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# Blackout Reykjavík

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*Issue 16 / 6 October - 2 November 2006*

# ISSUE SIXTEEN: OCTOBER 6 - NOVEMBER 2

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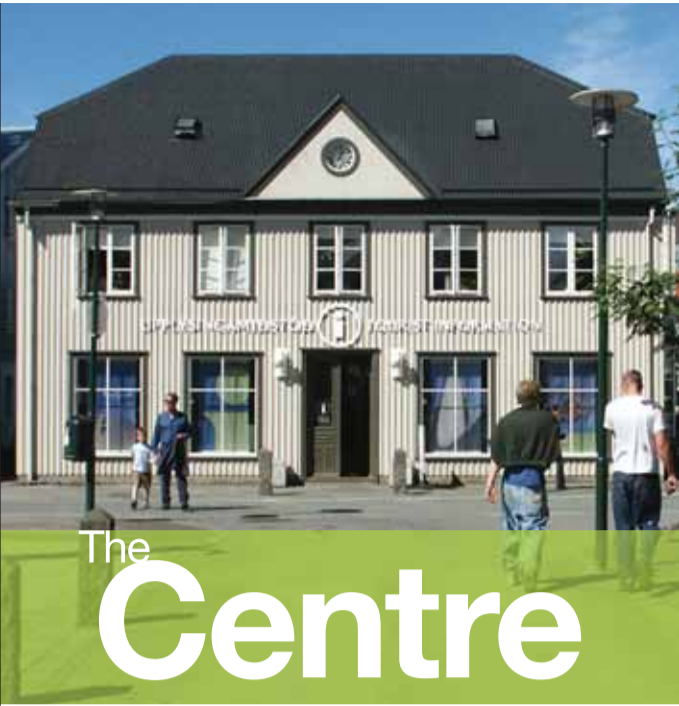
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# SOUR GRAPES

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First off, we have two letters from this cat called Roy.

Hi,  
Stefán Pálson is probably right.. Think about all of the money that was spent during World War II building tanks,airplanes,ships etc. just to defeat some misunderstood folks like the Germans and Japanese. We should have entered into serious discussions with these people instead of building a war machine to defeat them. Think of all the Icelandic seamen whose ships were sunk by misunderstood German U boat commanders. SP ought to be damn grateful not hateful. Very few Icelanders were killed by the U.S. military during their long stay in Iceland. Having the U.S. as an ally is not a bad thing.  
Sincerely,  
Roy Roesel

*Hey... you are right, you are always better off siding with the bully. Like we all know, you are either with him, or against him.*

Hi,  
The statement from Magnús [Porkellsson, interviewed in the last issue of the Grapevine] "In Iceland, I could say that there is more freedom or more flexibility to discuss ideas on an intellectual basis. " doesn't hold water. You can say anything you want at a liberal arts college in the U.S. If you live in a fishbowl country like Iceland you definitely have to watch what you say are you might not be employed the next day. Look at Omar Ragnarsson's latest comments as reported in Iceland Review.  
Sincerely,  
Roy Roesel

*So, Omar is out of a job then? Hmm... not? What Porkellsson is obviously saying to is that in an Icelandic classroom, a discourse on the Middle East can stick to an objective discussion on historical facts, where as in the US, the discourse tends to stray of into a more personal and subjective territory, tainted by politics and religion. If you failed to comprehend that form the interview, I might suggest that you could do with a few years at liberal arts college in the U.S.*

Back to the Esso station where your illustrious newspaper use to stay

sometime ago its planned a concert hall to be built. Cost of the project 30 bilions krona. Whatever? The same guy i asked for a better job told it to me: "It's simply ridicolus!" and whit this he argued about what the price means: "If instead of this building they give the money out each icelandic would have10 million krona" For what urbanistic concern a concert hall on the harbour will make of Reykjavik on line with what pitcure tell me about Sidney. Three years ago when first i came year i've seen how downtown at Kaffi Rekyavik "The coolest bar of the town" the deal whit an aussie beer was broken, the arms of the precious drink by the trash: now it happen icelanders are back on the OZ line too? For what money concern i would not earn not beeing icelandic one of the ten milion krona package. "I could live for free for at least three year" i said to the guy at the gas station. Then i realized better: i'm deny about icelanders wage such of 400.000 kr once i've heard one man can earn with a showel. Those free years could have been seven. The same years an italian friend advised me are necessary for an icelandic passport or citizenship. Back again to the plan, if estethically i figure out in that placegardens more than an aquarium, on the income side people from iceland whit "-sons and -dottir" surname driving Subaru are still figuring me out as a long sleeve orange, maybe belonging to the suit of a first class japanese traditional beach, one of those of "no" theatre. Believe it or not, even whit those opportunity i've heard about, four time my wage, the same icelandic came to me begging for some pizza cash they have never return. When i realized anybody here has much bigger wage than mine i start suspecting some dirty racket was slicing me off and denying me freedom. I could only find my mum and sister call on my handy, i do not think it was them, nobody foxy with a pint would never call you: "Hello i'm pooring you out!" I am vegetarian but i am afraid i stink sushi. I am arguing how far, enough for beeing used as a screen saver in a pop stage? I decided to go away from Lombardy, Italy, unhappy about house parties and what come whit it: building society, banking, trust and insurance: no freedom and a bad family condiction jacking me over. I move in Great Britain first and then Iceland, at the job

centre i was warned there was workers request here. Result: unskilled job whitout any intrestment by the company to educate workers, not much rice back to how then living here is pricy: houses, nutrition, vacation, etc etc... Here i have experienced socially the value of the word "House" the little spoon icelander and english, and most probably lombards have in common and i don't. A similar background did't stop a clash in the '70: must have been over an horse to beat on. Apart for that, I do not match this this country for many other things. I cannot stand in a smokey pub, i feel very bad. I was banned from university for i cannot speak icelandic, and all the book of the course where in english. True my english is poor but so far no access to a better linguistic resources would't improve it. Different think to say when taxes offices of this Iceland took a share of 40 percent off of my wage, gap the fact my report went lost two times between tax collector, post and tax offices. I was asking my right and tax officials where asking the state one accusing me of beeing late. Who was the arrogant there? Well, i'm living at the camp site no quids for a room. Last, estetically iceland is a beautifull country (even if Bleik og Blatt are no more those of 2002) and it's two years and half i'm joked by fish factories, farms an other jobs the 9000 not islanders do. Radio on Bon Jovi's "Living on a prayer" as focused by a sharp reporter, sound romantic but it's back in the '80 and i'm sick whit it. Personally i can hardly trust i can find a way for opportunities here, unfortunately. What i will say in my small shit about Iceland: country, institution, business, relationship and people. I still do not know how i will remember that. By now i am planning quick to go working in a country i have better chances before the next system plan automatically will feed me. Ps: I forgot to mention Thay and Polish syndacate. It's a rule, how come there is always somebody or something in a cupboard worth it better?

*I have no idea what this guy is talking about, but the Grapevine employees have voted this as the most entertaining reader response to date.*

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## EDITORIALS



Sveinn Birkir Björnsson,  
Editor

## Yes, He Was the Most Strongest Man in the Universe!

I was writing this masterpiece of an editorial, then the blackout hit and I lost all my data....

I am joking of course.

While on the subject of jokes... A few months ago, I saw a film called *The Aristocrats*. Presenting it self as a documentary, it is in reality a 90-minute exercise in vulgarity. It is also hilarious. The idea behind the film is to take the vulgarity to such an extreme that it enters the realm of absurdity, and where it instantaneously becomes funny. Strangely, many people have a problem with that particular movie.

You might think that I am about to make the tired old argument that people in general are too PC. That is an incredibly stale assumption. The

truth is a lot simpler: we have a problem with absurdity. We don't understand it. We tend to take things at face value, so when we are presented with absurdity, it fails to compute.

Why do I bring this up? I don't know. Perhaps because lately, ever since I took over as editor of the Grapevine, I have been getting all sorts of absurd criticism regarding the editorial policy of the paper. At first, I tended to take this at face value, but lately, I have learned to laugh it off as any other absurdity. Naturally, some of the criticism is actually valid and thoughtfully argued. I value such input. But for those who claim that the Reykjavík Grapevine exists for the sole purpose of drawing a skewed image of what Iceland, and

the Icelandic experience, is like – you are way off. Strangely, most of the criticism seems to come from people who present – as facts – such absurdities as the claim that the majority of Iceland believes in elves and the hidden people, or that we all feast on shark, all the time, or that the women are loose or the nature is unspoiled and the water is the cleanest in the world. Well, those 'facts' do not hold up under scrutiny.

At the Grapevine, we do not buy into the hype and the myths surrounding the mystical Island in the North. We do not sugarcoat the truth, but present you with Iceland the way it is, warts and all. We feel that is the most respectful and honest approach.



Steinunn Jakobsdóttir,  
Journalist

## Searching for Darkness – a surprisingly successful hunt

Like many Reykjavík residents, I was immensely excited about the planned blackout in the city last week. I had admired the idea of a lightless city since I first heard Andri Snær Magnason bring it up in the year 2000 in relation to Reykjavík being one of the European Cities of Culture. Turn off the lights, watch the stars and experience the majesty of the sky above. What a brilliant gesture. At that time the proposal was denied. Now, six years later, the city council gave it the green light. All streetlamps in the city were to be turned off for half an hour in the hope of making the city as dark as possible. How could one not look forward to such a grand performance?

At the same time as I was excited for the event, I was nervous for Magnason, who would finally see the payoff of all his work. Regardless how cooperative the authorities were, in the end it would all depend on the general public and private companies' participation.

Text messages and e-mails circulated, advertisements and posters printed and news stories written and broadcast, all with the goal of encouraging people to turn off the lights in their homes and businesses. No one can say the PR didn't do its job well. Still, I was afraid the solidarity wouldn't be as expected, as in the end, proved to be the case.

That was a fact I was unaware of when heading to Grafarholt in a Peugeot full of friends, determined to have a good view over the whole city. Parked next to a number of other cars we waited for the lights to go off. At 22:00 they did. Well sorta.

I have to say, it was awesome seeing the streetlights turned off. The city dimmed and the atmosphere grew relaxing. What pissed me off were all the lights still shining in companies, gas stations and floodlit buildings in every direction I looked. Car traffic and fireworks assisted in lighting up the city and spoiling it for the rest of us. I have to admit; when I realised this was it. I was disappointed.

As my friends and I were now longing for the complete blackness we hoped to experience, and not in the mood to drive home just to turn-on the TV, we decided not to drive back downtown, but in the opposite direction. In search of darkness we ended up finding ourselves driving out of the city. At first the streetlights brightened up the edge of the road along the way but as soon as we exited Mosfellsbær and approached Þingvallahreppur, there was no light to be seen on the road. With no traffic, the only light we got was from the headlights of the car. We parked, turned off the lights and gazed up at the

black midnight sky. Now it didn't matter anymore that there were no twinkling stars. We finally experienced complete darkness. The only light in view was a yellow ring up in the sky in the far distance, created by the light contamination from Reykjavík, sending a gleam across the sky.

In saying I was disappointed with Reykjavík's non-blackout I'm not undermining the whole concept or the effort that was made in attempts to make it a reality. The idea has not only gained well-earned global attention, it also saved citizens and the city money in electricity costs. It's my sincere hope this will become an annual event. With every repeat occasion, new blackout supporters will join the group, someday resulting in Magnason's dream coming to majestic fruition. If we look at last week's event as a rehearsal, next year's premiere might prove to be a success.

For me, the event was for the most part a reminder of how close we are to wilderness. In only 20 minutes or so, urban residents can easily be exposed to a complete natural blackout, and no grumpy company owners and party poopers can spoil that for us. Icelanders are privileged by how easily we can enjoy the darkness and the "unwrapped sky" just by leaving the city. If there's one thing I need to thank Magnason for, it is simply reminding me of just that.

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# Culture of Constant Change

An interview with Róbert Marshall

BY SVEINN BIRKIR BJÖRNSSON PHOTO BY SKARI

Ten months ago, Róbert Marshall was selected to oversee an exciting experiment for 365 Media. The largest media company in Iceland, was creating the 24-hour TV news station NFS. Less than a year after the station went on the air, the plug was pulled and the experiment was regarded a failure. In an effort to save the project, Marshall wrote an open letter, titled “Dear John”, to the owner of 365 Media, Mr. Jón Ásgeir Jóhannesson, president of Baugur Group. He was promptly fired. In an interview with the Grapevine, Marshall discusses the final days of NFS and the future of Icelandic media.

**/// You quit NFS on Friday September 22, the same day you received the termination letter, does that apply to the other 20 who were fired as well?**

– Yes, in most cases. The station went off the air that same evening, so there was nothing left to do there. The difference is that I was fired on Friday morning, while everyone else received a letter later that day. However, it became obvious earlier that I would be parting ways with the company. On Friday, the week before, when [the daily newspaper] *Bláðið* reported that plans were underway to close NFS, I sat down and reviewed my options. Was I prepared to be a part of that process, to close the station and fire all those people? Or should I resign myself? In my mind, the choice was very clear. I had no interest in being a part of closing the station, so instead of resigning, I chose to write an open letter, where I stated that from the beginning, everybody involved maintained that it would take two to three years to get people to establish the idea. That is, at some point, management was ready to lose money on the project for two to three years. So, as soon I wrote the letter I knew that I would probably not be returning to the company, but I hoped that the station would at least continue. But, everyone knows what it means in English when a girl writes you a “Dear John.” That is a different kind of a termination letter.

**/// So you wrote the letter knowing that it would effectively be the last thing you did as an employee of 365 Media?**

– Yes, I mean, I wrote a letter directly to the owner, going over the head of my superiors. But I did not write the letter asking for a handout. I was asking people to keep their words and asking for the financial means to continue this experiment, there is a big difference. There is also a difference in being a media company under the ownership of Baugur and being a Baugur media relations company – which NFS was not, and never will be. But it would be naïve to think that the owner is not the one who has the reigns. It is Rupert Murdoch who decides if Sky is on the air or not, but that does not mean that he is influencing editorial policies.

**/// Many believe that you burnt a lot bridges when you wrote that letter, that you even committed professional suicide. Do you think so?**

– No, I don't think so. When you take on a particular project under specific premises, you expect those premises to hold. I gave 100 percent and I believed in the project and that it could be successful. I was willing to fight for it.

**/// Was it a realistic project?**

– Absolutely. By bringing in 20 more people, and greatly increasing potential income, we were creating a media where there was no limit to the amount of advertising you could sell, we were broadcasting 16 hours each day. We were combining different mediums and methods of reporting. I am positive that this is how the media will develop.

**/// Viewer ratings never met expectations though?**

– Viewer ratings for the NFS TV station

alone were not high, that is true. But you have to take into consideration that for the first six months the station only reached 30 percent of the nation. If you look at the lowest ratings, you will see that 6-10,000 people were watching the station. But if you combine the 12-14 percent listener ratings for [the radio station] *Talstöðin*, broadcasting the same program, the 30,000 people who watched the web-TV, the 40,000 people who visit *visir.is*, and the news on [the popular radio station] *Bylgjan* and that we provided news for [the daily newspaper] *Fréttablaðið*; if you take all these things into consideration, then viewer ratings can never reflect them. Overall, this news station was providing most Icelanders with their news.

**/// It seems as if there is a high employee turnover at 365 Media. Is that the case?**

– Well, I don't know how it is overall, but on NFS, it was not very high. We took in a lot of new people, and we put an effort into training them, we trained the first group of journalists who specialised in stand-alone media journalism, where people are responsible for the whole production process of the news story. But 365 Media is a young company that is still going through a development phase. It has been trying to establish the right size and identity. During such times, it is natural to a higher than average employee turnover. The nature of the company also encourages a high employment turnover. In a company like this one, there is no constant. The culture you try to create is a culture of constant change, where you try to keep the company in constant development, constantly trying out new ideas to see if they work, and let them pass if they don't and continue if they do.

**/// I've heard employees of 365 Media complain about this in particular, that ideas are not given enough of an opportunity to develop, such as perhaps NFS?**

– Experience shows that these people's complaints are reasonable. You need stamina to maintain this culture. You have to be sure that you have fully put the idea to the test before you discard it. It is the basic premise for this model that things have been fully tried, and I think this is where 365 Media went off track.

**/// Then isn't “the culture of constant change” backfiring?**

– Yes, if people don't know the premises behind it, and don't work in accordance with it, then it will inevitably backfire. Either you are this sort of company that I described, or you are like [the daily newspaper] *Morgunblaðið*, where you have to go back decades to see the changes made to the paper.

**/// So, what went wrong? Did the management lack the courage to keep going?**

– It lacked the stamina to keep it going. I created a budget plan for the company, which I followed in detail. We also had a revenue plan, which I did not create. Both these plans were presented to the management and accepted. Then obviously, the revenue plan did not hold water.

**/// Doesn't that simply mean that the business model was not realistic?**

– No, look. The revenue plan was far off, but we had always said that we needed two to three years to reach our goals. Sales were increasing; nationwide distribution would have made all the difference in that regard. So you can't say that model wasn't realistic, it would have been realistic if the station had been in full distribution.

**/// So the premises were wrong?**

– The premises of the revenue plan were wrong.

**/// Mbl.is [the Morgunblaðið website] has been implementing videos along with their regular news delivery. Is that a direction**



**NFS will be moving towards?**

– I think *mbl.is* has surely been moving in the right direction, they are focusing on the internet, and they simply have to take a step further. They are doing what NFS was doing, in offering a combination of text and video material.

**/// Isn't it embarrassing for NFS then, if Morgunblaðið, this institution, is taking the lead in this development?**

– Yes, it would be.

**/// Well, they have, in my opinion, mbl.is is a better news site.**

– Yes, it is still the strongest news website in Iceland. They have an advantage over other media outlets in that respect. But that is a good example, because *mbl.is* has been in operation for a long time, at least ten years I think, and I believe last year was the first time they showed a profit.

**/// So they had the stamina to keep it going.**

– Yes, exactly. It is just short-sighted to take on a project like this one, without realising what it entails and to be ready to put the project to the test.

**/// It seems that we have managed to draw up two different models here. On one hand, the culture of constant change that NFS was working by, and then the slow, conservative model used by Morgunblaðið, and at the end of the day, it seems as if Morgunblaðið is left standing in a better position.**

– Yes, but I don't know if that says anything. I am not sure if we should draw any conclusions from that, whether that reflects a final victory for anyone.

**/// I am not necessarily referring to this as a**

**victory for one business block over another, but rather the different models; do you still maintain that the NFS model is a better one?**

– Yes, I think that is closer to what we will see in the future, which is a media synergy, where the combined effects are more important than that of a single unit. NFS is going to take this development further. In the near future, people will be able to choose what news they watch and when they watch it. The time of appointment viewing, where viewers gather in front of the TV screen at a pre-determined time to watch the TV preacher in the form of the news anchor inform on them what happened today, has ended.

**/// What comes next for Róbert Marshall?**

– Many people ask me if I am going into politics.

**/// Are you?**

– It is certainly something that I have considered. At this point, I wonder if I am perhaps done with this business and it is time to move on. Perhaps I could be of use somewhere else.

**/// I've heard rumours that you'll be running in the primaries for the Social Democrats in the south district, is that true?**

– Yes, I have plans to run for a pole position in the south district. That is true. I will announce it formally soon.

**/// What will be your political agenda?**

– I think there are certain signs of danger regarding civil rights in this country. Especially regarding freedom of expression. I think it is a cause for concern if the so-called “War on Terror” means that our civic rights are being curtailed. Then someone else has won.



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## News in Brief

BY HAUKUR MAGNÚSSON, STEINUNN JAKOBSDÓTTIR, SVEINN BIRKIR BJÖRNSSON AND VIRGINIA ZECH PHOTOS BY SKARI

### Farewell to U.S. Forces

Saturday the 30th of September marked a significant chapter in Iceland's history when the American flag was lowered at the now former U.S. military base at Keflavík. After a small ceremony, the Icelandic flag was raised alone and the closure of the base and the withdrawal of the army's presence in Iceland became official. The U.S. defence force, which has been stationed at Keflavík base since 1951 is gone for good and the area now defers to Iceland's control alone. Many locals celebrated the turning point over the weekend by throwing their own little farewell parties and a large group cheered the army's departure at a meeting held at NASA yesterday afternoon. "I'm still celebrating," Stefán Pálsson, spokesperson for The Campaign Against Military Bases told the Grapevine. Yesterday, Pálsson and a bus full of anti-war protesters went on a guided trip to Reykjanes to explore the now desolated area, but the area is closed to public traffic.

"It was all very informative and very unreal to walk around such a ghost village and think about all the waist that strings along such military bases. To think about all the money spent in constructing the buildings, which now are empty. Money, which could have been used for something very different."

The struggle is a long way from being over though, according to Pálsson. "The situation in the world today shows quite clearly that we have a lot of tasks on our desks. The Campaign Against Military Bases is against warfare in general and we have been a leading force in protesting against wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Lebanon here in Iceland for example. With this event, the umbilical cord has been cut and hopefully Icelandic government can now start innovating a new independent foreign policy and stop supporting other nations warfare's."

What will become of the enormous area at Reykjanes is still uncertain.

### Planned Blackout Not So Black As Planned

Thursday night the 28th of September, Reykjavik experienced the world's first [known] planned blackout. The event marked the realisation of its architect's (Andri Snær Mag-

nason) dream to expose urban youth to the dark night skies that have influenced culture around the world for millennia. The Reykjavik City Council agreed to turn off all the city's streetlamps to participate in the event. Unfortunately, not all privately owned homes and businesses participated, making the event not quite as black as hoped. In an interview with the Grapevine, Magnason said, "We might look at it as a dress rehearsal."

As for the fireworks Reykjavik residents may have seen or heard, they were unplanned, and perhaps served only to exacerbate the problem of light pollution created by those lights that were left on for the duration of the half-hour event. Magnason also noted that once the lights went out it seemed that people turned on their headlights and "took to their cars quite a bit." Overcast skies further obstructed the much-anticipated view of constellations, or even the Northern Lights, in an urban setting. Nevertheless, Magnason stated that he was "quite happy... Even though the constellations were not visible, the concept was much bigger than that. [It was] about turning off time."

Magnason does not view the incomplete blackness as an indication of failure, however, stating that, "The idea has been going all over the globe in newswires... I've been talking to the BBC and PBS and it was in Italian papers," and the Washington Post. The story has reportedly been featured in news media as far away as Australia. "I heard from people [that] there was [a] good atmosphere in parts of the city. People went out and strolled around with their neighbours," Magnason said. He hopes that if people enjoyed the event, and would like to see it repeated – hopefully growing darker with each effort – that they will express their positive opinions to bolster his efforts to make the blackout an annual occurrence. "I would need some back-up to sell the idea again," he stated.

Only one injury resulting from the event has been reported. "In the U.S. and in the Toronto area [blackouts] just brought people together.... [They] just go into the street and get to know each other," Magnason told the Grapevine. As in the New York City blackout in July 2003, increased crime in the darkness of Reykjavik proved a non-issue. "The crime

rate doesn't go up, quite the opposite... People seemed to whisper and all the sounds went down [with the lights]," Magnason said.

The blackout signalled the beginning of the third annual Reykjavik International Film Festival (RIFF). More information on RIFF, schedules and events, can be found at [www.filmfest.is](http://www.filmfest.is).

### Kárahnjúkar: Final Preparations Begin

On the morning of September 28th, the bypass tunnel for the Kárahnjúkar Dam was closed, effectively starting the build up of the Hálsalón Lagoon, which will provide the hydro-electric dam with consistent water pressure. The water level rose fast in the first few hours, up to 15 metres in four hours and the 3rd of October its water level had become 65 metres, but as the canyon widens towards the top the rise of the water level will slow down, and the eventual water level of 200 metres is not expected to be reached until next summer.

### Thousands March For Nature and Ómar

Thousands of Icelanders marched in protest the 26th of September, in support of retiring television reporter and nature enthusiast Ómar Ragnarsson and his call to the Icelandic government to forego the Kárahnjúkar dam. Thursday last week saw an epoch in the Kárahnjúkar damming process, when water was finally released to flood the valley behind the already-built dam. In a public address, Ragnarsson called for Icelanders to mightily protest this, stating that when an unjust execution is about to go forth one should continue disputing it until the last day. Protest walks took place on Laugavegur in Reykjavik, in Akureyri, Egilsstaðir and Ísafjörður. Police and organisers disagreed on exactly how many thousands marched down Laugavegur, although both agreed that the numbers were great. According to Reykjavik police estimates, around seven to eight thousand people marched while organisers present decreed it to have been up to 15,000. Local media reports up to 200 marching in Akureyri, around 100 in Egilsstaðir and 50 people protesting in Ísafjörður. In conversation with the Grapevine right before the march, Ísafjörður organiser

and scholar Ólína Þorvarðardóttir reflected public opinion to the latest developments in the dam spectacle. "It was foremost Ómar's call that sparked our interest in marching here in Ísafjörður. He has been very diligent in calling attention to the impending harm to nature and the environment and people are finally starting to realise that it's not too late to do something about it. This is why we will answer his call and march, expressing our sorrow over what is happening."

When asked about the effects the Kárahnjúkar endeavour had on the people of Ísafjörður Ólína replied that the scope and effect of the projects is far greater than anyone envisioned. "In environmental and economical terms, the effects are alarming. Here in the Westfjords, we have experienced drawbacks due to the inflation caused by the dam, where greatly needed projects such as improving our dismal road system have been postponed to accommodate it. On another note, the country belongs to all of us; Easterners do not 'possess' the Eastern highlands any more than we possess the Westfjords peninsula. This is our heritage and we have an obligation to pass it on to future generations."

