this is how things are and how

they have always been. It has been passed down. In Reykjavik, people have been sort of split off from nature, but only very recently. Almost until 1970, everyone kid in Reykjavik was sent out into the country during summer vacation to work on the farm. Everyone who was born before then has worked on a farm, so the connection with the country was much stronger.

Why are there are two Pagan associations in Iceland?

There should really be 36 separate groups. This was, I believe, the object of the three who united into Ásatru Félag, which was the first Pagan association in Iceland, in 1972. When I was leading the group, I tried to organize this as close to the ancient organization as possible simply because I thought that nothing has been invented ever since that comes close to the old Icelandic republic. This was not accepted by others in the group so we split up, also there where other issues which we will not get into. The ancient system was a mixture of a religious power and very much of people deciding, because you would have 36 Goðar spread over the country, and if you didn’t like your representative, you could simply leave and attach yourself to another one. It was a very direct democracy.

In Icelandic politics, we see many initiatives that seem to exploit Iceland’s natural environment. How do you interpret the government’s behavior, specifically with their policies that have been controversial for Icelanders and foreign groups alike?

We should do like the ancient people did. We should be scared of nature. We do know, and

I have pointed out for decades, that there are no sins. The idea of sin does not exist in Paganism. You will bear the consequences for your actions, like karma in India. The price you pay for overfishing is no fish next year. The price you pay for overgrazing is no grass next year. With the whaling issue, I am not even sure whether I support the decision to start commercial whaling, but in Iceland we feel that we have the right to decide this ourselves. It’s ridiculous to think that the killing of seven whales this year and 39 next year is going to ruin the stock of whales. I can state categorically that there is one wrong thing in the whole scheme, and that is the whalers that say that “the whales eat our fish, so we have to kill them.” That is ridiculous. So right there, that will make my support a little shaky. Whales cannot deplete the oceans of fish, but man can because we are not living in the ocean. We are taking things out of the ecosystem. I think that human beings not only have the right to utilize the land like any other living creature in the world – to graze, to mine, to fish, even to make dams – but in reality we are obliged to. So if you don’t graze, that is also bad. You have to keep the balance. It is the excessive use which is bad, and this is when you are making decisions for the wrong reasons, like the dam at Kárahnjúkar which will never make any money. They just crossed their fingers and built the dam and it hasn’t leaked, at least not yet, but no one knows what will happen when it is full. It is too big a risk for a very small gain, so it is wrong.

So Paganism is the original Green Party?

We would be, as I say, ecological, but in the

sort of way that we should not back away from everything, ie. no dams, no fishing, and so on, because if you live in nature without ever touching nature you also upset the balance. Thirty years ago when you talked about Paganism as an ecological religion, it was OK because ecology was not in fashion. But it sounds corny when you say it today because it looks like you are trying to cash in on the ecology trend. There is a good parallel that we are acting ourselves into a corner where we are so dependent on electricity and oil and new technology. Science will tell you that it doesn’t matter because there will be a new science that will solve all the problems of the old one. This is basically the same as what the prophesy of the Sibil in Völuspá states, except that there will be a crash, a collapse before you can go on.

Do you think Iceland will bear any ill consequences of its actions?

If you go against nature, nature will revenge. And you have to explain the word revenge, or hefna in Icelandic, it means simply to even things. If you upset the balance, nature will even things out, there will in other words be a new balance. Just like the Mother of the hunting animals, you go too far and you will pay the price when nature evens it out.

As “Goði,” what does your role as a spiritual and ceremonial leader entail?

I am licensed to perform marriages, and we have funeral services also. They are all based on old ceremonies. This would probably not be a very scientific way of doing it, but when I prepare a ceremony, I go to old law books, to the sagas, to all sorts of old traditions which often preserve a great deal of ancient knowledge. I simply go to my subconscious, to the things that my grandmothers and great-grandmothers told me. I am sure I have forgotten most of it but it is there. I know that I have succeeded in this because people say “this is a beautiful ceremony” and so on, but they also say “it is so Icelandic.”

How does one become a Pagan? Is there a so-called “sacred” text?

The sacred text would be the Eddic poems, but Snorri’s Edda is the key to understanding them. If we didn’t have Snorri’s Edda, we wouldn’t know anything about the Nordic sagas. We would be walking in the dark. It is all so vague, but Snorri explains it. To be a Pagan you must think of all of nature and the whole world as a balance, and everything is very close to being stable. This is what people, especially people living in cities, have a little bit of difficulty understanding: preserving too much is just as bad as destroying too much. There is no good or evil there, the good thing is to just have the scales be immobile. When people go too much on what they consider to be the good side, they will tip the scales just as much as if they do too much on the negative side.

Does your organization have a training center? Do you do any outreach?

