

# The Reykjavík Grapevine



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Volume 23

Issue 04 2026

Best before May 7

## The Mayor Left In The Cold

Culture

Music

Travel

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## On The Cover



It was on a very windy Friday in February that the current Mayor of Reykjavík, Heiða Björg Hilmisdóttir, found a slot for us in her schedule to take her photo at City Hall. Before the shoot, her assistant graciously allowed us to scout the building and its balconies for a good location for the shoot. After having stormed through the mayor's office, our publisher decided to drag our photographer out on the office's balcony. With the wind blowing directly from the direction into which the door to the balcony opened, all the precious paperwork on the desk and shelves of the mayor's office were sent flying into the air, creating utter chaos. We're happy that the photo shoot itself had better luck and less meddling by the publisher.

COVER IMAGE: Axel Sigurðarson

## Publisher's Note

### The Top 10 Cutest Waterfalls In Iceland

WORDS Jón Trausti Sigurðarson  
Publisher

Media research in the past decade has established that feedback online, first from clicks, then from social media interaction, has formed the agenda-setting of editorial boards across the globe. This has been going on for so long now that it now looks like the editorial staff of most media outlets in Iceland at least, don't even comprehend any more that the agenda-setting – what stories to emphasise, what discourse to uphold – is their job. Instead, be it consciously or not, editorial agenda-setting has been ceded to the algorithms. On top of that, because these are easier to write and more likely to be viral, Icelandic media mostly puts out updates on ongoing stories, while leaving the tedious work of compiling, explaining and contextualising the news out in the cold.

This is far from what the purpose of newsrooms was conceived as. Not only that, there are indicators that readers actually don't want the stuff they are being fed this way. According to the Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2025, readers want the news media to "provide depth rather than chasing algorithms for clicks."

This magazine saw exactly this materialise in our last cover feature on recently deceased former Prime Minister Davíð Oddsson, probably the most consequential politician in Iceland's modern history. Twenty years ago, such an article would have been an input into a discourse on his legacy. So far, it is the only article in the Icelandic media that tries to come to terms with the man's legacy. The article did nothing on social media platforms, yet it was our most read article in the past month.

To this publication, it is a reminder that journalists have a duty to set agendas and not cede that to unseen, undisclosed algorithms of gigantic tech companies, not only because those algorithms serve the business models of said companies, not the readers, but also because those algorithms do not seem to be aligned any more – if they ever were – with what readers really want, not to mention need.

Wait, this was supposed to be about the 10 cutest waterfalls in Iceland. ■

## The Human Staff



### AÐALSTEINN JÖRUNDSSON

Aðalsteinn was born in the 70s. The 70s in Iceland were bleak, and so is Aðalsteinn. Aside from having a noise music career as AMFJ, running a label, being a father and walking the dog, Aðalsteinn makes sure that this publication stays afloat financially.



### BALDUR BJÖRNSSON

Baldur, formerly of Snatan Ultra (no, we won't explain that), is a visual artist, connoisseur of Japanese noise music, musician and music label manager whose towering presence has been a feature of Reykjavík's cultural landscape for the better part of three decades.



### BART CAMERON

Bart returned to Iceland so that his children would learn the Icelandic language and culture. He edits the Grapevine in an effort to murder the English language. He is often successful.



### IRYNA ZUBENKO

Like most other people working in this office, Iryna is a disappointment to her parents because of her career choices. Feeling obliged to turn every minute of her life into content for this publication, she uses her few spare moments to make fun of her boss.



### ISH SVEINSSON HOULE

In an effort to stem the brain drain places on the periphery, such as Iceland, usually have, Ish moved here. Being responsible for this publication's knowledge of what is culturally relevant, they often find themselves enlightening older staffers about how dated their cultural references are.



### JÓHANNES BJARKI BJARKASON

Jóhannes Bjarki is a Reykjavík local, straight out of Grafarvogur. Having been active as the frontman of the post-punk band Skoffin and in the post-dreifing art collective, Jóhannes is fascinated by the Icelandic music scene. He yearns to increase shareholder value.



### JÓN TRAUSTI SIGURÐARSON

Jón grew up in every other small town in Iceland, moved pianos in Michigan in the late 90s and founded this publication in 2003. Has since acquired a few degrees, lived abroad, been a stay-at-home-parent, worked as a lawyer and run numerous ultras.



### ÖRN ELVAR ARNARSON

Örn was born in the 90s but is somehow older than all of us. He has done every blue collar shit job you can think of, like painting people's roofs and driving forklifts. He's a published poet and has the friendliest disposition known to man.

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Editorial

## Walk North Until You Find Your True Sun Voyager

Google is ruining your vacation and probably your life

WORDS Bart Cameron  
IMAGE The Reykjavik Grapevine

There aren't ten people on this island who would send a friend to look at Sun Voyager (Sólfar), the roadside art on the Sæbraut highway. I use the English title for it first, because, God bless Jón Gunnar Árnason, this isn't for Icelanders. If it were, it would be in a museum, not along a highway that lacks any drainage, almost custom built for splashing mobs of tourists following strange Google results. The wind off Sæbraut is strong, the Land Cruiser is the most popular car in Iceland, and that highway is meant for people zipping from east to west Reykjavík. There have been two fatalities on this stretch of road in the last five years alone.

We had been asked, in the last few months, to explain why so many tourists stand on a highway instead of visiting museums, galleries, coffee shops, parks, anything worthwhile. Then, this week, I received an itinerary from an American engineer visiting our household, and lo and behold, Sun Voyager was top of the list for something to do in Reykjavík.

Not a single museum was on the list. The list was too dumb to imagine. No human, even trying to be dumb, could dumb this hard. I grabbed my laptop, and typed in "three-day itinerary for Reykjavík" into Google, and clicked that much-reviled AI icon. Every word matched our American guest's itinerary.

Google doesn't share information about how many people have obtained itineraries for Reykjavík, but, again, no human source would send a human they cared for to this specific location. There's a Chicago saying, "Walk east until your hat floats." It's a way of telling people to fuck off politely because Lake Michigan is east, and Midwesterners love politely telling you to fuck off. Walk north until you see Sun Voyager is somehow more mean-spirited, but it means the same thing. Except Google has taken a missive literally. This is all to say, Iceland allows you objective proof that Google provides bogus results that ruins vacations and sometimes kills people. Great news though, Google and Facebook also kill newspapers.

This month, Statistics Iceland revealed that advertising on Google and Facebook topped 15 billion ISK in 2024. What do you get with that ad spend? For one thing, Icelandic companies pay no taxes to advertise using Google or Facebook. Unlike our neighbours in Europe, Google and Facebook have no obligation to pay a surcharge toward the local media. They also face no liability for things like promoting tourism in lethal deathtraps, (by algorithm, not

intention), for example, the bucket list item of standing on a black beach with sneaker waves and taking a selfie. Advertising on Google and Facebook gets you metrics and ROI that you can show your boss. Bullshit metrics but tax-free. Throughout this issue, you'll note that we are coming to terms with our digital age, specifically Meta (Facebook and Instagram) and Alphabet (Google and YouTube). You'll read about an Iceland-only alternative to Facebook, called Slapp, about our local pop star, Laufey, a Berklee-trained musician who rose to fame using social media, and our mayor, who appears to have been displaced by a political machine reacting, I believe naively, to the Manosphere. We don't present easy solutions, but the fallout of this digital culture does become more and more of a focus.

If you're here three days, get to the National Museum of Iceland, get to Árbæjarsafn, get to the National Gallery, at a minimum. Get out to the D-Gallery at Hafnarhús and see Hugo Llanes's exhibit. Our Best of Reykjavik magazine dedicates a large portion to museums, and we honestly researched the hell out of this. So if you live here or want actual insight, check that. Do not stand on a highway staring at skidding Land Cruisers. When you're done with your vacation, having discovered that Google is a tepid, toxic turd, consider finding other sources of information so that you don't waste your life. Alternatively, walk north until you find your own true Sun Voyager. ■



The Reykjavik Grapevine

PUBLISHER  
Jón Trausti Sigurðarson  
jontrausti@grapevine.is

EDITOR IN CHIEF  
Bart Cameron  
bart@grapevine.is

JOURNALISTS  
Iryna Zubenko  
Ish Sveinsson Houle  
Jóhannes Bjarkason

COPY EDITOR  
Erika Wolfe

CONTRIBUTORS  
Adam Roy Gordon  
Agnar Freyr Stefánsson  
Anna Margrét Björnsson  
Björn Penk  
Francis Laufkvist  
Kristinsbur  
Freyr Thorvaldsson  
Grayson Del Faro  
John Pearson  
Larry Jaffee

PHOTOGRAPHY  
Árni Torfason  
Art Bicnick  
Axel Sigurðarson  
Björn Penk  
Einar Egils  
Hildur Yr Ómarsdóttir  
John Pearson  
Vigfús Birgisson

ILLUSTRATIONS  
Harriet Cleal  
Lóa Hjálmtýsdóttir

SALES  
Aðalsteinn Jörundsson  
adalsteinn@grapevine.is

Örn Elvar Arnarson  
orn@grapevine.is

DESIGN & LAYOUT  
Blaldur Björnsson

MAGAZINE DESIGN  
Sóley Bartsch  
& Arnar Hjartarson

GRAPEVINE STORE  
shop@grapevine.is

ADVERTISING  
ads@grapevine.is

DISTRIBUTION & SUBSCRIPTIONS  
distribution@grapevine.is

PRESS RELEASES  
events@grapevine.is

GENERAL INQUIRIES  
grapevine@grapevine.is

FOUNDERS  
Aldis Pálsdóttir  
Hilmar Steinn Grétarsson  
Hörður Kristbjörnsson  
Jón Trausti Sigurðarson  
Oddur Óskar Kjartansson  
Valur Gunnarsson

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Word Of The Issue

# Mikligarður

The Grapevine's guide to sounding Icelandic, one word at a time

WORDS Jón Trausti Sigurðarson  
IMAGE Wikimedia Commons

or a great farmstead. What better captures the essence of a sprawling metropolis than a word consisting of "big" and "farm?"

But why? Well, back in the 10th century, Scandinavia itself hardly had towns at all. So the Scandinavian languages, Icelandic included, may not have had a good vocabulary to describe towns or cities, not to mention anything as impressive as Constantinople. However Scandinavian farms, and that was pretty much all the infrastructure the area had at that time, were often delimited by a wall, made out of stone, without mortar. The Old Norse word for such a structure is Garður, and a farmer's land is therefore, to this day, often called Bondegårde, e.g., in Swedish.

**M**ikligarður, the Icelandic for Constantinople, now Istanbul, entered common use in Scandinavia in the 9th or 10th century. At that time, Constantinople would have been the most densely populated city in all of Christendom. Many times the size and population of any so-called city in Europe at the time.

So picture this. Young Scandinavian – let's call him Ulfr – travels to Constantinople by way of doing some slaving, raping and pillaging on the Dnieper and the Black Sea. He then joins the Varangian Guard. Makes a buck. Travels back home. Now, Ulfr wants to describe to his mom the magnificent gigantic city of Constantinople in a way she'll understand. He searches for words. Finds none. So what does he end up with? Well, the greatest city in the world looks like – yeah – a really, really BIG farm. ■

And what does Mikligarður mean? Of course it means a great garden

The Reykjavik Grapevine

The Reykjavik Grapevine has provided independent journalism and English-language coverage of Icelandic culture for local and international readers for over twenty years.

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Iceland Roundup

# Foreign Tenants Screwed, Lightning Strikes, And No On EU

A selection of stories making the headlines this month

WORDS The Reykjavik Grapevine  
IMAGE Wikimedia Commons

ments than native tenants. But what is interesting is that the rent is not necessarily lower for foreign tenants despite renting smaller apartments. In many cases, it is even higher," says Jónas.

### OVER 3,000 LIGHTNING STRIKES RECORDED

Weather dominated headlines in recent weeks, as wave upon wave of low-pressure winds engulf the country. On April 6, Easter Monday, roads in and out of the capital area were temporarily closed as wind gusts reached 50 metres per second. A bus toppled over in Kjalarnes; a storage container in Vestmannaeyjar was blown downhill; roof plates came loose, and at least one person was knocked unconscious as the winds swept them to the ground.

Additionally, over 3,000 lightning strikes were recorded on Easter Monday. On average, days when lightning strikes in Iceland are about two per year. A powerline supplying Keflavik airport was hit, resulting in a temporary blackout until the backup power supply took over. In conversation with Vísir, geophysicist Þórður Arason claimed that there have been 10 instances in the last 1,000 years of people dying due to

lightning. No reports of injuries due to the lightning activity have been published.

### GROWING OPPOSITION TO EU ACCESSION

A new survey conducted by Gallup for Viðskiptablaðið shows that 47 percent of the public oppose Iceland's membership, in contrast to 40 percent in favour of it. Thirteen percent of respondents claimed to be indifferent. Compared to the latest poll, published in April 2025, support for EU membership has dropped from 44 percent, while the number of people opposing it increased. Independence, Progressive, and Centre Party voters are more likely to oppose the accession, while Social Democrats and Liberals are more likely to favour it. People's Party supporters are the most ambivalent, with 49 percent of its voters being for and 39 percent against it. ■

The Reykjavik Grapevine also does a weekly news podcast called Iceland Roundup. Check it out here:



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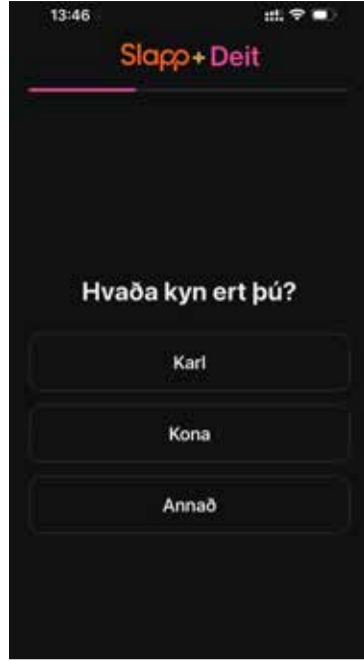
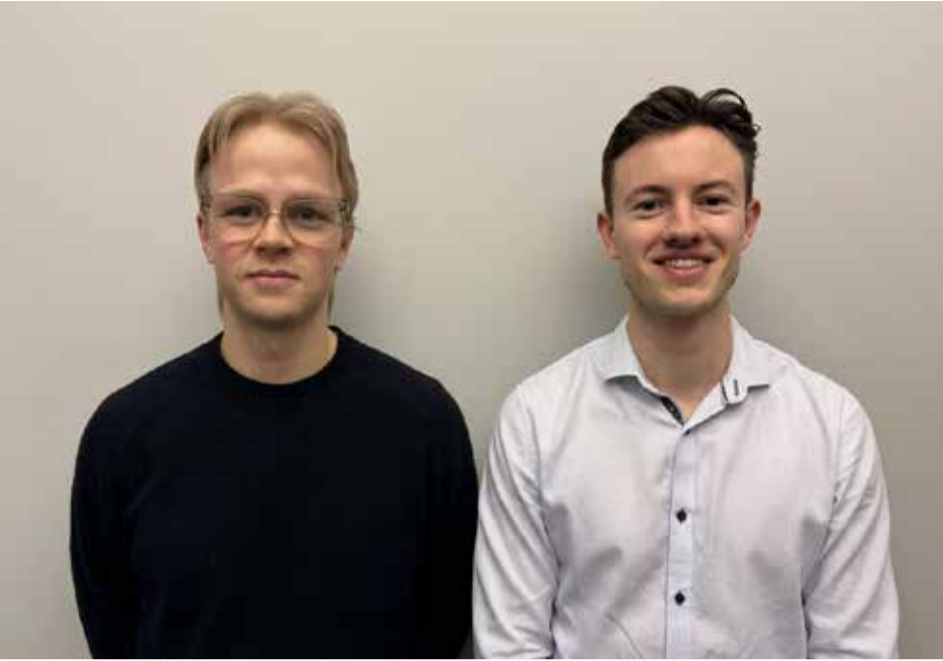
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Slappicle

# Slapp-ing The Pain Away

A new social media has entered the arena

WORDS Jóhannes Bjarkason  
IMAGE Supplied by Vestra AI ehf.

"We always had this idea on the backburner," Kristján Leó Guðmundsson explains, co-founder of the venture with Bjarki Sigurjónsson Thorarensen. "I think it was last summer when we had the idea of creating a sports social media. There wasn't a lot of interest, so we put that aside and started experimenting."

Bjarki continues the origin story. "We had sensed a general feeling among people that they were tired of social media and the ads. It wasn't until November, where I saw a Facebook post asking whether a platform like [Slapp] existed," he says from his student housing in Sweden. "I began working on the side, throwing up a prototype which only featured a digital ID log-in and a wall you could post on."

Therein lies Slapp's genius. By limiting users to a government-issued digital ID, Slapp circumvents the contemporary problem faced by other platforms riddled with fake profiles and malicious bots. On the other hand, it limits its user base to a small North Atlantic island.

## LOCAL SOCIAL MEDIA

Creating a new social media platform is a subversive action. That is, by rolling one out, you acknowledge that somewhere, something is broken within the code of other platforms. Bjarki begs to differ.

"The question isn't, 'What wasn't working?' But more, 'How are they working?' The advertisements, the AI content, the fake accounts — we're seeing explosive amounts of these types of content on these platforms. Especially the ads, which

are just a bit too targeted, especially on Instagram," he laments.

Kristján dubs it a "local social media" (local media, anyone?). "You're connecting with people, friends and family, who are in a similar location as you. These people are in Iceland. It's also clearly valuable for the language — you're reading posts in Icelandic. I think that's a big component. It's like how social media used to work before."

So, how does Slapp work? At its most basic level, it's an infinite scroll feed comprising text, photos and videos. The twist is, you see every users' full name and birth year, if they make it visible.

Friend requests can be sent, but the feed can be tailored to receive updates by filtering "everyone", "for you", "popular posts", and "friends". A nifty feature allows you to toggle whether you're "partying" — therefore openly admitting to your friends that you have a binge-drinking problem.

Since its rollout, Slapp has become slightly cumbersome, with features being added that encapsulate the fact that this was made by two dudes in their 20s, most notably a dating option.

## DESPERATE MEASURES

Slapp comes at an interesting time where countries worldwide are either considering, or have already placed, limitations on social media. In December 2025, Australia was the first to enact landmark legislation, banning children 16 years and younger from accessing social media.

Conversely, Slapp's digital ID barrier allows children 13 years old and up to use the platform, given the ID's proprietary age restrictions. According to the founders, age restrictions did not enter their start-up discussions.

"We will comply with all the legal requirements," Bjarki puts it plainly. "It's easy, very easy — easier on Slapp than other platforms — to enforce an age requirement. If the state would suddenly ban social media for children, we could implement that in a single day. As it stands, you can't access Slapp without a digital ID. So that's the age limit now."

By sticking to an infinite feed, Slapp, like other platforms, creates a frictionless interaction between the user and browser, which may lead to compulsive browsing. For the founders, that's not a point of contention affecting hollow spikes of dopamine.

"I think the main factor affecting the dopamine spike are the likes and notifications," Kristján ruminates. "When you leave [social media], you're unhappy. But we want people to feel good on and off the platform," he continues. "I think, if you're seeing more content from friends and family, you're more likely to have your needs fulfilled. It gives you more fulfillment than seeing a random video of a person falling somewhere," he philosophises.

"What I'm getting out of [Slapp], and what I think plays into this social media addiction, is a limited need to be comparing myself to other people in the world," Bjarki contrasts. "[Slapp] doesn't allow the same comparison with seven billion people each day which leads to unhappiness and that

dopamine spike."

## WORLD PEACE

The road to hell is paved with good intentions. While Slapp presents itself as a positive, more down-to-earth, force than its parallel platforms, only time can demonstrate its usefulness. But its founders have lofty ideals.

"One of our goals is to unify society," Kristján states. "There's a lot of fragmentation among people on other platforms, I think. The sentiment I get from people is that we're all friends here. That's also a factor playing into the experience on and off the platform. Maybe you leave with a sense of purpose."

And data collection is off the table. "These big platforms, they're exchanging data between each other. We won't be buying data from Instagram with the purpose of supplying you with a better feed," Bjarki iterates.

Having provided the work pro bono for months, Slapp has now moved to a LinkedIn-style monetisation scheme with Slapp+. The premium version allows users to see profile views, post statistics, visibility of promising suitors on Slapp Date, and other marginally useful options.

