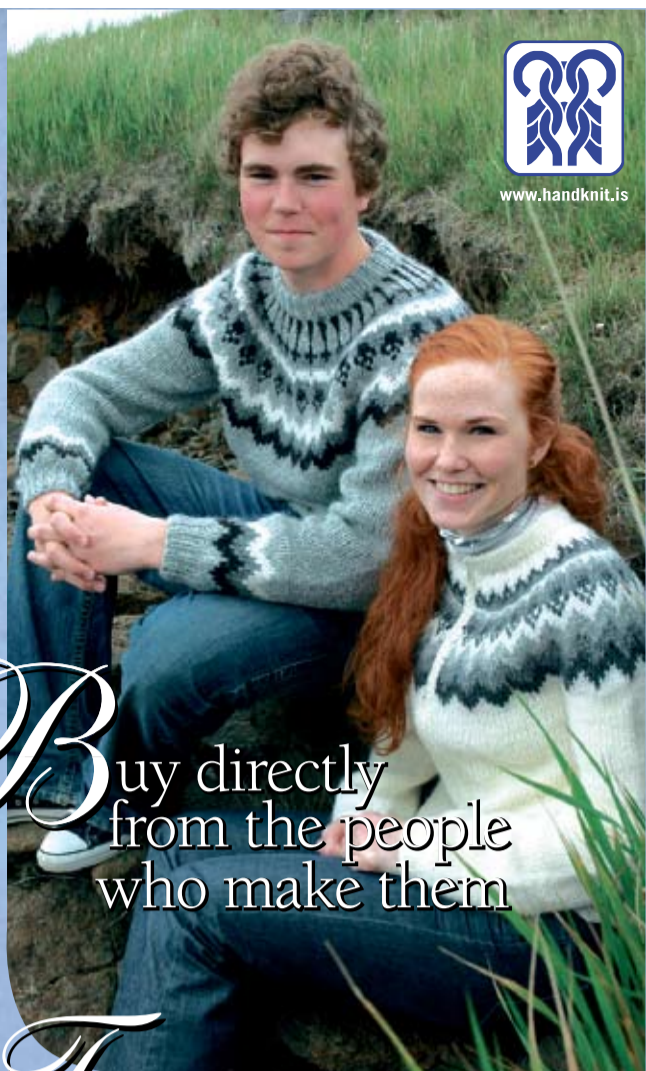


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# SUNDAY

# The REYKJAVÍK GRAPEVINE AIRWAVES



## FESTIVAL HIGHLIGHTS FROM OUR CONTRIBUTORS

### Alistair Lawrence: Kerrang!

For a first timer, what Iceland Airwaves highlights the best is not only the strength of the country's music, but the diversity within the Icelandic music scene. For a rock music journalist like myself, the sincere aggression and musicianship of Gavin Portland's punk-metal hybrid took some beating, although Agent Fresco's dedication to cramming each song full of nods to their love of opera and Dillinger Escape Plan made them another name I'm taking back to London etched in my brain.

### Jesse Darling: Plan B Magazine

It's only right that Airwaves should be the global platform for showcasing Iceland's excellent music scene, which is probably the best music scene in the world ever. I've had a sweet time drinking schnapps and discovering new favourite bands that I may never have come across in anglocentric London: Hjaltalin, FM Belfast, Borko, Benni Hemm Hemm. I only regret having too little time here: you better believe I'll be back. In the meantime: so long, and thanks for all the fish.

### Henry Barnes: The Guardian

Because of the number of singer/songwriters I was exposed to this year my festival was made by anyone who went "ARGGHHHHHHHHH" and jumped around a lot. The idiotic madness of Dr. Spock and the ADHD rock of Sudden Weather Change (although a sudden name change would be a good idea, too fellas) were great but top honours go to Reykjavik! - the volume-o-philos choice. Keep Airwaves rocking, not strumming.

### Heather Rosemary Harrison Phillip: Reykjavik Grapevine

The quality of music offered up by this year's Airwaves has been phenomenal. On Wednesday, Subminimal got everyone in 22 bouncing. On Thursday, despite being the first band of the night in NASA, Soundspell were the definitive, start-to-the-weekend sound. Biogen saved the night back in 22 again on Friday; after a mediocre evening, he had the entire place jumping. However, Saturday offered the best of the festival with Pnau, Crystal Castles and Yelle making everyone inTunglid completely losing it....

### Ben H. Murray: Grapevine's England correspondent

Despite missing a dwarf armed with a strobe light at Singapore Sling's Lost Horse gallery show, I still saw an enormous amount of music to remind me why I love this festival. Biogen's Art Museum set made me look at experimental dance music in a whole new (positive) light; The Mae Shi dug up long-forgotten memories of hardcore-era Beastie Boys, Dynamo Fog provided both dancing girls and great rock music but it was Half Tiger's superb, flowery pop that made me forget a lack of sleep in the nightly beer-sodden march towards dawn.

### J. Edward Keyes: Emusic.com

For me, the best part of this weekend was the opportunity to come out here to Iceland and spend my hard earned dollars (and maikie no mistakes, I may be a music journalist, but those dollars are made with a lot of hard work none the less), in support of the local economy. As much as I'd have liked to, I simply could not spend as much as I'd have liked to, but I am planning to come back as soon as I can to spend even more. At that point I might even spend it on something useful.



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**Published by:**  
The Reykjavik Grapevine  
Fröken ehf.  
Vesturgata 5  
101 Reykjavik  
Tel: 540-3600  
Email: grapevine@grapevine.is  
www.grapevine.is

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**Proofreader:**  
Jim Rice  
**Thanks to:**  
Mr. Destiny  
**Printed by:**  
Landsprent ehf.  
**Copies:**  
10.000

### The Cover



**On Cover:** Ólafur Arnalds  
**Photo:** Baldur Kristjánsson  
**Make Up:** Karin Kristjana

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RESTAURANT AND TAKEAWAY

## SUNDAY



WORDS BY SIGURÐUR KJARTAN KRISTINSSON  
PHOTOGRAPHY GAS

## BORKO

A PERFORMING EDUCATOR

BJÖRN KRISTJÁNSSON IS THE HEAD OF THE ELECTRO PROJECT KNOWN AS BORKÓ, WHICH IS ALSO BJÖRN'S OWN ALTER EGO. BORKÓ HAS TRIED HIS LUCK AT VARIOUS TYPES OF PROJECTS INCLUDING COMPOSING SCORES FOR BOTH FILM AND THEATRE. HE ALSO PUBLISHED HIS DEBUT TREES AND LIMBOS EP EARLY IN 2001. HIS DELICATE ELECTRONIC TEXTURES HAVE FASCINATED MANY BUT HE IS VERY THOROUGH AND SELECTIVE. HE SPENT SIX YEARS WORKING ON HIS FIRST FULL-LENGTH, CELEBRATING LIFE, WHICH KIMI RECORDS PUBLISHED THIS YEAR. HIS FOLLOW UP HAS BEEN EXTENSIVE AND THERE ARE FEW ICELANDERS THAT DON'T RECOGNISE HIS SOMEWHAT SINGULAR APPEARANCE.

**T**HIS year's Airwaves Borkó isn't performed not only once, but twice. As we talk, he lights a cigarette and explains that he didn't know about his multiple appearances, not exactly. It turns out that the whole preparation for a festival like this tends to be a bit fuzzy.

Many must wonder who is this mysterious Borkó in real life and when I ask Björn he doesn't hesitate: **"Well, he is definitely me. But who am I? My name is Björn Kristjánsson and I am a working teacher in an elementary school, and I like to make music. I think that sums it up."** Borkó used to play all his instruments by himself but lately he has gathered a posse around him that help him out by putting all the pieces together. **"It was a bit hard to do everything on my own,"** he says, **"and I think it's always rewarding for a musician to get other's opinion on your stuff. So for me it's a step forward."**

Hitherto he has solely composed all his music alone, whether he is strumming his guitar at home or putting electro melodies together in his computer. But, as any great artist knows, there's something to be said for the editorial process and he's happy to let his friends give input. **"I think that in the future I'll let them enter the songwriting process much earlier than I've done before, these guys know me for what I am and know how I like things."**

When I ask Björn why he makes his music he says that he thinks he is just like any other musician trying to put his thoughts out into the world; **"Isn't it all about doing that? If you have an idea which you think is presentable and you want to let people know what you're thinking, composing music is a great way of sharing it."**

Lately Borkó has been on a tour around Europe so potential attendants to their show should expect a bulletproof and well rehearsed set. **"Before we went out to Europe we also did this tour with our label Kimi, where all the bands signed traveled around the country together."** Björn explains that he really admires Baldvin Esra, the manager and owner of Kimi Records because he isn't a money grubbing scumbag but in it for all the right reasons. **"We have also established a great bond between all the bands, but that mainly happened when we spent several weeks together, and you might say that we're are kind of a family today. A music family."**

The future looks promising for Borko, their new album has received marvelous feedback in Europe. Morr published the European edition. Björn has a head full of ideas for the next album and when they've finished traveling around performing, he plans on taking some time off where he will materialize his ideas.

