



Issue 06

2020

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REYKJAVÍK GRAPEVINE

COVID-19

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Summer Holiday

Travel: A beach day out in the Westfjords

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Idiotic PR Failure: The Odd Story Of Samherji And YouTube

EDITORIAL



The case of the fishing company Samherji hasn't perhaps caught the attention of the world, but if the details are true, it has hurt a lot of people. The company, which is based in Akureyri, is accused of grotesque corruption in the African state Namibia, and hiding its profits securely in offshore companies instead of paying taxes to the owners of the fish around the Namibian coastline i.e. the Namibian people. The company has also been accused of bribing ministers and officials in Namibia and there are ongoing trials in the country.

All in all, three different countries have begun to investigate these allegations. Norway is investigating the shell company and its relationship to their state-owned bank DNB NOR. The shell company, entitled Cape Cod FS, was flagged because its ownership was unclear. Based in the Marshall Islands, the company transferred 9 billion ISK through the Norwegian bank before said bank stopped doing business with the company for fear of being involved in money laundering.

Namibian authorities have already arrested the top suspects in the case: the former Minister of Fisheries of

Namibia and his son-in-law. They are both in custody and have offered to pay a high amount of money to get out, but both have been denied bail.

Willem Oliver, investigator at the Namibian special corruption department, stated that their investigation revealed that Esja Fishing, a daughter company of Samherji, paid the Minister's son-in-law 30 million Namibian dollars—or a quarter of a billion Icelandic krónur. The son-in-law claims that there is nothing illegal about these transfers.

But what is happening in connection to the case in Iceland? Not much really. No one is in custody. The economic crime department in Iceland asked for an interview with the owners of Samherji some months ago, but we haven't heard much more. The Icelandic Minister of Fisheries revealed shortly after the scandal broke that he had called the owner of the company, Þorsteinn Már Baldvinsson, and asked him how he felt—nothing more. The Minister just wanted to explore his emotions at the moment as he and Þorsteinn were old friends, and he himself had worked for Samherji some 20 years ago.

It was investigative journalism that broke the story, lead by a well-known Icelandic journalist, Helgi Seljan at the news show Kveikur at RÚV, the national

broadcasting company.

Samherji has denied these allegations from the get-go, and accused RÚV of witch-hunting.

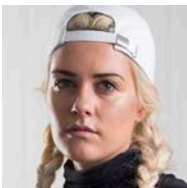
Samherji struck back in the middle of August, as we report on page 6. They have now made a propaganda video in the disguise of a news documentary and released it on YouTube. The purpose was to get their side of the story out, but it was mainly an aggressive attack against Helgi, accusing him of fabricating news in a story from 2012, which is completely irrelevant to the Namibia case. These attacks backfired in a spectacular way.

Of course, nothing Helgi reported on was fabricated and the people of Iceland instead saw quickly how grave such an attack against a single journalist truly is. The only honest way to describe this scenario is that it was an idiotic PR failure of an massive company that should have known better. The story is nonetheless a timely reminder of how companies use their money and time to distort the narrative. This move is unprecedented in Iceland, and quite shocking, but it's a reality many journalists have to face all around the world. Samherji should be ashamed. 🇮🇸

Valur Grettiðsson
Editor-in-chief



Elin Elisabet is an illustrator and cartoonist born and raised in Borgarnes. At the tender age of 15, Elin moved to Reykjavík and hasn't looked back, except for the annual springtime impulse to move someplace quiet and keep chickens. Elin likes folk music, stationery, seal videos, the country of Ireland, and eggs.



Hannah Jane Cohen is based out of Iceland by way of New York. She's known for her love of Willa Ford, David Foster Wallace, and other such "intellectuals." Her visionary work is known for expanding the definitions of emotion, introspection, and above all else, taste. Hannah is also the current Drag King of Iceland, HANS.



Catherine Magnúsdóttir studies social sciences and came to the Grapevine for the internship her studies mandate. And for fun of course. When she's not reconnecting with her Icelandic roots, she's either watching video essays or attempting to finally come up with a good story idea that she can actually finish writing.



Nico Borbely is an American-Italian language and geography nerd from Michigan and Viadana, Lombardy with stints in several other countries. He can usually be found brewing espresso, hoarding books, singing along to multilingual Disney videos, or cooking experimental noodle dishes.



Sveinbjörn Pálsson is our Art Director. He's responsible for the design of the magazine and the cover photography. When he's not working here, he DJs as Terrordisco, hosts the Funkþátturinn radio show, or sits at a table in a Laugardalur café, drinking copious amounts of coffee and thinking about fonts.



Samuel O'Donnell Sam is an English major from The United States. He has his Bachelor's Degree, and keeps telling himself that this is the year he will begin pursuing his Master's. In his spare time, he enjoys playing video games, writing short horror stories, listening to all kinds of metal, and reading.



Andie Sophia Fontaine has lived in Iceland since 1999 and has been reporting since 2003. They were the first foreign-born member of the Icelandic Parliament, an experience they recommend for anyone who wants to experience a workplace where colleagues work tirelessly to undermine each other.



Poppy Askham is a languages student, fledgling writer, and lover of flared jeans who has fled to Iceland in a desperate bid to escape Boris' Brexit Britain whilst she still can. Looking for a new adventure, she's swapped her hometown Bath with its crowds of tourists and famous hot springs for... Reykjavík.



Valur Grettiðsson is an award-winning journalist, author and playwright. He has been writing for Icelandic media since 2005. He was also a theatre critic and one of the hosts of the cultural program, 'Djöflaeyjan' at RÚV. Valur is not to be confused with the dreadful football club that bears the same name.

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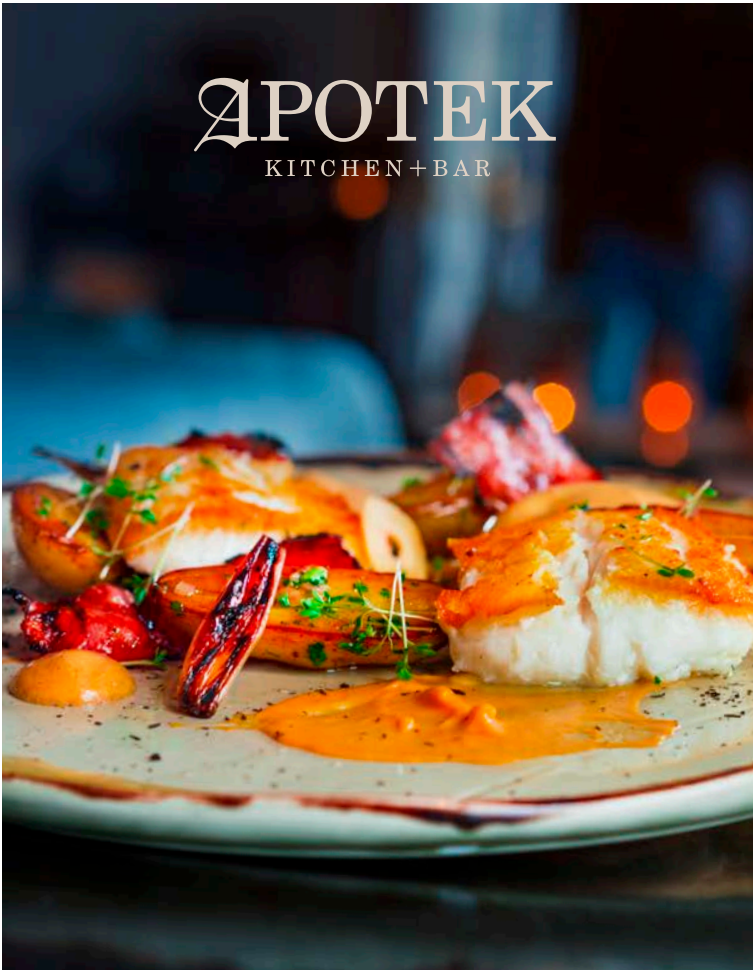


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Grapevine artist's rendition of the city line

What Are Icelanders Talking About?

News and views in the Icelandic discourse

Words: **Andie Sophia Fontaine** Photos: **Adobe Stock & Art Bicnick**

NEWS The biggest story in Iceland right now is the “second wave” of the coronavirus in Iceland. No one doubts that there has been a resurgence of the virus in this country; the point of contention is who is to blame: tourists or locals. On the one hand, there are folks pointing out that since opening the borders a bit more last June, cases have gone up. On the other hand, there are folks pointing out that every new instance of the coronavirus that we know about has been attributed to Icelandic residents either skipping re-entry recommendations or eschewing our health guidelines. One question that has still gone unanswered in all the talk about closing the borders again is: until when? Until a vaccine is available? Until the virus disappears from the face of the earth? No one seems to have a workable solution, especially as schools are due to open again soon. For now, the best bet is to continue social distancing, wear a mask, and wash your hands.

One of the most controversial transportation issues in the greater Reykjavík area is **Borgarlínan** (The city line), a proposed bus rapid transport system that has been in the works for many years now

and has changed permutations several times. The area of conflict revolves around what effects such a proposed system would have. Car culture is very prominent in Iceland—Statistics Iceland’s data shows there are about 250,000 cars in this country of just over 360,000 people—and many of these car owners fear that Borgarlínan

people would probably rely on cars less. When Borgarlínan will go into effect still remains to be seen.

Opinions are also divided when it comes to the idea of **combining the Reykjavík area towns into one big city**. A recent poll showed that most capital area residents support merging at least some of these towns, with the greatest level of support coming from Reykjavík, and in favour of merging all of them together, and merging Seltjarnarnes and Reykjavík having the second highest level of support. The most opposition to any merging notions came from residents of both Seltjarnarnes and Mosfellsbær. Were a total merge to happen, there would then be one city in Iceland comprising more than two



Víðir Reynisson, corona hunter

would take away their precious parking spaces and traffic lanes. At the same time, there are folks who correctly point out that if Icelanders had more transportation options with better service,

thirds of the total population. For scale, just imagine if the population of the US remained the same, with one city populated by some 230 million people. 🍷



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PUBLISHER
Hilmar Steinn
Grétarsson
hilmar@grapevine.is
+354 540 3601
publisher@grapevine.is

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Valur Grettisson
valur@grapevine.is

ART DIRECTOR
Sveinbjörn Pálsson
sveinbjorn@grapevine.is

NEWS EDITOR
Andie Sophia Fontaine
andie@grapevine.is

CULTURE EDITOR
Hannah Jane Cohen
hannah@grapevine.is

PHOTO EDITOR
Art Bicnick
art@grapevine.is

LISTINGS DIRECTOR
Hannah Jane Cohen
listings@grapevine.is

COPY EDITOR
Catharine Fulton

ILLUSTRATIONS
Elin Elisabet

INTERN
Catherine
Magnúsdóttir
catherine@grapevine.is
Sam O'Donnell
samuel@grapevine.is
Poppy Askham
poppy@grapevine.is
Nico Borbely
nico@grapevine.is

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS
Shruthi Basappa

PHOTOGRAPHERS
Sigurgeir S.
Xim Izquierdo

SALES DIRECTORS
Aðalsteinn
Jörundsson
adalsteinn@grapevine.is
Helgi Þór Harðarson
helgi@grapevine.is

CONTACT US:
—> **Editorial**
+354 540 3600
editor@grapevine.is
—> **Advertising**
+354 540 3605
ads@grapevine.is
—> **Distribution**
+354 540 3604
distribution@grapevine.is

—> **Press releases**
listings@grapevine.is
—> **General Inquiries**
grapevine@grapevine.is

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

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Ég fer þarna til skattrannsókna

Lamest clap-back of the year award goes to...