No, we are not allowed to do any missionary work. It is our own rule. If you convince someone that they should change religion, it doesn’t hold. You may become a member of that religion on the surface, but it doesn’t hold. We have spoken at schools, even kindergartens, but we have not had seminars or courses in Our Way, as Icelandic Paganism is properly called. We would like to, at least I would like to. We used to have a huge building here down by the harbor, but it was sold after I quit. They plan to build a new one, and that will start on the first of December.

If you are not actively seeking new members, how will interest in Ásatru grow?

It’s a strange thing – it is growing mostly in Reykjavik, where it would be, in the good sense of the word, a nationalistic trend. It has become organized now that there are probably around 900 people, at least in my old group. People realize that this is maybe the best way for the younger people to express that they are actually Icelandic. One reason that Paganism is coming up could simply be because the church is losing ground. The strata that is underneath is only coming up when the patina of Christianity is starting to fade away. This is so much alive in Iceland that it is not considered strange to be a Pagan. It is such a part of the national identity that it’s very difficult to define Iceland without mentioning the ancient Paganism.



A Christmas Flood of Books and Noah's Freezer Trawler

Text by Haukur Magnússon Photos by Skari

So, what's the deal with Iceland's heavily condensed book market, where almost all of the year's titles are published in the space of three months?

Kristján B. Jónasson: Well, it's a gift market, one that clocks up sales for about 5-700 million ISK each Christmas. The total market brings in around 3.5 billion every year, schoolbooks included. That isn't a lot in light of the number of books aimed at it each year. Everybody is trying to get his slice of the pie, present company included.

So, all of you have in common the fact that you publish books, and that you're interested in selling them?

Haukur Már Helgason: You two had this debate, didn't you? Eiríkur doesn't want literature to be sold, and Kristján only wants it to be sold...

Eiríkur Guðmundsson: I remember nothing of the kind. You tell us something about this, Kristján, selling the books.

Jónasson: Well, the first books were printed in Iceland in the 16th century, but they weren't mass-produced and affordable until the mid-19th century. That's when the Icelandic book market was created. The current tradition then takes shape following World War II, because there was a shortage of giftware in a country operating under rigid currency restrictions but with a strong purchase power due to economical upheaval during the war. You couldn't import traditional gift items, but there were few restrictions on importing paper. Thus the book was born as Iceland's premier Christmas present, although book sales pick up in every country around Christmas. Right now, Britain is raging with price wars and competition between those who vie for having this year's Christmas bestseller.

Auður Jónsdóttir: But other countries certainly have more than one publishing period, and also a more constant literary discussion.

Jónasson: The Christmas season is really what keeps up the literary market here; without it, prices would drop as people would primarily buy books for their own consumption, and as a result authors couldn't count on re-

ceiving enough payment for their works. The state would have to sponsor the profession to a much greater extent, either that or writers would have to work two extra jobs and have a fat bank account to rely on. People expect to pay a lot more for gift items, and the publishers take that into account. They even divide the market into certain categories, for instance how a book is advertised, presented in the media, the jacket design.

Guðrún Eva Mínervudóttir: Are you really that devious? I thought most publishers were idealists, primarily concerned with realising their vision.

Jónasson: It's always a combination of the two. What I'm really saying is that the so-called Christmas book flood isn't entirely a bad thing.

You've been quoted as saying that books in Iceland are too cheap, and that customers are thrilled when 20,000 ISK ones are released...

Jónasson: Yes, that is correct. This year's popular Christmas present is a juicer that costs around 10,000 ISK. We all have so much money now, it's ridiculous.

Minervudóttir: Then a cheap book makes for a bad present?

Jónasson: When [publishing house] Edda released their 20,000 ISK Atlas of Iceland last year, people were brimming with joy that there was finally an expensive book they could spend their money on.

Helgason: That sort of publication is cost efficient?

Jónasson: Man alive, it is! The Atlas in question has sold around 10,000 copies to this day.

Helgason: Hmm... this might be a new direction for Nýhil?

Jónasson: I think the publishing industry isn't paying enough attention; it keeps getting lost in pre-Christmas price wars. The catalogue prices for hardcovers are accurate as is, and the paperbacks are reasonably priced, too. They just have to focus on advancing that market, so that people will buy more books for their own consumption.

Minervudóttir: Yeah, why hasn't the indus-

try used its tricks to convince Icelanders that paperbacks are the new gospel?

Helgason: Since the paperback market got its legs, books have started to sell a lot better here, and they're now bought throughout the year.

Jónsdóttir: They're even selling them in gas stations now. Guðrún, you were sort of a pioneer in that field when you released *Albúm* in paperback form during spring, weren't you?

Jónasson: Things have changed a lot since ten years ago. I remember when Einar Már Guðmundsson's *Englar alheimsins* [Angels of the Universe] was released in paperback form two years after its hardcover release. It sold tremendously well, and the industry was taken back by it. No one expected that a paperback would be so successful. And now, the amount of units sold increases each year, as well as the amount published. This year's release catalogue has 300 more titles than the one from 1996 – there are about 700 titles being published and aimed at the Christmas market this year.