## INTERVIEWS



## AGENT FRESCO

PROLONG THEIR TRIUMPH

THE UP N' COMERS AGENT FRESCO HAVE RAPIDLY CREATED A REPUTATION AS A VIGOROUS BAND WITHIN THE ICELANDIC MUSIC INDUSTRY.

WORDS BY SIGURÐUR KJARTAN KRISTINSSON  
PHOTOGRAPHY GAS

**I**T TURNED out to be more difficult than I thought to catch up with their extremely lively singer Arnór. As the current store-manager of the Naked Ape, which produces all of the 700 official Airwaves t-shirts, he's a very busy man. On top of managing the store and performing, he's also making t-shirts for his band and several for the Mr.Destiny crew, so you could say his hands are pretty full. **"Isn't this how Icelanders do it? Everything's rigged in the last minute?"** he says.

The band members knew each other a bit before they started the group, they all study at F.Í.H., which is the only jazz school in Iceland. But, none of them were actually friends before they established Agent Fresco **"It all started with an email from the bassist where he invited me to join the flock,"** Arnór explains. With that email, they plunged into preparation for the Battle of the Bands. Armed with a three song EP they ended up winning the competition. **"Afterwards we knew we were tremendously lucky that we all connect, that doesn't happen very often, if you put together a pack of random guys then it's more likely that they don't add up at all."**

He says it's tough to actually describe what Agent Fresco is all about, but their sound is definitely intense, at least when performed live. Their music boasts lot of melodies and they have the whole polyrhythmic going on. **"We have of course some jazz influences for all of us study jazz, but I hate saying it because when you say you have jazz and funk influences people tend to think of porno-ish funk guitars and such, which is definitely not true in our case."** Arnór studied classical singing for a long time but recently switched to jazz and rock. **"We can also be quite heavy, almost hardcore, so you could say we cover the whole spectrum."**

Lately Agent Fresco have been recording their EP and are hoping that they'll be able to release it in a month. The album was recorded by the band themselves, mixed, mastered and they are going to publish it themselves. The only thing not being made by them is the artwork, which was made by a good friend of Arnór from Denmark. **"We wanted to find out how far we could go without having anyone doing anything for us, and so far it has worked out fine."** Even so, they have spoken to Kimi Records concerning the future and Arnór is optimistic that they could do excellent things together.

Agent Fresco have played almost every day over the last couple of weeks. Arnór says that's how they've been rehearsing for Airwaves which is more rewarding than jerkin' off the same old tunes in a garage over and over again. **"If you come to our show you can expect a really energetic and dynamic show, so please do check us out."** Finally, Arnór expresses how ecstatic he is about being a part of the Iceland Airwaves and how great the atmosphere is, **"it's wonderful how all the bands in Iceland seem to be in harmony and nobody has a grudge against one another, but I guess it's because nobody's in it for the money, simply because there is no money. And if you're in it for the fun, why shouldn't you have some laughs while you're at it?"**



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## SHOGUN

WORDS BY FLORIAN ZÜHLKE  
PHOTOGRAPHY GAS

YOUNG GUNS SHOW THAT ICELAND'S  
HARDCORE-SCENE REMAINS ALIVE AND  
KICKING

**S**HOGUN IS the first and only Icelandic band that tries to integrate a maximum of melody into their bone crushing metal sound. To prove this reputation, the five-piece from Reykjavik has just released their debut-album "Charm City" which could become an Icelandic blueprint for modern metalcore. Sharp metal riffs, hard-hitting breakdowns and emotional melodies make these five guys pioneers for a sound that is well established abroad but never really caught on in Iceland.

How long has Shogun been playing together?

**Y:** We started one and a half year ago.

What were the first steps, when you founded the band?

**Jói:** At first we took part in the *Músiktilraunir*, the popular Icelandic Battle of the Bands, which was a good start for our band. It was the first gig we played in front of an audience and we won the contest. We were actually quite surprised by that. Shortly afterwards we made a demo and toured Iceland together with We made God and Gordon Riots. But then we made a mistake. When we started writing the new CD we stopped playing live. People really seemed to forget about us. So, at the moment, we are really putting our heart into playing live, every occasion we can get, to build an audience again.

The CD you are talking about is called "Charm City" and it has just been released in Iceland. How would you describe the record in a few words?

**Gummi:** It is very diverse and melts lots of styles. There is everything from emo to deathcore, even pop-punk. We tried to bring all that together.

You're the only band, that I know, who are playing metalcore in this melodic variant here in Iceland. How would you assess this kind of music here?

**Jói:** In Iceland there is just a little crowd who likes heavy music.

**Gummi:** Yeah, and this style, like we play it, with clean singing and everything is not very popular. Most people over here like either Death Metal or Hardcore. And we are kind of stuck in between. I have the impression that most Icelandic bands always try to get heavier. Opposite to that, we want to keep the melodies in our sound.

**Jói:** There are few bands over here that drag new people into our small scene. I think we accomplish that, because many can relate to our melodic edge.

How is it then difficult for you to find a label?

**Gummi:** You have to be able to show up everywhere to get signed by a label. And that is indeed quite hard when you live on an island. But we really want to go abroad.

**Jói:** We have made sacrifices in the past – jobs, money. We are putting everything into the band.

Do you plan to release "Charm City" outside Iceland as well?

**Gummi:** If we could do that that would be great! It is our goal to release it in as many places as possible. But at the moment we think about Iceland and getting an audience here.

You played Airwaves last year. How did you get to do that?

**G:** That was one of the prizes we won in the Battle of the Bands.

How is Airwaves different from other shows in Reykjavik?

**G:** For us, there is no difference at all. There are not many people that come to Airwaves to see a metal band. It is just an honour or like an award for us to play there with the other metal bands.



## SUDDEN JUST A ROCK BAND

SUDDEN WEATHER CHANGE HAS A STRONG WORK

# WEATHER

ETHIC, A LOYAL FAN BASE AND A FIRM STANDING IN THE REYKJAVIK MUSIC SCENE. WE CAUGHT UP WITH BAND MEMBERS BERGUR ANDERSON, DAGUR SCRAVARSSON, LOGI HÖSKULDSSON, ODDUR GUÐMUNDSSON AND BENJAMIN STACEY TO TALK ABOUT AIRWAVES, THEIR NEW ALBUM AND HOW TO COMBAT THE EVER-ESCALATING PRICE OF BEER.

**I**KNOW YOU play a lot of gigs here in Reykjavik. Have you had any favourite shows?

**BA:** We had one in Bar II.

**DS:** It was insane.

**BS:** The audience was so close and everyone was going berserk. Microphones were flying into our faces and we'd have bloody lips. Things were falling on my guitar and pedals were all over the place. All the cables of my pedal got pulled out, so I had to put it straight into the amplifier just to keep playing. Then my guitar got wrecked so I just tossed it and started screaming and crowd surfing.

**BA:** What I get out of the shows is that I really like the fact that teenagers have a really good reason to go out piss drunk.

**BS:** We have a really strong fan base that religiously come to all of our shows. It's almost like a collaboration we provide the music and they provide the party they get everybody else going.

What do you think accounts for such a strong following?

**Ben:** My theory is that we enjoy what we do so much and I think we do so to the point that it really shows so people can connect to that

So would you say there's a difference in playing Kaffibarrin on a random weekend and playing Airwaves?

**Ben:** I guess the run up to it. There's more scrutiny it's a bit more stressful because of that.

**BA:** It's a lot more formal. When we play regular gigs it's usually just like a friend's concert and it's free and it's a lot more easy going. Airwaves is like a really formal party.

Is it something you get pumped up for?

**BS:** Yeah we love Airwaves. We've been going to Airwaves as patrons for years as well and have heard some really great music. It's nice to get the chance to actually play Airwaves as well, especially on the big stage.

**OG:** We are releasing an album in a little over a week so it's nice to get attention for that.

Can you tell me a little bit about the new album is there any concept or idea behind it?

**BS:** Not really. It's more a lack of an idea. We rented a big house in the country and recorded there for 11 days. It was this really strange place and it was full of flies and everything

WORDS BY DESIREE ANDREWS  
PHOTOGRAPHY VALDIS THOR

# CHANGE

creaked when you walked in. The atmosphere was nice and we thought that was important. Instead of going in to this big spaceship-like fancy studio—we'd rather have a good atmosphere. A big part of our music is how much we love it.

Were you writing during that time or just recording?