Samherji Strikes Back

The fishing giant releases their own “documentary”

NEWS

Words:
Andie Sophia
Fontaine

Photo:
YouTube

Some nine months after several news outlets—including Kveikur, Al-Jazeera, Stundin and The Namibian—broke The Fishrot Files, which detailed how the Icelandic fishing giant Samherji engaged in bribes to secure fishing quotas in Namibia and funneled millions of dollars into tax havens, Samherji has launched a web series that aims to showcase their side of the

story—not about the Namibian scandal, but a case from 2012.

Accusing journalists of falsehoods

The web series, called “Skýrslan sem aldrei varð gerð” (“The report that was never made”), levels strong accusations against journalist Helgi Seljan, who

works for public broadcasting service RÚV, of which Kveikur is a part. In the first episode of the series, which has just been released, Samherji contends that Helgi had falsified a report from the Exchange Rate Bureau.

Kveikur’s reporting had in part stated that a report from the Bureau showed that Samherji had sold fish way under market value to its own sister company, but the news show was aired in 2012. Samherji contends that the Bureau confirmed for them last April that this report was never made. To back up this claim, Samherji includes an audio clip of a conversation between Helgi and a former detective, wherein Helgi says that while he had had difficulty confirming the report, he believed its information was “legit.”

Smoking gun?

Much of the rest of the first episode is testimony either from Samherji or its allies, wherein they accuse everyone from journalists to the Icelandic government itself of having stretched the truth in order to smear the good name of Samherji.

The most striking thing about this case is that a major Icelandic corporation has singled out an individual journalist, and is putting a lot of effort into smearing his name. This is virtually unheard of in Iceland, and both Helgi and his colleagues have responded well, categorically demonstrating the holes in Samherji’s smear campaign. Also, interestingly enough, Samherji has poured tremendous effort into this case from eight years ago, yet remains entirely silent on the Fishrot scandal.

No doubt the embattled fishing company is trying hard to clear its name. Whether their efforts will be successful or not is as yet to be determined. 🍷

FOOD OF ICELAND

Snúður



Want a quintessentially Icelandic way to achieve a rapidly diminishing bank balance and an even more rapidly growing waistline?

Look no further than the humble snúður—literally “twist”—our native species of cinnamon roll. Ok, so we grudgingly

acknowledge that this may not be an uniquely Icelandic delicacy—rumour has it that it’s kind of a Scandinavian thing—but the Icelandic take is nevertheless a distinctive breed, easily spotted by its thick icing, preferably of the chocolate variety, and by its impressive girth. Look, if your snúður isn’t the size of your head, it’s just not big enough. No one is quite sure of the circum-

stances surrounding the cinnamon bun’s birth, but we haven’t got any proof it wasn’t an Icelandic idea (no matter what the Swedes say). At any rate, cinnamon has been knocking around the island since European merchants brought it back from Sri Lanka some time in the Middle Ages. Pretty much any café, bakery or supermarket will sell you a snúður, but finding a good one is a different

story. Guidebooks will direct you to the poster-boy for Reykjavík bakery culture, Brauð & Co. If we’re being picky, their pastries have more of a pan-Nordic aesthetic, although we have to commend their blackberry and liquorice snúður, an impressive attempt to elevate the medium. For the classic doughy, chocolate-covered Icelandic affair, your best bet is Sandholt. This bougie bakery may not

be the cheapest on the block, but boy is it worth every króna. Be sure to grab an accompanying kókomjólk if you really want to blend in with the locals. Right, we’re off to enjoy a snúður and partake in all our other eye-rolling-ly-stereotypical Nordic pastimes...I dunno beers and beards or something? PA 🍷

ASK A

Linguist

Q: What do Icelanders have problems with concerning the Icelandic language?



Icelandic is a notoriously difficult language that even native speakers often struggle with. But what exactly do they find difficult? We reached out to Jóhannes B. Sigtryggsson, assistant research professor at the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies, for answers.

Native speakers don’t usually have problems speaking and using their mother tongue. What Icelanders probably have the most difficulties with is the more formal aspect of the language, the spelling. This has its origins in the archaic nature of the language. The golden age of literature was in the 13th and 14th centuries and when the spelling of Modern Icelandic was standardised in the 19th century, this older stage of the language was seen as a model. The normalised spelling in the Sagas is thus similar to modern spelling, which makes it easier for modern Icelanders to read them. The problem is that the pronunciation of Icelandic has changed a lot in the intervening centuries and therefore grown apart from the spelling. There were some efforts to simplify the spelling in the 19th century and make it more phonetic, but they weren’t successful. The modern pronunciation of words is therefore not as helpful in this regard as in some other languages. An example is the letter ‘y’, which morphed with ‘i’ in the 15th century but still survives in the spelling as a separate letter. The pronunciation thus doesn’t help to differentiate between words like “il” (“sole”) and “yl” (declension of “ylur” or “warmth”) and “tina” (“gather”) and “týna” (“lose”), which have the same pronunciation. The current version of the spelling rules are from 2016 and 2018 but the standard orthography hasn’t changed perceptibly since the latter part of the 19th century. The biggest change happened in 1974 when the letter z was abolished. 🍷

Volcano & Earthquake Exhibition

Photo: Eyjafjallajökull Eruption 2010



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My apples bring all the boys to the yard

Deities Of Iceland: Iðunn

Æsir’s very own Instagram influencer

Words:
**Andie Sophia
Fontaine**
Photo:
**James Doyle
Penrose**

If Iðunn were alive today, she would be an Instagram influencer. This goddess was associated with youth and apples, as was her husband Bragi, making them the kind of power couple whose stories you would follow religiously for tips on how to defy ageing.

So crucial was Iðunn, in fact, that when a giant named Þjassi kidnapped her, all of the gods began to turn old

and whither. This could not be allowed to happen, and so Loki (who was, not surprisingly, partially responsible for Iðunn’s kidnapping) set off on a daring mission to return her to the home of the gods, Ásgarðr. He succeeded, but Þjassi chased after him. Tough luck for Þjassi, because when he arrived, the gods jumped him and beat his ass down, killing him.

Iðunn’s apples, which she carried around in an ash wood box, were regularly eaten by the gods to keep them forever young. That’s right—without her, the gods would literally die, so she is indeed a pretty big deal. And you can see why the gods would murder anyone who messes with her.

Today, Iðunn is a not-uncommon Icelandic name. It’s also the name of an Icelandic organisation dedicated to traditional verse (rímur). Will rhyming keep you young? Hey, it can’t hurt. And in lieu of eating one of Iðunn’s apples, it’s probably your next best bet. **VG**

JUST SAYINGS

„Að fleygja barninu út með baðvatninu“

This one—which is international yes, but weirdly popular in Iceland—is a bit harsh. It’s direct translation is “to toss the child out with the bath water,” meaning to sacrifice something valuable along with all the worthless stuff. But what everyone actually thinks when they hear this phrase is what the hell Mom? Did you not see me

in the tub? Mean. In Iceland, this idiom is not often used by your average person, but rather by frustrated lobbyists that just really want attention. They yell this as loudly as they can in order to pressure Parliament into giving them whatever it is that those greedy fuckers want. We hope their bath drains clog. **VG**

COMIC



GRAPEVINE PLAYLIST



Supersport! - Dog Run (EP)
Just what the summer needed: a shiny new EP from Reykjavík’s most charming indie pop group. All four band musicians are active members of Post-dreifing, an anarchic grassroots music collective that we couldn’t be bigger fans of here at the Grapevine. The record is jam-packed with lo-fi fun and wholesome ethics. Just give it a listen, you won’t regret it. **PA**



Holdgervlar - Eiturveitur
This eerie minimalistic track is Holdgervlar’s first release under the newly launched Myrkfælni record label, and what a great start! The pair are our favourite Icelandic post-geoth darkwave duo (believe me there was some stiff competition for the title). Check out the music video if you’re not a fan of sleeping soundly. **PA**



Elin Ey - Ljósið
Bouncy and groovy, Elin Ey’s newest single is quality listening. Aside from its good vibes, its lyrical message comes just in time for Pride, with the simple but true hook: “I can be myself, you can be yourself, and they can be themselves.” **NB**



Oscar Leone - Lion
With a nice beat and a distinct summer holiday feel, Oscar’s third single radiates the uplifting yet chill vibes of easygoing indie rock. In his newest song he perfectly balances acoustic and electric soundscapes and invites listeners to sing along. **CM**



Annalisa - 00:01 (EP)
Annalisa’s first EP is a heartfelt work with beautiful Icelandic vocals, provided by a soft yet strong voice and accompanied by a musical fusion of acoustic sounds and synths. Like a mix between lullabies and a movie soundtrack. **CM**



Tómas Welding - Go The Distance
Between Tómas’s melodic tenor vocals and steady, rhythmic instrumentation, this recent hit is both engaging and relaxing. Its balanced nature and fun sound make it an ideal addition to a road trip playlist. **NB**

BARFLIES REYKJAVÍK 2

As the name of this book suggests, it is a follow-up to an earlier book by the same name. Again, the people portrayed are the Kaffibarinn regulars. Some of the faces you will recognize from the first book, just a quarter of a century older. Others were not born when the bar served its first drink.