### Björgólfur Officially Declared Most Successful Human Ever. Sorta

In a striking turn of events that unfolded earlier last month, an article in one of Britain's premier money mags, The Financial Times, declared Icelandic banking tycoon Björgólfur Þór Björgólfsson the sexiest billionaire alive. Referencing his 'big blue eyes' and 'pleasingly imposing Viking stature', the magazine went on to recount his noble quest of restoring his family name after a 1986 business scandal involving his father. Björgólfsson has yet to comment on the accolades, but is surely contemplating his next moves in a diamond-studded, champagne-fuelled private jet somewhere over the Atlantic.

The NYU-educated, London-living Björgólfsson made his first millions co-founding Russia's Bravo brewery and now holds stakes in several of Iceland's biggest companies, including national bank Landsbanki and pharmaceutical giant Actavis. He is currently the world's 350th richest man. Sexy, to boot.



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# Putting Pop on the Priority List

An interview with Bryndís Ísfold Hlökkversdóttir

BY STEINUNN JAKOBSDÓTTIR PHOTO BY SKARI

How to support the Icelandic music industry and promote Icelandic music abroad has been an issue of debate year after year with no clear answer in sight as to how to create an acceptable platform for the industry to grow. While a proposal on an Icelandic Music Development Fund bounced back and forth between the Ministry of Industry and Commerce and Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, other projects took priority while musicians have had to settle for little, if any, pay and lack of facilities.

Meanwhile, some MPs and interest groups have been looking to Sweden for a good example of how to do things right. Export Music Sweden, formed in 1993, has aimed at promoting and marketing Swedish popular music globally, resulting in 6,533 million SEK total export income from the music industry in 2004 alone. Swedish bands have been the focus of worldwide attention, not only ABBA and Ace of Base, but The Hives, Roxette, Sahara Hotnights, Refused, The Cardigans, The Helicopters, The (International) Noise Conspiracy and José González, making Sweden one of the largest exporters of music in the world.

Bryndís Ísfold Hlökkversdóttir, a candidate for The Social Democratic Alliance (Samfylkingin) in the upcoming primaries, believes the same could be done for the Icelandic music industry. Hlökkversdóttir is making the issue a priority in her campaign by pointing out that investing in musical talents could be a more pleasurable way to create job opportunities than heavy industry plans will ever be.

**///You talk about making music a growing industry with opportunities to create jobs. It is an idea that has been brought up a couple of times before. What makes you think now should be a good time for introducing it to the public once again?**

– Rightfully this is not a new idea and there have been talks on making music a trade for years but nothing has happened. The Alliance Party debated the issue in the 2003 elections and now I'm bringing the issue up again as I think it's more important now than ever to start focusing on new job opportunities. Recent protests against Kárahnjúkarvirkjun are good examples of what Icelanders don't want, so instead of making plans on more power plants, which I think are short-term solutions, I want to look at the future and its opportunities, like those in the music industry.

It is clear we need to adjust to a new world and changed situations and one angle to do so is to look at the Icelandic music scene seriously, invest in it and emphasise creating a field for that industry to grow. By that I mean spending money on marketing and promoting as well as distributing Icelandic music abroad and providing suitable facilities. To put popular music further on the map so to speak.

It's all just a question of ideology and political stand to say we believe in Icelandic music and that we prefer to harness people's talents instead of rivers and rivulets crisscrossing the country.

**///There are a lot of issues to be tackled to satisfy everyone. How would you want to see it done?**

– My idea is to stop thinking of musicians as people with a hobby and start thinking about them as investments worth financing and providing them with decent working conditions. My aim is to create a platform for the musicians and give them a space to grow in the form of some sort of development and export grants from the state treasury. As the situation is today, very few musicians can earn their living by creating music, let alone pay for plane tickets to go abroad, but still we are producing a huge amount of music every year. One thing we aren't lacking is talent and people who are willing to give it all they've got if they get the possibility to do so, but Icelandic musicians are greatly lacking in funding and facilities. I want to use the Icelandic Film Centre



as a model. It gets around 350 million ISK per year from the government and with that amount it can finance film projects and promote Icelandic films abroad. The result is that Icelandic movies are gaining worldwide recognition. There's nothing to indicate that we can't create the same model for the Icelandic music scene, an Icelandic Music Centre. That centre would consist of professionals and individuals who know the industry inside and out, are in touch with the grassroots and what's going on. This new centre would handle export, host concerts, help and support musicians to attend festivals and be a general adviser for musicians as well as those who want to invest in Icelandic talents, all with the aim of promoting Icelandic music.

One idea could also be to cooperate with private companies and get them to donate empty buildings as rehearsal facilities. Take the DV building for example, which has been desolate for a long time. That could be a perfect rehearsal facility. Instead the companies wouldn't need to pay rates.

**///What do you think about the effort being put into promoting music today? The Trade Council of Iceland for example organised a trip to the annual Midem music trade fair in Cannes earlier this year under the banner Hear Iceland! where 23 representatives from 15 companies and organisations were present to promote Icelandic music for possible buyers.**

– Efforts have been made, I'm not undermining that. I don't know what the trade council's plans are for the future though. There are also some grants but in my view that's just not enough. The Airwaves festival is a great enterprise and the travel fund Reykjavík Loftbrú an excellent project as well. The drawback is that there's no official institution where people can seek guidance, grants and direction

on what to do, how to apply, etc. We do have potential but unfortunately, there's still a lot missing.

**///Now there are number of individuals who have been working hard at creating a setting for young musicians, Danny Pollock and his conception Tónlistarþróunarmiðstöðin (The Centre For Musical Evolution) is an example, where today 43 bands have facilities. Is there any interest in supporting private enterprises like that one and building upon?**

– What Danny Pollock has been doing is really admirable. He has created a healthy environment for young bands and artists and has made a great effort in applying for grants and keep the centre running. I think it is really important to sponsor those kinds of enterprises and give them better opportunities to flourish.

**///You talk about government grants. When decisions like those end up in a committee isn't there always a risk that the grants don't go to the right people? Who will choose on whom to gamble, how much he should get and why? Who's going to evaluate the applications?**

– Well, what I find practical is to get interest groups and bodies within the music industry and record companies as consultants, just like the Icelandic Film Centre does. The politicians have to create the platform and get the bill through the parliament and after that rely on the professionals to supervise.

**///This idea, making music a real industry, comes from Sweden, which has become a leading music centre. Are you looking at Sweden as a model?**

– Yes, we can learn a lot from Sweden. They have made a very promising environment

for their musicians. Today, royalties are the largest growth area in the export industry, but even though it's not an extensive part of the Swedish economy, it's a large industry compared to many others.

At the same time the setting has been quite unfavourable in Iceland. Many artists have proven that it is possible to be quite successful, like Björk, Sigur Rós, Gusgus, Quarashi and Emiliana Torrini to name a few.

**///Making this matter an electoral issue, what the general public will want to know is whether this is profitable for the national economy.**

– In Sweden, it has proven to be quite profitable. There, music in general is a growing industry, and bands from around the globe are travelling to Sweden to record and seek expertise. Of course it will take time. We won't be Sweden overnight but in making an effort, we are getting closer. Music will never be our biggest export or save us when we are all out of fish in the sea but it is a kind of job creation that will get us far away from outdated thinking.

Marketing music internationally is a costly project but a profitable one for the country in the long run. The first task is to make music an accepted industry but to do so there needs to be some government intervention.

It's not all about profit though. We need to think about what kind of a country we want to build and create a more positive image. We have everything we need: the talent, the people and the interest. It's all just a question of harnessing what we've got and making music a priority. In my view, that is a far more prosperous choice than many others and much more joyful choice than the aluminium smelters for example. We can easily market ourselves as a country of music, and that is a goal we should seek to achieve.



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## The First Brave Step

BY TOSHIKI TOMA

In September, the Kjalarnes deanery of the national church of Iceland held a conference titled Peace and Conflict Resolution. Present were two special guests, Dr. Rodney Peterson of the Boston Theological Institute and Dr. Raymond Helmick of Boston College, and they lectured about their special field, social reconciliation and social healing. Dr. Peterson and Dr. Helmick have both studied social reconciliation as scholars, and they have also participated in the real process in places such as Northern Ireland, the Middle East and the city of Boston.

They analyse the process of social reconciliation and healing using four key concepts: forgiveness, reconciliation, restorative justice and community. I can just hear readers saying “OK, that’s fine, that’s beautiful!” in a cynical way. It looks too idealistic at first glance. But these concepts can help us to understand how the groups we belong to might choose to act in the wake of conflict with another social group.

In the conference, it caught my attention that some Icelanders tended to find examples of social reconciliation and healing in the recent history of the Middle East or Sri Lanka, but not in their own experiences in

third party, faced criticism from debaters in the church. We had to endure criticism from the gay peoples’ side, too, because they often saw us only as a part of the establishment they were trying to change or fight. I think that there were also people who tried to use the dispute in order to criticise the church, quite apart from its attitude to gay peoples’ rights. I have to confess that it was a really hard time for me, and I felt angry and sad. Many must have hoped for more effort towards reconciliation and healing. But since the dispute ended, not enough has been done.

On the day of the Gay Pride festival in Reykjavik in August, a Rainbow Mass was held in Hallgrímskirkja church with many participants. It might have been a kind of symbolic event to mark a reconciliation between the church and the gay community. But one of the essential conditions of reconciliation is to forgive and to be forgiven, and this has not happened yet.

Icelandic society can go ahead, of course, without making any effort towards reconciliation between the church and the gay community. But we should know by now that a cease-fire with no reconciliation usually leads to more conflict in the future. Memories of hurt,

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**“Icelandic society can go ahead, of course, without making any effort towards reconciliation between the church and the gay community. But we should know by now that a cease-fire with no reconciliation usually leads to more conflict in the future.”**

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Iceland. I remembered a wise old saying: “It is easier to love the whole world than to love one’s neighbours.” So I would like to point out one local example that fits into the framework of social reconciliation: the “gay” issue.

During the recent debate about the legal status of gay people in Iceland, and whether they may be married in church or not, there was a lot of conflict. Fortunately there was no physical violence, but a sort of violence of words took place. Many people were hurt spiritually, and many human relationships were torn.

Ultimately, the synod of the Icelandic church recommended an ongoing effort to examine the issue theologically. But another important thing here is that one would hope to see some kind of reconciliation and healing follow the conflict, but it has not yet taken place.

I would like to make it clear that I am not trying to bring up the issue of what is the right or the wrong doctrine for the church. I would like you to remember the fact that many were hurt during the debate.

Many gay people and their supporters left the church during these debates. Some announced their departure in public, and some others just left. I know some of them personally and I could see anger, disappointment and irritation among them, but most of all, sadness. Those who sit on the other side were wounded, too. I mean those who were not willing to support expanded rights for gay people. I am sure that they had reasons not to. They got harsh criticism from society, which must have been tough for them.

There were people in a third position and I myself was among them. These people were inside the church and yet supported the gay people. We, those in this

distrust, suspicion and hatred linger in peoples’ minds and resurface over and over. Scholars of social reconciliation and healing point out a pattern. Each side in a conflict creates its own stories of what happened, and over time they begin to see these stories as a kind of historical truth. Once two groups have created separate stories, it gets more difficult to get each to understand the other’s story or to put them back on a mutual track.

So I think now is the right time to work for reconciliation, not in a year or two. In doing so we would need to recognise that the parties involved still disagree and will continue to disagree for some time at least. What we need to concentrate on is not solving the puzzle, but showing our counter-disputants the same human respect that we show to those who are on “our side.” We should encourage all participants to recognise that they have hurt others and have themselves been hurt, too. That would allow us to take the first step in reconciliation: asking for forgiveness. Again, asking for forgiveness doesn’t mean giving in to the other person’s arguments. Asking for forgiveness ensures that people who disagree can live together in the same society, and can continue the discussion when the time comes to move forward again.

The final question, and my only question, is who should take the first step? Who will express their longing to be forgiven? For me, as a pastor in the national church, it seems quite clear and obvious that we, the church, should act first. Do we not teach forgiveness and reconciliation? The annual ecclesiastical council is coming up now, in October. I hope that the church will use this opportunity to take the first, brave step towards reconciliation with the gay community.

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## Fear of a Colourless Society

GABRIELE R. GUÐBJARTSSON

It was the spring of 2003 when I experienced Iceland for the first time. The country completely captivated me and I wanted to fit in as much as I could in the little time I had. So at the tail end of my trip, I decided to dip into the pools at Laugar to see what all the hot tub fuss was about. While sitting back and relaxing in the euphoric steam, I noticed a very determined Icelandic toddler, cloaked in hot pink floaties, swimming up to me.

This child, who could not have been more than one year old, was so bent on reaching me that I was a little worried that the girl thought I was her mother. (Clearly a long shot, but stranger things have happened.) Soon after, the child stopped directly in front of me, reached out her hand and touched my face. Next, she stroked my hair. For the next two minutes I allowed the sheer honesty of a child to invade my comfort zone. It was by far the most innocent expression of curiosity I had ever encountered. Yet, I thought to myself, has this child ever seen

culture. In this way, expectations are clear, making life much easier for its citizens. It's kind of like a McDonald's cheeseburger. No matter where you go in the world, a McDonald's cheeseburger always tastes the same. I will leave it at that.

On the other hand, cohabitating in a diverse society is not such a bad gig either. Living in New York for the past five years has redefined the concept of the "melting pot" for me. When I taught in Brooklyn, New York, I never felt like I was actually in Brooklyn because by 8:30 a.m. the world was at my door. In one of my middle school English classes alone my students came from Haiti, Pakistan, El Salvador, Russia, India, Guyana, Bangladesh, Mexico, Trinidad, Nigeria, Puerto Rico and Albania. The beauty of diversity is that I learned as much from my students as they learned from me. I was spoiled and naïve to think that any other city could create the multi-cultured atmosphere that was encompassed by Brooklyn. The thing about diversity is that it allows

**"My biggest fear in moving to Iceland was not the temperamental weather, the colossal import tax or the hideous trolls that live in the surrounding mountains. What kept me up at night was the lack of diversity that plagued this unexploited island."**

a black person before? Do people of colour inhabit any of this land? Little did I know that in a few years I would be the one answering those very same questions.

My biggest fear in moving to Iceland was not the temperamental weather, the colossal import tax or the hideous trolls that live in the mountains. What kept me up at night was the lack of diversity that plagued this unexploited island. Over the seven or eight times that I ventured back here before my official move, the lack of colour in the faces I ran across led me to believe that my experience was going to be dismal. At this point I had to stop and ask myself, how am I going to cope with living in a colourless society?

After researching and discussing the issue with several people, I have discovered that there are a few benefits to existing in a homogeneous society. First, tradition is highly valued and maintained by the people. Whether it is because they are passed down by individual families or held up by the government, Icelanders hold onto their customs quite firmly. Icelandic calendars are excellent tools for total strangers to learn about holidays and celebrations that keep traditions alive from generation to generation. Second, the idea of "normal" is understood by all in homogeneous societies. The concept of knowing and seeing what is normal on a daily basis serves to be quite comforting for any

different to be the norm and change to be more than acceptable. And, as we all know, the only certainty in this crazy world is change.

Unlike France, where fed-up immigrants stormed the streets last year demanding equality and an end to an institutionalised racist system, Iceland has not given off vibes of a racist society in my opinion. Although people may have experienced racist incidents, I think the blame comes down to an ignorant few who have not been educated on the waves of change occurring in the world around us. Xenophobia, a fear of that which is foreign or different, will exist in every society because people will always be people. However, how a country deals with a cultural shift is critical and needs to be thought about with precision and an open mind.

Based on my time in Iceland thus far, I have been pleasantly surprised by the integration of thousands of immigrants onto this isolated island nation. I have met more minorities than I expected and can honestly write that I no longer find Iceland to be as colourless as I perceived two years ago. Although it will take time for non-Icelanders to emerge from the pockets and find themselves in the mainstream, it makes me smile to report that the last time I visited Laugar, I was not the only individual with an invisible "Touch Me" sign on their forehead.

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## A Basic Form of Communicating

Valgeir Sigurðsson takes the stage, finally

BY HAUKUR MAGNÚSSON PHOTO BY SKARI

“Music has been intertwined with my life from the age of six. Actually, I didn’t give up my soul to it until I turned nine and started playing an instrument. After that, there was no turning back, really,” says soft-spoken Valgeir Sigurðsson.

After an industrious career as a recordist and producer in his recording studio Greenhouse, recording artists such as Björk, Bonnie ‘Prince’ Billy and múm, he is just now stepping into the limelight as a musician after more than a decade of working in the shadows. This is due more to the nature of his work than personal modesty, although those who meet him will attest he isn’t lacking in that department either. A quiet, contemplative demeanour gives off the air of someone who would rather just do his work properly than boast of it.

“I started off as most people do, perusing my parents’ record collection, listening to the Beatles, strumming a tennis racquet, however, my uncles quickly exposed me to what was happening in punk and new wave at the time. soon enough I was making ritualistic visits to the Grammið record store whenever I got to Reykjavík [Sigurðsson was born and raised in the small town of Blönduós]. I remember going by myself to see Crass play Laugardalshöll at age 12. I was pretty scared of all the large punkers,” he says, laughing. Soon after moving to Reykjavík for high school at age 16, Sigurðsson found a job at a recording studio. Describing it as “a way out from a school I couldn’t find myself in,” the job quickly took over his life, eventually leading him to decide that music was what he wanted to devote his life to.

The early nineties saw Sigurðsson record his first full-length records, but he says it was through his work with Bad Taste recording artists Magga Stína and Unun [for whom he ended up serving as a keyboardist] that he started gaining momentum. Setting up his own studio in 1997 was a milestone, as would a fruitful collaboration with Björk that commenced the following year. “She was moving back to Iceland and wanted someone to work with. She invited me to try my hand at it, and I guess we both liked it enough to collaborate

further. Our first project was the *Dancer in the Dark* soundtrack and it kind of evolved from there, we never planned on working together for as long as we did.”

Was it intimidating to work with her at first?

“No, not at all. It probably helped that I wasn’t a particular fan of hers, although that would change as I got to know her. I approached it as just another job to be done, an attitude I probably learned from [Unun guitarist] Þór Eldon while touring the world with him. I learned a lot from his outlook on things, one of them being that no matter how famous or notorious someone is, in the end, they’re still just people.”

Since working on *Dancer in the Dark*, Sigurðsson has steadily added successful

or 50, everybody operates on the same level in regards to conveying ideas and emotions through music. It serves as a basic form of communication and interaction that everyone participates in.

“Their attitude towards music betrays a certain purity in their culture, whereas our culture seems to have alienated a large portion of the population. Here in Iceland for instance, it’s more common for people over 30 to withdraw themselves from those forms of culture, perhaps feeling that they should rather leave it to knowledgeable cultural beacons. This is unfortunate, as I feel that music talks to us on so many levels, be they primal, sexual, intellectual... It’s a universal language if there ever was one.”

What determines the value of a piece of

tions to release the best in experimental and unorthodox music. Formed around Sigurðsson, Muhly and Reykjavík-based Australian composer extraordinaire Ben Frost, the label released its debut last month, Muhly’s critically acclaimed *Speaks in Volumes*. October will see the release of Frost’s *Theory of Machines* and Sigurðsson’s anticipated solo debut is tentatively planned.

“Nico and I were originally discussing doing a project together that we felt might be difficult to get a decent release for. So, we figured we might as well release it ourselves and started conceiving the *Bedroom Community*. When Ben moved to Iceland, I told him of the idea and invited him to join. He liked it and wanted to be part of it, after that it became serious. We’ve been working hard at the project for the last year, doing idea work and preparations, and it’s therefore pleasing to watch it manifest now. Although we’ve only got our own records planned at this time, we see the community as a growing organism that will continue to thrive for a long time.”

Sigurðsson explains that there is indeed a wide audience for the type of music they plan on releasing – reaching it is just a matter of distribution and aggregation. However, there is no business plan: “I feel that viewing music as a consumer product severely diminishes its value. This is one of the reasons we’re operating the project on a smaller scale and putting our own money into it, rather than, say, securing funding from an investor. I have a limited belief in anyone who invests in such a project to make money.”

“If you only want to partake in something to financially benefit from it, then I have no interest in speaking with you. I can’t relate to that mode of thought at all, although I suppose it must be a valid one since so many people are practicing it. The *Bedroom Community* will have to find its feet without an investment from someone who’s simply hoping to advance his capital. Expectations of productivity and revenue only serve to create a negative pressure that stifles creative thought. And we are creating this forum to be free of such things.”

**“If you only want to partake in something to financially benefit from it, I have no interest in speaking with you. I can’t relate to that mode of thought at all, although I suppose it must be a valid one since so many people are practicing it.”**

projects and collaborations to his résumé. His level of professional respect, probably culminated when he was asked to provide Britney Spears with some songs for consideration [he gracefully declined]. When asked what determines his decision to work with an artist, he says the most important thing will always be the possibility of a dialogue between the two. “Music is a form of communication. In order to make it you have to work with someone that you can communicate with. There needs to be a level of trust, that really serves as the basis for everything else.”

He speaks enthusiastically of a recent visit to Mali, where he was fascinated by how the natives approach music. “It’s a purer form of communication, something that really underlines the difference between our culture and theirs. In Mali, it doesn’t matter if you’re five

music for you?

“There are many factors. It’s hard to say exactly. Often, I will look for a certain integrity in the artist, if that is missing then there isn’t really anything to get from it. When you make something that’s been determined to push someone’s buttons, to please them, it’s unlikely to have any merit. That said, I immediately feel an urge to contradict myself. You can of course make excellent calculated pop music too.”

In the past year and a half, Sigurðsson has embarked on his most ambitious project to date: setting up an eclectic record label with two close friends. At first conceived as a means to release a collaboration between Sigurðsson and New York-based composer Nico Muhly, *Bedroom Community* quickly evolved into a full-fledged ‘boutique label’ with ambi-





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## Connecting Through Music

Will Oldham speaks of art, entertainment and recording in Breiðholt

BY HAUKUR MAGNÚSSON PHOTOS BY STEVE GULLICK

For the past decade, musician Will Oldham – also known under the moniker Bonnie ‘Prince’ Billy – has proven to be a prolific and important voice in contemporary music, expanding his audience and cultural impact with each new release. Therefore, it was pleasing to learn that his latest release, *The Letting Go*, was recorded in Reykjavík, with fabled Björk collaborator Valgeir Sigurðsson acting as a producer. Wanting to learn more about what drove him to record in our revered city, and what drives him in general, the Grapevine located Oldham in Louisville, Kentucky, where it has been raining a lot lately.

/// Good evening. Is this Mr. Oldham?

– Yeah. How are you?

/// I am a bit stressed out.

– Yeah, me too.

/// Really?

– Yeah.

/// Why are you stressed out?

– What do you mean why am I stressed out?

/// You just said you were.

– Yeah. Well, I got back last night after being out of town and now I am preparing for a tour. It’s hard work. Just now, when I went to answer the phone, I went into a room I haven’t been in since I got back. There’s been a lot of rain lately, and I just discovered that there’s been a leak in this room. There’s lot of plaster on the floor from when the rain flowed through the roof. It’s frustrating because the rain has been so extreme that it’s probably going to be very hard to find a repairman who’s available.

I appreciate when bad things like this happen, however, because I know that bad things have to happen to all of us and if that’s the worst bad thing that happens, then I feel safer.

When something bad happens, it usually makes me feel safe because I know you can’t have too many bad things happen on a given day. Like a sort of karmic distribution, yeah. It could be a precursor to worse things, but I think that you’re safe as long as you take it as a symbol right away and try to attend to your karmic issues rather than just, say, accepting it as something terrible. The instant you accept things as being terrible, you’re really just asking for more bad things to happen to you.

/// Recording an album with Valgeir Sigurðsson must have been a new experience to you, as he is very involved, probably the

**“Big heroes of mine in music, people like country singer Merle Haggard or the R&B giant R Kelly, I don’t know if it will ever happen, but some day I want to do something with them in a recording studio.”**

opposite of people like one of your former producers, Steve Albini.

– I am very pleased with the results. It’s a different approach for sure, but both of their personalities become so involved. There’s a different quality and quantity of knob turning, but in terms of infusing the experience with their person, it’s not dissimilar. It’s always a different experience. Ideally, it does affect the music in a good way. The reason to work with anyone for a record has to do with the desire for him or her to affect the music in a good way.

/// One of the things I noticed from the new record is that in a way it’s reminiscent of some of Valgeir’s past work with Björk and others.

– That’s good [laughs]. Well, the goal was to work with the people we had at hand to come up with the record we came up with. I didn’t think about anybody else’s records in relation to this one, sometimes I do but this time I didn’t since I managed to gather a pool of individuals that was collectively so strong. If there’s something there that you recognise as carrying forward some of Valgeir’s past work, then that’s pretty cool. In gathering musicians and recordists for making a record, I’ve always hoped to represent a good example of the work of people I’m collaborating with at a given time.

/// Like paying a tribute, or spreading the word about things you like?

– And wanting to learn from these things. I think the best opportunity to learn from someone is to have an interaction with them, in the studio for instance. That’s very valuable to me.

/// By now, you’re probably in a position that anyone would love to work with you.