But aren't individual releases at a risk of getting lost when 700 hundred titles are released to such a small market?

Jónasson: You could say it's a case of over-production.

Helgason: If you think about it, it all makes sense. There are 700 titles released each year, and the Christmas season brings in up to 700 million ISK. Shouldn't they just pay each author a cool million every January?

Jónsdóttir: That would be really nice. An excellent solution.

How would you describe the Icelandic literary scene to an outsider?

Jónasson: [In a forced Icelandic accent] Hall-dór Laxness got the Nobel Prize...

Jónsdóttir: When I was in Denmark, the only author people asked me about was Sjóón. As I was trying to explain him and summarise what else was going on here, I was struck by how disparate the literary landscape is in Iceland.

Helgason: I've given Italian friends some of the Icelandic literature that's been translated

and they're all amazed by how simple and lyrical the narration is, exclaiming: 'What! This is just a story!' This applies to some of the country's most skillful writers, this symptom of Icelandic literature, they just tell simple lyrical stories. With noteworthy exceptions, it feels to me as if post-modernism in literature is just making its way here now.

Jónsdóttir: We also seem to define and interpret our literature differently from some of our neighbours. I published the same book here and in Denmark and Icelandic critics kept referring to it as being of the realist vein, while the Danish media uniformly cited it as absurdist. So what we feel is realistic, they think of absurd. Neither interpretation is more correct, but I do feel we tend to look at things differently over here.

Jónasson: We haven't been doing a good job of defining ourselves in regards to the outside world. We haven't examined our literature from an outside perspective, and we're lacking a vision of how whatever it is we're doing falls in place in a historical context.

Helgason: It's especially noteworthy in light of just how many literary scholars we have.

Jónasson: Yes, they've failed. The last 20 years have been a literary golden age in Iceland as far as I'm concerned, a lot of really presentable work has been published, things that stand comparison to the best of what's happening in Europe. It's certainly telling that only twenty years ago, it was an exception if an Icelandic book got translated. There's since been an explosion in terms of sales and translations.

Hasn't that got a lot to do with marketing?

Jónasson: Of course there are trends, but you can't get away with selling something that amounts to a worthless piece of crap.

Jónsdóttir: That's true. The crap gets sifted out pretty soon, but we do have authors such as Jón Kálmann [Stefánsson] and Hallgrímur Helgason getting five-star reviews in places like Germany.

Helgason: They're likening Hallgrímur Helgason to Thomas Mann over there.



Auður Jónsdóttir
Auður Jónsdóttir (b. 1972) is a highly revered author with a total of eight published works under her belt, among those four well-received novels. She was awarded the Icelandic Literature Prize in 2004 for her novel *Fólkið í kjallaranum* (The People in the Basement) and her just published fourth novel, *Tryggðarpantur* (Depositum) has received great reviews. Her works have been translated into Swedish and Danish.



Eiríkur Guðmundsson
Born in 1969, author, National Radio One personality and literary scholar Eiríkur Guðmundsson has made a reputation for himself as a veritable authority on Icelandic culture and literature. His collection of essays, *39 Þrep til glötunar* (39 Steps to Damnation), was released in 2004 to critical acclaim, and his recently published sophomore effort, a novel entitled *Undir himinum* (Under the Sky), is already receiving the same treatment.



Guðrún Eva Mínervudóttir
Thirty-year-old Guðrún Eva Mínervudóttir spent her youth moving between Iceland's smaller towns, before reportedly sleeping her way through college. She has thus far published five novels, as well as several poems, short stories and translations. Her work is widely acknowledged and critically lauded, and her latest novel, *Yosoy*, was awarded the DV prize for literature in 2005.



Haukur Már Helgason
The youngest of the group, Haukur Már Helgason (b. 1978) released his first novel, *Svarar Pétur & 20. öldin* (Svarar Pétur & the 20th Century) just last month. He has previously released three volumes of poetry and been highly active in Reykjavík's cultural life, co-founding the ever-growing publishing house/collective *Nýhil*. Helgason, an active proponent of Slavoj Žižek, holds degrees in philosophy and cinema studies.



Kristján B. Jónasson
A literary scholar and published author, Kristján B. Jónasson (b. 1967) is perhaps better known for having, until recently, worked as publishing director and head of development for one of Iceland's major publishing houses, Edda. He currently serves as president of the Association of Icelandic Book Publishers and remains one of the industry's leading voices.

Helgason: Eiríkur is winning! Why?

Jónasson: Well, Rokland is getting those kinds of reviews.

Guðmundsson: That book is written specifically with a German audience in mind, isn't it?

Jónasson: They're also raving about *Höfundur Íslands* [The Author of Iceland]. The discourse is on a much different note than what we had here, when people were focusing on politics...

Guðmundsson: When they market these books in Germany, no matter what the subject matter is, they always put the same picture of a field on the cover, same as with the Laxness novels. A freshly mowed field, even for *Atómstöðin* [The Atom Station]. They play that field; perhaps it's our only chance to get attention in that market?

