SIGUR RÓS ARE SEEING OUT 2017 IN STYLE. THEIR NORÐUR OG NÍÐUR FESTIVAL PROMISES TO FILL THE HAZY VOID BETWEEN CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR WITH MUSIC, ART, LIGHT AND COLOUR. INSIDE: WE TALK TO THE BAND ABOUT CREATING THE FESTIVAL; THE ARTISTS NOT TO MISS; THE FULL SCHEDULE; AND LOTS MORE.
Nothing says Sigur rós like a winter music festival that also includes lectures, dance performances and movie screenings. But hey, if there is someone who can pull off squeezing a lecture on extraterrestrial life between a twirl of baton and a harpist’s performance, that’s indeed Sigur rós.

Like an oscillating pendulum

Among the impressive list of artists who hopped on board with the Norður og Niður festival is the prodigious ensemble amiina, who worked with Sigur rós in the late ’90s and for the following decade.

Framing Fantómas

Amína was originally asked to score the second of five movies in the Fantómas series, on the 100th anniversary of the films, when French film company Béaumont restored the old 1913 film to a 4k resolution. The project, which was sponsored by various European cultural institutions, was curated by Yann Tiersen, best known for his ‘Amélie’ soundtrack.

Scoring a movie is an art in itself. One needs to be able to capture the height of every single moment and put it into a melodic perspective. And if the creative process involved in making an album weren’t already difficult enough, the fact that there are points to connect and structures that need to be adhered to makes scoring a movie a different endeavour altogether.

From being claustrophobic, however, the architecture of the movie ended up being almost liberating.

“In a way it’s nice to have a frame to work into—it releases the pressure of inventing the frame yourself,” Sólrún explains. “It’s also quite clearly defined in sections, so it was tempting to define the sections and reality work on the details.”

The process was quick but intense, and after a three-week-long tour de force, amiina was done. It’s hard to do the results justice in words. Between the thrill and excitement of the movie and the jaw-dropping talents of the band, amiina’s performances are well worth the experiences that need to be felt first hand.

A Different Tempo

Amína on scoring silent movies and feeling free

Their impossible-to-categorise, man-on-wood orchestral performance at Arénales oscillated between theatre, cinema and music like an unstoppable pendulum. The group was providing the soundtrack to a screening of the 100-year-old silent film Fantómas. The movie was in turn funny and ridiculously dramatic, but it was through amína’s live soundtrack that it acquired a soul. Every low and high point of the movie—the accidents, the gunshots, the smooches and the over-acted fights—was highlighted and emphasised in an exciting performance by the ensemble that was literally one of a kind.

It was one of those rainy days in London when you just walk with your bandmates from The Vaccines in their recording studio. After a short exchange of small talk and jokes, everyone sat down and started their intense songwriting game. The goal of the game is to write as many songs as possible in a fixed short period of time.

As Árni started to churn out songs, he quickly realized that he did not have a lot of time to make decisions. B minor or G major? He had to think fast, or rather, not think at all. “Writing from your heart is what you kind of end up writing songs that you think you want to write,” Árni explains. “But if you take that off for a second and just force yourself to not think about what you’re doing, in the end it’s way more interesting and bizarre.”

Depresso Tropicana

It was a snowy day in Baltimore, which means that Árni had nothing else to do but write. So he picked up his guitar and played a few chords. “I was just thinking about the title, ‘Epicycle,’ and that’s how it all started,” Árni says. “It’s just a title that stuck with me.”

After the Norður og Niður Festival in Reykjavik, Árni will be back in his studio in London, where he may continue to work on the details. “It’s tempting when you’re scoring a movie like this, which is quite abstract and doesn’t really have a clear story to just improvise, go with the flow and interact with it live,” says band member Sólrun Svarfilskátt. “But we decided we wanted to sort of work together so the film can make it easier for us and for the audience to stay focused, because the tempo of the film is quite different from the tempo we’re used to today. Some scenes are excruciatingly long and sort of about nothing, while others that have a lot going on and are over in a moment.”

South And Up?