– Well, a lot of the people I admire are folks who don’t even know I exist. I like all different kinds of musicians from all over the world that I may never even get the chance to see play, let alone work with. I won’t tell you who they are, however, so I can keep silently praying and hoping that active movement can draw me to them. If I become pro-ac-

tive, it might risk the possibility of a positive relationship between us. I am not very good at expressing myself in those ways, so if I want something from somebody, I’m pretty much fucked. I don’t know how to ask for anything unless I have some solid way of speaking their language, which takes a lot of effort. The language of individuals who are themselves, in their own way creating and living in their own linguistic system, it’s challenging to find a way to express the desire to collaborate, to find a way of entry.

With Dawn McCarthy from Faun Fables [a prominent voice on *The Letting Go*], it took me years of listening to their records and communicating, doing a couple of shows together, spending time with her here and there before I felt we were on strong enough grounds to broach the subject of collaboration. I felt she wouldn’t have understood because I was seeing her do things that I strive for or am perplexed or fascinated by – or even pissed with – it might be difficult for her to understand why I feel there’s a connection between what we do. I want her to know I am approaching her music with respect. If that doesn’t translate, and you get the collaboration by coercion, then the working relationship probably isn’t going to be a good one. In any case, I have a tremendous respect for Dawn and the whole of Faun Fables. They remind me of how great things can be and how great they are. They help point me in the right direction sometimes when I feel directionless or lost.

/// You feel you’ve strayed off course in the past?

– Not necessarily. It’s a daily concern, you know, tending to direction. I don’t feel like I’ve severely strayed off course, but that’s because I tend to direction with such persistence. Being on the right track is a lot of work.

**/// You spoke of a tour. Are there any plans to come to Iceland?**

– No, nothing planned for now. This tour will take me through Middle America and then the West Coast, that's it for now. In the beginning of next year, we'll try to do some shows in Israel and Turkey. I am a little uncomfortable with going to Israel, but yeah, I think it's a good idea. I feel the opportunity is there and I am into conquering ignorance – that's among my own principles. It'll be interesting to see the audience that comes to those shows; you don't really have a conception of a normal human being on any side of the conflict that's going on there, which is all we've known throughout my lifetime, at least. I am thinking there must be more ways to look at it; I am counting on it in fact.

**/// Has your worldview changed a lot in the past decade? I notice listening to your early records such as *Arise Therefore* that they seem all dark, conveying a certain bleakness even, while the later ones seem more accepting and content in a way. You reference love a lot, and seem to be using it in the universal sense...**

– Yeah, it's more of a universal kind of love. It's about trying to learn from the works of others. Also trying to express a desire to openness and for connection that can only come with something that's greater than respect. It has to do with acceptance, a kind of harmony.

**/// Are you then documenting a personal journey, sending out messages to the world?**

– I can only hope. Doing what can be done. But maybe not. If I said I was documenting something or delivering a message, that sets me up for potential failure. I don't want to say that there's a goal and I don't feel like a goal is something that reveals itself. You know you work at moving towards something, knowing that in the shortest term you're moving towards the next thing and in the next one you'll be moving towards your own death, which is an end in itself. After that, you're heading towards infinity. None of those things are definable or foreseeable; therefore, an unreach goal would count as a failure. Music should of course be a goal in and of itself, but it should also be a goal that has reverberations that continue towards those other ends and everything that is between now and those things. I try and reach for such things because, yeah, that's what I listen and look out the window for.

**/// You obviously see yourself more as an artist than an entertainer.**

– I feel I have a responsibility to fulfil as an entertainer. Here's more: say an artist has his field, be it painting, sculpture, theatre or music. My goal, then, would be to be an artist whose field was entertainment. I think of entertainment as being very serious and important, from Laurel and Hardy and upward. It has to do with emotions of release, giving up or extreme hilarity and absurdity. What does 'entertainment' mean, anyway, and what's the difference between that and art?

I would say the main, important difference was that art isn't necessarily funded by the consumer but entertainment always is. In that way, entertainment is a million times more important to me than art and being an entertainer is more important to me than being an artist. The relationship with the audience is so direct, while the government or rich collectors are going to pay for something that is art, rather than the person who is actually going to have a relationship with the piece. That's what's most important to me about what I do. I feel the value of my work is determined very precisely by the audience.

**/// Do you then try and find out what it's likely to go for?**

– I think that is important to some extent.

**/// You really do that?**

– I think I do. I came at this thing not as a creator, but as an audience member. Before I made things, I was an audience member and a lot of what I'm doing when creating things is about wanting to evolve as such. To develop a richer and more interconnected relationship with the audience member. If I, say, create a record and ask Valgeir, Don, Emmet and Jim to collaborate, it is because I, the audience, want to hear them work together with these



lyrics and chord progressions and melodies. It's rewarding when I find a broader audience that doesn't think I'm too crazy. Trying to make something for that audience to experience, also knowing that at some level I will be sharing that experience. My absolute, purest particular taste would not be something that could be appreciated on a grand scale. It just wouldn't. That's why it's more important to me to make a record that serves itself and serves its audience as well. If I really made a record to just serve myself I would end up alone in a dark, wet room, you know, that's not really where I want to be tomorrow. I'd rather do more things that are in the light and

– Yeah, but with the understanding that the greatest possible audience might not be that great. I want to reach a wide audience, but I also want to continue to make music that I wouldn't disdain or resent. You always compromise to a certain extent, but it's important not to go too far. It happens all the time that Domino asks me to do this and that, like, 'Why don't you want to be on a cover of a magazine or do more press or tour more?' I want to do that for them, and I understand what they are saying, but I would be at a loss to continue afterwards.

For instance, *Greatest Palace Music* [an album where Oldham covered and 'softened

a mutual understanding can be formed.

It's nice whenever I finish a recording or a tour and I feel like I've done something that I could share with someone that I want to have a communication with, if I feel that it could explain to them how I value their listenership, like with that record. I feel with any music there are people who might not be able to access it unless it's through a specific recording. Big heroes of mine in music, people like country singer Merle Haggard or the R&B giant R Kelly, I don't know if it will ever happen, but some day I want to do something with them in a recording studio. I don't know if there's anything I can do to make that happen, rather than continue doing things my way and hoping that some day that weird, magical gateway will open.

I'll finish a song, and hope it could make them understand how I admire them. I don't necessarily think I've done anything that Merle Haggard would understand, he's one of the people that I admire most in the world, but I know that there are weird things with my records that I don't expect him to even need to extend himself towards because he seems so fulfilled by his own explorations. It's a huge thing to imagine that he would, but I know he does listen to music and that it's a possibility. I thought the song *I Called You Back* on *The Letting Go* was something he might have sung, but I don't think he would even like it, even if that recording of that song is my most favourite thing that I've been involved with. He probably wouldn't think it was anything at all, but it doesn't change the fact that I totally love that song, and it doesn't change the fact that I totally revere him. It's a strange predicament.

**/// It might not translate to the general population. It's not necessarily weird music, there is a certain aesthetic you need to tend to in order to be able to get all there is from it. Like adding to your vocabulary.**

– Yeah, exactly. And you know, a lot of the

**"I would say the main, important difference was that art isn't necessarily funded by the consumer but entertainment always is. In that way, entertainment is a million times more important to me than art and being an entertainer is more important to me than being an artist."**

with the community. A good record of mine should involve my needs, the listeners' and the other people who worked on the record. If I manage that, then I feel I've accomplished something but ultimately it is the audience that holds the lion's share of determining if a record is worthwhile.

**/// Kind of like being a selfish lover. You just end up making love to yourself?**

– Yeah. At the same time, there are inconsiderate lovers who retain their marital union for a lifetime. There are inconsiderate musicians who continue to make music without giving a shit. You know it's shitty, I know it's shitty; still they continue to make records and get accolades.

**/// You want to reach the widest audience possible?**

up' some of his older songs with a selection of Nashville's finest] wasn't done to conform to anyone's standards. It's still really exciting when something like that happens, that allows for a different group of people to access the music. The same as with *The Letting Go*, a couple of days ago there was a review of it on [American] National Public Radio ([www.npr.org](http://www.npr.org)). That was exciting to me because I feel like a lot of people don't get to listen to good music or see great movies because of cultural barriers that have arisen between them and that. People will listen and they won't know how to get it. They'll sit and ask themselves, 'How am I supposed to be relating to this?'

The only way for my entire audience to appreciate the music is if they come to it of their own accord and find something in it that satisfies them as individuals. I'll do what I can do and they'll do what they can and hopefully,



people that I admire the most, people like Dawn [McCarthy] or Ben [Chasny, of Six Organs of Admittance], Merle Haggard or R Kelly, those are people that I don't think necessarily need to expand their vocabulary because their world seems so huge and fulfilling in itself. Maybe they don't feel that way, maybe they're constantly seeking something and I don't recognise it because they sound so confident and appealing to me.

**/// Maybe as an artist, you shouldn't seek to expand your vocabulary, but that's something that's necessary to you as an audience?**

– Yeah, as an artist I don't want to. Doing something that's beyond my abilities or vocabulary just for the sake of doing it is not a good idea. However, if you'd pick ten records randomly out of my collection, it would be difficult for you to make the connection, while to me it is both natural and impossible to define. It's only like five percent of the time that there is going to be a way to make a connection and that's what has been mind-blowingly fortunate about working with Dawn, for instance. It doesn't mean I'd be dissatisfied with my life if I didn't make a connection with Merle Haggard or this Indonesian group called Surosama. It doesn't mean life sucks. It's not even a missed opportunity because it helps me know the limits of what that communication is. Then I can continue making music at the level of other artists and audience members. The bulk of the music I listen to is music that I'm always going to be an audience member for, and that's great. Ideally, most people who connect to my music are going to do it in relation to their own universe and not mine. That's why it's mass produced; so it can have existence in the places that I myself will never reach.

**/// Would you like to participate in the mainstream to a greater extent, to spread out the impact of your influence?**

– No, I mean. I wouldn't necessarily want to be a featured MTV artist, even though there's

a lot of great music on there, but at the end of the day I think the visual takes away from the experience of the music. I like the idea of being in some ways available to the audience, but I ultimately don't think of it as something I would really want to get involved with at this point.

**/// Even though you're pretty good looking...**

– That shouldn't have anything to do with the experience of my music, no matter how handsome I am. Is there anything else you'd like to know? I should really start looking into my roof situation...

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**“There are inconsiderate lovers who retain their marital union for a lifetime. There are inconsiderate musicians who continue to make music without giving a shit. You know it's shitty, I know it's shitty; still they continue to make records and get accolades.”**

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**/// Yeah, you should definitely get going. For the sake of our readers, could you maybe spare five minutes on how you came to record in Iceland?**

– A couple of years ago, Björk and Matthew Barney contacted me about providing a voice for one of the songs on *Drawing Restraint 9*, something I was very happy to be asked I might add, and Valgeir was the one recording it. It was great and afterwards, Valgeir said, reminiscing about our musings from the Björk tour a few years ago that he thought it would be a good idea for us to work together. I figured that it would of course be a perfect way of making the record I'd been writing at that time. Also, it was great to have just completed a short recording session with him. It was manifest seeing him working and choosing the sounds, recording and playback, those are

really super important little hints of how a creative dynamic can work.

Now, there were some rough spots, but for the most part, it was a smooth, enjoyable process. When it comes to recording sessions, I am not the most relaxed person in the world. It's a short, expensive amount of time to focus on and realise a year-and-a-half of ideas, to just try and cram all those ideas together. Communicating with people in terms of the music itself, paying attention to their actions and performances in the recording studio, it's super tense and demanding. But it's also very rewarding. I love that part, but it's really hard.

**/// How was the experience of staying here in general? And did the darkness affect you at all [The Letting Go was recorded in the months of December and January, when the sun is more or less absent from Iceland.]?**

– We started out with the musicians staying in a hotel in downtown Reykjavík. It wasn't very satisfying since we lost a bit in travelling time and it was also kind of anonymous and cold, being a hotel. So Valgeir's brother Mió – whose presence contributed a lot to our stay – he soon found this wonderful older woman named Svana who rents rooms out of her house just a short trip from Greenhouse studios, after we got that it was just magical. We all had our cosy little bedrooms and she would make a little breakfast for us, each day we would feel more a part of where we were, you know. We'd go swimming every day in

some of the great pools that are there. I can't remember the names of my favourite ones, but I liked having a slide. A slide is important, as is hot water. My priorities, when swimming, are having hot water and a big slide.

As for the darkness, I thought I was looking forward to it in a way, to needing to focus on each other, on all of us who were involved in the recording process instead of the sun. Most of the time we were recording it was rainy and grey, even when it was light out it was rainy, grey and cold. We tracked and tracked and once we had done the tracking, we went away for the weekend, to this little country house that Valgeir's father has, to listen to all the songs. That was amazing, being in that stormy, isolated, traumatic landscape in a warm little cabin. We had a bunch of whale meat we stir fried, that was great and delicious.

Also, for the whole time we were there, Dawn [McCarthy] was fascinated by your Christmas visitors (the 13 Icelandic Santa Clauses). That became a running theme for the stay as we'd learn more and more about them. They were really grim, and that's right up our alley, a part of the attraction.

**/// Did you learn about the Christmas cat?**

– Yeah, I think that's great, saying he'll eat you if you don't get new clothes for Christmas. You need that kind of stimulation to be able to accept sucky presents.

At the end of the tracking process, we scheduled a day off where we went driving around the countryside a bit. There was a full moon and when it cleared up it was beautiful. We drove around all day and the whole time we had the moon sitting on one side of the horizon and the sun sitting on the other side. For the whole time we were out it stayed that way, and it was magical, in a way.

*A web-exclusive extended dance-mix of this interview can be found at Grapevine.is. There's some really interesting stuff there, so you should really check it out.*

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# ◀ INFO ▶

Issue 16, 2006

8 Page Listings Section in Your Pocket



## Another Glorious Week of Noise

Once again, the whole of Reykjavík, nay Iceland, braces itself to welcome the annual Iceland Airwaves festival and the plethora of young and exciting musical talent it brings, both local and international. The festival has steadily grown ever since its inception as a means to promote Icelandic dance legends Gusgus in 1999, and has seen some now-revered musicians off to greater fame. Now being held for the eighth time, Iceland Airwaves boasts what can likely be called its most impressive line-up ever, with nearly 200 artists performing at eight venues. And that's not counting the numerous off-venue

events taking place all over 101 Reykjavík.

For the visiting music enthusiast, Airwaves offers many prospects to broaden one's horizons. Visiting artists such as Kaiser Chiefs and the Go! Team offer up a serving of what's often referred to as 'hot' in the outside world, but it's the local talent that should be the real cause for excitement and what will most likely give participants the defining moments of their visit. Iceland has a thriving music scene going all year with concerts happening all over the country regularly, but the truly good thing about Airwaves is that it offers a chance to witness the cream

of Iceland's crop serve up its finest offerings non-stop for five whole days.

Judging by past experience, the safest plan to experience what Airwaves can offer at its chaotic best is to forego expectations and plans altogether, opting instead to wander randomly around the venues and the city, taking in what catches your eyes and ears at any given moment. HM

Iceland Airwaves takes place at various places in 101 Reykjavík, October 18-22. For a full festival schedule and further info, visit: [www.icelandairwaves.com](http://www.icelandairwaves.com).

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

## FRIDAY – 6 OCTOBER

**Alfons X**  
KAFFIBARINN

**DJ Raggi**  
ANGELO

**Jam session with FÍH music school students**  
HRESSÓ

**DJ Gulli Ósóma**  
BAR 11

**Beggi Bluesband**  
RÓSENBERG

**DJ Fúsi**  
AMSTERDAM

**Mát in concert followed by DJ Maggi**  
HRESSÓ

**Anthony Pappa**  
NASA

**Franz and Kristó followed by DJ Benni**  
PRIKIÐ

**Foreign Monkeys and guests**  
DILLON

**DJ Krummi**  
SIRKUS

## SATURDAY – 7 OCTOBER

**DJ Platur**  
CAFÉ OLIVER

**DJ Ingui and DJ Kocoon**  
ANGELO

**Hostile, Blood Feud, Diabolus and Lister in concert**  
HELLIRINN

**Don Balli Funk**  
KAFFIBARINN

**DJ Maggi Legó**  
SIRKUS

**Mát in concert followed by DJ Maggi**  
HRESSÓ

**DJ Thomas Bangalter (Daft Punk)**  
NASA

**DJ Óli Weapons**  
BAR 11

**DJ Andri and DJ Anna Rakei**  
PRIKIÐ

**Beggi Bluesband**  
RÓSENBERG

**Danish rock band Hekken Fcld**  
AMSTERDAM

**Piker Ryan's folly and Paris Texas in concert**  
HRESSÓ

## MONDAY – 9 OCTOBER

**Leifur Eiriksson celebration day: Gunnar Guðjónsson, Cynic Guru, Helga Magnúsdóttir, Seth Sharp and the Black Clock and Kung Fú.**  
THE NATIONAL THEATRE BASEMENT

**Tómas R. Einarsson and band**  
RÓSENBERG

## THUESDAY – 10 OCTOBER

**Jonathan Richman in concert**  
IÐNÓ

## WEDNESDAY – 11 OCTOBER

**DJ Platur**  
VEGAMÓT

**Don Balli Funk**  
KAFFIBARINN

**Ladies-Night: Americas Next Top Model and house DJ**  
PRIKIÐ

**Perfect Disorder and guests**  
DILLON

## THURSDAY – 12 OCTOBER

**DJ Platur**  
CAFÉ OLIVER

**DJ Shaft**  
ANGELO

**DJ Alfons X**  
KAFFIBARINN

**DJ Kári**  
PRIKIÐ

**Halli Reynis in concert**  
RÓSENBERG

**DJ Lauren Flax**  
SIRKUS

**Octoberfest: Snorri Idol and Kristján from Ísafold**  
HRESSÓ

**Múgsefjun, Santiago and Shadow Parade**  
AMSTERDAM

## FRIDAY – 13 OCTOBER

**DJ Skeletor**  
SIRKUS

**DJ Platur**  
VEGAMÓT

**DJ Andrés and DJ Óli Ofur**  
ANGELO

**DJ's Steinunn and Silja**  
KAFFIBARINN

**Minus in concert**  
NORÐURKJALLARI MH

**Franz and Kristó**  
PRIKIÐ

**Misery Loves Company in concert**  
RÓSENBERG

**Ebrietas and Driver Dare followed by DJ Master**  
AMSTERDAM

**Octoberfest: Gotti and Eisi followed by DJ Johnny**  
HRESSÓ

**Wulfgang in concert**  
HRESSÓ

## SATURDAY – 14 OCTOBER

**DJ Árni Sveins**  
KAFFIBARINN

**DJ Ingui, DJ Shaft and Beatúr**  
ANGELO

**DJ Árni Sveins**  
SIRKUS

**Octoberfest: Gotti and Eisi followed by DJ Johnny**  
HRESSÓ

**Útlendingahersveitin release concert**  
NASA

**Misery Loves Company in concert**  
RÓSENBERG

**The Iceland Symphony Orchestra: Jón Leifs: Edda I**  
HÁSKÓLABÍÓ

**Blood Group in concert followed by DJ Anna Brá**  
PRIKIÐ

**Live music**  
AMSTERDAM

## WEDNESDAY – 18 OCTOBER

**Mugison in concert**  
PRIKIÐ

**Múm – DJ set**  
SIRKUS

**My Summer as a Salvation Soldier**  
12 TÓNAR (starts at 17:00)

**Don Balli Funk**  
KAFFIBARINN

**Iceland Airwaves festival: www.icelandairwaves.com**  
GRAND ROKK, PRAVDA, GAUKURINN, THE NATIONAL THEATRE BASEMENT, REYKJAVÍK ART MUSEUM, IÐNÓ AND NASA

**Pete, Torben and Svavar Knútur**  
RÓSENBERG

**Future Future and special guests**  
SMEKKLEYSA (starts at 17:00)

**Hardcore punk day: STF, Deathmetal Supersquad, Innvortis, Gavin Portland, I Adapt and DYS**  
KAFFI HLJÓMALIND (starts at 17:30)

## THURSDAY – 19 OCTOBER

**Iceland Airwaves festival: www.icelandairwaves.com**  
GRAND ROKK, PRAVDA, GAUKURINN, THE NATIONAL THEATRE BASEMENT, REYKJAVÍK ART MUSEUM, IÐNÓ AND NASA

**DJ Platur**  
VEGAMÓT

**DJ Shaft**  
ANGELO

**Siggi Sig. blues quartet**  
RÓSENBERG

**Mammút and Benny Crespo's Gang**  
SMEKKLEYSA (starts at 17:00)

**Hot Club de Paris, Johnny Sexual, Tilly and the Walls and Pétur Ben**  
12 TÓNAR (starts at 17:00)

**Joanne Kearney, Haraman Band, My Summer as a Salvation Soldier and many more**  
KAFFI HLJÓMALIND (starts at 14:00)

**Klovn – DJ set**  
SIRKUS

**Franz and Kristó followed by DJ Danni Deluxe**  
PRIKIÐ

**DJ Árni Sveins**  
KAFFIBARINN

**Ég, Androm and Royal Fortune in concert**  
BAR 11

## FRIDAY – 20 OCTOBER

**Iceland Airwaves festival: www.icelandairwaves.com**  
GRAND ROKK, PRAVDA, GAUKURINN, THE NATIONAL THEATRE BASEMENT, REYKJAVÍK ART MUSEUM, IÐNÓ AND NASA

**Reykjavík Grapevine presents, Westfords special: Skúli, Weapons, Foghorns, Reykjavík!, Skátar and Nine Elevens**  
HRESSÓ (Iceland Airwaves Info Centre)

**Patrick Watson, Reykjavík! and Kimono**  
12 TÓNAR (starts at 17:00)

**Skakkamanage, Hairdoctor and special guests**  
SMEKKLEYSA (starts at 17:00)

**Lay Low, Kira Kira, MidiAmbient and many more**  
KAFFI HLJÓMALIND (starts at 12:00)

**DJ Platur**  
VEGAMÓT

**Santiago and Voxfox in concert**  
RÓSENBERG

**DJ Panoramix and DJ Jónfri**  
ANGELO

**Khan of Finland, Jack Schidt – DJ set**  
SIRKUS



Live music

Thu-Sat

Lækjargötu 2, tel. 551-8008

SIRKUS

**Benny Crespo's Gang and Telepathetics in concert followed by DJ Andrea Jóns**  
DILLON

**DJ's Benni B-Ruff, Dóri DNA and Gisli Galdur**  
PRIKIÐ

**DJ Kasper Björke and Krede**  
KAFFIBARINN

**Wulfgang, Weapons and Pan in concert**  
BAR 11

### SATURDAY - 21 OCTOBER

**Iceland Airwaves festival:**  
[www.icelandairwaves.com](http://www.icelandairwaves.com)  
GRAND ROKK, PRAVDA, GAUKURINN, THE NATIONAL THEATRE BASEMENT, REYKJAVÍK ART MUSEUM, IDNÓ AND NASA

**Reykjavik Grapevine presents, Suðurnes special: Slugs, Tabula Rasa, Kojá, Tommygun, Hellvar and Æla**  
HRESSÓ (Iceland Airwaves Info Centre)

**Eberg, Brazilian Girls and Hafdís Huld**  
12 TÓNAR (starts at 15:00)

**DJ Platur**  
VEGAMÓT

**Reykjavik, Ninety Nine, Dikta and special guests**  
SMEKKLEYSA (starts at 13:00)

**DJ Groovebox at Angelo: DJ's Tommi White, Andrés, Ingvi Shaft and Beatur**  
ANGELO

**DJ President Bongo and DJ Thor**  
SIRKUS

**Brain Police in concert followed by DJ Andrea Jóns**  
DILLON

**Truckload of Steel followed by DJ Gullfoss & Geysir**  
PRIKIÐ

**DJ Benni B-Ruff**  
KAFFIBARINN  
**Tommy Gun, Atómstöðin and Savant in concert**  
BAR 11

**Santiago and Voxfox in concert**  
RÓSENBERG

### SUNDAY - 22 OCTOBER

**Iceland Airwaves festival:**  
[www.icelandairwaves.com](http://www.icelandairwaves.com)  
GAUKURINN

**DJ Andrés**  
SIRKUS

**Lay Low, Rósa, Pétur Ben and DJ**

**Andrea Jóns**  
DILLON

**DJ TBA**  
PRIKIÐ

**Reykjavik Grapevine presents, All Over special: Markús, Svavar Knútur, Lay Low, Helgi Valur, Bob Justman, Pete Ulenbruch, Súkkat and Megas**  
HRESSÓ (Iceland Airwaves Info Centre)

### WEDNESDAY - 25 OCTOBER

**Don Balli Funk**  
KAFFIBARINN

**Hilmar Garðars in concert**  
RÓSENBERG

### THURSDAY - 26 OCTOBER

**DJ's Óli Hjörtur and Rósa**  
KAFFIBARINN

**DJ Tommi White**  
ANGELO

**DJ Benni B-Ruff**  
PRIKIÐ

**Snorri Idol and Kjartan from Ísafold**  
HRESSÓ

**Fabúla in concert**  
RÓSENBERG

### FRIDAY - 27 OCTOBER

**Franz and Kristó followed by DJ Danni Deluxe**  
PRIKIÐ

**DJ Ingvi and Ewok**  
ANGELO

**DJ Árni Sveins**  
KAFFIBARINN

**Helgi Valur troubadour followed by DJ Johnny**  
HRESSÓ

**Krummafótur playing djangojazz**  
RÓSENBERG

### SATURDAY - 28 OCTOBER

**DJ Sampling and DJ Óli Ofur**  
ANGELO

**The Iceland Symphony Orchestra: Fóstbræður Choir 90th Anniversary**  
HÁSKÓLABÍÓ

**Alfons X**  
KAFFIBARINN

**DJ Andri and DJ Kári**  
PRIKIÐ

**Public in concert followed by DJ Johnny**  
HRESSÓ

**Krummafótur playing djangojazz**  
RÓSENBERG



## The Grapevine Presents: Airwaves Off-venue Extravaganza!

You may have noticed that the Iceland Airwaves festival looms over in all its decadent glory. Yeah, we're excited too. One hundred eighty bands performing at some eight venues over the course of five days does seem like a lot, but there's always room for more. In that spirit, the Grapevine decided to cough up its own addition to the festival by sponsoring an off-venue stage at Hressó for Friday, Saturday and Sunday. The first two days are dedicated to displaying the more exciting regional scenes that have developed in Iceland, with the Ísafjörður crowd (and friends) taking the stage on Friday, with Saturday devoted to the Reykjanes peninsula and its plethora of exciting young things. On Sunday night, we have set up an elaborate hangover-recovery theme, with Iceland's (mostly) acoustic team taking over (including the legendary Megas). With most of the bands lined up also enlisted to perform at the festival itself, you can use this opportunity to catch up on exciting acts you may have missed, or just plain want to see one more time.

