

The Reykjavík Grapevine



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Volume 21

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Best before May 3



Iceland's Cultural Atomic Mass

Culture

Music

Travel

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On the Cover

You hear a lot about Iceland's long literary history. We're the home of the sagas, the Poetic Edda and all the source materials for at least one galaxy in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. In this issue's feature, we talk about manuscripts, setting the stage with María Guðjohnsen's take on an illustration of Óðinn and his ravens that appears in a manuscript dating to 1765.

COVER ARTWORK:
María Guðjohnsen



Editorial Of Bribes And Books

WORDS Catharine Fulton,
Editor in Chief

For a short moment there in mid-March it felt like spring was returning to Reykjavík. Then I remembered that this town doesn't really experience spring like other parts of Europe do; we just cycle through a series of false starts to summer that inevitably give way to more weeks of sub-zero temperatures and the occasional sprinkling of snow. That's where we are now as the small crew that fuels the Grapevine's engine huddle in our penthouse office space readying this latest issue.

Luckily, we have our incandescent rage to keep us warm, sparked by the news that the authorities are looking into laying charges for alleged bribes paid by Icelanders to Egyptian authorities in order to secure safe passage of a family of Palestinians over the Rafah border to escape Israel's ongoing massacre of the Palestinian people.

It's remarkable how quickly the Icelandic authorities can move on an alleged bribery case when they're motivated. How many years has it been now since fishing giant Samherji paid out millions in bribes to Namibian officials in order to scam the system in the southern African nation and rob its citizens of profit from their fisheries sector. Allegedly.

Maybe the authorities are simply building up to the more obviously problematic case? We'll see.

Back to the issue, the cover feature this time around takes a look at the cultural value of Iceland's historic manuscripts. Give it a read starting on Page 12. Still on the theme of books, Iryna Zubenko got to spend some time in her happy place: a secondhand book store in Akureyri run by a lovely British couple. You can read all about that on Page 36. And then read everything else, because it's all good and we worked really hard and I just know you'll love it.

Happy reading! ■

Contributors



CATHERINE
MAGNÚSDÓTTIR

Catherine studies culture and literature in Iceland and came to the Grapevine for the internship but ended up freelancing for the magazine. When she's not trying to reconnect with her Icelandic roots, she's usually watching video essays or attempting to finally come up with that one good story idea that she can actually finish writing.



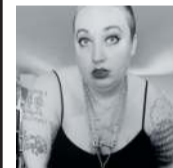
JÓHANNES BJARKI
BJARKASON

Jóhannes Bjarki is a Reykjavík local, straight out of Grafarvogur. Having been active as the frontman of the post-punk band Skoffín and in the post-dreifing art collective, Jóhannes is fascinated by the Icelandic music scene. Among his interests are politics, history and pop culture.



IRYNA ZUBENKO

Iryna is a Ukrainian journalist working at the cross-section of media and technology for the past five years. While still figuring out what to do in life, Iryna's love of travelling, unspoiled nature and Scandi design has brought her to Reykjavík. One day she'll write a non-fiction book.



REX BECKETT

Rex Beckett has been a fixture in the Reykjavík culture scene for over a decade as a longtime music/art writer and as former synthpunk diva Rex Pistols. They are currently working on a series delving into the influence of Garfield on queer millennials.



SHRUTHI BASAPPA

Shruthi Basappa traded the warmth of Indian summers for Arctic winds of Iceland. She's a food enthusiast masquerading as an architect at Sei Studio and loves obsessive attention to detail. When not leading our Best of Reykjavík food panel, Shruthi can be found trying to become a Michelin restaurant inspector.





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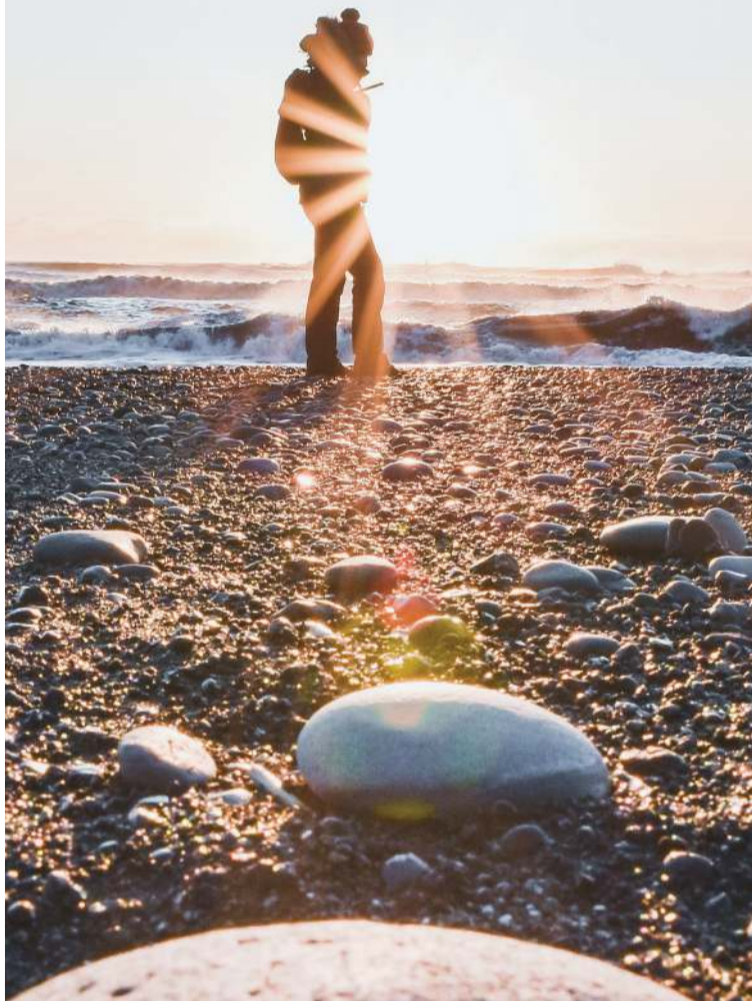


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Everybody's Running For President

What The News!?

A selection of news making headlines in recent weeks

WORDS The Reykjavik Grapevine
IMAGE Art Bicnick

Iceland has been gripped by a case of Presidential Race Fever, with new high-office-hopefuls throwing their hat into the ring on a daily basis at this point – some unintentionally.

Icelanders and government officials alike are waiting with bated breath to find out if Prime Minister Katrín Jakobsdóttir will launch her presidential bid. The head of the Left-Green Movement, who has served as prime minister since 2017, raised eyebrows when an internet sleuth noted she had registered a website in her name.

Katrín kept her lips sealed about whether the URL purchase portends higher aspirations, but the national broadcaster reported in early April that she'll be announcing her presidential plans within days. At the time we're sending this issue to print, we're still playing the guessing game. So too, it seems, is Katrín's coalition government, who con-

vened an all-party meeting on April 3 to discuss the situation.

Political scientist Eiríkur Bergmann opined in a conversation with RÚV that the chances of Katrín running are high. The fact that she has not denied the rumours definitively points to her interest in a presidential bid.

If Katrín were to run, it would seriously impact the current government's future. Minister of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries Svandís Svavarsdóttir returned to office on April 3 following her sickness leave. Some speculate Svandís to be a possible successor to Katrín if the prime minister were to make a move on Bessastaðir.

After a brief period of "will he or won't he," beloved comedian and former Reykjavik mayor officially announced his presidential candidacy on April 2. His campaign acquired the 1,500 necessary signatures needed for eligibility in less than three hours.

In his election announcement, Jón emphasised his continued efforts towards peace and human rights. He stated that he respects Alþingi and aims to keep a good relationship with parliament and government. As president, Jón said he would work towards "Iceland's well-being and strengthening the country's reputation and respect. I will be the nation's agent domestically and its representative abroad."

As Jón's campaign was accompa-

nied by a very intentional video, it's safe to assume he very much meant to enter the race. That can't be said for upwards of 40 people who declared their candidacy unintentionally thanks to a glitch on the website where candidates can register and collect signatures supporting their bid on island.is. The National Election Board has remedied the technical glitch.

Presidential candidates have until April 26 to collect at least 1,500 signatures from all quadrants of the country in order to be added to the ballot. Icelanders head to the polls on June 1 to elect their next president.

OH YEAH, THE FERRIS WHEEL

Finally, despite the idea being emphatically rejected and widely mocked by residents of 101 a few years ago when put to a vote in the annual Hverfið mitt exercise (a city-led initiative letting residents of neighbourhoods vote on how funds will be dispersed across a range of beautification projects), Reykjavíkurborg is looking to erect a ferris wheel in the harbour.

The city was advertising through March for a partner to build and operate the ferris wheel, with the municipal government's contribution being provision of the land.

So, yay. Reykjavík may soon have a ferris wheel that absolutely nobody wants and that will only be operational during the summer months. ■



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Do Shit Making Sense Of Recycling In Reykjavík

The Útlendingur's ongoing guide to getting shit done

WORDS Catharine Fulton
IMAGE Art Bicnick

For 14 years living in Reykjavík, I found myself lamenting the lack of home pick-up for sorted recycling and biowaste. So when Reykjavíkurborg began rolling out its new waste management system in 2023, I was excited. When I came home one day last summer to find a stash of paper bags for household compostable waste (along with that polarising grey-green receptacle), I was downright eager.

I read through the pamphlet accompanying the new bins that had been rolled up outside my home, ready to begin my new life of responsible waste management. Buy when my kids finished their first TetraPak of juice, the confusion began to set in. It's paper, lined with metal and plastic, with a plastic spout and lid. Where does this go? If I throw it in the general direction of my bins, will it simply hover in midair, existing outside the laws of physics just as it seems to exist outside the rules of recycling?

Knowing I'm not alone in my sporadic confusion about the still-new system, I turned to Gunnar Dofri Ólafsson from the SORPA waste management and recycling centre for some clarification.

BACK TO THE BEGINNING

"This all goes back to July, 2021, when Parliament passed a law that went into effect on January 1, 2023, stipulating that every household

needs receptacles for three different categories by their house," Gunnar Dofri explains. "So that's food waste, plastics and paper – that's what's legally mandated. But you can't really get by without also having mixed waste, so we went with four different types of waste bins for every home."

The legislation and eventual city-wide roll-out was a boon for SORPA, who had been struggling to access "clean" enough waste to feed into its gas and compost operation GAJA. "The input material that we were sorting from the mixed waste to feed GAJA wasn't clean enough," Gunnar Dofri tells me. "The compost turned out to be polluted with plastics and glass in particular. So for us to get separated food waste into GAJA was a godsend."

GAJA is a sister operation of SORPA. It takes all our compostable waste and transforms it into methane gas and compost. So, essentially, we're paying GAJA to take our garbage and we pay them to get it back in the form of gas and nutrient-rich soil. What a time to be alive.

LIGHTNING ROUND

But back to the matter at hand: seeking to set the record straight on the correct bins to toss certain everyday items, I challenged Gunnar Dofri to a lightning round, recycling edition. Here's what he said:

- Empty glass containers (not beverage bottles) go in the glass bin at your neighbourhood recycling station.
- Glass and plastic beverage bottles can be returned to SORPA for cold hard cash.
- Metal lids from containers go in the metal bin at your neighbourhood recycling station.
- Fernas, like TetraPak cartons

that are simultaneously paper, plastic and metal in one can be put right in the paper recycling bin. There is no need to separate the plastic spout or lid. Chuck the whole thing in the blue bin outside your home. Seriously, Gunnar Dofri said so.

- Pizza boxes can also go right into the paper recycling bin. Just be sure to eat the pizza first, of course.
- All food waste, including bones and coffee grounds, go into the paper compost bags inside your home and then into the food waste bin outside your home.
- Blister packs that once contained medication should be taken back to the pharmacy for disposal. The same goes for empty pill bottles and any unused medication.

Do paper labels have to be removed from glass or plastic containers? Gunnar says "no."

How clean do glass, metal or plastic containers have to be before being tossed in their respective bins? "Just clean enough that they won't start to smell after a few days," Gunnar says.

Every recyclable is shipped overseas to be processed, while mixed waste is kept in Iceland. The most important category from SORPA's point of view is food waste, so be sure to do the best job sorting that in your home so GAJA can reap the benefits of your sweet, sweet trash.

While SORPA is responsible for receiving your waste, the city is responsible for picking it up. So if your bins aren't being emptied or they're being flagged as not properly sorted, that's an issue you'll have to take up directly with Reykjavíkurborg.

Crystal clear, right? ■



Word Of The Issue Listen! It's Heyrðu's Time To Shine

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

WORDS Derek Allen
IMAGE Adobe Stock

In many languages, telling someone "Listen!" is a good way to start a fight. Telling bank tellers to listen will get you kicked out, telling the receptionist at the doctors' office to listen will get you hung up on and telling your partner to listen will result in a massive tiff. Yet, the Icelandic equivalent "Heyrðu!" is a mainstay in the language. It might be difficult to understand the nuances behind this word and you might be afraid to employ it because of the baggage the single word phrase "Listen!" tends to carry. Hopefully you'll soon feel much more comfortable peppering some "Heyrðu!" in your vocabulary.

Heyrðu, let's begin.

I know you saw that, and that right there is the most common use of the phrase. It is used any time you are about to start talking for a very slightly extended period of time. I

certainly don't mean a speech, but more in contexts like telling the waiter what your order will be, telling the employees at the clothing store what you're looking for, or even when your friend asks why something happened and the explanation is a bit long-winded.

Essentially, you can use it as a way to verbally bold your words.

Heyrðu can indeed be used in a way similar to its direct English translation "listen," but perhaps not quite in the same way. If I really wanted someone to listen, because I was upset or frustrated with them, I would opt for "Hlusta!" or something similar as it's a bit sharper. However, if you want to concede someone's point (Heyrðu, you're actually right about that) or gently push back (Heyrðu, I love you, but I don't like the way you were talking to that waiter), heyrdú can work.

Heyrðu, the article's coming to an end! Here's hoping that this has helped you just that wee bit more on your Icelandic learning journey. Gangi ykkur vel og skemtið ykkur! ■



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On The Fringes

Nocking It Out Of The Park

Getting to know Iceland's archery enthusiasts

WORDS Catherine Magnúsdóttir
IMAGE Supplied by Bogfimisamband Íslands

Who hasn't at one point dreamt of dramatically pulling back their bowstring and hitting that impossible mark in the far-off distance, much to the adulation of peers and spectators? In my ongoing exploration of Reykjavik's engaging endeavors against ennui I have set my sights on a terrific new target to pursue that dream! That's right, I sought out one of Iceland's sharpest shooters, Heba Róbertsdóttir, who along with the rest of the Icelandic team, brought home a cache of medals from the European Championship in Croatia last month. Eat your heart out Legolas!

Hebea and I meet at Bogfimi-setrið, the local archery hall where we are fittingly surrounded by rows of targets, some of them with a few extra holes already, and occasionally hear arrows landing with a mighty THWUMP in the background. While still attending school, Heba practices here twice a week and coaches three times a week, passing along the knowledge she has gained in a little over two years. What started with a love for Disney Pixar's Brave (relatable) turned into an opportunity

when Heba discovered the club and picked up the bow herself.

"I like that it's an individual sport, apart from team matches," she tells me. "You go at your own pace, it's all according to you, it's very much mental. Also, I have a herniated disk in my lower back and couldn't really practice any other sport like dance, like I used to, so this is also a really good sport for that."

It's also very good to get your brain to shut up for a while, according to Heba. "You kind of have to turn off your thoughts but at the same time while you're learning something you have to think about what you're doing, the movement and everything so it becomes ingrained in your autopilot," she says. "I really like this aspect of shutting off my brain, getting in the groove and not thinking. Although while I'm competing, I tend to get one part of a song that I don't actually know stuck in my head on loop – it's annoying but it helps!"

It must have helped last month when Heba and her teammates set out for the European Indoor Archery Championship in Croatia, from whence they brought home five top medals – a gold medal for the U21 Men's Team, two silver medals for the U21 Women's Team and Individual, and two bronze medals, one for the U21 Men's individual and one for the Women's Team for Compound bows. Who knew the Icelandic archery teams kick so much ass? I certainly hadn't heard about it through all the football and handball hype that tends to cover the sports news.

"I practice barebow, which is kind of the basic 'house bow' you get when you first come here," Heba explains after giving me a crash course on competition categories. "Then there's also recurve, like the Olympic recurve, the only bow that's in the Olympics; and compounds, the bow that's most like a gun, with weights that release and actual buttons to push to release the string." An intimidating piece of machinery to be

sure, though for now Heba seems content with her weapon of choice. "I got stuck with a barebow. I love it, it fits me."

Apart from the individual aspect of the sport, Heba also emphasises the community aspects of practising an arguably "nerdy" sport together. "We kind of know it as the sport that weird people come to," she says. "And we're all weird in our own ways and that kind of gets us together. This is a really good place for kids that maybe don't quite fit in as much, that want a space where they can do what they like and maybe meet other people with the same interests."

Heba recalls her own first time coming to Bogfimisetrið as a shy new student. "Vala was teaching and had on these camouflage overalls, standing like a drill sergeant. I was so scared of her – which is funny because she's so cute – and I ended up thinking, 'this is scary, but this is fun, I love this!'" ■



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Side Hustle The Lazy Gardener With A Blooming Business

Sigríður Soffía Nielsdóttir's side hustle sparks fireworks and profit

WORDS Iryna Zubenko
IMAGE Art Bicnick

"I found it very uncomfortable that I was so interested in flowers. I genuinely thought this was me being middle-aged," laughs Sigríður Soffía Nielsdóttir on the other end of the line. Having worked with dance and fireworks, she unintentionally built a business out of her newfound interest in gardening. What's more, she successfully turned her passion into a series of art projects.

Sigríður Soffía Nielsdóttir, 38, a choreographer

My main occupation is being an artist. I'm a choreographer working in the National Theatre and City Theatre, mainly doing choreography and stage productions for the Iceland Dance Company.

Also, I'm a fireworks show designer. I designed the firework shows for Menningarnótt from 2013 to 2015 and a firework show in Barcelona. Then, I worked on Eldblóm, a flower installation for the City of Reykjavík in Hallargarðurinn by the pond. It's a beautiful bed of flowers, like a slow-motion fireworks show.

When covid hit, I couldn't dance or do anything, so I created a box on how to grow your own fireworks show. I collected seeds and took out the tubers, dividing them with gardening experts. That project was supposed to be a small thing: you could buy seeds to grow your own slow-motion fireworks show. But then it became my side hustle

because so many people bought flower cases. Suddenly, I was doing product design and now I've been seasonally selling seeds and tubers through my website. It was totally unplanned!

Because this is seasonal, I'm trying to keep it as lean as possible. I only deliver the product four months of the year, but I'm also selling gift certificates that can be purchased any time. I have to combine it with the shows I'm in during February and March, and September and October.

CALMING RITUALS

When the season hits, I always wake up to deliver the boxes and prepare the orders between 5:00 and 7:00 before my kids wake up. I'm a dance artist and shows in the theatre are scheduled by the theatre, so I can't say, "This is not so convenient." Last year, I was working in the National Theatre from 8:00 to 17:00, so I hired a person that could help me for a month.

My daughter loves arranging the boxes – putting tubers and seeds into a box and closing it. I'm so stressed from my other jobs that I enjoy assembling the stuff, too. It's such an easy task and feels like meditation. I feel like I delivered 20 boxes today – it's a sense of achievement. Everyone's always telling me, "Why don't you get someone to do these boxes? This is way too much work." But I always answer that this is the stress-free activity I need in my life.

What's my least favourite thing? This is ridiculous but when I get a crazy number of orders, I freak out a little bit because I need to deliver the whole thing. Because this is a side hustle, I like it when it's semi-smooth. Of course, I'm happy that it's going well. But if I'm honest, if it's going *really* well, I get stressed.