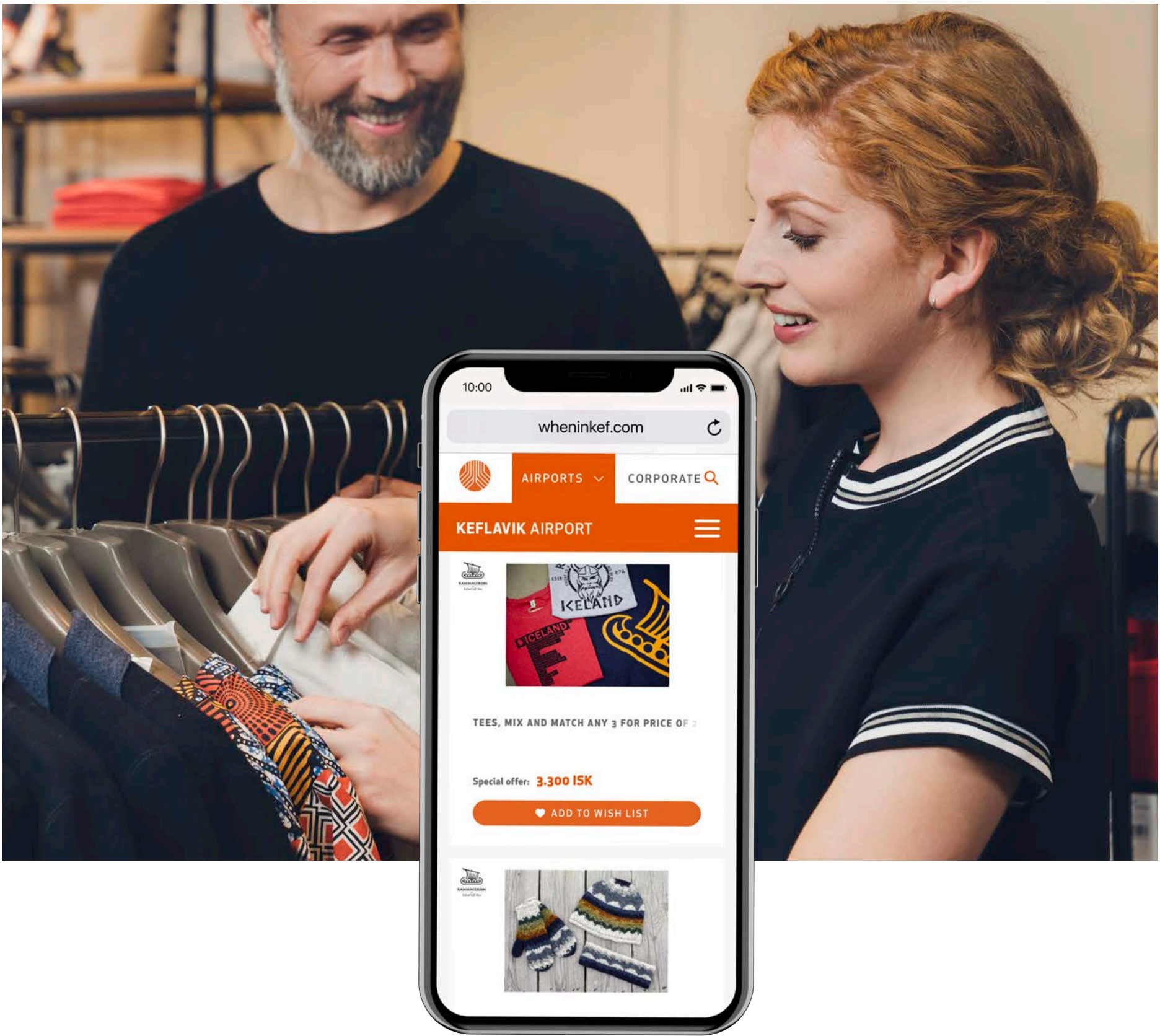


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It's a social distance showdown at COVIDCon

Iceland's Second COVID Wave: Who's To Blame?

The conversation gets heated

Words:
**Andie Sophia
Fontaine**

Photos:
Art Bicnick

Iceland is currently experiencing a resurgence of incidences of the novel coronavirus. That much is incontrovertible. But when it comes to what we can attribute to this resurgence—Iceland opening the borders again, or locals eschewing health guidelines—things get a bit more murky, and the discussion gets heated.

In order to get to the bottom of this, we need to examine what we know about the timeline of events so far, and the origins of infections. Throughout, there is much the Icelandic authorities could have done better.

The doors swing wide

Last June 15th, Iceland opened its borders again to Schengen area countries, later adding four countries that could skip border screening, in addition to the Faroe Islands and Greenland.

At the time of this writing, 39 people have been detected through border screening to have active coronavirus infections, of the nearly 120,000 people who have visited Iceland since June 15th. Certainly a small proportion, but do we know if any of those people have infected Icelanders?

To date, there is no evidence of any foreign tourist having infected any Icelanders. There was one initial report that a foreign tourist had infected a tour guide, but it later came to light that the spouse of the tour guide in question also had the virus, and that spouse had a sibling in a group infection in Akranes, which was itself traced back to an Icelandic resident. Even deCODE Genetics CEO Kári Stefánsson, long a critic of opening the borders, has conceded that no new

cases of the virus have come from any of the “safe countries” that Iceland has permitted to visit without screening.

While Icelanders are subjected to a more rigorous border screening and social restrictions upon arrival in the country, this particular Icelandic resident fell through the cracks because he did not speak Icelandic, and therefore was given the English language guidelines, which are directed at tourists. Bear in mind that Icelanders have always been free to travel to and from the country—even before June 15th.

Relaxing domestic restrictions

Many people have been diligent to draw a direct correlation between the June 15th re-opening and the more recent resurgence of coronavirus cases—despite all available evidence showing that tourists are not infecting Icelanders. The use of this correlation also ignores another important thing that happened on this date: the expansion of the social gathering limit.

On June 15th, gatherings of up to 500 people were permitted in Iceland, bars and clubs were allowed to stay open until 23:00, capacity limits of local swimming pools were lifted, and the two-metre social distancing rule was relaxed. Icelanders embraced this newfound freedom with gusto—summer is a special time for Icelanders, with many of them on vacation during this period and looking for a good time, and locals actively sought to get out and party.

The effects of this have been observable, with the new domestic cases frequently traced back to public gatherings.

Party hard

Over the Merchant's Holiday weekend—a very popular festival for Icelanders—two new cases cropped up in the Westman Islands, which is the premiere destination for Icelanders during this festival, and 78 people were put into quarantine as a result. Clubs and bars have been packed, and one group infection was traced back to a group of Icelanders who visited a restaurant last July.

New domestic cases also ended up cropping up at the Icelandic Transport Authority and the Reykjavík area police, none of which have been traced back to tourists.

Restrictions ignored

The flourishing of domestic cases prompted authorities at the end of July to reinstate restrictions, including a public gathering ban of no more than 100 people, the return of the two-metre social distancing rule, the requirement to provide sanitiser, and the wearing of masks on ferries and domestic flights.

These new guidelines do not appear to be respected by far too many locals. Police visited some 24 restaurants and entertainment venues over the second weekend of August and found that 14 of them were violating the new restrictions.

To be fair, the public could be forgiven for being confused by the ever-changing guidelines. In some cases, there has been a demonstrable lack of clear communication between relevant authorities. One stunning example of this was when it was announced that masks would be required on city buses. Strætó, the capital area bus service, were apparently never consulted on this matter, and would later say they would only strongly recommend that people wear masks. Clearly, relevant authorities need to do better when it comes to domestic pandemic policy.

It is hard to ignore the direct line of cause and effect between the relaxing of domestic restrictions, a resurgence of domestic cases, the reinstatement of restrictions, the continued and worrying flouting of these, and the contin-

ued resurgence of domestic cases—all of them traced back to locals. Nonetheless, calls to close the borders remain prominent.

Until when?

Kári has been actively advocating for closing the borders, and Prime Minister Katrín Jakobsdóttir has said she is considering new border restrictions, despite all evidence showing the resurgence of domestic cases can be directly connected to domestic activity.

In fairness, Kári has emphasised that tourists have not played a role in the second wave; rather, he is cautious that they might. But the talk of closing the borders leaves one important question unanswered: until when? Until a vaccine is widely available? Until the virus disappears from the face of the earth? No one has been able to answer the question adequately.

Politicisation of a virus

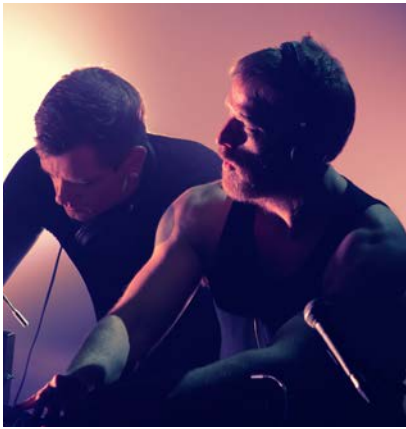
It cannot be ignored that there is a political aspect to this discussion. Minister of Tourism Þórdís Kolbrún Gylfadóttir, who is also a member of the conservative Independence Party, recently told RÚV that there is an “acceptable risk” in continuing to allow tourists to come to Iceland. This unfortunate wording has struck a nerve with many Icelanders, many of whom feel that the re-opening of the borders in the first place was a decision based more on greed than science.

As in other parts of the world, discussions about how to deal with the coronavirus certainly have a political aspect in Iceland. This is unfortunate. Our public health policy must be based in science; so far, the science is showing that tourists have not caused the second wave. It does, however, underline the importance of all of us taking part in the collective responsibility of protecting one another, with relevant authorities communicating and coordinating better—no matter how bad we might want to shift the blame elsewhere. 🍷

The Impossible Band:

The unlikely story of how **GusGus**, against all odds, formed, and the outlandish tale of how, against all odds, they just continued to happen.

Words: **Sveinbjörn Pálsson & Hannah Jane Cohen**
Photos: **From forthcoming book**



None of this was supposed to happen. GusGus was just supposed to be a short film, not a band. And even when it became a band, and remained a band, it—in some ways—still felt like more than a band. Cycling through catastrophes, last-minute collapses, and terrible drama, the act—one of Iceland's most beloved—has been down for the count more than once. But intertwined with that has been a string of high-water mark moments, each more improbable than the last. When they burst onto the scene in 1995, people immediately took notice of GusGus. Sure, their music was strikingly original, but they also possessed an attitude unparalleled within the Icelandic scene. They refused to be called a band, instead opting for the term “fjölistahópur,” which could be translated as a multi-discipline art collective or circus. To many, this stance felt pretentious, but somehow, the group converted naysayers. It was an apt description.

Now, twenty five years later, the group is revving up again with a new release set to rival the album that many consider their landmark achievement, ‘Arabian Horse,’ as well as a crowd-funded photo book celebrating the entirety of their peculiar history. To mark their quarter-century birthday, the current lineup of the band—Daniel Ágúst Haraldsson and Birgir (“Biggi”) Þórarinnsson—sat down to give their version of the story of GusGus, the one you haven't heard before in interviews, album by album. No former members were interviewed: This is how 2020 GusGus remember it, re-arranged, remixed, and with additional material from the author, a GusGus fan since the early days.