Jónasson: Well, you have to look at the situation over there. Many German publishers are very market-oriented and they base all their covers on extensive research. The editors don't have any say in those matters.

Helgason: You seem to think that the golden age is defined by your stint in the literary business. I rather feel like it's just beginning right now, this Christmas. There seems to be such a heap of good stuff coming out now.

Jónasson: I never said it was over.

Minervudóttir: We are facing an endless golden age!

Jónasson: It's multi-voiced; a lot of very different authors have been prominent in the field. It's hard to find a common denominator for all of you, for instance. Maybe Eiríkur and Auður are the most similar ones here. We've been hesitant to draw lines and make up categories, something that foreign translations can perhaps help us with. It can help us put things into perspective.

Helgason: With all the snow pouring down outside, it's tempting to look at Iceland as the Platonic realm of Ideas. It could be said that over here, we've got single representations of all the noteworthy trends in the outside world. The outside world could then

be construed as the real one, and when students return from Portugal, Spain or New York, they bring home a sampling of what it has to offer.

Jónasson: That's a good analogy, and if you look at each of the present company's work you'll find a lot of prototypes of larger literary movements. Eiríkur represents the recycled, self-reflexive story, Guðrún Eva has the macabre fantasy, and Auður's work is actually the most European, in some respects her new book could have been written by a German. You have a distinctly European worldview; I was actually concerned when I read your latest work that Icelanders wouldn't warm to it. And then there's you, Haukur, with the modern avant-garde.

Helgason: Avant-garde?

Jónasson: You know what I'm referring to, historically.

Minervudóttir: Well, he did call mine a fantasy.

Jónasson: Each of you is writing in a different genre, and you're pretty much on your own there. You're not necessarily engaging in a dialogue with your next-door colleagues, rather your voices are meant for a worldwide discourse.

Helgason: Perhaps Iceland is like literary Noah's Ark in this respect. If everything goes to hell out there, we'll have a sampling of everything there was.

Jónsdóttir: More like Noah's freezer trawler, where we keep one of each [the room bursts out laughing at this point].

Guðmundsson: Only one of each?

The Icelandic music scene is similar in this respect. What the literary establishment needs now, then, is an Einar Þórðarson [a prominent Icelandic music promoter/agent].

Jónasson: I can agree on that, we do need an Einar Þórðarson for the literary world. We're having trouble reaching the young adults, the 15-20 year olds. It can easily be done, if the task is approached on adequately commercial terms.

Minervudóttir: You did it once, with very good results.

Jónasson: And once with really horrendous results. We can't just have a slew of literary masterminds writing nothing but epic works of staggering genius for others of their ilk. You also have to appeal to kids on their own terms.

Helgason: Are you saying it's easier to sell this age group worthless crap?

Jónasson: Icelandic kids read a lot. Just this year, there are 220 titles being released that are aimed specifically at children. Around 30 percent of children aged 8-10 subscribe to some sort of book club, they read a lot. Then, at age 12-13, their libido kicks in and reaching them becomes near impossible. Authors start moralising and preaching, something that's bound to alienate and annoy their target audience to no end. I think Manga comics are going to come on strong in a while, they all feature OC-like plots, themes of jealousy, gender blunders, etc.

Do Icelandic authors compromise to an extent, to widen their appeal in order to reach a greater success?

Helgason: Compromise isn't the right word. Writing a piece of text is like stretching out a certain fabric of meaning that's already out there. It's never merely your own, it's something you have to pull at it without tearing it, to employ a certain amount of force without breaking it apart.

Jónasson: Like pulling at that Charles Atlas spring mechanism to exercise your chest. No, I don't think this question is really applicable to literature, selling out isn't really an option.

Minervudóttir: I haven't even had editors instructing me to compromise. It happened once with a column I wrote for radio, they thought my death talk would offend all the old people listening.

Jónasson: In terms of the Icelandic literary tradition, the only sure-fire way to be a sell-out is to write a memoir or an interview book. Non-fiction, that's where the literary

sell-outs reside, but there are also tons of flops published in that genre every year.

Helgason: That's probably the surest way to become a sell-out. You don't have to do a lot of writing when you start getting all kinds of pressure to write books about one person or another.

Jónasson: I think Iceland's smallness imposes the greatest limits on Icelandic writers, where it's pre-determined what you can and can't do as an author. There are all kinds of unspoken agreements to be honoured, and fought. People like Guðbergur Bergsson [fabled Icelandic novelist] sometimes venture outside of those boundaries and reap anger and fear in the process. At the time he released his defining novel, *Tómas Jónsson, Metsölubók*, [Tómas Jónsson, Bestseller] people were really upset, going as far as mailing him boxes of faeces. It's those unwritten laws that pose the greatest threat to Icelandic authors, not selling out. It's the fear of overstepping those boundaries that have been silently agreed on; doing that will always cause an author to experience all sorts of righteousness and rejection from the public.