Scrolling through Slapp's infinite feed, you get a sense that the majority of its demographic skew young — even Gen Alpha — creating the possibility of a generation growing up totally reliant on Slapp for socialisation. However, whether the dominant culture of the platform turns constructive or destructive is entirely up for grabs. ■

**S**ocial media is awful. From data peddling to misinformation, platforms have been shown to increase polarisation in the world of today. By prioritising, even rewarding, extreme content and creating disparate echo chambers via powerful algorithms, social media truly is awful.

On a positive note, there has been a shift in how people use and approach social media in recent years. Whether it's the "analogue trend" of 2026, complete abstinence from social media, or "bricking" your phone, the general mood seems to be moving towards increased opposition, possibly spurred by app fatigue and digital lethargy.

Some, however, don't oppose the concept of social media, pointing to its uses for connecting people across distances. In early 2026, news broke that two young software engineers were doing exactly that. Slapp, a new, Iceland-only social media app, set out to unite the nation on a single platform.



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Lingua Franca **An Online Language School “For Us, By Us”**

Icelandic AI takes a student-centric approach to Icelandic

WORDS Bart Cameron  
IMAGES Supplied

“I taught Icelandic for six years. You had people come in after working a long day, trying to study, trying to learn. They should be sleeping,” Sandra says, detailing her history. “You know they want to learn, but they are exhausted.”

With this in mind, Sandra and her partner Chris Ayliffe undertook what would be a 14-month project to build a comprehensive, flexible online language system. Bizarrely, they named the company Icelandic AI, despite crafting every component.

“There are some things that are kind of AI supported, like tools are built, to an extent, using AI, but all the content that’s in it I entered personally, so I created it, and it’s using all of my own things. You are never like doing a one-click Google Translate or AI-prompted. That’s why it’s taken so long,” she states.

We discuss the details of actual AI in the program. Using artificial intelligence, Sandra is able to blend the variables of custom classwork she has written. Essentially, the AI removes the seams on the edits.

So who is this for? Who needs an online Icelandic course?

“You will not get credit hours for the courses for your residence permit,” Sandra warns. “For hours, I recommend The Tin Can Factory.” As many of us know, there is a 150-hour coursework requirement for a permanent residence permit in Iceland. In her six years of teaching Icelandic, Sandra has kind words especially for the Tin Can Factory. She notes the benefit of the online course she has created, if you don’t need hours: “This will prepare you for the citizenship test. And it corresponds to the teaching levels at the other schools.”

When I note that this might be ideal to prepare for studying at the University of Iceland, she doesn’t disagree.

I get a quick run-through of the coursework during our meeting. The foundation of the program is staggering. You can see the effort that went into the project, which was funded in part by a Rannís (Icelandic Research Fund) grant. A similar project comes to mind, the outstanding app TVÍK, created by Gamithra Marga.

“This is not an app. This should be used on a computer,” Sandra notes.

And I understand the difference. Where TVÍK is excellent on a phone, Icelandic AI more closely approximates a classroom experience. In my brief introduction, I understand that 15-minute segments would likely be the briefest interlude for study.

“Usually people are on for about a half an hour or more, each login,” Sandra notes. She is a few weeks post initial launch, and there are already more than 100 members. While the product launched in English, the launch of Polish to Icelandic is next, with Spanish to Icelandic launching soon. Belying the product name, all the coursework translations are done by language instructors and translators, without AI. “If we did that using AI, that would be such a mess, and I would hate it because we don’t want to give out product that is low quality,” Sandra notes.

Concluding our meeting, I can’t help but admire the dedication. For those of us studying the language, we now have public instruction, private instruction, a notable app, and a flexible high-end online course. The cost is roughly equivalent to private instruction: Tin Can Factory charges 59,900 ISK for Icelandic 1, about

the same as Mímir. For Icelandic 1 through Icelandic AI, the cost was 50,000 ISK at the time of our conversation. There has since been a deal launched offering Icelandic 1 and 2 for 89,000 ISK. A quick conversation with my union confirmed that 75 percent of course costs should be refunded by the union.

Given the effort put into teaching a language that is not her mother tongue, I ask the question that is often on my mind, maybe insensitively. “Is it worth saving, the Icelandic language? You’re putting in a lot of work to save someone else’s language.”

“I think it’s worth saving. Yeah, but they need to do something about it. The local community needs to do something about it. And I’m seeing now the trend, for example, like Roberto [Luigi Pagani] and a lot of us who learned Icelandic and who now teach Icelandic are in this battle to kind of make it more accessible, to make the government see that this is really important, right? It has to come from the local community, from the Icelandic community. They need to invest in it.” ■

You can sign up for Icelandic AI at [icelandic.ai](http://icelandic.ai)

“This is a company of foreigners. This is for us by us,” Croatian-born Sandra Juzbašić says at the end of a meeting about the Icelandic language-learning platform Icelandic AI, which launched February 17, 2026.

Her new language-learning website addresses the primary concerns so many of us face when learning the language: flexibility in scheduling, quality content, and moving beyond learning superficial phrases.



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# In Focus Laufey's March 2026 Homecoming Was More Than Concerts

Taking in the music and business of Laufey Lín Jónsdóttir

WORDS Larry Jaffee  
IMAGE Art Bicnick

**O**n my first trip to Reykjavik, I met Sigtryggur Baldursson at the Iceland Music office in March 2024. He touted Laufey's success. I was already familiar with the breakout single "... From the Start" from her 2023 second album, played in heavy rotation on my favorite local public radio station WFUV-FM. Since then, Laufey's audience has exponentially expanded. I noticed Laufey being touted in the U.S. media as the next big thing in pop music.

In May 2024, Laufey sold out two nights at Manhattan's storied Radio City Music Hall. This past November, she topped that earlier feat by filling up Madison Square Garden for two concerts.

## THE TIMELESS SOCIAL MEDIA STAR

Laufey's overall success builds on the generational influences of Judy Garland, the businesswoman savvy of Madonna, and the pop ambition and work ethic of Taylor Swift. But the 26-year-old's very old-fashioned music is the opposite of what a stereotyped Gen-Z might find appealing. Her original lyrics are romantic and wholesome, more Julie London singing in the 1950s from the Cole Porter songbook than today's Cardi B, more Debbie Gibson, the G-rated early 1980s pop singer than the 1990s saucy feminist girl-power group the Spice Girls.

This success didn't come out of nowhere. Even though she couldn't tour because of Covid, social media launched her career. What is really

intriguing about the two-time Grammy winner is that Laufey Lín Jónsdóttir writes and performs original, often big band, music, music my parents — who were teenagers at the outbreak of World War II — would have loved.

Laufey's natural affinity for social media became evident at the beginning of the pandemic. Coinciding with the lockdown, her TikTok videos went viral, demonstrating musical talent and personality. She found on

according to local media reports. By the numbers, this is the largest homecoming concert in history, surpassing the 2008 Náttúra concert from Björk and Sigur Rós, a free concert which drew 30,000 attendees.

Although nearly all of her songs are sung in English, about 20 minutes into the concert I attended, Laufey asked if any of the audience were from places other than Iceland. Surprising to me, I wasn't alone,

## She found on TikTok adoring teens not bent on being contemporary cool in a mean-girl environment. The nerds became rebels for liking old-time jazz.

TikTok adoring teens not bent on being contemporary cool in a mean-girl environment. The nerds became rebels for liking old-time jazz.

Social media played the key role. Her social media follower numbers tell the story: 9.8 million (TikTok); 8 million (Spotify); 7 million (Instagram); and 2.6 million (YouTube).

## LARGEST HOMECOMING IN HISTORY

On back-to-back nights, March 13 and 14, 2026, I immersed myself in the Laufey phenomenon. A Business Iceland/ American-Icelandic Chamber of Commerce-sponsored event explored whether Laufey's success in creating an international brand could be replicated in other industries.

I then grabbed a ticket for the first of two homecoming concerts at Kórin, an indoor multipurpose sports arena in Kópavogur within Reykjavik's Capital City area, which attracted 36,000 attendees, almost 10 percent of Iceland's population,

as a smattering of hands went up and cheers came from the actions around me. She urged us to "enjoy our beautiful country," but apologized that she planned to speak between songs only in Icelandic.

Throughout the concert, Laufey strummed an acoustic guitar, sat at the piano for a few numbers, and ran a bow across the cello on another, an instrument she played at 15 for the Iceland Symphony Orchestra.

This was no ordinary concert. A string section and her band, background singers, and choreographed dancers flawlessly executed a meticulously planned stage production. You forgot you were sitting in a nondescript steel sports arena that had surprisingly great acoustics. Fashionista Laufey made three costume changes to reflect the music mood, such as donning a sequined flapper dress for the jazz club set.

## THE BUSINESS OF LAUFEY

At a business event the week of the concert titled "Laufey: Rise of

a Global Brand in the U.S. Market," Laufey's twin sister Júnia Lín Jónsdóttir, who serves as her artistic director, explained that their elaborate stage shows were no different from when their imaginations ran wild at four years old with their Barbie playhouse.

Moderated by Icelandic venture capitalist Helga Valfells and Icelandic musician/Iceland Music senior advisor Sigtryggur Baldursson, the discussion explored "how Laufey has achieved a strong position in the world's largest and most competitive consumer market, how the competitive landscape and visible opportunities have evolved, and what lessons can be drawn from her remarkable journey," to quote Business Iceland's press release.

Key to Laufey's success was her team's decision to retain all of her intellectual property and publishing, clearly learning from Taylor Swift's early career mistakes, which were corrected after protracted litigation,

## Key to Laufey's success was her team's decision to retain all of her intellectual property and publishing, clearly learning from Taylor Swift's early career mistakes.

as well as going through the trouble of re-recording her most popular earlier albums.

Max Gredinger, Laufey's Brooklyn, NY-based manager since 2021, explained their decision to avoid the major label route that most A-list artists seek, allowing them to control all aspects of their careers. The music business calls such contracts "360 deals."

"From the beginning, it wasn't like, 'we are going to stick it to the man,'" Max said, adding that for some

stars, the three majors' machines work very well. Laufey has been supported by a bootstrapped operation. As they began getting booked in larger venues, the productions' budgets organically grew, attracting tour support from other brands.

Max is a partner in Foundations Artist Management, which oversees the careers of 30 artists. Although his company employs social media specialists, the manager said Laufey is more talented than all of them.

While Laufey is not signed to a major label, her three full-length albums are distributed in all formats by Sony, which in 2021 acquired the previously independent AWAL (an acronym for Artists Without a Label), just when Laufey's career launched. Sony/AWAL was among the founders of The Laufey Foundation to help young musicians get the same chances she had. Inspired by her own experience with great mentors and education, the foundation gives grants and top-quality gear to

youth music programs around the world. Other founders of the charity include the philanthropic arms of concert promoter AEG Presents, piano manufacturer Steinway & Sons. Since then, guitar manufacturer Gibson and Laufey's music publisher Warner/Chappell signed on as benefactors of the foundation.

Based on what I've seen, I will bet that Laufey's international brand will continue to transcend preconceived notions of what works in the digital age, as well as modern music tastes. ■



Cover Feature

# Does Reykjavík Have Any Id

An interview with the mayor the city refused to acknowledge

WORDS Bart Cameron  
IMAGES Axel Sigurðarson

the City of Reykjavík? The joke hit especially hard in our household because in December I had been at a function in Vesturbæjarskóli, an elementary school in 101 Reykjavík, and the mayor joined. When our principal announced her presence, the parents surrounding me all acknowledged they had no idea who the mayor was – we couldn't identify which woman in the crowd was the active mayor.

## THE DEFLECTION

Without tact or grace, I asked the mayor how she lost. "I am confused about the political party, how it works." I stated bluntly. "Pétur seems nice, he owns a good bar, Kaffi Vest, but I don't understand what issue he defeated you on. What issues were discussed? You've been in the party for what – 20 years – and he joined just recently?"

Without that context, I'll be left at a loss. Certainly, the mayor, even so soon after a defeat, doesn't note or highlight the optics or contextualise. She has lost, but the party has won more voters. Voter turnout was unusually high.

Finally, she concedes one point, "I mean, I'm the fourth woman [mayor] who is like one and a half, [or] two years. Yeah, just one [mayor] has had two terms. I think that is something that someone at the university might be able to look into. I don't have the time to reflect really a lot about it, but I'm the third women in this century that gets this opportunity in the last years of the term, [a partial term]. And then there comes a guy...."

"Like a glass cliff, like Fortune 500 companies in America?" I ask. The mayor moves on.

I will later go into detail with, indeed, someone from a university, asking help from the University of Iceland and Professor of Gender Studies Gyða Margrét to explain why pushing a qualified woman out of office doesn't meet the criteria of a glass cliff.

She will note that Iceland has had a major glass cliff politician: prime minister Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir, who served immediately after the 2008 crash. Jóhanna fits the mould slightly better, as she was abundantly qualified to serve as prime minister, and her successor, Sigmundur Davíð, would bring the nation ignominy when his name would feature in the Panama Papers while he was serving. After leaving office, Sigmundur Davíð would go on to start the far-right Centre Party.

Gyða Margrét will then detail a difficult conclusion that is reflected in the city's political discussion,

"I would relate the second point to retrogressive mobilisation (vehicle of the anti-gender politics and deals with how the far right has managed to sway the political field retrogressively). But Heiða Björg's position potentially relates to that and the narrative about women taking over (prime minister, president, leaders of the coalition parties, bishop...). Analysing the discourse of crisis in masculinity (which is part of anti-gender politics) is helpful here as it might seem that some might feel that women's rights/status/position is at the expense of men, hence we have to make space for men."

Retrogressive mobilisation is the academic explanation for the current wave. As the mayor noted, this will be the subject of papers for quite some time. Living in the moment, though, it is overwhelming.

## FIFTEEN MONTHS

"I have 15 months and I'm using it all," the mayor says. She is ready to talk her view of the duty of government. "I know there was a joke," she says referring to the Áramótaskaup skit, "that people didn't know my name. I mean, the people in their city know who is the mayor, usually, or they don't. And those who don't, don't care. Those who care, those who watch the news and follow the politics, they know, the others not, maybe not so interested in it. And that's, of course, something that we have to work with. Why are so many not interested in what we are doing?"

"We have been making a lot of tough decisions that matter a lot to the people, even though they might not see it right away. I know it matters. We have been for those who have the least pay, those who maybe are poor, they have a little bit better, at least with what we have been doing,"

**I have been active, yes, but that doesn't matter. We need new people.**

Between the time I set up our interview, and the date the interview was conducted, a final insult came the mayor's way. Former professional soccer player, former Independence Party parliamentary candidate, and well-liked co-founder of Kex Hostel Pétur Marteinsson won first chair of the Social Democrats, beating out the sitting mayor. Discussion downtown was that the prime minister's office had presented the winner flowers, suggesting that Pétur was prime minister Krístrún Frostadóttir's preferred candidate, no matter the fact that Krístrún in fact presented both candidates with flowers.

I walked into our interview a week after this defeat, to a mayor who knew she had three more months to serve, and who had been replaced as the first chair of her party to a relative newcomer. Other than brief cordialities, our interview took place entirely in English. A political advisor was present, but at only one point did he intervene. While our interview was scheduled for a half hour, the mayor spoke freely for closer to an hour. The only deflection came early on.

The mayor does not take the bait. She acknowledges she has been active in the party for 15 years, and indeed a member for 20 after following Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir into the party, but says, "We need new people. I think it's just really important that people engage in politics and discuss how we can make our society better, and the more people who engage, the better."

When pressed she continues, "I have been active, yes, but that doesn't matter. We need new people."

I will later speak with Professor Gyða Margrét Pétursdóttir of the University of Iceland who will offer her opinion on the new candidate overtaking a sitting mayor: "Miðflokkurinn [the Centre Party] has been rising in the polls, and it might seem that some of the other parties are trying to appeal to the potential voters of Miðflokkurinn by selecting men that embody typical masculine traits, i.e., have connections to the worlds of sports/football and are quite well known. Yeah, men that can appeal to the men's men, as you write."

**T**his New Year's Eve, as the nation bonded over the annual comedy show Áramótaskaup, one skit caught particular attention: in a spoof game show, the contestants are asked to name the mayor of Reykjavík. No contestant can answer. The host has no idea what the answer is. None of the staff does either. In a comedy show that otherwise bathed in Temu and Ozempic jokes, this was a solid jab.

I became curious, though; who exactly was the target? Why would the country's largest city not know its own mayor, the executive over the largest employer in the nation,

# Who Heiða Björg Really Is?

she says roughly gesturing toward the old school Social Democratic philosophies of redistribution of wealth, being honest about taxation.

"I think [voters] should talk to all the parties who are running and ask critical questions. And I mean, what are you going to do to make my life easier? How are you going to make the city more wholesome and good to live in? I mean some parties, and also people in their society are using immigration to make people afraid, that is really dangerous."

"Are you going to name the party? Miðflokkurinn?" I ask. "Will you rule out working with the Centre Party?" I always ask if political figures will specifically address the obvious right-wing party, and I rarely get a response.

"Absolutely, and I have said that all the time. I don't see, how they are

talking, in the parliament, that we have anything in common with them, actually, not in those politics. I mean, unless they change their politics, I don't say that we can work with them in the city because the main task is to make a good society. If you're a city politician, that is your task to make a good society for everyone, integrate everyone into society, see that everyone gets the opportunity to be, to live their best possible life. And if you're not on that, if you're trying to get rid of people from your society, or making people not have opportunities to participate, that's not our politics."

The mayor continues, explaining why a coalition should not be formed with the Centre Party, "Those who are in the majority, they have the most influence on how the city is developing, and if we could get a right-wing majority in the city council, that could really change the

city's atmosphere. I think maybe we are not welcoming enough as it is for new [Icelanders]. We have to do more to reach out for people who are coming here and trying to introduce our city and our society and learn and how we can, how you can like flourish here, because we want people to flourish in our city and, and if we find way to do that, we can get so much more done, more happiness. And integration is also like both ways. We made that now very clear, our majority accepted the first like multicultural strategy for Reykjavík. So it's not only those who move here who have to learn. We also have to learn, and we have to adapt also and, and, of course, culture is always thinking, and part of the painting is that we are now a multicultural society in Reykjavík."

Since I returned to the Grapevine in August, the Centre Party has been at the forefront of the political con-

versation. For all that, I have heard very few alternatives. The mayor's full-throttle defence of basic Social Democratic progressive politics may seem old hat, but it is the first straightforward defence of basic values I've heard from a politician in Iceland in a decade.

meeting. "Then the kids don't have to call their parents asking for money for the bus."

To be clear, the mayor proposed motion for free busses for children 16 and under. She mentions this to me on Friday. On the following Tues-

## I have 15 months and I'm using it all.

Free busses and school lunches. Our discussion veers, briefly, to our own kids, and my son's bus trips for language lessons. Suddenly, the reason why nobody knows the mayor's name becomes crystal clear.

"What we're going to propose, on Tuesday, is free busses for children 16 and under," the mayor notes. I had not read of this proposal before our

day, the city council approves the initiative, with a goal of free busses for every school child 16 and under.

This bold policy does not make an impact in the news. For all the legwork required for such a policy, the payoff in public attention was a brief Vísir article and a single paragraph in a right-leaning newspaper, essentially a cut-and-paste of the city's press release. According to the

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Wayback Machine, the Visir article disappears from the front page of the website almost immediately.

The state-run media, RÚV, did not cover the legislation. They did write up a survey that noted the Social Democratic Party and the Independence Party were shifting in popularity, Independence at 32.7, Social Dems at 29.4 percent. Using the Wayback Machine, I can see the focus in Visir was on the Centre Party's search for leadership, with quotes from a right-wing podcaster. (Despite controlling the media narrative, the Centre Party sat at 9.3 percent.)

You would think free busses for school kids 16 and under would be newsworthy. It's a public service. It's not an unusually complicated idea. In a post-information news cycle, a policy that affects a staggering amount of the population was far less worthy than coverage of a podcast bro.

Complications arise. The city council approves the idea, but our city busses involve multiple municipalities. Despite an approval from the Reykjavik City Council, there is no evidence, at the time of print, that this policy will actually be put into effect. Given the lack of public interest, it is unlikely Reykjavik will push this policy to the finish line.

As our interview continues, I see the mayor that I have seen at public events – the listener and note-tak-

er. She asks me detailed questions about raising children in Iceland, how our children get to sports, the obstacles. She's curious about the effects of emailing in this country using a last name. (Spoiler: In my experience, if you're not using a patronymic, you're not likely getting a reply.)

"I will say my kids have never eaten better school lunches," I blurt out at one point.

"The chef at Vesturbæjarskóli is great! He could be at a restaurant, but we found him," the mayor notes. Her political advisor jumps into the game. "Heiða Björg played a large role in school lunches."