**BS:** We'd written most everything we were going to have on the album before that. The weeks leading up to when we were going to record, we just practiced, practiced, practiced. We were really focused on being prepared for it.

Do have a specific label that you put on your music?

**BA:** We have switched genres but we've narrowed it down to just being a rock band.

**BS:** It's how we think of our music. We play just exactly the kind of music we liked so it could go from heavy bits to mellow bits in the same song, it's not bound to one specific genre, it's just rock in general.

You said your album isn't going to be released for another week or so. I think a lot of bands might just hurry and try and get the album out before Airwaves no matter what. What made you decide not to?

**Ben:** We were going to do that but at this stage if we rush it out in the form that it is now, it wouldn't really justify the effort that we put into it because if we're going to do it we'd like to do it well. If we were to release it, there would be bits in it that we would say, "we could have done this better". We'd just rather put out a promo album.

What's it called?

Everyone together: Stop Handgranade in the name of crib death 'nderstand

With the economic situation, how will you deal with the escalating price of beer this Airwaves?

**LH:** We have a great party at our car last night.

**BS:** We were keeping all our beer in our car. It was like our beer stockpile. So between concerts we just ran to the car and put a Ramones CD on. There were all these people walking with us and asking us were we were going. We kept saying "we're going to the car" and every one was shouting "yeah we're going to the car" and it ended up just being this kind of really weird rainy 50s type on-the-street party with the worst sound system ever blasting the Ramones drinking cheap beer out of the trunk.

**DS:** We'll have to have another one.

Anything else you want the world to know about you?

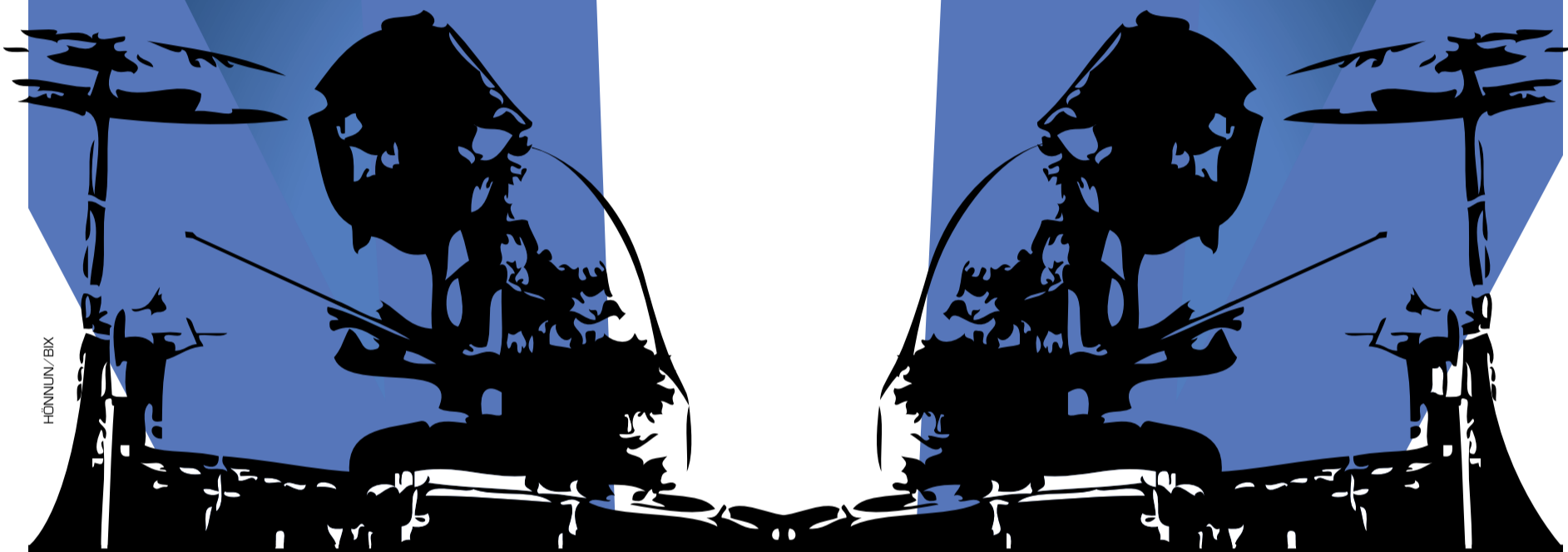
**BA:** For the record: we don't sound like Wolf Parade.



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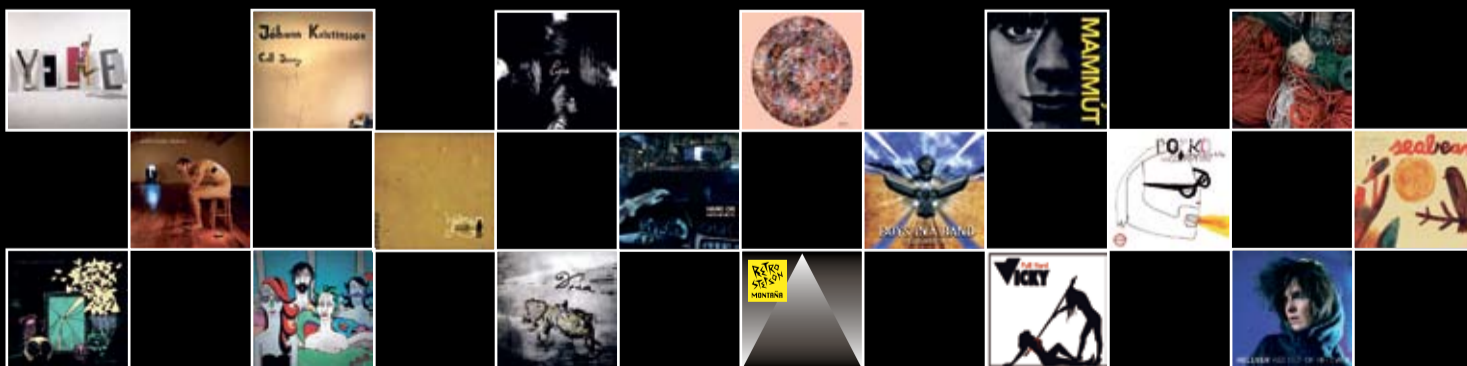
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# SAT URDAY

## Iðnó

For the uninitiated, Iðnó is such a beautiful venue that it's more like going to someone's house than going to a gig. The main hall boasts ornate arches and fine acoustics, which suited the cello-led post-rock of **Rökkurró**. Given the largely subdued, introspective nature of their music they provided an early evening downer but were forgiven by a receptive audience who didn't mind the low energy levels and with good reason: Rokkurro have the musicianship and composure to make a great addition to the likes of Constellation records in the US. In contrast, **Ske's** positioning on the bill probably helped them. Stronger indie rock acts appeared later in the evening, but following on from Rokkurro meant that their mournful indie rock, filled out with layers of piano and then keyboards, didn't stop them from making the spotlight their own. They fell into pedestrian territory at points and several attempts to hold a sustained note when singing fell flat, but when they arrived at some more up-tempo material those songs showed them at their driving, rhythmic best. **Viking Giant Show** breezed past the other acts on the line-up, with their excellent, sussed lyrics and music that was all of off-the-wall, intelligent and catchy as hell. Almost like a less wacky Presidents Of The United States, they got the crowd clapping along and that quickly turned to enthusiastic applause at the end of each song. That they have a country-tinged number about 'praying out the gay' tells you everything to know that's good about this band. They have the unassuming charm of true satirists. **Sprengjuhöllin's** sound was composed of many parts, not least intermittent trombones and trumpets. Their versatility was a strength, in both their music and lyrics. A helpful translator explained them singing about everything from perverse sex to a tribute to a specific area of the city to this British journalist. Their quirkiness and polite intelligence make them wholly likeable and their raft of former hit singles helped maintain the energy levels transmitted from the crowd back to the band, too. Dressed all in black, **White Lies** were the only foreign band on the bill – from London – and their otherness seemed to get them through. Although hotly tipped and tightly honed, their sound was heavily derivative of too obvious choices for a band of their ilk. Joy Division and The Smiths are long gone and The Killers showed how to invigorate that sound with style and panache a few years ago. White Lies do nothing new, really. They're hard to hate but impossible to find interesting. **Jeff Who?** made a late arrival but took only two songs to jack energy levels back through the roof. Eminently danceable, their quirky indie pop might not be very distinctive but they know how to write tunes and nonsense verse that hole up inside your head. By the time their deserved encore had ended, Iðnó's stylish wooden floor was groaning from the number of bodies that had been bouncing up and down on it. **ALISTAIR LAWRENCE**



Emma

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Enkidu (acoustic set), Loji,  
Jóhann Kristjánsson, Stormy  
Curves, Jökull Snær.**