Guðmundsson: The bottom line is that there's not nearly enough of us Icelanders to maintain such a culture, or do any damn thing, really. We still do, however.

Minervudóttir: Like the Flateyri theatre club.

Helgason: President Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson pointed out in the recent Klink & Bank documentary that Iceland had a similar population that Florence had during its golden age.

Jónsdóttir: People in Denmark used to giggle when I told them I was an author on the Icelandic market. The reaction was similar to what people here would be like if I told them I was writing solely for Keflavík's populace.

Guðmundsson: At its core, I think writing for such a small market is a beautiful task to undertake. It has a kind of poetic hopelessness.



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Icelandic Hockey Suffers for Lack of Ice

Text by Virginia Zech Photo by Skari

Forget everything you think you know about Icelandic hockey.

For Icelanders this will mean accepting that hockey is at least fairly popular here (500 players and counting). For outsiders, know that what Disney's 1994 film *D2: The Mighty Ducks* implied about Icelandic hockey was not exactly accurate. The vision presented of a Scandinavian hockey culture (played by some tall, silent, blond dudes) is probably more aptly illustrative of the situation in Finland, if anywhere. Iceland itself has been forced to overcome a series of obstacles imposed by its small population and rapidly changing climate conditions to build its emerging hockey culture. Iceland does not currently compete in the Junior Goodwill Games, against a team of American hoodlums or otherwise.

Icelandic hockey was born in Akureyri around the middle of the 20th century, and the northern city continues to pride itself on its locals' skills with a puck. Originally played on frozen ponds and rivers in wintertime, unpredictable weather made practising difficult in the north and impossible in warmer areas of the country. By 1990 Iceland had built two outdoor artificial rinks. Though manmade ice was an improvement on previous "facilities," Viðar Garðarsson, Chairman of Ice Hockey Iceland, told the Grapevine that melting still caused problems. Reykjavík's rink "often looked more like a duck pond" than an ice rink." Covers for the existing arenas in Akureyri and Reykjavík were constructed by 2000 and later, a third indoor rink was added in Reykjavík.

Since the creation of a national competitive league in 1991, Icelandic hockey culture's rise has been perceptible. The national league is currently composed of three men's teams –

Skautafélag Akureyrar (SA) in Akureyri, and Skautafélag Reykjavíkur (SR) and Björninn in Reykjavík – and two women's teams – SA and Björninn. While this bodes well for the international and domestic competition in years to come, a rising interest in hockey, and ice sports in general, has led to more logistical problems for current programmes.

Even with no speedskating to speak of, and curling still in its infancy (introduced in 1996 and only competitive for the past three years), ice-time at the nation's rinks is booked solid. Between figure skating programmes

Since the creation of a national competitive league in 1991, Icelandic hockey culture's rise has been perceptible. The national league is currently composed of three men's teams and two women's teams.

and hockey's junior and competitive leagues (many of whose male players cross-upwards through the three age divisions to play for multiple teams while they can) there is only barely enough time to fit everyone in. Considering that regular season games go untelevised and are barely attended by local press, the enthusiasm is impressive.

Icelandic hockey culture, as such, might be somewhat new domestically, but Icelanders have been competing in hockey abroad since the early 20th century. Icelandic emigrants to Canada attempted to gain entrance to the nation's hockey teams. After being repeatedly denied, they formed the Winnipeg Falcons. The Falcons won the prestigious Allan Cup in 1920. Icelandic national team jerseys

commemorate their Canadian hockey playing ancestors with a maple leaf and falcon crest. A native of Canada, new SR and Icelandic national team head coach Ed Maggiamomo brings the crest's symbolism full circle.

Speaking with the Grapevine, Maggiamomo, former Danish women's national team coach, said the schedule was tight. "Of course, you always want more ice... but people are pretty good about sharing with the national team." Though ice-time is currently a logistical problem, it doesn't appear to be a sensitive issue for

those involved. Ice Hockey Iceland's Chairman Viðar Garðarsson told the Grapevine that, though it is difficult to continue to build Iceland's hockey enthusiasm without more space, he feels there is definitely a developing hockey culture here. Pausing for a moment after seeing his son send his second puck that week flying into a light fixture and showering the ice with glass, Garðarsson said that expansion in ice facilities will come. The process is slow, but growing local support for hockey will help, and eventually more ice will be available for Iceland's athletes, he stated.

Maggiamomo isn't the only Canadian with the Icelandic programme this year. Icelandic teams recruit foreign players for the regular competitive season. This year

two Czech citizens, brothers, are playing for SR as well as one Canadian. When I asked Coach Maggiamomo if the relative shortage of players growing up in the sport in Iceland was a problem for the national men's team recruitment he replied no, stating that every country's programmes are different. "Some have big junior leagues and some don't," Maggiamomo explained. "It's not a problem."