Setting the scene

To get to the GusGus studio, I walk past a giant trampoline on a decrepit patio and through an intricately designed garden with a stately two-story tree-house built by Birgir, better known as Biggi Veira, for his children. I then enter a synth-laden paradise, a grown-up funland—it's the studio of Biggi Veira, GusGus producer since the beginning.

This story starts with an idea. Director duo Árni & Kinski wanted to make a short film entitled ‘Nautn’. (It's

currently on YouTube, if you want to check it out.) In their crew were cinematographer Stephan Stephensen and producer Baldur Stefánsson. The group reached out to a bunch of actors—all also musicians—among them singer Daniel Ágúst.

Everyone knew Daniel. His guitar-rock based band Nýdönsk had been huge since the start of the 90s and before that he was a fresh-faced Euro-vision contestant. But ennui was creeping in. Disillusioned with the constraints of the rock band structure, he left Nýdönsk and subsequently produced the second Bubbleflies album, where he got a taste for electronic elements in music. Then he got the call.

0. Soundtrack to ‘Nautn’

So GusGus started out as a soundtrack to a short film. Daniel Ágúst sought a collaborator who shared his fascination with the electronic. A few producers were considered before the team settled on reaching out to T-World, Biggi's band.

Daniel and Biggi can't agree on how this happened, and won't let this article disclose any names.

For long-time fans, it's interesting to consider how GusGus might have turned out with other producers at the helm. Biggi—whose sound is so iconic that every musician in Iceland has, at some point, tried and failed to emulate it—might never have joined.

Biggi founded T-World in the 80s, with a guy called Beggi. They were influenced by Depeche Mode, Marc Almond and the like. When Beggi left in the early 90s, Biggi brought Maggi Legó on board, and together they started making techno.

Maggi Legó's presence added another level of skill to the team. Part of the first wave of acid house DJs, which pushed DJ culture away from its cheesy 80s roots, Legó has always had an air of legend around him.

T-World had already had one release, ‘An-them’, on Underwater, Darren Emerson of Underworld's label. But, as Biggi describes, the label staff had a cocaine problem, and when Maggi asked for an allowance to fly back to Iceland, the label boss—presumably

in an altered state—fired them on the spot. Their track “Purple,” a hit in the making, was shelved.

I. ‘Gus Gus’ (The Album)

Back to the main story. While the production of the short film ‘Nautn’ was postponed, the trio decided to rent a room in an old warehouse, which they shared with a gang of bikers, and make some music.

Daniel painted the space blue. He and Maggi hunted for samples to loop and the whole cast of the film dropped by to collaborate on a track or two.

It was all quick and casual. Emiliana Torrini covered Slowblow's “Is Jesus Your Pal?” over a bass drum beat. Magnús Jónsson brought in soul and disco influences. Ragnheiður Axel orchestrated a rowdy, shouty rave tune. Heiðrún Anna came in, but unfortunately the track didn't work out. She'd go on to write for the Spice Girls among other things. Others added their own spin on songs.

The soundtrack became an album, simply called ‘Gus Gus’, released late in 1995. They did a few shows around the country. The filmmakers made some visuals and they VJ-ed on stage, mixing together footage shot by Stephan on analog video tape. After that, the project just petered out. It was finished and a modest success, though no one in the group yet identified GusGus as a proper band, rather just a one-time project.

Then they got a fax from 4AD.

II. Polydistortion

4AD was a one of the most respected indie labels in the world, best known at the time for launching the Pixies and Cocteau Twins. After the success of Björk and the Sugarcubes, the label had been keeping an eye on Iceland and wanted to release the ‘Gus Gus’ album worldwide. So a decision had to be made: Was GusGus now a band? And if so, who would join this new band?

Some joined, others did not, and the band eventually signed as a nine piece, featuring Stephan Stephansen, Biggi, Daniel, Maggi Legó, Magnús Jónsson, Hafdís Huld Þrastardóttir, Sigurður

Kjartansson, Stefán Árni Þorgeirsson, and Baldur Stefánsson. Interestingly enough, despite having worked in the collective for over a year, it was only now that Stephan Stephansen and Biggi Veira met in person.

The group released ‘Polydistortion’ on 4AD in 1997. Most of the album's material originated from ‘Gus Gus’ although there were some new tracks. These additions were mostly due to changes regarding the use of sampling. While the 80s and early 90s had been a free-for-all, by '97 high profile court cases had bankrupted some of the early sampling pioneers. As a result GusGus removed all but two samples, one of which—the cowbell loop that drives “Believe”—ended up costing the band 70% of the proceeds from the track.

They made short films as videos to each track and hype built around the collective. Then they toured the world.

III. This Is Normal

Touring—with nine members and a gigantic video projector—was hugely expensive. That said, the venues were packed and the media exposure was enormous. Apparently, the world realised, there was more to Iceland than Björk and the Sugarcubes.

Back in Iceland, the group embarked on a new record. ‘Gus Gus’ and ‘Polydistortion’ had happened in such a casual manner, but while recording this new, international album entitled ‘This Is Normal’, the strain of being a band became obvious. Members became more ambitious and tried to push the project in directions that reflected their own personal tastes and image.

And so, in the record's production stage things began to unravel. Hafdís Huld was unhappy with the material she got. Biggi and Magnús Jónsson struggled to work together. Maggi Legó didn't want to tour again. “We became a dysfunctional pop band,” Daniel admits. Biggi, meanwhile, didn't even believe that GusGus would survive the album—too much politics.

The band subsequently split into camps, separated in two studios. One was Biggi's, who had been joined by Stephan Stephansen, the other was Maggi Legó's studio, he was joined by Þórir Baldurs—best known for his work on Donna Summer's “I Feel Love”—who was working with Legó.



Baldur



Biggi Veira



Daniel Ágúst



Emiliana



Hafdís Huld



Högni



Siggi Kinski

These years saw Biggi and Legó journey in different musical directions. Legó wanted to move closer to his disco and soul roots, while Biggi, in his own words, wanted to explore Depeche Mode-influenced ambient breaks.

Nonetheless, ‘This Is Normal’ was released in April 1999. “Ladyshave” was supposed to be the breakthrough hit, but due to an error in the 4AD label offices, not enough copies were sent out of the single to stores, so it was sold out early in the week. Due to this, the track only hit number 42 on the U.K. charts so they missed Top Of The Pops and BBC Radio 1 playlisting.

It was the band’s first disappointment. While the track did have some success in ads among other things, the cost had been high—jobs had been quit, and sacrifices made for something that never panned out. Magnús Jónsson and Hafðís Huld left the band completely and Legó briefly stepped back from the project. Matters were coming to a head.

IV. Gus Gus vs T-World

The band was in disarray. 4AD went bankrupt, and was subsequently taken over by Beggars Banquet. Reorgansing, GusGus’ advance payments were cut, so the band left the label. In April 2000, just before leaving, they released another very different album.

‘Gus Gus vs T-World’ was a compilation of early T-World tracks, written and produced by Legó and Biggi before the formation of GusGus. The album was pushed by Daniel, who felt that it was a shame not to release these classics. He helped select the tracks for the album, even naming some previously untitled numbers (since the band was called T-World, the blank tracks were named after teas, i.e. “Earl Gray”).

But with crisis came opportunity. Palm Pictures, a company formed by Island Records founder Chris Blackwell, offered the band, as the duo puts it, a “Million Dollar Deal.” The caveat? Daniel could not do any other work except GusGus. Daniel promptly refused.

Now, the band was in serious debt by this point—in fact, Daniel only made the final payment for the 4AD-era debts last year—so his refusal was not popular with his bandmates. The final straw came when Daniel was putting together a soundtrack for a performance by the Iceland Dance Company. Biggi Veira, who was producing the project, lost interest and so Daniel had to call in another one to help.

In response, Daniel quit GusGus. Biggi, sitting here in 2020, is remarkably honest about his role in the situation and his difficulty working with others at that time. He uses harsh language to describe how stubborn he had been in situations, such as this, where diplomacy would have been more appropriate.

The future of GusGus was once more up-in-the-air.

Following the ‘Gus Gus vs. T-World’ album, an offer came in to do an instrumental tour. Biggi and Stephan Stephensen, by now the only remaining GusGus members, accepted and played a number of French festivals. On the final night of the tour, all the bands joined GusGus on stage for an improvisational session featuring French rappers and even a horn section. This glorious cacophony rejuvenated the duo. Once again they saw a future for GusGus.

Inspired, they came home and asked Maggi Legó to rejoin. The search was on for a new singer. At the time, Stephan and Legó had been perform-

ing as a DJ duo. At a gig in Kaffibarinn, a girl came over and asked if she could MC with them. They said yes. She tore the roof off the house. Her name was Urður Hákonardóttir.

V. Attention

While working on their next album, ‘Attention’, Stephan stepped up as the driving force behind the band. In fact, Biggi gives most of the credit for this release to him. Alone at the studio, Stephan would make beats, with Biggi dropping in to add synths, hooks, and shaping up the mix. The stakes were lower and thus, things were fun again. Around half the tracks on the album would be initiated by Stephan.

Stephen had previously been DJ-ing under the moniker Alfred More, or A.More, but around this time, he adopted a new name, President Bongo. With this new identity, he began to move from behind the machines to the front of the stage, acting as hype man and singer alongside Urður.

Biggi, meanwhile, was still burned out after the excesses of the 4AD era, and was happy to let Stephan take the reins for a bit. Biggi directed the recordings, Stephan had the run of the band outside the studio. “Steph held the act together, he made it happen,” Biggi admits. Daniel goes even further with his praise. “For a period, he kept the band alive,” he says. In a surprise twist, A track from an older session with Daniel also went on the album.

Returning to the Underwater label, the group released ‘Attention’ in 2002. The main single, “David,” became a club hit across Europe, hitting #1 in Germany. GusGus was back.

VI. Forever.

Underwater established Germany as the band’s new base of popularity. But the office enthusiasm for cocaine that had thwarted T-World’s relationship with the label was still present, and so the band promptly left the label after ‘Attention’ came out.

It was during this era that GusGus grew as a live act, becoming the most popular band in Iceland and headlining the Iceland Airwaves festival year after year.

During this period, Biggi essentially dropped out of the group and started working as a programmer at a bank. Focused on his job, he put off working on the next GusGus album, much to the dismay of Stephan and Urður. Relations between Stephan and Biggi were beginning to deteriorate, and while Daniel describes the duo’s relationship in the studio as, “all love and lotion,” outside it, and especially on tour, territorial tensions were rife. The two would get into heated arguments on the tour bus, usually ending with them hugging and crying.