The mayor nods. "I took a debate about that. And the Sjálfstæðisflokkurinn (Independence Party) were not for that. They think that the parents should pay for the food." She goes on, "One year after we passed school lunches they made a survey, and it's just been a huge success. There are no noodle soups any longer in the schools for the kids who can't afford their meals. There was actually almost nothing negative."

We talk about school lunches, comparing programs in Iceland to those in Sweden and Finland. The mayor speaks in massive, paragraph-length sentences, usually resolving with the idea that helping all is a public good. I come to realise

she is the rarest politician in the world: someone who believes she can help people.

TALK STRAIGHT TO THE PEOPLE

"This is my social democratic movement," she says at one point. "We have to see if something changes. But I hope not, really hope not. I think a lot of people who identify as social democrats in Iceland think like this, and we want a more fair society. My youngest is soon 18, but I'm happy my taxes can freely go to helping children to get the best opportunities in their lives. I mean, absolutely. Why not? Why should I just think about my kids? My happiness depends on others' happiness too. Like if their society is working, and people are genuinely happy, my life is better."

At no point does the mayor waver in her convictions. As it turns out, I will revisit City Hall repeatedly, for fact checks, for photos for this article, before we run the interview. I will see the mayor meeting with concerned citizens angry that their neighbours' trash is in their yard. I will see, repeatedly, the mayor running to help with a public housing initiative that will go almost completely uncovered in the local media. The mayor will actually volunteer to come to the Grapevine Music Awards and give out the Artist of the Year award.

Then, as we prepare to go to print,

the first positive description I have read about her will appear in a website for the former lifestyle magazine Mannlíf, on April 6, 2026. It will be a public letter from Ragnar Erling Hermannsson, a man who has struggled with homelessness, who met with the mayor while eating at the charity Samhjálp. His impression was very close to mine. He notes that this mayor has a way of listening that is almost shocking for a public figure. Also, like me, he can't get the Áramótaskaup skit out of his head. He addresses that skit in his letter:

place when elected officials prepare to leave. While the employees cannot go on record regarding the mayor, it is clear she is well-liked in the office.

"I would have liked to get a second term," the mayor tells me. "But still, I can use my knowledge now to be a better councillor, also, because now I know more about the city than I did before, even though I was a part of the council. I think it is really important that if you get the opportunity to serve as a mayor, to talk straight to the people."

My youngest is soon 18, but I'm happy my taxes can freely go to helping children to get the best opportunities in their lives.

"The woman you made fun of is the same one who came to us at the Samhjálp cafeteria, sat down with us, and listened with sincerity. She is the one who helped those who could least afford it. She is the one who showed us respect when we had little left but hope. It's easy to mock those in power from a distance. It's much harder to meet people in real life – and you did, Heiða Björg."

For all our conversation, on and off the record, the mayor never breaks. She never relents in her optimism, toward her city, her office, and her political party. For me though, her departure seems more ominous. When I leave after our photo shoot, saying goodbye for now to the city office staff, I confess that I can't imagine being interested in meeting Heiða Björg's successor. ■

There is a melancholy as we close our discussion. City Hall is a strange

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Punk At The Museum

# In Between Cultures, Under Construction

Hugo Llanes brings scaffolding, punk, and glowing Lýsi to Hafnarhús

WORDS Iryna Zubenko  
IMAGE Vigfús Birgisson

In a country where every fifth person has arrived from somewhere else, the topic of immigration and adaptation is embedded in the collective psyche. Iceland-based Mexican artist Hugo Llanes addresses this through humour and punk, blending cultural references from both his home country and his adopted one to create something entirely new. *Bonita*, his multimedia installation now on view at the Reykjavík Art Museum's D-Gallery brings together sound and video, sculpture, textile, lenticular prints and more, all built around a steel scaffolding as structure that serves as the exhibition's backbone and central metaphor.

"I wanted to have this body structure that is temporary, that is not always fixed, that can be removed, that somehow implies being under construction," Hugo explains. "I think this process of adaptation is being under construction. It's not a final position or structure or platform, but something that is just temporary." Running through the scaffolding, in a room cast in muted industrial green, are queuing belts with text, or subtitles, as Hugo calls them. Nearby, three buckets filled with Lýsi pills, Iceland's infamous cod liver oil

supplement, glow from within like gold.

At the heart of the show is *Bonita*, Hugo's alter ego that exists in the liminal space between cultures. "*Bonita* is this space, but also this being that lives between cultures, between translations and interpretations," he explains.

Born from experiments at Kling & Bang, *Bonita* has since evolved into a costumed figure made from black belts, deliberately stripped of any ethnic or geographic markers. "I wanted to break through it being depicted through body features, something that resembles somebody from a particular place," Hugo says. "I didn't want people to recognise that this person is from Latin America, for example, or is brown, things like that."

That in-between existence is visualised through a series of lenticular prints, where *Bonita* appears against landscape paintings by one of Iceland's most prominent painters, Kjarval. "I was first thinking who could be Diego Rivera or Frida Kahlo for Icelanders or for Iceland? Then I was like, 'Kjarval,'" Hugo snaps his fingers. "Kjarval is somebody who has managed to be a reference point for Icelandic art globally," he explains. "Without Kjarval, the piece wouldn't be or make sense. I wanted to juxtapose this being that is from many, many sources in front of something that also originates from many sources."

## BRÚNI OG HVÍTI...VÁÁÁ!

One of the exhibition's central works is a reinterpretation of "Luxor y Mohawk" by Las Ultrasonicas, a female punk band from 1990s Mexico City whose original song told the story of

a punk couple navigating prejudice and conservative society of those days. Hugo commissioned GRÓA, an Icelandic punk band known for their DIY-approach and unmatched energy to cover the song. The result is more, as Hugo puts it, "a situational cover" – the pit of the original song is preserved, but the story is completely reinterpreted: it is now situated in Iceland, and sung in Icelandic. The new song is about a biracial gay Mexican-Icelandic couple, where a Mexican partner moves to Iceland and the Icelandic partner introduces the Mexican partner to a new culture, the two are referred to as "brúni" ("brownie") and "hvíti" ("blondie").

"I wanted to give a whole new sense of contemporary Iceland into it by taking and by mirroring two sources to create this hybrid," Hugo shares.

The piece consists of a three-minute punk track, with lyrics displayed on queuing belts in English, Icelandic and Spanish, followed by seven minutes of silence, on a continuous loop.

## LOST AND FOUND IN TRANSLATION

Even though the exhibition employs different media, at its core it is strongly language-based. Hugo displays pages from his first Icelandic textbook, *Íslenska fyrir alla*, something every immigrant who has ever tried to master the language will recognise. Also on display are his first work permit and a CV translated into Icelandic. He draws attention to similarities between words in the two languages, highlighting their overlaps. Take, for example, *hola*, which means "hi" in Spanish and "a hole" in Icelandic, a contrast he highlights by carving out words and

making holes in them.

In another work, Hugo reinterprets a painting by the Icelandic artist Stórval, known for his naive sheep-and-mountain motifs. Instead of sewing horns on sheep, he uses the word "fé," which in Icelandic means money, livestock, and wealth. "When I approach this word, I don't read 'fé,'" he explains. I read 'fe' and 'fe' in Spanish means faith."

Hugo admits he has long been fascinated by discovering objects that connect to his home culture in Iceland. Some of his finds, like the book *Undir mexíkóskum mána* about an Icelandic family trip to Mexico, or elements from DVDs he found in the Kjötborg shop in Vesturbær, are reimagined in the exhibition. In one piece, Hugo takes lyrics from a live DVD of Celia Cruz, one of the most iconic Latin American artists, and literally translates them into Icelandic and English, placing them on queuing belts, or narrates a telenovela in Icelandic and English as it would be narrated in Spanish.

"I got these two materials for 600 krónur in a corner store in Vesturbær. I thought, 'wow, these coincidences that made me get this material in Iceland have to be part of the show,'" he smiles.

In another such coincidence, Hugo's ÚTL ticket has been enlarged and reproduced as a rug, hand tufted with white Mexican and black Icelandic wool. "It's an enlargement of my real ticket, when I went to collect my permanent residency card in 2025," he explains. In the piece, Hugo draws attention to the cultural and economic importance of wool in both Iceland and Mexico, while also addressing the process foreigners must go through to be accepted into

the country.

## ONGOING ADAPTATION

"[The show] seeks beyond that feeling of just being a foreigner," Hugo says at the end of our conversation. "Because I'm still a foreigner, but I live here so I'm no longer a foreigner," he shrugs.

That in-between state runs through the exhibition. Hugo marks his physical presence in Iceland by writing *norður*, "north" in Icelandic, dozens of times on a white pillar with his non-dominant hand, reminding himself where he is and where he comes from.

He agrees that fitting into a new culture and trying to navigate a new, strange language can be incredibly difficult. But he seems to have made a conscious choice not to anchor himself in the frustration and resentment immigration can bring. Instead, he opens his personal story to talk about these challenges.

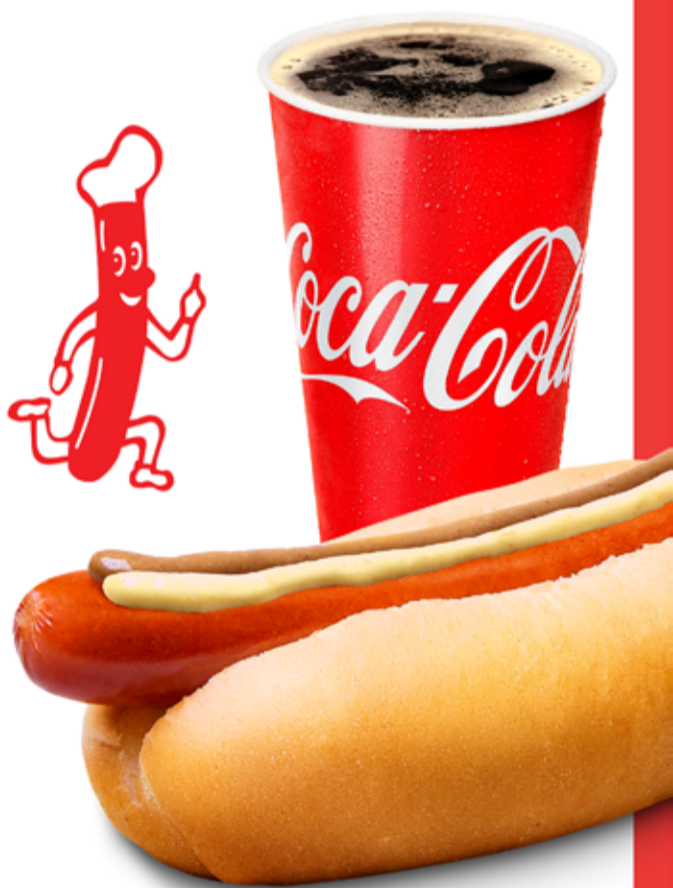
"What I am trying to kind of pick, I'm not saying that everybody is the same, or that everybody has to seek beyond that," Hugo says. "I think we all have different strategies, and this is my strategy – use humour, use punk, use vulnerability, to kind of pass through all these ways of being in inhabiting contemporary Iceland."

Eight years in, Hugo still finds himself mid-construction. "Linguistically, it will be an ongoing exercise for some time in terms of adaptation," he says. "I see the scaffolding system as just a stage – as under construction. I don't know how the construction is gonna end." ■

*Bonita* is on view at the Reykjavík Art Museum until May 3.

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Keflavík Detour

## In A State Of Flux

Tumi Magnússon's exhibition is a meditation on movement and change

WORDS Iryna Zubenko  
IMAGE Vigfús Birgisson

One sunny Sunday in February, having exhausted the number of times I could do a day trip to Hveragerði, I decided to head southwest to Keflavík. This time, though, I wasn't going to the airport.

Keflavík is an unusually long town of residential buildings that lives in the shadow of the runway. Let's be honest: how often do you actually visit of your own will? Most reluctant visitors pass through only when a flight is delayed or cancelled, grabbing snacks, killing time, weighing options.

But it turns out that beyond departures and arrivals, Keflavík has its own attractions to offer: natural-

ly, there's a pool; then there's the Icelandic Museum of Rock 'n' Roll (the name says it all); Viking World, though technically in Njarðvík, is a must-stop for history buffs, with its impressive replica of a Viking ship; a quirky Giantess Cave, where you can try on the shoes of an actual troll; and the Duus Museum, a cultural hub housing two museums under one roof: the Reykjanes Art Museum and the Reykjanes Heritage Museum. One ticket gets you into both, and it's hard to think of a better place to spend a rather uneventful Sunday afternoon.

The Heritage Museum currently hosts a delightfully odd exhibition on Icelandic collectables, including collections of pens, hats, and other small objects, like plastic bags, talking about design and consumption (take my word, it's more fascinating than it sounds). Meanwhile, the Art Museum has long offered a well-curated programme, and its current poetic, sensory exhibition stayed with me long after I left Keflavík. A few weeks later, I called the artist and the curator.

CHANGE IS CONSTANT

*Herefrom Thereto Therefrom Hereto* (or *Héðan þangað þaðan hingað* in Icelandic) is an exhibition by contemporary artist Tumi Magnússon, curated by Gavin Morrison, curator, writer, and former director of the Skaftfell Art Center in Seyðisfjörður. Both are not particularly easy to catch in Keflavík – Tumi has been

living in Copenhagen for the past 20 years and Gavin has spent the last five in the U.S. The two first met in early 2000s, have collaborated a few times since, and maintain a continued relationship with Iceland, which Gavin admits, "kind of saved my sanity," he laughs.

Tumi's career has transitioned from early post-conceptual paintings to video, sound, and digital images that preoccupy him now. The exhibition features mainly Tumi's new works but is interspersed with a few key earlier pieces, the oldest dating back to the late 1990s.

The name of the exhibition gives viewers a hint of what to expect. The four words, herefrom, thereto, therefrom, hereto are distinct from one another but share the basic idea – moving from one place to another and back. This reflects the motif connecting the works in the exhibition which, as Tumi sees it, is simple: everything is always changing.

"In my works, there's this common thread that has something to do with movement and time and change," he explains.

This thread can be seen in both newer and older works and, more broadly, reflects Tumi's view on life, echoing Heraclitus' metaphor: "things being in [a state of] change all the time, in flux and movement, not being static."

He explains, "There's always in-



corporated that degree of change. Whatever you look at today, you know that in 20 years or 100 years, it's going to be totally different. We are in this physical form today, but in 100 years, we will all be dead, and then our bodies... maybe will still exist in some form, but not there anymore as we are now."

Tumi often uses repetition and sound to highlight the underlying sense that everything is short-lived and temporary, giving the exhibition a poetic continuity throughout.

"It was also quite important for me to have this mixture of old and new because I used to paint, and people tend to think that if you paint, and then you stop painting and start working in another medium, you're changing — you are dropping something in favour of something else," Tumi says. "It was important for me that even though it's a change of medium, it's the same thought that runs through everything."

Gavin agrees that including both recent works and key pieces from the past allows viewers to understand the full scope of Tumi's practice and even offers insight into his thought process.

"One of the things that I was very excited to work on this exhibition, and I hope that people pick up on this, is that Tumi has had this very long and distinguished career. This exhibition is a real opportunity to see the consistency of idea, the core of a

practice evolving and being articulated in a variety of ways over this period of time," Gavin explains. "It feels kind of a really rich and generous way to view how an artist thinks. Walking through the exhibition, you really feel that you can engage with someone who's looking at the world in a very particular way."

#### BENDING REALITY

The work that greets you at the entrance is *Peninsula Walk*, a two-channel video installation, filmed by attaching a small camera to the artist's ankle on two different seaside walks, and in fact, in two different countries — Iceland and Denmark. The two videos play side by side, showing the sea and horizon changing, each accompanied by the sound recorded on the respective walk.

"You have this view of the sea on both sides, which means that you *must* be on a peninsula," Tumi explains. "But it is in different places. You have the video synchronised, so it's one walk — except the footsteps sound slightly different, because it's not the same ground that you're walking on — it's mostly sand in one place and more rocky on the other one."

The work is rather involving, even activating your senses — after a few minutes of craning my head, trying to follow the camera through its repetitive movements and loud, distracting sound, I admit I felt a lit-

tle dizzy. "It's not really my intention when I start working on something, but this seems to occur sometimes that what I do has kind of a direct physical effect on people," Tumi says. He has heard such feedback before, particularly with *Swing*, an-

always moving in the same directions. The cities, though different, begin to look alike; the vehicles become difficult to distinguish, and, as Tumi emphasises, that barely matters — the only constant is their movement.

## It was important for me that even though it's a change of medium, it's the same thought that runs through everything.

other work exploring the capture of movement, which shows multiplied steps of a sneaker and a pink Crocs shoe. "Each picture shows just one step — a swing of one foot from when it stopped until the next one," Tumi explains. Originally recorded as a video, each frame is printed out as a photograph and mounted on a 10-millimetre transparent acrylic plate, giving it a sculptural physicality and thickness. The series is conceptually linked to *Peninsula Walk* and references the early motion experiments of pioneering photographer Eadweard Muybridge.

In the next room, a series of videos takes over the entire space, each showing footage captured from public transport — "sometimes a bus, sometimes a tram, sometimes a train, in 10 different cities," as Tumi explains. The work has been edited so that trips synchronise, stopping and starting at the same time and

#### A DIALOGUE ACROSS TIME AND SPACE

In a room hidden behind a thick black curtain (which I admit I almost missed) is one of Tumi's earlier, and perhaps most well-known, works on display: *Coffee and Piss*. It's a series of eight monochrome canvases that progress from black coffee to yellow urine, creating "an illusion of that bodily process," as Gavin puts it. "Each of those canvases individually becomes a kind of slice of time," he adds. Yet while this series captures distinct moments in time, the idea of everything in the world being in a constant state of transformation is evident even here.

At the opposite ends of the same room is *Monochromes* — two screens, each showing a single colour. Suddenly, you hear a loud sound, and the colour on the screen

changes with a splash. It's a continuous loop, at first intriguing and even mysterious to the viewer, yet the underlying idea remains the same. "It's the same movement through the room — in an old work and the newer work," Tumi says.

According to Gavin, this idea was central to how the exhibition was conceived — building an awareness of how you experience the work, and how as you move through the space, older and newer pieces begin to nod to each other.

When I ask what he hopes visitors take away, Tumi offers a humble reply. "Hopefully not the works, at least," he smiles. "I just like it if it makes people feel... happy, creative, it sounds a bit cliché," he laughs, searching for a word. "If it opens something up for people, if it inspires people. That's what I like."

You still have a few weeks to make your way to Keflavik to catch *Herefrom Thereto Therefrom Hereto*. In the meantime, Tumi and Gavin are already planning their next trip to Iceland. This summer, both are working on exhibitions at Skafffell Art Center in Seyðisfjörður, with Tumi participating in a group show and Gavin curating Roman Signer's exhibition. For anyone looking for museums off the beaten track, that one, too, is well worth the trip. ■

*Herefrom Thereto Therefrom Hereto* is on view at Listasafn Reykjanes-bæjar until April 19.



Film Feature

# Hlynur Pálmason's World In One Frame

The Icelandic auteur on authenticity, slow filmmaking, and his funny, atmospheric *Joan of Arc*

WORDS Iryna Zubenko  
IMAGES Hildur Yr Ómarsdóttir & Supplied still

time. Judging by the almost constant chuckles in the audience, Hlynur says it's been special to watch the film with viewers who understand the nuances of the language.

It is a short stop in Reykjavík, and, by the next afternoon, when I give him a call, Hlynur is already on location outside Höfn.

"After my first two films, I had this feeling that I didn't like the distance between an idea and filming it. There's years between," he says. "There's playfulness, and spontaneity, and an impulse that goes away in that process."

**This very strange little film became, actually, my favourite of everything I've made.**

When he and his family returned to Iceland after more than a decade in Denmark, he wanted to bridge that distance. "I thought, can we just buy a camera and make small, playful things while we're developing and making bigger things, the bigger ones being the features that finance the way we live?"

Somehow Hlynur managed to make it work. Spending years financing a film only to shoot it in two months is perhaps his worst nightmare. He's always been more interested in exploring narrative threads than traditional plot, often taking just as much time to do so. In *Godland*, he filmed a decomposing horse for two years; in *The Love That Remains*, he spent years following the threads of a family; and *Joan of Arc*, shot over three years, began as a "process of

getting into *The Love That Remains*."

As Hlynur kept filming, writing and exploring, he fell more in love with the story. "I just kept filming and this very strange little film became, actually, my favourite of everything I've made," he admits.