BLOOM BOOM

The stereotype is that people who like gardening are just middle-aged, but I think the hipsters are taking

over – everybody loves gardening.

In the beginning, everyone told me, "You can't grow these flowers." And I said, "Yes, I think we can." It took me three years to figure out what kind of soil and nourishment they needed. I'm not using seeds from just any flower – mainly dahlias and peonies. The project centres around the flowers that inspired fireworks, so you are essentially growing a fireworks show. It's a choreographed seeding program you're creating.

Before I realised that fireworks and flowers were connected, I was obsessed with shapes. I didn't realise why until I did a project in Barcelona and realised that all the fireworks I've been shooting off have flower names. I found a book that finally had the proof I needed – in 1585, the word *hanabi* was first used in Japan. *Hana* means fire and *bi* – means a flower. So, fireworks were originally designed to imitate flowers and trees of Asian origin.

FLOWERS IN ISOLATION

At the beginning of this side hustle, we needed to make the flowers grow

to obtain the seeds. We had to grow all the dahlias indoors because they can't withstand frost, and we have night frost in Iceland until the first of June. So, in the middle of covid, when everybody was isolated, we grew 88 sq. metres of dahlias. Then, I received a call saying, 'I think all the dahlias are dying.' We didn't have a plan B because these were the only flowers of this variety in Iceland. I was told that they possibly had a contagious virus disease. I asked, "What do you mean? Can flowers get sick?" We had to put thirty flowers in isolation so they wouldn't be cross-contaminated, and all the sick flowers had to be taken away. But then, someone suggested it might be because they lack magnesium since the Icelandic soil doesn't have the magnesium they need. We decided to give them massive amounts of magnesium and see what happened. Long story short, there was no virus disease. They just lacked some chemicals, and they all did really well.

This was very memorable. But I panicked for two weeks and promised never to work with live plants. It's way better to work with fireworks

because they just explode. But then I've been doing this for almost five years now, so I'm a slow learner.

THE FLOURISHING OF A SIDE GIG

I realised that all these flowers I've been working with are also edible. So, I started making wine with Foss Distillery called Icelandic Spritz. Currently, I'm working on a visual art show at the Design Museum of Iceland, where I will introduce a shapeshifting project illustrating how everything is connected – including my side hustle. So, my side hustle is taking off. But because this is not my main area of interest or expertise, I'm trying to keep this as a side gig. My main focus is on theatre and dance; I don't want this to take over. ■

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eldblom.com

Learn more about Sigríður's side hustle at her segment at this year's DesignMarch festival. Check the schedule at DesignMarch.is

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Migrant Moguls

The Unlikely Perfumer

Meet an American immigrant who followed his nose toward the scents of Iceland

WORDS Iryna Zubenko
IMAGE Art Bicnick

with nature and music. Inspired by the likes of Björk and Sigur Rós, Nicholas first came here to do a summer study focusing on the music scene. After a few years bouncing between the U.S. and Iceland, Nicholas started a family, became a parent and ultimately settled in Iceland.

Trying to be a responsible parent, Nicholas postponed quitting a job he didn't like. "I always dreamed of the great big grandiose things and it looked nothing like that," he reflects on his years working as a software developer.

He knew he wanted a change. Having been fishing for one summer in Alaska, Nicholas reached out to a few friends in the fishing industry in Iceland and asked if they could get him on a boat. "I left the world of software development behind and said, 'I'm gonna be a fucking fisherman.'" The harsh, physical, but honest work turned out to be exactly what Nicholas needed. "I needed to be out in storms in the middle of winter on a ship in the North Atlantic, just working hard and catching fish."

He spent a couple of years on fishing boats, but eventually stopped — being away from his daughter proved too difficult. Nicholas was once again on the lookout for something else. "I started writing music again. Then about a year and a half ago, I started perfuming," he says. This was the moment he finally realised, "This is it. This is what I'm supposed to be doing."

BIRTH OF ILMUR & SJÓR

At the beginning of his perfumery journey, Nicholas was working at a restaurant and was particularly inspired by his boss' use of essential oils for cleaning products. "I borrowed a book from a friend and followed some essential oil recipes. Within the first two days, I made 11 or 12 scents and one of those is one of my best-selling fragrances," he shares.

At first, Nicholas decided to give a few perfumes as Christmas gifts. But then, as he describes, the little things propelled him forward, "It was one little thing at a time — first, I started sourcing nicer glass bottles. Within two months, I bought my first Aroma Chemicals kit. Before that, I had only been using essential oils and with essential oils you can only go so far. When I received this kit, it just blew my mind." From not knowing anything about perfuming, Nicholas was quickly obsessed — "grabbing, reading everything I could, listening to podcasts and being on forums and all this."

A pivotal moment came when his boss from the restaurant suggested he should do a scent for the restaurant. "The process of putting that together made me realise I should just be doing this on my own and start a perfumery," Nicholas says. By that time, he felt confident he had a product he could market and sell. So, he took it a step further and rented a room at hafnar.haus, where

most of his perfume-making now takes place.

Inspired by his time spent on fishing boats, Nicholas named his brand Ilmur & Sjó (fragrance & sea). "My time at sea fishing, especially in Iceland, saved me in so many ways," he reflects.

The idea behind Ilmur & Sjó is fiercely Icelandic — fragrances capture Icelandic countryside, using locally-made essential oils and tinctures hand-made by Nicholas. "What I make is so different from the average perfume that you would smell in the airport," says Nicholas.

At the moment, Nicholas sells his perfumes at pop-up events and is working to get them into stores. "It's half of my job and it's a constant struggle," he admits. When not mixing fragrances, Nicholas works at the private terminal of the domestic airport to support himself.

CRACKING THE INSIDER'S CODE

"Being an immigrant I don't have any connections here. I'm a totally unknown person that just popped up and said, 'Hey, I am a perfumer. Here's my business,'" Nicholas shares. While navigating the legal system of starting a company in Iceland was mostly straightforward, trying to collaborate with other perfumers turned out to be more challenging. "Oftentimes, in Iceland, things run through nepotism and connections. When you don't have

those connections, it's more of a struggle," he says. For instance, not knowing where to buy ethanol alcohol, an essential ingredient used in most perfumes, put his venture on hold for months.

Nicholas emphasises the importance of scratching off an illusion that your product is simply making art. Building a sustainable business is vital, he says. "You can't just have a beautiful product and just be an artist. Five percent of my time is actually doing perfumery and the rest is everything else around it — from putting labels on bottles and trying to source materials to contacting people, advertising, putting numbers in a spreadsheet and figuring out percentages."

Nicholas' advice to anyone thinking about starting a business, in particular while combining it with a day job, is to start expanding their professional network as soon as possible — reach out to people from Startup Iceland, attend their meetings, read about grants you could apply for, or find your creative community in places like hafnar.haus.

"The best thing that I could have ever done was becoming a member of hafnar.haus," he says. "Because even though I didn't have Icelandic family and friends, I didn't know the right guy to call at all times, I did have this beautiful community here," Nicholas admits. ■

Ilmur & Sjó officially launches on April 27 during DesignMarch.

“I worked as a software developer until I was just so burnt out from it, I just hated that life,” Nicholas Brittain Shaber shares as we meet in his tiny office that also serves as his perfume lab. “I stayed with it, because the money was good. But I felt like I was, in a lot of ways, dying inside.” Fast-forward a few years and Nicholas has given up on a few jobs to find his passion — the natural Icelandic perfumery, Ilmur & Sjó. We met up with him to talk about the ins and outs of building a business in one of the most secretive industries.

A JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY

Similar to the stories of many other immigrants, Nicholas' love affair with Iceland began with his fascination

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Feature A Measure Of Iceland's C

The massive impact of the nation's historic manuscripts

WORDS Catharine Fulton
IMAGES Art Bicnick

“**T**his feels strangely intimate,” Ryan Boudinot jokes as he removes stacks of paper first from a pair of reusable Bónus shopping bags and then from four cardboard boxes. There’s one box for each neatly arranged bundle of crisp white printer paper. Once unboxed, the four piles occupy roughly the entire surface of the café table on which they’re placed.

The surrounding shelves are stocked with books on international artists, exotic travel destinations and photojournalism. They’d be welcome additions to any coffee table. But the pages Ryan has laid out are not yet books. Or they are, just without the glossy covers and bound spines. They’re his unpublished manuscripts – two novels, *Murders & Hallucinations* and *The Tree with the Missing Trunk*; and two memoirs, *Lambs and the Lion* and *Dude Ex Machina*. “Fifteen years of work,” Ryan says, seemingly to himself or perhaps the pages themselves, as he squares off their corners and readies them to be photographed. An American author of several

books, nominee for a handful of literary prizes, former professor and current tech worker, Ryan is on his third trip to Iceland in early March, 2024. To be clear, a carry-on laden with thousands of pages of paper doesn’t typically accompany him on his international voyages. This was a one-off occurrence that has brought us here to a café-slash-bookstore in downtown Reykjavik for Ryan to hand his manuscripts, the product of more than a decade of his mental labour, to an Icelandic friend and colleague for safekeeping.

How we got to this point can be traced back 33 years, or, if you’re inclined to more poetic musings about time and fate, back hundreds of years to Iceland’s earliest embrace of the written word.

RECENT HISTORY

“I have had this strange attraction to Iceland for a long time,” Ryan shares. “It’s like a lifelong thing to the point where, when I was in my 30s, I had a series of recurring dreams in which I was in Iceland – and I hadn’t been here yet. They were super emotional and I would wake up crying.”

The precursor to the dreams was Ryan’s exposure to a book of photography from Iceland when he was 18-years old. “I was struck in a way that I can’t really explain. It was a feeling that ‘I must go there,’ and then it became a significant place for me,” Ryan says of the memory. “And so to bring my manuscripts here feels like fulfilling that path in a way – it feels appropriate to me.”

The opportunity for Ryan to visit Iceland for the first time came in

2011 when, over coffee with Sigurjón Birgir Sigurðsson – perhaps better known as Sjón – at Grái Kötturrinn, he learned about Reykjavik’s recent success in being named a UNESCO City of Literature. He and Sjón had connected through writing several years earlier when Ryan was guest-editing the Hobart literary magazine and reached out to the Writers’ Union of Iceland to commission submissions from Icelandic authors. Sjón’s “The Net” found a place in the issue.

That in-person meeting with the famed poet, novelist and habitual Björk collaborator sent Ryan on a

mission to secure the same recognition for Seattle, his adopted hometown in the United States. The bid was successful in 2017.

himself on the adjacent table. “Then, I think it was 2013 that Andri and I were both nominated for the Philip K. Dick Award – him for his novel *LoveStar* and me for *Blueprints of the Afterlife*.” At this point in our meeting the friend to whom Ryan is entrusting his manuscripts had arrived and occupied the vacant seat at our table.

Andri Snær Magnason was awarded the Philip K. Dick Special Citation of Excellence in 2013 (“I got nothing,” Ryan clarifies) and he and Ryan forged a friendship from that point on.

there are two cultures developing and branching off from each other, and each of those cultures has expectations about conduct and speech. I never thought that the States would get to this point; I’m realising in hindsight that I took a lot of freedom of speech and expression for granted.”

“Books are being banned from libraries now,” Ryan continues, “and the challenges to books are coming from both sides of the political divide. Right wing, left wing; it doesn’t matter anymore. Books are being challenged and removed from libraries.”

I never thought that the States would get to this point; I’m realising in hindsight that I took a lot of freedom of speech and expression for granted. So it’s frightening and there are a lot of people very concerned about what’s going on right now.

In addition to stashing his manuscripts in Iceland, Ryan plans to stipulate that any publishers interested in reading his works would have to travel to Reykjavik to see them in person. That’s where Andri comes in.

“I call my office the Andri Magnason Institute, so these would be the first of its manuscripts coming to Iceland,” Andri jests, referencing the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies where Iceland’s historic manuscripts are housed. Asked what compelled him to step in as guardian of Ryan’s unpublished books, Andri continues to serve as comedic foil to his friend’s concerns over looming threats to freedom of speech. “My motivation is just friendship and my fondness for quirky ideas.”

His arrival brings the conversation back to the reason they’re both here: transferring Ryan’s manuscripts into Andri’s possession.

“So I travelled to various other Cities of Literature and went to a conference in China for UNESCO. It’s a huge tale and part of it is told in one of those books,” Ryan says, gesturing to the stacks of paper sunning

“In the United States right now there is this feeling that we’re breaking apart into two tribes,” Ryan says in explaining why he has brought his works to Iceland. “This has been going on for a while, of course, but

“In the world of coincidences and randomness, it’s always good to set afloat possibilities for randomness,” Andri continues. “There is a linear way the universe works and then there’s the more floating way; I have



Cultural Atomic Mass

a big flair for working in the floating wind.”

ATOMIC MASS

The wind has seen Andri swirling around the manuscripts for much of his life, with Iceland’s cultural history being a topic that he has spent a great deal of time considering. When he was just starting out at university, Andri was studying in the same building where the historic manuscripts were housed, but two years into his education he had yet to lay his eyes on a single sheet of vellum.

“Then I remember my father’s friend was working there and he wanted to invite us to come and see [the manuscripts],” Andri recalls, “and I was really starstruck. They had had a huge impact on me since I was 10 or 11; I really felt how special it was that I could actually read them.”

Some years later, Andri’s thoughts turned to the missed opportunities around Iceland’s historic literary treasures and the lack of domestic fanfare surrounding them. “It was strange that our national treasures were held in an exhibition room the size of an IKEA display – sofa plus cabinet,” he says. It was – and still is – his belief that, even if Iceland’s landscape wasn’t a massive draw for international tourists, people would make the trip just to see the Poetic Edda with their own eyes.

That’s precisely the point he endeavoured to make when tasked with writing a report on cultural tourism and attractions for the Ministry of Culture in the year 2000, more than a decade before Iceland’s touristic star really began to rise.

“The main question for me was ‘what is the most important man made thing in Iceland – what has the highest cultural atomic mass?’” He continues, reenacting his train of thought at the time: “So there’s Björk, of course. She’s very influential, but maybe not something that would be appropriate for the government to be working on. Would it be Hallgrímskirkja? Well, you know, it’s a monument but it’s not influencing the world; it’s an icon for Reykjavík. Would it be Njáls Saga? Well, it’s interesting, the Viking sagas are interesting.”

“But if you look at the Poetic Edda, the cultural impact of that book is greater than the Mona Lisa. It’s not like we have a Marvel Comics movie every other year about Mona Lisa. It’s not like we have Norwegian death rock bands based on stories about the Mona Lisa. So we have this amazing source right here. Humans throughout the last 10,000 years have left fragments of world-views, mythologies, complete image ideas of origin stories, gods, their battles and deeds. We have maybe seven or 10 intact, big mythologies in the world – one of them is Norse mythology and it so happens that the source of Norse mythology is *in* Reykjavík in the Poetic Edda, in the Prose Edda.”

“These stories are this infinite source,” he continues. “Even one line can become a Marvel movie, Tolkien, comic books, contemporary dance, Norwegian death metal, tree huggers and racists – the cultural impact is huge.”

Andri’s position at the time that he was writing his report for the government was that, if a proper museum

would be built to house and exhibit Iceland’s manuscripts, the draw would be massive and admission prices would pay for the facilities. Such is the case with the Book of Kells, a biblical manuscript in Ireland that draws up to a million visitors every year.

“But then I was torn by that idea,” he admits. “Because I had the privilege of accessing the books in a very modest place. So then I was thinking, ‘Why am I feeling like that is normal, this ultimate utilisation?’ Why am I feeling like a million people is how things are supposed to be? We’d have a gentrified downtown

collection of historic literature and manuscripts.

Árnastofnun is housed in an eye-catching new building on the university campus that has been named Edda. Though Alþingi approved the construction of a new building to house the institute back in 2005, ground wasn’t broken until 2013 and the building wasn’t opened until 2023. The fenced-off, muddy construction pit that occupied the site for so many years became affectionately known as “hola íslenskra fræða” (the hole of Icelandic studies).

It was strange that our national treasures were held in an exhibition room the size of an IKEA display – sofa plus cabinet.

filled with elderly Germans buying copies of the Edda and every other store would be an ‘Edda store,’” he says, poking fun at the “puffin stores” that sprouted throughout Reykjavík like mushrooms as tourist numbers swelled.

“But for school children, the fact that every school child does not get to go there and see it is a great shame,” he laments.

FROM ANDRI TO ÁRNI

Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir is a research professor at the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies, or Árnastofnun, a research institute at the University of Iceland entrusted to preserve the nation’s

But the building is now open, excluding that new construction smell. However, Árnastofnun is still in the process of moving its collection over from its old locations in other university buildings, in part due to ongoing experiments to pinpoint the correct climate settings for storing the historic texts.

“We now have this beautiful library,” Svanhildur says while navigating through a series of bright and modern rooms, tapping her key card at every door. Security around the collection is tight. “So all printed books have been moved and we have a very good library for Icelandic studies and also for mediaeval studies. It’s a huge change for us to have this library; it’s much more accessi-

ble than our old premises, when the institute was spread across three places.”

Árnastofnun is named for Árni Magnússon, a 17th century Icelandic scholar who made it his life’s work to collect Icelandic manuscripts to be preserved for posterity’s sake.

“He went to study in Copenhagen and, with time, became a professor at the university there,” Svanhildur says, explaining that the only university in the Danish colonies (which included Iceland) was in Copenhagen. “He was living in a time where intellectuals in Europe were kind of realising that there was a lot of antiquarian interest in humanism. That alerted scholars, among others in Europe, to the fact that people in Iceland had actually preserved sources on the history of not only Iceland, but also Scandinavian and even German culture and so forth.”

Árni was, in Svanhildur’s words, “a crazy collector.”

“You need to be a little bit crazy to achieve what he achieved. He travelled throughout Iceland, he collected manuscripts and not only beautiful manuscripts, he was interested in every last scrap of a manuscript.”

“At that time, people had long since started writing on paper, not on vellum. The vellum manuscripts were old and dirty, difficult to read. So people copied them on paper and then they would just throw away the vellum. So this was happening and Árni was after every scrap. People had even started recycling the vellum manuscripts, using them as covers for other books or in bindings or even as a sieve! We have a very



old manuscript in the collection that has holes in it because it was used as a sieve.”

What made Árni such an incredible collector, Svanhildur says, is that he saw the value in even the fragments. So much of the collection at Árnastofnun is fragments and scraps that serve not only as valued manuscripts, but also a chronicle of changing times and the evolution of the mediums in Iceland over the course of centuries.

“In the early 12th century, we know people started compiling genealogies, preserving memories of their ancestors coming from Norway and then gradually also writing down stories and poetry,” Svanhildur recounts. “Then in the 13th century, we find that Icelanders are putting together sagas about Norwegian kings, for instance.”

“One man, Snorri Sturluson, is kind of famous in this regard,” Svanhildur continues. Snorri was a writer and politician who would compose stories about Norwegian kings, but he is most famously the writer of the Prose Edda, which is one of two main sources of Norse mythology in existence. “Snorri wanted to collect this knowledge, basically for the benefit of would-be poets or skalds, because the way people produced

poetry in Iceland in that time had very much to do with metaphors and extended metaphors,” Svanhildur says. “And these are often based on allusions to the heathen gods or mythology in general. So you see, if you were going to be a good poet, you needed to have knowledge of the stories from the mythology.”

It is largely through the writings of Snorri that the stories of the Norse gods live on today, influencing countless aspects of modern popular culture.

“But there were also older poems, called the Eddic Poems, that preserved this kind of worldview,” Svanhildur clarifies. “Poems like Völuspá, which describes kind of the pre-Christian northern worldview of the Askur Yggdrasils and, of course, Ragnarök, the end of the world.”