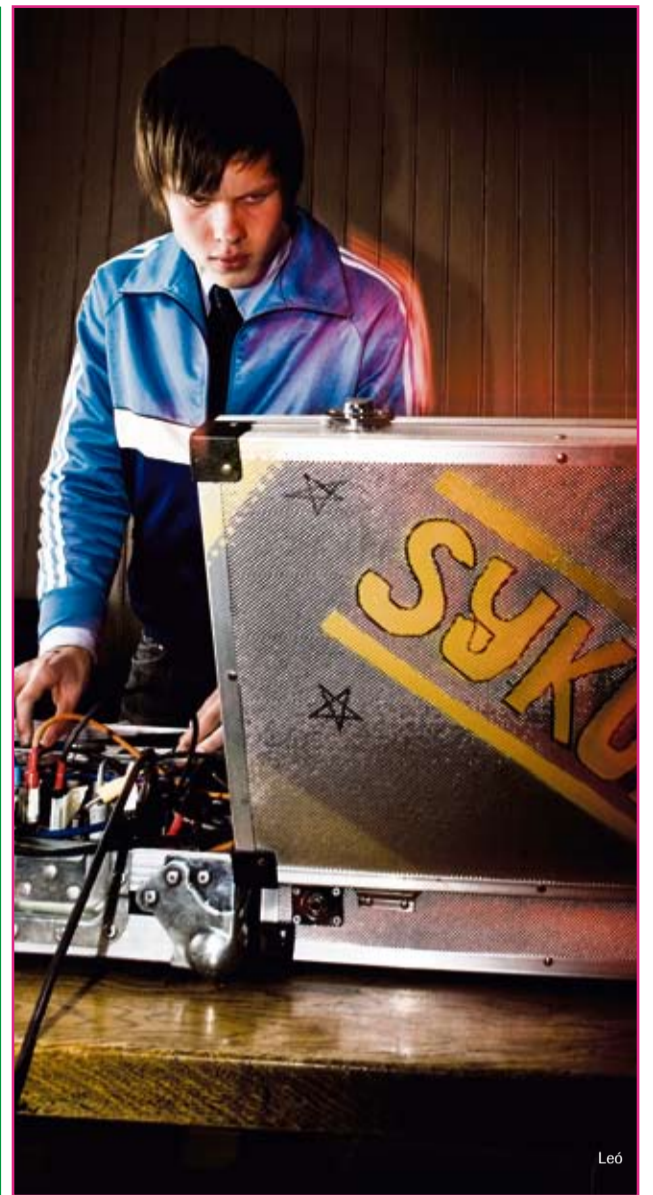
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22

Disorientation is the diagnosis for a jaded Saturday night crowd. **Prince Valium** prescribes a similar medication that his name implies, his spellbinding electronica feels like a comedown, enveloping the listener and posting them to icy Siberia. One guy certainly looks dressed to go there, sporting hat, scarf and baggy brown coat; he slow-paces around the room and is perhaps on valium himself. This provides a fantastic visual accompaniment to a wholly worthwhile audio. One man lies asleep on the floor now for **Stereo Hypnosis** and it's a wonder because the immersive, reverberating drones are a little too loud. The father and son duo work best when they neglect their ambient tendencies and make a bit of mess. A cluster of beats recall the Italian collective **Port-Royal** for sheer texture and maximum isolation. Next, a visit to the bathroom sees a keen groomer try to comb the Grapevine's hair. This is becoming a very trippy experience. Luckily **Sykur** arrive to deliver a huge party parcel. These two young teenagers stack up a tower of synths that never threatens to topple. Plus, it's free of annoying vocals, so the driving bass lines do the talking. By the end, they finally have everyone dancing. If these young chaps drink lots of milk then it's exciting times ahead. Downstairs, **Oculus DJ's** tech-house but at 11pm it's too early a slot to be doing this. **Steve Sampling** scrambles around in his record box and scratches all over his vinyl. It's not really danceable but there's nobody here to do that anyway. Steve would probably appreciate it if one man and his dog showed up. **Ingi Þór** of **Family of Sound** fame loves his set a bit too much. He seems happy though in playing to what would be a poorly attended house party. However, when he plays some Simian Mobile Disco, it brings a glorious finish and immediate nostalgia for Simian's Friday DJ set, just a day later. **DJ Hero's Trial** play techno that skids all over the ice and many show off their dance moves and some are a bit too aggressive in doing this. **Plugg'd** close up with techno fare that's good for drunk, silly dancing, even when sober.

MARCUS WALSH

## Reykjavík Art Museum

The first three bands are natives of the unreconstructed rocker variety, but that ain't a bad thing. **Bob Justman** is the kind of boy who sings heartfelt songs of wronged love as though he ain't the one breaking all the hearts: looking and sounding like a younger, more melodic Nick Cave, he starts his set with wistful country-tinged angst-pop –groovy and mournful all at once – and ends by busting out the raunchy rock n' roll. The sound is great: every drumbeat feels like a punch in the face, and that's is a good thing. Next up are **Jan Mayen**, and already the teenage girls are pressing themselves against the barrier. Maybe they like the way the singer plays guitar; watching him flailing and jerking that thing around is like watching unscripted porn [and that's a good thing, too]. It's chippy, sharp-edged indie-rock with nineties overtones and mathy tendencies, but despite the precision there's real abandon in these riffs. A dude in a tail-coat appears at interludes to coolly Pwn the hell out of a moog while the rest of us – and them – headbang like crazy. Epic. **Dikta** are epic as well, but in a Ben Folds Fiveish sort of way, especially when they start hammering at the keys. It's affronted, enjoyably un-hip rage-pop with big percussion and stirring screamo choruses, embarrassingly earnest but lovable nonetheless. Fortunately **Boys In A Band** were around to show 'em all how chest-beating macho rawk should be done: with ego, attitude, camp theatricality and a sense of humour. Referencing spiritual forefathers AC/DC, who [also] elevated bad

taste to a glorious art form, these guys are all about the bandanas, the thrusting crotches, the beats as big as your balls. Keytars! Korgs! Sweat and hair and swagger! They rock. The boys announce their intention to reunite the nations of the Faroe Islands and Iceland, but insist on a formal introduction: on the count of three, we all have to yell out our first names. It's ridiculous and we know it, but it feels good – a lot like the band. On stage they're mental, melting every teenage girl down to a wet cliché, and even the po-faced press rats are grinning. After these guys, **CSS** look positively staid: the sound is muddy and over-amped and we're deprived of all the subtlety and sexiness in a great big wash of sound. Maybe they're not feeling it either; it all looks a bit formulaic, with **Lovefoxxx** doing her inevitable thing and the rest not doing anything much at all. I wander off to the bar, where the sound is better. **Vampire Weekend** are worth returning for, all precision and control. There's a sunniness to them, but despite all the afro-beat hype, there's nothing loose or laid back here, nothing funky – it's brisk and brittle like the northern sun. Boogying stiff-legged in the blue lights, the lead singer comes on like Elvis: the whitest of whiteboys who made a black style his own. They're a weird band, but a damn good one. I leave just as the last song is finishing: making my way through the crowd there are guys in suits and ties that are throwing down like no drunken teenage girl ever could. And that ain't a bad thing at all. **JESSIE DARLING**