PLAY, PUNCHES,  
AND MAGIC

Filed in a small camera house equipped with a sound recording system, within walking distance from Hlynur's home on the outskirts of Höfn, *Joan of Arc* uses a single frame for the entirety of its runtime.

In it, energetic twins, Grímur and Þórgils, Hlynur's own sons, build a knight-like figure to shoot arrows at. It's a task that seems to keep them busy for months: first they dig a hole, install a pole, build and rebuild the dummy, all while throwing punches at each other and breaking into sibling squabbles. In the background, seasons change, birds fly away and return, the ground erupts with grass and flowers, then hardens under ice, and the sky changes from summer hues to crisp winter blue.

Their older sister, Ída Mekkin, appears on screen from time to time, laughing at the boys, teasing them. This DIY backyard project holds no interest for her — she's a teenager now, and likely spends most of her time locked up in her room watching *Narcos*. But once the hard work is done, she eagerly picks up a bow

and names the figure Joan of Arc, teaching the boys that women can be knights too.

The tangible energy between the kids is the foundation of the film. Not for a second do you doubt that they're actually siblings — they move around the screen with an ease only those who grew up in the same house, likely sharing a bedroom, can. Little teases, small jokes, the casual cruelty of making someone feel stupid without really meaning it — all of it feels natural, almost impossible to write. While the film uses written dialogue for deeper or more philosophical moments, more often Hlynur simply creates the circumstances and steps back. "It was about creating setups where I maybe wouldn't write a scene, but I would, for example, give one of the boys a brand new shovel, and one of them an old one," he explains. "It's like tension without doing anything, almost."

Blending fiction with spontaneity, Hlynur often let the camera roll even as the boys fought on the ground, watching carefully to ensure it didn't get out of control. "They're used to it, and they're good at pulling through even if they hurt themselves. Of course, never seriously," he says. "I didn't want it to be sentimental. I wanted it to be a little bit rough, like it is."

"My favourite scenes are actually some of the long freestyle scenes with the boys," he continues, "where they're just talking shit for five minutes — just talking, throwing punches, making fun of each other, shooting arrows. Those scenes are absolutely impossible to write, and I think they're just magical." They evolve naturally, he adds, and were

the reason he fell for the process of making this film.

CAPTURING TIME

This sense of authenticity allowed Hlynur to be playful in ways his previous features hadn't, pushing into surreal territory, dabbling in magical realism and slapstick humour. "I knew that this kind of magical, absurd, weird, surreal side would only work if the family felt real," he says.

Finding the right frame, however, took time. "It's only one frame for three years, for 62 minutes, and that kind of sounds really boring, but actually there's a tension in that. How do you make that work? It's really difficult," he says. "It's a beautiful challenge for us as filmmakers: how can you make one frame work, and how do you build on that?"

The frame he chose, though static, feels almost tactile and layered — sky, sea, small islands, cliff, grass — add the rapid changes of East Iceland's weather and it almost comes alive. Small moments of magic, like "the sound of birds coming after winter," kept Hlynur returning to the camera house for days, sometimes months. "I could feel that these things were impacting me," he says. "So I hope that if you spent an hour in the cinema, it would also impact the audience."

The extended nature of the process meant that Hlynur served as his own cinematographer. Working with his frequent collaborator, Copenhagen-based Maria von Hausswolff, simply wasn't practical. "She has her own life and family, and it would be too expensive to fly her over here each time I pick up the camera," he says.

"It's a very playful film that nobody wanted," says director Hlynur Pálmason, speaking to a live audience at Bió Paradís after the premiere of *Joan of Arc* (*Jóhanna af Örk* in Icelandic), the closing film of the Stockfish Film & Industry Festival. Based in East Iceland, Hlynur rarely visits the capital, and even more rarely with his family, who also happen to be the cast. Often described as a sidebar to his previous feature, *The Love That Remains*, and at times overlapping it, the 62-minute film is being shown in Iceland for the first



#### BEFORE THEY LEAVE THE NEST

As Hlynur talks about the making of the film, I ask whether it exists in part because the cast are his own children – real sibling dynamics, and the kind of 24/7 access most filmmakers can only dream of.

study.

“One of your main characters, who is a lot in your films, suddenly has a smaller role – just naturally because she doesn’t live with us anymore. And, suddenly, the boys kind of step in and become the main characters. This isn’t something we pre-plan or

## The things that I’m interested in making are the things that only I can make.

“The things that I’m interested in making are the things that only I can make,” he answers. “And I don’t mean that in an arrogant way or anything. I’m not saying that these are the best things in the world.” What he means is working with his surroundings, both in terms of landscape and people. Look through credits of any of his films and you’ll notice the same names returning, both actors or crew, reinvented project after project. “It is creating a life and a family of filmmakers so you can work together, and it’s not about only one singular project – it’s about growing older together and making different things.”

His kids have no interest in pursuing acting or filmmaking, but they’re curious enough to take part – and as Hlynur notes with a smile, they get paid. There’s a more sentimental reason too, one that Hlynur has spoken about openly: time. Making films with children is a way of spending time with them before they grow up and their lives pull them elsewhere. He’s already experiencing that with his eldest daughter, Ída, who recently turned 18 and moved away to

preconceive. It’s just something that happens very naturally, and that’s my favourite thing,” says Hlynur. “Whether it’s films, video installations, paintings or whatever, if the work you’re making surprises you in some way, that’s the best thing in the world.”

While he treasures time with his children, Hlynur sees both life and work as evolving chapters. “When you grow older, there are new things and new dilemmas in life and things you experience and the people around you – so you begin exploring different things,” he says. “I can feel a change from the things that I’m planning in the future, they’re quite different from the things that I’m making now.”

#### A FRAGILE INDUSTRY

A few weeks earlier, I spoke to Stockfish Managing Director Dögg Mósesdóttir, who noted that *Joan of Arc* is the festival’s only Icelandic premiere. “There have just been very few films made because of cut-downs in the film industry,” she said.

“Which is scary,” Hlynur adds.

“Whether it’s directors, gaffers, editors, or whatever, the filmmaking community is really struggling now because there’s less and less money to put into filmmaking and culture. The film fund, the foundation for Icelandic cinema, for the language of Icelandic cinema, is being cut. It’s almost impossible to nourish cinema and the next generation of filmmakers.”

Hlynur admits he is among the lucky few. Last year, he premiered two films, in part thanks to international collaborations. *Joan of Arc*, he notes, only found its audience because distributors who bought *The Love That Remains* were willing to take a chance on it. Otherwise, getting such an experimental, strange work out into the world would be difficult. “If I wouldn’t have that,” he says, “I wouldn’t have survived as a filmmaker because there would be too much of a gap between films.”

Hlynur is already deep in new projects, though he admits, “It’s not looking very good with the government right now, in their lack of love towards the arts.” He’s a year into filming his fifth feature, *On Land and Sea*, which pushes beyond the terrain of *Godland*. “It’s basically the genesis story of my hometown. It’s a story of a family that deconstructs their house and turns it into a raft to sail to the other side of the mountain, to rebuild their house and find a home,” he explains, stressing, “That’s actually a true story. I know that nobody will believe me, because in *Godland*, I wrote that it’s a true story, and it wasn’t. But this is actually a true story.” ■

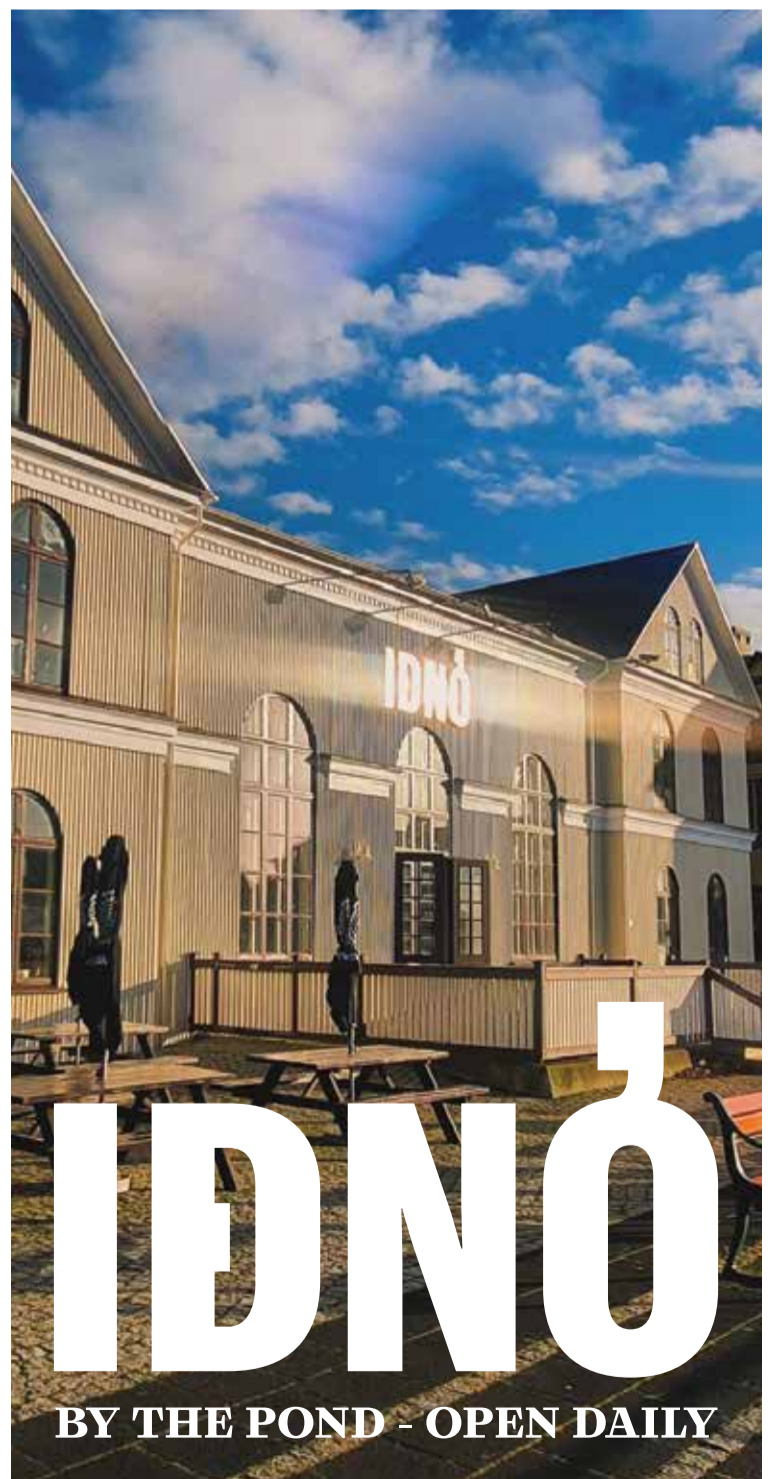
*Joan of Arc* is screening at Bió Paradís. See showtimes at [bioparadis.is](http://bioparadis.is)



# ÆGIR BAR

ÉT, DREKK, OG VER GLAÐR

LAUGARVEGLUR 12 - 101 REYKJAVÍK



# Centre Map

We're here to fill you in on our personal favourite places around town.

## Dining

**1 NAPOLI**  
Tryggvagata 24  
We love places that do one thing and do them damn well. This takeaway place is a case in point. Napoli offers sourdough Neapolitan-style pizzas with a menu to match – think margherita, quattro formaggi, parma, calzone – plus vegan options and magnificent sandwiches. Look out for their lunch offer, every day from 11:30 to 15:00. JT

**2 GAETA GELATO**  
Aðalstræti 6 & Laugavegur 23 & Hlemmur Mathöll  
Gaeta Gelato is at the centre of a heated ongoing debate at the Grapevine office about who makes the best ice cream in the country. For those keen on the deep tastiness of Italian gelato, this place is IT. They are also located right smack downtown, so you can take that icecream for a stroll – we suggest a stroll to their other location for another scoop. JT

**3 PLANTAN**  
Njálsgata 64 & The Nordic House  
This cute little neighborhood cafe is 100% vegan and does a few things right: their soup of the day menu updates every week and uses seasonal produce, they mastered the plant-based cheese bun recipe to perfection, and this might be the most hearty vegan brunches in town. Look out for the daily bun and coffee deal, it truly is like a warm hug. IZ

**4 KEMURI**  
Hverfisgata 82  
A good bowl of steaming pierogi is like a warm blanket or a comforting hug. With Polish immigrants comprising the largest diaspora in Iceland, this culinary delight was long overdue. But it was worth the wait – Kemuri offers a few options of handmade dumplings daily (all vegetarian), with a vegan option available too. You can pick and choose your favourites or get a mixed bowl to try everything. IZ

**5 BAN THAI**  
Laugavegur 130  
The absolute GOAT – as they say – in Thai cuisine in Reykjavik. Ban Thai's menu is dotted with little symbols of chili, denoting the spice level of each course. You're welcome to order a level-5 chili course, but do so at your own risk. JB

**6 GRÁI KÖTTURINN**  
Hverfisgata 16a  
This no-nonsense downtown staple has been serving Reykjavik dwellers quality breakfast food since 1997. Tucked away in a cute cellar, the diner boasts retro Icelandic design charm, while its menu is far from outdated. Pancakes, bagels and frying oil all have their special place at Grái Kötturinn. As Grái Kötturinn closes at 14:30 every day, it's not a place for nighthawks, but early-birds. JB

**7 CHICKPEA**  
Hallveigarstígur 1  
This Mediterranean-inspired restaurant is a great place for a quick bite. Servings are generous and the food nutritious, meaning you'll go full well into the day. They do wraps, falafels, and all kinds of salads exceptionally well. Prices aren't extremely steep, but nothing to write home about either. JB

**8 KRÓNAN**  
Hallveigarstígur 1 & more locations  
If you're ever in a pinch while looking for something cheap to eat if you're downtown just go to Krónan and pick out some flatkökur. Flatkökur goes great with everything. Be it the Mediterranean/Icelandic fusion of lathering some with hummus, or turn it into a poor-man's pizza with pizza sauce and cheese. Honestly, the flatkaka is an empty canvas for you to paint your wildest dreams on. JB

**9 JÓMFRÚIN**  
Lækjargata 4  
Icelanders may have a love-hate relationship with the Danes, but let's be honest, who can resist craving a delicious smørrebrød every now and then? If you get what we are talking about, there's no better place in town for an authentic Danish smørrebrød than Jómfrúin. IZ

**10 RAMEN MOMO**  
Tryggvagata 16 & Bankastræti 8  
The first ramen house in Iceland and the first to offer fresh organic noodles, Ramen Momo has been a fixture of the food scene as long as it has been open. In August of 2024, they outgrew their eight-seat ramen station on Tryggvagata and expanded to a location on Bankastræti. We recommend their creamy, flavourful Tantanmen pork ramen (or the vegan version with tofu!), but truly, you cannot go wrong here. ISH

**11 VITABAR**  
Bergþórugata 21  
If you're staying in Reykjavik more than a few days, you ought to find your own dive bar – this is ours. It seems like the time froze at Vitabar, but we love it that way. People come for their famous blue cheese burger, but stay for a few pints and delicious fries. Sometimes I wish Vitabar discovered craft beer, but I go back nevertheless – for a late night bite and Thule on draft. IZ

## Drinking

**12 12 TÓNAR**  
Skólavörðustígur 15  
Legendary label and legendary shop, there's always something interesting happening there. Whether you grab a beer or a coffee, whether you sit nose-to-turntable watching the DJ pull from their collection or nestle into the basement couch for a game of chess, there's something for everyone. 12 Tónar is both a great place for a chill weekday afternoon or a rowdy weekend with well-curated tunes. ISH

**13 RÖNTGEN**  
Hverfisgata 12, 101 Reykjavik  
Röntgen is renowned for its multifaceted vibe. Not one to back down from a raucous party, Röntgen's tight quarters might have you thinking it's not fit for a party. You couldn't be more wrong. For the adamant partygoer, it's probably best to never leave. Show up early for the best spot in the building and watch a regular Röntgen night morph from polite conversation in the afternoon to sweaty stomping until early morning. JB

**14 BINGO DRINKERY**  
Skólavörðustígur 8  
Admit it, sometimes you just feel like travelling back in time to your grandma's house, full of weird memorabilia one should have gotten rid of at least three decades ago. Luckily, Reykjavik now has a place like this – Bingo Drinkery. Tucked away from the crowds of tourists just off Skólavörðustígur, it offers a selection of beers and cocktails, all on happy hour 16:00-18:00. IZ

**15 KAFFIBARINN**  
Bergstaðastræti 1  
There are no correct words to explain just how iconic Kaffibarinn is in the local bar scene. It's the perennial hangout for the who's who of Reykjavik, welcoming everyone from members of Blur to curious passers by and everyone in between. Kaffibarinn is an establishment in and of itself. JB

## Shopping & Activities

**16 THE VOLCANO EXPRESS**  
Austurbakki 2  
With an eruption every other month, the locals have gotten quite acclimated to "yet another eruption" happening on the very same peninsula Reykjavik sits on. But what does all of this mean? This show will, in a fast and furious way, get those eruptions and the volcanic systems in and around Reykjavik into spatial context for anyone brave enough to buckle up for the virtual flyover experience that is *The Volcano Express*. Not bad. Not bad at all. JT

**17 BÍÓ PARADÍS**  
Hverfisgata 54  
Sometimes the smell of popcorn fills the air of Hverfisgata, as if beckoning you to come inside. You succumb and find yourself in the cutest art house cinema with colourful posters on the walls and vintage-looking bar straight outta Wes Anderson movie. There's always a film screening and you rarely need to book tickets in advance, so enjoy the old school walk-in experience and one of the best Happy Hours in town. IZ

**18 LAVA SHOW**  
Fiskislióð 74  
I didn't know I had a primal urge to see a person clad in a Homer Simpson nuclear suit replicate the natural flow of molten lava until I paid the Lava Show a visit. Nothing will prepare you for sitting in an enclosed space while literal magma flows out of a chute through the wall. And then you just stare at the colours as the host explains the geological properties of lava. JB

**19 SKÁLDA BÓKABÚÐ**  
Vesturgata 10a  
Skálda is a brand-new independent bookstore housed in a 120-year-old building on Vesturgata. The one-man project of former teacher Einar Björn Magnússon, Skálda offers an excellent selection of new books, featuring a wide range of contemporary authors in both Icelandic and English, as well as a curated collection of used books – available for as low as 990 ISK. IZ ■



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**16**

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**THE VOLCANO  
EXPRESS**

**4**

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**A**

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\*By Reykjavik Grapevine

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New In Town **Tónabíó**

**SKIPHOLT 33**  
105 REYKJAVÍK

From its opening in 1962 as a cinema to its days as a bingo hall, Tónabíó has long been a festive gathering spot. In March, the venue's latest chapter began as a concert venue for the attached RVK Brewery. Offering great music and great beer, the bigger space allows for longer lineups and a grander stage than their previous – a corner of their taproom. With a stellar first couple of weeks and some of the best lineups Reykjavík has seen in a while (courtesy of their newly reinstated booking manager), Tónabíó could just be the larger venue we've all been hoping for. ISH ■

Opening hours:  
Sunday to Tuesday: 15:00 to 22:00;  
Wednesday: 13:00 to 22:00;  
Thursday: 13:00 to 23:00;  
Friday to Saturday: 13:00 to 00:00



**FOOD HALL & BAR**  
**PÓSTHÚS**

PÓSTHÚSSTRÆTI | 101 REYKJAVÍK

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BEST FOODHALL

**HAPPY HOUR**  
16:00 - 18:00

# Art Exhibitions

# 10.04.26–07.05.26

Gallery openings, happenings, showings and pop-up exhibitions all around the capital region

## Opening

### ÁSMUNDARSALUR

*Logi Pedro – Heimur*

Angolan-Icelandic industrial designer (and musician) explores how heritage enters the home

Opens May 6 at 17:00  
Runs until May 10

### BERG CONTEMPORARY

*Bórdís Erla Zoëga – Domestic Sci-fi*  
The artist explores human perception, digital culture, and more in her visually-striking, colourful pieces

Opens April 11 at 17:00  
Runs until May 23

### GALLERY FOLD

*Group exhibition – Casted connections*

Ceramic students explore the theme of connection

Opens May 4 at 12:00  
Runs until May 10

*Ísak Óli Sævarsson – Stitches and Strokes*

Often inspired by his favourite characters such as Donald Duck and Tintin, the artist uses both painting and embroidery to create

Opens May 4 at 16:00  
Runs until May 10

### H,A,K,K GALLERY

*Studio Brynjar & Veronika – Constructed Landscape*

The designers brought the method with heat-treating wood to produce furniture out of poplar to Iceland in this exhibition