When Coach Maggiamomo returned to the ice, his wife Carol told me he is training some of the older players to act as coaches to younger players. Teaching strategies of instruction in the sport of hockey could be his "legacy to leave behind," as Carol put it, for hockey playing Icelanders down the road. Carol explained that the players brought in from abroad aren't "super-star players... And the team is starting to see that... They're here to help them improve." Carol also commented on the idea of a hockey culture here in Iceland. "You're instantly embraced by hockey people," she told me, going on to say that even so far away from Canada she feels at home at the ice rink.

Last year was Maggiamomo's first in Iceland. It was also the year that the Icelandic team hosted and won the Division III World Championships, competing against Turkey, Luxembourg, Armenia and Ireland. The championship brought "about 2,500 people, most of whom had never seen a game before," Carol told me. Iceland's win at that tournament earned them a spot in Division II for the 2007 event. I asked Coach Maggiamomo what Icelandic fans can expect from team Iceland this year. "We're looking to stay in Division II," he said, "and to get stronger" in the process.

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Swim Naked and Sing Your Heart Out in Helsinki

Text by Virginia Zech Photo by Sari Peltonen

Helsinki (Helsingfors) is in many ways the Nordic capital that tourism forgot: especially, for reasons of both light and weather, in winter. Keeping the aforementioned factors in mind, however, I surely wasn't disappointed by the city in November. Following six hours of flight delays out of Reykjavik due to bad weather, losing and locating my luggage mid-journey, a brief nap (a little over an hour) in Copenhagen, and another - extremely early morning - flight out of Denmark, I finally arrived in the Baltic Sea-side city. Snow was falling heavily as we made our decent (I couldn't see the ground until the plane was about three metres off the runway).

After a slippery cab ride to my new Finnish home, the fantastic (seriously) Hostel Erottanjänpuisto in Helsinki's city centre, I took a walk in a nearby park. My efforts to build any part of a snowman were foiled by lack of moisture, though some nearby kids managed to make a significant number of snowballs. In summer, Helsinki's parks play host to numerous live concerts and events. By November, with temperatures and daylight hours dwindling, they are slightly more sedate. People-watching on this particular day I learned that the Finnish regularly use

umbrellas in the snow (huh?). With this exception, as well as that of the goth-punk youth contingent who seem to take their hairstyling cues from Sharon Osbourne, the aesthetic in Helsinki is almost invariably business chic and well put together.

The home of Marimekko and Alvar Aalto, Finland is big on design and aesthetics in general. Both art museums and good shopping are in no short supply. The architecture, perhaps what Helsinki is most famous for, is undeniably impressive in scale and kept as surprisingly clean as the city streets. Snowfall that preceded my arrival made the urban landscape all the more picturesque.

The layout of Helsinki's city centre, and many of the buildings for which she is most recognizable, were designed by the German Carl Ludvig Engel in the 1800s. When Russia defeated Sweden in the Finnish War in 1809 the country changed hands and Helsinki, a struggling city with few tall buildings, became the new capital (previously Turku). Engel's neoclassical architecture was an effort at mimicking St. Petersburg, part of a Russian attempt to put its own stamp on Finnish culture. Almost 200 years after Russia's capture of the easternmost Scandinavian state - Fin-

land has been officially independent since 1917 - visitors can now see Finnish-designed Art Nouveau and Functionalist buildings from the early 20th century mingling harmoniously with the older neoclassical edifices.

Like most European capitals, Helsinki is bigger and busier than Reykjavik, where my journey began. Greater Helsinki is home to over a million people, almost one-quarter of Finland's population. Buses, ferries, a metro, and electric trams make getting around the city easy on both travellers and their wallets. In fact, the comprehensive public transit system had me dodging traffic several times when crossing the street - cars, trams, more cars. To get a better idea of Helsinki's layout, on my second day I took a ride on the 3T, a tram that makes a loop around the city: past the university, an amusement park (complete with Ferris wheel), the Olympic stadium, one of the lakes that bisects the city, a port, an uncountable number of beautiful buildings, under the railroad going out of town, and through the downtown area. Though it takes over an hour to ride, including one cigarette break for the driver, the 3T is well worth the price at only two euros.

Seeking out a Finnish obsession, sauna, prompted my evening journey to a local indoor pool. How was I supposed to know that the pool segregated their hours by gender because everyone swims and takes saunas naked? Moving back in time a couple of weeks, I fell into a hole outside my new apartment in Reykjavik and sustained a rather gruesome, grapefruit-sized bruise on my hip before going to Finland. Having forgotten this, I couldn't fathom why locals at the pool were staring at me in the sauna, and could only assume they had somehow sensed my foreignness.

Upon realising I looked abused, I departed the saunas and made for the pool. Getting used the idea of swimming nude might have been easier if it weren't for the women on the second floor balcony drinking tea in bathrobes. Perhaps the most surprising discovery of the experience, though, was that the lack of self-consciousness extended through generations. If you thought that only old women do water aerobics you were wrong, at least as far as this pool goes, and needless to say without swimwear. Difficult as it is to imagine high demand for a crowded naked pool, on my way out I ran into a mad - apparently after-work - rush at the door.