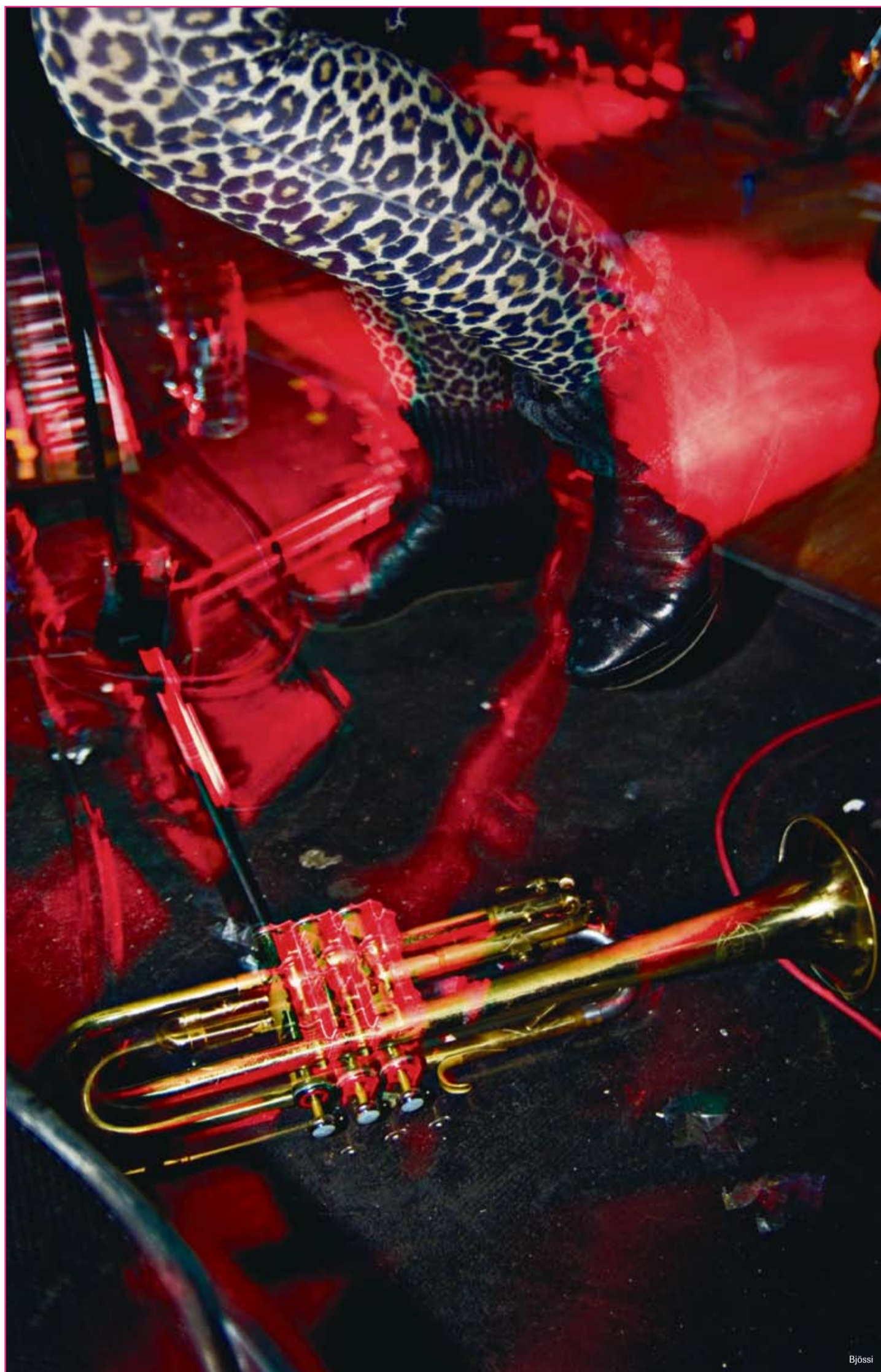
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# SATURDAY

## Organ

The best band on the bill at Organ Saturday night had the unfortunate pleasure of playing long after most of the crowd had stumbled out in search of other pleasures at the nearby overcrowded bars. The dozen or so people that remained were treated to a vibrant, bracing set by the Reykjavik power-pop trio **Weapons**. Weapons are the perfect example of a simple thing done right: their songs don't stretch any borders or look to pull off any tricky genre-splices. They're just simple, guitar-driven pop songs delivered with spirit and spunk, drummer Sigurmon and frontman Hreinn trading off vocal duties and teaming up for choruses that soared sky high. At their best moments, they recalled prime Sugar: indelible choruses driven by hot rodding guitars. What preceded them was mostly mediocre, with a few notable exceptions. One of those exceptions was **Mammút**. The group is a powerhouse on stage, delivering a series of searing post-punk songs that were terrifically fractured and neurotic. Guitarists Arnar and Alexandra deliver notes in tight clusters, and the songs strike like stabs to the chest. Vocalist Kata is just as aggressive: her voice is a miracle, a collection of tics and gasps and shrieks that injects the songs with the proper sense of panic. Their set was a series of well-timed thrills, breathless and invigorating. Though they were long on imagination, **Benny Crespo's Gang** couldn't quite manage to get their million disparate ideas to click. The group takes an exploratory approach toward metal, and at their finer moments they can be thrilling. Too often, though, they feel anchorless, and their songs expand without ever really gaining heft. They were still better than Montreal's **Miracle Fortress**, whose songs hung like pink haze, lacking shape or definition. They were all mood with no motion. The same could be said of Brooklyn, New York's **Cruel Black Dove**. Vocalist Anastasia Dimou is certainly charismatic: decked out in a ruffled white shirt and dark eye makeup, she frequently climbed atop the gate at the front of the stage and sang straight down into the audience. The trouble was that she had more character than the songs, which were mostly wan and wandering. **Eberg's** gentle indie pop was tender but forgettable, and the trio of bands that opened the night seemed to settle for the simply average. **Lights on the Highway** played a kind of dull grey rock for a room full of rabid fans. **Noise** blended searing glam vocals with chugging, doom metal riffs. And **Johnny and the Rest** played basic bar blues to a mostly empty room, blustery and technically flawless but mostly uninspired. **J. EDWARD KEYES**



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# SCENES

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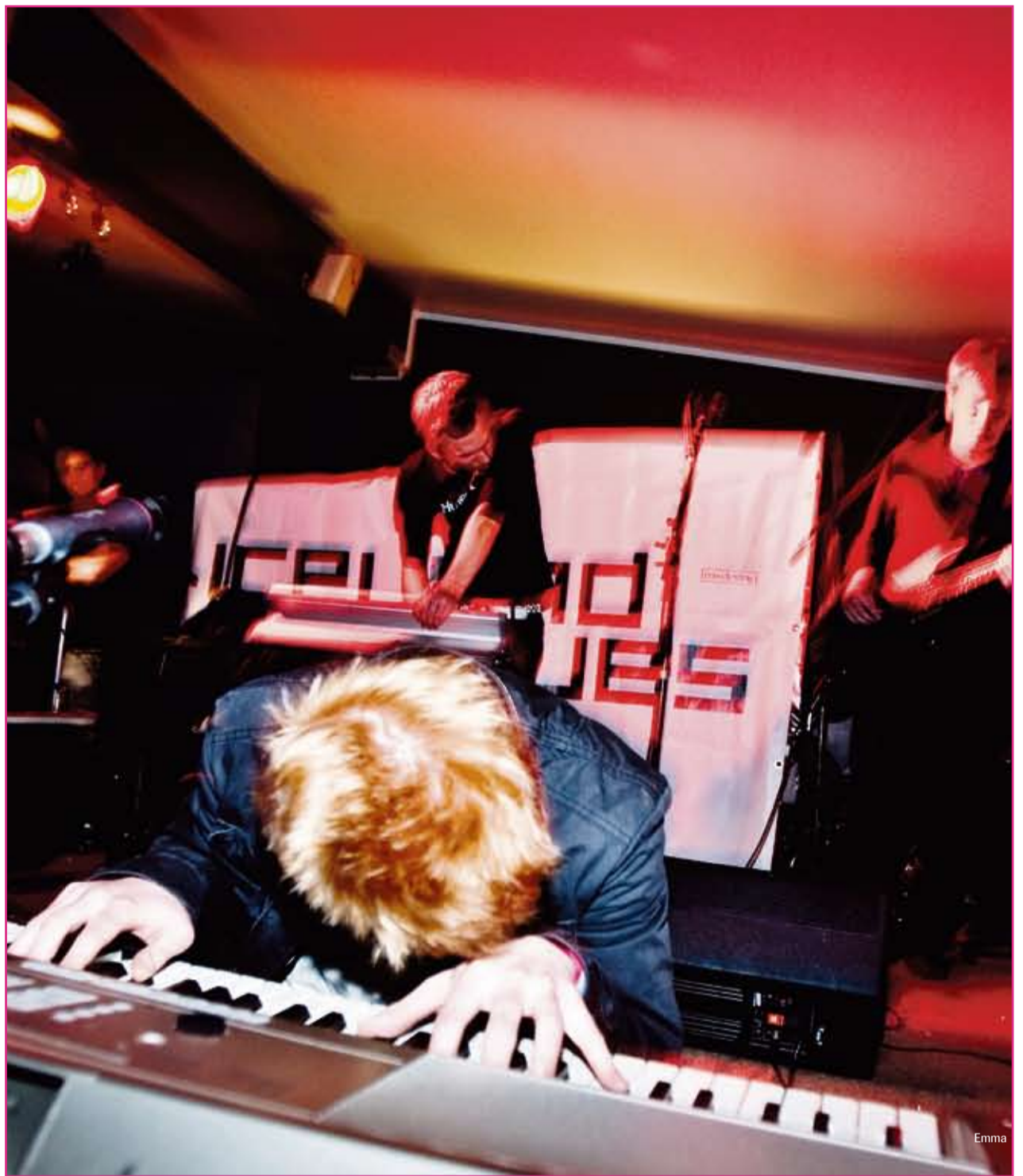
# SAT URDAY