With 48 fascinating artists already announced for the inaugural Norður og Niður music festival, and more to come, we thought we’d offer you a few choice reads from the lineup. Here are a handful of artists you should firmly ring on the schedule.

With his most well-known faces of the Icelandic music scene. Her first solo album, ‘Brazil,’ felt like a creative breakthrough, and it was full of surprises live, when Jófríður brings together an ever-evolving ensemble of talented musicians to create fresh new takes on her songs.

Sóley, Sin Fang & Órrvör Smárason

This power trio started off in 2011 with a panel to make a song together each month. The results have been fascinating to hear, with a different artist taking the lead at various times. From lovelorn ballads to upbeat Tropicana. It’s breezy and whimsical, but with a slight twist of sadness, like the affect by a Mojito on a Californian beach with a broken heart. ‘Bore You With My Melody’ is such a song.

Back to the roots

The Akureyri-born musician went to school in Reykjavik, and moved to London ten years ago. “I love London,” Árni says. “It’s the city where you can find anything you want, as long as you know what you’re looking for.”

This Christmas he will bring his musical tunes back to the Norður og Njúfur Festival in Reykjavik. He will play on December 27th, and you will get to hear the magic of his “shirty synthesizers.”

Looking ahead

“I didn’t set out to make an album,” Árni muses. “I didn’t even set out to do anything else, other than to just play a couple of gigs for fun.”

But he has been in various ways. Since then he has been writing more and playing more shows. After the Norður og Niður Festival, he will be back in his studio in London, where he may continue to create his brand of Depresso Tropicana. “You never know,” he finishes. “I might just get an album out.”
North And Down
Sigur rós brighten up the winter with their Norður og Niður festival

Words: John Rogers Photos: Timothée Lambreque

It was over ten years ago, in 2006, when Sigur rós last had a grand homecoming. The band had released a trilogy of albums—Ágætis byrjun, ‘(i)’ and ‘Takk’—that took the world by storm. They came back to Iceland for a victory lap of their homeland, staging shows for locals in remote corners of the country, from the Ásbyrgi canyon to Ólafsvík, Ísafjörður, Djúpavík, Seyðisfjörður, and more. Flash forward to 2017, and Sigur rós are coming home once more—but this time, they're bringing some friends. Their brand new festival, Norður og Niður ("North and Down" in English)—a euphemism, roughly, for "Everything's going to hell"—started as a simple idea. The band would stage a series of headline shows at Harpa in that hazy, lazy, period between Christmas and the New Year. The idea of support acts came up, and the project snowballed as the wish list grew. Soon enough, Sigur rós realised they'd almost accidentally created a music festival.

Great expectations

"Originally it was just the idea that we'd play a show in Iceland at the end of this tour," says Georg Hólmi, the band's bassist and sometime spokesperson. "We didn't want to play in Laugardalshöll again, because we always play there—and we have this beautiful room in Harpa. It's smallish, but it's still a beautiful room. We knew that we would play multiple nights. And it wound itself up and became more than just three or four Sigur rós shows. We invited more and more people to come along. And it became a festival.

"Elborg is a beautiful room," says Jónsi, the band's frontman. "I like the colour. When you walk into Harpa it's like walking into an airport. We want to change the feeling when you walk in, so it feels nice, instead of cold. It's a nice time of year to do something like this—between Christmas and New Year is a little depressing and dark, so it'll be nice to do something fun. People will have somewhere to go and have drinks and see good music." Adds Georg: "We're working on making it nice inside. It'll be pretty spectacular, I hope."

Old losers

The lineup includes established artists like Jarvis Cocker and Kevin Shields, post-rock acts such as Mogwai and Stars Of The Lid, and up-and-coming musicians like harpist Mary Lattimore and emerging electronics star Kaitlyn Aurelia Smith. "It was a lot of fun at the beginning," says Georg. "We thought, 'Who do we want?' and started writing down names. Then another name pops up, and another."

"There are a lot of old losers like us," smiles Jónsi. "Kevin Shields and Jarvis Cocker have been around the block. We met Kevin when we were playing in Spain, a long time ago. It'll be fun to do something together. We grew up with My Bloody Valentine, I have great memories of being sixteen years old in a rehearsal space, blasting 'Loveless' through a guitar amp and lying on the floor really drunk. It's amazing."