A COLLECTION SPANNING THE NORTH ATLANTIC

When Árni died in 1730, he bequeathed the entirety of his collection to the University of Copenhagen. Again, at that time there was no institute of higher learning in Iceland, so the thought of returning the manuscripts to this remote island where he first collected them would have seemed absurd.

As Svanhildur underscores, the poems contained in the Poetic Edda, for example, were recorded around the year 1275 and had not been well preserved elsewhere. “So there are only three poems that are in that book that are also preserved in their entirety in another mediaeval manuscript. If this book had been lost, like many, many manuscripts were at the time, we would only have about three of the poems instead of 31. That’s how precious that one manuscript is.”

That piece of history is now back in Iceland. Petitions to repatriate Árni’s collection of Icelandic manuscripts began to gain steam in the 1830s and really took off in 1944 in connection to Iceland’s struggle for independence from Denmark.

The government in Copenhagen had rejected the request of an Icelandic bishop in the 1830s to return diplomas dealing with the former dioceses of Skálholt and Hólar. It also denied Alþingi’s request in 1907 for Copenhagen to return the entirety of the judicial and religious documents that Árni had borrowed from Iceland and never returned. According to the University of Copenhagen, another request in 1925 eventually resulted in the return of four manuscripts and some 700 diplomas to Iceland.

It would not be until 1971, however, that a large portion of Árni’s collection would be repatriated – but only after a long and drawn out debate in the Danish parliament. Eventually, those documents that could be deemed “Icelandic cultural property” were ordered to be repatriated. A special clause also legislated the return of select manuscripts from the Danish Royal Library – including the Codex Regius and the vellum codex Flateyjarbók. The former contains the Poetic Edda, and the latter is the largest and arguably most lavishly illustrated Icelandic manuscript in existence. Both had been gifted to King Frederik III by the Icelandic bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson in the mid-17th century.

“We received back 1,666 manuscripts from the collection,” Svanhildur states. “The rest remain in Copenhagen.”

Though Svanhildur likens the separation of the collection between Iceland and Denmark to the division of assets in a modern divorce, there has been talk in recent years about pushing Copenhagen to return more historic artefacts to Iceland. Minister of Education, Science and Culture Lilja Alfreðsdóttir appointed a task force in 2019 to plan negotiations with Denmark on that very matter. Talks are ongoing.

“Attitudes are changing,” Svanhildur points out. “You can see it in the Greek and British disputes about returning historical items. There’s much more understanding now than there was 30 years ago or 50 years ago towards claims like this. It’s really the people who produce

use photographs because often they will be easier to use – you can enlarge and zoom and manipulate them so that they are easier to read.”

IRL ACCESS AT LAST

While digitised access has been a boon for scholars and history buffs – and the illustrated manuscripts in particular are wildly impressive to view even on a computer screen – the opportunity will soon come for Icelanders to lay eyes on their national treasures in the (preserved animal) flesh.

An exhibition hall in the Edda building sits empty for now, save for barren glass cases and a lone humidifier sealed off with plastic sheeting to run climate experiments, but it will soon be the site of a rotating exhibition of artefacts from Árnastofnun’s collection.

“The Codex Regius will sometimes be in the exhibition and sometimes not,” Svanhildur says of the planned exhibition. “We are going to show about 20 manuscripts at any one time, but we are having to rotate them every three months for preservation’s sake. That’s a big logistics exercise. It’s fun, but it’s challenging.”

“They’ve lasted for 800 years, probably not always under good conditions,” Svanhildur says. “And if we take care of them, there’s no reason they can’t last for another 800 years.”

Ryan’s manuscripts, on the other hand, have traded their Bónus bags

It’s not like we have a Marvel Comics movie every other year about Mona Lisa. It’s not like we have Norwegian death rock bands based on stories about the Mona Lisa.

these things who should be allowed to look after them. So I think time works in our favour.”

Constructive collaboration between Iceland and Denmark has seen the digitisation of much of Árni’s collection, though. Svanhildur is particularly excited by the fact that images of many of the manuscripts can be called up online, granting unprecedented access to scholars and students.

“That is a wonderful resource, because we rarely use the manuscripts themselves,” she says, pointing to the fragility of the documents. “When we are working on them, we

for their new home in the “Andri Magnason Institute,” where they’ll be kept in far less technologically advanced conditions. But they’re being honoured nonetheless as written works worthy of preservation, adding themselves to Iceland’s centuries old tradition of respecting and safeguarding the written word. Those wishing to view them will have to take it up with their keeper, but those wanting to lay eyes on the Poetic Edda – whether it be 100 people or 1 million – need only wait until November to be struck by the full force of Iceland’s cultural atomic mass. ■

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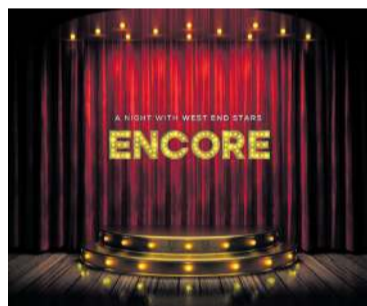
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Founded in 2015 as a continuation of the defunct Reykjavik Film Festival (not to be confused with the Reykjavik International Film Festival), Stockfish aims to create a platform for collaboration between international and domestic film communities. In celebration of their tenth anniversary this year, the Stockfish Film & Industry Festival is waiving its admission fees. Lucky you! The festival's opening screening is *Eternal* by Ulaa Salim, a Danish/Icelandic production. Be sure to check out all the magic Stockfish offers at stockfishfestival.is JB



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Design is ubiquitous and all around us. A sandwich maker can design the perfect meal. You ever been to a Subway? Looking past the apparent misnomer, DesignMarch brings together participants and guests through progressive design and innovation. The festival platforms countless artists, makers, thinkers and doers, who mediate their ideas through diverse exhibitions, performances and happenings around town. Parallel to the festival, the DesignTalks conference invites some of the leading voices in international and Icelandic design for a panel talk on April 24. JB



Culture Cover

The Ceremony Of Community

The Icelandic Sorcery Festival readies its new ritual

WORDS Rex Beckett
IMAGE Art Bicnick

to get a better life because obviously Iceland was very, very harsh. Everybody was poor and hated their neighbours."

Known professionally as Habba-nero, Habba is a local tattoo artist and co-owner of the studio Örlög renown for her traditional Nordic handpoke technique. Specialising in Icelandic magical staves – 16th century sigils blended with Christian symbols – Habba's tattooing practice is its own form of ritual.

"I love working with the energies that involve staves, so when I tattoo and when I make specialised staves for people, it's like a little mini ceremony," she says. "It's hard to describe because there's not really any description for it. It's just like this connection and this interaction with another soul."

She is also a musician in the band Vévaki alongside her husband, ancient-instrumentalist Sigurboði Grétarsson, who also shares a long history with the sorcery museum

of different things." Habba started spending a great deal of time at the museum with her husband, becoming part of the museum and the town's community, which led her to the notion of holding a small tattoo expo there.

With that seed planted in the spring of 2023, the idea for the festival rapidly grew through her connections with the Northern Fire collective, a group specialising in Nordic and Celtic art forms.

"My friend, Sean Parry, [started it] and his idea was a collective where we could all sell our arts and where we could talk about subjects we are passionate about in regards to ancient history," says Habba. "Most of us are tattoo artists, but also dabbling with things like music, leather work, folk dance – there are a lot of historians in this group. So I was like, 'okay, one of our meetings should be in Iceland.'"

This conclusion naturally entangled itself with Habba's original tattoo

historical Viking reenactment group Rimmugýgur, take in workshops and lectures on ancient Nordic sorcery methods, such as Icelandic herb magic and *fóstbræðralag* [blood brotherhoods]. Folks can also get some magically unique ink from the 14 tattoo artists on site, throw some axes around or just take in the museum's multi-housed exhibitions.

The nights will be filled with music, from the entrancing sounds of goth-witches Kælan Mikla, classical-folk enchanters Umbra, doom-ethereal band Svartþoka, Habba and Sigurboði's Vévaki – who perform ritualistic styles of *kvæði* and *rímur* [ancient epic poems] – and many more. The Friday night concert will be followed by a walk through the town to the beach where a bonfire ritual will be performed.

"We're going to have a blowout ritual with a little twist, which is going to be so interesting to see," Habba says, the glint in her eye adding to the air of mystery surrounding the ritual. A smidgen of secrecy is all part of the fun of sorcery, but the festival is most definitely not only for those already in the know.

"We want this festival to be absolutely welcoming to everyone to come and learn and participate," she says effusively. "I hope people will be high on love and togetherness and I hope they will feel spiritually light. If people are curious, they should come and see for themselves because we're not going to be flying on broomsticks." ■

The Icelandic Sorcery Festival is happening April 19-21 in Hólmavík. Program and festival pass information is available at SorceryFestival.is. See you there!

Along the southeastern coast of the Westfjords, in the town of Hólmavík, resides The Museum of Sorcery and Witchcraft, a true gem for lovers of obscure history, pagan spiritual traditions, and generally spooky stuff. This month, it will transform into the home and hearth of the Icelandic Sorcery Festival, a brand new celebration of art, music, tattoos and the uncanny numinous history of the Strandir region.

"For Iceland, the sorcery that was practised back the 16th century mainly involved hardship," Hrafnhildur (Habba) Inga Guðjónsdóttir, the festival's main founder and "Big Mama" says of the unique nature of Icelandic sorcery practices. "People were using sigils and staves to try

People were using sigils and staves to try to get a better life because obviously Iceland was very, very harsh. Everybody was poor and hated their neighbours.

and its owner, Anna Björg Þórarinsdóttir.

"Sigurboði works a lot with traditional instruments, so Anna has been getting him to come to the museum to perform *kvæði* [medieval ballads], play little shows and talk about Nordic mythology, runes and all sorts

expo idea, which then blossomed into the Icelandic Sorcery Festival. Now barely a year later, along with the support of her artist and the Westfjords communities, the festival will fully bloom over April 19-21.

Over the weekend, guests can stroll through the village set up by the

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Gaming

Chasing The Phantom

The dreamy, Iceland-made racing game that's gathering real momentum

WORDS John Rogers
IMAGE Art Bicnick

off your time and close the gap, until it happens — you overtake at the last gasp and streak over the finish line. You slump back in your chair with a mixture of relief and elation as “New Personal Best” flashes on the screen.

The game is Phantom Spark, a stylish time-trial racing game that's been in development since 2021. Its makers are Jonatan Van Hove (ludonym: Joon) and Torfi Ásgeirsson,

found ourselves passing the controller back and forth,” says Jonatan, “not actually racing against each other, but competing to shave milliseconds off each other's best time. It was compelling and convinced us that we could build a game around constantly improving and learning to be a better driver.”

The idea proved to be a good one and after pitching some publishers, the pair inked a deal with Coatsink

Each track is like a puzzle to be solved.

an independent game developer duo working out of their cosy office in the hafnar.haus creative space. They met through the Reykjavik indie games scene and worked together on Jonatan's successful 2021 title NUTS. It was in the wake of that release that a new idea started to form.

“I had been working on a prototype vehicle controller,” says Torfi, “figuring out the physics of how the vehicle should behave; how it should move, jump and collide. I landed on a version that I thought was pretty promising and decided to continue evolving that prototype. And that became Phantom Spark.”

PASSING THE CONTROLLER

Torfi and Jonatan quickly realised they were onto something when playtesting early track designs. “We

and Thunderful. With funding in place, work could begin in earnest. The next challenge would be to try and evoke that same competitive instinct in solo players.

“We had to get people to care about their times the way that we'd come to care about them,” explains Torfi. “It wasn't trivial and took a lot of figuring out. We added a narrative structure and champions who challenge you to beat their time. So even if you're playing alone, there's someone to race against.”

GHOSTS AND CHAMPIONS

Players can repeat each track endlessly, racing against champions and the “ghost” of their last attempt. “The ghosts are very important,” says Torfi. “They are where the ‘phantom’ in the name comes from. They act as your competition, but

You are an iridescent bug, skating at high velocity across a wide, glassy surface. You speed effortlessly forward, arcing smoothly between coppery pillars and rusty ruins, finding the path of least resistance — a graceful, chitinous speed skater. Ahead, a ghostly shape traces the same racing line. Your senses sharpen as you try to shave seconds



Spark

they also offer guidance. You can try to copy their racing line and find the best way to take on each track."

The final game will include both local multiplayer and online leaderboards, so players around the world can see how they measure up against one another. Players can race each other's ghosts, picking up new tricks in doing so. "You can see the other player's movements and learn from them," Torfi explains. "Each track becomes a puzzle to be solved."

Learning and improving are key elements of playing Phantom Spark. The game includes short challenges designed to teach players key manoeuvres, like how to take corners and chicanes at high speed. As races and challenges are completed, new ones unlock, creating a feeling of constant progression.

"There are three champions to race against," says Jonatan. "The first is very supportive and talks about how you're on a journey to enlightenment. They encourage you and tell you not to get frustrated when it's difficult, that it's not important to be the best. Another is really competitive. He's intentionally kind of a jerk. So of course, you feel more competitive racing against him."

CASTLES AND CLOUDS

The setting of the game is a character in itself. The initial tracks have a dreamy sci-fi vibe, leading players on a weaving journey between

strange ruins, cast in the luminous palette of oxidised copper. It's the work of art director Joost Eggermont.

"We were super lucky to find him," says Torfi. "When I was making the first prototypes for this game, I had recently started following him on Twitter and I was already fantasising about how cool it would be to make a racing gun game with his art."

We found ourselves passing the controller back and forth, shaving milliseconds off each other's best time.

As luck would have it, Joost was looking for a new project. "He was an incredible discovery," says Jonatan. "It can't be overstated how much work he's done. I feel like the aesthetic we've ended up with is something that you might need a ten person team for. We were able to do it with three three full time people and some external help."

Joost's dreamlike art, combined with the game's silky, free-flowing movement, create a sense of lightness that permeates Phantom Spark. "I think 'dreamy' is a good way to put it," muses Torfi. "The environments intentionally feel a little bit unreal, with all the castles and clouds."

NEARING THE FINISH LINE

As the game nears completion, the effort to raise awareness amongst players is ramping up. A new trailer was shown at the Game Developers Conference (GDC) in March and Torfi says there'll be a demo for people to try before the game is released widely this summer. The two are quietly optimistic about the game's release, and hope that its sense of gentle competition and op-

timistic self betterment will connect with a wide audience.

"It's always important to improve and be a better version of yourself," finishes Jonatan. "That's what the high level concept of the game is. It's about acknowledging what it's like to play these kinds of games—building up a skill and deriving enjoyment from that. 'Enlightenment' is a big word — but there's definitely a kind of personal enrichment to be found." ■

Phantom Spark will release on PlayStation, Xbox, Switch, PC and Mac in Summer 2024. You can wishlist the game now on Steam.

Smiðjustigur 10 / Klapparstigur 16, 101 Reykjavík
Artists Björn Roth, Dodda Maggý, Finnbogi Pétursson, Haraldur Jónsson, Hulda Stefánsdóttir, John Zurier, Katrín Elvarsdóttir, Kees Visser, Monika Grzymala, Páll Haukur Björnsson, Rintaro Hara, Rósa Gísladóttir, Sigurður Guðjónsson, Steina, Woody Vasulka, Þórdís Erla Zoëga
www.bergcontemporary.is, (354) 562 0001

BERG Contemporary



John Zurier
Morning, 2023
Oil on linen
65 × 45 cm



Kees Visser
Y-102, 2022
Acrylic on Bristol 400 grs
54 × 38.3 cm

John Zurier
Kees Visser
Where we are
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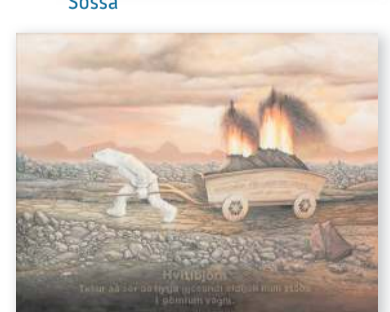
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Film Feature **Movies On The House**

Stockfish Film & Industry Festival celebrates its tenth anniversary with a diverse program open to everyone

WORDS Iryna Zubenko
IMAGES Supplied stills

the importance of Stockfish in today's ever-changing film industry.

EVERYONE'S INVITED

Stockfish was founded in 2015 by the Association of Filmmakers in Iceland as a reincarnation of Kvikmyndahátíð í Reykjavík (Reykjavík Film Festival) that aimed to fill the gap in the industry regarding film policies and marketplaces. To avoid confusion with RIFF (Reykjavík International Film Festival), the creators chose the name Stockfish. "It's a bit strange, but it really relates to the value of the economy in Iceland, which, at one point, was the 'stock fish,'" explains Carolina.

A decade later, Stockfish remains a non-profit festival supported by the Icelandic Film Centre, Film in Iceland, the Nordic Film and TV Fund, and a number of other sponsors, all collaborating to bring a selection of the best European and world cinema to Iceland.

As the rate at which Icelanders go to the cinema continues to decline, reaching out to younger audiences is at the forefront of Stockfish's strategy. "The main innovation of the tenth anniversary is that Stockfish is inviting the whole community to take part," Carolina says of the decision to open all screenings to the public.

"There will be no charge to access any film screening. We want to make the whole city a celebration and provide for those who don't have means or their means are limited."

A KALEIDOSCOPE OF STORIES

With Denmark being the festival's Industry in Focus, Stockfish will screen an extensive portfolio of Danish films. The opening film, *Eternal* directed by Ulaa Salim, is a sci-fi romance flick. The Danish-Icelandic co-production follows an ambitious climate change scientist on a dangerous mission, who is forced to make a choice between their career and love, exploring the repercussions of his decision that follow.

Another Danish highlight, according to Carolina, is *Kalak* by Isabella Eklöf. The film, which won the Best Cinematography award and the Special Jury Prize at the 2023 San Sebastián Film Festival, explores Denmark's traumatic relationship with Greenland through a story of sexual abuse, relived trauma and longing for connection.

Beyond the Industry in Focus, the festival is divided into three Stockfish corners dedicated to specific topics: the European Film Awards corner, showcasing films that were

nominated or awarded by the European Film Academy; the World Cinema corner curated by Chicago International Film Festival Artistic Director Mimi Plauché; and the Heritage Corner curated by the National Film Archive of Iceland in collaboration with the Icelandic Film Centre to celebrate the 80th anniversary of Icelandic independence taking place on June 17. To mark the occasion, two influential Icelandic films, *Á köldum klaka* (*Cold Fever*) by Friðrik Þór Friðriksson and *Á hjara veraldar* (*Rainbow's End*) by Kristín Jóhannesdóttir will be screened, along with a collection of works from the archive.

"The programme has 25 international titles that have not yet been screened in Iceland," shares Carolina. "One of my highlights is *The Human Hibernation Project* by a Spanish artist and director, Anna Cornudella. It's a mockumentary about a utopian world where humanity goes into hibernation for three months."

The festival director also highlights two Palestinian films – *Bye Bye Tiberias* by Lina Soualem, a documentary that follows Hiam Abbass leaving Palestine to pursue her acting career, and Farah Nabulsi's *The Teacher* about a school teacher stuck between his commitment

to political resistance and being a father figure.

Another film addressing contemporary issues is *In the Rearview* by Maciek Hamela, co-produced by Poland, France and Ukraine. The documentary follows a van evacuating people from Ukraine amidst the Russian invasion. "It's a documentary about a driver continuously crossing the border from Ukraine into Poland, recording the people he has in the car. It's a multi-story road trip during wartime," says Carolina.

Scottish filmmaker Lynne Ramsay is the festival's guest of honour this year. Stockfish will screen a retrospective of Ramsay's works, including her BAFTA-nominated film *We Need to Talk About Kevin*.