Emma

## Hljómalind: Off-venue

The bands that Kaffi Hljómalind had booked this day were more on the hard side, especially metal and punk bands. Morri just played one song of atmospheric post-rock, which was somehow disappointing. *The Tentacles of Doom*, which were up next, served straight up punk-rock with female vocals and did a solid job doing that. *The Fist Fokkers* came up with a surprise, as they had invited a trio of elderly gentlemen with brass instruments for their first song. Although they did not play very precisely, their mixture of raw rock like The White Stripes and chaotic punk like The Bronx sounded quite interesting. The next band, *The Pen*, also presented punk, but put its trashy side in the foreground. Unfortunately, Anarchy symbols on blank bodies and undressing during the show do not make a good punk band. Way more convincing was the gig of Iceland's oldest punk band, *Sakmóðigur*. These guys have been around for about 20 years, which you could see in their experienced performance. The audience got screaming and singing along with their songs – the perfect proof that this band is an Icelandic legend. The definite highlight were the subsequent *DYS*. Iceland's most political hardcore band draw so much attention that people were actually standing outside Hljómalind's back room, enthusiastically watching the show through the window, while the crowd inside completely freaked out. Their last song somehow marked the start of the metal part of this afternoon. First on were *Muck* which impressed with ultra-slow, down-tuned songs. Hopefully there will be soon heard more of this band. They were followed by *Dormah*, which served their metallic hardcore properly. After this band, *Swords of Chaos* hit the stage and delivered a powerful show with punk attitude, rock riffs and the morbid atmosphere of later Breach. The most annoying thing about *Plastic Gods*, the next band, were the black-metal vocals. Also apart from that their stoner-doom missed their examples of hypnotic heaviness. *Shogun* did a quite good performance playing new material for an audience that also wanted to hear it. After them were *Celestine*, which managed to sound like a steam-roller in spite of the generally bad PA at Hljómalind. *Gavin Portland* were the last band playing and they made a good ending to this heavy day. **FLORIAN ZÜHLKE**



Emma

## Hressó

On a night in a cafe that featured dead animal headgear, hillbillies and *Wulfgang*, the EMO-tinged opening performer, one of the bands hailed from South and another just went south. *Andrúm* started oh so gently, too much so after *Wulfgang*'s dramatic 'Streetcar Named Disappointment', but their gradual progression towards 70s-tinged shoegaze was exciting and dramatic, especially when a mammoth riff intertwined with the vocalist's gentle whispers. The small front-of-stage space in Hressó began to fill and *Borkó*'s performance was the best-attended of the night – the rest attracted a sparse crowd of fans, friends and passers-by at best. It was also the most accomplished as they swerved around a variety of progressive rock and indie styles, sounding like the sort of avant-garde, timeless music a Tarantino film might feature, piercing trumpet and all, but anything sharp and tuneful would have saved the ensuing *Ultra Mega Technobandið Stefán* from being the biggest disappointment of the whole festival. Their start was auspicious, with a slowed-down version of 'Story Of A Star' promising to lead to the sort of high-energy show their reputation strongly suggests, but after less than fifteen minutes of slow, badly-sung, tuneless nonsense they unplugged their keyboards and thankfully made way for *Soundspell*. Billed as sounding like Coldplay and Keane, they bore no resemblance to either (Radiohead would be more accurate) and could be one of next year's hits if they can repeat their impressive mix of beeps and guitars in 2009.

'The Key Ingredient' is a work of great promise. Contrarily, nobody knew anything about *Southside* before they arrived at Hressó for their headline slot, so an extended hillbilly rap during their "public sound check" was a welcome bulletin. They took an age to all get on stage and, like the poster you had at school depicting the ages of man – from knuckle-dragging primate to upright Homo Sapiens – the six members of *Southside* showed us a sort of hick life-cycle in all its Southern glory. Starting with a fresh-faced mouth organ player, obviously the most normal member of the group, we could also see the middling point of hickdom in the leather-clad singer, who had a large dead animal in the shape of a hat balanced on his head, and the final stage – a crazy old man with a platted beard who sat by his monitor sipping wine from a Pepsi bottle for almost the entire set. He did get up to perform a poem, accompanied by the band playing Hendrix's 'Little Wing', but that just confirmed that the authorities at Keflavik must have been on a coffee break when he flew in. "We are the fucking storm generation, the storm generation!" was the crux of the poem, and it was as bad as it sounds. After settling down they did play some fine blues rock and the eccentricity was actually endearing. After all, without a sense of fun you'd up performing the sort of set that *Ultra Mega Technobandið Stefán* tried to pass off as party music. **BEN H. MURRAY**

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## Tunglið

It's very much a slow start – **Guðrun Gut** completely fail to put in the promised appearance which means that we are left listening to pretty easy musak. Fortunately, **KaprioKurt** is worth the wait; arriving on the stage looking a little like an English history teacher, he is deceptively brilliant... banging techno rhythms get everyone moving and before we know it, people are getting down to the dirty basslines that he offers up. A constant issue of this festival is the poor transition between sets; it's good to have enough time to move between venues without feeling that you are missing out but at the same time, a few decent background tunes would not go amiss! The other concern is that, so far, some of the nights have started superbly well but sadly deteriorated into quite bland mediocrity before picking up again... Fortunately, this is not one of those nights... **Steed Lord** throw themselves into the event with all the theatre that they are known for. **Kali**, tiny though she is, looks beautiful and completely dominates the stage, whilst **DEMA & AC Bananas** get the crowd bouncing in time to the filthy beats that they spit out. The place is half full and everyone wants to dance to this, hands are in the air, 300 people are bouncing in time, we want more! **PNAU** look like beach surfers but drop some heavy tunes that are both entirely suited to this crowd tonight, and appear to be beyond their youthful appearance. The visuals that accompany the set are amazing but suffer from being displayed on too small a screen. **Wild Strawberries** goes down incredibly; at times it's almost hard to believe that they are performing live. However, as Nick Littlemore begins swinging from the bars around the stage, it is clear that there is nothing insubstantial about this band. **Crystal Castles** arrive to a venue that is absolutely full to capacity and ready to let themselves go to their electro-extravaganza. Opening with 'Courtship Dating', Alice Glass's voice is astoundingly clear and capable of hitting notes normally only audible to dogs. Despite some technical hitches, they raise the bar of the evening and by the time they wind up, the place is completely jumping and wanting more. The ½ hour of bland, barely audible intermission between CC and **Yelle** is no deterrent to the mood of this bunch of party people. They have been swaying rhythmically since Crystal Castles left and as soon as Gerry & Christian appear, arms are thrust upwards and they are ready to go. After an immense set, the crowd are unwilling to let them go, but finally after offering up *Je Veux Te Voir*, they make themselves leave. Wow, what a truly banging night. **HEATHER ROSEMARY HARRISON PHILLIP**

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# SAT URDAY

## Nasa

“Thanks to Nick for coming”. Nick is the jolly American squashing his frame against the barrier and he’s here to see [For A Minor Reflection](#) again. This is their sixth show at Airwaves. We can assume from the way he sways and swoons to their cryptic drone rock that Nick has made the majority. You’d guess that he likes the way their songs build into ten-minutes-on-one-chord semi-epics and probably loves Mogwai. Chug. Chug. Chug. Churn. Churn. Churn. Zzz. Zzz. Zzz. Next. Band. Please. Unlike the Reflections, [Sudden Weather Change](#) know when to cut the thing short before boredom sets in. They switch vocalists and genres every thirty seconds. The closest band you could peg them to is Fugazi, albeit after taking several albums worth of XTC. Midway through their set a spontaneous slam pit of topless young men starts up to the sound of three of the five Weather Change’s screaming “OH MY GOD, I HATE NICHOLAS CAGE”. We hope that’s what they were saying anyway, because if so that’s the best lyric of the festival. Nothing subtle but still pretty immense. [Singapore Sling](#) are proof that modern culture is formed from whatever past movements contemporary musicians fancy slamming into each other. The Sling have bashed together Lou Reed’s monochrome 70s and the dark side of the 60s, namely U.S. garage rockers, The Sonics. They’ve brought some period pieces with them – the wine bottle wrapped in brown paper and the duck’s arse greaser hairdos are a particularly nice touches – but they look too young and nervous to properly carry these manliest of genres on their skinny shoulders. Lots of rock points for hiring a band member solely to play the tambourine though. [Boy Crisis](#) probably formed their band to get laid more. They’re a quartet of jerky, nerdy, sweaty, passion-led American bucks from the Hall and Oates school of seduction. As such they deliver their brand of very purple punk-funk with a hefty wodge of irony. Their standout track, ‘1981’, is ridiculous and sexy and scrappy and filthy and ultimately (after a couple of awkward stabs in the dark) very, very satisfying. Now, anyone got a cigarette? Or something stronger for [Handsome Furs](#)? From their on-stage banter they sure love their acid. All the acid, all the time. That aside, this Canadian duo follow Singapore Sling in taking two seemingly disparate eras and forcing them into bed together. In this case it’s 90s house and 70s proletariat punk. One day that king of experimentation, Elvis Costello, will ring these guys up for a collaborative album. Suggested title: Ebenezer Shipbuilds a Good Army. The rest of the night is a blur of brainless, soulless electro. [Junior Boys](#) drag on \$250,000 worth of synth boxes when they would have been better off spending \$2.50 on a metronome – their live elements are horrible out of time. [Robots in Disguise](#), an all female dance-rock group, play a set drowned out by the sound of Sleater-Kinney’s royalty cheque spinning slowly in its grave and [FM Belfast](#) – who have been mostly superb throughout Airwaves – disappoint thanks to an out-of-sync backing track. Our man Nick would not approve. [HENRY BARNES](#)