## Kaffi Hljómalind

This is really getting too much. As if that whole Airwaves festival wasn't enough, we now face a barrage of free off-venue shows around town, designed to lure us in and stuff our heads with music until we plain can't take it anymore. The Hljómalind off-venue program is one of the more ambitious ones being held this year, as it offers a wide selection of almost every band, musician or guitar-owner known to man performing from early 'til late during the course of the festival. Some highlights include performances by Deathmetal Supersquad, I adapt, Kira Kira and Lay Low, but you can be sure to find something interesting at almost all times during Airwaves-week. It also boasts of being all-ages and free, two things the actual festival certainly isn't.

## Nordic Music Days

Nordic Music Days celebrates its 118th anniversary this month, taking place in Iceland between October 5th-14th. A festival of the Nordic Council of Composers, with participants from Faroe Islands and Canada, its emphasis, as the name clearly states, is on new Nordic music as well as combining music with other art forms. The festival will kick off with concerts performed by the Iceland Symphony Orchestra culminating in a world premiere of EDDA 1 by Icelandic composer Jón Leifs. Also performing are Stockholm Saxophone Quartet, Norway's Cikada chamber orchestra and Quatuor Bozzini from Canada and a number of other artists. Among the participating venues are Iceland Academy of Arts, Háskólabíó movie theatre, Hallgrímskirkja Church and even the Blue Lagoon, among many others. For more info visit: [www.nordicmusicdays.is](http://www.nordicmusicdays.is).

**1 CAFÉ**

**Café Roma**  
Laugavegur 118

wireless network

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

**8**

**Tíu Dropar**  
Laugavegur 27

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

**15**

**Café Victor**  
Hafnarstræti 1-3

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

**22**

**Pravda**  
Austurstræti 22

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

**25**

**Ölstofan**  
Vegamótastígur

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

**28**

**Kaffibú**  
Póstbústaðvegur 1

Café, bistro, restaurant – you want to call it, Kaffibú is consistently pleasant and refreshments of various kinds happen to be good. Their selection of beers in Reykjavik is second to none. Try the Cobra and Sól.

**2**

**Ráðhúskaffi**  
City Hall

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

**9**

**Kaffitár**  
Bankastræti 8

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

**16**

**Vegamót**  
Vegamótastígur 4

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

**23**

**Café Cultura**  
Hverfisgata 18

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

**26**

**Thorvaldsen**  
Austurstræti 8

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

**29**

**Glaur**  
Tryggvagata 1

Partly a sports bar, Glaur is a popular venue for live music. It's mostly it's just a good party. They can happen to be good. Arrive before midnight if you want to avoid the queue. You would be hard pressed to find a deal on a keg party there.

**3**

**Grái Kötturinn**  
Hverfisgata 16a

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

**10**

**Segafredo**  
By Lækjartorg

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

**17**

**B5**  
Bankastræti 5

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

**4**

**Kaffi Hljómalind**  
Laugavegur 21

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

**11 BARS 'N' BISTROS**

**Sólun**  
Bankastræti 7a

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

**18**

**Rósenberg**  
Lækjargata 2

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

**SPOTthis**

**Belly's**



Belly's is not a particularly trendy, or clean, establishment, but it offers some of the best beer prices in town along with a welcoming atmosphere and some rather interesting patrons. A multitude of televisions mounted on its walls helps its visitors keep in touch with what's going on in the world of sports; the arm-wrestling machine is fun, too. The cheap beer alone could make Belly's the underpaid Grapevine staff's locale of choice, but it also has a decent music selection.

Hafnarstræti 18a, 101 Reykjavik

**5**

**Mokka**  
Skólavörðustígur 3a

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

**12**

**Litli Ljótí Andarunginn**  
Lækjargata 6b

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

**19**

**Grand Rokk**  
Smíðjustígur 6

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

**6**

**Ömmukaffi**  
Austurstræti

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

**13**

**Kaffibarinn**  
Bergstaðastræti 1

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

**20**

**Bar 11**  
Laugavegur 11

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



**7**

**Babalú**  
Skólavörðustígur 22a

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

**14**

**Sirkus**  
Klapparstígur 30

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

**21**

**Hressingarskálinn**  
Austurstræti 20

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

**24**

**Prikið**  
Bankastræti 12

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

**27**

**Kaffi Amsterdam**  
Hafnarstræti 5

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

**30**

**Dillu**  
Laugavegur 1

Legendary Icelandic DJ Pröstur founded this place, and Pröstur founded this place. You can dance here. This place will be here when you walk in on a Friday night.



**tveir fiskar**

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**tveir fiskar**



**rennslan**  
ræti 9

nt, bar – whatever  
ffibrennslan is a  
place to go for snacks  
whatever variety you  
also have the largest  
Reykjavík. We recom-  
Staroprammen.

## 31 RESTAURANTS

### Krua Thai

Tryggvagata 14

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

## 34 Argentina

Barónsstígur 11a

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

## 37 Tapas

Vesturgata 3b

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

## 44 Bæjarins Bestu

Tryggvagata

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

## MUSEUMS

**Árbæjarsafn**  
Árbær  
www.listsafnreykjavikur.is

**The Culture House**  
Hverfisgata 15  
www.thjodmenning.is

**Reykjavik Electrical Museum**  
Refstöðvarvegur  
www.rafheimar.is

## ambar

gata 20

ambar is also a  
bands and DJs, but  
place to get drunk  
ost private gather-  
on weekdays, and  
essed to get a better  
an here.

## 32 Tveir Fiskar

Geirgata 9

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

## 35 Vín og Skel

Laugavegur 55

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

## 38 Sægreifinn

Geirgata

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

## 45 Subway

Austurstræti

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



## 39 Shalimar

Austurstræti 4

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

## 46 Nonnabiti

Hafnarstræti 11

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

## 40 Við tjörnina

Templarasund 3

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

## 47 Hamborgarabúlla Tómasar (Búllan)

Geirgata 1

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

## 41 FAST FOOD

### American Style

Tryggvagata 26

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

## 48 First Vegetarian

(Á næstu grösum)

Laugavegur 20b

One of the first places in Reykjavík to specialise in vegetarian and vegan dishes. Despite having changed owners a couple of years back, the quality has remained consistent and you almost get the feeling that the place is being run on sheer principle as much as anything else.

## 42 Pizza King

Hafnarstræti 18

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

## 49 Kebabhúsið

Lækjargata 2

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

## 33 Hornið

Hafnarstræti 15

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

## 36 Tjarnarbakkinn

Vonarstræti 3

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

## 43 Bernhöftsbakarí

Bergstaðastræti 13

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

## 50 Vitabar

Bergþórugata 21

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

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**RADIO**

**Rás 1**

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

**Rás 2**

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

**Bylgjan** (98.9 FM)

Light pop music.

**Útvarp Saga** (99.4 FM)

Iceland's oldies station, featuring both Icelandic and foreign music from decades past.

**Talstöðin** (90.9 FM)

Talk radio station, in Icelandic.

**Létt 96.7** (96.7 FM)

Office pop, easy listening.

**FM 957** (95.7 FM)

One of the "hnakkistöðvar," playing pop-rock geared towards urban clubbing youth.

**XFM** (91.9FM)

Iceland's rock station, often playing cutting-edge releases.

**Lindin** (102.9 FM)

Christian broadcasting station, available all over the country.

**TV**

**Rescue Me**

Focusing on a group of New York City firemen, this dark comedy show becomes more twisted, brutal and chaotic with every single episode. When the ill-tempered Tommy Gavin (played by Denis Leary) is not lambasting some punks he tries to patch things up with his ex-wife, reconcile with his three children and drag survivors out of burning buildings. When Tommy's brother starts an affair with his ex-wife while Tommy himself is having some sort of a relationship with his ex-sister-in-law at the same time he's also having sex with his son's teacher, things really start heating up. Not to mention all the personal dilemmas his crewmembers are dealing with, gambling debts, alcoholism and prostitutes. When you think the show can't possibly



get more complex, some new twists and sub-plots slap you right in the face, with a good dash of humour of course. All in all, the characters can be quite likable although nothing is sacred to them, not even family ties or friendships.

**Brotherhood**

There's no actual celebration or a slaughtered calf when the lost son, Mike, returns to his family in the new show Brotherhood on Skjár 1. Mike was lost and now has been found, and after seven years of exile he's here to stir things up in town. This drama, set in an Irish neighbourhood in Providence, revolves around main character Tommy Caffee, who is a family man and a local politician. His returned brother Mike has earned a reputation as a criminal and conman and is involved with the Irish mob. With the aim of taking the



power in Providence's underworld, Caffee is implicated in his brother's corruption, collusion and bribery while trying to fight racism in the neighbourhood and be a good role model for his kids. It doesn't help that his lonely wife is cheating on him with the mailman. Nothing seems to work out, but of course Caffee never loses his cool.

**The Seventh Heaven with Hemmi Gunn**

Hemmi Gunn's comeback to the TV screen is far from taking an end. Now he returns once again, not with a group of singing celebrities but as an Icelandic Jay Leno replica, broadcasting life from club NASA every Thursday night. Hemmi has years of experience as a talk show host and following the basic format of such shows it will feature celebrity interviews, entertainers, and yes, some singing. Dilana and Rockstar Magni were his first guests along with Björgvin Halldórsson, Raggi Bjarna and some politicians. As we have many locals who just thrive on being in the spotlight, regardless of whether they have anything interesting to say, there will be no problem filling space in upcoming shows. Not all agree on how professional the first episode was, but as the nation seems to adore Hemmi, this newest addition might just turn out to be a success.



**The U.S. vs. John Lennon**

The U.S. vs. John Lennon, a documentary by David Leaf and John Scheinfeld, is a retrospective examination of Lennon's life – political, personal, and professional – from 1966-1976. The intended focus is the interplay between Lennon's activism and the U.S. Government's attempts to silence and deport him as viewed through a nostalgic and often romantic lens. Lennon is portrayed using archived footage and extensive use is made of interviews with Walter Cronkite, George McGovern, Mario Cuomo, Geraldo Rivera, G. Gordon Liddy, Gore Vidal and, of course, the late Lennon's wife Yoko Ono. The film has been oft criticized for presenting a view of Lennon that caters more to the myth of the man (and the memories of his wife) than a realistic presentation of his memory.



**The Road To Guantanamo**

Michael Winterbottom's documentary film tells the story three young British men who make the philanthropic, if poorly thought-out, decision to cross the border from Pakistan to Afghanistan as the War On Terror breaks-out. Theirs is a choice which irreversibly changes their lives and results in their almost three year imprisonment in the U.S. Army-run detention facilities in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. At times both extremely disturbing and heart-breakingly funny, The Road to Guantanamo is a roller-coaster of strikingly realistic re-enactments of daily lives of modern political prisoners. Including interviews and commentary from the ex-detainees themselves – as companion narration to the scripted 'plot' – makes this film one of the most unbearably intimate and horrifyingly human vicarious journeys to undertake as a patron of documentary cinema.

**THE ANT BULLY**

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

**BARNYARD**

Animal Farm, as seen by today's storytellers. Probably.

**CHILDREN OF MEN**

This Alfonso Cuarón adaptation of a P.D. James novel is set in 2027... where no one can have children! Supposedly manages to be both apocalyptic and entertaining.

**GARFIELD: A TAIL OF TWO KITTIES**

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

**JACKASS 2**

Doing for culture in general what the Spanish Inquisition did for Catholicism, the Jackass crew churns 'em out in this one. Give them your money, please.

**MY SUPER EX-GIRLFRIEND**

Uma Thurman plays a cuckolded superhero out for revenge on her former beau. Sounds interesting enough. Smárabíó.

**TALLADEGA NIGHTS: THE BAL-LAD OF RICKY BOBBY**

Comedian Will Ferrell continues banging his comedic drum – as usual, we all dance to the beat. Now featuring drag-racing! Smárabíó, Regnboginn, Laugarásbíó, Borgarbíó.

**TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE: THE BEGINNING**

The origins of THE CHAINSAW MASSACRE are explored in this shock-fest gorestravaganza.

**THE DEVIL WEARS PRADA**

In which a naïve young country girl tackles an über-bitch magazine editor played by Meryl Streep. It's nice to have you back, Meryl.

**THE GUARDIAN**

Kevin Costner is back! This time, he's serving in the Coast Guard alongside a reckless young hothead played by Ashton Kutcher.

**UNITED 93**

This first of the 9/11 feature films attempts to give a real-time account of the events on board United Flight 93, where passengers foiled the terrorist plot. Sambíóin Kringlunni.

**YOU, ME AND DUPREE**

Owen Wilson stars as a best man who overstays his welcome at Matt Dillon and Kate Hudson's house. Laugarásbíó.

**PETTA ER EKKERT MÁL**

A full-length documentary on late Icelandic legend and former strongest man in the world, Jón Páll Sigmarsson. Smárabíó, Regnboginn.

**THE WICKER MAN**

Nicolas Cage plays a sheriff baffled by a neo-pagan community in this pointless remake of the classic 1973 movie of the same name.

**THE WILD**

You know the score by now; CGI-based action comedy featuring some lovable shiny animals, celebrity voice talent and William Shatner. Probably very amusing. Sambíóin Álfabakka, Sambíóin Kringlunni, Háskólabíó, Nýja Bíó Akureyri, Nýja Bíó Keflavík.

**MONSTER HOUSE**

A family-type CGI-flick about some neighbourhood kids' dealings with a haunted house.

**THE THIEF LORD**

A German English-language production based on Cornelia Funke's fantasy novel. Supposedly avoids the trappings of the colonies' family adventure movies.

**WORLD TRADE CENTER**

Oliver Stone is responsible for this non-conspiracy theory take on the events of September 11. Allegedly tasteful and moving.

Visit [www.kvikmyndir.is](http://www.kvikmyndir.is) for regularly updates on new films and showtimes.

**Regnboginn**  
Hverfisgata 54  
101 Reykjavík  
Tel. 551-9000

**Sambíóin**  
Álfabakka 8  
109 Reykjavík  
Tel. 575-8900

**Smárabíó**  
Smáralind  
201 Kópavogur  
Tel. 564-0000

**Háskólabíó**  
Hagatorgi  
107 Reykjavík  
Tel. 525-5400

**Kringlubíó**  
Kringlunni 4-12  
103 Reykjavík  
Tel. 575-8900

**Selfossbíó**  
Eyrarvegur 2  
800 Selfoss  
Tel. 482-3007

**Laugarásbíó**  
Laugarási  
104 Reykjavík  
Tel. 565-0118

**Sambíóin Akureyri**  
Ráðhústorgi  
600 Akureyri  
Tel. 461-4666

**Nýja-Bíó**  
Hafnargata 33  
230 Reykjaneshar  
Tel. 421-1170

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

### 101 GALLERY

Hverfisgata 18  
Thu.-Sat. 14-17 and by appointment  
[www.101hotel.is/101hotel/101gallery/](http://www.101hotel.is/101hotel/101gallery/)

08 Sep – 14 Oct  
**"Verkamenn / Workers"**  
Spessi photo exhibition

### AURUM

Bankastræti 4  
Mon. – Fri. 10-18  
Sat. 11-16

16 Sep – 13 Oct  
**Aron Bergmann exhibition**

### THE EINAR JÓNSSON MUSEUM

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

Permanent exhibition of the work of sculptor Einar Jónsson

### THE CULTURE HOUSE

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

29 June 2006 – 27 Feb 2007  
**Icelandic Fashion 2006**

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

### DWARF GALLERY

Grundarstígur 21  
Opening Hours Vary  
[this.is/birta](http://this.is/birta)

### GALLERY 100 DEGREES

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

### GALLERÍ ANIMA

Ingólfsstræti 8  
Tues.-Sat. 13-17  
<http://www.animagalleri.is/>

15 Sept – 07 Oct  
**Iain Sharpe**

03 Oct – 04 Nov  
**Hjörtur Hjartarson**

### GALLERY FOLD

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

### GALLERÍ SÆVARIS KARLS

Bankastræti 7  
[www.saevarkarl.is](http://www.saevarkarl.is)  
Mon.-Fri. 10-18  
Sat. 10-16

Current exhibition:  
**Rudolf L. Reiter**

### GALLERY TURPENTINE

Ingólfsstræti 5  
Tue.-Fri. 12-18  
Sat. 11-16  
[www.turpentine.is](http://www.turpentine.is)

### GEL GALLERÍ

Hverfisgata 37  
Mon.-Fri. 10-19  
Sat. 10-17

01 Aug - ?  
**Aron Bergman**

### GERÐUBERG CULTURAL CENTRE

Gerðuberg 3-5  
Mon.-Thu. 11-17  
Wed. 11-21  
Thur.-Fri. 11-17  
Sun.-Sat. 13-16

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

23. Sept - 12. Nov '06  
**Reykjavík - Úr launsátri / Reykjavík - From an Ambush**  
Ari Sigvaldason photo exhibit

### GYLLINHÆÐ

Laugavegur 23  
Thu.-Sun. 14-18

Students from the second year of the Academy

### 18 GALLERY

Klapparstígur 33  
Tue.-Fri. 11-17  
Sat. and by appointment 13-17  
[www.i8.is](http://www.i8.is)

14 Sept – 21 Oct  
**Bakgrunnur / Background**  
Hildur Bjarnadóttir

### ICELANDIC LABOUR UNION'S ART GALLERY

Freyjugata 41  
Tue.-Sun. 13-17  
Free Entrance

### KLING & BANG GALLERY

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

**CLOSED until**  
**14 Oct – 05 Nov '06**

Hrafnhildur Arnardóttir & New York artists

### HALLGRÍMSKIRKJA CHURCH

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

26 October – 29 October  
**Festivities in Hallgrímskirkja Church Celebrating the 20th anniversary of the church's consecration 26 October 1986 with exhibition of documents and photos from the church's construction period 1945-1986 and from the consecration ceremony itself.**

### LIVING ART MUSEUM

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

### THE NATIONAL GALLERY

Fríkirkjuvegur  
Tue.-Sun. 11-17  
Free Entrance  
[listasafn.is](http://listasafn.is)

### THE NATIONAL MUSEUM

Suðurgata 41  
Open daily 10-17  
[natmus.is/English](http://natmus.is/English)

30 Sep – 26 Nov  
**Ókunn sjónarhorn/Unknown perspective & Myndir ún lífi mínu/Images from a life**

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

Permanent Exhibitions:  
**The Making of a Nation**

### THE NORDIC HOUSE

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

### NÆSTI BAR

Ingólfsstræti 1a

Regular exhibitions by local artists

### REYKJAVÍK 871 +/- 2 : THE SETTLEMENT EXHIBITION

Ádalstræti 16  
Open daily 10-17

### REYKJAVÍK ART MUSEUM

#### ÁSMUNDUR SVEINSSON SCULPTURE MUSEUM

Sigtún  
Open daily 10-16  
Admission ticket is valid on the same day for all three museums.  
[www.listasafnreykjavikur.is](http://www.listasafnreykjavikur.is)

#### HAFNARHÚS

Tryggvögata 17  
Open daily 10-17

10 Jun 2006 – 07 Jan 2007  
**The Erró Collection: Graphic Works**

#### KJARVALSSTAÐIR

Flókagata  
Open daily 10-17

08 Apr – 03 Dec  
**Let's Look at Art: A series of exhibitions especially designed for children**

#### REYKJAVÍK MUSEUM

Kistuhylur 4  
[www.arbaefarsafn.is](http://www.arbaefarsafn.is)

#### THE REYKJAVÍK MUSEUM OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Grófarhús, Tryggvögata 15, 6th floor  
Weekdays 12-19  
Sat.-Sun. 13-17  
Free Entrance  
[www.ljosmyndasafnreykjavikur.is/english/index.htm](http://www.ljosmyndasafnreykjavikur.is/english/index.htm)

30 Sep – 19 Nov  
**POLSKA 1969-1989 - Poland under communism**  
Chris Niedenthal

28 Sept – 22 Nov  
**Gollí photo exhibit**

#### SAFN

Laugavegur 37  
Wed.-Fri. 14-18  
Sat.-Sun. 14-17  
Free Entrance  
[safn.is/english/index.html](http://safn.is/english/index.html)

16 Sept – 05 Nov '06  
**Tilo Baumgärtel & Martin Kobe**

In October Safn will be presenting a performance art series as part of the Sequences Art Festival. Besides Safn, over 30 Venues around Reykjavik will be utilized for exhibition of the event's performance art pieces. Updated schedules and listings can be found online at [www.sequences.is](http://www.sequences.is)

### SIGURJÓN ÓLAFSSON MUSEUM

Laugarnestangi 70  
Tue.-Sun. 14-17

Permanent exhibition of the work of sculptor Sigurjón Ólafsson

Photography in the Streets of Downtown Reykjavík

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

### >>>OUTSIDE REYKJAVÍK

Seyðisfjörður:

#### SKAFTFELL

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

Hafnarfjörður:

#### HAFNARBORG

Mon.-Sun. 11-17

Keflavík:

#### SUÐSUÐVESTUR

Hafnargata 22  
Thu.-Fri. 16-18  
Sat.-Sun. 14-17  
[www.sudsudvestur.is](http://www.sudsudvestur.is)

Akureyri:

#### DALÍ GALLERÍ

Brekkugata 9  
Mon.-Sat. 14-18

#### GALLERÍ +

Brekkugata 35  
(Closed for the summer)

#### JÓNAS VIÐAR GALLERY

Fri.-Sat. 13-18

#### AKUREYRI ART MUSEUM

Kaupvangsstræti 12  
Tue.-Sun. 12-17  
[listasafn.akureyri.is](http://listasafn.akureyri.is)

26 Aug – 22 Oct '06  
Visual Arts

An Exhibition of the works of Icelandic National Visual Arts Award Nominees





## Indigenous Culture from Canada

A Canadian Culture Festival mixing modern aboriginal culture in dance, acting, music and visual arts with seminars, films and concerts will take place at various venues in Kópavogur from October 14-22. With a special focus on Canadian indigenous art the festival aims to highlight the Inuit culture as well as contemporary artists in Canada. Three exhibitions will open in Kópavogur Art Gallery while Salurinn Concert Hall will house a selection of live music acts as well as seminars on indigenous and pioneer culture in Canada while at the Kópavogur Library, emphasis is on films and literature. The festival concludes with a rendezvous with writer Michael Ondaatje (author of *The English Patient*) at Salurinn on October 22, after which the Oscar-winning film, based on his novel, will be screened.

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



## Rooms for Improvement

Kjartan Þorbjörnsson, better known as Golli, recently opened a photo exhibition in *The Shot* at Reykjavík Museum of Photography. Golli, who had been shooting photographs inside prison cells around the country, got the idea to do the same at student dormitories, which resemble each other in many ways, although the atmosphere inside is quite different. The photos aren't sorted into categories so viewers guess which room belongs to a student and which one to an inmate. The exhibit runs through November 22nd.

Reykjavík Museum of Photography (Tryggvagata 15, 6th floor) Monday-Friday 10-19, Saturday-Sunday 13-17



## Iceland Dance Company

The Iceland Dance Company will premiere two new original dance pieces, October 12. Both pieces were created by Icelandic choreographers. The first piece is *Við erum komin* (We Have Arrived) by Ólöf Ingólfssdóttir. The music is composed by Áskell Másson and Nordic singer/songwriter Maja Ratkje, who will perform the music at the premiere. The music is a part of Nordic Music Days in Iceland, October 5-14. The second piece is *Hver um sig* (Much About Nothing) by the choreography team Vaðall, consisting of Aðalheiður Halldórsdóttir and Valgerður Rúnarsdóttir, both dancers at the Iceland Dance Company. The music is composed by Valdimar Jóhannsson and Jóhann Friðgeir Jóhannsson.

The Iceland Dance Company (Borgarleikhúsið, Listabraut 3) Monday-Tuesday 10-18, Wednesday-Friday 10-20, Saturday-Sunday 12-20



## African souvenirs in Iceland

Entitled *Hippos and Carrier Women*, African souvenirs are on display at the Reykjavík Cultural Centre in Gerðuberg. The exhibition consists of souvenirs that Ólöf Gerður Sigfúsdóttir, anthropologist, has collected through the years from Icelanders who have travelled around the continent. With a mixture of old crafts and modern pieces the exhibitions portrays a different culture and progressive creation. In collaboration with the Cultural Centre, the Reykjavík Academy will screen the documentary *In and Out of Africa* at its lodge in the JL-building, Hringbraut 4, October 12. The exhibition is open until November 12.