They could never settle the disputes though. As Biggi had trained Stephan, he struggled to view him as an equal. Daniel refers to this as an “Obi Wan Kenobi situation.” Biggi describes having trouble accepting Stephan’s suggestions to change things that Biggi had created. “Biggi’s not an alpha dog, he’s a tyrant,” Daniel jokes. Biggi laughs. “I compromise, but really unwillingly, and people never hear the end of it”. That said, throughout the interview, you can sense that Biggi has been looking inward and coming to grips with this difficult history. He seems to be growing.

Urður, meanwhile, kept getting stuck in the middle of this tense dynamic and at the start of 2008, she left the band. That said, her voice dominated the album ‘Forever,’ which was released in the midst of all the

drama.

VII. 24/7

Daniel re-entered the picture post-‘Forever’, which had featured a remix of “Moss,” from his solo album. He started appearing with them onstage again—to uproarious applause from the audience—and eventually decided to rejoin GusGus.

They planned to showcase new tracks on tour during the summer of 2008, with Ásta Sveinsdóttir in place of Urður, but the deadline came and went and the tracks were nowhere near finished. Without a plan, they decided to work out the album live on stage.

Both Daniel and Biggi remember the terror they felt going onstage for the first time without any map. “It was also thrilling though,” Daniel says. “Doing a great show even though we never knew where the night was going to take us.”

Slowly, the album started taking shape, and by their Airwaves gig in October, the tracks had some form. Daniel recalls Florence from Florence & The Machine throwing herself on her knees after their show in admiration. “We realised when we walked off that stage that we were going to do things differently,” Biggi says. “We were going to record this album in the same way as we did it live”.

The reunited trio—Biggi, Stephan and Daniel—set up a studio in Flat-eyri for two weeks. They stayed in a summer cabin and spent more time on meal preparations and dressing up than on music. Seriously, every day they would put on suits.

They rented a giant, if somewhat vintage sound system and recreated the show in its entirety four times during in just one week, afterwards editing the recordings together into the album ‘24/7’.

The album, which was released by Kompakt in September, 2009, was John Grant’s favorite. He later got in touch with Biggi, and this relationship snowballed into Biggi producing John’s second album ‘Pale Green Ghosts.’ And just like that—big things were once again on the horizon for GusGus.

VII. Arabian Horse

The ball that started with ‘24/7’, continued rolling into ‘Arabian Horse.’ The band started recording in a countryside cottage. After that, they once again geographically split into two, divided between Biggi’s studio and Stephan’s new studio in Grandi. Stephan brought in Högni Egilsson, the Hjaltalín composer and singer, as a band member and also a roster of rotating live musicians—one of the main reasons behind the richness of the album.

‘Arabian Horse’ came out in 2011 and is by far their most critically acclaimed release. Biggi was sad that Kompakt only released two singles off the album—“Over” and “Deep Inside.” In Iceland, “Within You” became a surprise hit, and the title track, “Arabian Horse” was a underground sensation in Eastern Europe. The album found success in new places. When they toured Russia for the first time, they were surprised to find that the whole crowd knew the lyrics to most of the songs on the album.

In comparison to their last few albums, it was a relatively drama-free period for the band.

IX. Mexico

But the peace didn’t last long. Stephan, now in his solo studio, began veering off in his own direction. In the middle of making GusGus’s next effort ‘Mexico,’ he decamped for a three-month sailing trip around the Caribbean. When he came back, much of the album was close to finished by Biggi, Högni and Daniel. It was instantly clear that a rift had formed between Stephan and Biggi regarding the sound of the album, and it ran so deep that the fight ended in Stephan’s departure. Biggi speaks of the split in a sombre tone.

Högni, meanwhile, also departed the group in the midst of the Mexico tour, citing health reasons.

X. Lies Are More Flexible

Daniel likens himself at the end of the Stephan era to the child of divorcing parents. Starting a new album as a duo with Biggi was sort of a relief for him—it seemed simple even.

That said, the album took a long time. “There was a big gap after Stephan left,” Daniel explains. “And maybe there still is.” Musically, the album dove deeper into Biggi’s new-wave influences—a journey that had started with ‘Mexico’s “Sustain,” a track which had been one of the final points of contention between Stephan and Biggi.

‘Lies Are More Flexible,’ released in 2018, was the result of this new lineup, and while the duo does admit it was a strange, short effort, the album was coherent, featuring strong tracks and an even stronger sonic direction—a melange of new-wave and italo disco.

And so, the GusGus—stripped back to its initial duo line-up—was back in business.

The future

Upon first listen, there’s no doubt that the forthcoming album exists in the same sonic universe as the last one. That said, it’s clearly the climax of the story, to which ‘Lies Are More Flexible’ was merely the crescendo. The as-of-yet-unnamed album is full of hits, joy, and inventive ideas. For GusGus it’s a return to form.

Biggi describes their new sound as being, in part, electronic country. Daniel objects, suggesting that it’s more like electronic suburbia. Perhaps it’s in between, they posit. An industrial area surrounded by cows? A big factory with grass on one end and meat on the other? Is it a distant town like Skagafjörður or Raufarhöfn? What kind of country is it?

They end up agreeing that perhaps Sauðarkrökur is the best choice. This devolves into a quibble about the merits of the proposed final track on the album. Daniel wants it gone. Biggi is having none of it so Daniel suggests naming it “Sauðarkrökur.” Biggi counters with “Grass In Meat Out.”

Apart from the album, the duo is also excited about their upcoming 25th anniversary photo book, compiled by Réza Kalfane and Dominique Lameule, which is currently being crowdfunded on Karolina Fund.

And so you’ve made it to the end of the GusGus Saga. Of course, there’s no way to do everyone justice in a mere two pages and many important people could not be included. All we can say is congrats to what is perhaps the most dramatic band in Iceland for surviving a quarter of a century. Let’s hope for another 25 years of good stories. 🍷



Maggi Legó



Maggi Jóns



Páll Garðars



Raxel



Stefán Árni



Urður / Earth

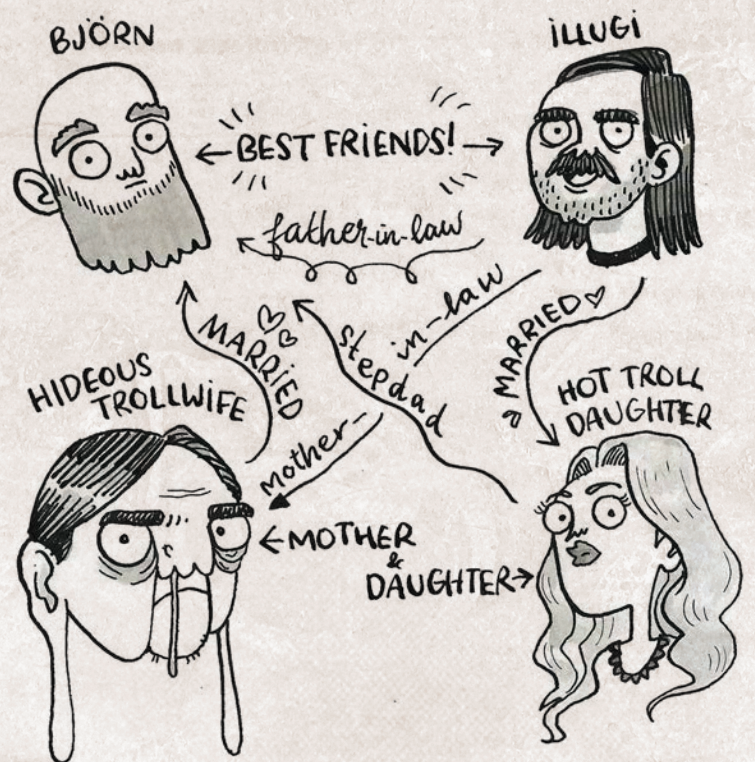
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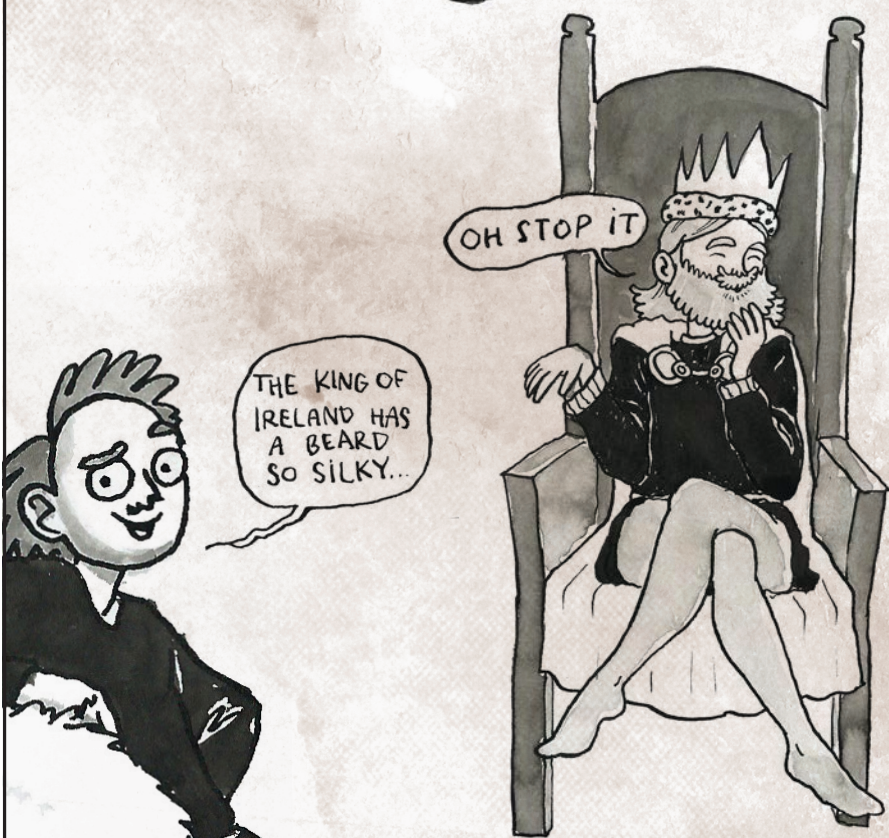
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Until January 3rd, 2021 - Hafnarhús

Gilbert & George are known for their pioneering performance pieces, bold photo-based graphics and anti-elitist "Art for All" ethos. From modelling themselves as "living sculptures" in the 1970s to filming a lock-down video diary chronicling the events of recent months, Gilbert & George's style is constantly evolving and pushing creative boundaries. The pair are widely credited with helping to advance changes in attitudes towards the LGBTIQ+ community, making this exhibition the perfect way to safely celebrate the cancelled-Pride amid the COVID-19 restrictions. **PA**



Poland Will Hear Us

Demonstration of Support for LGBTQ People In Poland

August 16th - 17:00 - Polish Embassy

In light of the growing homophobia in Poland, the community needs to hear an expression of support now more than ever. Join this demonstration to send this message of support to LGBTQ+ individuals in Poland, Iceland, and beyond who have faced persecution and discrimination due to their gender or sexuality: "You're not alone!" As we are in the midst of a pandemic, remember to take the right precautions; bring a mask and try to stand two meters apart. **SP0**



I've Seen It All... Online

Björk Orkestral Livestream

August 29th, September 13th, 19th & 28th - Various Times - Online - £15

Björk's back, baby! That's right, the eccentric chanteuse will grace us with three weekend performances in collaboration with Iceland Airwaves. Björk will be playing unplugged, accompanied by some of Iceland's greatest classical ensembles. Unfortunately, tickets for the live show are now sold-out—but fear not, the event will be live-streamed. That's safer anyway! **HJC**

CULTURE NEWS

Info

Catch Víkingur Ólafsson at Harpa on September 6th and 7th at 20:00
Tickets are 4,900-9,900 ISK.