Obviously I couldn't leave the capital without going in search of the Finnish karaoke phenomenon. The next day proved that it's not hard to find. After arriving in the area my hostel advised I try for such entertainment, I followed some of the loudest noise into a bar. A surprising (for me anyway) percentage of songs were Finnish rather than English pop. Perhaps more shocking was the unapologetic enthusiasm palpable in the crowd. Clearly, the collected company thoroughly enjoyed dancing to karaoke and, perhaps, even more so than to the original versions of the tunes. The occasional singer pausing, pointing to his buddies, grinning and gesturing, didn't seem to bother the audience in

the least. Amused, but completely unable to participate (yeah, that's my excuse), I departed when the performers began to recycle themselves for encores.

On my final day in Helsinki I dropped by the Senate Square (Senaatin Tori) to see Engel's Tuomiokirkko church, pristine outside and austere beautiful inside, before making my way to dinner. Zetor ("tractor") is a restaurant and bar decorated with exactly that. My delicious, though strong, reindeer dinner would kick off my Saturday evening in the midst of Finns of all ages letting loose on the enormous, not yet full, dance floor.

After meeting up with my photographer for the trip, Sari Peltonen, we made our way to Erottoja Bar. The turquoise brick interior, live DJs, friendly bartenders, and Sari's friends filling me in on the specifics of Helsinki's karaoke scene, formed an eclectically pleasant atmosphere. They said, by the way, that home karaoke is becoming increasingly popular and that there are, in fact, bars catering to most genres so that one can choose a karaoke venue to suit their musical tastes.

About an hour later, Sari, her friends, and I headed on to the next (my last - I swear) bar for the evening, We Got Beef. While waiting in line to pay a two euro entrance fee I noted that the bar's opening hours were listed under the enigmatic heading "Hammer time". Once inside, we found ourselves in the midst of a couple of Finland's more prominent musicians, several girls dressed in poofy dresses and fairy wings, and the usual collection of jovial drinkers. This might be a good time to point out that the reputation Finns have for being cold is completely untrue in my experience. The only Finns who weren't eager to talk to me on my trip and share tips on Helsinki and other travel advice (generally consisting of "go to X place outside Helsinki" - Estonia seems to be a favourite) were those who didn't speak English. This particular location was no exception and certainly a good way to end my stay in Finland's largest city.

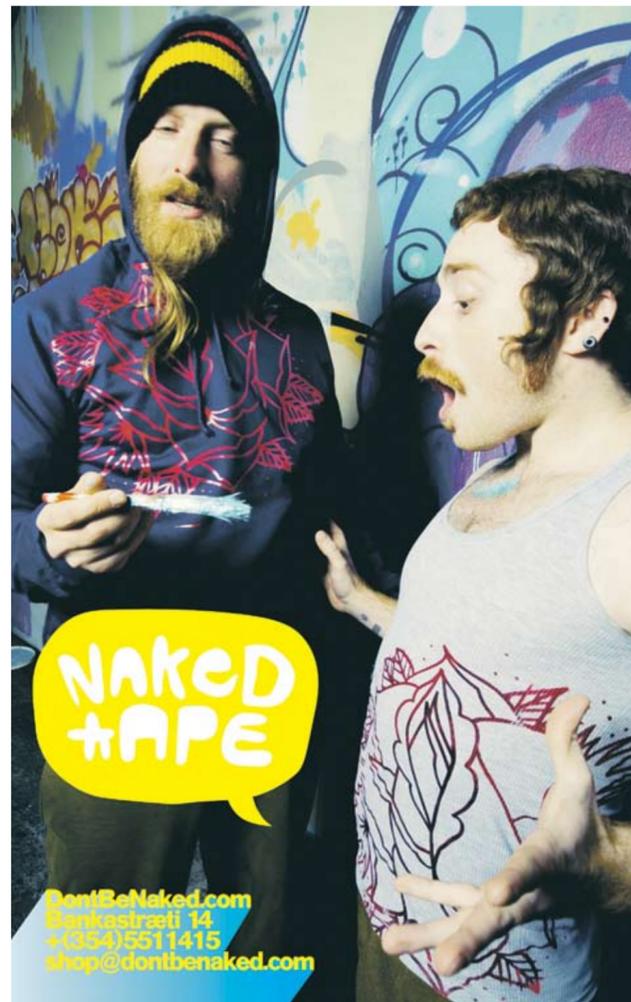
After capping off my night out with some Danish hot dogs I bought on the street, I returned to my hostel to rest up for the next day. Regardless of specific advisories on where to go, my skis and I were off on a gruelling 15-hour train and bus ride in the morning. The scene in our destination, Levi, a ski resort in the Lapland and well above the Arctic Circle, is another story entirely.