Reykjavík Cultural Centre (Gerðuberg 3-5) Monday-Friday 11-17, Saturday-Sunday 13-16



# GRAPEVINE ALBUM REVIEWS



## Tómas R. Einarsson Romm Tomm Tomm

Worth four beers.

Bassist Tómas R. Einarsson is an institution in the small Icelandic jazz world. He is known for excellent bass playing on numerous albums with a handful of bands. Apparently he bought his first bass with money earned on an oil rig in the North Atlantic. Now that's jazz. Romm Tomm Tomm is his third album with Cuban/Latin jazz and includes 14 musicians from Iceland and Cuba. It is filled to the brim with a summer feeling, excellent

playing and great compositions. DJ Gísli Galdur of Trabant fame adds some turntable magic on a few tunes, thereby modernising the conventional salsa feel, especially on the wicked track Eineygði Kötturinn (One-Eyed Cat). This reviewer admits to not being much for hot salsa dancing but this album certainly calls for some of that. An excellent album for hot summer nights and cool Mojitos. *PH*



## Brain Police Beyond the Wasteland

Worth three beers.

Veteran rockers Brain Police return with their fourth studio album, sporting a new guitarist, Búi Bendtsen. The result is more guitar heavy than past albums without losing their distinctive stoner-rock sound. The band is as tight as Baden-Powell's Boy Scout knots – especially the connection between drummer Jónbi and bass player Höddi. Seen live Brain Police are a tough act to follow and Beyond the Wasteland captures that well. So a great album? Almost, but not quite. The problem with Brain Police

is their monotonous sound – it's easy to spot their songs on the radio – but it's harder than hell to pinpoint which song it is or from what album. Beyond the Wasteland shows improvement in that department. Evidently, Brain Police are developing their sound. So if you're not anal about musicians constantly coming up with new ideas (hell, AC/DC have made over 15 great albums that all sound pretty much the same) and just want a good, solid, rock album then Brain Police has your medicine. *PH*



## Toggi Puppy

Worth two beers.

Toggi has spent the last three years honing his debut album and it shows. The first single, Heart in Line, is a polished melancholy acoustic pop tune – complete with a full-blown string chorus. These 12 songs are well-written, well-executed and well... not that memorable. It's a great modern mystery how Coldplay have become the world's biggest band but it's not a great mystery where Toggi gets his inspiration from – although Travis would be a better compari-

son. But he has a knack for writing good pop tunes and the lyrics have the necessary ingredients of sadness, sorrow and regret. Toggi's voice is perfectly suited for these songs and the production – including the pretty booklet – is excellent. It's just that all this feels so harmless somehow. I'm sure a fair number of songs will become big radio hits and a fair number of lonely people will sing along – but that's as far as it will go. *PH*



## Donni And Clout Monkey Paw

Worthless.

Ah yes, improv music: Why? Why the fuck? This is stupid and retarded jam music for stupid and retarded people, and if that isn't bad enough, they've taken the liberty of writing all kinds of cute little anecdotes and comments on the recording of the individ-

ual songs in the liner notes, like anyone would ever give a shit. This entire CD is about as enjoyable as waking up to the sound of your legs being separated from your torso with a rusty hatchet. *SE*



## Fighting Shit Forgotten Daughters, Abandoned Sons

Worth three 1/2 beers.

Fighting Shit's second full-lengther is a tasty, if somewhat shallow chunk of thrashcore that speeds through its half-hour with vigorous power, stopping just long enough in the quiet areas to keep one from losing

interest. The whole thing is rounded up nicely with its finely crafted closer, I Am The Quiet End, an epic-length battle between metal chord progressions and punk riffs and beats. *SE*



## Gestir Burtur Frá Toftunum

Worth two beers.

This Faroese melodrama doesn't really focus on its strengths enough to create the rain-drenched mental murk it strives for, but there are slices of brilliance here, such as the cavernous, smoggy waft of Í Skuggum Av

Sólina and Døgg's indulgent croon. Too bad the strings and some of the guitar work tend to get a little bit too jazzy and plain, condensing the album's mysterious fog into a pool of stagnant water. *SE*

### Guide to the rating system:

In prison, you deal in cigarettes. In Iceland, you deal in beers. We don't condone this, we just accept it as fact. One beer = 500 ISK at the seedy bars we frequent. That means a mainstream release costs up to 2500 ISK... or \$40. Yes that much. That's why we do the beer thing. Reviewed by Páll Hilmarrsson and Sindri Eldon



The Whale Watching Centre offers daily whale watching tours on Faxaflói bay. These tours include a free visit to The Whale Exhibition Room, a sightseeing around Puffin island\* and other natural wonders – all at a convenient distance from Reykjavík!

\*Puffin season approx. 20.05–15.08

### Schedule

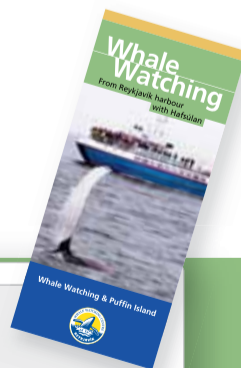
Seven days a week

Puffin season\*

April - May	June - July - August	Sept.	Oct.
9:00	9:00	9:00	13:00
13:00	13:00	13:00	
	17:00		

# Whale Watching

From Reykjavík harbour with Hafsúlan



Call +354 533 2660  
www.whalewatching.is

# DINING, EATING & GRUBBING

By **Haukur Magnússon** and **Steinunn Jakobsdóttir** Photos by **Skari**

## VITABAR

Bergþórugötu 21, 101 Reykjavík  
Tel: 551-7200



On the corner of Vitastígur and Bergþórugata stands the legendary local bar Vitabar, a Reykjavík burger fan's favorite. This is the place most locals will point out to tourists looking for a quick hamburger meal, the way hamburgers should be presented, that is, those who are fed up with multinational chains like McDonald's and Burger King, who by the way can't be found in the city centre. Vitabar actually is a pub and a popular hangout spot for a crowd of thirsty middle-aged regulars, but if you don't mind the smoke or the occasional drunkenness the burgers are simply the juiciest you'll get in Reykjavík, and the price to pay is fairly cheap as well.

When entering Vitabar, one's first thought will probably not be that you just set foot into one of downtown's more popular fast food restaurants. The place is not very big and the interior is rather basic. A couple of tables are aligned against the walls, the lighting is rather murky and the establishment hasn't been renovated for years, but all that helps in creating a cosy feeling where you just want to take it easy, as if right at home. A big bonus is the selection of newspapers and magazines that fill one corner of the counter for customers to browse while waiting for a meal.

The place was quite busy when my com-

panion and I arrived on a Thursday evening. Busy in the sense that almost every table was occupied. Even the counter contained customers gulping down a big one. Luckily we got a table and with no real need to look at the menu we both ordered the specialty, the Gleym-mér-ey burger or Forget-Me-Not burger, consisting of a 200 grams hamburger covered in blue cheese and garlic sauce. Along with a small portion of French fries (which should be quite enough for a normal eater) and a soda, the meal only put us back 1.050 ISK.

I have to give compliments to the service, which was excellent. We only waited a couple of minutes for our fresh-from-the-grill burgers to arrive at the table and the hearty dish was just as expected. Made the old-fashioned way, the burger is extremely flavourfull. The beef itself perfectly grilled and with the right amount of sauce, the burger was just as greasy as it should be. As the sauce dripped down our chins, we were once again reminded that the Gleym-mér-ey burger is the ultimate, perched on top of the hamburger kingdom.

For those who don't like the blue-cheese taste there's always a special offer on a cheeseburger with fries for 650 ISK. Also worth mentioning is the beef steak, which comes with fries, salad, béarnaise sauce and a large beer for a laughable 1,700 ISK.

In my opinion, few things in life are better than a bite at Vitabar, especially if you're on a tight budget. If you're aching for a burger and beer in a chilled-out atmosphere or just need to grab a quick meal on the way home from work, Vitabar comes highly recommended. *SJ*

## CARUSO

Þinghólsstræti 1, 101 Reykjavík  
Tel. 562-7335



Caruso has long been of the establishments one is bound to notice while strolling down Bankastræti any given night. Its trademark of sorts is an inviting row of candle-lit windows, where one can usually observe a plethora of seemingly satisfied patrons engaged in conversation while gorging on the restaurant's version of Italian food.

The restaurant Caruso, then, has an allure when seen from the street, so my companion and I were excited to have the chance to experience it first hand. We were not let down. The first thing one notices when entering Caruso is that it's every bit as cosy as their window-display indicates. A warmly lit, comfortable establishment, the undertones of an Emiliana Torrini album quietly playing in the background proved a perfect companion to the relaxing dining experience we enjoyed.

Caruso's menu is spun out of Italian culinary traditions, albeit with a twist; few of the courses are traditionally Italian in the strictest sense. While waiting to order, we munched on fresh baguettes smeared with a garlic-style sauce that accompanied (we were also provided with consumer size packages of smjör – an unfortunate style breaker). For starters, we decided to sample carpaccio with fresh parmigiano (1,550 ISK) along

with an interesting course, thinly sliced tuna with tomatoes and mozzarella (1,490). The carpaccio was simply put impeccable. The tuna dish tasted good and was inventively presented.

The extravagant blend of veal and lobster-tails (4,390) was our main course, along with spaghetti Calabrese (1,790). Our otherwise competent waiter neglected to ask for our preferred cooking of the veal, so the too-well-for-our-tastes state it arrived in was a foreseeable disappointment. The course was satisfying and fine tasting however, although the lobster-tails didn't serve any real purpose apart from adding an air of luxury to the meal. Also extravagant was the size of the veal-cut: fans of meat will not be let down by it.

The Calabrese was an altogether subtler affair. Plentiful and modestly presented, the course carried the pleasant taste of its fresh ingredients followed by a surprisingly hot aftertaste. The spaghetti was boiled to perfection, too, something often lacking in Iceland's Italian restaurants.

We enjoyed our desserts in a pleasant Cognac lounge reminiscent of a larger version of some grandmother's living room. While the homemade coconut ice cream 'Caruso' (1,150) was a standard affair, it managed to arouse our stomachs out of the slumber the heavy meal had put them in and thus served its purpose well. However, our order of liquid chocolate cake with ice cream (1,290) was a disappointment: although it had a pleasant taste, it simply wasn't liquid – causing it to remind us more of a bakery-style 'skúffukaka'. *HM*



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# BEZT Í HEIMI

## Kaffitár



## Coffee for the Coffee Enthusiast

BY SVEINN BIRKIR BJÖRNSSON

The company Kaffitár (i.e. Coffeetear – reflecting the Icelandic habit of asking for ‘a tear’ of coffee) was established in 1990 by coffee lover Aðalheiður Héðinsdóttir. Her goal was to educate her countrymen on the finer aspects of coffee drinking. The company imports the finest coffee available, directly from farmers around the world. Héðinsdóttir is one of the company’s two coffee samplers and travels the world to find the best available raw materials as well as to establish a professional relationship with the farmers themselves in places such as Kenya, Nicaragua and Colombia. The coffee is selected after careful scrutiny, where the coffee’s aroma, taste and body are judged and only the best is deemed good enough. The coffee itself is processed in Iceland under the company’s strict quality standards.

After establishing a viable import business, Héðinsdóttir decided to branch out, starting a chain of coffeehouses around Reykjavík. One of these happens to be my favourite coffee shop in town. The Kaffitár shop located in the National Museum of Iceland. Sitting squarely on the University of Iceland campus, Kaffitár is a favourite among university students, offering a product far superior than the university cafeteria.

The newly renovated museum building offers the perfect surroundings to enjoy a tasty cup of your favourite beverage. The museum’s book shop offers the appropriate mental stimulation, while the quiet museum atmosphere allows for easy flowing conversation. A large window offers a view over the university bookstore and a small pond outside that brings an element of tranquillity to the place.

The selection of beverages is plentiful. My personal favourite is the Americano, a delicious espresso saturated with a little hot water. For those with a sweet tooth, a hot cup of cocoa is always enjoyable. A large selection of quality tea from all four corners of the world is also available. I must admit that I have a guilty pleasure for the chai latte, a milk-based tea drink, flavoured with Indian chai mix and a lot of syrup.

Of course, if you are hungry for something more substantial than liquid, a selection of scones, bagels and other goods are available. The biscotti comes highly recommended.

If lounging around in coffeehouses, leading the bohemian life is not your cup of tea (pun intended), it is also possible to buy ground coffee or coffee beans by weight and enjoy your cup at home, or perhaps, put it in a thermos and enjoy it out in the wilderness. Nothing compares to a hot cup of coffee out in the nature.

But good coffee is not produced by the raw material alone. At Kaffitár it is possible to stock up on all the available equipment to produce and enjoy both coffee and tea, be it coffee grinders, cups, kettles or French press coffee makers.

You could really say that it is the one-stop coffee shop.

*Kaffitár*  
Suðurgata 41, 101 Reykjavík  
Tel. +354 551 7710

*Opening hours: Tuesday-Friday from 8-17;  
Weekends: 11-17*



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Soloists :: Gunnar Guðbjörnsson,  
Bjarni Thor Kristinsson  
Choir :: Schola Cantorum  
Choirmaster :: Hörður Askelsson  
Jón Leifs :: Edda I

SATURDAY, **OCTOBER 21TH** @ 3:00 PM

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- 40TH ANNIVERSARY

Conductor :: Kurt Kopeccky  
Choirs and brass band of Mosfellsbær  
Hector Berlioz :: Roman Carnival  
Pjotr Tchaikovsky :: 1812 Overture  
Páll P. Pálsson :: Arrangements for Choir  
and Orchestra

(CONCERT IN MOSFELLSBÆR)

SATURDAY, **OCTOBER 28TH** @ 5:00 PM

FÓSTBRÆÐUR MALE CHOIR  
- 90TH ANNIVERSARY

Conductor :: Árni Harðarson  
Male Choir of Fóstbræður  
Various songs (arr. Jón Þórarinnsson)  
Gustav Holst :: Six choral folk songs  
Samuel Barber :: A stopwatch and  
an ordnance map

TUESDAY, **OCTOBER 31ST** @ 7:30PM

BEETHOVEN / BRAHMS I

Conductor :: Rumon Gamba  
Soloist :: Olli Mustonen  
Beethoven :: Piano Concerto no. 1  
Beethoven :: Piano Concerto no. 2  
Brahms :: Symphony no. 3

THURSDAY, **NOVEMBER 2ND** @ 7:30PM

BEETHOVEN / BRAHMS II

Conductor :: Rumon Gamba  
Soloist :: Víkingur Ólafsson  
Beethoven :: Piano Concerto no. 3  
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# Reykjavík International Film Festival

The Grapevine goes to the movies

BY ÁSGEIR H INGÓLFSSON

## Turtles Can Fly

Turtles Can Fly, and so can Kurdish cinema. Director Ghobadi's stated intent is to help breed a true Kurdish culture of cinema and just with this one film he puts many more established film cultures to shame. The film is a stunningly beautiful meditation on childhood in the midst of a never-ending war. Our main protagonist is Soran, always nicknamed Satellite since one of his many talents is to install those prophets of the newest CNN broadcasted war. He is the hustler of the town, but one with a heart of gold and all his dealings seem aimed to help the children in the village, since the adults seem to busy watching the news. We also have the clairvoyant Henkov, the most resolute armless boy you ever saw, his little sister Armin by whom Satellite is smitten, and a baby boy who turns out not to be their brother but just a child left behind by those who had killed their parents. Henkov isn't the only one to be handicapped though, a lack of limbs is quite common with these kids and they move fluidly despite that. This is landmine country. But the nobility and purity of heart some of these kids display is enough to soften even the most cold-hearted critic. And Armin, Soran's sad and haunted object of affection, has the grief of the world on her shoulders. If there's any soul in us we will too by the end.

## Princess

Princess is a pitch-dark morality tale of a priest who goes on a mission to avenge his dead porn-star sister, accompanied by the sister's baby daughter Mia. This is not only the perfect answer to anyone who thinks cartoons are just for kids but also a bloody good movie. In an inspired move flashbacks are made from blurry live action footage, giving us the back-story on two very different yet close siblings, August the clergyman and Christina, the Princess of the title. While dead she is still very visible since the company she worked for sees no reason to recall her material after her death, meaning little Mia will encounter her mother in the nearest newsstand. The movie shifts easily between an icy revenge thriller to tender scenes where August gets to know his little niece Mia. Then it turns into the movie Fight Club would have been had it been made by an angry feminist but by the final scene we're reminded of the unflinching morality of a Christopher Nolan film where the end never justifies the means. Perhaps not for the faint of heart but certainly full of heart.

## Paradise Now

They are monsters to some and martyrs to others. But rather than judging the notorious suicide bombers of our time it wouldn't hurt to try to understand where they are coming from. Here we have two childhood friends in Palestine, Said and Khaled, who go on a mission that goes awry before it can properly begin – and after that questions are raised about whether they should try again or not. These are ordinary men in hellish circumstances, having lived under occupation since birth. A girl they know challenges them on their methods and tells them they are harming the cause to no end. And while they may not share her belief in a peaceful solution one starts to feel they agree about the futility of their mission. The title is a clear indication of that, Paradise Now as in right now. Said repeatedly refers to life under the occupation as hell on earth and seems to crave the paradise he's been promised on the other side. That actually raises interesting questions about religious fundamentalism, with its strong belief in a better afterlife. Can it be that such notions will always thrive in those

hellish environments where redemption in the next life seems much further away than the supposed paradise of the afterlife?

## Lights in the Dusk

Aki Kaurismäki is probably the one Finnish director you've heard of. His work has shown us the Finns as a nation of reserved people who talk little and move their other facial muscles even less. Combine that with a quirky sense of humour and you have the potential for a film as hilarious as Kaurismäki's previous Leningrad Cowboys Go America. But repeat it often enough and you start to become a bit of a parody of yourself, and even guilty of reinforcing national stereotypes rather than exploring them. This, his most recent film, centres on a lonely watchman who falls in love with a homely blond. But later we see that same girl turned to ice by a different hairstyle and clothing and we immediately recall the icy blonds of Hitchcock and sure enough the story seems to be taking a Vertigo-like turn when it turns out she has been hired to manipulate him in order to steal some jewellery. But sadly the movie never comes close to the emotional complexity of Hitchcock's masterpiece. It does, however, always maintain the warmth Kaurismäki has towards his characters and that does go a long way.

## 12:08, East of Bucharest

There are some who say the Romanian revolution of 1989 wasn't really a revolution at all, but simply a scheme cooked up by those next in charge to Nicolae Ceausescu who had grown tired and fearful of the tyrant's idiosyncrasies. Those theories take strength from the fact many of those have remained in power and proven themselves well-versed in the corruption Ceausescu bred, although they've thankfully never equalled that royal family for sheer madness. Director Corneliu Porumboiu doesn't try to ask those questions directly but rather wonders what exactly a revolution is and how you can be a part of it. After an aimless first half the movie comes to life inside of a TV studio on December 22nd, exactly 16 years after Ceausescu fled in a helicopter and relinquished power. It's the talk show from hell, featuring a host incredibly uncomfortable in front of the camera and two old men who reminisce aimlessly about the events, although one of them is more busy making paper airplanes from his note sheets. The other claims to have taken part in the revolution, but when viewer after viewer calls in doubting his words we start to wonder if cheering in the streets after it's finally safe makes one a revolutionary or not. The main criticism is really that he had been too late for the revolution because after 12:08 everybody knew dancing in the streets revolting was perfectly safe (although that is surely a latter-day simplification). It is of course an absurd notion that one can be a few minutes late for a national uprising but puts the question of the nature of revolutions under the microscope. These questions are interesting, but sadly the scene (which is more than half the movie) goes on a little too long for the film to truly deliver.

## Zidane, a 21st Century Portrait

In the beautiful Kurdish film Turtles Can Fly Zinedine Zidane is referred to, proudly, as a Muslim by a young boy. Shortly afterwards an armless boy headbutts our main protagonist to the ground. The film was made before the World Cup final but I don't think anybody in the audience could help but think of the Gallic master at that moment. Zidane's exit from the world of football last summer was probably the most dramatic

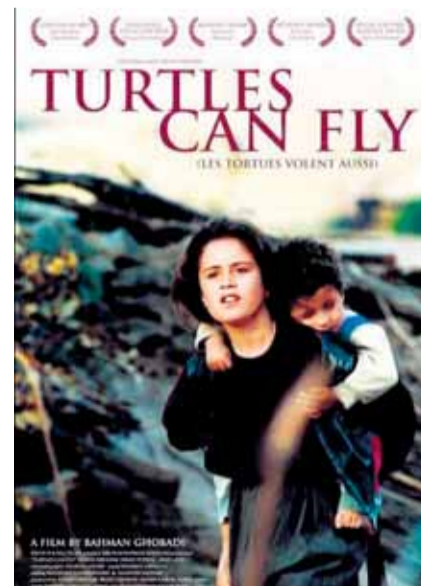
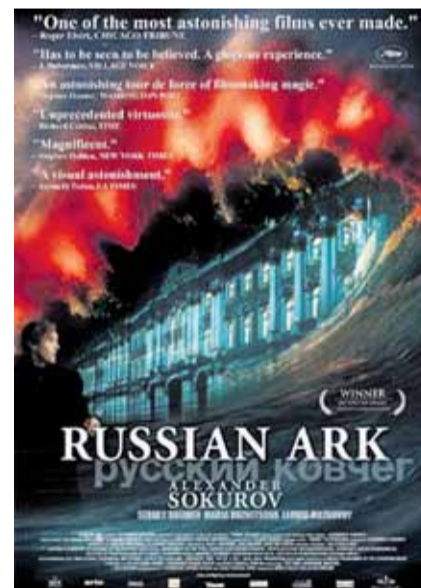
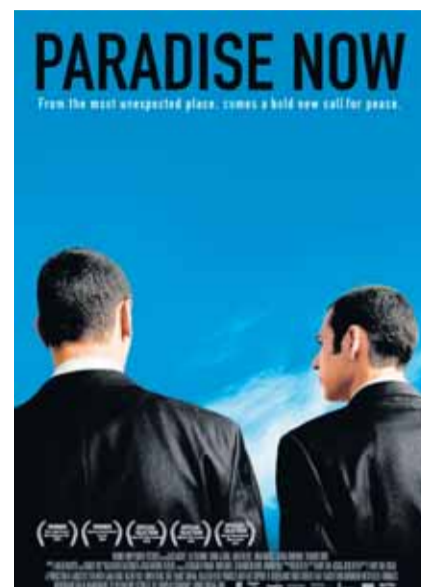
and intriguing exit of any athlete in living memory. The highs, lows and subtexts of his German adventure would have made Shakespeare proud. Sadly, this is not a film of those events but of a forgotten league game against Villarreal last year. That is the filmmaker's quest though, to capture the ordinary day – as exemplified with footage from events around the globe that same day. The concept, to follow just one player but not the game, is not a complete novelty (a German filmmaker once did a similar film with George Best) but courageous nevertheless. But it doesn't quite work simply because one man walking around and running for 90 minutes can only be so interesting. They allow us into his head with the use of subtitles that enrich the film but the one beat they missed was letting us see what he saw; we always see Zidane but we never see they game from his perspective. The subtitle of the film (A 21st Century Portrait) is also puzzling. Zidane has always seemed a very classical, almost old-fashioned footballer who was more poet than athlete. The 21st century part might have suited David Beckham better. But special praise has to be given to Icelandic band Kimono for combining their haunting music with the noise of the players and the audience to create a truly stunning soundscape the visuals rarely equalled.

## Clean, Shaven

In the early days of Icelandic filmmaking the major problem used to be the sound. It simply wasn't good enough and the term "good Icelandic film" almost began to mean a film where you could actually hear what the actors said. But that was a technical problem. In Clean, Shaven it seems to have been an artistic decision. Like most artistic decisions director Lodge H. Kerrigan makes in the film it is a poor one. The film, for what it's worth, seems to be about a schizophrenic who tries to reunite with his daughter on a eerie remote island while also being implicated in a murder case. He's also very much into self-mutilation, including the one truly memorable scene in the movie. But all of the characters are distant and uninteresting, a worthy topic in itself, but since the camera (and the microphone) is equally distant and uninteresting we might as well all be at home. Reading the festival booklet it claims the film "immediately grabs the audience's attention" and I couldn't help but think of the girl three seats away who fell asleep five minutes in. I bet she had a better time.

## Russian Ark

Aleksandr Sokurov wrote himself into the record books by filming the longest continuous shot in movie history, the 96-minute movie that is Russian Ark. It's a walk through the many rooms of the Hermitage Museum with a cast of thousands that represents various aspects of Russian history. So many will probably call it a technical marvel. It is not, a technical marvel would be to do this well. Basically Sokurov's achievement lies in knowing how to work a steadicam and the newest digital technology, getting a lot of actors to dress in period customs for the shot and not bother to cut the film. It's not that the idea is bad, it's actually brilliant. The problem is that we are accompanied by the cinematographer and a French marquis that both blather aimlessly throughout the whole film about absolutely nothing at all and hardly any of the talk seems in any way relevant to Russian history. A rich and fascinating history that, if you can read Icelandic, is covered infinitely better in Árni Bergmann's short tome Rússland og Rússar (Russia and the Russians). But this ark sinks a wonderful premise – and it's also often poorly lit.