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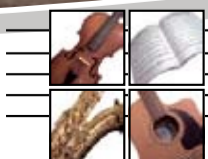


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# ICELANDIC MUSIC IN THE MOVIES

OVERVIEW OF ICELANDIC MOVIES FEATURING ICELANDIC MUSIC

WORDS BY BERGUR EBBI BENEDIKTSSON

1982



## ROCK IN REYKJAVIK "ROKK Í REYKJAVÍK"

The beginning of the 80's was an important era in the Icelandic music scene. The disco era had basically wiped out all live acts in the country except for country-ballad groups fronted by singers with receding hairlines. It took a few years for punk rock to travel from the UK to Iceland, but when it finally did, it was a tsunami. The film *Rock in Reykjavik* was shot during the winter of 1981-1982 and is a good example of these exciting times. "It's gritty, funky and sweaty, shot on a 16mm film under hard conditions," says independent filmmaker, Ari Eldjárn. "It's a great documentary. It basically shows what was going on at the time. They did not intentionally only choose cool bands to perform. They also had typical baldy pop to show the contrast," says Ari. *Rock in Reykjavik* features such acts as the Tappi Tíkarrass with Björk on vocals, the new-wave rock band Þeyr, the punk band Sjálfsfróun and many, many more. You should note that the DVD-version of the film includes the art-happening punk group BB Bruni chopping heads off chickens, a scene which was not included in early releases of the film for home video. Most critics agree that the film ages well and is a remarkable testimony of what everyone agrees is the most interesting times in the Icelandic music scene. The film marked the first steps of the director Friðrik Þór Friðriksson, who has since, with movies like *Children of Nature* and *Angel's of the Universe*, become one of Iceland's most successful filmmakers.

1998



## POP IN REYKJAVIK "POPP Í REYKJAVÍK"

The 90's was a time of confidence in Icelandic music. Björk had, as early as 1994, become an international superstar and the search for a new eccentric Icelandic super-act begun shortly thereafter. The 1998 *Pop in Reykjavik* is a documentary about the Icelandic music scene. The movie is obviously meant to promote Icelandic music abroad and attract record company executives and the international music press. Perhaps it lacks the raw energy of *Rock in Reykjavik*. "The scenario is obviously staged. The producers have chosen what they believe is cool music and therefore the movie is not a good representation of what was actually going on at the time. It has some fantastic shots and it was evidentially meant to promote export of Icelandic music," says Ari Eldjárn. The film was directed by Ágúst Jakobsson, a talented Icelandic filmmaker who was then mostly famous for directing a music video for Guns 'n Roses hence he was better known under the name "Gústi Guns". The search for a new Björk paid off in some ways, as is evident in the film which features a memorable scene of the then little known Sigur Rós. Among other artists from this film who are still active are Bang Gang and Gus Gus.

2005



## SCREAMING MASTERPIECE "GARGANDI SNILLD"

In 2005 Iceland was not modest at all about its achievements in the music industry. This documentary is all about exalting Icelandic music as a screaming masterpiece claiming that there must be something in the water or the nature of Iceland that explains such success. The film interviews people who talk about the influence of medieval poetry on modern Icelandic music and a great effort is spent on talking about Vikings and the Icelandic nature. The film is ambitious and it is never silly but on the whole, it could just as well be an expensive and long commercial for the Iceland Tourist Board. It does not necessary reflect what was going on in Icelandic music at the time but rather manually draws a picture feasible to foreigners. "It doesn't have enough garage in it," says Ari Eldjárn. It could be a safe bet for the regular tourist though. The film is filled with shots of glaciers, mountains, lava and hot springs and it has some very good music. Only time will tell if *Screaming Masterpiece* becomes a music documentary classic like *Rock in Reykjavik* though the odds are against it. Among featured artists are Björk, Sigur Rós, Slowblow, Múm, Ghostigital, the late hip hop band Quarashi, Mugison and Singapore Sling.

## OTHER INTERESTING DOCUMENTARIES

Various documentaries have been made about Icelandic music. Some are full length for the screen and others are made for television. Most of them are or will be available on DVD. For electro-heads the film *Electronica Reykjavik (2008)* is a must see. It covers the electro-scene in Reykjavik starting in the 80's and features such acts as Gus Gus, Ghostigital, Biogen and Anonymous. One of the most successful Icelandic documentaries is the Sigur Rós film *Heima/Hvarf (2007)* which follows the eccentric Icelandic group along the country-side during late-summer. Hip-hop enthusiasts should be sure to see the new *Hip Hop Homecoming (2008)* which deals with the American raised Icelandic DJ Platur and his visit to Iceland. Even country music has been covered with Friðrik Þór Friðriksson's *Cowboys of the North (1984)* about a country festival in Skagaströnd in the north of Iceland. Alternative music and punk are featured in *The Punk and Fræbblarnir (2004)* about the Icelandic punk group Fræbblarnir founded in Kópavogur 1978. People should also check out the documentary about the legendary rock group Ham called *Ham - The Living Dead (2001)*. A rather disappointing fact is that a very ambitious documentary about the Icelandic sixties group Hljómar, also known as Thor's Hammer, is lost. The film was called *Umbarumbamba (1966)* and did perhaps not turn out to be the masterpiece the band had hoped, as is described in Gunnar Lárus Hjálmarsson's history of Icelandic rock *Eru ekki allir í stuði*. "The film proved to be only 15 minutes, cryptic and 'lame' as one of the band member put it". It only ran for a few days in theatres and hasn't been available since.

## ICELANDIC FILMS WITH A GOOD SOUNDTRACK

For people looking for feature films with good music there are some Icelandic flicks better than others. The Icelandic pop-group Stuðmenn made a clever and entertaining film *Með allt á hreinu (1982)* which features their music as well as music from the girl group Grýlurnar. This movie is to date the highest grossing Icelandic movie in theatres. The film *Nýtt líf (1983)* had an ambitious music policy. The folk singer Megas was named musical director and Björk's band Tappi Tíkarrass played much of the music. The same goes with Friðrik Þór Friðriksson's *Skytturnar (1987)* where Björk's the Sugarcubes took care of most of the soundtrack. The session includes rarities like Björk singing the Velvet Underground hit *Sweet Jane* among other things. A very interesting soundtrack which is not available on CD. *Veggfóður (1992)*, *Stuttur frakki (1993)* and *Blossi (1997)* all feature good contemporary Icelandic music which perhaps ages better than the movies. *101 Reykjavík (2000)* has soundtrack made by Einar Örn Benediktsson of the Sugarcubes and Damon Albarn of Blur. The cult hit *Sóðóma Reykjavík (1992)* has very good music including stuff made by the Ham frontman Sigurjón Kjartansson and a little bit of Björk as usual.

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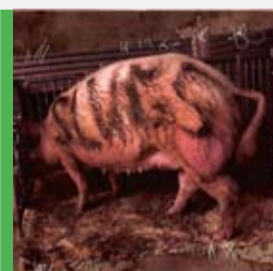
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# ÓLAFUR ARNALDS

## "IN THE END IT'S ALL JUST SOUNDWAVES"

WORDS BY FLORIAN ZÜHLKE PHOTOGRAPHY BALDUR KRISTJÁNS

THE GRAPEVINE DID AN INTERVIEW WITH A VERY GOOD-HUMOURED AND TALKATIVE ÓLAFUR ARNALDS ABOUT THE CONNECTION BETWEEN METAL AND CLASSICAL MUSIC, THE CLASSICAL SCENE AND THE SPECIAL MOOD, EVERYONE IS IN FOR AIRWAVES.

You have been playing in various Icelandic metal and hardcore bands. How did you get from heavy music to arrangements with piano and strings?

■ **I am interested in both. I like hardcore music and I like classical music. It is just two different types of expression.**

Do you think there are parallels between these two kinds of music?