Opens April 11 at 16:00  
Runs until July

### HERMA

*Group exhibition – Simple Rio de Janeiro*

Seven artists explore Instagram and crushes in this exhibition

Opens April 9 at 17:00  
Runs until April 12

### 100 people

Photographs of 100 people, born from 1926 to 2026, are accrued to celebrate 66°North's centennial

Opens May 7 at 17:00  
Runs until May 11

### HLÖÐULOFTIÐ (KORPÚLFSSTAÐIR)

*Helgi Þorgils Friðjónsson – Horizon*  
Often presenting large-scale works, this artist uses clay and paint to capture nature

Opens April 11 at 14:00  
Runs until May 10

### LITLA GALLERY

*Group exhibition – Á milli heima*  
16 artists affiliated with the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw present small works

Opens April 9 at 18:00  
Runs until April 12

*Nína Þorbjörg Árnadóttir*

The mixed media art student presents colourful, playful works

Opens April 16 at 18:00  
Runs until April 26

### MUSEUM OF DESIGN AND APPLIED ARTS

*Lauf – Bike Ride*

Born in Grafarvogur, the now international bicycle brand explores their journey since their founding in 2011

Opens May 5  
Runs until October 4

### MUSEUM OF DESIGN AND APPLIED ARTS (THE PLATFORM)

*Anna Gulla – Órói*

The artist plays between natural and man-made materials to create delicate mobiles

Opens May 5  
Runs until September 13

### NATIONAL GALLERY OF ICELAND

*Woody Vasulka – Whaling Station*  
This 12-minute film, set in Hvalfjörður, captures the whaling industry in 1964

Opens April 24  
Runs until May 10

### REYKJAVÍK MUSEUM OF PHOTOGRAPHY

*Group exhibition – Press Photographs of the Year*  
Six categories are presented: news, daily life, sports, portrait, environment, editorial and series

Opens April 11 at 15:00  
Runs until May 17

*Group exhibition (FÓKUS) – Winter Scenes*

Part of the amateur photography group's year-long takeover of Skotið

space, six photographers present their work

Opens April 17 at 16:00  
Runs until May 31

### SIND GALLERY

*Telma Har – Traumatic Tension*  
Presenting photography collages, a video game, and sculpture, the artist explores the body, stress, invisible labour, and experiences of trauma

Opens April 10 at 17:00  
Runs until May 16

## Ongoing

### ÁSMUNDARSAFN

*Group exhibition – Wonderland: Remnants*

Multimedia  
Runs until May 30

### ÁSMUNDARSALUR

*Group exhibition – Sambland/Combi-nation*

Multimedia  
Runs until April 26

### ÁSMUNDARSALUR (SETUSTOFA)

*Bórdís Jóhannesdóttir – Moment*

Photography  
Runs until April 14

### BERG CONTEMPORARY

*Ryoji Ikeda – data-verse*

Video-work  
Runs until July 4

### CITY LIBRARY (GERÐUBERG)

*Hafsteinn Michael – Breiðholts boogie*

Collage, painting  
Runs until April 25

### CITY LIBRARY (GRÓFIN)

*Bergrún Íris – Skissur verða að... bókum!*

Drawing  
Runs until April 15

### FLYOVER ICELAND

*Kevin Pagés*

Photography  
Runs until May 14

### GERÐARSAFN (KÓPAVOGUR ART MUSEUM)

*Hörður Ágústsson – Hörður*

Retrospective, abstract art  
Runs until May 3

### GLERHÚSIÐ

*Ólöf Nordal – Ó*

Multimedia  
Runs until April 19

### HAFNARBORG

*Weronika Balcerak & Lukas Bury – Some Honest Persons*

Multimedia  
Runs until May 25

*Ragna Fróða – Echo*

Textile  
Runs until May 25

### HAFNARHÚS (REYKJAVÍK ART MUSEUM)

*Group Exhibition – Lavaforming*

Multimedia  
Runs until April 26

*Katrín Elvarsdóttir – A Botanical Future*

Photography  
Runs until April 26

*Erró – Erró: Remix*

Multimedia  
Runs until May 3

*Hugo Llanes – D54*

Multimedia  
Runs until May 3

### HANNESARHOLT

*Laura Valentino – URBANTREES*

Multimedia  
Runs until April 11

*Group exhibition – Resistance*

Archival work  
Runs until 2028

### 18 GRANDI

*Ingólfur Arnarsson – ... just a shell.*

Architecture  
Runs until January 2027

### IPA GALLERY

*Ólöf Björg Björnsdóttir – Seidr of Uncertainty – An Ode to Mothers*

Paintings  
Runs until April 19

### KJARVALSSTAÐIR (REYKJAVÍK ART MUSEUM)

*Guðrún Kristjánsdóttir – Traces*

Painting  
Runs until June 7

*Kjarval – Kjarval and the 20th Century: When Modernity Anchored*

Paintings  
Runs until September 6

### LA BOUTIQUE DESIGN

*Anna Álfréidur Brynjólfssdóttir – Appearances*

Sculptural textile paintings  
Runs until April 25

### LÁ ART MUSEUM

*Alberte Parnuuna & Antonía Bergþórsdóttir, Íris María Leifsdóttir & Vikram Pradhan – Augnablik jökuls*

Video work  
Runs until May 31

*Hlynur Hallsson – Enn og aftur - schon wieder - once again*

Painting, text  
Runs until August 23

*Jeannette Castioni – Only Data*

Animation  
Runs until August 23

*Bernard Khoury – Toxic Grounds*

Multimedia  
Runs until August 23

*The Field in Between – Styrmir Örn Guðmundsson & Agata Mickiewicz*

Multimedia  
Runs until August 23

*Rebekka Kühnis – Transient*

Painting  
Runs until August 23

### LISTASALUR

*MOSFELLSBÆJAR Hrafnhildur Halldórsdóttir – Heimilisgestur*

Textile  
Runs until April 17

### THE LIVING ART MUSEUM

*Ben Frost & Francesco Fabris – Harmonic Tremor*

Multimedia  
Runs until April 19

### MUSEUM OF DESIGN AND APPLIED ARTS (THE PLATFORM)

*Hanna Dís Whitehead – Bits And Pieces From The Workshop*

Product design  
Runs until April 26

### NATIONAL GALLERY OF ICELAND

*Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir & Mark Wilson – Seas' Blue Yonder*

Multimedia  
Runs until May 10

*Agnieszka Polska – Innocent Bodies*

Video work  
Runs until May 17

*Group Exhibition – Affinities of Form*

Multimedia  
Runs until May 10

*Donald Judd & Hörður Ágústsson – Architecture of Place*

Architecture  
Runs until May 17

*Big Be-Hide – Alicja Kwade*

Sculpture  
Runs until May 1

### THE NORDIC HOUSE (CHILDREN'S LIBRARY)

*Group exhibition – The North*

Drawing  
Runs until April 26

### THE NORDIC HOUSE (HVELFING)

*Group exhibition – Ripples: Shifting Realities In The Arctic*

Multimedia  
Runs until April 26

### PORT9

*Elis Hinz – Collage verka*  
The collage maker presents the works she's made since 2017

### RAF GALLERY

*Dagur Benedikt Reynisson – Exhibition #4*

Prints, installation  
Runs until May 1

### REYKJANES ART MUSEUM

*Tumi Magnússon – Herefrom Thereto Therefrom Hereto*

Painting, photography, soundwork  
Runs until April 19

### REYKJAVÍK MUSEUM OF PHOTOGRAPHY (SKOTIÐ)

*FÓKUS (Group exhibition) – Landscape*

Photography  
Runs until April 12

### THE SCULPTURE GARDEN

*Ragnheiður Sigurðardóttir Bjarnarson – Stones of Emotions*

Sculpture  
Runs until May 24

### SIGURJÓN ÓLAFSSON MUSEUM

*Sigurjón Ólafsson – Face to Face*

Sculpture  
Runs until May 17

### WHALES OF ICELAND

*Karim Iliya – Giants of the Sea*

Photography  
Runs until May 31

## Art Picks



*Group exhibition – Press Photographs of the Year*  
Reykjavík Museum of Photography  
Opens April 11 at 15:00

To mark the achievement of press photographers this year, awards for six categories of photography will be handed out for the year 2025: news, daily life, sports, portrait, environment, editorial, and series. After the awards, the photographs will remain in an exhibition until May 17, allowing all to see and celebrate the skill of our industry's press photographers. ISH



*Studio Brynjar & Veronika – Constructed Landscape*  
H,A,K,K Gallery  
Opens April 11 at 16:00

In this exhibition, the designers blur the lines between furniture and sculpture. Studio Brynjar & Veronika combine the versatile yet fast-spreading western balsam poplar with the centuries-old, environmentally friendly method of heat-treating the wood. Pulling inspiration and material from Icelandic nature, they present proof that artists and builders can use wood sourced in Iceland. ISH



*Bórdís Erla Zoëga – Domestic Sci-fi*  
BERG Contemporary  
Opens April 11 at 17:00

We all began our year with the artist Þórdís Erla Zoëga as she took over more than 500 billboards in town with her work *Sólarhringur* in this year's *Auglýsingahlé*. Now, you can catch her work at BERG in her solo-show *Domestic Sci-fi*. As the artist explores the effects of technology on our natural world, she works with AI, processing AI images and predicted outcomes, alongside a work continuing her investigation of the effects of blue light on the circadian rhythm. ISH

# Events 10.04.26–07.05.26

If you're putting something on for the general public, send us a line to: [events@grapevine.is](mailto:events@grapevine.is)

## Friday April 10

**DJ SOFTFISKUR**  
21:00 12 Tónar  
**Free Supermarket**  
17:30 Andrymi  
**Party Screening: Mamma Mia!**  
21:00 Bió Paradís  
**Devine Defilement: SLAMDOWN @ Dillon**  
20:00 Dillon  
**Issue #1: On Generated Propaganda**  
18:00 Garg bookstore  
**Magic Show**  
21:00 Kabarett  
**Bobbie's Holy Hits**  
21:30 Kiki Queer Bar  
**GG BLÚS**  
21:00 LEMMY  
**DJ & Drummer**  
23:00 LEMMY  
**ghostglitter & jdubs**  
20:00 Mengi  
**Big Geewok**  
22:00 Röntgen  
**KUSK & Óviti + Lára**  
21:00 Stúdentakjallarinn  
**BRIM-BALL**  
20:00 Tónabíó  
**Már & Nielsen**  
23:00 Kaffibarinn

**Saturday April 11**  
**Party Screenings With Greg Sestero: Big Shark & The Room**  
18:00 Bió Paradís  
**SPREK**  
21:00 Dillon  
**Fire & Ice Comedy Night**  
21:00 Kabarett  
**Straumur: Hermigervill**  
21:00 Kaffibarinn  
**LEMMY x Grunge: Live**  
23:00 LEMMY  
**Mikael Lind & Sigga Björg**  
20:00 Mengi  
**Friends b2b Mix-up!**  
22:00 Röntgen  
**Smátíðni: Einakróna, Andervel, Chum n Bass**  
19:30 Smekkleysa  
**Hrafnamynd: Film Screening**  
17:00 Space Odyssey  
**House of Revolution x Belonging?: THE UPRISING!**  
19:00 Þjóðleikhúsið  
**DJ Óli Dóri**  
23:00 Kaffibarinn

## Sunday April 12

**Matthildur Fest Fundraiser**  
15:00 Bió Paradís  
**Black Sunday: The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie**  
21:00 Bió Paradís  
**The Sunday Comedy Show**  
21:00 Dillon  
**Reykjavík Big Band Marathon**  
13:00 Harpa (Flói)  
**Hverfullt: Chamber Music**  
16:00 Harpa (Norðurljós)  
**Sunday Jazz: Rebekka Blöndal & Andrés Þór**  
20:00 Iðnó  
**Tíbrá: All Roads Lead To Paris**  
13:30 Salurinn  
**Orang Volante**  
21:00 Kaffibarinn

## Monday April 13

**Pub Quiz**  
20:00 Bodega  
**Mánudjass**  
19:30 Le Kock  
**Witchcraft Wine Wednesday #3**  
20:00 Port9  
**Ari Árelíus (DJ Set)**  
21:00 Kaffibarinn

## Tuesday April 14

**Upprásin: j. bear & the cubs, Venus Volcanism, & Gargan**  
20:00 Harpa (Kaldalón)  
**Gelluquiz with Tanja**  
20:00 Röntgen  
**DJ Vala**  
21:00 Kaffibarinn

## Wednesday April 15

**Ichiko Aoba: Across the Oceans**  
20:00 Harpa (Norðurljós)  
**Artivism As a Catalyst For Wellbeing Economies**  
17:30 The Nordic House  
**Vinyl Wednesday: Snáðinn**  
21:00 Röntgen

## Thursday April 16

**Ahmad Rana: On The Spectrum**  
21:00 Kabarett  
**Monkey Coup & Rant Viceroy**  
20:00 LEMMY  
**Drink & Draw**  
20:00 Loft Hostel  
**Hróðmar Sigurðsson, Ingibjörg Elsa Turchi, & Magnús Trygvason Eliassen**  
20:00 Mengi

**DJ Lexeline**  
21:00 Röntgen  
**Comedy Open Mic**  
20:30 Útópía  
**Húsdjú: DJ Kári**  
21:00 Kaffibarinn

## Friday April 17

**Free Supermarket**  
17:30 Andrymi  
**Party Screening: Demolition Man**  
21:00 Bió Paradís  
**Nai Barghouti**  
20:00 Harpa (Eldborg)  
**DJ & Drummer**  
23:00 LEMMY  
**Turturi, Laglegt, <333 trio**  
20:00 Mengi  
**SPIRAL.E**  
20:30 Port9  
**KGB**  
22:00 Röntgen  
**Guðný Jóns**  
23:00 Kaffibarinn

## Saturday April 18

**After The Future: Survival Under The Eclipse Of Technology**  
14:00 City Library (Grófin)  
**Swap Market**  
16:00 Dalur Hostel  
**Litli Matjurtagarðurinn**  
21:00 Dillon  
**In Memoriam: Jón Nordal Student Concert**  
14:00 Hallgrímskirkja  
**Leyla Wara Leyla: Leyla Arabiyah Arabic Shownight**  
21:00 Kabarett  
**Rokk & Metal: Drungi, Eldrún, Alchemía, Drápa**  
20:00 LEMMY  
**Óli Dóri**  
22:00 Röntgen  
**Iceland Championship In Beard Growing**  
19:00 Tónabíó  
**RSD '26 Single Release: ex.girls, ZAMILSKA, AtliGummi**  
18:00 Smekkleysa  
**ADHD**  
20:00 Austurbæjarbíó (Silfurtunglið)  
**Straumur: Spouses**  
21:00 Kaffibarinn  
**DJ BenSöl**  
23:00 Kaffibarinn



National Gallery of Iceland  
Fríkirkjuvegur 7  
The House of Collections  
Hverfisgata 15  
Einar Jónsson Museum  
Hallgrímstorg 3

## Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir & Mark Wilson Seas' Blue Yonder



Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir and Mark Wilson, *Minke Whale, Áltanes, Ísland* (from the series *Windfall*), 2024. Courtesy of the artists.

Listasafn Íslands  
National Gallery of Iceland

+354 515 9600 [listasafn.is](http://listasafn.is)

25.1.–  
10.5.2026

## Event Picks



**Matthildur Fest Fundraiser**  
April 12, 15:00 to 23:00  
Bió Paradís  
Free to enter, but donate!

If you haven't heard of Matthildur Skaðaminnkun, they're a local harm-reduction organisation that sets up stations at raves and festivals, providing literally life-saving offerings, such as test strips and Narcan, alongside advocacy and education. To help the Matthildur volunteers keep doing what they're doing, a fundraising event for them will take over Bió Paradís with an art fair, performances, an auction, DJs, and more! To learn more about them, check out [matthildurskadaminnkun.is](http://matthildurskadaminnkun.is). ISH



**Landvernd: Highlands Festival**  
April 23, doors at 19:30  
Iðnó  
5.900 ISK, available online

On Sumardagurinn fyrsti (The First Day of Summer), the Icelandic Environment Association will put on a benefit festival for the Icelandic Highlands. This is their third iteration, and what better way to celebrate the beginning of summer than going to a festival where proceeds go towards protecting the environment for generations to come. To boot, they've got a great lineup: KUSK & Óviti, lúpína, gugusar, Daði Frey, and Biggi Veira. ISH



**Wacken Metal Battle Iceland 2026**  
April 25, doors at 18:30  
Iðnó  
4.900 ISK, available online

Seven bands will compete for one slot at the Wacken Metal Battle, an international band competition that aims to promote the metal scene and find the bands of the future. An international jury, alongside audience votes, will decide who will represent Iceland in the world's biggest heavy metal festival. To kick off the night, mainstays of the scene Múr and Gaddavir will perform, and then the competition begins. ISH

**Reykjavík Art Museum**  
One museum  
Three locations

**Hafnarhús**  
Tryggvagata 17  
101 Reykjavík

**Kjarvalsstaðir**  
Flókagata 24  
105 Reykjavík

**Ásmundarsafn**  
Sigtún  
105 Reykjavík

**Open daily**  
[listasafnreykjavikur.is](http://listasafnreykjavikur.is)  
[artmuseum.is](http://artmuseum.is)

# Events

# 10.04.26–07.05.26

Concerts, comedy, movies and other happenings that defy categorisation

If you're putting something on for the general public, send us a line to: [events@grapevine.is](mailto:events@grapevine.is)

## Sunday April 19

*The Sunday Comedy Show*  
21:00 Dillon

## K-POP INFINITY

15:00 Harpa (Eldborg)  
18:00 Harpa (Eldborg)

*Sunday Jazz: Magnus Thorell*  
20:00 Iðnó

*Classical Music: Cigar Smoke and French Weather Moods*  
13:30 Salurinn

*Two Traditions: French Pâtisserie & Japanese Tea*  
10:00 Sweet Aurora

*Castaway Stories by Tiit: English Improv Show*  
18:00 White Lotus Venue

*King Lucky*  
21:00 Kaffibarinn

## Monday April 20

*Pub Quiz*  
20:00 Bodega

*Mánudjass*  
19:30 Le Kock

*DJ Vinur Minn*  
21:00 Kaffibarinn

## Tuesday April 21

*Pub Quiz With Sonur Sæll*  
21:00 Röntgen

*Kraftgalli (DJ Set)*  
21:00 Kaffibarinn

## Wednesday April 22

*LiteFun*  
20:00 12 Tónar  
*Dumplings x Bao Bao Yum Cha*  
17:00 Ramen Momo

## BellaMix69

21:00 Röntgen

*Last Night Of Winter: Rorri, Númer 3, Valgeir, Haukur Páll*  
23:00 Röntgen (Upstairs)

*Þorgerður*  
21:00 Kaffibarinn

*RVK Poetics*  
20:00 Mengi

## Thursday April 23

*Children's Choir Festival*  
14:00 Hallgrímskirkja  
*Landvernd: Highlands Festival*  
19:30 Iðnó

*Drink & Draw*  
20:00 Loft Hostel

*Berglind María Tómasdóttir & Júlía Mogensen*  
20:00 Mengi

*Giovanna Del Bio*  
21:00 Röntgen

*Comedy Open Mic*  
20:30 Útópía

*Húsdjúð: Allenheimer*  
21:00 Kaffibarinn

## Friday April 24

*Free Supermarket*  
17:30 Andrými  
*Qaleidoscope: Queer Film & Performance Tour*  
19:00 Bió Paradís

*Party Screening: Little Shop of Horrors*  
21:00 Bió Paradís

*Reykjavík Big Band: Music From The Blue Planet*  
18:00 Harpa (Norðurljós)

*SAMPL: REVENGE OF CALCULON & more*  
19:00 Iðnó

*DJ & Drummer*  
23:00 LEMMY

## Natan Kryszk & Arnljótur

20:00 Mengi

*Torfi (DJ Set)*  
22:00 Röntgen

*No Borders Iceland: Rave 4 Refugees*  
21:00 Prikið

*Straumur: Spouses*  
21:00 Kaffibarinn

## Saturday April 25

*Party Screening: Nýtt Líf*  
19:00 Bió Paradís

*Qaleidoscope: Queer Film & Performance Tour*  
19:00 Bió Paradís

*Karaoke*  
22:00 Ellý

*Reykjavík City Band + Icelandic Pop Icons*  
20:00 Harpa (Norðurljós)

*The Best Of Deep Purple*  
21:00 Harpa (Eldborg)

*Wacken Metal Battle Iceland 2026*  
18:30 Iðnó

*StAustin Larkin & John McCowen*  
20:00 Mengi

*Fusion Groove*  
22:00 Röntgen

*Biggi Maus Release Concert*  
16:00 Smekkleysa

*Brenninetla, GiKeR, LiteFun*  
19:00 Smekkleysa

*Straumur Concert Series*  
21:00 Kaffibarinn

*Kjörk*  
23:00 Kaffibarinn

## Sunday April 26

*Black Sunday: Starship Troopers*  
21:00 Bió Paradís

*The Sunday Comedy Show*  
21:00 Dillon

*Verdi's Requiem*  
17:00 Harpa (Eldborg)

## Sunday Jazz: Sigurður Flosason

20:00 Iðnó

*Alfons X*  
21:00 Kaffibarinn

## Monday April 27

*Pub Quiz*  
20:00 Bodega

*Mánudjass*  
19:30 Le Kock

*Andri Björgvinsson*  
21:00 Kaffibarinn

## Tuesday April 28

*Pub Quiz: Atli Diamond*  
20:00 Röntgen

*EP Release Listening Party, MÍT*  
17:00 Smekkleysa

*Fu Kaisha*  
21:00 Kaffibarinn

## Wednesday April 29

*Vinyl Wednesday: Júlala*  
21:00 Röntgen

*Anna Ásthildur*  
21:00 Kaffibarinn

## Thursday April 30

*Bogomil Font: International Jazz Day*  
20:30 Hornið (Djúpið)

*Drink & Draw*  
20:00 Loft Hostel

*Halli Guðmunds: Guiso de Chili*  
20:00 Mengi

*DJ MBK*  
21:00 Röntgen

*Comedy Open Mic*  
20:30 Útópía

*Fusion Groove*  
21:00 Kaffibarinn

## Friday May 1

*Free Supermarket*  
17:30 Andrými

## Party Screening: Mean Girls

21:00 Bió Paradís

*DJ & Drummer*  
23:00 LEMMY

*Söngvaskáld: Daði Freyr*  
20:00 Salurinn

*Mattías Moon Release Concert*  
19:00 Smekkleysa

## Saturday May 2

*Matinée With Organ & Accordion*  
12:00 Hallgrímskirkja

*Aldis Fjóra*  
21:00 LEMMY

*Straumur Concert Series*  
21:00 Kaffibarinn

*Drag Brunch*  
13:00 Austurbæjarbíó (Silfurtungli)

## Sunday May 3

*Black Sunday: Black Sunday*  
21:00 Bió Paradís

*The Sunday Comedy Show*  
21:00 Dillon

## Monday May 4

*Pub Quiz*  
20:00 Bodega

*Mánudjass*  
19:30 Le Kock

## Wednesday May 6

*Speed Dating: 40-60 years*  
19:00 Bió Paradís (Regnboginn)

*Vinyl Wednesday: DJ No Service*  
21:00 Röntgen

## Thursday May 7

*Drink & Draw*  
20:00 Loft Hostel

*Comedy Open Mic*  
20:30 Útópía

# The Reykjavík Grapevine

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Appy Listings

# Some Of The Happiest Hours In Town

If your bar has a happy hour, email us on [events@grapevine.is](mailto:events@grapevine.is) with the details.