## Nýhil Poetry in the Grapevine:

Pórdís Björnsdóttir

Pórdís Björnsdóttir (b. 1978) has been affiliated with the Nýhil group ever since releasing her first book in 2004, *Ást og Appelsínur*, which received much hype (for a poetry book, anyway). Since then, she has released the prose book *Vera and Linus* in cahoots with Jesse Ball, as well as the book of poetry this week's Nýhil selection is culled from: *...og svo kom nóttin* (...And Then Came the Night).

### And Then the Night Came

The wood filled with creatures that sang with faded voice and flitted.  
As the warm breeze they surrounded me, filling me with such gladness  
that I fell to nothing in peace and slowly ran away like water.

It was fine watching them move. They watched each other's eyes  
like fish in the green calmness of the core, and gave to him images;  
a beautiful flower, a little stone that felt right in the palm.

The bleeding trees drank into themselves . . .

And there a girl lies hidden, her eyes closed!  
Yes, all's fine while she sleeps on soundly  
so like the soil.

I covered myself with a blanket, hoping she would not see me.  
But through a tear in the cloth I peered and saw.

I heard how you changed your voice while you sang  
for the crawling worms, and whispered words into the hole  
so they all came up covered in blood.

"How much I would like to be the wind," she finally said  
out loud through the air and vanished between the trees.

The wind and I.



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# Faces

BY BJARNI BJARNASON

## TIGER TOMSSON

Our house had once been a two-storey affair with a basement, but then the second floor was destroyed in a fire, and the roof collapsed onto the first. After that, the house looked like a venerable old lady who has pulled her hat down over her eyes. It was clad in rusty corrugated metal and leaned charmingly into the wind. In the yard stood an elegant birch tree that, upon losing its battle with the first violent storm after we moved in, made an excellent bridge leading up to the balcony. There was a ghost in the tiny basement apartment, a lovesick old woman who had the habit of lying next to people when they awoke and looking soulfully into their eyes.

One morning, soon after we moved into the house and I was allocated the bedroom that looked out over the spacious yard, I woke up positively convinced that I could fly. I announced as much to Jamie, my friend and next-door neighbour, who usually agreed with me about everything – until the day when I convinced him to run away from home with me. This most faithful of friends denied point-blank that I could fly. I tried to appeal to his intelligence, explaining that it could only happen in a really stiff wind, and then only if I went outside in a great wide coat and spread it out like wings against the wind; then I would take flight and could glide along the gutter on the edge of the roof. Admitting, of course, that if I let go of the gutter I was in trouble. But it was enough to hold on with one finger.

He didn't think so.

I found this utter disbelief on the part of my friend strangely enervating. The next time it was fiercely windy I went out into the yard in my parka and took position on a big rock beneath the bedroom window. I must have known deep down how it would turn out, for I felt distinctly ashamed of myself for acting like this; after all, I was seven years old. But I had to make sure, so I opened the wings of the parka into the autumn winds. Nothing happened. It then became clear to me that I'd dreamed it all, and that there were ruthless boundaries between worlds.

Ever since that time, the house, which has long since disappeared from the face of the earth, followed me. Though I only lived there for about three years, I never live anywhere else. My dreams of that house are always populated by bus number five and a large tomcat. The house, which may be about to topple over or may be newly renovated, is my state of being at any given time. The bus, which sometimes glides along inside the house, sometimes careens driverless down the street at a hundred and forty, and sometimes stands rusted and forlorn in a suburban parking lot, is the movement and direction my life is taking. And the cat in the house, which is sometimes eating an apple, sometimes saying something like "Thanks" when I offer him some tuna fish, is the soul.

I called him Tiger Tomsson because he was golden with white stripes. I had found him hungry and bedraggled on the street and had taken him home with me. I offered him some tuna, and he slept at my feet. Then I was ordered to take him out, and when I went to school he followed me to the bus stop outside the Single Parents' Association building. The wind slapped us like a wet rag in the face, and I left him in the shelter of a new building next to the bus stop. Told him to wait there. When I came home three hours later, having received an adequate dose of education for that day – in my opinion, at any rate – there he stood waiting for me. From that day on I never allowed him to be banished from the house.

## NÚANDAR

An unsettled feeling always welled up inside me when bus number five approached the stop near the university. The kids from my neighbourhood got out there, walked across the square, and went to the primary school. My restlessness had its root in the fact that I was never sure whether I would get out of the bus with them or stay aboard and go downtown. At first my friends participated in the suspense: "Tiger, aren't you going to show?" A great farewell ceremony took place in the bus when it became clear that I wasn't going to school that day, and the kids promised to say I was sick and wished me well out in the big world. Little by little things changed, though, and soon enough the kids were astonished when I did get off the bus with them: "Tiger, are you going to school?"

Miss Astrid, our teacher, had discovered that I was the root of all evil in the class, and perhaps she had something there. Actually I didn't do much myself, but the other kids were strangely willing to act out the monstrosities that my fertile mind conjured up. One time Miss Astrid tried to outfox me by making me sit at the back of the middle row, behind the girls. She was delighted with her own cunning, for I couldn't get away with anything from that location. I was bored to death sitting back there, and once while she sat and read aloud

from a book, I slid down under my desk. Crawled between the girls' chairs, inching my way toward the teacher's desk. The kids sat quiet as corpses, and Miss Astrid's reading achieved ever higher levels of dramatic fervour. When I reached the teacher's desk, I slithered underneath the narrow slat on the front of it and peeked under her skirt. Her stout thighs were encased in black stockings, exuding heat and humidity. I glanced back at the boys who sat in the row by the window, terror tattooed on their faces. I grabbed her crotch. A most educational sensation. She hopped screaming out of her seat.

I looked pensively at her. Her face was beet-red. She couldn't believe what had just happened. She couldn't even manage to work herself up into the neurotic hysteria that she resorted to so often I could never take her seriously. Just asked me gently to sit down. Forced a tense laugh and tried to make a joke out of it. No one understood what had happened, least of all I myself. I'd only done it because I was bored. It was nice to see that sergeant-major transformed into a human being for a split second.

## IN THE COUNTRY

When spring came I was sent north to the country. Out in the barnyard was a large group of boys milling around aimlessly, as no one was hired to talk to them. I was to sleep in a large dormitory lined with bunk beds. There were tussles, yelps, and giggling in every corner of the room. The cacophony reminded me of a colony of birds nesting high up on a cliff. I was the youngest boy in the group and had no particular desire to go in there, so I took my bag and continued down the hall until I reached a door and opened it. Two made-up beds. Family photos and pictures of angels here and there. These people were obviously well connected in heaven. The light from outside seeped in through the black curtains and played on the old suit hanging on the wall. It seemed to recognise the place. I sat down on one of the beds.

In a little while a curly-haired farm hand in boots came in and told me that I was supposed to sleep in the dormitory, not in this bedroom. I didn't answer him. Just looked at the pictures. He rattled off a series of names familiar and exotic. Said then that it would be best if we went over to the dorm so he could show me my bunk. I looked at the bedside table. Next to an angel walking over a bridge lay a thick, heavy tome with gilt-edged pages. I started paging through the book. The farm hand looked me over for a minute. Said then that he'd see whether I couldn't just stay here in the bedroom for the first few days.

I lived in that room all summer. Actually, another boy came later and stayed in the other bed, but I was miffed that anyone should barge into my quarters like that, so I never even looked at him. I can't even describe him. He was nice to me, though. Maybe he even thought we were friends.

The farm hand came and said our prayers with us in the evenings – first with the other boy, and then with me. The cook had begun to read the Bible for us during the lunch hour, and it seemed to me an exciting story, though I couldn't understand a word she said. The farm hand read to me from some book that was supposed to be a story about a boy growing up, but to me it was one unrelieved tragedy from beginning to end. It was called Confessions and was by some guy called Augustine.

First there was a long and detailed account of how the author had been a shockingly bad boy when he was little. This description was so painful and teeming with remorse that I became pretty solidly convinced that he had killed his teacher, his parents, his siblings – probably everyone he knew. Finally he got to the point. He'd stolen an apple. The man so regretted his childhood peccadilloes that one would have thought they had alienated him from God for time and all eternity, though he never mentioned any crime other than having colluded with his friends to steal one poor miserable apple. The part he considered worst was the fact that he knew it was wrong when he did it. But he did it nevertheless. I thought this was odd, because if he didn't know he mightn't take the apple, then he wasn't really stealing it. Just taking it. And for simply taking it he wouldn't be cast out from the company of the righteous forever. There must have been something special about that apple and that apple tree. So I asked the farm hand,

"Was that apple from the same tree as the one the cook was telling us about, the one no one was allowed to eat from in Paradise?"

He thought it over for a minute. Then he said, a little hesitantly,

"Mebbe so."

It seemed to me that I had figured out what these people were always talking about, and so I decided then and there to believe in God and say my prayers every evening.

# The Invasion of the Visual Artists

Sequences Real Time art festival

BY STEINUNN JAKOBSDÓTTIR PHOTO BY SKARI

The first Sequences – Real Time Festival, an international cross-media art festival focusing on time-based art phenomena will kick off Friday October 13th and perk up downtown Reykjavik for two weeks. The festival includes 140 local and international artists, musicians and performers who will invade over 30 venues in Reykjavik's city centre. Established museums and galleries, shops, bars and public spaces will be hosting multiple exhibitions focusing on time-based art phenomena. Linking contemporary visual art with other media, especially sound and performance art, bringing together different art forms.

The Grapevine talked to Christian Schoen, director of the Centre for Icelandic Art and one of the festival's organisers, and discovered that there's going to be a lot of very weird things happening in the city.

"Basically the idea was to establish a platform for what I think is very typical for the Icelandic art scene today. Typical in the sense of this special raw and creative energy characteristic in Iceland as well as the collaboration and interrelation between visual arts, sound and performance art. Numerous artists are working in collaboration with other artists and musicians. Here, art and culture has kind of a different notion than in other parts of the world. The freedom in creativity in general is something that makes Iceland very attractive and is in my view something very unique but very typical of its art scene," Schoen explains.

"To create a festival is nothing new but a lot of art festivals have no clear focus," Schoen continues. "I think that festivals make sense if they are really focusing on something contemporary, something up-to-date. Therefore we stressed that in our concept we would be focusing on time-based art projects. Time-based art is a term that is used in art theory for specific projects that deal with time and are somehow in perception time based. The subtitle 'real-time festival' stresses that you really have to be here to experience it. You can't transport the idea of the festival through catalogues for example. You have to experience what is going on by showing up at the venue at the time the performance takes place, and even participate in it."

By the number of artists taking part in the festival, it is clear that the need for expression and creation is strong in local as well as international art culture today. The Reykjavik downtown will be somewhat crowded with contemporary visual artists putting up art performances, sound installations and video projections and the venues are as diverse as the exhibitions they are housing. To name a few, Gallery Turpentine will host Jón Sæmundur Auðnason's Longplay installation and Húbert Nói's movie of a 50-megawatt geothermal



drill hole at Hellisheiði. The short film Time-Killing will be on display at the Naked Ape, The National Gallery will focus on the post-1980s paintings by the first generation influenced by pop and punk culture, while a ping pong dance installation by Egill Sæbjörnsson will take place at SAFN. The list goes on and on.

## Praying in a pyramid

Sequences' opening ceremony will take place at The Living Art Museum, which is the artistic heart of the festival. Hosting various performances, video projections, and sound installations, it will begin with performances by Geirþrúður Finnbogadóttir Hjörvar and Snorri Ásmundsson. Ásmundsson's Pyramid of Love will undoubtedly grab someone's attention but he is building a pyramid made out of plexiglas, which he will sit inside to meditate and pray for love and happiness.

"I find that love, peace and happiness is lacking in our society. With this performance I want to send a positive message out to the public," Snorri says. The pyramid will be placed in various locations around the city during the festival.

The basic idea for this festival is namely not to invade only established art venues like galleries and museums but also places where life is, where the public hangs out and wanders around. Performances will take place at Austurvöllur, Laugavegur and various other public spaces. Musician Kira Kira's contribution to

the festival, called the Helium Choir, which is a 20-minute sound installation, will take place up in the tower of the Apótek building while Marta María Jónsdóttir will show her animated film on the corner of Laugavegur and Klapparstígur.

"I'm personally very excited to see the artists working in public spaces," Schoen says. "You'll have to find the exhibitions or stumble on them, kind of like a surprise. The front wall of the Icelandic Parliament will for example be lit up one night," (that event is a video projection by Andrew Burgess). Giving the old building a fresh new look. The city centre will be no less exhilarating when Copenhagen/New York collective Parfyme Deluxe will get on their weird little wagon and speed around town with the aim of helping people and doing good deeds.

Ilmur María Stefánsdóttir is very mysterious when explaining her project, called Stupid People, which she will perform opposite Café Hjómáland on Laugavegur, Friday the 13th. Stefánsdóttir describes the performance as "a surreal, pointless and useless performance about a lonely cat in a tree, wet window washing, eccentric painting, impossible jumping in the wrong outfit, a 70s circus in windy rain, poorly performed with frightfully bad technique." When asked to clarify a bit Stefánsdóttir told the Grapevine that the idea is basically to take things out of context and find them a new role. "The useless element in things is very dominating. What do I mean by

useless? Well, that all has to unfold when you see the performance."

At Skífan record store, Stefánsdóttir's three video works, Dinner Party, Mobiler, and Playtime will be screened at the same time. "The useless element is also very clear in the video works. In Dinnerparty I'm for example preparing a dinner party but not in any ordinary way. I cook fish with a hairdryer and boil potatoes in a food processor and in Playtime, which I worked on in cooperation with Davíð Þór Jónsson keyboardist, I play some weird instruments, change an ironing board into a cello and use a blender as drums for example," Stefánsdóttir adds, but how that all worked out, she says we'll just have to see for ourselves.

For the upcoming two weeks there will be plenty to see and the schedule is quite packed. Asked about certain highlights, Schoen points out particularly the schedule at Tjarnarbió movie theatre, where a row of local and foreign artists and musicians will put on a rich program of video and performance nights.

"It is really hard to point out certain events. Of course you can't be everywhere at the same instant but we try not to have too much going on at the same time. If locals are willing to participate with us, I'm pretty sure that this festival is going to be a very unique event, and hopefully an annual one."

For full program visit: [www.sequences.is](http://www.sequences.is).

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## The Mission is the Goal

Exploring isolation and devotion with some LDS kids

BY HAUKUR MAGNÚSSON PHOTO BY SKARI

"I didn't pick Iceland. I was assigned it," says Elder William Ferrell, 22, a native of Utah and a missionary from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, whose adherents are most commonly referred to as Mormons.

"What happens is that in the church, we have a living prophet and apostles. When we have the desire to go out on a mission we fill out a form and send it in for evaluation. Divine inspiration then determines where we get sent, although we of course have the right to decline a given mission. We spend two months at the Missionary Training Centre, or MTC, preparing for our mission, mostly learning how to teach but also taking language tips from Elders who have been in our designated region."

Twenty one year old Arizonan Elder Brennik Maxwell, a soft-spoken psychology major and punk rock enthusiast says the decision is not an easy one. To go about it properly, they must effectively distance themselves from the outside world for two years spent in a strange country. For the course of their mission, they can not follow any media, news or pop culture in any way. And although they do get to communicate with their families via e-mail [Monday is e-mail day], phone calls are limited to greetings on Christmas and Mother's Day.

"We want to concentrate on our mission. We shouldn't really be worrying about what's happening in Iraq or what's going on in pop culture. If I happen to hear the radio these days, I am at a complete loss," says Elder Maxwell, "I don't recognise any of the songs. That's actually rather refreshing for a change. And if something important is in the news, people we know will usually call and let us know." Continues Elder Ferrell: "Not watching TV is a kind of a benefit too, I think. It's made me realise how much time and effort goes into it. Although sometimes, if we have time to spare on preparation day, we can watch like a Disney movie to pass the time. We were watching Mulan yesterday, that was nice, we saw that and Hercules."

There are other things they must leave behind as well. When asked if they have girlfriends waiting back home, Elder Maxwell tells of a girl who said she'd wait for him when he decided to take up the mission. "She got married before I even made it to the MTC. Do I regret leaving? Not at all. I figured it would probably happen. I guess she just didn't have it in her."

### Speaking in tongues

Elders Maxwell and Ferrell share similar backgrounds. Both come from devout Mormon families and the faith has formed a large part of their lives. Elder Maxwell has six siblings who are all "pretty much Mormon," as he describes it, although he is the first in his family to ever go on a mission. "I was a normal kid. I grew up playing sports, listening to music. I was in bands and stuff when I was a teenager and associated with all types of kids, I went to concerts and parties although I didn't participate in the drinking or smoking. Around the time I turned 19 however, I decided that I wasn't going to go to church just to go, I wanted to find out if there was more to it. I received an answer, and the answer I got is the reason I am here now. I wouldn't be spending two years of my life as a missionary if I didn't know."

Elder Ferrell went through a similar process before deciding to 'go missionary'. He says that Mormon youth is actively encouraged to think critically about the things they are taught and make up their own minds as to whether they decide to heed the call of faith. "You have to be 19 to go on a mission and when I turned that age, I started asking myself if I should go on a mission. It was something I'd always thought that I wanted to do, but when the time came, I wanted to be sure that it was right for me so I sought out classes that teach about scripture and did a lot of studying myself. I obviously came here, but I wanted to make sure I was going because it was something meaningful and not out of a sense of obligation."

A notable thing about Mormon missionaries in Iceland is how quickly they seem to learn the difficult language. They claim the only notable difference in how they study languages from other people is that they pray a lot – not the answer those striving to teach the language to foreigners were hoping for.

Says Elder Maxwell: "When I first got here I talked to an administrator of the language department that teaches Icelandic to foreigners. I approached him on the street like so many others and he was like, 'How long have you been here?' and I was like, 'Five months.' And he was just amazed and asked to interview me, to find out what we were doing differently and if his program could benefit from that. When I told him how we went about it, he said it didn't help at all.

"We mainly do it on our own and use an hour of every morning to advance our studies. We'll write down words we don't understand and try and look them up or ask people we meet what they mean. Once in a while, we will have a member of our church that gives a class." Elder Ferrell agrees and offers: "One of the major things that helps us more than anything is talking with God and asking him for help. You have to be humble enough to ask for help, something that not everyone knows how to do. It is a very humbling experience to speak Icelandic to Icelanders after only learning it for two or three months from someone who doesn't speak the language fluently."

Do you speak Icelandic to one another?

"We try to, as much as we can. Try is a good word. From the first day we started learning at the MTC, we started to pray in Icelandic. It was hard at first, but it got easier after a while. Now, we sometimes even find it difficult to switch to English for our prayers," says Elder Ferrell.

### Punk rock missionary

Elder Maxwell speaks of his love for giving young kids from the congregation guitar lessons. His main musical inspirations were, in the past: "Punk music, screaming music. As I Lay Dying and Alexisonfire are personal favourites. I didn't listen to the typical music most LDS kids like. I am pretty sure I will reconsider my listening habits when I get back home. I might at least go over the CDs and take out any tracks that have swear words in them."

You didn't have any problems participating in the punk rock scene in your hometown?

"Not at all. It's maybe not the scene I would go back to now, there was a lot of smoking and drinking involved and I don't think I'd want to be around that anymore. It was fun, though, being around all my friends, I wasn't drinking with them or participating in those aspects, although it could be entertaining to watch them. But I managed to be there without following blindly. I thought for myself, like I was raised to."

They tell me that they generally try to approach people they meet on the street to offer them a lesson in Mormonism, although they sometimes resort to knocking on people's doors. They try to approach at least ten different people every day and that between the two of them they probably go through about 200

people a week. They had two conversions last year, but this year's looking better, with ten baptisms so far and more to come..

"People are usually polite," Elder Maxwell replies. "But sometimes they are not. Especially at night, when they're drunk and don't know what they're doing. We have been threatened, cussed at, spit at and had doors slammed in our faces, told to 'get the F outta here!' But usually, they'll just not want to talk about it. We're used to hearing that. Some people are afraid of change and if they would find out that what we're saying is true, that would mean a lot of change for them. That's a big part of it, people don't want to think about it or challenge how they're living; they're comfortable with where they're at and would rather not talk about it at all. That's the most common reaction, I would think."

"Although I'm not sure how I would react if someone from another religious persuasion would come to me and try and convert me. I'd probably be willing to talk about it, now more than ever. We are rather experienced in rejection."

Referring to the last year and a half (ten months for Elder Maxwell) as the biggest learning experience of their lifetimes, the Elders tell me how they've come to fathom more about forgiveness and looking at life from different people's perspectives. They tell me they've learnt humility and made a lot of great friends. One thing they haven't experienced, however, is what most visitors to Iceland will.

"I would think that tourists that have been here for a week have seen more of the attractions than we've seen to this day," says Elder Ferrell and Maxwell continues. "The mission is why we are here and we spend most of our time working towards that goal. We've probably seen more of the streets and the people here than most tourists do. We did go on a tour of the Golden Circle, of course, and we'll go to the Blue Lagoon, but not to go swimming."

Is it because of the naked showering policy?

"No, it's just... we don't go swimming at all while we are here. We're a group of 20 year olds and while we're here, it's best not to think about certain things. Therefore, we keep ourselves in a position so we don't have to worry about that."

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# Best of Kárahnjúkar

Reviewing the dam project that split a nation

BY STEINUNN JAKOBSDÓTTIR AND SVEINN BIRKIR BJÖRNSSON PHOTO BY FABRIZIO FRASCAROLI

As the Kárahnjúkar power plant inches closer to completion, opposition against the project increases. The Reykjavík Grapevine has compiled the major events that have shaped the discussion in the last few years.

**1999:** The government of Iceland, the National Power Company and Norsk Hydro sign a declaration of intent to explore the viability of building an aluminum smelter in Reyðarfjörður, powered by a hydroelectric dam in Fljótsdalur. Norsk Hydro later withdraws their interest out of concern for dam's environmental effects.

**14.2.2000:** The group Friends of the Environment start a petition against the planned Fljótsdalur dam project. The petition was signed by 45,000 people by the time it was presented to the Prime Minister and the Minister of Industry.

**14.7.2000:** The National Power Company presents an assessment of environmental effects of a proposed dam in Fljótsdalur, located at Kárahnjúkar.

**29.5.2001:** Icelandic Nature Conservation Association (INCA) issues a resolution rejecting plans for the proposed Kárahnjúkar dam, due to the irrevocable environmental damage the project calls for.

**2.8.2001:** The Icelandic National Planning Agency rules against the Kárahnjúkar dam project. The National Power Company, along with 100 inhabitants of East Iceland appeal the decision. INCA considers the verdict the biggest victory for environmental protection in Iceland.

**20.12.2001:** Minister for the Environment, Sív Friðleifsdóttir, reverses an earlier verdict by the Icelandic National Planning Agency on the Kárahnjúkar dam project and agrees to the hydroelectric power plant as long as 20 conditions on environmental protection are met.

**20.12.2001:** Member of Reykjavík City Council, Ólafur F. Magnússon, resigns from the Independence Party, citing the party's environmental policy and the party's support for the Kárahnjúkar dam project as reasons.

**6.2.2002:** Minister of Industry proposes a bill that would allow the damming of Jökulsá á Brú and Jökulsá í Fljótsdal.

**15.2.2002:** INCA, along with three individuals, sue Sív Friðleifsdóttir, Minister of the Environment and Geir H. Haarde, Minister of Finance on behalf of the Icelandic government, following the earlier decision of the Minister for the Environment to revoke the Icelandic National Planning Agency's verdict and authorise the Kárahnjúkar dam project.

**8.4.2002:** Parliament approves a proposal that allows the Kárahnjúkar dam and authorises the National Power Company to build and operate a hydro-electric power plant in Fljótsdalur with 750 MW production capacity and to dam Jökulsá á Brú and Jökulsá í Fljótsdal, the Kárahnjúkar dam. The proposal is approved with 44 votes against nine, while two MPs abstain.

**19.4.2002:** Representatives from Alcoa study the possibility of building an aluminum smelter in Reyðarfjörður.

**11.7.2002:** The chairmen of seven Icelandic environmental and nature preservation associations encourage Alcoa to revise plans for the construction of an aluminum smelter in Reyðarfjörður.

**19.7.2002:** Valgerður Sverrisdóttir, Minister of Industry, G. John Pizzey, vice president of Alcoa Inc. and Friðrik Sophusson, director of the National Power Company, sign a declara-



tion of intent on the continued discussion of the construction the Kárahnjúkar dam and the construction of an aluminum smelter in East Iceland.

**2.9.2002:** Minister of Industry authorises the construction of a 750 MW power plant at Kárahnjúkar to provide the Reyðarfjörður aluminum smelter with energy.

**6.12.2002:** Italian contractor Impregilo has the lowest bid for the construction of the Kárahnjúkar dam. The Italians's bid is substantially lower than cost estimates.

**7.12.2002:** Swedish contractor NCC claims to have pulled out of the bid for the Kárahnjúkar dam project for environmental reasons.

**10.12.2002:** In a meeting in City Council, council member Ólafur F. Magnússon demands that the Mayor of Reykjavík declare that the City of Reykjavík will not take part in the signing of an agreement between the National Power Company and Alcoa, planned later that week.

**10.1.2003:** The executive boards of Alcoa and the National Power Company agree to a price for energy for the Reyðarfjörður aluminum smelter. Minister of Industry, Valgerður Sverrisdóttir, celebrates the agreement. Energy prices are kept confidential.