■ **It is all music. In the end it is all just collections of different frequencies of sound waves, that go into your ear and your mind understands them in some way, that we cannot really explain. Furthermore lots of classical music has the same emotion as metal music: it is supposed to be loud and noisy, really intense and heavy. But of course the approach is always different.**

In an interview you are quoted: "The classical scene is closed to people, who haven't been studying music all their life". Do you remember, when that first frustrated you?

■ **Yes, it was at university. I came to my teacher one day with two of my pieces. One was serialistic. Serialism is all about numbers and math, you put up formulas and then you change the numbers into notes. I had spent ten minutes on this piece. My teacher loved it. I also had written a simple piano piece, something really accessible, and I had spent six hours on writing it. The teacher said 'No, this is not good.' He was only judging it like that, because it was not serialistic. The classical scene is very much elitist. What people like about modern classical music, is understanding the math behind it. They do not get some feeling from listening to it. This way it is not very accessible to most people. I want to make classical music that everyone can listen to.**

Were you actually surprised, that people like your music so much, especially that young people like it?

■ **Yes, at first I thought: 'Who would buy your classical music? Old people and my mom perhaps.' And then I got all these insane reviews. 10 of 10 points in big magazines and people were saying, this would be the best thing coming from Iceland. I mean, I was happy with the album, but I did not think, that indie and rock magazines would write about it like that.**

Now I know that this is what I want to do: I want to bring the classical music to the young people. In the beginning I was just writing music.

You have played in big halls, but you have also played in smaller clubs. Which do you prefer?

■ **Both. I have played small shows for 50 people and it was amazing because I easily could communicate with them. It was not like I was playing for them, it was more like I was playing with them. In big venues it is harder to get that connection to the audience, but when you manage to play for 3000 people, and they are completely silent, it is amazing. It is so much fun, when you can start talking to them and they will answer you. It is like being friends with them. So both kinds of venues are good.**

What do you think of playing Airwaves?

■ **The Airwaves week is so much fun for me. I like playing the off-venue shows even more than my actual show, because they are more special. They are always packed with people and you always meet nice people, do so many funny interviews.**

What do you like about the Airwaves audience?

They are all in this special mood: 'Okay, I am going to Iceland and I am going to see 200 bands'. That is why the gigs are different for me from those where the people only come to see me.



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# Samán í Síðumúla 20

Tónabúðin í Reykjavík sameinast Hljóðfærahúsinu í Síðumúla 20. Þar verður til langstærsta hljóðfæraverslun landsins. Hinir vösku starfsmenn Tónabúðarinnar koma að sjálfsögðu með og mynda einstakt teymi fagfólks með yfirburða þekkingu á hljóðfærum og búnaði fyrir tónlistarfólk.



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**Alda** / Student, Iceland

*FM Belfast's stage presence is just amazing and you can always expect a crazy show whenever they play. They are one of the best Icelandic bands today, no question.*



**Atli Fannar** / Editor of Monitor, Iceland

*Dynamo Fog and Boys in a Band were both insane. Boys in a Band announced that Icelanders and the Faroese should team up and form an alliance. I think that would be a brilliant idea!*



**Edda Guðmundsdóttir** / Fashion designer, Iceland  
*I really liked SpaceVestide on Wednesday and CSS's concert was a mad party. But I have to mention the biggest downside with the festival, which are the queues. They ruin all the fun.*



**Marcino** / CSS manager, US

*For me, CSS was the best band. FM Belfast was also really good. The best part of my weekend was though dinner at the Seafood Seller. That was one of the top three meals of my life. I'm very impressed with the festival, especially with all the financial troubles going on in Iceland. Despite everything, people are so energetic and ready to have a good time.*

# SEE SHIT!

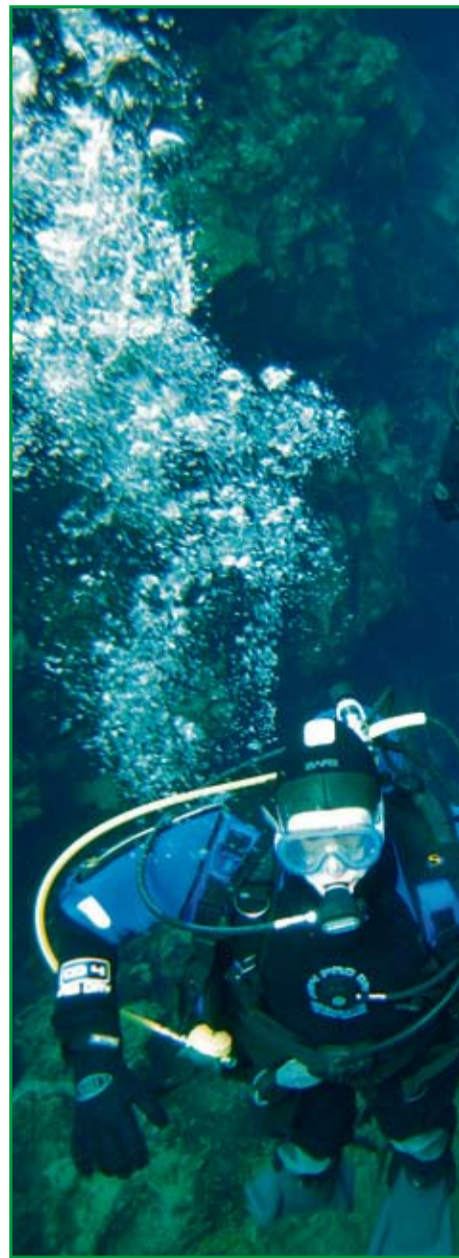
FRIENDLY ADVICE FROM THE GRAPEVINE JOURNALISTS ON WHERE TO WITNESS ICELANDIC LANDSCAPES, INSPIRED BY YEARS SPENT ON THE ROAD.

WORDS BY GRAPEVINE JOURNALISTS



## WHALE WATCHING

Whale watching and deep sea fishing with Sjárvarferðir is an ideal way to spend an afternoon. Ísafold, which doubles up as a tour boat and angling vessel, takes you out to sea from Reykjavík harbor where four types of whales swim around – killer whale, dolphin, humpback and minke whales. Minke whales are calm creatures, and unlike their brethren – the humpback and the dolphin - do not leap out of the ocean like circus performers. The whales curve out of the ocean for air, sounding like a bus with an air suspension and the daredevil seagulls compete with the minke's for fish. And then there are puffins! The tour also includes a 20-minute angling session.



## DIVING IN SILFRA

Thanks to the development of new technology designed to tackle the problems of frigid water and severe weather, Iceland's waters have become the new frontier in diving and a revolution is happening meters under the surface. Underwater explorers have traveled the world for decades, building a legacy of adventure and romance. But until now, Iceland has been left all but untouched. According to Tobias Klose, owner of the Reykjavik based dive company Dive.is, today cold-water recreational diving is becoming a trend but diving here is more than fish-gazing and underwater tourism. Diving in Silfra at the Þingvellir National, which is considered by many well-respected divers to be one of the top five sites in the world, is an amazing experience. With a visibility that is unrivalled — on a good day a diver can see over 100 meters — and deep canyons created by the divide in the American and Eurasia continental plates, diving here feels like an epic adventure even if you're just going down a few meters.



## THE WESTMANN ISLANDS

The Westmann Islands is the ideal remote milieu for an exotic off-the-mainland excursion. Replete with an ethereal terrain, the island is a Mecca for Iceland's famous quirky little auk birds known as puffins. A striking off-the-beaten-path archipelago 7.4 km from the southern coast of Iceland; the largest and only inhabited of these islands is Heimaey. Heimaey has a population of 4,036 and a quarter of this island-hamlet is draped in a hellish post-apocalyptic landscape. In 1973, the island became caked in volcanic ash expelled from Mount Eldfell, swallowing up a large segment of the village. Astonishingly, only one person died from the disaster. More than three decades later, houses still remain buried in the aftermath and are an amusing sight to behold. Despite the overwhelming puffin kitsch that permeates, the little birds don't wander the streets. Their habitats are among the insanely treacherous steep cliffs that line the island. While hunting for puffins here, TV chef Gordon Ramsay nearly died after careening 85-metres off one of the island's crags, tumbling into to the sea below. Overall, a trip to the Westmann Islands is a wonderful excursion for Iceland completists who love the raw outdoorsy kick that this country can provide.

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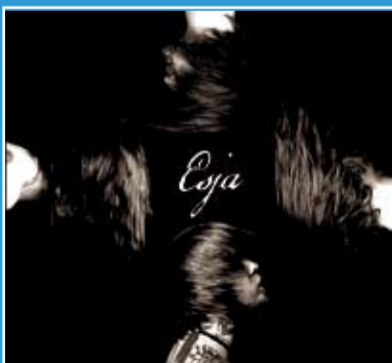
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