## 12 TÓNAR

Every day from 14:00 to 19:00  
Beer 1.100 ISK, Wine 1.300 ISK

## BINGO DRINKERY

Every day from 16:00 to 18:00  
Beer 1.000 ISK, Wine 1.000 ISK,  
Cocktails 1.500 ISK

## BÍÓ PARADÍS

Every day from 17:00 to 19:00  
Beer 1.100 ISK, Wine 1.200 ISK

## BODEGA

Every day from 16:00 to 18:00  
Beer 1.000 ISK, Wine 1.200 ISK

## DAISY

Every day from 17:00 to 19:00  
Beer 1.100 ISK, Wine 1.300 ISK

## DEN DANSKE KRO

Every day from 16:00 to 19:00  
Beer & Wine 1.550 ISK 2-for-1 offer

## ELLÝ

Every day from 12:00 to 20:00  
Beer 1.200 ISK, Wine 1.200 ISK

## FORRÉTTABARINN

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Músíktílaunir

# Teenage Kicks And Funky Licks

Prog-folk trio Falinn Gjóður wins the cumbersome Músíktílaunir

WORDS Jóhannes Bjarkason  
 IMAGE Árni Torfason

AN UNTIMELY DECISION

Comprised of three 16-year-olds, Falinn Gjóður plays a 21st-century rendition of progressive and folk rock. Citing influences such as Frank Zappa and Hinn Íslenski Pursaflokkur, Falinn Gjóður uses elements of traditional songwriting thrown into a shaker with disparate elements of rock, sifted through so many filters that the original source is long contorted. Performed by a bass, electric guitar (and sometimes, a banjo), and electronic drums, the arrangements were made from necessity rather than aesthetics.

“We just did it because we couldn’t find a drummer in time for the show,” guitarist Porri explains. “It’s a bit of a hassle to have a drummer, and the electronics are good,” bassist and lead singer Aron Elí Arnarsson continues. “Eventually we want to find a drummer,” he says.

Having been introduced to each other through school and their musical education, the three were in informal talks of forming a band based on their mutual music interests. Músíktílaunir, however, served as the band’s impetus. “We didn’t form the band until two days before the deadline,” Aron admits.

LOVE FOR THE GAME

Despite their young age, the musicians are incredibly articulate in describing the pre- and post-show jitters, the current state of the music scene, and their future plans.

“We weren’t hoping to win. We were just participating to have fun,” keyboardist, computer operator and background singer Baldur Þórarinsson says. “I’d say we weren’t playing just to win. It was just supposed to be a bit of fun,” Aron concurs. “When our name was called out, it felt like a dream. I’m still waiting to wake up,” he explains. “A lot of people have

complimented us, and that’s so encouraging,” Porri says.

For teenage musicians, access to public music spaces has always been a barrier given strict age requirements at music venues. With the decline of mid-sized venues and bars, this access is further curtailed, giving increased importance to spaces such as Músíktílaunir.

“It’s a bit sad,” Aron comments. “The number of places seems to be going down. But if you look hard enough, for example what’s going on at Iðnó and that sort of thing. If you know where to look, there’s enough to be found,” he continues on a positive note. “I think accessibility to these places, like Músíktílaunir, needs to be increased. Or venues that allow small bands to perform. It’s difficult to enter the scene,” he ruminates.

A DECLINING INSTITUTION?

With this year’s Músíktílaunir in the bag, countless young musicians have sought the opportunity to further their musical aspirations. Still, as every new year passes, it becomes more and more unclear what kind of talent the institution wants to incubate – and how it wants to do so.

Notwithstanding the high median age of the organizers and jury panel, very few winners since the infamous gap year of 2020 – apart from perhaps KUSK – have managed to establish themselves as an artistic force and build on the resources and prestige a Músíktílaunir win provides.

Whether this is an industry or an institutional issue is unclear, but the fact remains that Músíktílaunir has become a rigid establishment, and young people don’t really vibe with institutions. As asserted before, the system needs evolution. ■

As spring rolls around, nothing encapsulates the turn of the Icelandic music season as well as Músíktílaunir. Since the 1980s, the perennial battle-of-the-bands style competition has been platforming musically inclined adolescents and slingshotted some of them to world-wide fame.

For this year’s iteration, 11 acts from four qualifying rounds were selected to perform in the finals, held on March 28.

Ultimately, it was the prog-folk trio Falinn Gjóður (Hidden Osprey) which took home first place, followed by experimental jazz group Brenninetla in second place, and IDM artist Lára in third.



Concert Preview

# Nai Barghouti On Developing A Vocal Technique, Stubbornness, And The Vulnerability Of Performance

The Palestinian singer, flautist, and composer previews her upcoming Reykjavík debut

WORDS Ish Sveinsson Houle  
IMAGE Supplied

“I always say that just being on stage — after the first, let’s say, three minutes, that’s the worst — then it becomes one of the best feelings ever,” Nai Barghouti laughs, calling from Amsterdam. “I was born to do this. This is what I love doing the most, more than recording in the studio, more than anything else.”

Nai is a musician and composer, raised in Ramallah, who is currently touring her evocative, narrative music alongside her four-piece band. She performs both singing and playing the flute — the latter being her childhood passion — and explains that her drive to create and perform has been present for as long as she can remember.

Music played a crucial role in Nai’s upbringing. “As a Palestinian child, just like any Palestinian child, you’re under so many boundaries that are forced on you, whether it’s actual

physical checkpoints or just the mental boundaries that are enforced by the occupation on us,” she explains. “It was very important for me to find this thing that I can express myself with — and music was that.”

She began studying the flute at the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music at age six; however, at times it was difficult to travel to the music school in Israel. Checkpoints and resistance lay along the way, but nothing deterred her. “Every child is also very stubborn — [your parents] tell you to take a jacket, so then, all of a sudden, you’re not cold. That’s just how it was, but on a much larger scale.”

Nai continues, “It’s also showing you how strong it is to be a musician. For a soldier that is completely armed and very powerful in terms of their weapons, in terms of the support that they have, and then there’s a helpless child with her flute, and yet that somehow is very threatening to them. And that idea just always stays with you. You don’t really get it as a child, at that point, but it really just stays with you — to always want to keep pursuing your dream.”

For Nai, her roots in Palestinian folk continue to inspire her. The music tradition “can be very rhythmic. It has a special factor of sounding joyful, yet the lyrics can be quite sad and very expressive towards poverty, or occupation, or racism.” She gives an example: “Yuma Mwel al Hawa,” a soft traditional lullaby whose title roughly translates to “Mum, Sing to the Wind.” The refrain of the song, though, repeats: “A dagger’s stab is better than being ruled by a scoundrel.” “It’s calm, yet the lyrics are very powerful,” she explains. “I always like to have it in every concert.”

## FOLLOWING THE FEELING

As a teenager, Nai moved abroad to continue her music education. While she studied, she began refining her tastes and her style. She moved first to the United States, and later to Amsterdam, explaining, “The general atmosphere of being in [the United States] was just not fitting with what I wanted to do, and also because the academic rules there were very strict in terms of what you can and cannot do. And for me, that never worked. I always had to just do what I felt, and not just what somebody said was right or not right 100 years ago or 400 years ago.”

By following what felt right, Nai explored new paths. “I always was curious to just do music that is not always labelled and not always put in, like, ‘This is jazz,’ or ‘This is classical music,’ or ‘This is pop,’” she emphasizes. “It was just music that sounded good, and that was developing, and that was curious, and that’s all I cared about at that point.”

Following these curiosities led her towards developing her own vocal technique — which eventually became the subject of her master’s thesis in the Netherlands — deemed “Naistrumenting.” She explains that Naistrumenting is to use the voice as an instrument, and forging this style was the key to figuring out “how to seamlessly blend Arabic music with jazz and other music genres.”

“Using the voice as an instrument is not my own discovery, obviously,” she clarifies. “It’s been used a lot in different music genres like scat singing in jazz, Konnakol in Indian music and many, many others. But using the voice as an instrument in

an Arabic-music setting that focuses on a multi-layered ornamentation technique — that was the thing that I was developing, which has not been done before.”

## A JOURNEY OF EMOTIONS

In recent years, Nai has won the Concertgebouw Young Talent Award, released her debut album *Nai 1*, garnered a quarter of a million followers on social media, and toured all over the world. She’s even lent her voice on a Skrillex track, “XENA,” where her Naistrumentation of a traditional Palestinian wedding song combines with Skrillex beats to make something electric and immersive.

Now, in her current tour, she brings together four other musicians: Khalil Khoury, Tony Roe, Ruven Ruppik, and Mark Haanstra. One enthralling aspect of their performance is Khalil, who plays the qanun — a harp-like instrument played in the lap, similar to a zither. “The beautiful and most complex thing about this instrument is that every single accidental has to be physically manipulated with the fingers,” Nai notes. “Khalil has this ability to adjust so deeply, not just in volume, but filling the music, filling the sentence, filling the notes.”

All together, Nai’s performances are distinct and textured; her style has hooked her fans, who describe her music as “flawless,” “angelic,” and “magic.” Nai notes that many of her listeners have found her through social media, where she posts videos — simple, unvarnished — of her singing.

“Social media has always been a very weird thing for me to get used to,” she admits. “It all started with

Facebook — at the time where Facebook was the main thing — before I could be a lot on stage or have a lot of professional videos taken of me on stage, a lot of it was undocumented. And so I just would sing at home and post a video, and a lot of people found out about what I do through that. There’s a lot of beauty in that; you can share things and reach people. Then there are a lot of barriers as well because it feels like sometimes that’s the only way to reach people.”

“These trending, very polished videos — it’s just very different than what I like music to be and the personal experience behind it,” she emphasizes.

In contrast, Nai hopes to create a rich, deeper experience for her audiences in her concerts. “It’s really more of a journey of emotions that the audience goes through,” she notes. “It can have joy, and then it can have grief, and then you can cry, and then you can laugh. And then it’s everything in between.”

She identifies that the unpolished side of live performance *is* what makes it beautiful. “It’s being in that very vulnerable state, where anything can go wrong and everything can go wrong. You’re affected by everything as well — if somebody coughs, if you all of a sudden have to sneeze — the voice is such a fragile instrument,” she says. “I just need to be present in that moment. And I think that’s the most beautiful point for me: to just let go.” ■

Nai Barghouti and her band will perform in Harpa’s Eldborg on April 17 at 20:00. Tickets can be found at [harpa.is](http://harpa.is) and Nai’s music can be found on most streaming services.



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Music Feature

# Beauty Through Abra

Gyða Valtýsdóttir's *Mother Pearl* is a testimony to life

WORDS Jóhannes Bjarkason  
IMAGE Einar Egils

When first asked to describe her latest record, Gyða Valtýsdóttir immediately draws a blank. Then she laughs, her face emotive. "I meant to prepare myself because I had an interview a few days ago. My head is just so focused on other projects right now. I suddenly didn't remember anything," she admits from a rich leather couch in Hótel Holt's foyer – a stone's throw away from her current workspace. In addition to her newest album, Gyða's is a fixture within múm, and work for a

new, high-profile film score was just added to her docket.

In a previous interview, Gyða stated that *Mother Pearl* is more personal than her previous releases – a bit closer to home. When confronted with her comments, Gyða pulls back a bit. "I don't want to explain things too much. I find it a bit obvious," she concedes.

Although Gyða has released two albums since the influential, Nordic Music-nominated *Ox* (the motion picture soundtrack *Missir* and the collaborative album *Auga*, both in 2025), *Mother Pearl* is her first solo work since then. Gyða compares her solo albums based on the respective levels of freedom she experienced during their making.

"[*Ox*] was personal in the way that I allowed myself to write a rap song or something. But this one is maybe..." she hesitates. "I don't know. Maybe slightly more personal."

*Ox*, the creative process of *Mother Pearl* managed to leave the confines of Reykjavik. Songs were written in various locations, most notably New York, Belgium, and Greece – one of Gyða's highlights during the process. "[*Checking In*] was written in a wonderful studio named the Old Carpet Factory in Hydra, which Úlfur [Hansson] and I visited," she reminisces about her time at a residency in the Mediterranean.

For *Mother Pearl*, Gyða worked closely with fellow composer and husband Úlfur, who produced the album. Additionally, Gyða was joined by familiar names from her repertoire: Bert Cools and Indré Jurgelevičiūtė of the folk-forward duo Merope; flautist Alex Sopp, drummer Julian Sartorius, and harpist Katie Buckley whose talents shine on "Riverbed". With a long history of collaboration with Gyða, there is a special layer of kinship resonating within the ensemble.

**I approach life similar to improvisation. If you say yes to mistakes, it can be the best thing to happen to you.**

On *Mother Pearl*, Gyða claims to experience a similar sense of freedom as she did with *Ox*. "But I have higher standards now," she quips. "I had a lot of time and space to make *Ox* during Covid. I didn't get the same level of space for this album. It was made in the whirlpool of daily life in Reykjavik," she describes. Imagine Gyða getting a lyric idea while queuing for groceries during a rainy Reykjavik afternoon.

BEAUTY THROUGH ABRASION

Continuing the comparison, unlike

Calling back to the personal level of the album is its elusive title. Conceived as a result of Gyða and Kjartan Sveinsson writing the titular track, "when we showed up early to a rehearsal," Gyða's allusion to the geological properties of mollusks contains multiple interpretations.

"It's a reference to a lot of things. It can be a seed, or a potency of some sorts," she expresses, referring to a shell's hard lining as the impetus for growth.

"If I tie that to the overall theme, pearls are jewels which are formed due to irritation. So it's also referring

**W**hen first asked to describe her latest record, Gyða Valtýsdóttir immediately draws a blank. Then she laughs, her face emotive. "I meant to prepare myself because I had an interview a few days ago. My head is just so focused on other projects right now. I suddenly didn't remember anything," she admits from a rich leather couch in Hótel Holt's foyer – a stone's throw away from her current workspace. In addition to her newest album, Gyða's is a fixture within múm, and work for a



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to my belief that mistakes don't exist," Gyða continues. "I approach life similar to improvisation. If you say yes to mistakes it can be the best thing to happen to you."

## AT HOME IN THE MAGIC DIMENSION

Rooted in the album's foundation is the philosophical concept of existence – the state of something having an objective reality. "It's something I've been very interested in. These dimensions of reality, and where you're located in them," Gyða ruminates. "I remember as a child searching for this magical dimension and feeling like I was inside it. It's maybe something you find in all art. When you get zoned into whatever you're doing. That's like being inside a magical dimension. I think I belong there. It's a good place to be in."

Gyða is describing what is vernacularly known as reaching a "flow state", where mental energy becomes fixated on a single task.

"When you feel creativity flow through you. When you become one with your occupation," Gyða expands. "But I think today's world is making it more difficult for us to reach that state – to find these moments," she opines. "How do you maintain a connection to something higher or creativity in general, or this magical dimension?"

These are questions that linger on *Mother Pearl*. In Gyða's opinion, the contemporary digital landscape is a barrier to human connection. Asked what's affecting people's ability to reach this level of existence, Gyða points at phones.

"You open your phone these days and you see what's going on in Gaza and Iran," she exhales. "It's supposed to affect us. But we're seeing so much of it that it kind of stops doing that. So I think empa-

thy is a thread on this album. I think that's important. But I'm also kind of examining my relationship with pain, and resolving it." Gyða pauses. "Humanity is so important. Connecting with people. Popping to the bakery and meeting people in the eyes," she concludes.

## LIGHT AND DARK

As *Mother Pearl* opens with its titular track – written in collaboration with Sigur Rós's Kjartan Sveinsson – you immediately sense that Gyða is wanting to move closer to the listener. This is a feeling that persists throughout as the album's close-mic method creates an ethereal intimacy with the chorus of sounds.

Fine-woven melodies intertwine within each other while a barebones piano builds the foundation. Intermittently throughout the record, Gyða's familiar cello strokes make appearances at the exactly correct times, adding an abrasive texture to the body of work.

Brilliantly crafted from start to finish, *Mother Pearl* sees Gyða take on chamber pop, imbuing it with a sense of existential dread. Still, there is light, hope and love peering out from underneath the haunting compositions.

When working on music, Gyða usually doesn't set herself a strict, pre-determined ideation, rather letting herself identify different strands of her creation retroactively.

"When I start noticing a thread. It's like, 'Right, I'm sort of speaking into this or that.' But also, what I'm personally navigating constantly is being connected to the wider world and being open and empathetic," she explains. "When I was younger, it made me depressed. I managed to stave off the depression, so today I'm constantly navigating how much I can allow to seep in, without it pulling me down."

## BAD BAD NOT GOOD BUNNY

Ironically, *Mother Pearl* is probably the last thing on Gyða's mind these days. She's preparing for her next project, scoring the upcoming historical drama *Porto Rico*. Directed by filmmaker and rapper René Pérez "Residente" Joglar, the film stars Benito Antonio Martínez Ocasio – better known as Bad Bunny – in his first feature role, including Javier Bardem, Edward Norton and Viggo Mortensen.