"There are some newer things," Jónsi continues. "We've been spending more and more time in L.A., and Mary Lattimore and Kaitlyn Aurelia Smith and Julianna Barwick—they live close to me, so we kind of hang out. They're really nice people."

It's a rich musical menu, and the band are gratified at how many artists have agreed to play, given the timing of the festival during the holiday season. "We're really happy and amazed how many people said yes," says Georg. "There are even more acts that we haven't even announced yet. It's amazing. How many great bands agreed to this. It's not the easiest time of the year to get people to come, during the holiday season."

Bland i poka

The lineup forms an interesting diagram of Sigur rós's diverse and widespread musical mores and influences. As well as friends and family (both proverbial family, and in some cases, literal family), many of the artists playing are Sigur rós collaborators, old and new. "Dan Deacon did an arrangement for us when we played at the Disney Hall in L.A.,” says Jónsi, coming animated at the memory. “He's a Baltimore guy, so we know him a little bit from there. Stars of the Lid is one of my all-time favourites. They never play! So it'll be really good to see them, actually.

"There are bands like Mogwai who we've played loads of shows with in the past years," says Georg. "It's a 'bland i poka'—a mixed bag, when you go to the shop and put your 500 króna on the table for a mixture of candy."

Phone home

Music is just one piece of the Norður og Niður puzzle, and Jónsi and Georg are keen to talk about additional events, from dance performances to artist collaborations to lectures. The band will also unveil unreleased work at the festival, with The Icelandic Dance Company performing to a previously unheard piece. Some specially-pressed vinyls will be on sale—including a solo electronics album from Jónsi, highlights of the generative music from the 'Route One' project, and solo material by Alex-Somers—with limited edition handmade artwork.

"We didn't want it to completely be a music festival," says Georg. "It's an art thing, or even wider than that. We have people giving lectures, like Nelly Ben Hayoun, who works with NASA and SETI. She's a really interesting character—super intelligent, and out there, to say the least. She'll be talking about the search for extraterrestrial life. There'll be little things for everyone, and lots going on for free."

"It's been a lot of work." finishes Jónsi, laughing. "But it's going to be a lot of fun, too."
WED DEC 27th

ELDBORG
20:00 Sigur Rós

SILFURBERG
16:00 Dimma
20:00 Sigur Rós’s Gloomy Holiday
22:30 Blanck Mass

KALDALÓN
14:30 Kristín Anna
21:35 Alexis Taylor
23:45 Árni

NORDURBRYGGJA
12:00 Flow VR (all day)
12:00 Gramophone Installation (all day)
22:35 Alex Somers

HÖRPUHORN
18:00 Hallowing Opening Ceremony
18:30 Hilmar Örn Hilmarsson, Steindór Andersen and Quartet, Iceland Chamber Choir and Special Guests

THU DEC 28th

ELDBORG
20:00 Sigur Rós

SILFURBERG
16:00 Bergrun
18:40 Mammút
22:10 GusGus
23:30 Kevin Shields

KALDALÓN
14:30 Kjartan Holm and Caleb Smith
21:15 Mary Lattimore
23:45 Kaitlyn Aurelia Smith

NORDURBRYGGJA
12:00 Flow VR (all day)
12:00 Gramophone Installation (all day)
22:20 Alex Somers

HÖRPUHORN
16:00 Annual Icelandic World-Champion ship Ginger Cookie Competition
17:00 Reykjanessbær Music School Bell Choir
17:45 Jo Berger Myhre and Ölafur Björn Ólafsson
19:00 Gyöla

RIMA
13:00 Nelly Ben Hayoun presents ‘Disaster Playground’
15:45 Screening ‘The Golden Waterfalls of Strandir’
16:00 Andri Snær Magnason presents ‘Light in the Last Age of Glaciers’
16:45 Screening Andri Snær Magnason ‘Dreamland’
20:00 Helium Karaoke