**14.1.2003:** Premiere of Ómar Ragnarsson's documentary *Á Meðan Land Byggist* to a full house in Austurbæjarbíó.

**14.1.2003:** On behalf of the City of Reykjavík, Mayor Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir meets with representatives from Alcoa and agrees to pose a request to city council that the City of Reykjavík will guarantee a loan for the National Power Company for the construction of the Kárahnjúkar dam.

**16.1.2003:** 1,000 people protest the proposed developments at Kárahnjúkar outside Reykjavík City Hall, while City Council meets to discuss the city's loan guarantee. City Council approves the guarantee.

**4.3.2003:** Leader of the Leftist-Green Party, Steingrímur J. Sigfússon, proposes an amendment to the Kárahnjúkar law, which would allow a nationwide referendum on the Kárahnjúkar dam in relation to the parlia-

mentary elections in May 2003. The proposal is declined with thirty-five votes against six, while ten MPs abstain from voting. Twelve MPs are not present during voting.

**5.3.2003:** Parliament approves a proposal that allows the Minister of Industry to enter into negotiations on the building and operation of an aluminum smelter in Reyðarfjörður. The proposal is accepted with forty-one votes against nine. One MP abstains from voting. Twelve MPs are not present.

**14.3.2003:** Opponents of the Kárahnjúkar dam plan a torchlight procession in front of the parliamentary building. Sixty-three candles were lit, one for each of the country's MPs. Fifty-four candles are then blown out, representing the fifty-four MPs who did not vote against the Kárahnjúkar dam.

**15.3.2003:** 1,000 people attend a meeting in Reyðarfjörður where Minister of Industry-Valgerður Sverrisdóttir, Minister of Finance Geir H. Haarde, CEO and director of Alcoa Alain J.P. Belda, head of Alcoa's, negotiations committee Michael Baltzell, CEO of the National Power Company Jóhannes Geir Sigurgeirsson, director of the National Power Company Friðrik Sophusson and the mayor of Fjarðabyggð Guðmundur Bjarnason, sign a contract for the construction of an aluminum smelter in Reyðarfjörður.

**18.3.2003:** The National Power Company and Impregilo sign a contract for the construction of the Kárahnjúkar dam, worth 38 billion ISK, plus VAT.

**20.12.2003:** The first of three giant drills used for the construction of the Kárahnjúkar dam arrives from Cleveland, Ohio, The drill is 130 tons, its largest piece weighing 70 tons, making it the heaviest payload ever transported on Icelandic highways.

**15.3.2004:** An Icelandic worker is fatally injured while working on the Kárahnjúkar dam.

**24. 4.2004:** Drilling starts.

**July 2004:** TV news reporter Ómar Ragnarsson, publishes the book *Kárahnjúkavirkjun - með og á móti* (Kárahnjúkar - Pros and Cons)

**8.7.2004:** First ground is broken for the construction of the Reyðarfjörður aluminum smelter.

**5.1.2005:** The Icelandic Labor Union ASÍ criticises wages paid to foreign workers on the Kárahnjúkar project. They receive 50,000 ISK less than minimum wage according to a contract for the project.

**7.4.2005:** New geological studies show that dislocations at the Kárahnjúkar damming site are more extensive than originally anticipated. The studies indicate that water pressure from the Hálsalón lagoon could cause movement in the dislocation.

**19.7.2005:** Protest camp established at Kárahnjúkar.

**27.3.2006:** Twenty-six-year-old Icelandic worker is fatally injured in an accidental explosion at the Kárahnjúkar dam.

**2.4.2006:** Icelandic worker is fatally injured in an accident at the Kárahnjúkar damming site.

**12.5.2006:** Three hundred people protest outside the parliament building as the cornerstone for the power plant's control station.

**7.8.2006:** Protesters camp by Kárahnjúkar closed by local police authorities. Fourteen people are arrested.

**26.8.2006:** The MPs of the Leftist-Green party ask the government to postpone plans to start filling the Hálsalón lagoon until risk assessment can be re-evaluated.

**21.9.2006:** TV news reporter Ómar Ragnarsson declares that he can no longer maintain his objectivity regarding the Kárahnjúkar project, and will not report on the matter in the future. Ragnarsson calls for the shutdown of the dam and that plans to fill the Hálsalón lagoon be postponed.

**26.9.2006:** Twelve-thousand people join a demonstration march in support of Ómar Ragnarsson and in protest against the Kárahnjúkar dam.

**28.9.2006:** The construction of the Kárahnjúkar dam is complete, build up of Hálsalón lagoon begins, and the water reservoir will flood 57 km<sup>2</sup> of Europe's largest unspoiled wilderness.

**Outside Reykjavík**
**Kárahnjúkar**


## The Lonesome Traveller: Kárahnjúkar

One last look before the flood

BY FABRIZIO FRASCAROLI PHOTOS BY FABRIZIO FRASCAROLI

It takes only ten years of detoxification and total abstinence from cigarettes for a smoker's body to completely undo the damage of former years of dependence, and return to its original state, as if never touched by the habit of tobacco intake. It is my favourite argument against those who eagerly sentence me to premature death. It also brings me to beg the question, how much time will be needed for a heavily altered ecosystem to find balance again, and heal from the cancers of ill policy-making and forced industrialisation?

Kárahnjúkar. One of the unpronounceable names (to foreign readers) of Icelandic geography. A modest elevation forking into two distinct peaks. It is a location that used to be mostly unknown, even to locals, which has suddenly risen to international notoriety and relevance in the context of one of the most heated debates this country has seen.

And yet, for the most part, Kárahnjúkar is only a label – an inappropriate and rather misleading one, as often happens when the language of media takes over, and obsessively repeated expressions become both sign and referent, burying reality under a veil of indeterminacy and intangibility. Thus, Kárahnjúkar has become the moniker for a much broader region. But it is not healthy practice to underplay the reality of things through ambiguity and vagueness. And some of the areas that will be affected – or utterly flooded – in the context of the much disputed “Kárahnjúkavirkjun” (Kárahnjúkar Power Plant) lay there, where the Kárahnjúkar peaks are unable to show their presence.

The project – a big part of which has now been completed – affects the surroundings of two of Iceland's most powerful rivers, both running from the icefalls of Vatnajökull: Jökla, stemming from Brúarjökull, and Jökulsá á Fljótssdal, running through the flats of Eyjabakkar from Eyjabakkajökull. The peaks of Kárahnjúkar are far from being

a landmark for the entire region. Another landmark, and a common denominator of these lands is Snæfell: queen of Icelandic mountains, the highest non-glacier summit in the country, an immense mass of rock and ice that towers above the land and claims the horizon for a range of many kilometres. This is the Snæfell area, one of the largest wildernesses in Europe, a well-known destination for hardcore trekkers long before it ended up as sacrificial lamb of a harnessing project, and Kárahnjúkar usurped the title of lordship over the region. Curiously, in spite of five years of scrambling up across the Icelandic highlands, I had never hiked here before. “Tourists mainly arrive in Reykjavík, and from there

am surprised to hear people speaking English at every corner, but in a remote Icelandic town the size of a napkin – there will be a power plant effect, you can bet on that.

I have not been in the East for some years. Coming back, I am only positively impressed by the friendliness of the people. Even after a seven-year lucky career in hitchhiking, I am still especially surprised by how easy it is to find a lift and get around. As if being accepted as a passenger is not enough, farmers offer me carrots from the crop, or invite me to their homes for coffee. It is a refreshing sensation.

The drive through Hallorssstaður is a pleasant affair, too. Lots of trees all around,

**“I used to believe – or at least to behave according to the conviction – that there is always a second chance in life, that a missed opportunity will be redeemed by another similar one. I must now realise that it is not always so.”**

they start spreading,” a hunter once told me. He seemed to apply rudiments of migratory theory to the tourist's behaviour. “But few reach the opposite side of the country, and that's why the East is still so wild and beautiful.”

### Fljótssdalur valley and Eyjabakkar

My journey begins in Egilsstaðir. It is September 14th, which means I am already on the edge of a possible winter. Unsurprisingly the campsite is basically deserted (with the exception of myself and another solitary journeyman, a Canadian bicyclist on a multi-month adventure across Northern Europe). I

even surpassing the size of a grown man: a rarity in the Icelandic landscape. The locals proudly call it a forest, which may sound like a bit of an exaggeration, but this remains the largest wood in the country nonetheless. Here, the presence of the trees connotes autumn as a distinct part of the year, not as a mere transition between summer and winter. It may vary in length, depending on when the real cold actually arrives, but it is the moment when the leaves turn red and the surroundings exhibit their most vivid and charming colours. People there seem particularly fond in this seasonal luxury.

Glúmsstaðir is the last farm in the

Fljótssdalur valley: beyond it, the wild begins, as well as my walk. No real plans in mind: I have enough time at my disposal (roughly two weeks) for giving myself over to some thorough exploration. The Kárahnjúkar camp is the ultimate destination, and Snæfell a compulsory midway halt – besides that, nothing is truly settled. It feels good, however, to start the journey in sunny and warm weather, as these may be the last glimpses of summer I am accorded.

Again, I have never been here before, and I am aware that I am exploiting the moment as a last chance to see these places as they used to be, and will be no more. I don't really feel the coming doom as an incumbent threat, but the consideration clearly affects my sensations as I approach. I seek the wild essentially for the sense of freedom it brings back to my life, but in this case it feels different. I dislike any flavour of a scheduled, calendar, or charted trip, which inevitably takes something away from the pure enjoyment of a looser plan. I have a sort of existential bitterness about this, even. I used to believe – or at least to behave according to the conviction – that there is always a second chance in life, that a missed opportunity will be redeemed by another similar one. I must now realise that it is not always so.

The countryside along the banks of the river Jökulsá á Fljótssdal runs smooth, almost bucolic in bright weather. Rich vegetation with cliffs of basalt towering above and sheep roaming ubiquitously, is bordered by the river bed playing nice tricks with the rushing muddy waters, forcing them to continuous jumps, falls, unexpected bends, in an unbroken and almost hypnotic chain of potential camera shots. Trees – real ones – make their appearance again in Kleifarskógur, a tender and truly lovely wood embellished by the yellow shades of its flora, fast and gushing waters

>>> CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE



falling from the cliffs above and cutting its precipice. Further on, Snæfell discloses itself for the first time, accompanied by its vassal Laugafell, and that presence saturates the picture. A work camp is built here, where one of the four dams that are part of the Kárahnjúkar Power Plant project will soon be operational. The sight obviously does not help to make the surroundings more charming. There are explosions in the distance; a farmer told me yesterday of drilling machines, the diameter of five metres, piercing and wounding the mountains – I am starting to grasp the scale of what is going on.

Where the land is completely flat, the waters of Jökulsá á Fljótssdal become placid and slow, spreading over a vast area and branching into a number of veins and rivulets. This is Eyjabakkar, a wetlands pullulating with life to an extraordinary extent, and one of the main havens for birdlife and biodiversity in Iceland. But biodiversity, we all know, is not synonymous with cash, and heavy industry rarely makes poetic distinctions. So part of Eyjabakkar is ready to be submerged by a water reservoir: right here, right now.

The flatlands extend unbroken southwards in the distance. The only elevation in the range is now Snæfell itself, which has grown terribly close on my right, mysteriously enveloped by the thick fog that has descended on the land. A reddish tonality dominates at the chromatic level, but it is not given to shine in today's dull weather. I have never learned to take swampy grounds into more serious account when making my route, and the outcome is always the same – and mostly an unpleasant – one: I end up walking in soaking wet shoes. Great. Pink-footed geese take flight in flocks. I can hear their call above me, as my march becomes miserable and faltering.

I reach the western flank of Snæfell, where the welcoming hut is located, after a walk at altitude through mist and drizzle. The thick veil of fog condemns me to an almost blind navigation for the whole day. The hut's seasonal opening is already over, and I can be only grateful that Ferðafélag Fljótssdalshéraðs (the local Touring Club, which built and runs the shelter) has agreed to leave a set of keys at my disposal. I have become seriously wet by now, and drying out my gear will surely prove easier here than inside a tent.

Now Snæfell is entirely hidden in a cloak of melancholy. The lesser elevations of Sauðahnjúkur and Fitjahnjúkur occupy the scene in its stead.

#### Jökulsá á Brú

Jökla, Jökulsá á Dal, Jökulsá á Brú: three different names for the same glacial river. They run from the Brúarjökull icefall, cut the land west of Snæfell, carve one of the deepest and sheerest canyons in Iceland, skirt the peaks of Kárahnjúkar themselves, and finally direct their own course towards the eastern coast, carrying with them amounts of mud and silt unrivalled by any other stream in the country. It is this watercourse and its surroundings that will pay the highest toll for the realisation of the hydro-electric project. The first 20 km of the river and anything along it standing below 600 m of altitude, as well as part of the icefall itself, will be regularly submerged by the water reservoir – every summer – just to reappear again in wintertime, when ice-melt is least intense, by then deformed and covered in mud.

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**“Again, I have never been here before, and I am aware that I am exploiting the moment as a last chance to see these places as they used to be, and will be no more. I don't really feel the coming doom as an incumbent threat, but the consideration clearly affects my sensations as I approach.”**

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I flank the course of Jökla twice, first along the east bank – starting down from Gamla-Jökulkvísl, the ancient springs that now lay north outside the glacier's surface – and then on the west side. The experience turns out totally different from my previous ones – and not because of the change of perspective. It is the sudden mutation in the weather conditions that affect my journey the most now. I see my first reindeer this morning, as soon as I start walking, still slightly numb after the night. The animal's silver mantle flashed swift and sudden like an apparition in the impenetrable fog, merely a few metres away from me. I did not even have time to think of putting hands on the camera. Such a sight, so early in the day, felt like an omen. And in fact, shortly afterwards, the snow began to fall, slow and in big flakes at first. Rapidly it becomes a storm in every sense. I push my way northwards now. An evil frontal wind makes it particularly difficult to keep my balance. The temperature must have dropped

almost 15°C during the night, and considering today's weather conditions, I can only feel glad and sage for having dumped my original plan of a two-day traverse across Brúarjökull. It seems that winter has come.

The storm ceases sometime during the night and still weather greets me upon awakening. It is still freezing cold, however. Under the white cloak of snow, the landscape only reveals its contours, unreal and stylised in a monochromatic representation. Small ponds surface every now and then, dark mirrors to the sky, which appears like a plate of stainless steel. It reflects a pale light, colder than the snow itself. Kárahnjúkar is now big and visible, standing out against the vast flatness in front of me.

I have been out here for one week already. The thought of the cold and other possible snowstorms (more than probable this time

Autumn has finally imposed its colours on the landscape – the last autumn anyone will ever be able to admire around here. I usually find the thought of autumnal decay to be made bearable only by the perspective of the following resurrection. But a sleep without awakening – such as the one which is now expected here – that's a different issue entirely.

I have covered a very wide part of the area around Snæfell by now, and I believe I am finally starting to grasp its peculiar and specific beauty. Especially fascinating for me is how different these locations feel from the rest of the Highlands. Even in the most remote and solitary places, far away from Reykjavík, Iceland is punk-rock: a young land, fast, rugged, raw and barren, with sudden and disharmonic explosions of energy and violence. And Iceland is noisy: thundering and growling waters, feedbacks in the wind – I never have the perception of silence, falling asleep in my tent in some remoteness of the countryside.

But here it is different. Here everything is dilated, solemn and majestic, almost grave, overgrown in the red and green of the vegetation – because royalty does not tolerate nudity. And silent, terribly silent – a silence you can hear and listen to. All the lines in the visual range – straight and regular – seem drawn according to geometries of Euclidean perfection. Parallel lines form stratified terraces that almost look man-made.

It feels curious, but hardly accidental, how emotionally Sigur Rós have fought for the preservation of this region, when one thinks of how perfectly their music and the surroundings appear to reflect each other. In both, the sense of melancholy and nostalgia for something which is not here seems to shine through – something that, in this case, soon will be no more.

#### Kringilsárrani

The oasis of Kringilsárrani lies right beneath the glacier, protected as an island, encircled as it is by the two impassable rivers of Jökla and Kringilsá on the flanks, and Brúarjökull at the back. A preserved wilderness area, unique both for its fauna (besides the rich birdlife, herds of reindeer freely roam here) and its geology (seldom will you appreciate so neatly the millenarian action of the glacier in shaping the land).

The approach to Kringilsárrani is a walk across Brúarjökull, and through a rather primitive but effective ropeway scarily suspended above the impetuous waters of the





river Kringilsá. It is a sort of rite of passage introducing hikers here to a different world. A couple of kilometres further along the river, Töfrafoss (i.e. “the magic waterfall”) offers itself up as a spectacle of immense power, a crowning twofold rainbow springing from the crashing waters.

Hraukar appear as a stripe of tumuli covered in emerald green grass and surrounded by clear ponds. From here towards the Brúarjökull, a staggering and truly unique sequence of glacial moraines develops, giving a strange impression of dynamism to the land. And it is around Hraukar that more reindeer start making their appearance. I count about a dozen in one day, but I never manage to get closer to them than some 20 metres.

If Snæfell is the landmark and the patron of the whole region, Kringilsárrani definitely represents its spiritual core. A reindeer country, shamanic, hieratic – it seems infinitely vaster and higher than it actually is. As one stares at the snow-clad peaks all around, a superior sense of ascension and elevation comes to dominate, while the perception of space appears altered in the strong magical aura that pervades the surroundings. As I climb one of the few hills near the glacier, just up to 700 m, the outlook over the horizon becomes breathtaking, even inspiring. As if the place

were appositely built to be an observation post, the gaze embraces all the main summits of the Highlands: the Snæfell massif with all its peaks, to start with, and Kverkfjöll, like embedded in Vatnajökull, and Trölladýngja, Dyngjufjöll, all the way to Herðubreið, which usually looks like a Christmas-cake; today it appears like a crown. And yes, also Kárahnjúkar in the north, the most recent – and heretical – acquisition in this pantheon of celebrated mountains, the place where the doom of the whole region is engraved like a sentence into reinforced concrete.

Part of Kringilsárrani – including Töfrafoss – is going to be directly affected by the flooding, and will be disappearing under water. And even though most of the area will not meet the same fate, it is hard to believe that the fragile ecosystem won't suffer heavily from the environmental changes all around.

Here in particular, the perspective of such locations submerged under an artificial lagoon gives the disturbing feeling of profanation of sacred ground. It is not the thought of lost and marred beauty that bothers me. Landscapes change – often for the worse – for natural reasons as well as artificial. A waterfall cannot be preserved in a museum. Rather, in this place, it is the deliberate attack on diversity and otherness that I find truly

appalling. These areas used to host a highly diversified basin of life – machinery is going to cover it under a veil of non-existence. This region used to represent a unique instance in Icelandic landscape, a term of comparison against which the country could define itself. Now its otherness will be denied, specificity erased in the total levelling of the geographical spaces. Yes, it will be another fragment of difference rendered to the Moloch of oblivion, according to that perverse logic of homologation and univocal thought, sadly inherent to industrialism.

#### Kárahnjúkar

When I finally get to the Kárahnjúkar camp, on Monday, September 25th, I have eleven days and around 180 km of walk in the wild behind me.

There is intense traffic and the activity of cars, trucks, and Caterpillars is evident all around. Noises come from every direction in the distance. The girl who sells me my coffee asks me, almost shocked, why on earth I bother to walk. I suppose that my motivations would not be understood, so I give it to her plain and simple, “It is my job.” At least this explanation does not elicit any objection.

I find a lift. Someone will drive to Egilsstaðir in half an hour.

From this vantage point, I take a last look at the canyon carved by Jökulsá á Brú, winding southwards. It is my last chance to stare at it as it is, before it will be buried under the surface of an artificial lake, but strangely I am still spared that sense of imminence. The main dam, the one erected on the western side of the Kárahnjúkar mountain, is close at hand now. A sheer and immense wall obstructing the canyon – it almost gives me a feeling of vertigo as I stare at it. And as it stands beside there, idle and close, Kárahnjúkar looks both succubus and accomplice, as someone who has made a deal with the devil and is now victim – willing or not – to the stipulations of an inescapable fate.

The waters of the river run exactly beneath my post, waiting for the moment they will be definitively contained and accumulated. Already now, they look still.

Thanks to:

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Energy for life through forces of nature

Outside Reykjavík

Mývatn



## Trolls and Bubbling Mud Pits

The Grapevine visits Lake Mývatn

BY VIRGINIA ZECH PHOTOS BY SKARI

Tourists who come to Iceland for culture, rather than nature, are likely to miss Lake Mývatn. Less than two hours' drive from Akureyri, there are no towns of notable size right on the lake. While this may be perplexing at first, given Mývatn's considerable beauty as well as its annual tourist draw, it is explained by the fact that it is illegal to build homes adjacent to her shores. Avid birdwatchers will know the lake for the plentiful bird species that live around her waters – Mývatn is, in fact, Europe's largest bird sanctuary. But even if birds aren't your thing, a wealth of natural beauty, as well as geological and man-made history, are to be found within only a few kilometres of Lake Mývatn.

Our trip began with an early morning flight from Reykjavík to "the capital of the North," Akureyri. There we immediately boarded our homebase for the day – a minibus. Our tour was small, composed of myself, our cameraman, a pair of newlyweds from Northern Ireland, a young man from Japan, and our driver and guide, Ragnheiður Ragnarsdóttir. A native of the Akureyri area, Ragnarsdóttir began the day by taking us on a brief driving tour of the city. We were informed that Akureyri is home to the 30-time national hockey champs (in a nation with four competing teams, but still impressive) as well as the Iceland's winter sports association (the local ski area is capable of carrying over 3,000 people per hour up its slopes in wintertime).

On leaving Akureyri our first stop is Goðafoss, a double waterfall named for the pagan idols Þorgeir Ljósvetningagoði threw into it after deciding at Alþingi that Iceland should convert to Christianity a millennium ago. Not as large as Gullfoss in the southwest, Goðafoss offers up clear aquamarine waters in contrast to Gullfoss's opaque glacial runoff. Though the Grapevine's acrophobic cameraman did not seem enthusiastic about the various vantage points of the river fed by Goðafoss on the short cliffside walk, I very much enjoyed taking the misty trail to the nearby restaurant, which was our next departure point.

From Goðafoss we drove on, to our first

glimpse of Mývatn. The lake is named for the plentiful black flies that swarm near its waters and feed the multitudinous birds who make it their home. Luckily, this was a clear, damp day, and there were no flies to be seen. A light drizzle accompanied my fellow tourists and me on our next nature walk around the pseudo craters that litter Mývatn's shores and islands.

Pseudo craters can be concentric, with up to four or even more craters sitting one within the next. They differ from other volcanic craters in that nothing is blown out of the vents, but on releasing steam from the ground they collapse inward on themselves. The craters here are grassy and home to a number of sheep (which Ragnarsdóttir encouraged me to chase on hearing how much I have wanted to pet them – I was mercifully stopped by my co-worker who informed me their speed defies the size of their legs). Despite the pastoral setting found on many of Mývatn's edges, evidence of recent volcanic activity is all around, looming sepulchral in the background. Hverfjall, an enormous, black volcanic crater would dominate the horizon for much of the day's journey.

Following this walk we took a lunch break in Reykjahlíð, a place in legendary for the volcanic activity that came in 1729. The tale goes that as the lava flowed towards the town, its people came together in the church and prayed that the lava would not overtake it. After praying for hours, and finding themselves still alive, the townspeople vented outside where they saw that lava had bypassed the church building on not one, but both sides. Regardless of your religious persuasions, it is a startling sight. Reykjahlíð is also where we took our lunch break at the local hotel. They served my companion and me, respectively, French fries and their special of traditional Icelandic lamb soup.

Getting back on the road we headed to Dimmuborgir, a word that translates to English as "dark castles." As with many locations in Iceland, the geology here has a mythology to accompany it. The story is that there was once a lonely troll whose friends paid him a visit to cheer him up. The trolls danced and

partied all night, unfortunately all the way until sunrise, which of course turned them to stone, thus explaining the fantastic rock formations seen here. I don't know about trolls, but I definitely saw a formation that looked exactly like a sheep. Ragnarsdóttir informed us that later on, "people called scientists came" to refute the original troll/sunlight explanation, but I would recommend going to Dimmuborgir with a sense of humour and imagination to get the full experience.

Now heading further away from Mývatn, we drove to Grjótagjá. Natural bathing caves at Grjótagjá are set in a chasm ripped into the earth by volcanic activity and were long used by locals until an eruption in 1975 made the waters too hot to bear. They are slowly cooling down again, but even without using the caves for a bath, it is worth the climb down into the natural caverns to get a look at the steaming blue waters. The caves are just off the roadside, but totally invisible to those unaware of their existence.

From Grjótagjá we move on to Hverarönd. Bubbling mud pits and abandoned sulphur boreholes make Hverarönd, as Ragnarsdóttir put it, a "warm and smelly" tourist attraction. The bubbling mud – a few dark grey, pulsating pools that can reach 400°C – which lie throughout the area, are best characterised by my companion's remark, "So this is where the black paint is made." As for the boreholes, Germans originally drilled them for sulphur before leaving Iceland at the outbreak of WWII. In an example of "Scandinavian cooperation," as Ragnarsdóttir told us, after the war, Danes took over sulphur excavation which they "exported from Iceland to make gun powder, and sold it to Norway, and the Norwegians used to shoot the Swedish."

Following what was, indeed, a smelly though interesting walk, we hopped back in the minibus and drove up past the Krafla power plant. The plant has been operational, despite some

setbacks because of volcanic activity, since 1977. The borehole stations, red "space igloos" as my companion called, along with the plant and traversing pipelines make Krafla an interesting man-made alteration to the natural landscape.