Just a man in a Mandarin collar

Les Enfants Terribles

Víkingur Ólafsson puts Rameau and Debussy in dialogue on the Harpa stage

Words:
Hannah Jane Cohen

Photos:
Art Bienick & Timothée Lambrecq

It's 1918. World War I rages on as French composer Claude Debussy lies on his deathbed. His last few days are but a fever dream, but as the renegade artist waits for the end, one lament remains on his lips: in the face of death, Debussy is sad that he won't be able to catch the new revival of Jean-Philippe Rameau's 18th century opera, 'Castor et Pollux,' at The Paris Opera. Louis Laloy sees Debussy only days before his passing, and as he leaves the room, Debussy has just a few dramatic words for his friend. "Say hello to Monsieur Castor!"

Rameau and Debussy were separated by hundreds of years and composed in vastly different styles, but they've been united on pianist—and former Grapevine cover star—Víkingur Ólafsson's newest album, which presents the two revolutionary composers in dialogue with each other. Now, Víkingur will finally take the album to the Harpa stage as the Reykjavík Art Festival's opening concert.

Two controversial Frenchmen

The project began in March last year in the weeks before the birth of Víkingur's son. "My boy arrived two weeks later than expected, so I had all this time on my hands. I started to play all these pieces of Rameau on the piano and as I played it, I just kept thinking about Debussy, which is weird because they are from completely different periods," he explains. "It's like comparing Picasso to Rembrandt."

But Víkingur saw an undeniable thread between the two—one that only

grew stronger with time. "I started to do some research and found out that Rameau was one of Debussy's favourite composers. He wrote incredibly beautiful reviews about his music and was thinking of him on his deathbed," he says. "But the deeper I went, the more I understood that they had some similar elements in their lives."

These similar elements relate to both composer's relationships with the musical institutions and conventions of their time. "They were both musical outsiders who didn't really fit in. They challenged the establishment and picked fights with people. Enfants terribles," he posits. "Today, [their music] all sounds very nice and beautiful but in their day, not so much. They were shocking."

But while it's established that Debussy was a Rameau devotee, would

Rameau reciprocate? The pianist is understandably hesitant to speak on behalf of a dead man, but still takes a moment to ponder their hypothetical friendship. "Well, we have to remember that these are two Frenchmen and Frenchmen are often totally surprising and unpredictable in their views—and they're not always nice to each other, especially when they are two giants," he laughs. "I think we should be careful not to assume that Rameau would have liked Debussy. He certainly hated many of his contemporaries."

The devil in the details

To be fair, comparing Rameau and Debussy was a rather 'enfant terrible' move for Víkingur to make, but unfortunately, the notoriously unpredictable pianist stays mum on what artist—or artists—he's planning on diving into next. "Every album has to be a surprise," he explains with a smile. That said, he does reveal a few dream projects he's been mulling over, such as deconstructing a Beethoven symphony.

"There's incredible potential in the time dimension of a piece like a Beethoven symphony," he says. "It won't sound at all like the original; it'll become a new piece. I think you can bend time in very interesting ways there."

Mozart—a fellow enfant terrible—is another area of fascination. "I'd be curious to do something with Mozart and maybe five or six composers from his time. Mozart wrote during the classical period, when the rules were quite set for how to make music. On the surface, everyone sounds a little more connected and alike, but somehow Mozart still sounds completely different from anyone else always," he explains. "It'd be interesting to take a period like that [and] show how extremely different Mozart was, how the devil is in the details."

Alone, no words, one instrument

But right now, Víkingur is most excited to get back onstage. "The fact is that I cannot wait for these concerts," he says, his voice uncharacteristically animated. "Honestly, as much as I like recording and doing TV, somewhere inside I really am an exhibitionist, so I love the spotlight. To be there alone with a piano on a big stage and to have all these people channeling into it, that's unlike anything else in life." He pauses. "A solo recital to me is the most interesting form of expression. To be alone with no words and only a single instrument... Well, nothing equals it for me," he concludes. And there, perhaps, we've found something that both Debussy and Rameau would agree on. **🎹**



Dreaming of Debussy

EXPLORE UNSEEN ICELAND

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Just A Small Town Boy

Grapevine Fringe Award winner
Arnór Daði serves up rural charm
on the stand-up stage

Words: Poppy Askham Photos: Art Bicnick

Silhouetted against the red velvet curtain, mic in hand, Arnór Daði Gunnarsson exudes an irresistible awkward charm. Though you'd never guess it from his easy stage presence, he's in the midst of his Reykjavik Fringe Festival debut and the premier of his first solo show "Big Small Town Kid". The hour-long special sees the comedian veer between deadpan self-deprecation and glimmers of childish mischievousness, all the while interweaving observations about parenthood and Reykjavik's quirks as he regales the crowd with a series of bizarre anecdotes from his rural hometown.

When the Grapevine Comedy Committee convenes some days later in a top-secret bunker of undisclosed location, the decision is unanimous: Arnór is granted the most prestigious cultural accolade in town—the inaugural Grapevine Fringe Award.

Two weeks after his momentous victory, Arnór sits back with a coffee in the Icelandic Street Food Café. He's mentally preparing for tonight's show, which will be his first stand-up performance since the festival. "I feel like I'm just getting back up from the dead," he laughs. "Fringe was so stressful that I didn't even want to think about comedy for a week, but I'm excited to get back on stage now."

Lucky (for some)

Arnór is a familiar face on the Reykjavik comedy scene, but this year was the first time he'd braved the Fringe stage, starring in not one, but two shows (one the aforementioned solo extravaganza and the other in collaboration with Huw Coverdale Jones).

"Sometimes I feel more like myself on stage than in real life."

"It's the third year of the festival and every year I was nearly going to do it," he explains. The first year he felt too new to performing. The second, he missed the application deadline, and if it hadn't been for COVID-19, 2020 might have been another no-show. "I applied too late so I didn't get in, but then the pandemic happened and they were looking for people. I got kind of lucky, I guess. It's bad for the world

but it benefitted me," he laughs awkwardly.

"I feel grateful that I didn't do a show in those two years because I've become a stronger comedian and performer over that time," he reflects. But while today the comedian radiates a quiet confidence, when Arnór first left his small northern hometown for Reykjavik, that was anything but the case.

Geese and weirdos

Arnór first set his eyes on the stand-up stage at age 18 thanks to the nonchalant ease of Louis C. K. "That kind of style looks easy. I know now it's one of the hardest to achieve, but back then I thought if he can do it, I can," he relays, "I just became obsessed, I thought about it non-stop every day."

But there was one problem: Arnór lived in a rural northern village, hundreds of miles from the open-mics of Reykjavik. In fact, as Arnór emphasises, there was no comedy scene where he grew up and in fact, very little organised entertainment full stop. He subsequently launches into an anecdote about the most thrilling summer of his childhood, the year a goose named Goosey arrived:

"She escaped from a near-by

farm and she lived in our town for a summer. It was the summer of 2003, wonderful times, simpler times," he reminisces. "There was an abandoned house that we used to play in, but it burnt down and after that there was nowhere to hang out anymore, so when Goosey turned up we had something to do. We could feed her bread! It was great." He pauses for a moment. "Huh, it really shows how little there was to do that the highlight was a goose."

Desperate to flee the monotony of small-town life and achieve his aspirations, Arnór made a plan. "I applied to film school as a cover-up to move to Reykjavik to do comedy without anybody knowing," he explains. "Where I come from, if you say you want to be a stand-up comedian people are not going to take you seriously. They're just going to think you're a weirdo."

Fuck Dalvík

After the big move, it took a year before Arnór finally plucked up the courage to make it up on stage. "I even remember the day: 16th of June. It was on a Friday, downtown at Bar 11," he reminisces. "I remember everything because I signed up two weeks early and I couldn't sleep for two weeks." When he turned up, his audience was a resolutely bad-humoured stag-do from Dalvík. "I was actually bailing as they introduced me on stage. I was too nervous; I couldn't think. I had opened up the door to leave, but I heard everyone clap for me so I turned back. Then my mind just went blank. Eventually, I remembered the joke, but the timing was off and I held the mic at my belly-button because I was too nervous to think about my hands and nobody was laughing because nobody could hear me. Even if they could hear me, they wouldn't have



...living in a lonely world...

been laughing because the whole thing was just too weird.”

While his debut was, as the comedian himself describes it, “horrible,” the show did give him the confidence to do it again. “I got off stage and I was very happy,” he smiles. “I knew I had bombed, but I had finally done the thing I’d been wanting to do for years.”

“It’s kind of odd to think about it now because stand-up just feels way too normal now. I’m really grateful that I had the balls to do it—I don’t know where I would be right now if I hadn’t,” Arnór reflects. “Sometimes I feel more like myself on stage than in real life. I feel like I have more control over how I feel. There’s nothing else I want to do, everything else is just boring.”

Gotta love those drunk farmers

Though Arnór cut his teeth on the Reykjavik comedy circuit, the first

time he felt like he had truly “made it” was at a performance at a Þorablót celebration for a crowd of drunk farmers in a school gymnasium in his northern hometown.

“It was one of the shows that I’ve been most nervous for because I felt like I had to prove myself. Of course, it was just in my own head—the small town mentality isn’t actually that bad,” he says. “But I did ten minutes and it went really well. I made fun of some locals, which really kills in a small town. I felt like I was doing it for real, like I’d proved to them that I could do comedy.”