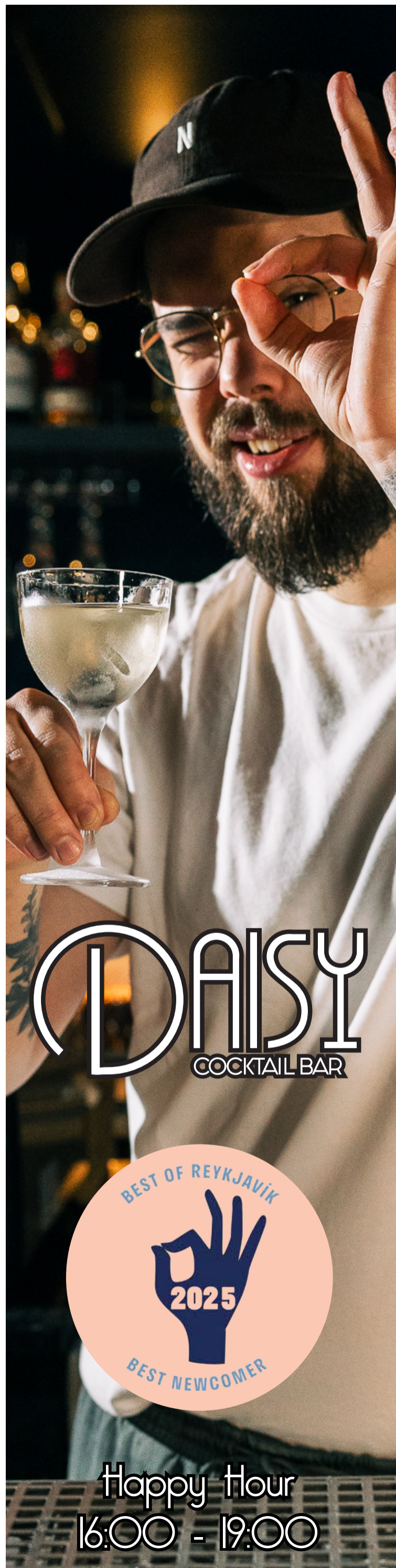
As the story goes, Residente contacted Gyða via an Instagram DM. The reason for choosing Gyða, Residente told her, came after an AI program recommended her for the role of composer.

"It's so fun to work with Residente," Gyða says of the process. "He's also a musician, and he's very involved and has a lot of trust in me. He's sent me a lot of inspiration but his message is always, 'Just do what you want.' So this is a total adventure," she smiles.

Further drawing Gyða's attention from her solo material is her ongoing work with múm, touring Asia in April, with more show dates to be announced. Releasing *Mother Pearl* via the creative nucleus Marvaða, Gyða managed to free up crucial time.

"I released the last two albums on my own, and this time I wanted a team and support," she says. "I was scheduling everything myself, every tour and the like. I slowly started to realise that this kind of admin work was taking over all the time I had to create music or be an artist. And I wasn't even good at it," she laughs. ■

*Mother Pearl* is out on available streaming platforms now. Gyða fans will have to wait until fall 2026 for news about the upcoming release show.





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Brunch Brawl

# Brunch Beyond 101 Re

Makona and Kaffi Vest are worth the detour

WORDS Anna Margrét Björnsson  
IMAGES Supplied & Art Bicnick

mimosas are a go-go, and indulgence comes stacked, poured and refilled. But lately, as locals increasingly feel the city centre slipping into tourist territory, the gravitational pull seems to be shifting outward. In Austurbær (East Town) and Vestur-

Set in the heart of Reykjavík's financial district, the space, formerly home to a rather uncharming pizzeria, has been transformed into something unexpectedly airy and calm. High ceilings, large windows and a warm, sophisticated palette

But lately, as locals increasingly feel the city centre slipping into tourist territory, the gravitational pull seems to be shifting outward.

The humble brunch is perhaps one of the greatest inventions of the modern age, whether it leans into pancakes, bacon and eggs, or something altogether lighter. The city of Reykjavík is particularly well stocked with places to indulge in the breakfast-lunch hybrid. Our brunch scene has long orbited around 101, where queues snake out the door,

bær (West Town), two very different cafés are quietly making a case for brunch that feels less like a performance and more like a habit.

MAKONA IN AUSTURBÆR

When Makona opened in Borgartún only a couple of months ago, it felt like an attempt to soften the city's most corporate stretch, less suit-and-spreadsheet, more slow coffee and something indulgent on a plate.

of wood and beige give it a softness that feels almost at odds with its surroundings. It's busy, but never cramped; tables are generously spaced, and the overall effect is one of understated ease.

On weekdays, Makona caters largely to the office crowd with buffet lunches and an evening à la carte menu, but weekends are clearly where it comes into its own. Brunch is served buffet-style across curated



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# Reykjavík: Austurbær Versus Vesturbær

stations that reward a slow, considered approach rather than hurried plate-stacking.

The usual suspects are all present: a full English breakfast, croissants and pastries, yoghurt and muesli, cheeses and charcuterie. But there's also a more substantial, almost Sunday-lunch offering: roast lamb, crisp potatoes, and a notably good vegan lentil pie that elevates the spread beyond standard buffet fare.

For the health-conscious, there's a generous selection of salads, fresh slaws and Middle Eastern-style accompaniments, alongside panini and what might well be one of the best hummus offerings in Reykjavík: smooth, balanced, and clearly made with care.

If you still have room, the dessert table leans into indulgence. Alongside familiar staples like chocolate gâteau and cheesecake, the stand-out is the pastéis de nata which is a rarity in Iceland. These small, flaky Portuguese custard tarts, caramelised just enough on top, alongside excellent coffee, are reason enough

to linger longer than intended.

**These are places you go to disappear a little, into a second coffee, into conversation, into the reassuring idea that Reykjavík still has corners that belong to the people who live in it.**

Makona has, unsurprisingly, in its short lifespan, become a popular weekend destination, so booking ahead is advisable. The crowd spans everything from couples to large family groups, and the atmosphere remains bright, relaxed, and relatively unboozy, making it an easy choice for a more laid-back daytime gathering.

It's the kind of place you drift into on a Sunday and stay longer than planned, making it the sort of neigh-

bourhood spot this part of town has quietly been missing.

## KAFFIHÚS VESTURBÆJAR, VESTURBÆR

Kaffi Vest, on the other hand, doesn't need much introduction. When it opened in 2014, it was something of a pioneer, one of the first cool cafés to make a convincing case for life outside 101 Reykjavík. Situated in Vesturbær, a neighbourhood that manages to be both deeply local and quietly chic, it sits opposite the ever-busy Vesturbær

pool and draws a crowd of regulars, artists, and the kind of culturally attuned, well-educated residents that give the area its distinct character.

Comfortably in its own rhythm, brunch here is not an event but a continuation of the morning. Always busy but never hurried, it is perhaps the closest thing to a French café in Reykjavík, embodying a quiet, old-world elegance: classic, unpretentious interiors, a chalkboard menu, an outdoor terrace, and none of the urgency that defines downtown spots.

Open throughout the day for coffee, lunch, dinner and drinks, it is particularly beloved for a post-pool weekend brunch and, increasingly, a leisurely glass of wine. Brunch here is an à la carte affair, with a menu that changes weekly but reliably features favourites such as croque monsieur, shakshuka and Turkish eggs, alongside what might well be one of the most perfect omelettes in Reykjavík with a handful of varieties to choose from. Portions are generous, often accompanied by a crisp green salad lightly dressed in

a French vinaigrette and thick slices of sourdough.

Coffee is excellent, matcha thoughtfully prepared, and the wine list favours the French, making a glass of Crémant de Bourgogne or a Pinot Noir feel not only appropriate, but almost necessary. It's a place for friends, couples and families alike; lively, cosy, and the sort of spot where you could easily spend an entire afternoon. You might even spot an Icelandic star or two but here, nobody really bats an eye.

And that, perhaps, is its charm: a place that feels quietly in-the-know, without ever needing to show it.

If downtown brunch is about being seen, these are places you go to disappear a little, into a second coffee, into conversation, into the reassuring idea that Reykjavík still has corners that belong to the people who live in it. ■

You can find Makona at Borgartún 26, 105 Reykjavík, and Kaffihús Vesturbæjar at Hagamelur 67, 107 Reykjavík.

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Bað Habits

# A View From The North

Are new lagoons muddying the waters for our traditional swimming pools?

WORDS John Pearson  
IMAGES John Pearson

experience a little less bracing.

These days the sundlaug boasts four hot tubs, three swimming pools, two wading pools and a cold tub for that heart-stopping plunge after you've been in the steam bath. Add some massive plastic tubular water

— Representative List Of The Intangible Cultural Heritage Of Humanity. It's essentially a community centre: parents teach their kids to swim, older residents use it to maintain social connections, and the general townsfolk use the hot pots as a forum to discuss the issues of the day.

**We do see them as competitors. But in another sense, they are also partners.**

If you're tempted to get into hot water in the northern town of Akureyri, you have two quite different facilities to choose from. The first is Sundlaug Akureyrar: a classic Icelandic swimming pool complex. Run by the local municipality, its roots go back to 1897 when locals first dammed a stream to bathe, later adding geothermally heated spring water to make the

slides, and you've got a wonderland of splashy geothermal fun for the whole family.

Sundlaug Akureyrar is the kind of civic facility that UNESCO had in mind last December when they added Icelandic swimming pool culture to their — take a deep breath here

Your other option is Forest Lagoon: the newbie contender. This luxurious facility literally sprang up after workmen encountered hot spring water as they were digging a road tunnel through the Vaðlaheiði mountain. As Icelandic entrepreneurs are never slow on the uptake, soon a con-

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## h: Sundlaug Showdown

glomerate of businessfolk had conceived an upmarket mountainside bathing facility among the trees, with a view across the fjord.

Forest Lagoon opened in 2022, enticing visitors with warm waters, cold beers from swim-up bars, and a cool bistro for that post-dip burger. It's part of the recent rise of high-end geothermal baths which also saw Laugarás Lagoon open last October in south Iceland, and north Iceland's Earth Lagoon undergo a substantial upgrade at the start of this year.

### FRIENDS, FOES OR A BIT OF BOTH?

So are Sundlaug Akureyrar and Forest Lagoon engaged in a water fight for the same clientele? Or are they operating in two distinct markets — budget bathing and luxury lagoon-ing? Pálína Dagný Guðnadóttir, who manages business operations for Sundlaug Akureyrar, sees the duality of the situation quite clearly.

"People come to Iceland to see the northern lights and seek out the lagoons," she says. "There are all these swimming pools which don't really do a lot of marketing, but the lagoons are marketing themselves and making a good job of it. People are just realising that there is a cheaper way to do it."

Cheaper is right; adult admission of 1,400 ISK to Sundlaug Akureyrar is less than a fifth of the cost of basic entrance to Forest Lagoon. But as Pálína points out, the sundlaug is run as a civic service to promote a healthy community, not as a revenue generator. In fact, the bulk of its running costs are met by Akureyri council.

### BULLISH BUSINESS

Tomas Popelka looks after marketing for Forest Lagoon, and views the relationship between his upmarket facility and the sundlaug across the fjord slightly differently to Pálína.

It's been a good few years for Forest Lagoon. Thanks to some 180,000 visitors through the turnstiles last year, revenue rose from 1 billion ISK in 2024 to 1.2 billion in 2025 — enough to give confidence in a substantial expansion of the business. In September last year they extended the lagoon to increase capacity, and have now embarked on a major building project to add a spa and a four-star hotel, both with private access to a further lagoon extension.

### ICE BATH CHALLENGE

For Sundlaug Akureyrar, however, ideas for future development are less bullish. The number of users is healthy — 435,000 in 2025, which is nearly 22 times the population of the town. But despite that, Pálína says that there is very little long-term planning for the sundlaug, partly due to politics regarding the use of public money.

Some sundlaug customers are pushing for facilities such as expensive Finnish-style dry saunas and ice baths — ideas perhaps more at home in the more upmarket lagoons. Even the sale of alcohol has been mooted: "I don't think that will ever happen," Pálína says. Given the health-focused ethos of sundlaug culture, it would be interesting to see UNESCO's reaction to the introduction of boozing.

Perhaps it's best if Iceland's lagoons and sundlaug facilities follow the lead set in Akureyri, respecting each other's cultural boundaries and peacefully coexisting at arm's length. ■

John Pearson is an Akureyri-based writer and photographer. You can follow his work at [johnpearson.co](http://johnpearson.co).

There are all these swimming pools which don't really do a lot of marketing, but the lagoons are marketing themselves and making such a good job of it.

"We do see them as competitors," she says of Forest Lagoon. "But in another sense, they are also partners."

That partnership might be neither overt nor deliberate, but Pálína recognises that a rising tide lifts all boats.

"Even though it's the same thing," Tomas says, referring to the act of soaking in hot water, "it's such a different product. I don't think we would see them as a competitor. I don't think the sundlaug is taking any business from us, and I don't think we are taking any business from them."

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Axe Murder

# Axlar-Björn: The Tale of Murder

Folktales did true crime long before podcasts

WORDS Grayson Del Faro  
IMAGES Lóa Hjálmtýsdóttir

myself generally disinterested. Don't get me wrong: I love crime. I personally live my life by the 21st-century meme-turned-adage "be gay, do

if not a man of the people, so I will put aside my personal opinions to introduce you to Iceland's first serial killer.

The meat-stranger also gives him directions to a buried treasure that will make him famous.

crime," but I admittedly tend to go hard on the former and keep it fairly light on the latter. You know, just your basic civil disobedience, frequent sedition, and casual encouragement to steal from corporate grocery stores. Stuff like that. Preferably no murder. I mean, come on! A normal person killing another normal person for some petty reason, or worse, for no reason at all? Boring. Tedious. Uninspired. That said, I am nothing

### THIRST FOR BLOOD

The Tale of Axlar-Björn is recorded in the collection of Jón Árnason, who is kinda like the Brothers Grimm of Iceland. Björn of Öxl (or Axlar-Björn as he is known in Icelandic, which sounds like "Axe-Björn" and perfectly fits the sensational serial-killer vibe) is not only considered Iceland's first serial killer, but also

**D**espite the current global obsession with gritty crime dramas and true crime documentaries, I find



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## of Iceland's First Serial

the only one! I'm a bit sceptical of this, and not only because the Icelandic sagas written 300 years prior to this guy are rife with murder, but we'll let them have this one. Lack of crime is part of Iceland's brand, after all, and Iceland would be nothing if not for its misinformation-laden internet persona.

The tale starts out spooky as hell. There is a woman, whose name is of course not given, who is pregnant with her third child when she begins to crave human blood. She tries to resist and keeps it secret until she can't any longer and confides in her husband. It turns out he's a pretty good dude and can't deny his wife anything within his power to give her, so he cuts open his foot and lets her drink his blood. Why the foot I have no idea, but let's just assume that was her fetish. We don't kink-shame around here! Then she has nightmares so terrible that the narrator of the story won't even get into them.

and suddenly becomes sick. The meat-stranger also gives him directions to a buried treasure that will make him famous. Björn wakes up, follows the instructions and finds an axe. (Cue dramatic dun-dun-dun.)

### MURDER MOST FOUL

This is where the story turns from supernatural horror into a classic slasher. That's a downgrade if you ask me, but hey, this isn't about me! Björn's cowerd colleague goes missing and is never found. He marries a servant girl named Steinunn, and they move onto their own farm in Snæfellsnes. They have a pretty flashy amount of horses, like the 16th-century equivalent of a six-car garage full of Porsches, and rumours begin to swirl that these mysteriously wealthy country bumpkins are not only robbers, but murderers.

It was extremely common in those days for folks to seek shelter and hospitality at random farms as they

at Murder-Björn's if you're nicely dressed / he'll chop you up and sink the rest / now go to sleep, you little pest." The brother runs out, leaving his sister to get axed. (Not cool, bro.) The murders continue for years because Björn is besties with the powerful Guðmundur, and no one will accuse him.

### FROM THE AXE TO THE CHOPPING BLOCK

One day, Björn even tries to axe Guðmundur himself. He misses, killing Guðmundur's horse instead. He escapes, and Steinunn goes to ask Guðmundur to just forget about that whole my-husband-trying-to-murder-you thing. Guðmundur is basically like, "Aight, aight, he's my bro, so it's chill. We're cool." I'm sorry, but what the actual fuck? The reports eventually reach the sheriff, who confronts Björn at church on Easter Sunday. He asks where the hell he got such fancy clothes, to which Björn is like, "No comment." However, the onlookers are able to prove the clothes were stolen from a man who'd disappeared years before, and the murderer is basically cooked.

So Björn confesses to having axed 18 people and sunk their bodies in the pond. He's sentenced to have all his bones broken and then be beheaded. He accepts this stoically, and in the midst of the brutal punishment, his wife shouts something like, "Oh no, all my husband's limbs have been smashed!" Björn replies, "All but one, which would be better cut off." Then he gets the chop. His wife is pregnant, so they let her give birth to their son before they kill her as an accomplice. The son grows up to be a thief and also ends up being unalived for his crimes. I dunno if you can call that a happy ending, but at least there's some poetic justice? ■

**A normal person killing another normal person for some petty reason, or worse, for no reason at all? Boring. Tedious. Uninspired.**

Eventually Björn is born and turns out to be a fairly normal kid, if a bit of a little shithead. (This is, unfortunately, normal for a kid.) He is sent to live at the farm of some rich dude nearby to straighten him out. He becomes friends with the other cowerd there as well as the rich dude's son, Guðmundur. One day, he decides to skip church and sleep in. (Cue ominous music). He has a dream that he's offered meat by a stranger, of which he eats 18 pieces

travelled around Iceland. Some dude reports that he stayed there once and found a body under his bed. Realising something sus was going on, he swapped places with the corpse and when Björn sneaked in to axe him in his sleep, the visitor was able to get away. A pair of siblings also stopped there and discovered a creepy old woman whispering a hilariously not-cryptic lullaby to rock a baby to sleep. It goes something like, "Don't sleep



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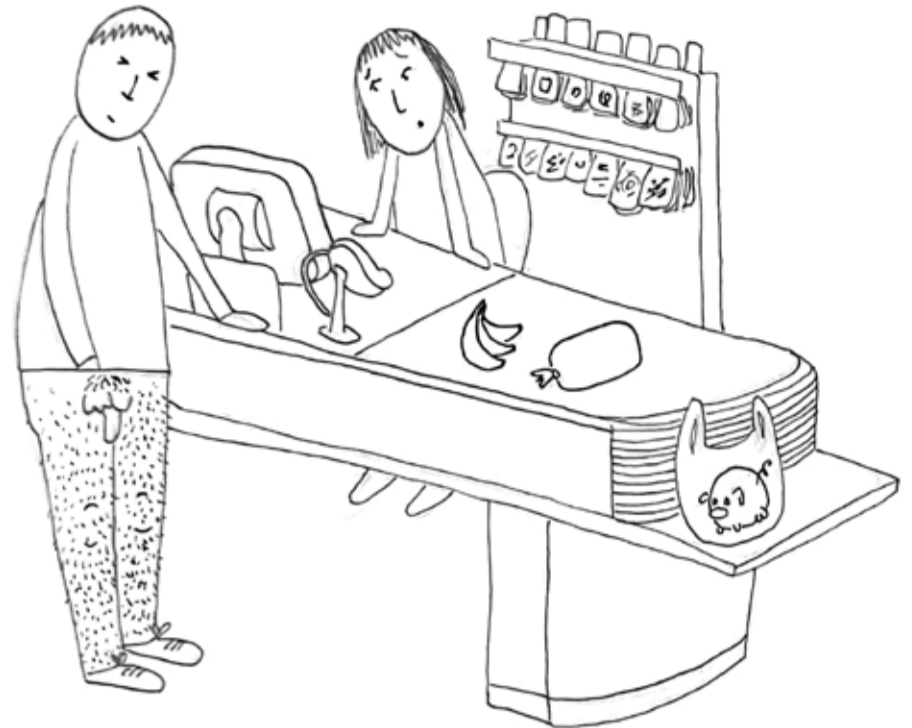
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Free Money

# Free Business Idea: Necropants

Make infinite money with folkloric magic

WORDS Freyr Thorvaldsson  
IMAGE Harriet Cleal

Friday afternoon at The Reykjavik Grapevine offices. Waiters circulate with trays of Kir Royals and vol-au-vents. “We’ve done a lot for the masses lately, haven’t we?” someone says to general agreement. “We published Best of Reykjavik – a useful guide for the ignorant – and not a single bribe was accepted. That’s a record.” More agreement. “And our music awards,” said little Timmy, our mailbox, voice quaking from fatigue, “We really helped out the scene.” “Hush, back to work,” we said. There was still a great deal of fan mail for him to sort through.

But the adorable little urchin was right. We’d done a lot. But could we do more? “How about another Free Business Idea?” someone suggested. “The people, they remain unshod.” The fateful decision was made. Calls were connected, sleeper cells activated, a briefcase stuffed with unmarked cash crossed three borders on a single moonless night. Two days later the following article was taped to a brick and thrown from a moving car, breaking a window at the Grapevine offices, maiming two.