SHORTFISH: SPOTLIGHT ON NEW TALENT

Over the years, the festival's short film competition, Shortfish, has become its trademark, attracting crowds, along with filmmakers' friends and families to the largest screening room at Bio Paradis. "Our competition programme is exclusively for Icelandic talent and is related to shorts," says Carolina. "One of the rules is that these have to be premiered within Stockfish. You can only submit work that you have nev-

"It's been harder and harder to get the young people to come to the cinema," says Carolina Salas as we sit in the kitchen of her office. "Everybody has a show that they're watching at home and they pay less and less for a night at the cinema. We really want to make them experience what a film festival is like, so that next year, they might consider coming again."

As the Stockfish Film & Industry Festival prepares for its tenth edition, led by a team spanning 14 nationalities, its managing director reflects on this year's lineup and personal highlights, and speaks to



CHAOS

A Nordic Photo Exhibition

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At the Nordic House





er shown in any other festival or on any other platform in Iceland.”

Out of 75 submissions, the reviewing committee, comprised of programmers, festival staff and board associates, selected five films for each category: Narrative, Documentary, Experimental and Creative Music. Carolina highlights that the quality of competing films is growing every year. “Many of them have really professional setups and the outcome is high,” she says, noting that even in more amateur films, plot, characters and overall relevance are considered.

The competition is supported by the national broadcaster RÚV and equipment rental company KUKL. The winning film in the Narrative category receives 1,000,000 ISK in cash from RÚV and the equivalent amount in equipment rental from KUKL. Prize money varies for other categories.

BEYOND THE SCREEN

Year after year, Stockfish aims to provide a platform for networking and collaboration opportunities for industry professionals. “Our focus is to be an industry festival apart from having a curated programme of films for any audience,” says Carolina. The festival’s industry-focused

events include masterclasses on documentary filmmaking, festival strategy and casting, as well as panel discussions on new policies in filmmaking, sustainability in the industry and a networking reception for women in film and television, to name a few.

Traditionally, Stockfish invites industry professionals for the Work-in-Progress screening that allows filmmakers to get feedback on projects that are yet to be finished. “Everybody talks about the glamorous part of filmmaking, but nobody really talks about how important behind the camera people are,” says Carolina, adding that Stockfish will host a panel in collaboration with the Association of Technicians and Filmmakers of Iceland about working with technicians to receive the desired results.

For the first time since its inception, the festival is also organising a Writers Lab led by BAFTA and Sundance-nominated writer and director Tina Gharavi. “The Lab is not about how you write a script, but how you take your script to a different level,” explains Carolina. Through a three-day workshop, participants will learn how to navigate the script timeline, build characters, collaborate with other writers, receive expert feedback and pitch

their script. With the Writer’s Lab, Carolina is confident Stockfish is addressing the need for professional training. “We believe that there is a need for more writing training and opportunities within the country,” she says.

ALL ROADS LEAD TO THE CINEMA

While a number of festivals around the country throw in the towel, Stockfish remains a breath of fresh air. According to Carolina, it still has a long way to go to compete with big industry festivals like Torino, Berlinale or Cannes. But whether you’re an industry professional, a cinephile, or just passing by, Stockfish offers a carefully curated film program you won’t want to miss.

“It’s a financial loss, but we aim to have an impact,” says Carolina. “We need to get the community to know we are Stockfish. We’re here for the industry, but we also have an amazing programme of films where everybody could find something they like.” ■

Stockfish Film & Industry Festival takes place on April 4-14 at Bíó Paradís. The festival is free of charge but requires prior registration to attend screenings. Find the full festival schedule here: stockfishfestival.is

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Centre Map

We're here to fill you in on our personal favourite places around town – and a few to consider avoiding.

Dining

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

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

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

5 CAFÉ BABALÚ
Skólavörðustígur 22
This quirky café hangout is a great choice when you're looking for a cozy, chill experience. Decked with kitschy decor and plush chairs, the café is perfect for a refuge from an instant shower of rain. If you're looking to snuggle up with a book and a good cup of coffee, look no further. JB

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

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

8 CHICKPEA
Hallveigarstígur 1
This Mediterranean-inspired restaurant is a great place for a quick bite. Servings are generous and the

food nutritious, meaning you'll go full well into the day. They do wraps, falafels, and all kinds of salads exceptionally well. Prices aren't extremely steep, but nothing to write home about either. JB

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

10 JÓMFRÚIN
Lækjargata 4, 101 Reykjavik
Icelanders may have a love-hate relationship with the Danes, but let's be honest, who can resist craving a delicious smørrebrød every now and then? If you get what we are talking about, there's no better place in town for an authentic Danish smørrebrød than Jómfrúin. This family-run restaurant specializes in serving Danish and Scandinavian dishes, and to top it off, it boasts a fantastic outdoor terrace where you can relax, sip a beer and complain about politics overlooking the Icelandic parliament. IZ

Drinking

11 APERÓ VÍNBAR
Laugavegur 20b
A wine bar that is both opulent and accessible? Yes please. The small team at Aperó remember the orders of regulars and make first-timers feel like regulars. If you know what you like, Aperó will tick your boxes; and if you're new to wine, the sommelier will soon unite you with your ideal glass. CF

12 KEX HOSTEL
Skúlagata 28
The former biscuit factory now serves as a trendy hostel, with a bar, restaurant and a live concert space. There's always something going on, and if not, it's a great spot to grab those after-work drinks. With a rotation of foreign tourists who stumble onto a heavy metal show happening in the restaurant, you're always bound for an enjoyable experience. JB

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

14 VITABAR
Bergþórugata 21
If you're staying in Reykjavik more than a few days, you ought to find

your own dive bar – this is ours. It seems like the time froze at Vitabar, but we love it that way. People come for their famous blue cheese burger, but stay for a few pints and delicious fries. Sometimes I wish Vitabar discovered craft beer, but I go back nevertheless – for a late night bite and Thule on draft. IZ

15 VINSTÚKAN TÍU SOPAR
Laugavegur 27
There are a few bars in Reykjavik that have learned how to do wine right, and Vínstúkan Tíu sopar, although located in the middle of the chaos and tourist buzz of Laugavegur, is one of them. Craving Pét-nat? In the mood for orange wine? Ready to explore small Slovenian wineries? You name it – the bar's staff will be ready to come up with suggestions that will suit any pocket. Don't get me started on their small bites to pair with wine – I'm already dreaming about their grilled peppers and torched broccoli with salted lemon. IZ

Shopping & Activities

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

Random Spots

17 EINARGARÐUR
Laufásvegur 79
This little green space nestled into the curving juncture of Laufásvegur and Gamla Hringbraut is an oasis in the city. Exposed to full sun seemingly all the time, it's a peaceful spot to stroll through, climb trees, luxuriate on the grass or toss the ball for your four-legged friend. Don't do that last thing, though. It's not allowed. CF

Be Warned

18 101 BISTRO
Austurstræti 3
The bistro on the corner of Ingólfs-torg and Austurstræti that has a plaque outside saying, "Come in and try the worst [insert popular food item] that one guy on Tripadvisor said we had", or something like that. It's a trap, do not go there. That plaque has been in the same spot ever since Hrunið. RG

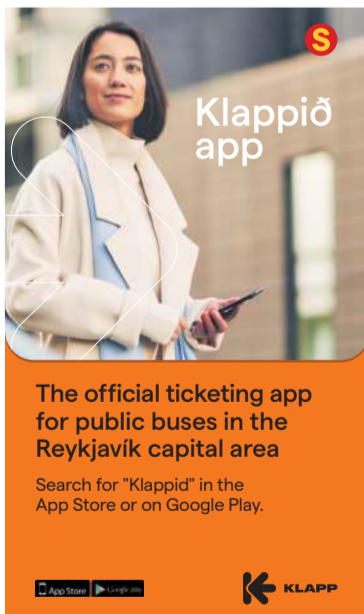
19 SBARRO
Austurstræti 17 & Vatnsmýrarvegur 10
"What is this shit?" is how Greil Marcus famously opened his review



of Bob Dylan's 1970 album in Rolling Stone. It is appropriate here. It looks like pizza, it is sold as pizza, it's priced like foie gras, but it tastes like salted shit. Avoid. RG

20 REYKJAVÍK FISH RESTAURANT
Tryggvagata 8
Our beef with this place has to do with their "plokari" (Traditional Icelandic Fish Stew). Taste wise, there is nothing wrong with how Reykjavik Fish makes their "plokari", the problem is that the volume you get for the price is unacceptable; a tiny cast iron pan of fish stew for 2.690 ISK. An outrage. RG

21 PHO VIETNAM
Laugavegur 3 (Multiple locations)
If you like rat shit, look no further than Pho Vietnam. Its parent company, Vyprif, was sued by the Reykjavik Health Inspection for the improper storage of food. During the health authority's visit, rat droppings, vermin carcasses, and evidence of human habitation in the storage was found. Eugh. AVOID. RG ■





H

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15

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New In Town **Trung Nguyen E-Coffee***

Hallgerðargata 19-23, 105 Reykjavík

It's often easy to forget that not all good things are contained in 101. In fact, some pretty darn great stuff is off the beaten path, such as newcomer café Trung Nguyen. Specialising in authentic Vietnamese coffee – a delectable concoction made with sweetened condensed milk – the bustling bright and eclectic café in Kirkjusandur is truly one of a kind. Attracting a large quotient of Iceland's vibrant Vietnamese community and located right next to the new home of Gallery Port, it's a perfect example of the rich culture that exists outside of the downtown core.

OPENING HOURS:

Monday to Friday from 7:00 - 18:00
Saturday from 9:00 - 20:30
Sunday from 9:00 - 18:00 ■



B

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Art Exhibitions

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Opening

BERG CONTEMPORARY
Kees Visser & John Zurier - Where We Are
 Painting works by two artists using similar abstract techniques, yet completely different, both exploring the sense of time.
 Opens April 5
 Runs until May 11

GALLERY FOLD
Birta
 Group exhibition of paintings bound by the theme of light, either in the vastness, in power or stillness. Nature plays a large role in the works.
 Opens April 6
 Runs until April 27

GALLERÍ KVERK
Guðný Rúnarsdóttir - FJARAN OG LEIRINN
 Solo exhibition of works made of clay and an installation of tiles crafted from clay the artist dug up from the beaches of Bjarnarfjörður.
 Opens April 6
 Runs until April 20

GALLERY PORT
Sindri Ploder - SINDRI
 Third solo exhibition of artist Sindri

Ploder, whose distinctive art across many media are characterized by his expressive and captivating portraits.
GERÐARSAFN (KÓPAVOGUR ART MUSEUM)
Sóley Ragnarsdóttir - Queen of Hearts
 In Queen of Hearts, the fascinating, hyper-decorative conceptual and material world of artist Sóley Ragnarsdóttir is revealed through mixed media.
 Opens April 13
 Runs until July 21

HAFNARBORG
Jewellery:object - Sculpture for the Body
 Group exhibition reflecting the varied approaches, techniques and topics of modern jewellery-making in Iceland.
 Opens April 6
 Runs until May 26

MOSFELLSBÆR ART GALLERY
Hanna Dís Whitehead - Attributes
 Playing with the different properties of materials, shapes and objects, the works in this exhibition are an interplay of craft and digital technology.
 Opens April 20
 Runs until May 17

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ICELAND
Anna Rún Tryggvadóttir - Multipolar
 How humans experience the inexplicable uncertainty of the earth's magnetic field is the subject of this holistic installation of two-dimensional and sculptural works.
 Opens April 13
 Runs until September 15

Coincidentally, We See Abstractly
 Group exhibition bringing together three groups of artists of different generations and dissimilar backgrounds, where juxtaposition creates coalescence.
 Opens April 13
 Runs until May 26

NORDIC HOUSE
NU24 CHAOS
 Photography exhibition for vocational education students in the Nordic countries. The NU series is held annually since 2017 by Yrkesinstitutet Prakticum in Helsinki.
 Opens April 9
 Runs until April 21

PULA
Guðmundur Thoroddsen - Drifts
 New paintings from this year where Guðmundur continues an ongoing experimentation with oil sticks, using the theme of movement and progression.
 Opens April 6
 Runs until May 19

Ongoing

ÁSMUNDARSAFN (REYKJAVÍK ART MUSEUM)
At Hand
 Sculpture
 Runs until September 1

ÁSMUNDARSALUR
Sean Patrick O'Brien - Luminiferous Aether
 Installation, mixed media
 Runs until April 14

THE EINAR JÓNSSON SCULPTURE MUSEUM
Brynja Baldursdóttir & Einar Jónsson - Be-coming
 Sculpture, mixed media
 Runs until August 25

GALLERY SKILTI
Sirra Sigrún Sigurðardóttir - Misseri
 Installation
 Runs until June 15

GERÐARSAFN (KÓPAVOGUR ART MUSEUM)
GERÐUR
 Works of sculptor Gerður Helgadóttir
 Permanent exhibition

HAFNARBORG CENTER OF CULTURE & FINE ART
Jónína Guðnadóttir - Tidemark
 Ceramics
 Runs until April 29

HAFNARHÚS (REYKJAVÍK ART MUSEUM)
Vitamin-D
 Group exhibition, mixed media
 Runs until May 5

Gambit - Erró, Chronicler of Current Affairs
 Paintings, collages
 Runs until May 12

THE HOUSE OF COLLECTIONS
Ásgrímur Jónsson - Flight From Volcanic Eruptions
 Paintings
 Runs until April 14

Resistance: Interplay of Art and Science
 Interdisciplinary group exhibition
 Permanent exhibition

HÖFUÐSTÖÐIN
Shoplifter/Hrafnhildur Arnardóttir - Chromo Sapiens
 Installation, colourful whole body experience
 Permanent exhibition

18 GALLERY
Ragnar Kjartansson - Mother and Child, Gin and Tonic
 Paintings
 Runs until April 20

18 GRANDI
Andreas Eriksson - Real Time
 Paintings, progressive exhibition
 Runs until December 2024

KJARVALSSTAÐIR (REYKJAVÍK ART MUSEUM)
Borghildur Óskarsdóttir - Heed
 Mixed media, installation
 Runs until June 9

Kjarval and the 20th Century: When Modernity Anchored
 Paintings, drawings
 Runs until December 2024

KLING & BANG
Sirra Sigrún Sigurðardóttir - Different Resolutions
 Interdisciplinary works
 Runs until April 7

LISTASMIÐJAN SLIP-ÞBARINN
Hrafnunna Ross - MARA, MÓÐIR,

MOLD
 Paintings, drawings
 Runs until April 18

LISTVAL
Steingrímur Gauti - Lingerin Space
 Paintings
 Runs until April 20

THE LIVING ART MUSEUM
Anna Hrund Másdóttir - desire paths
 Mixed media
 Runs until April 28

MOSFELLSBÆR ART GALLERY
Pórunn Bára Björnsdóttir - Gróðurhula
 Paintings
 Runs until April 12

MUSEUM OF DESIGN AND APPLIED ARTS
Jewellery
 Craftworks
 Runs until May 5

Katla Einarsdóttir & Una María Magnúsdóttir - Messages
 Graphic design
 Runs until November 2024

At Home in the Design Museum
 Over 200 examples of Icelandic design from 1900 to the present
 Runs until March 2026

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF ICELAND
From The Collection: Creative Hands
 Historical tapestries, textile works
 Runs until May 5

NORDIC HOUSE
WASTELAND
 Installation, mixed media
 Runs until April 28

REYKJAVÍK MARITIME MUSEUM
Heimir Freyr Hlöðversson - We are Earth, We are Water
 Video installation
 Runs until December 2024

REYKJAVÍK MUSEUM OF PHOTOGRAPHY
Stuart Richardson - Undercurrent
 Photography
 Runs until April 21

Daníel Perez Eðvarðsson - The Man who Slept like a Flamenco Dancer
 Photography
 Runs until April 28

SIGURJÓN ÓLAFSSON MUSEUM
Þura - Home & Away
 Paintings
 Runs until May 12

The Gift of Children
 Reliefs and Portraits
 Runs until September 24

From Various Sources
 Sculpture, mixed media
 Runs until September 24

WHALES OF ICELAND
Vera Paluskova - The Souls in the Arctic
 Paintings
 Runs until May 15

Art Picks



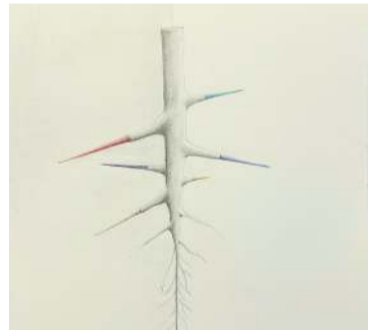
Hrafnunna Ross - MARA, MÓÐIR, MOLD
 Runs until April 18
 Listasmiðjan Slippbarinn

If you've ever fallen down the rabbit hole of reading Nick Cave's Red Hand Files, you are surely pilled up with the notion that, no matter your beliefs, creating art is a divine act. Multidisciplinary artist Hrafnunna Ross uses this act to communicate directly with the spirits in their new exhibition. Through their intense primal works, the spirit is interlaced with all the beauty and grotesqueness of nature, which is the truest highest power we know. RX



NU24 CHAOS
 Opens April 9
 The Nordic House

A cross-Nordic venture, NU24 CHAOS is an exhibition featuring works from over 15 photography students. Since 2016, Finnish, Norwegian, Icelandic and Swedish vocational education schools have teamed up to produce annual photo exhibitions. The project gives both students and schools the opportunity to showcase their work, all while developing a Nordic network of professional colleagues. JB



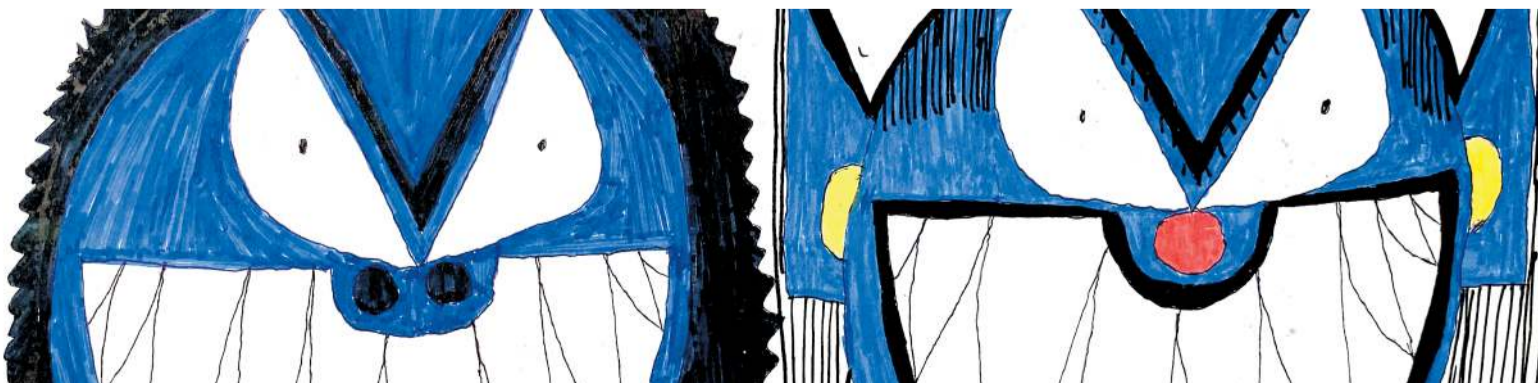
Anna Rún Tryggvadóttir - Multipolar
 Opens April 13
 National Gallery of Iceland

In this artist-led exhibition, visual artist Anna Rún Tryggvadóttir focuses on the Earth's magnetic field. Although it serves an imperative role in the complex network of systems sustaining all life, Anna's work points to the ever-changing nature of physical phenomena as evidence suggests that the four cardinal directions are only based in temporality. The exhibition displays a holistic installation of two-dimensional and sculptural works. JB