Although Arnór has overcome this internal hurdle, he is far from complacent. Climbing the comedy ladder often feels like an impossible feat, he explains. Progress can be slow and there’s always a new goal to reach for or something to improve. When comedy clubs finally reopened after the three-month COVID-19 hiatus, he therefore decided to re-visit his old ma-

terial. “I went back to the things that I felt were bulletproof and started rewriting. A joke is never done for me. It dies if you don’t try to improve it.”

At the same time, a new development in Arnór’s personal life has made him more determined than ever to continue honing his craft. “I feel like I have a game plan now that I’m a father,” he concludes. “I used to do comedy at the Secret Cellar every night and drink and not really think about it, but now I feel like I’m on a mission. If you’re leaving your girlfriend and baby to go and do something, you’d better make it count. So now when I leave, I feel like I have to improve every time.”

He takes a last sip of coffee, gives profuse thanks for the award and is promptly off to the Secret Cellar for his triumphant return to the stage. 🍷



...he took the midnight Strætó to Reykjavik

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Stay (In)Sane, Stay Inside

How to keep calm during the second wave of COVID-19!
Doctors hate us!

Words: Valur Grettisson Photos: EVE Online & Art Bienick

So how does one stay sane in the slowness of the second wave of COVID-19? To be honest, we have no idea, but that didn't stop us from writing this guide. Whatever the solution is—good food, slapstick comedies, and aggressive metal can't hurt.

DENIAL: ESCAPISM & FOOD

If you feel like the smallness and homogeneity of Iceland is choking your soul in this brutal era, induce some radical escapism by re-organising your apartment into a Spanish villa—no, the Mexican sombrero is not allowed, you idiot—and ordering some mouth-watering Spanish paella and unearthy croquettes from **Matur og Drykkur**. Don't worry, they do home delivery so you can stay safely distanced from others. Matur og Drykkur is a Grapevine favourite and actually a Michelin-starred restaurant, it just, well, *technically* needs a star. If you're not convinced, this paella will convince you. I ate an entire pan last weekend and downed it with some sangria and an old Almodóvar movie.

ANGER: METAL, METAL, METAL

So, you've been locked inside for God knows how long now, and now you just want to scream. Indulge that desire by deconstructing your Spanish-villa-Vesturbær apartment and remodeling it in the style of a Norwegian black metal venue from the early 90s. To complete the look, dye your hair black, paint your face white, turn **Svartidaudi** and **Misþyrming** up to eleven, and spend all night complaining on the internet that whatever cool Icelandic black metal release has just come out is not real black metal. Then faint due to all the screaming or wait until the neighbours call the cops. Either way works. Pick up the latest Icelandic metal releases at **Geisladiskabúð Valda**... not that they are real metal of course.

BARGAINING: DISCONNECTING FROM REALITY

Do you like to piss into bottles? How about neglecting everything that matters in your real life? Even your kids? If the answer is yaas and

yaas and fuck yaas, we have a solution for you to avoid this COVID-catastrophe entirely and also have some crazy fun at the same time! **EVE Online** is a complex “sandbox” MMORPG where players are free to roam around the universe to scam, rule, steal, profit or troll as they please. We'd recommend getting into gas harvesting, negotiating a deal with some vigilante police officers, and becoming some sort of space mafia boss. Regardless, if you get a membership and start playing, we promise that the next time you look at the clock, it'll be around June 2025. The downside, of course, is that you'll be out of a job,



Now that's some yummy yum

your kids won't talk to you and you will be bankrupt, both emotionally and financially. But hey, who needs a family when you have Sims?

DEPRESSION: WATCHING “COMEDIES”

The best way to sustain depression is typically to watch an Icelandic movie. How many ways can we tell a slow story about a struggling middle-aged man in the countryside? Apparently a lot! Occasionally though, Icelanders produce brilliant comedies. **'Nýtt líf,' 'Dalalíf'** and **'Löggulíf'** are all silly slapstick films about city boys trying to start a new life in, well, the countryside obviously. You could also check out **'Með allt á hreinu,'** the only successful musical comedy made in Iceland, featuring **Stuðmenn** and the legendary feminist band **Grýlurnar**. Pick up all of them at **Aðalvídeóleigan**.

ACCEPTANCE: READ, STUBIT!

Books? Remember them? We don't either, but we were forced to read them all in school just like you. If you really want to kill time, get the grasp of a nation, and maybe find some philosophical insight into this depressing world all at the same time, then there's some key literature to read. To save your mental health, we'd recommend **'Heiða: A Shepherd At The Edge Of The World'** by **Steinunn Sigurðardóttir**, translated by Philip Roughton. It's a unique insight into the real life of Heiða, a supermodel in New York who left the spotlight to become a farmer. For fiction, go for **'Woman At 1000 Degrees'** by **Hallgrímur Helgason**, translated by Brian FitzGibbon. It's about an old woman with a hand grenade who is reminiscing on her batshit crazy upbringing in World War 2 and her Nazi father. Fun stuff. If you finish those and need to kill even more time, there's always the collected works of **Halldór Laxness**.

FINDING MEANING:

...tba

BEST OF REYKJAVÍK

Best Bookstore



Eymundsson

Austurstræti 18 &
Skólavörðustigur 11

Eymundsson is a classic bookstore, offering up the newest in Icelandic writing and international titles. It has the rare characteristic of being perfectly curated for both locals and tourists, so if you're a traveller looking to get an illustrated edition of the Sagas, or a Reykjavík kid hoping to pick up the definitely-going-to-be-released upcoming Game Of Thrones book, this would be the place to find it. Bonus: The cafes at the Skólavörðustigur and Austurstræti locations also make for great people-watching spots.

RUNNERS UP

Bókin

Klapparstigur 25-27

If you're looking to buy the newest Dan Brown, Bókin may not be your thing. But if you're looking for a collectors-edition copy of an Icelandic book long out of print, there's only one option, and that's Bókin. “It has charisma, which makes it a winner,” one panel member said. “If there's a store in Reykjavík with charisma, uniqueness, nerve, and talent, it's Bókin.”

Bóksala Stúdenta

Sæmundargata 4

Located within the main building of Háskóli Íslands, the university bookstore runs the gamut from speciality academic texts to classics, new fiction, notebooks and much more. Another plus? The on-site coffee shop serves up what are potentially the fairest priced coffees in town, as does the Háskóli Íslands cafeteria next door.

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In Your Pocket



Reykjavík Map

Places We Like

Best Of Reykjavík

Perfect Day

Dance, jive & have the time of your life



Photo: Art Bienick

Catherine Côté

Montrealer Catherine Côté is Reykjavík's resident neon nail art queen. Ooh and aah at her work on Instagram at @rainbownails_ and learn about her Perfect Day in the city here.

Morning

The Perfect Day begins with some perfectly-made coffee. Maybe it's already brewing when I wake or maybe I have one of those alarm clocks that makes coffee, but on the Perfect Day, you wouldn't wake up to an alarm, right? So I guess it's just coffee-magic. Anyway, I sip and play League of Legends, except this time, I'm in the Challenger tier and am winning all the games. In reality, I'm actually on a losing streak, but I'd turn it around!

Lunch

It's 25°C and sunny and I teleport some friends of mine over from Canada for the day. We head to **Tjörnin** to have a picnic by the water. I have

this image in my head of us carrying a picnic basket with a baguette and wine in it, but does anyone actually have a picnic basket? I don't know, but we also take a private chef who sets up next to our blanket. He's like a personal buffet and can cook you whatever you want. I'd get some sort of Asian food or poutine, or maybe a poutine-Asian fusion. Along with the fancy food, he serves up all the things you like but just can't be bothered doing—like cutting a pineapple.

Afternoon

It's time for bowling at **Keiluhöllin Egilshöll**. Except, imagine you and all your friends have custom-made bowling outfits with UV fluorescent paint and yellow stripes and sequins. Of course, there are custom bowling shoes and a matching ball to go with it too. Why not?

Dinner

For dinner, we throw a giant bonfire and barbecue next to **Jökulsárlón**.

Don't forget—it's still 25°C but the icebergs aren't melting, the planet is OK, and corona is over. Everyone who is there has gone all out with their makeup and party outfits and it's beautiful because no one is ashamed to be looking like a fool! Maybe some bands play, I don't know, I guess we could just teleport them over?

In the heat of the night

I'd say we would have the full rave on some beach but then I'd just be concerned for people's safety, so let's hold it at **Harpa**. Outside, there's rides and roller coasters surrounding the building, while inside, every room has a special theme. Fire-eaters and hula-hoopers walk the halls and the whole of Harpa is just a neon circus. When it gets really late, we take a ferry to **Viðey island** to continue the rave and watch the **Imagine Peace Tower** light up—except this time, it's with neon lasers. 🦋



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Venue Finder

Venues			Museums & Galleries		
The numbers on the right (i.e. E4) tell you position on the map on the next page					
Austur	Austurstræti 7	D3	Kaffibarinn	Bergstaðastræti 1	E4
American Bar	Austurstræti 8	D3	Kiki Queer Bar	Laugavegur 22	E5
Andrými	Bergþórugata 20	G6	Loft	Bankastræti 7	E4
B5	Bankastræti 5	E4	Mengi	Öðinsgata 2	F5
Bió Paradís	Hverfisgata 54	E5	Nordic House	Sturlagata 5	H2
Bravó	Laugavegur 22	E5	Ölsmíðjan	Lækjargata 10	E3
Curious	Hafnarstræti 4	D3	Paloma	Naustin	D3
Dillon	Laugavegur 30	E5	Papaku Reykjavík	Klapparstígur 28	E5
Dubliner	Naustin 1-3	D3	Prikið	Bankastræti 12	E4
English Pub	Austurstræti 12	D3	R6013	Ingólfsstræti 20	E4
Gaukurinn	Tryggvagata 22	D3	Röntgen	Hverfisgata 12	E5
Hard Rock Café	Lækjargata 2a	D3	Reykjavík Roasters	Karástigur 1	F5
Hressó	Austurstræti 20	D3	Stofan Café	Vesturgata 3	D3
Iðnó	Vonarstræti 3	E3	Tjarnarbið	Tjarnargata 12	E3
Kex Hostel	Skúlagata 28	E7			
			Ásmundarsalur	Freyjugata 41	G6
			Aurora Reykjavík	Grandagarður 2	B1
			Ásgrímur Jónsson Museum	Bergstaðastr. 74	G4
			Berg Contemporary	Klapparstígur 16	E5
			The Culture House	Hverfisgata 15	E5
			The Einar Jónsson Museum	Eiríksgrata	G5
			Exxistenz	Bergstaðast. 25b	F4
			Galleri List	Skipholt 50A	H10
			Hafnarborg	Strandgata 34, 220	
			Hverfisgalleri	Hverfisgata 4	D4
			i8 Gallery	Tryggvagata 16	D3
			The Penis Museum	Laugavegur 116	F8
			Kirsuberjatræð	Vesturgata 4	D3
			Kling & Bang	Grandagarður 20	A4
			Listastofan	Hringbraut 119	
			Living Art Museum	Granadagur 20	A4
			Mokka Kaffi	Skólavörðustig. 3A	E5
			Museum of Design and Applied Art	Gardagorg 1	
			The National Gallery of Iceland	Frikkirkjuvegur 7	F3
			The National Museum	Sudurgata 41	G2
			The Nordic House	Sturlugata 5	H2
			Kjarvalsstaðir	Flokkagata 24	H8
			Ásmundarsafn	Sigtún	
			Reykjavík City Library	Tryggvagata 15	D3
			Árbæjarsafn	Kistuhylur 4	
			The Settlement Exhibition	Adalstræti 16	D3
			Reykjavík Museum of Photography	Tryggvagata 15	D3
			Saga Museum	Grandagarður 2	B2
			Sigurjón Ólafsson Museum	Leugarnestangi 70	
			SÍM	Hafnarstræti 16	D3
			Tveir Hrafnar	Baldursgata 12	G4
			Wind & Weather Window Gallery	Hverfisgata 37	E5