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At the pre-Sugarcubes reunion press conference, 'cubes Þór Eldon and Björk display a solemn serenity while being ravaged by photographers. Photo by Skari.

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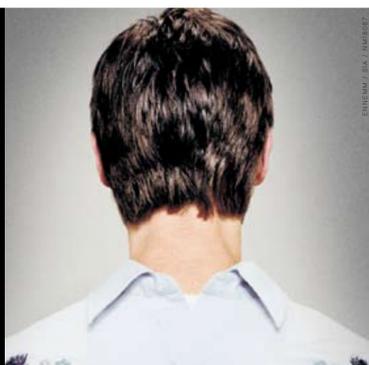
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er kominn tími til að snúa við blaðinu.



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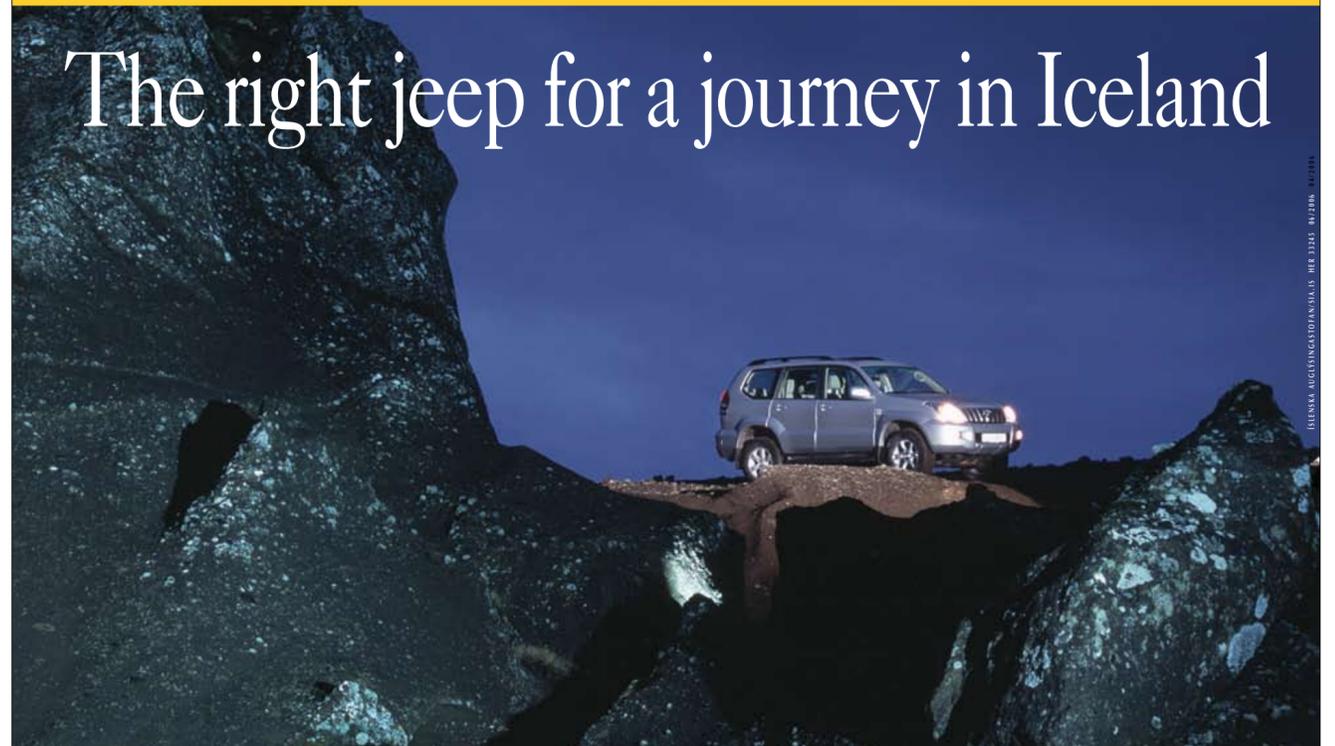


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Stuffed with stuff

When the first fistfight of the night broke out in the crowd, resulting in floodlights being turned on and security rushing the mass of people, the computer nerd seemed genuinely upset at the fact."

Haukur S. Magnússon attends a teen concert
Page 10.

Many Icelanders must have been waiting for the opportunity to say something about immigrants in this country – something negative.

Toshiki Toma weighs in on the immigrant issue.
Page 12.

In the game, you get to know the players better than many of your friends and family.

Steinunn Jakobsdóttir attends an EVE Online fanfest and meets people who clearly need time away from their computers.
Page 16.

For the final act, the 'Cubes brought out a special guest in none other than Johnny Triumph, the only man alive who could justifiably demote Björk to a back-up singer.

The Sugarcubes Reunite.
Page 35.

How was I supposed to know that the pool segregated their hours by gender because everyone swims and takes saunas naked?

Virginia Zech receives a culture shock in Helsinki.
Page 44.



The Reykjavík Grapevine Readers Survey



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