EYRI
19:15 Reykjanessbær Music School Bell Choir

KOLABAR
22:00 Special Guest DJ Set

RIMA
13:00 Dean Deblois presents ‘Heima’
20:00 Helium Karaoke

EYRI
19:45 Kórus

KOLABAR
22:00 Kjartan Holm (DJ Set)
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*NOTE: TIMES AND DETAILS ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE. REFER TO NORDUROGNIDUR.IS OR THE NORÐUR OG NIÐUR APP FOR THE MOST RECENT UPDATES.*
NORÐUR OG NIÐUR: MEET THE ARTISTS

Over forty artists across four days and nights. Take the time to get acquainted with the full Norður og niður line-up.

SIGUR RÓS’S GLOOMY HOLIDAY
A Christmas revue show like no other. The season’s best-loved festive songs as you’ve never heard them before. Delivered by an eclectic and unrepeatable cast of national treasures and indie superstars, plus Ing bag led by Samúel Jón Samúelsson.
HALLLOWING - OPENING CEREMONY with HILMAR ÖRN HILMARSSON, STEINÐÓR ANDERSEN, KÖRÚS and ICELAND DANCE COMPANY
A pagan bousing, an ancient thrume, some sáting singing and a wild dance. Welcome to Norður og niður.
ALEXIS TAYLOR
The Hot Chip hitmaker plays a stripped back set with a piano and vocals, his solo offerings embedding sweetness and bitterness melodically into intricately rendered pop songs.
BLANCK MASS
One half of Funk Bullets, Benjamin Powers, puts a punch with his solo project Blanck Mass. His live show conjoins up rapid-fire beats with heavy slabs of bass and foggy explorations of dark ambience.
DIMMA
For over a decade Reykjavík’s Dimma have brought the A game as Iceland’s premiere league heavy rockers. The powerful four piece’s explosive live show earned them Best Local Live act for 2016.
ANDRI SVERR MASNOSON
Acclaimed Icelandic writer and thinker Árni Snæri Snae Magnason presents a wide-ranging discussion ‘On Time and Ice - Living in The Last Age of Glaciers’ plus Q&A.
TÓMÁS GUDIÐJÁRTSSÓN
Tómas Gúðjónsson premieres his short film ‘The Golden Waterfalls of Stranda’.
KRÍSTIN ANNA
One time min member Kristín Anna reveals new music from her forthcoming song cycle ‘I must be the Devil’, performed on a grand piano and featuring some extraordinary guest musicians. Unique and bewitching.

HILMAR ÖRN HILMARSSON, STEINÐÓR ANDERSEN and PÁLL GUDMUNDSSON with STRING QUARTET and ICELAND CHAMBER CHOIR + special guests
Sigur Rós collaborators on the fabled orchestral work, Óliver’s Korean Magus, Hilmar Örn Hilmarsson, Steinóur Andersen and Páll Gudmundsson break out the one-and-only stone marimba for a moody and moving evening in the winter greening.

INGI GARDAR ERLENDSSON
'Sigurin / Sigurin (The Stair / The Points) 10 performers in two youth wind bands - Skólahálmunefn Austurhússkóla and Skólahálmunefn Reykjavík - occupy all the spaces of Harpa performing Erlendsson’s ambitious, interactive piece. HARPA DEC 27

ÁRNÍ
The Vaccines bass player makes the perfect musical detour. Via wosly sci-fi popcorn and depresso tropicana Ární has created the perfect soundtrack to an early morning space age pool party.

NELLY BEN HAYOUN PRESENTS ‘DISASTER PLAYGROUND’
The ‘Willy Wonka of design and science’ Dr Nelly Ben Hayoun presents her feature film ‘Disaster Playground’, investigating outer-space catastrophes and beyond. She’ll speak on ‘Designing The Impossible’, exploring the hyper real, where fiction is as truthful as reality, and premieres an animation set featuring the International Space Orchestra of NASA scientists covering Sigur Rós favourites.

ALEX SOMERS
Composer, musician and producer, Alex Somers presents a new musical installation, combining gramophones, transistors and cello, harmonium and pianettes to a dazzling aural effect.