Leaving Krafla we made our final stop at the "other Blue Lagoon," the Mývatn Nature Baths. Similar in almost every respect to its Reykjanes area comparison, the Nature Bath is smaller, less crowded, and feels altogether a lot more like a lagoon than a tourist attraction. Like its counterpart, both locations are famous for their beneficial effects on various skin conditions, psoriasis sufferers in particular claim the mineral-filled waters alleviate their symptoms. Suits and towels are available for bathers who happen by the Nature Baths on their tours of the Mývatn area.

After our soak, my five companions and I again loaded ourselves back into the minibus and drove off at record speeds to Akureyri where we would catch our evening flight. Landing in Reykjavík, I reflect that the scope of the geography available to Iceland's tourists in the span of a day is almost incomprehensible. Returning to the capital only 12 hours after leaving her behind makes a journey into wild nature, as well as a tour of metropolitan nightlife, easily attainable in 24 hours. Oh, Iceland.

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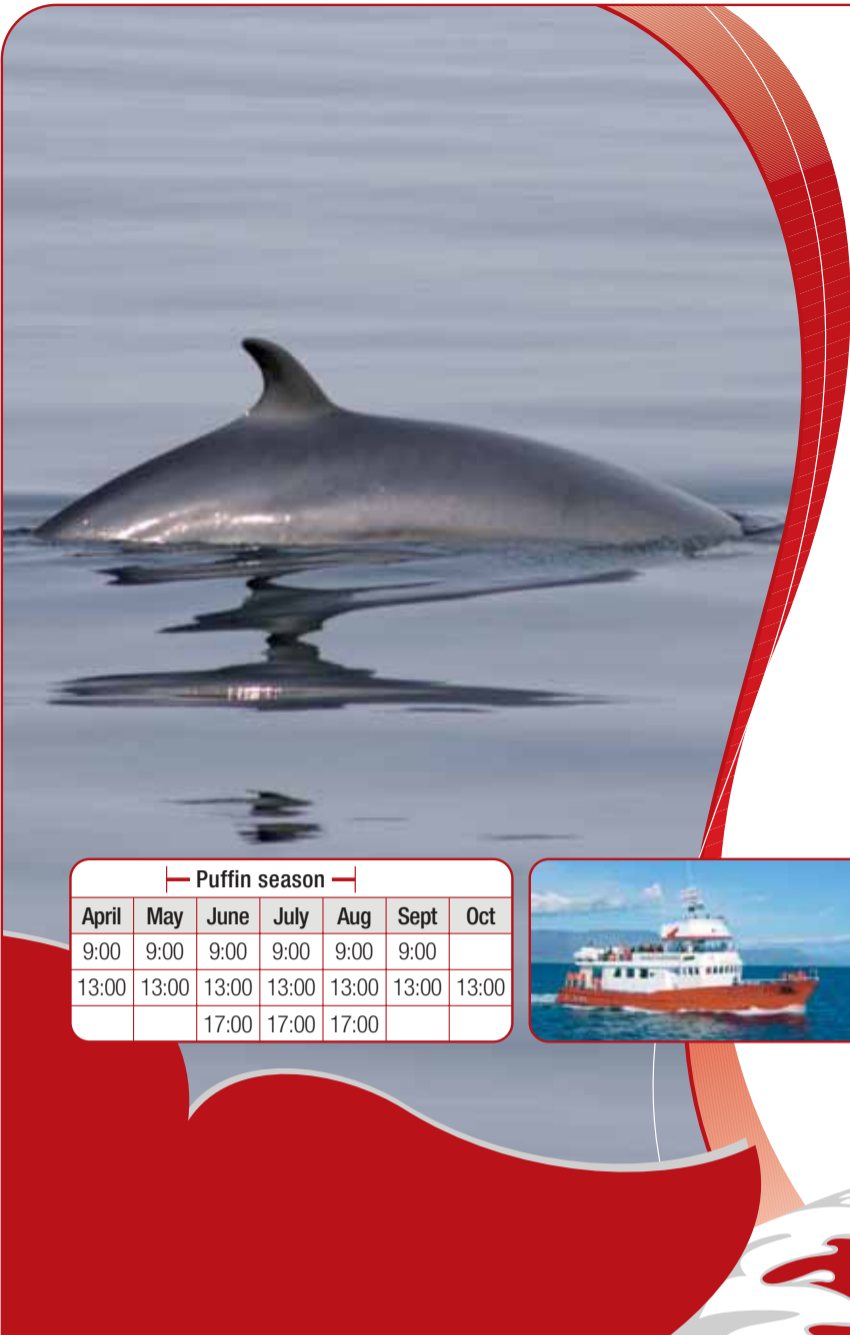
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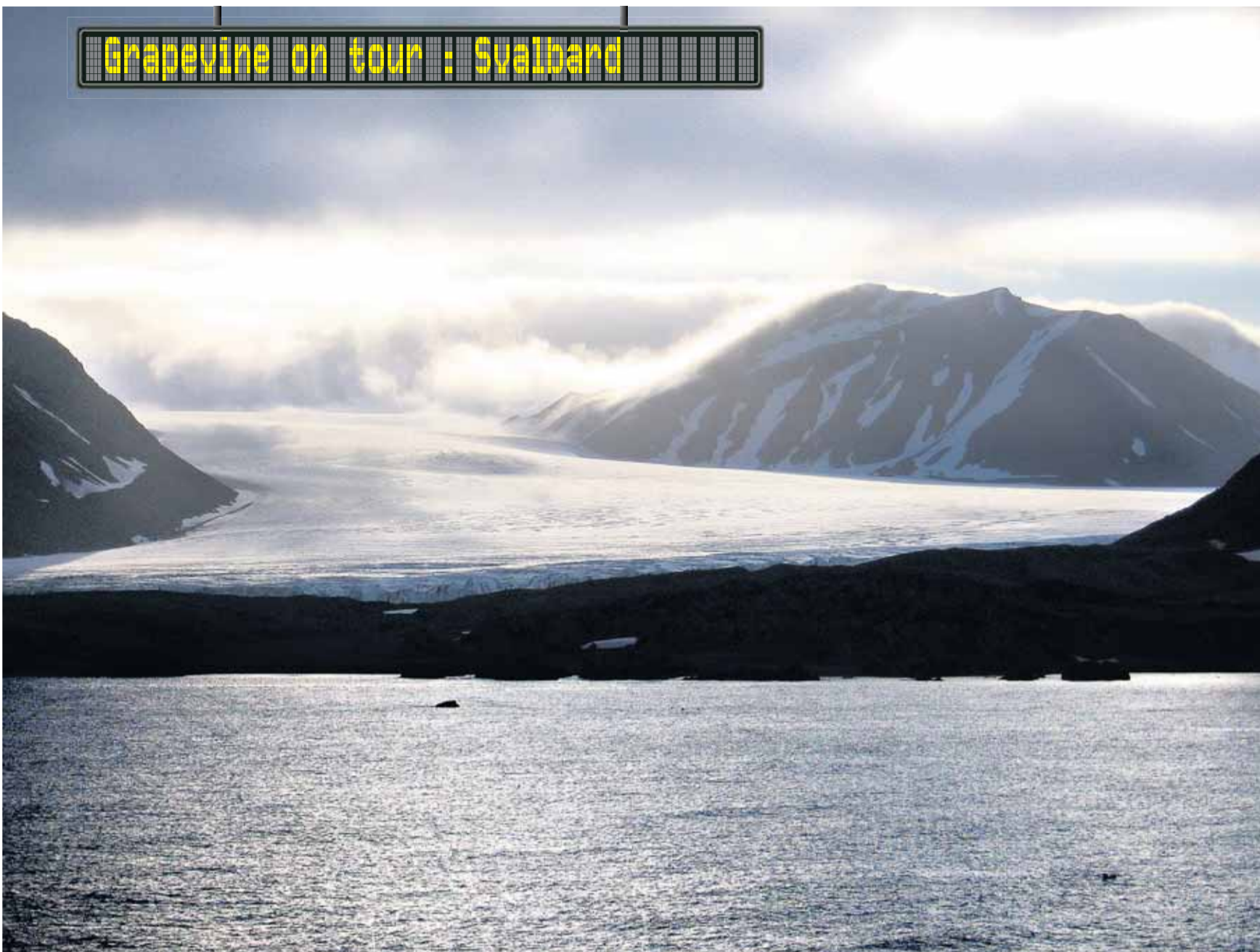
The myth, of course, is that there will be some survivors

## Pórdís Aðalsteinsdóttir

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## Grapevine on tour : Svalbard



## Beware: Polar Bear May Bite

Guns but no roses in Svalbard

BY IAN WATSON PHOTO BY IAN WATSON

I had never been on cruise ship in my life before I spent three weeks last summer giving lectures on the North Atlantic aboard the *Prinsendam*, a Dutch ship carrying mostly North American passengers. I wasn't paid for my work, but the trip was free, and I was allowed to bring along a guest. The other passengers were friendly, and I was scandalously overfed, eating piles of fresh pineapple every morning and nightly five-course dinners. But the high point of the cruise was getting to see two very special places in the high Arctic: Svalbard and Jan Mayen.

The "capital" of Svalbard is Longyearbyen, not named after anything having to do with its many weeks of summer daylight and winter dark, but rather after an American coal mining entrepreneur named John M. Longyear who founded the town in 1906. Approaching ships take the broad Isfjord in from the sea, make a right turn into the smaller Adventfjord, pass the airport and pull up at the pier. The town stretches up from the shore into a bleak, narrow valley between two high mountains. A single street of shops and pubs gives way to brightly coloured wooden houses. Disused mine tramway towers sprout from the mountain slopes like bare raspberry canes in winter. At the upper end of town is a cemetery where victims of the Spanish flu lie alongside one of the Norwegians killed in the German bombardment of Svalbard in 1943.

The highlight of our visit to Longyearbyen was a trip to Mine Number 7, the youngest of the island's coal mines and the only one that is still producing. Our guide, a former

miner, drove us a few kilometres out of town and up a hairpin road to the mine entrance. We put on dusty mining suits and piled into a dilapidated minivan for a spooky five-minute ride deep into the mountain, following the ups and downs of the coal seam to the mine face. Our guide let us see the huge machine that chews at the mountain and showed us how to drive metre-long bolts into the ceiling to stop it from collapsing. Unlike coal layers in Germany or West Virginia, the seams on Svalbard are above ground – indeed, tens of metres above ground – so one goes up to them, not down. This also means they are easier to ventilate, which is why we were able to drive a car into the seam. Half of Mine Number 7's production goes to the Longyearbyen power plant and the rest is exported to mainland Europe.

Fewer than a dozen people still work in mining in Longyearbyen, although quite a few more commute in shifts over to the large coal mine in the nearby settlement of Sveagrava. Longyearbyen is reinventing itself as a tourism and education centre. I had a small-world moment when one of the other mine tour participants turned out to be an acquaintance from Reykjavík, who had just spent seven days circumnavigating Svalbard on a small cruise ship, the *Polar Star*. She said she'd seen 30 polar bears. We met two middle-aged Danish women in front of the shop, newly in from a trekking tour, broad smiles on their faces and their rifles still strapped to their back. Anyone who leaves settled areas must carry a rifle and know how to use it, as Svalbard's polar bears

can and do eat humans.

The most impressive building in town is the brand-new university centre, which also houses the museum, bookshop and tourist office. The university centre is a cooperative project of several mainland Norwegian universities, not an independent institution. It has beautiful polished wood floors, and everyone has to take off their shoes even to enter the public spaces. I couldn't resist buying a book on polar bears at the bookshop and another on Franz Josef Land.

I once imagined Longyearbyen as a sort of arctic camp, with Nansen-like figures stumbling out of tents with ice in their beards, smelling of polar-bear steak. In fact Longyearbyen reminded me very much of certain Icelandic towns – say, Borgarnes or Siglufjörður. One main difference is that it's a town of transients who mostly live there for only a few years – no one really has roots in Longyearbyen. And there aren't any reindeer wandering the streets in Borgarnes.

Before stopping in Longyearbyen, our ship sailed under bright sunshine into Magdalenafjord at Svalbard's northwestern tip, as well as Hornsund in southern Svalbard. Both fjords had fine glaciers and craggy peaks, and Hornsund has a small Polish-run scientific research station. We also sailed up past 80° north to the edge of the polar ice cap. I thought we'd see giant icebergs, like the Antarctic ice sheets, but the polar ice cap is made of thin, flat floes formed from frozen sea surface which extend just inches above and below the water. At its edge, the floes are

small and broken, with more water than ice. We stood on deck looking down at the ice as the ship bumped against one floe and the next, kind of like pushing croutons around in a bowl of soup.

From Svalbard we sailed to Akureyri, passing the mysterious island of Jan Mayen on the second morning out. Long, skinny Jan Mayen belongs to Norway. It is home to a huge glacier-capped volcano, called Beerenberg, and a weather station with 18 crew members, who have found that the island has an average of four truly sunny days per year. There is no harbour, so we couldn't land. When I woke up and looked out the window, the ship was sailing through a giant fog-bank and I was afraid I wouldn't see the island at all. But the fog cleared during breakfast, we'd hit one of the four annual sunny days, and the view of Beerenberg and the north coast of the island was great.

I have mixed feelings about the life of a cruise lecturer (at this stage in my life I prefer to work for money instead of free time). But I can recommend Svalbard and (if you can ever get there) Jan Mayen. Svalbard is easy enough to reach, with frequent flights from Oslo and Tromsø, many ships going there each summer, and lots of things to do (see [www.svalbard.net](http://www.svalbard.net), where I reserved the mine tour). As for Jan Mayen, Icelanders have known about it since the year 1194 without ever finding an excuse to spend much time there. Unless you speak Norwegian and can swing yourself a job at the weather station, you'll have to be content with a sail-by.

# Inside Reykjavík

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# Guantánamo Detainees Released Into Captivity

The Grapevine conducts an interview during visiting hours

BY VIRGINIA ZECH PHOTO BY SKARI

After three years in military captivity, Rhuheh Ahmed and Asif Iqbal are touring the globe to present Michael Winterbottom's documentary film, *The Road to Guantánamo*. It tells the story of these young men's terrifying and unlikely journey from England to Pakistan, Afghanistan, and U.S. detention sites in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. As guests of the Reykjavík International Film Festival, where the film is being screened, Ahmed and Iqbal were able to sit down with the Grapevine – barely – before being shuttled to another event, dinner, a panel discussion, another film screening and yet another Q&A.

## /// We'll start with the obvious – what's your current take on America?

**Rhuheh** – We don't hate the American people. [They] have nothing to do with Guantánamo. They were not the ones who decided to open Guantánamo and lock people away indefinitely. It was the government. So, we don't like Bush and we don't like the administration either, or the U.S. army.

## /// You chose to leave certain elements of your experience out of the film. Why?

**Rhuheh** – That was because our parents were going to watch the film. Our family – sisters, brothers – we didn't want them to know what exactly happened to us and other detainees. For that reason we didn't

think it was appropriate to have those kinds of scenes in the film.

## /// What impact do you think these decisions had on the film as a whole?

**Asif** – The film's still powerful. It just doesn't have what we didn't want in there.

## /// There are some funny moments in the film that arise from the absurdity of situations you faced. How did you maintain your sense of humour?

**Rhuheh** – It's just the way we are. Since we were younger we've always had a great sense of humour. Even if we were badly treated, anything we found funny we just laughed. It was easier to get through if you laugh about some things, rather than be serious and take everything to heart. If you make a joke out of something you move on.

## /// Is this common among prisoners?

**Rhuheh** – No, I wouldn't say it's common among prisoners. There were three of us and we were childhood friends. If something happened to him I would laugh, [and vice versa]. But not everybody's the same. We were young. We have family, but we don't have wives or sons or daughters, so we didn't have that worry. We didn't have anyone else to care for. That's why we had a bit of a laugh in prison. For those people who were fathers and hus-

bands it was a totally different story. They wouldn't laugh about things. They would be serious.

## /// You've said that it is necessary to 'forget your family' and accept the reality of your imprisonment to stay sane. How was it to be suddenly reunited?

**Rhuheh** – It was difficult. You were back at home, in your own bedroom now. And you've got other relatives with you. You have to share [space] again. In prison it's just you in your cell in your bed. There's no Mom, no Dad, no sisters, no brothers. You have no responsibilities. You don't need to go out and buy bread, buy the milk, or pay the bills. You're in prison – that's it.

**Asif** – No contact with anyone.

**Rhuheh** – You can't touch anybody. And all the sudden you're back home and your mom's talking to you and your dad's talking to you and they want to touch you. They want to hug you. It's odd. It felt abnormal. To get back and reintegrate into society again – it's really difficult.

## /// The English government essentially abandoned you in Guantánamo; is it difficult to feel at home there?

**Rhuheh** – No, that's our home. We were born there, grew up there, went to school there. Everything we know is back in England. What the government did, that's just politics. We were just pawns.



## /// Are you pursuing legal action against England, as is pending against America?

**Rhuheh** – We can't pursue any in England because Guantánamo was opened by Americans. It has nothing to do with England. They might have had a part to play behind the scenes. But up front it was all American-run. It was the American army, George Bush and his administration. The British just went to interrogate detainees and you can't really take them to court for that.

## /// Besides the film, what are you currently doing on behalf of human rights?

**Asif** – We've been working with Amnesty in different countries [and] back home. We're trying to get Camp X-Ray closed and stop torture, because torture doesn't work.

## /// What should people be doing to stop situations like Guantánamo?

**Asif** – Campaigning against what's happening. Everyone looks at America [to] give freedom to the rest of the world, [as] the main democratic state, but what they're doing is completely against human rights. If they're doing it, [then] it's open season for everyone else to do it. We know China tortures people, but America is always telling everyone else off [for torture]. They're basically hypocrites... There's an Amnesty postcard campaign, if people would just sign them and send them to Mr. Bush.

*At that point, a tall man came in and barked that the time was up. They have a rigorous schedule to keep, and free time is limited.*

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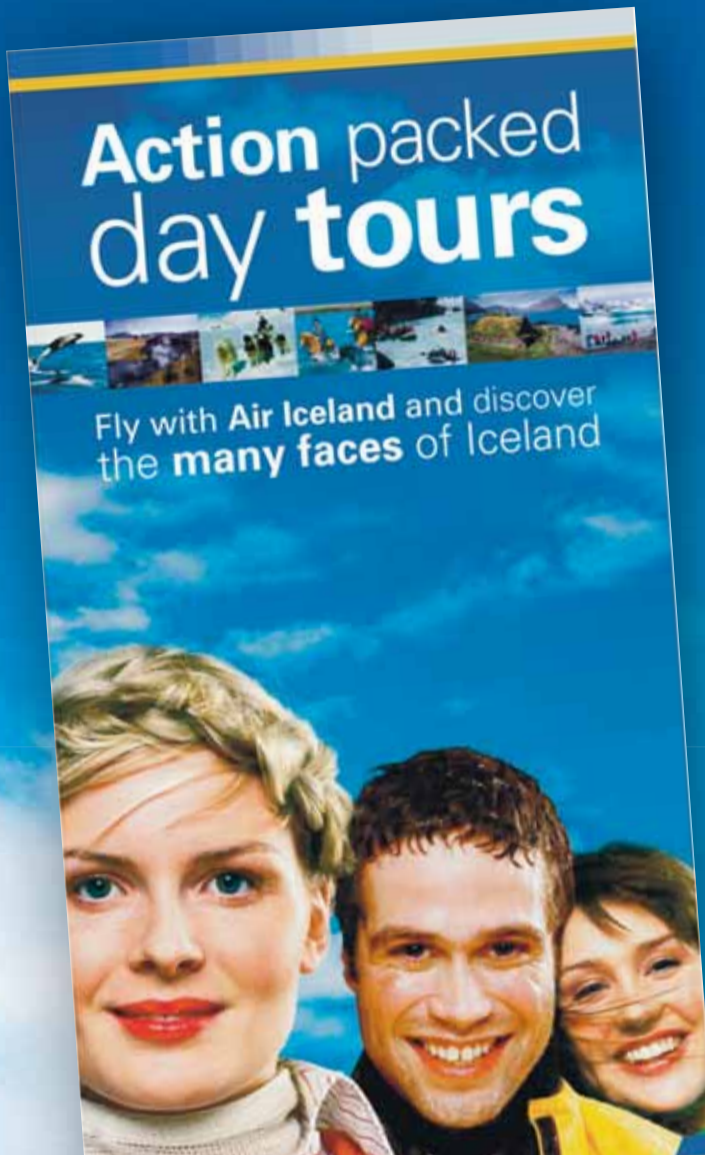
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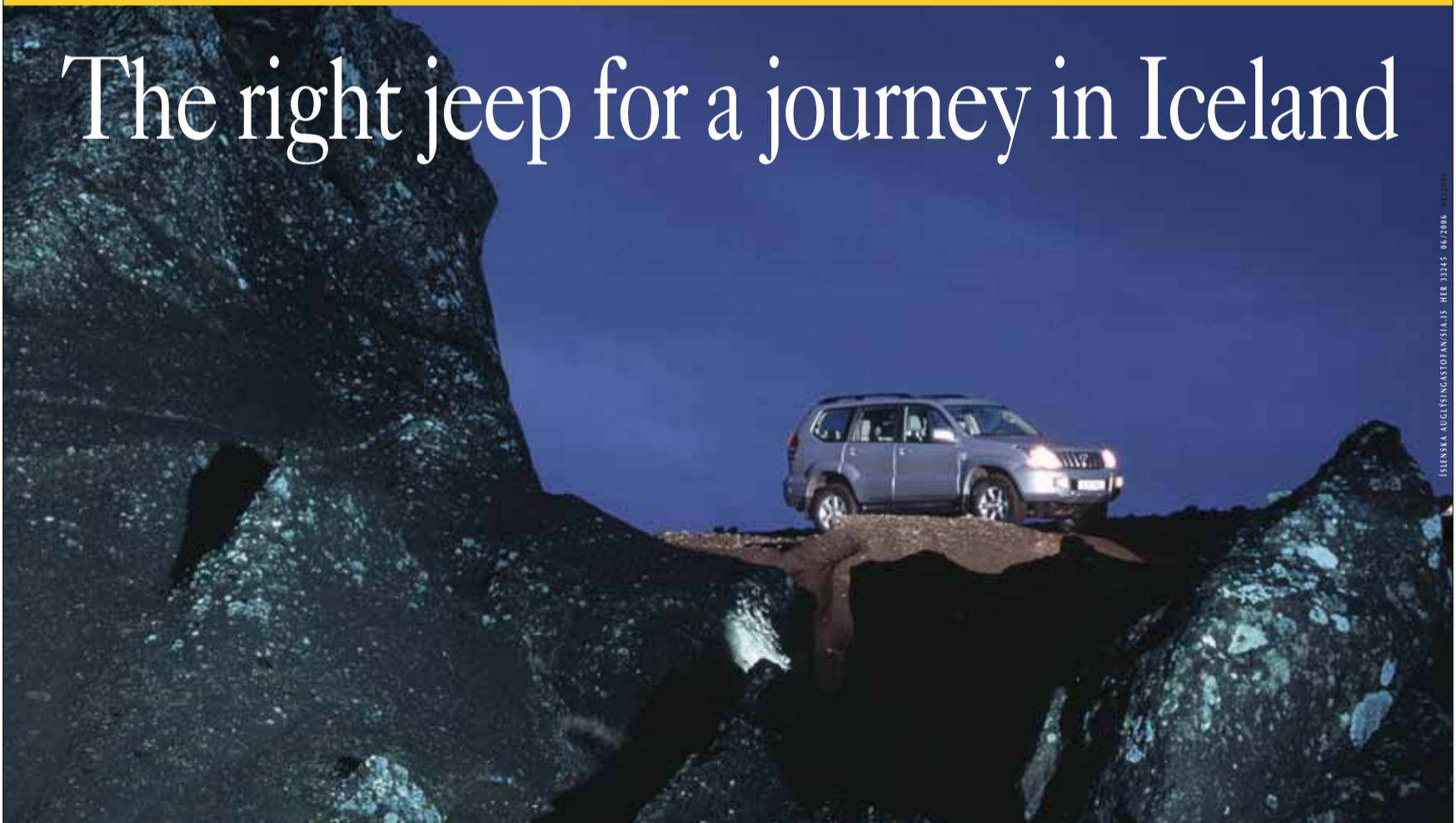
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Musician Will Oldham reveals the secrets to a good recording session.

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**"It is clear we need to adjust to a new world and changed situations and one angle to do so is to look at the Icelandic music scene seriously, invest in it and emphasise creating a field for that industry to grow."**

Bryndís Ísfold Hlöðversdóttir, candidate in the Social Democrats Primaries on her political agenda.

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**"It probably helped that I wasn't a particular fan of hers, although that would change as I got to know her."**

Recordist Valgeir Sigurðsson, on working with Björk.

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**"Everyone knows what it means in English when a girl writes you a "Dear John." That is a different kind of a termination letter."**

Róbert Marshall writes letters.

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**"If Snæfell is the landmark and the patron of the whole region, Kringilsárrani definitely represents its spiritual core. A reindeer country, shamanic, hieratic - it seems infinitely vaster and higher than it actually is."**

Fabrizio Frascaroli goes to Kárahnjúkar.

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**"By the number of artists taking part in the festival, it is clear that the need for expression and creation is strong in local as well as international art culture today."**

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