Sindri Ploder
 06.04 - 27.04.2024

SINDRÍ

Gallery Port
 Hallgerðargata 19-23



Events 05.04–02.05.24

Concerts, comedy, movies and other happenings that defy categorisation

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

20:00 Kex Hostel
House of Revolution vol. 4: METAMORPHOSIS
21:00 National Theatre of Iceland
Manic State x Ghozt
20:00 Radar
DJ Ívar Pétur
22:00 Röntgen
Smátíðni #1: Hátíðni Fundraiser
18:30 Smekkleysa

Sunday April 7

Anouska Shankar
20:00 *Harpa (Eldborg)*
Á Inniskónum Series: ADHD
20:00 Hannesarholt
DJ Bob Cluness
20:30 Kaffibarinn

Monday April 8

Improv for Dance Enthusiasts
19:30 Dansverkstæðið
Silja Glömmi
20:30 Kaffibarinn

Tuesday April 9

Lucajós, BODE & Martina Cirri
20:00 12 Tónar
Karaoke Night
20:00 Gaukurinn
Mary Jane from UA
20:30 Kaffibarinn

Wednesday April 10

Bring The Laughs: Comedy Night
20:00 Gaukurinn
DJ Brynja (Girls Gang)
20:30 Kaffibarinn
Ljóð og vinir #6
20:00 Mengi
Rory Stuart Nonet
20:00 Múlinn Jazzclub
DJ Coco Channel
21:00 Röntgen

Thursday April 11

Tom Hannay
20:00 Gaukurinn
Á Inniskónum Series: Ingibjörg Turchi & Hróðmar Sigurðsson
20:00 Hannesarholt
Coney Iceland Dance Show
20:00 Iðnó
Terrordisco Hand Selected 7" Vinyl Night
21:00 Kaffibarinn
DJ Arnar Eggert Indie Night
20:00 Kex Hostel

Agnar Eldberg
21:00 LEMMY
Virgin Orchestra, Countess Malaise & Alfred Drexler
18:30 R6013
Sweaty Records
20:00 Radar
Steindór Jónsson
21:00 Röntgen
FWD Youth Company: EFTIRPARTY
20:00 Tjarnarbíó

Friday April 12

Strip Lab
20:00 Gaukurinn
Distrakt Audio #8 Per Hammar x Skjaerstad x Ells
23:00 Kaffibarinn
Radar Invites: Isaac Elejalde & Thorkell Máni
20:00 Radar
Betri saman
22:00 Röntgen

Saturday April 13

Apocalypstick: Drag Night
21:00 Gaukurinn
Eva Luna & Hristo
23:00 Kaffibarinn
Þórunn Antonía
20:00 Kex Hostel
The Cult of One, Dada Pogrom & DJ Gulli DJ
18:30 R6013
After Eight: Carla Rose
20:00 Radar
Glókollur
22:00 Röntgen

Sunday April 14

Orang Volante
20:30 Kaffibarinn

Monday April 15

Monday Jazz: Nicola Guida
20:00 Iðnó

Tuesday April 16

Karaoke Night
20:00 Gaukurinn
Upprásin: Sucks to be you, Nigel, Torfi & The Post Performance Blues Band
20:00 Harpa (Kaldalón)
DJ Vala
20:30 Kaffibarinn
Lord of the Rings Pub Quiz
20:00 Röntgen

Friday April 5

Freyja Comedy Night
20:00 Freyja Pub
Úlfur Úlfur Album Release Show
20:00 Gamla Bíó
Reykjavík Deathfest 2024: Spring Slaughter
18:00 Gaukurinn
Kristmundur Axel
21:00 Iðnó
DJ Óli Dóri
23:00 Kaffibarinn
Fílalag Live
20:00 Kex Hostel
Rúnar Þórisson and Band & VAX
21:00 LEMMY
Intelligent Instruments Lab: Guðmundur Arnalds, Ásta Fanney & More
20:00 Mengi
Slackathon vol. II - Slacker Events
20:00 Radar
DJ Station Helgi
22:00 Röntgen

Saturday April 6

Partnering Workshop: Amelia Eisen & Kirill Berezovski
16:00 Dansverkstæðið
Reykjavík Deathfest 2024: Spring Slaughter
18:00 Gaukurinn
Simon fknhdsm
23:00 Kaffibarinn
Vökum blómin Showcase



National Gallery of Iceland
Fríkirkjuvegur 7
The House of Collections
Hverfisgata 15

Við sjáum óvænt abstrakt Coincidentally, We See Abstractly

listasafn.is



Sigurður Reynir Ármannsson (1988), *Strönd / Beach*, Year unknown

Listasafn Íslands
National Gallery
of Iceland

13.4.–
26.5.2024

Event Picks



Reykjavík Deathfest 2024: Spring Slaughter
April 5 – 6
Gaukurinn
10.000 ISK

While all the flowers are blooming and the birds and bees are doing their buzzing, you gotta hand it to Reykjavík Deathfest for bringing some doom and gloom back to town. The music scene's memento mori promoters come at us this month with a two-day blowout of absolute metal brutality, sure to make your neck snap from headbanging. With international bands including Cytotoxin, Cumbeast, Wounded not Dead, and Duskwalker, playing alongside local demons Devine De-filement, Offors, Holdris and more, you should rush to this festival like a lamb to the slaughter. RX



Á Inniskónum: Magnús Jóhann Curated Series
April 7 – 30
Hannesarholt
4.900-5.900 ISK

Bust out your fancy slippers and prepare to get cosy, folks. Throughout the month of April, acclaimed and beloved piano impresario Magnús Jóhann will be curating the *Á Inniskónum* ("in slippers") concert series! Hosted in the gorgeous historic Hannesarholt house, the series of five shows will feature such local favourites as ADHD, Ingibjörg Turchi, Flóni, and, of course, Magnús himself. We assume, based on the series name, that you are to kick your shoes off on entry and slip into something a bit more comfortable. Wear clean socks, please. RX



The Cult of One, Dada Pogrom & DJ Gulli DJ
Saturday April 13, 18:30
R6013
2.000 ISK / Pay what you can

If you want to find the best spot to be introduced to new music, head on over to Ingólfsstræti 20 and check out R6013. Run by musician Ægir Sindri Bjarnason, this garage-cum-music hub boasts some of the most exciting shows in town. This time around, artists The Cult Of One (Henrik Björnsson of Singapore Sling fame), Dada Pogrom and DJ Gulli DJ will hit the figurative stage. Support your local scene! JB

D-vítamín 26.01.–05.05.2024

Listamenn Artís
Halla Einarsdóttir, Hákon Bragason
Hanna Högnadóttir, Joe
Keya Katrín Jónes K.,
Katrína Helgadóttir, Kristján
Mortens, Lukas Bury & Weltonika
Bence, Lína Óskarsdóttir,
Ragnhildur Weiss, Popel, Sigrún
Syða Svendsdóttir, Selbjörg
narsdóttir, Lína Margrét Árnadóttir
þúur Harpa Þorvaldsson

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LISTASAFN

Hafnarhús
Tryggvagata 17
101 Reykjavík

listasafnreykjavikur.is
#listasafnreykjavikur
411 6400



Events 05.04-02.05.24

Concerts, comedy, movies and other happenings that defy categorisation

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

Wednesday April 17

X.U.L. & Bistrobø
20:00 Harpa (Kaldalón)
Röggi & the SunSong Band
20:00 Múlinn Jazzclub
Open Decks
19:00 Radar
DJ Hasar
21:00 Röntgen

Thursday April 18

Bubbi Morthens Album Release Concert
20:00 Borgarleikhúsið
Jazz Thursdays: Tóta Jónsdóttir, Ásgeir Ásgeirsson & Nico Moreaux
18:00 Hotel Holt
Housekell
21:00 Kaffibarinn
Pub Quiz
20:00 Kex Hostel
Spacebreaker & Mucky Much
21:00 LEMMY
We Are Eternal
20:00 Radar
DJ Bjarni Daníel
21:00 Röntgen

Friday April 19

Encore! A Night with West End Stars
20:00 Harpa (Eldborg)
Steindór Jónsson
23:00 Kaffibarinn
Celestine Album Release Show / DJ

Óli Dóri
20:00 Kex Hostel
An On Bast, Tomashevsky & More
20:00 Radar
Sonur sæll b2b Snádinn
22:00 Röntgen

Saturday April 20

Alchemia: Motorhead Tribute
21:00 Gaukurinn
Á Inniskónum Series: Flóni & Magnús Jóhann
20:00 Hannesarholt
Young G&T
23:00 Kaffibarinn
UPP & KOMANDI IV: Spacebreakers, Brotsjór, Dauðnafn & Lil Zxly
18:00 LEMMY
Volume: Marco Bailey, Eyvi, Samwise b2b Stefán
20:00 Radar
DJ Hotline
22:00 Röntgen

Sunday April 21

Choreographic Happy Hour
19:00 Dansverkstæðið
DJ Júlala
20:30 Kaffibarinn

Monday April 22

Snarky Puppy (USA)
20:00 Harpa (Eldborg)

Tuesday April 23

Karaoke Night
20:00 Gaukurinn
Silja Glömmi
20:30 Kaffibarinn

Wednesday April 24

Jónbjörn (Lagaffe Tales)
20:30 Kaffibarinn
DJ Station Helgi

20:00 Kex Hostel
Billy Strayhorn Tribute Band
20:00 Múlinn Jazzclub
Lágmennin
20:00 Radar
Simon fkhndsm
22:00 Röntgen

Thursday April 25

Morøse
20:00 Gaukurinn
Á Inniskónum Series: Björg Brjánsdóttir
20:00 Hannesarholt
Vélarnar
21:00 Kaffibarinn
Dögg Nónsgjögvi & Ari Árelíus
20:00 Kex Hostel
Stjörnuljós
21:00 Röntgen

Friday April 26

Reggie Watts (USA)
21:00 Gamla Bíó
Yahahas Queen! Drag Comedy Night
20:00 Gaukurinn
KRBEAR
23:00 Kaffibarinn
Hringekjan Fashion Show & Concert
20:00 Kex Hostel
Dimensions: Penerima, Funktion Einar, díá & Cliff Walker
20:00 Radar
DJ Óli Dóri
22:00 Röntgen

Saturday April 27

Ladies Night
21:00 Gaukurinn
Remembering Summer: Solveig Óskarsdóttir & Anna Þórhildur Gunnarsdóttir
15:00 Hannesarholt
Þorgerður Jóhanna

23:00 Kaffibarinn
Gular Baunir
21:00 LEMMY
Summer Contrast Festival Launch Party
20:00 Radar

Sunday April 28

Bill Bailey: Thoughtifier
20:00 Harpa (Eldborg)
Chillsphere
20:00 Radar

Tuesday April 30

Karaoke Night
20:00 Gaukurinn
Jazz í Djúpinu: Kristjana Stefáns Trio
20:30 Hornið Restaurant
Á Inniskónum Series: Move - Kvartett Óskars Guðjónssonar
20:00 Hannesarholt
DJ Bob Cluness
20:00 Kex Hostel
Pub Quiz / DJ Björn Leó
20:00 Röntgen

Wednesday May 1

Bring The Laughs: Comedy Night
20:00 Gaukurinn
Richard Sears Sextett
20:00 Múlinn Jazzclub
Vinyl Wednesday: DJ Kraftgalli
21:00 Röntgen

Thursday May 2

Jazz Thursdays: Richard Sears, Mattías Hemstock & Nico Moreaux
18:00 Hotel Holt
Curawaka
19:45 Iðnó
Jakob b2b Olivier
20:00 Radar
Curro Rodriguez (DJ set)
21:00 Röntgen ■



Reggie Watts
Friday April 26, 21:00
Gamla Bíó
8.900 ISK

Comedian, actor, musician and author, Reggie Watts is a quadruple threat. Performing in Iceland for the first time since 2010, Reggie Watts combines both stand-up comedy and music in his own unique way. In addition to performing at Gamla Bíó in Reykjavik, the comic will also take to the countryside, performing in Akureyri on April 25 and Flateyri on May 3. JB ■

See more at events.grapevine.is

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Appy Listings

Some Of The Happiest Hours In Town

If your bar has a happy hour, email us on events@grapevine.is with the details.

101 HOTEL
Wednesday to Saturday from 16:00 to 19:00
Beer 1.390 ISK, Wine 1.590 ISK

12 TÓNAR
Every day from 14:00 to 19:00
Beer 1.100 ISK, Wine 1.200 ISK

AMERICAN BAR
Every day from 16:00 to 19:00
Beer 900 ISK, Wine 1.000 ISK

APÉRO
Every day from 16:00 to 19:00
Beer 950 ISK, Wine 1.100 ISK

BÍÓ PARADÍS
Every day from 17:00 to 19:00
Beer 1000 ISK, Wine & Prosecco 1200 ISK

BJÓRGARÐURINN
Every day from 15:00 to 19:00
Beer 900 ISK, Wine 900 ISK

BODEGA
Every day from 16:00 to 19:00
Beer 900 ISK, Wine 900 ISK

BRAVÓ
Every day from 12:00 to 20:00
Beer 750 ISK, Wine 1.000 ISK

BREWD OG
Every day from 15:00 to 17:00 & 22:00 to 00:00
Beer 1.290 ISK, Wine 1.290 ISK

BRÚT BAR
Every day from 16:00 to 19:00
Beer 700 ISK, Wine 750 ISK, 2F1 on wine and beer on tap

DEN DANSKE KRO
Every day from 16:00 to 19:00
Beer 750 ISK, Wine 750 ISK

FJALLKONAN
Every day from 15:00 to 18:00
Beer 990 ISK, Wine 1.190 ISK

FORRÉTTABARINN
Every day from 16:00 to 18:00
Beer 800 ISK, Wine 900 ISK

FORSETINNCAFÉ
Every day from 15:00 to 18:00
Beer 990 ISK, Wine 990 ISK

FRÖKEN REYKJAVÍK
Every day from 16:00 to 18:00
Beer 990 ISK, Wine 1.100 ISK

GAUKURINN
Every day from 16:00 to 21:00
Beer 900 ISK, Wine 1.100 ISK

HOTEL HOLT BAR
Wednesday to Saturday from 16:00 to 18:00

Beer 1.000 ISK, Wine 1.350 ISK

THE IRISHMAN
Every day from 12:00 to 19:00
Beer 850 ISK, Wine 850 ISK

JÖRGENSEN KITCHEN & BAR
Every day except Thurs. 16:00 to 18:00, Thursday 16:00 to 20:00
Beer 890 ISK, Wine 1.100 ISK

JUNGLE COCKTAIL BAR
Every day from 16:00 to 18:00
Beer 1.000 ISK, Wine 1.100 ISK

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

KAFFIBARINN
Every day from 15:00 to 19:00
Beer 800 ISK, Wine 900 ISK

KAFFIBRENNSLAN
Every day from 16:00 to 20:00
Beer 850 ISK, Wine 900 ISK

KALDI BAR
Every day from 16:00 to 19:00
Beer 950 ISK, Wine 950 ISK

LOFT HOSTEL
Every day from 16:00 to 20:00
Beer 990 ISK, Wine 1.350 ISK

LÓLA FLORENS
Every day from 15:00 to 18:00
Beer 1.200 ISK, Wine 1.200 ISK

ÖLSTOFAN
Every day from 15:00 to 20:00
Beer 1.000 ISK, Wine 1.000 ISK

PETERSEN SVÍTAN
Every day from 16:00 to 19:00
Beer 900 ISK, Wine 1.200 ISK

PRIKIÐ
Every day from 16:00 to 20:00
Beer 800 ISK, Wine 1.500 ISK

PUNK
Every day from 16:00 to 18:00
Beer 850 ISK, Wine 950 ISK

RÖNTGEN
Every day from 16:00 to 19:00
Beer 900 ISK, Wine 1.000 ISK

SÆTA SVÍNÍÐ
Every day from 15:00 to 18:00
Beer 1.090 ISK, Wine 1.390 ISK

SATT RESTAURANT
Every day from 15:00 to 18:00
Beer 900 ISK, Wine 1.000 ISK

SKÚLI CRAFT BAR
Every day from 12:00 to 19:00
Beer 900 ISK, Wine 900 ISK

SLIPBARINN
Every day from 15:00 to 18:00
Beer 1.000 ISK, Wine 1.000 ISK

SPILAKAFFI
Every day from 17:00 to 19:00
Beer 1.000 ISK, no wine or cocktails

STUDENTAKJALLARINN

Every day from 16:00 to 19:00
Beer 710 ISK, Wine 850 ISK

TIPSÝ
Every day from 16:00 to 19:00
50% off select cocktails

UPPSALIR BAR
Every day from 16:00 to 19:00
Beer 750 ISK, Wine 950 ISK

VEÐUR
Every day from 12:00 to 19:35
Beer 800 ISK, Wine 800 ISK

VÍNSTÚKAN TÍU SOPAR
Every day from 17:00 to 19:00
Beer 1.300 ISK, Wine 1.600 ISK

VOX BRASSERIE & BAR
Every day from 16:00 to 18:00
Beer 900 ISK, Wine 1.200 ISK



Featured Apéro

Laugavegur 20b

Since its arrival on the local bar scene, Apéro has been a very welcome addition to one of the most bar-dense areas of the city. The French-inspired wine bar serves guests an absolutely unique experience by bringing the latest in wine technology to Reykjavik. A wine-lover could get very comfortable in this spacious and lush locale, while wine newbies won't feel out of place. The food menu is also a delight of small dishes – make it a meal and let the vino flow.

Happy hours
Every day from 16:00 to 19:00
Beer 1000 ISK, Wine 1.200 ISK ■

* We do our best to keep these prices current, but prices are constantly changing. Inflation, amirite!?

Cheap Eats

Here are some sweet meal deals that'll fill your tummy and without draining your bank account.