FLOW VR
Experience FLOW VR meditation technology; combining progressive, cutting edge meditation techniques with advanced virtual reality.

KEVIN SHIELDS
Musical ring-leader of legendary indie band My Bloody Valentine, Kevin Shields is one of modern rock’s great auteurs, building a reputation as one of the world’s most original guitarists on the basis of three fabled albums. Performinmg in Iceland for the very first time.

GUSGUS
The daddies of Icelandic dance music GusGus have explored every avenue of electronic music, from techno to trip-hop, house to progressive trance and pop. Biggi Veira and Daniel Agís will bring a powerful set filled with beats, grooves and vocals.

MAMMÚT
Famed for their ethereal loops around largely wordless song structure and time.

MARY LATTIMORE
La based harpist Mary Lattimore experiments with her harp through various effects to dazzling results. She’s recorded and performed with musical luminaries from Thurston Moore and Sharon Van Etten, to Juvent Cocker and Kurt Vile.

KAITLYN AURELIA SMITH
Riding high on praise for her latest album, the bubbling effervescent ‘The Kait’. Kaitlyn Aurelia Smith visits Iceland for the first time with her one woman electronic show. “Sprinkles a bodega alongside her music’s cerebral delights” - Pitchfork.

KALDALÓN DEC 27
KALDALÓN DEC 28
SILFURBERG DEC 29
HARPA DEC 27
HARPA DEC 28
KALDALÓN DEC 29
KALDALÓN DEC 30
SILFURBERG DEC 30
HÖRPUHORN DEC 29
SILFURBERG DEC 30
HÖRPUHORN DEC 30
KALDALÓN DEC 30
KÖRUS
The choir collective pulls together 30 active forces in the Icelandic music/art scene, meeting every week to sing new music together. Körus devotes itself to singing pieces composed by choir members.

KJARTAN HOLM AND CALEB SMITH
Having worked together since 2012 on various projects, Sigur Rós touring guitarist Kjartan Holm and filmmaker Caleb Smith present a new work bringing together sonic and visual textures, manipulating video footage using video degrading equipment and an experimental soundscape to match.

GINGERBREAD COMPETITION
Animal Iceland World Championship Ginger Cookie Competition Rules are simple, you may work solo or in teams but all members must be present at the judging, exterior surfaces must be edible, and you will be judged on originality, design, and of course, taste. Celebrity judges, entertainment, and tasty treats galore. Enter at gingercookies@truceland.com

JO BERGER MYRHE AND ÖLAFUR BJÖRN ÖLAFSSON
Jo Berger Myrhe & Ólafur Björn Ölafsson (sometimes Sigur Rós pianist/percussionist) create music that’s so rapidly populated, and its sense of space and scale so big, it’s as if one is being deliberately invited to fill in the gaps to provide both detail and motive.

DEAN DEBOIS PRESENTS ‘HEIMA’
Two-time Oscar nominated, Golden Globe winning film director Dean DeBois (‘How To Train Your Dragon’, ‘Like & Stitch’) introduces a screening of ‘Heima’, the documentary about Sigur Rós he directed in 2007. HEIMA DEC 28

REYKJANESBÆR MUSIC SCHOOL BELL CHOIR
Bringing handbell playing to a new level, this 11 piece ensemble collaborates with the composer and arranger Inga Garðar Erlendsson on pieces written by Sigur Rós.

MOGWAI
Twenty years deep into their career, Scotland’s Mogwai are now an immovable, centrifugal force in avant-rock. Riding high on the acclaim for latest release ‘Tone Country’s Sun’, they finish a year of festival appearances at Harpa.

JÖHANN JÖHANNSSON
The internationally acclaimed composer, musician and producer returns to Iceland for a one-off performance of ‘Englófr’, his seminal debut album, originally released in 2002 and set for reissue in 2018.

PEACHES
Pushing buttons and boundaries with a sexually-charged blend of electronic music, hip hop, and punk rock, Peaches delivers one of the most raw and creative stage shows in popular music.

DAN DEACON
Bending pop culture with abandon, Dan Deacon’s super energetic live performances are matched by his crisp and otherworldly electronic music. His wonderfully interactive live show is like being inducted into a friendly cult.