**M**aking money is, generally speaking, a lot of work. Men and women engaged in the Noble Art spend countless hours adjusting spreadsheets, yelling into phone receivers, saying things like, “Money never sleeps,” and “Don’t touch my bread.” It is tireless work. They dress differently from the mass, they see the world differently: where you see nature they see resources, where you see human frailty they see slick opportunity. The key thing to know

is that they work hard for their dosh, all right? When they’re not working they’re *networking*. If they’re not working or networking they’re reading the business papers in leather armchairs. They are the deserving rich.

Meanwhile lesser people engage in something called hobbies. Others raise families. Some senseless and misguided people even volunteer. I wrote this article for them. What’s needed is some method of making money from nothing. An infinite money glitch, a passive income stream, the satisfying clink of another coin tossed into the vault pile.

Throughout time many schemes for easy riches have been tried and found wanting: alchemy, NFTs, forex day trading, highly leveraged and loosely regulated banking. But folk tales gathered in the mid-1800s by one Jón Árnason indicate that a scheme for infinite money does in fact actually really truly in fact exist. A scheme long forgotten, but bound to make a return. How it was first discovered is anyone’s guess as the process is a little intricate.

trousers that once encompassed your beloved friend (RIP). Then Jón Árnason goes on to say: “So that the breaches may be of some use, one needs to steal a coin from an impoverished widow.” Place the coin in the necropantic scrotum. Here’s where all this effort (which I know you don’t like) starts to make an enormous amount of practical sense: Next time you’re at the checkout counter, you reach into your dead friend’s scrotum. You will find a bottomless supply of coins. Take what you need, just make sure not to use the initial ill-gotten coin!

Sadly this spell hasn’t received much feminist critique, closed as it is to women donors, and I for one am not thrilled about stealing from impoverished widows. I think it’s plain wrong. But more importantly, another anachronism hangs over the whole scheme like a dark cloud: The money takes the form of coins. This might have cut the mustard back in the day but now, with cashless businesses running rampant, it’s anyone’s guess what payment system should sprout from the Modern Man’s necropants. Today you

## Next time you’re at the checkout counter, you reach into your dead friend’s scrotum.

First you wait until your friend is in an exceptionally good mood. Ideally a little drunk. Put your hand on his shoulder (it has to be *his* rather than *her* shoulder for reasons that will soon become apparent) then you ask if he’s willing to do a deal. The deal would go something like this: Good Friend, when you die, I’m allowed to flay the skin off your body, okay? But if I die first, get this, you get my skin!

This will strike most right thinking people as a fair deal. What use will I have of skin in the great beyond? So he says yes, and he soon dies from an unfortunate accident. When he is buried, go by night and dig him up. Once you have skinned his lower half as one whole piece (*don’t puncture it*), step into the soggy

might reach into the sack and pull out a limitless bank card or even a phone, complete with a wallet app.

Prissy detractors say it’s wrong to resurrect dark and ancient magic. Others may even doubt its veracity. But I say there’s no harm in trying. Worst case you’ll learn how to skin an animal, a useful skill for you people in the lower orders, who I am given to understand sometimes eat roadkill. The best case is that you’ll be rich, at which point I ask you to send a bit of your sack-coin to your old friends at the Grapevine – who put you on to the scheme to begin with. ■

Freyr Thorvaldsson also writes *Atlantic Islander* – the premier newsletter for business psychos. Find it at [freyr.substack.com](http://freyr.substack.com)



## Birding Following Birds, Finding People

Discovering Iceland through birding

WORDS Björn Penk  
IMAGE Björn Penk

The first time I moved to Iceland, I arrived at night. Hitchhiking from the airport, I couldn't see the land itself, only its outlines. Street lights, windows, and construction cranes described the topography in glowing fragments, but the colours of vegetation and the feel of the place were missing. Iceland existed as memory, images I had seen before travelling. My first real introduction came at 05:20 the next morning.

Through the narrow gap of my slightly open bedroom window, I heard it: the unmistakable call of a Red-throated Diver. First came a mix of recognition and confusion. The call was familiar from home, but I was in an unfamiliar bed, in an unfamiliar cohabitation, in an unfamiliar country. Then the thought settled: a Red-throated Diver is a waterbird. There had to be water nearby.

Later that morning, on my way downtown to meet other exchange students, I crossed a bridge. My map told me I was looking at Gröfuvogur, just 200 metres from my window, as the crow (or diver) flies. A small dark shape rested on the water. Possibly my alarm clock. At that moment, Iceland became one bird less abstract.

### INTERSPECIES GUIDES

The following week, my world was small: the campuses of Listaháskóli

Íslands (LHÍ) and Háskóli Íslands (HÍ), and the route between them. But birding expands even limited geography. On my first walk through Reykjavík, it wasn't the buildings that oriented me; it was the soundscape of Tjörnin. Between a church, a parliament, and a theatre, I found Whooper Swans, Gadwalls, and Greater Scaup closer than I had ever experienced before.

Passing Þorfinnstjörn, Arctic Terns dive-bombed me – clear evidence of a nearby nest. Outside HÍ, European Golden-Plovers ran across the lawn, probing for worms. By a small shed in the harbour, a White Wagtail entertained bystanders, catching insects mid-flight. Outside the swimming pools, Redwings hopped around, slightly larger and darker than the ones I knew from home. Within days, the city began to organise itself not by streets, but by species.

### WELCOME TO ICELAND

Birders tend to be quietly strategic when travelling abroad. Many of us keep a “dream list,” a mental inventory of species we hope to see. These lists come from field guides, but just as much from social media, where birders share sightings and fleeting encounters. It's a global, loosely connected community where the barrier to interaction is low. You can ask a stranger about a bird and end up with a place to stay.

Before moving, I had already made a few contacts in Iceland. So when a flock of American Cliff Swallows, firmly on my dream list, showed up in Reykjanesbær two weeks into my stay, things moved quickly. My internet friend Edward connected me with Simmi, who offered me a ride. As we drove across Reykjanes, Simmi pointed out landmarks and told stories, filling in the landscape I had only just begun to see. At the site, I met others I had only encountered online, including Yann. “Welcome to Iceland,” he said, as we watched the flock of incredibly rare birds. It felt accurate.

### LEARNING THE PATTERNS

Birding doesn't just teach you where you are, it teaches you how a place works. Birds indicate environment and change. Certain species appear in certain places, at certain times, under certain conditions. When I arrived, it felt like noise. Then patterns emerged. Ruddy Turnstones returned to the same stretch of beach by Gróttu. Gadwalls lingered in the vegetation at Vatnsmýrin until evening. Eastern winds could bring European Robins across the ocean, and when they arrived, Fossvogur cemetery became one of the best places to find them. Through these patterns, the unfamiliar became legible for me.

### THE BIRD WAY IN

The second time I moved to Iceland, it felt different. I was no longer arriving into abstraction, but returning to something partially known. The same landscapes were there, now layered with memory and recognition. I hitchhiked more. I asked more questions. I reported the birds I saw. Somewhere along the way, I began writing and making art, trying to understand not just where birds are, but what they make possible between people. Because birding, at its core, is a way of paying attention: to land, to weather, to movement, to details that are easy to pass by.

I'm not claiming the answers are in the birds, or perhaps I am, but learning a place and its people is also about learning what isn't spoken. Birding creates small openings for that: a shared vocabulary between strangers, a reason to switch languages mid-sentence, an excuse to knock on a door, join a walk, or follow someone's directions to a windswept corner of the city. It is a practice that could just as easily welcome other newcomers as it has welcomed me.

I arrived in Iceland in the dark. A bird showed me where the water was. I understood a little bit more. ■

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Folking Around

## A Shelter From The Storm

Reykjavik Folk Festival emphasised storytelling and tradition at Iðnó

**WORDS** Francis Laufkvist Kristinsbur  
**IMAGE** Supplied by Reykjavik Folk Festival

**O**n a weekend in the middle of March, the historic Iðnó stands within a snowy storm. Warm inside, the guests of Reykjavik Folk Festival enjoy acoustic harmonies woven into rich storytelling. It's the second year the festival's been held since a hiatus from 2018 and with a wide range of musicians playing sets around 50 minutes, it's surely not missing one of its core values "spilageði," or the joy of playing.

Friday started strong with students from the Reykjavik College of Music, MÍT, filling up the second floor. I arrived late and had to peer through the door, crammed with six other people, all eager to witness the skilfully constructed indie pop/folk tunes the young musicians had to offer. Theódóra, the first of two acts, strummed the guitar while singing in a velvety voice. The second act, Ásgeir Helgi, played songs that had a Beatlesque quality and light-heartedness to them that reminded me a lot of modern bands making 60s-style music, such as the Lemon Twigs.

I find a comfortable seat on the first floor while Ásgeir Ásgeirsson plays the oud. In front of the stage are tables decorated with white flowers that match the blizzard outside. As the clock strikes eight, Harpa Þorvaldsdóttir, one of the festival's organisers, steps onto the stage and gives a speech going over the history of the festival. She reads from her iPad but excuses this by telling us how forgetful she is, and the audience chuckles.

### THERE ARE GHOSTS AMONG US

Svavar Knútur's set can best be described as half-music, half-stand-up, with him introducing each song at length and touching on subjects such as the overwhelming smell in Hagkaup's perfume section and the possibility of an accountant-ghost residing in Iðnó. Since finishing his more than a decade-long project on grief, he is now shifting his focus to using old Icelandic folklore as inspiration. He blended the new story-rich songs with older classics from his catalogue, leaving the audience happy and relaxed.

The festival continued with Umbra next on stage and following them, an ode to Icelandic folk music, played by a collection of various Icelandic folk musicians.

### REACHING THE CORE

First on stage Saturday were the solo artists Soffía Björg and Fríða Dís who frequently play together. Being just the two of them playing guitar and bass their songs were stripped down from the way they usually play, bringing us "closer to their core" as Fríða tells the audi-

ence. The two of them were not only in tune with the music but also in tune with each other. Between filling the room with their dynamic singing, they were finishing each other's sentences and cracking jokes. Soffía played her Icelandic translation of "Over the Rainbow", the eighth version known to exist, and when the song ended someone in the audience shouted: "Best version!"

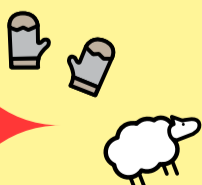
Next on the programme, blue light bathed the stage as Árstiðir's music washed over the audience like a magnificent sea. They switched between playing as a full band and singing vibrant acapella in parallel fifths, upholding an old folk tradition. They received an encore, but told the audience they are resting their famous version of the song "Heyr himna smiður," and instead sang another song from the same album, *Vetrarsól*. Right after their performance, a recording of the longed-for song played on the speakers.

Closing the festival, popular singer-songwriter Una Torfadóttir walked on stage with an acoustic guitar. Beside her, her boyfriend Hafsteinn played an electric guitar that added an ethereal vibe to the songs. Una partook in what seemed to be a ritual in the performances of the festival by introducing the stories behind each song she played. After being clapped back onto the stage, she played a short, unreleased song with a sweet chord progression. A song about thankfulness with funny rhymes, and it felt like she was thanking the audience.

As the final night ended, and as people put on their coats, ready to take on the wind, gratitude stayed in the air. ■

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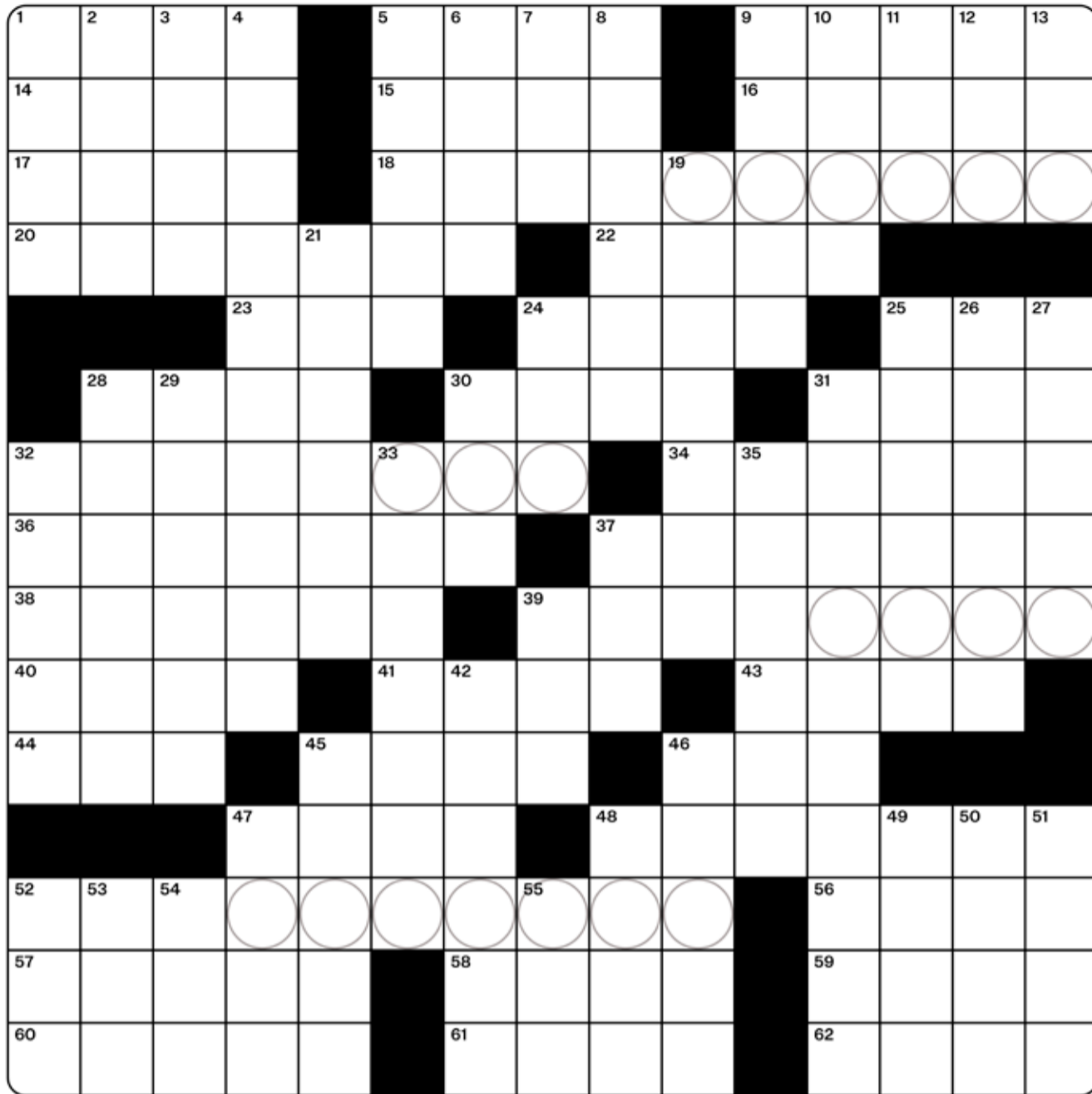
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09/04/2026

Last issue's solution:



Congratulations to last issue's winner: Hekla & Villi!

# Crossword Dip Into Our Crossword

Pack your bag and let's go!

**CROSS WORDS** Ish Sveinsson Houle  
Agnar Freyr Stefánsson

Hello beloved crossworders! We heard that everyone from DV to The New York Times was reporting on how expensive a hot dog + a soda is these days...but if you are the winner of our raffle, you get that deal for free. As always, all you have to do is email a photo of your (correctly) completed crossword grid to [ish@grapevine.is](mailto:ish@grapevine.is) to enter the raffle. You have until May 6, good luck!

**ACROSS**

- 1 Beloved band of Swedes
- 5 Beginning of a play
- 9 Japanese or Thai
- 14 Billiards game
- 15 Drug cop
- 16 "Duck, duck, \_\_\_!"
- 17 Countess's husband
- 18 *Logging leftovers*
- 20 Nana, by another name
- 22 Level
- 23 Five rings sports org.
- 24 Debussy's "Clair de \_\_\_"
- 25 Chance, poetically
- 28 Many culture publications, for short
- 30 Newborn
- 31 Fish respiratory organ
- 32 *Final drink of the evening*
- 34 Angry rant
- 36 Winning game after game
- 37 "Fly Me to the Moon" singer Frank
- 38 17:00, in the United States
- 39 *Kraftgalli or onesie*

- 40 The "A" in U.S.A.: Abbr.
- 41 Organised strategy
- 43 Org. or grp.
- 44 Your, in Paris
- 45 Sign of a Leo
- 46 1986 Russian space station
- 47 "To make a \_\_\_ story short..."
- 48 Smallest of the great apes
- 52 *Shades for the slopes*
- 56 "Choose! It's either her \_\_\_"
- 57 Hairstyling tools with teeth
- 58 Windows to the soul
- 59 Shade
- 60 Furious
- 61 Go against orders
- 62 *{The theme to this puzzle}*

**DOWN**

- 1 Take down \_\_\_ (humble)
- 2 Wild pig
- 3 When repeated, part of French Polynesia
- 4 Cram session for a procrastinator
- 5 Bit of tomfoolery
- 6 Feel for
- 7 Uno + due = \_\_\_
- 8 Cold plunge spot
- 9 Are on the same page
- 10 One of the basic tastes
- 11 Charged particle
- 12 Request
- 13 Nintendo's Super \_\_\_
- 19 "A Christmas Carol" boy
- 21 Warning on an aeroplane wing
- 24 Unit in running or swimming
- 25 Temporary break
- 26 Astronaut Buzz
- 27 Fold in fabric
- 28 Dr. Evil's sidekick in "Austin Powers"
- 29 Plants used to make tequila
- 30 Place to get tequila
- 31 ("Do It Together"), as in music scene
- 32 Skimmed milk feature
- 33 Outdoor activity
- 35 Hurting
- 37 What planets in our solar system orbit
- 39 Between Dec. and Feb.
- 42 Signed (in)
- 45 Slack
- 46 Like many Icelandic landscapes
- 47 First four pride letters
- 48 Feud, in internet slang
- 49 Forehead
- 50 Prefix with potent or present
- 51 Look to be
- 52 \_\_\_-fi
- 53 Where Seoul and Pyongyang are: Abbr.
- 54 "\_\_\_ Believer" Smash Mouth song
- 55 Soapmaker's need ■



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## Last Thoughts **The Bæjarins Beztu Pylsur Index**

WORDS Adam Roy Gordon  
IMAGE The Reykjavík Grapevine Archives

Schools closed in Reykjavik today, March 26, 2026. That happens rarely enough that it still means something when it does. Veðurstofa Íslands had issued an orange warning, which officially means dangerous conditions and non-essential travel strongly discouraged.

I went downtown anyway.

This is partly stubbornness, partly a suspicion that the warning was doing some overclaiming. Orange is supposed to signal genuine danger. Today it delivered strong wind, snow, and cold. Unpleasant, sure, but this is March in Iceland, where unpleasant is the baseline. The problem with calibrating warnings too high is the same one facing anyone who cries wolf: eventually people stop listening, and, the one time it really matters, half the city may already be on Tryggvagata getting a hot dog.

Which is where I was. The Grapevine office overlooks the Bæjarins Beztu hot dog stand. And, naturally, it was open.

This is when it struck me that Iceland already has its own version of the Waffle House Index. Waffle House is a cheap, fluorescent-lit diner chain from the American South that has turned refusing to close into something close to institutional identity. It runs 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, and closes for essentially nothing. Craig Fugate, who ran America's federal disaster agency FEMA, noticed this after Hurricane Charley in 2004 and turned it into an informal disaster metric. Open with a full menu: green, things are manageable. Open with limited service: yellow, the generator's running and supplies are low. Closed: red. "If you get there and the Waffle House is closed?" Fugate said. "That's really bad. That's where you go to work."

Bæjarins Beztu is Iceland's Waffle House, except instead of 80 years of surviving hurricanes, it has 88 years of surviving everything Iceland can throw at it. Founded in 1937 by a sailor named Jón Sveinsson, who switched professions after illness forced him off the sea, the stand has outlasted the Second World War, the Cold War, the 2008 crash, and enough Icelandic storms to fill a meteorological archive. It has been at the corner of Tryggvagata since the 1960s. The hot dogs are lamb, pork and beef; order eina með öllu if you want the remoulade, sweet mustard, ketchup, and both kinds of onion. The Guardian named it the best hot dog stand in Europe in 2006. On a busy day it moves a thousand pylsur.

So here is my proposal for a Pylsur Index. If the stand is open, whatever warning is on the board is survivable: green. If the stand is open but business is unusually thin, people have thought twice about leaving the house: yellow. And if Bæjarins Beztu is closed, stop arguing with the meteorologists and stay home: red.

Today was yellow. ■

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