GLÓ
Bowl of the Month
2.290 ISK all day, every day

HAMBORGARABÚLLA TÓMASAR
Tuesday Special: burger, fries & soda
1.890 ISK all day on Tuesday

HLÖLLABÁTAR
Lunch Offer: Choice of any sub and soda
2.195 ISK every day until 14:00

ISLENSKI BARINN
Soup of the Day
1.850 ISK all day, every day

LEMON
Combo of the Month: large sandwich & juice
2.195 ISK all day, every day

MAI THAI BISTRO
Lunch Offer: daily curry meal
2.090 ISK weekdays between 11:00 - 14:00

APÓTEK
Soup of the Day
1.990 ISK all day, every day

ARABIAN TASTE
Falafel Roll
1.590 all day, every day

BÆJARINS BEZTU
Hotdog and soda
990 ISK all day, every day

DEIG
Poor Man's Offer: filled bagel, doughnut & drink
1.850 ISK weekdays after 10:00

DRAGON DIM SUM
Lunch Offer: choice of any two dumpling baskets

2.190 ISK every day except Sunday, from 11:30 - 14:30

GLÓ
Bowl of the Month
2.290 ISK all day, every day

HAMBORGARABÚLLA TÓMASAR
Tuesday Special: burger, fries & soda
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ISLENSKI BARINN
Soup of the Day
1.850 ISK all day, every day

LEMON
Combo of the Month: large sandwich & juice
2.195 ISK all day, every day

MAI THAI BISTRO
Lunch Offer: daily curry meal
2.090 ISK weekdays between 11:00 - 14:00

NAPOLI PIZZA
Lunch Offer: choice of menu pizza or sandwich
1.890 ISK every day from 11:30 - 15:00

PÍTUBARINN
Veggie pita sandwich
1.990 ISK all day, every day

REYKJAVÍK ROASTERS
Breakfast menu & sourdough toasts
580 ISK - 1.800 ISK, all day, every day

SHALIMAR
Curry in a Hurry Lunch Special
1.590 ISK weekdays from 12:00 - 15:00

ZORBIAN HOT
Chicken shawarma wraps & falafel wraps
1.490 ISK all day, every day ■

* We do our best to keep these prices current, but shit's outta control. Let us know if you spot a sweet deal: grapevine@grapevine.is

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Happy Hour from 4-6 PM

Music News



The Icelandic Music Awards Ain't The Grammys

The Icelandic Music Awards were held in Harpa on March 12. Hundreds of musicians flocked to the music hall in the hopes of snatching a trophy of their own. With changes made to some of the prize categories in 2023, results in the ambiguously defined "Open Category" and "Other Music" left some spectators scratching their heads. Interestingly, Laufey's *Bewitched* can score a Grammy, but it can't win an Ístón. To

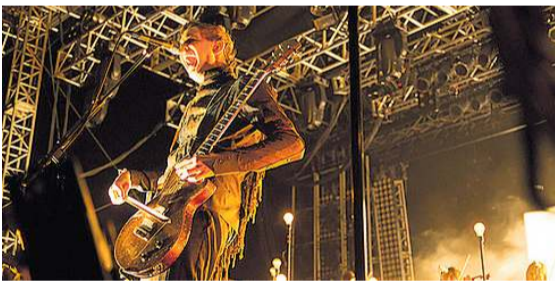
be fair, the singer reinventing jazz for Gen-Z won both singer and performer of the year in the category of "Pop, Rock, Rap, and Electronica." Because artists and labels nominate themselves for the Icelandic Music Awards, it's sort of like a conference for people who like to give themselves a pat on the back. JB



Vampíra 2024 Winners Of Músíktilraunir

Iceland's beloved annual battle of the bands went down in Harpa's Silfurberg hall March 10 to 16. Five nights of professionally produced sound and lighting, Músíktilraunir is intended for people aged 13-25 and provides a much needed platform for aspiring musicians. The atmospheric black metal band Vampíra won first place, wearing executioner hoods and medieval-style gauntlets. In second place came singer-song-

writer Eló, while the progressive metal band Chögma rounded out the top three. Additionally, the most popular act selected by audience members was the alternative-rock band Frýs. Winners of Músíktilraunir are given, among other things, studio time at Sundlaugin Studio and performance slots at music festivals Aldrei Fór Ég Suður and Iceland Alrwaves. JB



Sigur Rós Announce U.S. And Nordic Tour Featuring Full Orchestra

The inventors of the innovative Hopelandish language just announced a series of shows starting in the autumn of 2024. Sigur Rós will launch their U.S. tour on September 19 in Detroit, MI, and close it out on October 4 in Austin, TX. On November 24, the band starts its Nordic tour, doing so for the first time in the region with a full orchestra.

Sigur Rós finishes off with a hometown show at Harpa on December 8-10, supported by Elja ensemble. Tickets are sold out to the first two Reykjavík shows, with December 10 tickets still available. The setlist includes songs from the band's latest release, ÁTTA, as well as classics from their repertoire. Tickets are available at sigurros.com JB



That's a real place?

Heading Into Pleasure

Kira Kira's *Unaðsdalur* embraces light and truth

WORDS Jóhannes Bjarkason
IMAGE Art Bicnick

sun and then, in an instant, a healthy creative zest gone too far becomes the death of me."

"I know I need to sleep and eat, but sometimes the creative fires burn so hot that I can't sense anything else. In some ways, this kind of devotion can become quite comical, but there have definitely been moments where I've noticed that I went too far," she continues. "I wanted to write a film about how we can treat our creative spark with greater care."

Kira Kira began her career in 1999, founding the Reykjavík-based experimental art collective Kitchen Motors alongside guitarist Hilmar Jónsson and the late Jóhann Jóhannsson. She's been going pretty full-on ever since.

"I get a million ideas every second and execute a lot of them. I don't want to stop that. But I do champion a healthy rhythm around creativity, where there's space to bake bread and go swimming with friends," she says, using delightful phrasing that often characterises her speech.

"How it went for Jói is a big reason why I want to speak up about how we need to be careful not to overwork ourselves," she says of her friend and former collaborator, who died of a suspected overdose in 2018. "Even

when our job is in music. Working too much can happen to anyone. But when an artist does it, there seems to be a totally different attitude towards it. *Coffee First* is about this, among other things."

CAPTURING THE ESSENCE OF TRUTH

While filmmaking lends itself to confining, logistical challenges, Kristín nourishes her unrestricted creativity through music. "There are endless delays and waiting in the process of creating a film, as every filmmaker knows. But I'm always working on music, too. That's how I keep my creativity in a consistent, vibrant flow. It's important to me to tend to that flame with a kind of playful respect and curiosity at all times," she says.

In another brilliant turn of phrase, Kristín compares creativity to a room that can become stuffy without the occupant's care. "If you never open the curtains and let new sunshine in on your work, it just withers and dies like a flower in winter," she muses. "That can never happen with creations. Finding ways to continuously rebirth the energy of the creation is an absolutely vital part of the process."

Unaðsdalur (Pleasure Valley) is Kira Kira's tenth release — her sixth stu-

Since the premiere of her debut film *Grandma Lo-Fi* at the Copenhagen International Documentary Film Festival in 2011, Kristín Björk Kristjánsdóttir has sought to capture the tragicomic balance of creativity in private life. Now, 13 years later, her upcoming feature film *Coffee First* is in development, aiming to tackle creativity and love.

"It's wild how I always put my heart on the line and how much I care about the art I create," Kristín — better known as Kira Kira — explains. "Sometimes I fly too close to the

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Valley

dio album — adding to her versatile discography of film scores, collaborations and solo works. In contrast to her previous albums, *Unaðsdalur* is surprisingly short, running roughly 25 minutes. This brevity emphasises Kira Kira's message with the album. "It's a tribute to simplicity, the core truth."

IN PLEASURE VALLEY

Named after the eponymous location in the remote Westfjords, from where Kristín's paternal family hails, the album has taken on a broader conceptual meaning for the artist.

"Unaðsdalur has become a sort of utopia for me: an emblem of earnest grounding in harmony with nature and love, a parameter for authenticity. I've dipped my toes into the film scoring business and seen some of

ence Unaðsdalur's bliss through her music.

"One summer day, I sat in my garden after a trip to Unaðsdalur. I felt a sense of sadness over the fact that the road there is only open for a short period over the summer," she explains. "So, I thought, 'What if Unaðsdalur is a state of mind?' Then all I need is a shift in perspective and I'm there. So I looked around, flowers blooming, 'This is also Unaðsdalur. This is my Unaðsdalur right now,' a place within and around me where music and films are free from the influences of chaotic and often toxic outside forces. It's where no one except love tells me how my art should be done."

Kira Kira has filled her 47 years (and counting) with wondrous creativity, experimenting with sounds and

friends old and new, all united in playful experimentation and improvisation. Among those present on *Unaðsdalur* are her Kitchen Motors co-conspirator Hilmar and trumpeter Eiríkur Orri Ólafsson, whose instrumentation has featured on every Kira Kira record, save for one.

Through the artist's creative process, she's managed to release an album that emits a feeling of pure light, friendship and warmth. Perhaps exhibited most clearly on the album's final track, "Love in such a way that the person you love feels free," in which Kira Kira stripped the song of any bells and whistles.

Finished mere days before sending the album to be mastered, Kristín woke up on the morning before Christmas and recorded the song at her homestead in Stokkseyri. "I thought, 'How can I, in the most simple, clearest way, record and release this song?' I think that stands out, in regards to honouring a space for the purest form of unfiltered musical expression on a record."

During these turbulent times, Kira Kira hopes to inspire a "love revolution. A revolution of the open hearts. And that takes badass, expressive courage and tenderness. Fearless tenderness," she says. "There is great cruelty, pain and darkness rampant in the world right now and I believe it is of great importance not to add to that by creating art that invokes further pain. My intention is very clear. My intention lies in love, in the light. I'm not going to give darkness my attention." ■

Unaðsdalur is out now on all streaming platforms. Kira Kira will host the international premiere for her short film *We The Lightnings* alongside a music performance in Los Angeles on April 7 at the Philosophical Research Society.

If you never open the curtains and let new sunshine in on your work, it just withers and dies like a flower in winter.

the nonsense that goes on in there, which hardly anyone talks about. It wasn't pretty! The way I have seen film composers treated is both savage and cruel," she laments. "Luckily, I managed to come out relatively unscathed. But some people aren't that lucky."

The location — and by extension, the album — is a place of personal grounding, shielding Kristín from pernicious influences and leaving her artistic integrity unscathed. Unfortunately, the physical location is inaccessible for much of the year. Rather than letting that stop her from enjoying her rural sanctuary, Kira Kira invites others to experi-

textures, and collaborating with dear friends. Critical of the negative financial forces driving the film scoring industry, Kira Kira would like nothing more than to speak the truth. That's what *Unaðsdalur* is all about. "There's no room for pretence, snobbery, or career vanity," she says. "No rules that serve no purpose. In Unaðsdalur, only love and nature rule."

A REVOLUTION OF OPEN HEARTS

An important feature of Kira Kira's creative processes is her determination to work alongside trusted colleagues. Her chosen family includes

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GRÓA Scraps SXSW Performance In Solidarity With Palestine

Over 100 artists and panellists dropped their shows over festival's military sponsors

WORDS Jóhannes Bjarkason
IMAGE Anna Maggý Grímsdóttir

On March 7, Reykjavík-based punk trio GRÓA announced the cancellation of their scheduled performance at the South by Southwest Conference and Festival (SXSW) in Austin, Texas.

"We will protest by not attending and cancel both of our official SXSW shows in support of the Palestinian people," GRÓA posted to their social media profiles at the time. "This is because yesterday we found out that the US army [sic] is SXSW's main sponsor and SXSW is platforming defense [sic] contractors like [RTX]. [RTX] profits from the genocide by supplying weapons to the IDF, the IDF has now killed at least 1 in every 75 inhabitants of Gaza, including 12,300 children."

SXSW, which ran until March 16, is an annual event celebrating film, music and comedy. It attracts upwards of 300,000 visitors every year, including industry professionals from all

over the world, who split their attention between over 1,000 artists vying for their big break.

By pulling out of SXSW, the young group joined more than 115 other artists and speakers who cancelled their performances due to the U.S. Army's festival sponsorship. Every Irish and Northern-Irish artist scheduled to perform at the festival dropped out in support of Palestine.

GRÓA's announced change of plans came just two days ahead of their flight stateside. "I randomly saw a suggested Instagram post from the Austin for Palestine Coalition and found out that RTX had a platform at SXSW. I thought, 'Well, fuck,'" remarks GRÓA drummer Hrafnhildur Einars Mariudóttir. "I'd heard bad things about the festival itself and how they treat artists," she continues, referring to the festival's pay rates, but she didn't expect anything of this calibre.

The band went back and forth in their decision to cancel, momentarily considering alternative means of protest. "First, we thought if we should go perform in T-shirts sporting the Palestinian flag," Hrafnhildur explains. "It was not an easy deci-

sion to cancel, even though now I wouldn't have done anything differently. It's so obvious and I felt it in my gut."

Musicians who side with their conviction during moments like these are often torn between choosing boycott and making a statement. Fans of the Eurovision Song Contest might remember Icelandic contender Hatari's protest actions in Tel Aviv

and we sort of decided to believe in the boycott. To believe that more people would join in," says GRÓA bassist Fríða Björg Pétursdóttir. "We realised that our bottom line is the fact that we would never want to associate our name with a festival where weapons manufacturers are given a platform."

Despite notifying Iceland Airwaves and the other Icelandic showcase

"We did not feel pressured to cancel the event. In collaboration with Business Iceland (Íslandsstofa) and the Icelandic Music Centre, considerable efforts and expenses were put towards introducing Icelandic music to the outside world. As four out of five artists were ready to perform, we determined that it would not be a good decision on our part to call the event off with next to no notice, producing financial harm for everyone involved."

Out of the five Icelandic artists performing, GRÓA was the only one to cancel their performance. Will the band's decision affect their relationship with Iceland Airwaves and their chance to perform at the festival in the future?

"Of course not. We respect their decision."

What are Iceland Airwaves' views towards the SXSW artist boycott?

"We support musicians who fight for what they think is right. Naturally, they follow their conviction. About 1,200 artists were booked for SXSW and we also respect the viewpoints of those who decided to perform." ■

It was not an easy decision to cancel, even though now I wouldn't have done anything differently. It's so obvious and I felt it in my gut.

in 2019, when the artist brandished the Palestinian flag.

Despite the apparent support, the international BDS movement campaigns for the cultural boycott of projects involving Israel, its lobby groups and cultural institutions.

"When we pulled out, there weren't a lot of artists that had called it off,

artists about their decision and encouraging others to follow suit, the rest of the Icelandic delegation went on with their scheduled performances, including JFDR, Axel Flóvent, Myrkvi and Árný Margrét.

Asked about the festival's decision to go ahead with the showcase, Iceland Airwaves director Ísleifur Þórhallsson responded the following:

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Track By Track

Quintessentially Icelandic

Jónfrí tackles national mundanity, mountains and maritime affection on *Draumur um Bronco*

WORDS Jónfrí
IMAGE Supplied by Jónfrí

Shifting between genres and moods faster than you can say “skammdegisþunglyndi,” Jónfrí’s songwriting knows no restraints. The latest *Draumur um Bronco* — out March 14 — features music inspired by reggae, funk, indie, and 80s synthpop, to name a few. Here, Jónfrí tackles the essentials of Icelandic phenomena. Whether that be frozen haddock, Akranes, or a mysterious affinity for 4x4 jeeps, the artist’s cultural perception is reminiscent of one Mr. Bubbi Morthens on a good day.

FEBRÚAR

The album kicks off with “Febrúar,” written on a dark February morning when nothing seemed to be going right. A jolly guitar riff mixed with depressing lyrics. Poor me. Did anyone say *skammdegisþunglyndi*?

ANDALÚSÍA

Upbeat Chic-inspired disco groove about a night out when everything feels right and you dance like never before. The story takes place in Spain, where Icelanders flock in search of the right *stemning*. This was the first track we released from the album and was lauded by both club DJs and radio hosts alike. Based on real-life events.

DRAUMUR UM BRONCO

I sometimes daydream about having an old Ford Bronco. My father had one when I was a kid, and let me hang around the garage and help out restoring it. I have a lot of vintage amps and guitars. And film cameras. So I know that with vintage gear there’s hassle and maintenance. So I daydream.

FREDIN ÝSA

The song’s title translates to frozen haddock, which was the most mundane Icelandic thing I could think of at the time. It’s a reggae-infused jam with a healthy dash of self-loathing.

SKIPASKAGI

Skipaskagi is a nickname for Akranes, the place where I grew up. The town you see when you look over Faxaflói. The song is a love letter of sorts and an ode to the town’s mountain, Akrafjall. Almost every town in Iceland has that special mountain they cherish and that is engraved deep in the town’s folklore. I remember being mad at the present when I wrote it and wanting to travel back in time, so it has that nostalgic vibe going on.

SUMARIÐ ER SILUNGUR

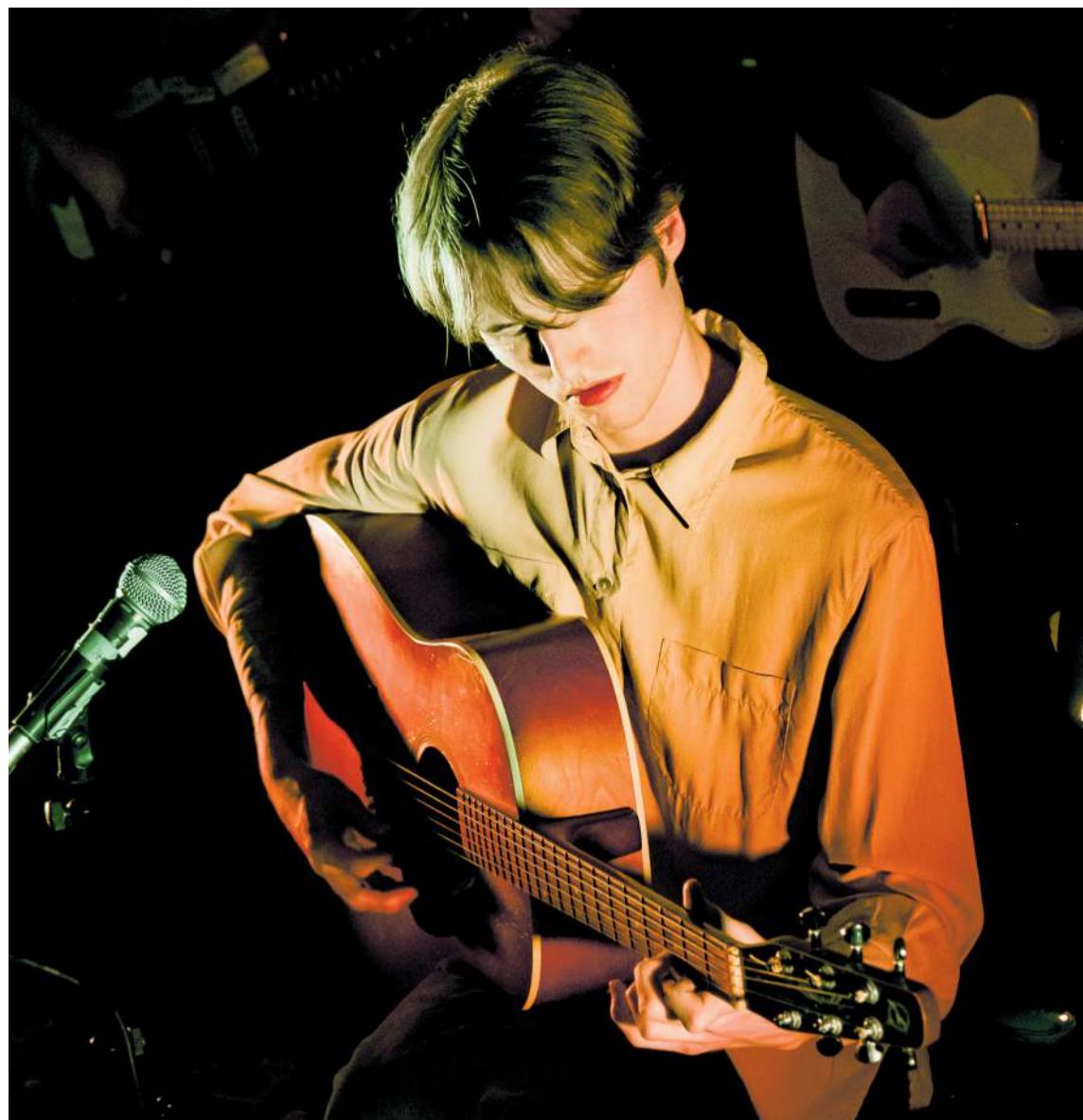
This one started as a folk song on the acoustic guitar. I had been listening a lot to Simon & Garfunkel’s “April Come She Will” and probably drew some inspiration from there. The track is basically two verses that paint random-esque pictures of an Icelandic summer in the ‘90s and a guitar solo. We love playing this one at gigs.

APRÍLMÁNI

This one is an 80s-infused indie stomper. The kind of track you’d put on before driving into the sunset. In the studio, we imagined the soundscape being a clash of Kate Bush and Joy Division. Lush synths and a gritty rhythm section. I kept forgetting half the lyrics during band practice, so to save face I just played a guitar line instead — that ended up on the recording and kind of makes the song.