DUSTIN O’HALLORAN
La-based film composer, pianist and streaming playlist superstar is joined by a host of local musical luminaries to perform a meditative piece at Harpa.

STARS OF THE LID
"Stars of the Lid’s fragile drone sculptures have gone from quasi critical sensation to the iconic standard for 21st century ambient.” - Rolling Stone. Beatless soundscapes composed of droning, effects-treated guitars along with piano, strings, and horns makes for a mesmerizing live show.

ICELAND DANCE COMPANY
with ‘The Great Gathering’ by Arve Grennholtt and Alexander Roberts to music by various artists performing at Norðurljósin. A large group of adults and children dance together with buzz in the ears, stone of sound and noisy fog. Splashing in puddles with bleeding noses, they live in another world where they are never invisible. Spinning round and round – holding hands – the whole world a bluecosmos DEC 24 and 30

JFDI
The prolific songwriter and multi-instrumentalist kitcher Aalokette (well known for her musical projects Samata, Pascal Pitzen, Gangly) plays cuts from her acclaimed debut long player ‘Brazil’ and beyond.

HUGAR
Noo-classicists and Reykjavík residents, Berger Jóhann & Petur Jónsson, join forces as Hugger to create ambient, blissed-out instrumental tools that achieve a sonic cohesion rarely afforded in today’s disposable musical culture.

BRASSGÁTT ÍBALA
Sigur Rós’ much loved ‘BRASSGÁTT’, together again for the first time in years to present the awesome power of their assembled talents on trombone, trumpet and tuba. take a bow. Sammi, Smaeri, Íska, Ingí and Haki

SÍGRÚN
Sigur Rós trombonist gives a solo voice and electronic performance, promising incarnations, heavy electronic beats and enchanted stones.

REX PISTOLS
Rex Pistols is the new project by former Antimony front woman Rex Buckett. Minimal synthpop grooves, grth blues, laden with lust and fear, boredom and decadence, vulnerability and obesity.

JARVIS COCKER
One of the most original and striking frontmen of recent years, the Pulp singer and ‘greatest living Englishman’, returns to Reykjavik with hot-off-the-press new material and favours from his sparkling career.

STARS OF THE LID
"Stars of the Lid’s fragile drone sculptures have gone from quasi critical sensation to the iconic standard 21st century ambient” - Rolling Stone. Beatless soundscapes composed of droning, effects-treated guitars along with piano, strings, and horns makes for a mesmerizing live show.

HILMAR ÖRN HILMARSSON and THE SHOWS OF SHOWS

ULRICH SCHNAUSS
The music of Ulrich Schneuss combines multi-layered synthetics with beats and electronic vocals, an aural escape route from the trappings of reality. ‘Touches the soul of the listener in a profound way’ - Louder Than War

MR. SILLA
Mr Silla’s solo incarnation of Sigrúnur Gísladóttir, known also for her work with main, Snorri Helgadóttir, Moxe Parade and Low Roar. His sets stunning voice requiring little more in back-up than the minimalist, electronic musings of her laptop, and occasionally some live guitars from Tyler Ludwick.

EIRRÚR ORRI ÖLAFSSON
Sigur Rós brass arranger Ólafur performs a windscape installation with trumpet and electronics, plus guest Robert Reyndisson from mím.

LIMINAL SOUNDBATH
Bathe your ears under a flowing stream of sonic warmth from Sigur Rós frontman Jónsi joined by collaborators Alex Somers and Paul Corley, accompanied by Sólböð, a pulsating light source from designer Juan Audey, that involutes in real-time to the hypnotic audio from Breiðmarini shot on thermal. BYO blanket/rug/pillow.

HILMAR ÖRN HILMARSSON
and ‘THE SHOWS OF SHOWS’

NILS FANG, SÖLÖY & ÓVRAR MÁRÁNAN
Three of Reykjavík’s most prolific and revered musicians have teamed up for a new project which has delivered a song-a-month project as aromatherapy around a surprising studio collaboration. They’re now expanding it to a full live performance, making its debut this December.