RÆKJUBÁTAR

The last track on the album. “Rækjubátar” means shrimp boats and this dreamy ballad ponders the question, “What if we are all just shrimp boats, floating around the Atlantic Ocean trying our best to squeeze some happiness out of life?” ■



We Heard It

While Six Guitars Gently Weep

Supergroup of the Reykjavík Do-It-Together scene shares a beautiful and impressive night at Mengi

WORDS Ish Sveinsson Houle
IMAGE Joana Fontinha

360°, caught them and continued the song flawlessly.

Stirnir’s style transcends genres, from lo-fi to noise rock, shoegaze to experimental. The instrument of the night suited his range impressively. It was an homage to the versatility of the guitar — and Stirnir himself. His latest release, *Apple Pie & <3 the Razor*, continues this menagerie of genre.

Intended as a release show for the album, the group played its first song, “I Don’t Know if I’m Gonna Get It Right” — and it was an impressive feat that saw Stirnir repeat the title throughout, ranging from soft admission to screaming pleas.

GO ELECTRIC

At the midway point of the evening, the ensemble transitioned from acoustic to electric guitars as they played. The musicians stood up one by one, handing off their acoustic guitar, blowing out a candle, and setting up their electric guitars to re-

better?” After a moment of consideration, someone in the audience shouted their reply: “Both!”

I couldn’t come up with a better answer myself — the talent that the sextet displayed acoustic, and the entire band electric, was truly captivating. It was impossible to choose a favourite moment.

The last song of the night was epic. Better put, the last song of the night was *an* epic. Over 18 minutes long, the song had a full narrative with peaks of jumping and dancing and screaming, the crowd the most active they had been yet, and dissipating away as Stirnir let his guitar hang limp around his neck and one band member after the other turned to face their amps, creating feedback to play us out.

After the band left the stage, a sizable proportion of the crowd began chanting. “Meira! Meira! Meira! Meira!” Unfortunately, the band did not return to the stage. In the introduction to the last song of the

On a windy Skírdagur, six guitars lay resting against six chairs on a stage with six glowing candles balancing on amps inside Mengi. This was the scene at musician Stirnir Kjartansson’s concert featuring an ensemble of six guitars playing his music. The sextet was a supergroup of Reykjavík’s finest in the DIY/DIT scene, connected by the post-dreifing artist collective.

Joining Stirnir on guitar were Bjarni Daníel Þorvaldsson and Hugli Kjartansson of Supersport!, Krummi Uggason and Vigfús Þór Eiríksson of Sucks to be you Nigel, and Simon Valentin Hirt, known by the musical moniker simmi.

Joining halfway through the set were musician and R6013 founder Ægir Sindri Bjarnason on drums and Friða Björg Pétursdóttir of GRÓA on bass.

IF THREE’S A CROWD, SIX IS A SHOW

In the first five minutes of the show, I found myself already impressed by the group’s symbiosis. Then, as if they had heard my thoughts, the six, entirely in sync, flipped their guitars

Then, as if they had heard my thoughts, the six, entirely in sync, flipped their guitars 360°, caught them and continued the song flawlessly.

join the song. The stage lights grew brighter, and the group’s energy grew more emphatic.

Spotlighting the duality of the night, they performed one song twice — once acoustic, once electric. As the group tuned their instruments between songs, Stirnir asked the crowd, “Which version did you like

night, Stirnir had told us, “We might not ever play again, but that’s just the way it is. So you’re lucky if you’re here.” Very lucky we were indeed. ■

Stirnir’s latest release will be available in physical formats, “very, very soon”. Be the first in the know by following the artist on Instagram, @stirnir



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Food The Advent Of Skál 2.0

Change is afoot as Reykjavik's beloved casual eatery moves from Hlemmur

WORDS Shruthi Basappa
IMAGES Karl Petersson

flight. Unsurprisingly, international food guides took notice and in 2019, Skál was awarded a Michelin Bib Gourmand.

changed too. Joining the OG founders Björn Steinar and Gísli Grímsson are head chef Thomas Lorentzen and manager Jonathan Sadler. Chef Gísli Matthías Auðunsson returns to the fold, as well, after his brief departure from the team.

When Hlemmur Mathöll opened to much fanfare as Iceland's first food hall in 2017, it was evident to those in attendance that Skál was the anchor amidst other establishments. Keen

It is also clear that Thomas Lorentzen will play a key role in the

It is no secret now that Skál is moving. A Reykjavik pioneer, Skál set the tone for ambitious dining in an approachable, affordable, casual setting with dishes that bridge fine dining flair and familiar comfort. After seven-plus years at Hlemmur Mathöll, Skál is making a move to brand new digs at Njálsgata 1.

At a time when gastropubs meant an assembly line of imported frozen goods masquerading as a full menu, Skál was dishing out the city's first goat meat shepherd pie and smoked carrots that led to copy cats all across town, and introducing natural wines before anyone else, while crafting an envious cocktail

It's not a change in concept, it's a matter of having your own front door, being more in control of all aspects of the experience we want to give our guests.

to see what we can expect from Skál 2.0, I sat down for a chat with the team.

NEW OWNERS

It isn't just the location that is changing, the ownership at Skál has

food, as he has been at the helm of operations now for a little over three years. Keli Ingi, celebrated bartender will continue to bring us inventive cocktails. Jon helpfully adds that, "there will be no 8,000 ISK steak" – a comfort in these times.



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Mathöll

Skál will continue to be operational at Hlemmur while its Njálsgata location is readied. An early summer opening is on the cards for the 40-seater restaurant.

NEW LOCATION

"It's not a change in concept," clarifies Thomas, "it's a matter of having your own front door, being more in control of all aspects of the experience we want to give our guests. It will definitely allow us to focus more on our product. What we have done the last three years is to improve on what we have been doing."

Jonathan chimes in, "we will have table service, a lot more of a personal touch with our diners. But we are going to maintain the rock and roll," he smiles, "it's part of who we are. We want to expand on the Skál experience. A little more detail, a little more love. We are excited to see how we are going to make that happen."

The Njálsgata location is seeing a massive overhaul as the team has roped in professionals to change it from what used to be an ice-cream store to a chic eatery. "Everything has been gutted," chuckles Thomas. There are plans to have street seating on good weather days, highlighting the curb appeal of its proximity to Óðinstorg.

WHAT REMAINS THE SAME

Part of the appeal of Skál at Hlemmur was the immediacy of the dining experience. There is an energy around the kitchen that the team manages to infect its diners with, that has pretty much been a constant at the restaurant.

Who can forget the rowdy rambunctious pop-up a few years ago, when Les Enfant Du Marche took over the restaurant? What was meant to be a dine and dash experience ended up being an all out, all night memorable extravaganza with extra dishes, endless wines and excellent conversations across the bar and kitchen.

Jon and Thomas both laugh as they shake their heads recalling, "it was a crazy night. But that is the Skál way. Bringing in the Hlemmur bar vibe is essential to us. It was a big part of the experience – to be able to interact with guests, to be immediate and intimate. We will definitely retain bar seats at the new location and not separate the kitchen and guests so much."

"We know what we want to bring. There is an atmosphere we want to create. Will there be a price increase, I don't know yet. If there is, it won't be noticeable," Thomas says about the changes. "We want to maintain our status as the best value for money in the city."

On changes, if any, regarding the food and wine, he shares, "I want to maintain what I am doing right now. I want to focus on Icelandic products, not just products produced in Iceland, but explore what is in the water, what is in the air." He pauses before adding, "I think there is a lot here

us to do something new and they'll like it."

Jon adds, "The mainstay of Skál is experimentation and making it fun. Like the Skál lemonade, it is never just a lemonade. It's seasonal, accessible and fun. For me particularly, to lower the price of wine is important." Bringing in high levels of wine at extremely affordable prices is vital, he believes. "Why not try a Sicilian orange today? We want dining to not be intimidating. And I want to make it even more accessible than it is."

Thomas shares his vision for the brick and mortar location: "People drop in after work, not necessarily with big plans... you might come in for a drink but end up spending two and a half hours getting a few dishes, a cocktail, another bottle of wine. We don't want it to be a sit down experience, where you sit and wait for dishes course after course. We find it boring ourselves. I cook the food I want to eat, Keli makes the cocktails

We know what we want to bring. There is an atmosphere we want to create. Will there be a price increase, I don't know yet. If there is, it won't be noticeable.

that has not been utilised. I'm going to regret saying this," he laughs, "but there has to be something more interesting than just cod as fish-of-the-day lunch specials."

"People have this confidence in what we do, the way we do, it allows us to try new things that other places couldn't get away with. And actually people are expecting us to do this. They come and try the menu, and then, we have to do something new for people to come back. For me it is an amazing privilege, that we can do something new and people expect

he wants to drink and Jon brings in wines he likes to drink."

When I ask them what is the secret formula to their continued success, Thomas is quick, "Don't sell products you don't enjoy yourself!" he exclaims. "We want our guests to leave happy, curious, challenged maybe." I can't help but ask if this stand-alone location is a conscious effort to attract attention from Michelin. Thomas is clear. "If Michelin wants to drop by, they are more than welcome, but we cook for our guests." ■

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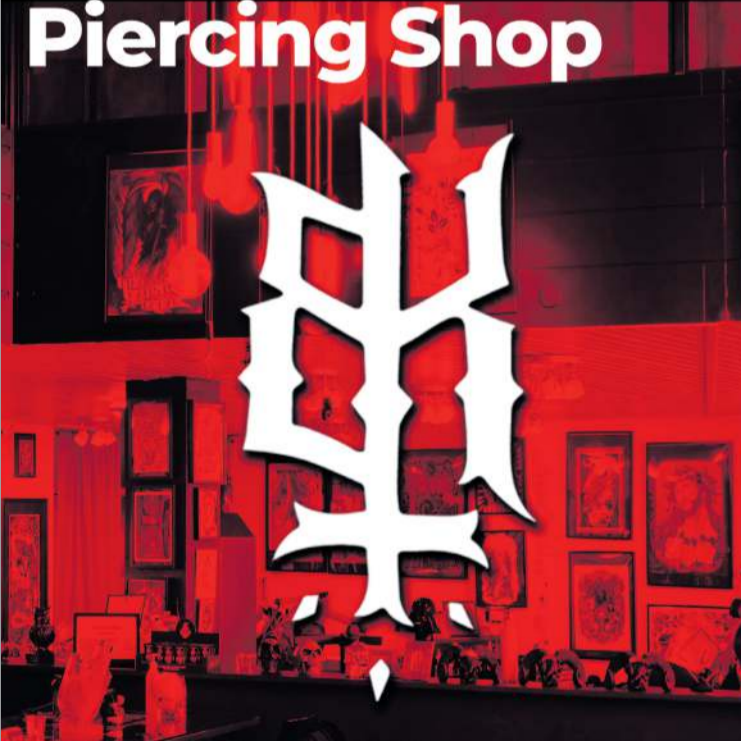



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It's A Taco Takeover

Reykjavík's Mexican renaissance is a delicious affair

WORDS Ragnar Egilsson
IMAGES Art Bicnick

over the past two decades, with 201 individuals of Mexican heritage known to be living here, according to Jorge Mena, the president of AMEIS. The association was formed with the goal of supporting Mexican expats and, in the words of Jorge, "offer them a sense of home away from home and facilitate cultural exchange between Mexicans and Icelanders."

restaurants have been almost entirely owned and operated by Icelanders, catering to what they believe to be the limits of the local palate. Which usually leaned heavily on the sugary margaritas while eschewing fresh ingredients.

ICELAND'S EXCELLENT ADVENTURE

Which is excellent news for the homesick and culturally-curious alike, as Iceland has a less-than-glorious history of authentic representation of Mexican cuisine. Until quite recently, what was marketed as Mexican food in Iceland wouldn't be out of place in the U.K. Midlands or U.S. Midwest in the 80s. Aside from the usual suspects like ground beef burritos, you also have your ever-popular Icelan-

This began to change with the opening of the taqueria La Poblana in the Hlemmur food hall in 2017, which was initially operated and later acquired by Juan Carlos Guarneros. The restaurant has since moved house twice and can currently be found on the 2nd floor of Laugavegur 12. I sat down with Juan over delicious birria tacos, a traditional street food from the state of Jalisco in western Mexico. Birria tacos are a weekend special at La

The Icelandic-Mexican Association (AMEIS) will be staging an event at Gallery Hafnartorg on April 7 where they will be joined by the mayor of Reykjavik in furnishing one of the two Mexican-owned restaurant in town with the title of the best "Authentic Mexican Restaurant in Iceland." Because what could be more Icelandic than the firm belief that you always belong on stage regardless of the size of population and what could be more Mexican than punching well above your weight.

We felt it was only right to use the opportunity to check in with the dynamic Mexican community and expound the delights of Mexican cuisine.

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

The community of Spanish-speakers in Iceland has grown steadily

It's hard to overstate the importance of celebrating the contributions of immigrants and children of immigrants in the Icelandic restaurant scene.

dic staples like "Mexican cheese" (a dense white cheese covered in a mild chilli powder) and "Mexican soup" (a chicken-tomato soup with cream cheese, double cream and sour cream, all topped with crumbled up nachos).

Poblana. These wondrous creations consist of shredded slow-cooked beef and cheese wrapped in a taco and accompanied by a highly-addictive dipping broth. They may just be the best start to (or recovery from) a round of beers you are likely to find in Reykjavik.

Similarly, local Mexican-themed res-



Juan is a soft-spoken young man, who is still adapting to his growing profile in the local scene and takes the responsibility of representing the cuisine of his homeland seriously. According to Juan it has been getting easier to authentically represent the cuisine, as the availability and range of ingredients has increased.

Poblana is not that specific when it comes to regionality, instead taking the approach of representing the melting pot of Mexico City. As Juan explains, "it is a city where every subgroup of Mexico is represented, whether it's the south or the north, like with the birria tacos" which landed on the menu as an

experiment after initially intending to feature lamb barbacoa, his family's speciality.

SPARKING THE FUEGO

The criteria used by AMEIS in selecting an authentic representation of Mexican cuisine, is not just that a restaurant should just respect the foundational elements of the dishes being served, by using authentic spices and cooking methods but by "showing a genuine love for Mexico, its culture and its culinary traditions in the ambiance, service, and overall experience of the restaurant," according to AMEIS. It's hard to think of a better example of the warm and welcoming spirit of the culture than

Chuy Zarate, the owner of Fuego.

Iceland's second Mexican-owned taqueria opened when La Poblana moved out of the Hlemmur Food Hall. Chuy was a former member of the Poblana team, who took on the mantle, originally in collaboration with the owners of Kröst. The operation expanded to Hafnartorg Gallery in 2022 and, a year later, Chuy bought the place in collaboration with his brother-in-law.

Chuy hails from Guanajuato and is focused on central Mexican delicacies like tacos al pastor, which remains their most popular offering, along with their prawn tacos. The taco al pastor consists of grilled

pineapple and meat shredded from spit-grilled hunks of pork. Appropriately, this taco variety is itself inspired by Lebanese immigration to the region and bears a faint resemblance to the doner kebab. The owners make light of the regionalism though, saying "the recipes are more focused on the history of the culture than regionality. This is Mexican food as seen through [Chuy's] family in central Mexico. These are recipes that have been passed down the maternal side of the family for generations."

It's hard to overstate the importance of celebrating the contributions of immigrants and children of immigrants in the Icelandic restaurant

scene. As in other countries, they not only make up a large portion of the team at any restaurant, but constantly invigorate the culinary scene by raising the bar in terms of quality and variety. The Mexican-Icelandic community is a particularly good example of this, as eager ambassadors for a food culture that far too often has gone undervalued. ■

Get yourself to Hafnartorg Gallery Food Hall on April 7 at 13:00 for AMEIS' Authentic Mexican Restaurant in Iceland Awards ceremony. It promises to be a delicious celebration of Mexican culture and cuisine.



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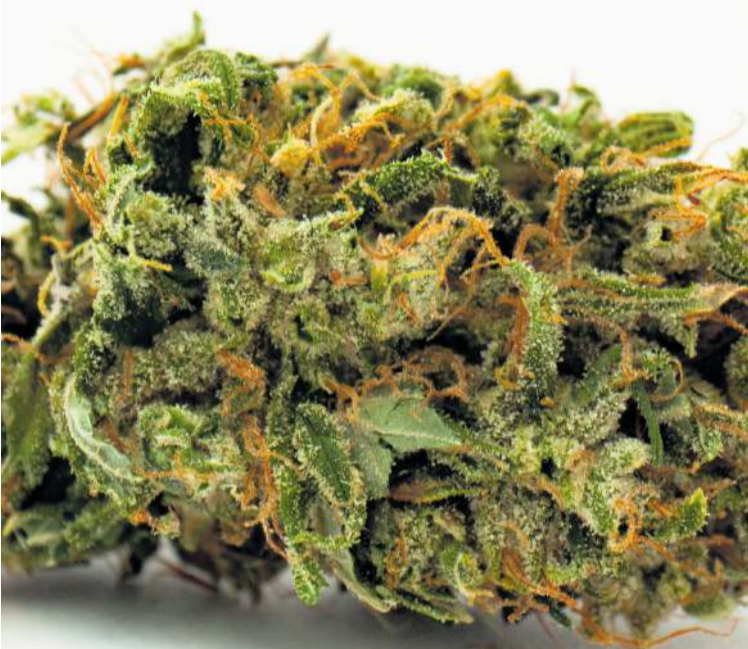
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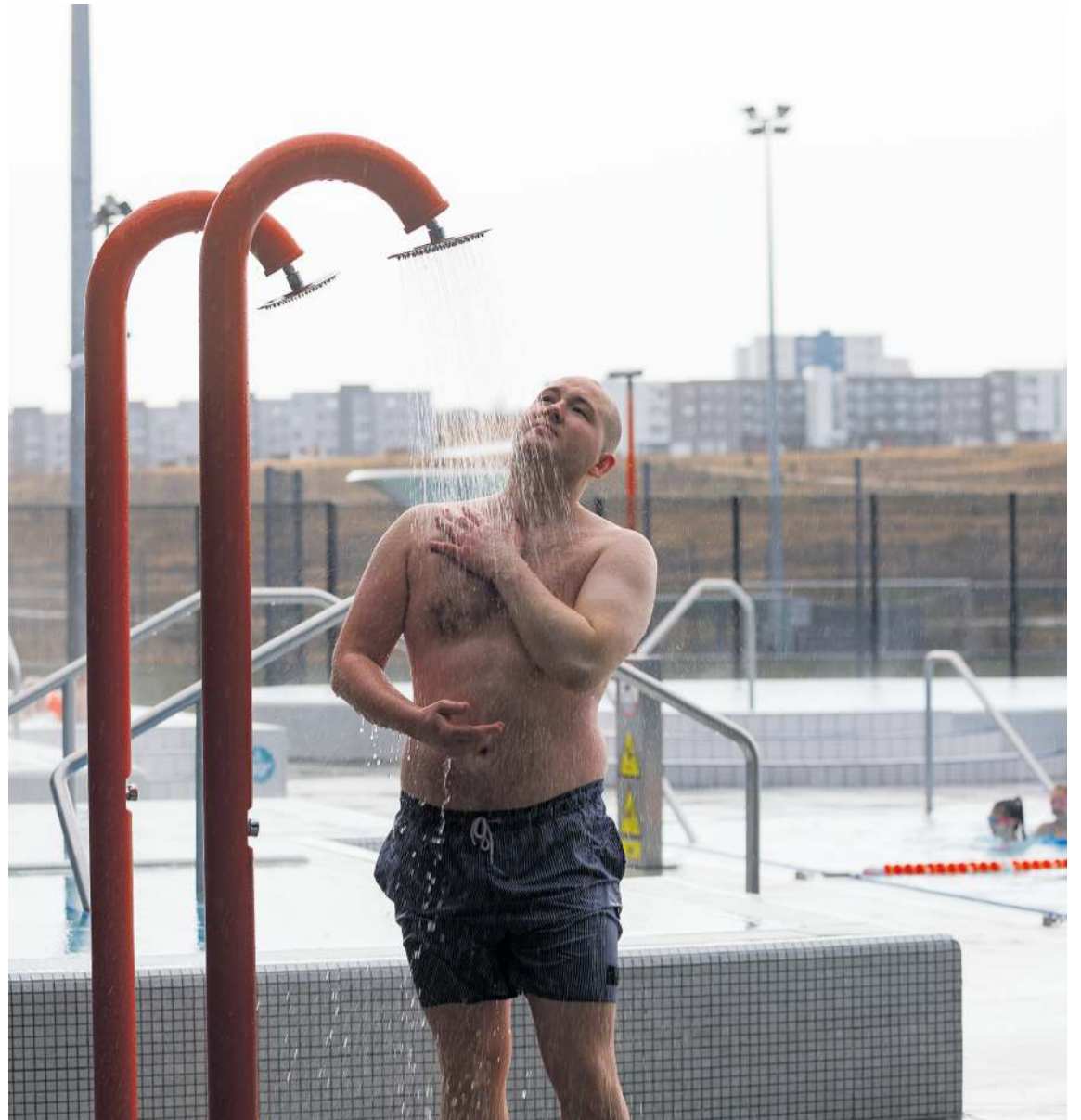
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Let's get cool

Venturing Into The Su

Dipping into Dalslaug

WORDS Jóhannes Bjarkason
IMAGES Art Bicnick

loved 101 postcode (can you blame them?), my feelings for the outskirts of Reykjavík have always been ambivalent.

Call it nostalgia, or even the hipster in me always wanting to go against the grain, I believe in calling attention to the positive aspects of what lies beyond the city centre.

A CASE FOR THE SUBURBS

As Reykjavík grew in the late 20th-century, expansion saw the city

An often cited divide in the city's urban landscape is the Elliðaá River, demarcating Reykjavík between the pavement-loving city-slickers to the west and the pick-up-driving NIMBYs to the east, where approximately 40% of Reykjavík's population lives.

Putting my self-proclaimed affinity for the suburbs into action, I decided to venture into Reykjavík's easternmost and youngest neighbourhood: Grafarholt-Úlfarásdalur.

In the case of Úlfarásdalur, it lives up to its reputation as a suburb.

Growing up in a suburb of Reykjavík, I was always extremely grateful for the times I got to visit the city centre as a teenager. Whilst a majority of loyal downtowners will do their utmost to never leave their be-

sprawling eastwards away from the more densely populated heartlands. Though Reykjavík's suburban districts may be lacking in amenities, they make up for it with character and population.

Valued for its open areas and proximity to the great outdoors, Grafarholt-Úlfarásdalur had the honour of becoming the site for the newest addition to Reykjavík's swimming pool fauna, Dalslaug, which opened



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Suburban Abyss

in late 2021. After hearing nothing but rave reviews, it was time to make the trip into the suburban abyss.

HOME COURT DISADVANTAGE

I opted to travel by Reykjavík's most despised form of transportation, Strætó. It's a straightforward ordeal via the city's trusted transportation centre/food court Hlemmur. Taking the number 18 bus will deliver you to Dalslaug's doorsteps in 40 minutes.

Although Strætó receives a lot of hate for their high fares, inefficient ticket app and chronic tardiness, I relish every minute spent not driving. Bring music, a book or an entertaining travel partner, and you'll wish that bus trip were longer.

Having zipped through town at the speed of, well, Strætó, cutting past neighbourhoods Háaleiti and ending up on the Miklabraut highway, I finally passed the distinguishing Elliðaá. I was officially out of the urban core.

Once at my destination, I soon realised I was at a disadvantage here. In the streets above, rows of grey apartment blocks gave way to flecks of single-family homes. In the distance on the opposite side of the valley, past the flowing Úlfarsá river was Grafarholt, whose colourless houses appear to cling for dear life onto the steep hillside. My prospects of making an impromptu travel discovery waned as I couldn't fathom which curiosities could possibly await me on the web of residential streets.

But the pool was great. An innovative building, Dalslaug is situated in a much larger complex that encompasses the Dalskóli primary school, a public library and the local sports club facility.

In fact, to get to the pool's changing rooms you must first pass the library, quickly followed by the school's caf-

eteria. It's a shame they won't allow you to take a book with you into the water, although it'd likely result in a sea of wet literature.

A TALE OF TWO SLIDES

The first thing one notices is that Dalslaug enjoys the rare benefit of not yet having been ravaged by time's unforgiving march. Everything feels fresh and new. Though smaller than I anticipated, the layout is big enough to accommodate everything a proper Icelandic pool needs — including multiple pool lanes, a cold pot conveniently located adjacent to the warmest hot tub, and two lounge areas. It even offers two pool slides, delightfully named Úlfur and Ylfa.

Entering the premises, what struck me was the absence of the quintessential circular hot tubs. Focusing on a more open and roomier design, the Dalslaug tubs seem to encourage the democratic nature of the Icelandic swimming pool culture.

Putting my self-proclaimed affinity for the suburbs into action, I decided to venture into Reykjavík's easternmost and youngest neighbourhood: Grafarholt-Úlfarárdalur.

Tucked away in the corner are Úlfur and Ylfa. Acting on my duties as a journalist, I took the time to test-run both of them. When climbing the ramps you need to act quickly, rushing to the safety of the gushing water surging from the chutes, lest the cold gets you. Still, I allowed a pair of boys to cut in front of me. After all, I'm not a savage.

Located at the extreme limits of the city, lounging in Dalslaug leaves you

with the strange border between settlement and vast nature. If not for the wired fence obstructing the view, you would almost forget about the surrounding city.

A CUISINE CONUNDRUM

Having finally inspected Reykjavík's newest swimming pool, the post-swim hunger struck. I made the grave mistake of not bringing any food with me and the nearest lunch option was a KFC two kilometres away.

Hoping to make great new pool-adjacent discoveries on my trip to raise the suburbs' profile, I was — perhaps unsurprisingly — disappointed. Mainly for the fact that, in the case of Úlfarárdalur, it lives up to its reputation as a humdrum suburb. Apart from the lovely civic complex, I did not find the motivation to explore the rest of the drab residential district.

On my way back to civilisation, I hopped on board a bus that somehow managed to bring me further into the wilderness, passing by Reynisvatn Lake on its way. Atop Grafarholt beside the giant red cisterns, I gazed at the seemingly endless stretch of town hugging the peninsula gradually entering my field of view. At that moment, I knew I could rest easy while I saw the mirage of the humble lunch I left behind at the office. ■



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Islanders

Living Off A Dying Business

Stu and Ren Gates run the cosiest bookstore in Iceland, perhaps the last of its kind

WORDS Iryna Zubenko
IMAGES Art Bicnick

I asked him if they would mail books to Reykjavík, only to be met with an unfortunate shake of the head. A few years later, on another trip north, I finally had a chance to sit down with shopkeepers Stu and Ren Gates to find out why.

FROM DREAMING TO DOING

Stu and Ren's journey to Iceland began eight years ago when they left the U.K. With a background in music and scriptwriting, respectively, and having juggled a number of jobs back home, the couple first moved to Vík.

"We both had enough of the U.K. and wanted to go somewhere," Ren explains. The choice came down to Italy or Iceland, but after a two-month stint in Italy's 40-degree heat, they decided to head north instead. After a year on a farm in Vík, the Gateses packed their bags again to make their way to Akureyri in late 2016.

"We wanted more people," says Stu. "Vík is nice, but it's 400 people or something."

"We did the good little immigrant thing and worked in hotels for a bit and then we sort of sat down together and thought 'what could we do?'" Stu explains. "We couldn't really face going back for a third year."

The idea of running a bookstore sprouted from their shared love of books. "Stu is a big reader, a very fast reader. I like collecting books more than reading them," Ren admits with a chuckle.

They started by collecting some books at home. "It was nowhere

near this much," Stu laughs, gesturing at the shelves behind him. "Maybe two boxes, sort of pathetic. But we started and then we found out through a friend of a friend that someone knew the owner of this place. It just went from there."

Though they initially wanted to set up their own shop, they decided to contact Fróði's owner, Olga Ágústsdóttir, to arrange a meeting and discuss the possibility of renting it. "The lady who owns the building was 84 at the time. She couldn't really do it as much," Stu says.

"It was shockingly easy!" Ren exclaimed, still surprised at how

are divided into specific sections, from history, biography and classics to poetry, hobbies, music and travel writing. "We spent the first two years just trying to organise where things were," says Ren. Stu adds that even though they now have a database and try to keep track of where everything is, it doesn't always work. "Things get moved all the time," he says.

In the first five years, the couple sold most of the books that were in the shop before they took over. Today, 90% of the books on sale are their own – some were imported from the U.K., while others were donated or purchased from elsewhere in

about the shop's bestsellers, before quickly adding, "*Independent People* [by Halldór Laxness] in the summer." In contrast, Icelandic customers often opt for poetry, chess and scout books.

KEEPING THINGS OLD SCHOOL

Iceland often prides itself on being a nation of bookworms, particularly when it comes to the number of books read per capita. But second-hand shops are few and far between.

"The population [here] is very well-known for reading, but there are not many actual secondhand bookshops," Ren shares. "Whereas we come from the U.K., where there are little towns that are just book towns with five or six different shops."

Fróði never intended to compete with the bigger chains, preferring instead to keep things analogue, so to speak. Throughout our conversation, Ren stresses a few times that Fróði is not Amazon. "We want to try and keep it like a very old school bookshop," he says with a laugh, joking that he and Stu "might be from the wrong century. We don't sell things online, we don't send things, we want people to come and experience it as a bookshop."

And not *just* a bookshop. With big cosy armchairs, free coffee and chess sets on site, Fróði is a place you'll want to spend time in, browsing through sections for hours, exploring names you've never heard of rather than simply grabbing the book you need.

While Stu and Ren significantly expanded the selection of books in English (and several other languag-

We don't sell things online, we don't send things, we want people to come and experience it as a bookshop.

smoothly things went. "We came for a talk and she was like: 'So do you want to buy this place?' and we were like 'Wow!' We got to talk for maybe an hour and then she said, 'Let's see how you do' and just left us in the bookshop for an afternoon." That's how Fróði fornbókabúð came to be.

BEHIND THE SHELVES

"When we took over, there were just books and shelves with no sections," Ren recalls. "It was just books everywhere – the previous owner liked the idea of having a treasure hunt, which was a nightmare for us."

The first thing the couple did after taking over was come up with some sort of structure. Now, the books

Iceland. Fróði counts about 31,000 titles in its collection, including some true rarities – a signed Halldór Laxness, for example. The oldest book in the shop is the first Icelandic Latin grammar book from 1651.

"Often when we get a donation, we think about who's gonna want this. But we put it out. And then you find someone who's like 'Oh, I've been looking for this book,'" Stu says.

Ren takes a book from a shelf, trying to illustrate what his partner is talking about. "Stuff like this. *Tank Spotter's Guide*."

"With tourists, I would say it's the first *Harry Potter* in Icelandic or *The Little Prince* in Icelandic," says Ren

The first time I stepped into Fróði fornbókabúð in Akureyri, my friends had to drag me out of there. I remember every single title I bought from the secondhand bookstore over the years. Each visit, I'd depart thinking about how Reykjavík lacked such an amenity – a cosy, eclectic bookshop offering unconventional titles you wouldn't find on shelves elsewhere. During my first conversation with one of the shopkeepers,



es) since taking over, they emphasise that their goal is to preserve the shop's Icelandic identity.

Along the same vein, Stu recounts an amusing encounter: "The new British ambassador was visiting Akureyri and she came in with some local council members and said, 'I've been told by everyone that I must visit the British bookshop.' We were like: 'No, no, no. We're not a British bookshop. We are an Icelandic bookshop run by two British people,'" Stu emphasises. "Very clear about that."

WILL FRÓÐI LIVE ON?

Though the couple's rental contract ends in September, they hope the shop will continue. "We gave our-

selves five years to see how we do and we're coming up to that fifth year now," Stu says. "We want to keep it going."

"We know we're never going to be rich from it," adds Ren. "We barely scrape by every month, but we do have love for it."

We know we're never gonna be rich from it.

The couple is now saving up to buy the shop, considering a number of ways to finance it, from their own savings, to taking a loan or launching a crowdfunding campaign.

As the afternoon progresses, more visitors pop into the shop, and Stu and Ren take turns looking for books, serving at the counter and speaking with me. Despite the busy-ness of this random Saturday in the small northern city, the two British expats wouldn't want to be anywhere else.

"Akureyri feels like home," says Stu. "We've got the shop. We've got our apartment. We've got two cats. Hopefully when we buy the shop this year we'll have a lot more reason to call it home." ■



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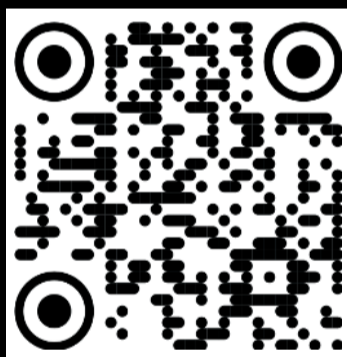
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Musings

I'm Starting A Cult

Really, how hard can it be?

WORDS Charlie Winters
IMAGE AI

Registers Iceland offers up 55 different beliefs that people can identify as. This is, as always, the most per capita of any country (I assume). The majority religious affiliation in Iceland right now is the Þjóðkirkjan or the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland. Most people born here don't even realise that they are automatically assigned a religious status. When you are assigned a religious status, part of your hard-earned taxpayer krónur is funnelled directly over to the relevant organisation. This is how the church steals all your money. This is important research because it means that if the cult I'm starting is to scam you out of your money, it needs to be legally recognised.

lations laid out in the law vague and unspecified. Honestly, if you are being judged by U.S. State officials for having holes in your laws you must know that you've fucked something up. Of course, having such gaping problems with the legal structuring of religious law can lead to catastrophic failings, like some asshole with too much time on their hands trying to get their religion recognised as legit.

As the Arch-Hierophant/God of the Cult of Not-A'h-Scham, I decree that we shall take inspiration from the Dionysian cults of old. Where people of all genders above the age of 25 go deep into the woods over by Perlan and get absolutely just fucking wasted. Party in the woods

I like to look for ways to inconvenience the Icelandic government.

According to lög nr. 108/1999, to be a legally recognised religion my cult has to: 1. Practice worship in a meaningful way; 2. Focus on ethical values and cultivation; 3. Follow the law, good morals and public order; 4. Deal with ethics or epistemology in a prescribed manner; 5. Take care of ceremonies such as marriage and funerals; and 6. Needs 25 people over the age of 25 to be members.

If you read through that list and thought that those qualifications seem vague and arbitrary, you should also know that the law and the government website say different things and that a 2022 Report on International Religious Freedom in Iceland from the U.S. Department of State specifically calls the regu-

everyday, bruh. Of course, we also preach love, acceptance and "good morals or public order." Anyone can come out into the woods and have a blast — except you Guðrún, you know what you did. Marriage would be an easy problem to handle, who hasn't gone on a three-day bender and woken up legally married? For funerals, the woods are right by the ocean, and our core belief is to just roll 'em down the hill and watch the bodies float off. Our prescribed morals, as acting within the bounds of the law boil down to, "Be gay, DON'T do crime."

That should get me by the censors. Now all I need is 24 more people to start following me, so I can get this scam legalised. ■

In the woods of Iceland, a figure-head stands at a podium wrapped in gold-adorned silk. The congregation kneels before them as they raise a goblet. They turn to preach to the literal choir that begins a hymn ancient and forgotten. Oh my God, it's me. I'm a cult leader!

Hello, I'm Charlie and I have a hobby. I like to look for ways to inconvenience the Icelandic government. Recently I stumbled upon the Act of Registered Religious Societies (lög nr. 108/1999). Apparently, religion is a big thing in Iceland. Whoda think it? Interestingly though, you can officially choose what religion you're subscribed to. So, this got me thinking: If people can unsubscribe from God, can I get them to subscribe to me instead? I think it's time to start a cult.



Horotropes

The End Is Noir

Horoscopes can't be all bad, but these come the closest

WORDS Charlie Winters & Catherine Magnúsdóttir
IMAGE Adobe Stock

Case-4-24, it's been sitting on your desk for a while. You take a slow drag from a cheap cigarette and wipe some stray ash from the dossier. Time to crack this bad boy open, see what it's got.



AQUARIUS
(January 20 – Feb 18)

You'll be absolutely working that feathered boa, big mama. Keep an eye out for your girls this month, there will be a man in a fedora askin' weird questions.



PISCES
(February 19 – March 20)

You'll have plenty of business come to your doorstep. When people need a pair of cement shoes, you're the cobbler. As Pisces, you know best what it means to be sleeping' with the fishes.



ARIES
(March 21 – April 19)

You've got moxie, kid. But if you wanna box in the big leagues you're gonna have to fork over more than just pretty words. Big Leo will want you to go down in the third round.



TAURUS
(April 20 – May 20)

Don't overwork yourself. Taurus, you've been playin' that sax in the back of this Horotrope the whole time. Remember to hydrate, little jazz star.



GEMINI
(May 21 – June 20)

With a snap and a crackle this month, you'll grab some saucy pictures of Leo the Lion getting hot and heavy with a lil' Miss Scorpio. But if you take 'em to the papers it might be your head on the cover next.



CANCER
(June 21 – July 22)

No one likes a rat, Cancer. This month, you'll be lookin' out for yourself, but you better keep your yap shut or you might have a rendezvous with Pisces and his cement shoes.



LEO
(July 23 – August 22)

They call you Leo the Lion for a reason, boss. Bravado's good and all – and you've got it in spades – but it looks like you'll have a rat in the cornfield. Someone's gonna spill the beans, boss.



VIRGO
(August 23 – September 22)

The boss will be ridin' your ass this month but someone's gotta do the dirty work. This month you'll have plenty o' knees to break and plenty o' giggle juice to smuggle. Good luck, Virgo.



LIBRA
(September 23 – October 22)

Justice waits for no one! But Libra, you gotta be patient. Buildin' a case this big ain't easy, see. It's got a lot of movin' parts, and you don't want your tie caught up in the gears.



SCORPIO
(October 23 – November 21)

What's a girl gotta do to cover up a murder round here? It's time to get all dolled up, Scorpio, and work your greatest asset: your mind.



SAGITTARIUS
(November 22 – December 21)

Sorry kid, this month, you're gonna find yourself at the end of a snub-nosed pistol at the back of a crooked cathouse. But don't worry, Reykjavik's finest is on the case.... Oh no.

Looking out the blinds you're startin' to put the clues together. How deep does this go? Maybe this city is as rotten as they say. But you've never left a case unsolved... ■



CAPRICORN
(December 22 – January 19)

You knew the dame was going to be trouble when she walked into your office. But you've never been able to say no to a pretty face. And you're not gonna start this month.

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Potent Quotables

Five percent of my time is actually doing perfumery.

Nicholas Brittain Shaber gets honest about accidentally becoming a perfumer on page 10.

It's not like we have a Marvel Comics movie every other year about Mona Lisa. It's not like we have Norwegian death rock bands based on stories about the Mona Lisa.

Dive into the cultural impact of Iceland's manuscripts on pages 12-14.

It's a financial loss, but we aim to have an impact.

Carolina Salas, Managing Director at Stockfish Film & Industry Festival, looks ahead to the festival's tenth anniversary edition on page 18.

I do champion a healthy rhythm around creativity, where there's space to bake bread and go swimming with friends.

Kira Kira talks latest release *Unaðsdalur*, film projects and inspiration on pages 26-27.

Located at the extreme limits of the city, lounging in Dal-slaug leaves you with the strange border between settlement and vast nature.

Jóhannes Bjarkason takes an afternoon off to test the newest pool in town on pages 34-35.

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