A



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The Map

Get the bigger, more detailed version of The Reykjavík Grapevine City Map at your nearest hotel or guesthouse, with selections from our Best-Of awards, vital info, downtown bus stops and a wider view of the city.

Dining

1. Austur-Indíafjélagið

Hverfisgata 56

Still going strong twenty years on, Austur-Indíafjélagið is an institution. Make a meal out of the delicate salmon pollichathu, kozhi mappas and kulchas and share it family style. Keep your eyes peeled for the vegetarian and vegan dishes as well.

2. Gaeta Gelato

Aðalstræti 6

Gaeta Gelato is owned by newly-arrived Italian transplants with nearly 25 years of experience as gelatai. Their artisanal and authentic flavours, from blueberry to Piedmontese hazelnut, are made with fresh and well-sourced Icelandic ingredients. Though only recently opened, Gaeta Gelato has already won over a crowd of committed regulars.

3. Sæta Svinið

Hafnarstræti 1-3

With big portions and a tasty menu, this hip restaurant offers everything you might desire, from crispy broccoli and big bowls of mussels to a great leg of lamb and a taste of lobster Try and get a seat upstairs: it'll be like dining under a starry sky in the most romantic, dim-lit set-up.

4. Valdís

Grandagarður 21 & Frakkastígur 10

This beloved ice cream parlour—which has a Grandi and downtown location—makes everything in-house each morning, and you can tell. If you like liquorice, try Tyrkisk Peber. While it looks like liquid cement, it tastes more heavenly. The spot doesn't have a large seating area, so take your cone on a stroll along the harbourside or enjoy it in a parked car, Icelandic style.

5. Bastard Brew & Food

Vegamótastígur 4

This downtown drinking hole is something of a beer and bar-food palace. It's an English pub style environment, without the sense of history—everything from the tables to the plush leather seating are catalogue-fresh—but with eleven beers on tap, a great happy hour, and the phenomenally good 'Fat Bastard' burger on offer, it's a firm Grapevine favourite. Their tacos are pretty notable too.

6. Noodle Station

Laugavegur 103

Billowing clouds of coriander scent are a mouth-watering introduction to Noodle Station. Choose beef, vegetable or chicken, and add an extra spice or flaky chilli sauce until your nose runs, your tongue throbs and your gums howl. It's bar-style stool seating and cheaper prices (for Reykjavík) attract prudent solo travellers.

7. Grandi Mathöll

Grandagarður 16

Grandi Mathöll has an immediately comfortable feel, with various stools, benches and couches scattered through the space. There are nine concessions and a bustling, social feel as people meander between the vendors, who shout out names as their orders are ready. Our tip: Vegan food from Spes and friend chicken from KÖRE. Everyone's happy!

8. Vitabar

Bergþórugata 21

This old-school burger 'n' beer joint is right downtown—near Sundhöllin—but feels like a real neighbourhood bar. Its unassuming exterior hides a cosy, no-frills dining room, where you'll mostly be surrounded by locals. For once.

9. Salka Valka

Skólavörðustígur 23

For a piece of good ol' Icelandic fish, there's no better spot than Salka Valka. The restaurant serves up a steamed fillet in their Fish Of The Day meal, with the fish options depending on what is the freshest available. They also have potentially the best plockfiskur in the city, some stellar soups, and—quite recently—a pizza menu.

10. Bæjarins Beztu

Tryggvagata 1

Icelanders have a weird obsession with hot dogs—trust us, you won't understand until you've been here. It's universally agreed though that the tiny stand Bæjarins Beztu serves the best one. Pro-Tip: When they ask what toppings you want, say "All." This is the only way to eat it.

11. Mama

Laugavegur 2

Nothing tastes better than ethics, which is why we can't wait to try the rainbow salad and "nicecream" bowls at Mama, a plant-based restaurant with big dreams. The company is

proudly environmentalist—they hope to use their profits to invest into land so that the kitchen can become self-sufficient. The restaurant also doubles as a wellness space offering a whole host of yoga sessions and breathing workshops. Have your plant-based prayers been answered?

Drinking

12. Röntgen

Hverfisgata 12

Röntgen is a party bar in the purest sense, with a rowdy dance floor, delicious cocktails and a fanbase that's just growing and growing. Run by the legends behind Húrra (RIP), Röntgen unexpectedly grabbed the runner-up for the Best Goddamn Bar category at the 2020 Best Of Reykjavík awards. We stan.

13. Lebowski Bar

Laugavegur 20a

This fully carpeted bar honouring the "Lebowski" Lebowski (not The Dude, man), is a nice place that offers two vibes: start the night nice and cosy with an artisanal White Russian, and end it on one of the rowdiest and most underrated dance floors in the city. Yup, Lebowski is a great place to hang at, but that could just be, like, our opinion man.

14. Jungle Cocktail Bar

Austurstræti 9

The verdant Jungle Cocktail Bar came in like a tropical storm this winter. Devoted to the elevation of all things cocktail culture, some of Jungle's stranger offerings over the past months have included a kale cocktail, but there's no shortage of level-headed concoctions like the signature "The Bombshell" (tequila, rhubarb & vermouth) along with any classic you can name.

15. Port 9

Veghúsarstígur 9

Cosy and tucked away with a secretive vibe, Port 9 is a true hidden gem, hosting a delicious wine list as well as potentially the most intimate atmosphere in Reykjavík. It also has a nice balcony—the ideal locale for sipping some Pino in the summer sun.

16. Mengi

Óðinsgata 2

Mengi's concert room is more white cube than dive bar. The programme encourages new collaborations and experimental performances, so even if you know and love the work of the musicians you're seeing, you might be treated to something brand new on any given night.

17. Luna Flórens

Grandagarður 23

Luna Flórens is Iceland's only "gypsy bar." Part flower-child, part spiritual and with a whole lot of whimsy thrown into the mix, this cosy and hand-crafted bar is so intimate it makes you wanna spend the day musing about geodes, lunar cycles and tarot card readings. You can do all this and more while sipping on their excellent house cocktails and an excellent slice of vegan cake.

18. RVK Brewing Company

Skipholt 31

Yes, there is a bar on Skipholt, and yes, it is one that you need to check out. The RVK Brewing Company has slid



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New In Town ☆



Flæði Vesturgata 17

Flæði is back! The art venue—whose name translates to "Flow"—has finally re-opened in a new central Vesturgata spot and we could not be more jazzed. Since their humble beginnings last year on Gréttisgata, the team behind the space has sought to showcase marginalised artists and counter the bourgeois elite gallery culture found in other spaces here and abroad. Alongside exhibitions, they host concerts, events, and basically anything else under the sun. Here's to flowing and growing, friends. Long live! **HJC** 🇹🇷

under the radar since it opened, but now, we're here to bring it out of the shadows. The brewery and beer hall offers a varied list of brews, most of which they make themselves locally. Come and experience your new beer addiction.

19. English Pub

Austurstræti 12

True to its name, the English Pub offers many different kinds of lager on tap and a whiff of that genuine UK feel. Try the famous "wheel of fortune" where one can win up to a metre of beer with a single spin while a steady team of troubadours engage the crowd in classic sing-alongs every night. The only thing missing is the salt & vinegar crisps.

Shopping

20. Hildur Yeoman

Skólavörðustígur 22b

As well as selling her own designs—womenswear characterised by flowing shapes made from fine fabrics with colourful, distinctive, busy prints—Hildur Yeoman's boutique also features sunglasses by Le Specs, jewelry by Vanessa Mooney, French tea, and other interesting trinkets.

21. nomad.

Frakkastígur 8f

A relative newbie to the Laugavegur

scene, nomad. was a surprise runner-up for the Best Design Store at the 2020 Best of Reykjavik awards. They have a fantastically curated selection of books, lamps, candles and more. Plus, the owner is a photographer and often has exhibitions on the lower floor.

22. Wasteland Reykjavik

Ingólfsstræti 5

For super á la mode downtown Reykjavik looks—i.e. cheerleader uniforms, Guy Fieri t-shirts, and astronaut-esque jumpsuits—this second-hand store is the go-to.

23. Lucky Records

Rauðarárstígur 10

Lucky Records is the punky, underground horse of the Reykjavik record scene. It's one of those shops that is easy to get lost in—expect to easily spend an entire afternoon perusing their selection.

24. Melabúðin

Hagamel 39, 107

For foodies looking for artisanal deli meats, fresh figs, rare cheeses and all sorts of unexpected, hard-to-find treats, Vesturbær's beloved Melabúðin should satiate your desires.

25. Pastel Flower Studio

Baldursgata 36

Pastel Flower Studio is only open

on Fridays from 13:00 to 18:00—so plan accordingly. The studio uses cut, dried, and fresh flowers to create unique arrangements that reference classic Icelandic nature in an unexpected and innovative way. Trust us: You won't find a florist in the city that's in any way comparable.

26. Street Rats Tattoo

Hverfisgata 37

Kristófer, a.k.a. Sleepofer Tattoo, has proven himself to be a fresh, experimental artist whose works have become a somewhat coveted symbol in the city. So if you're looking to get your travel tattoo, go there. It's way more interesting than a Vegvisir.



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TRACK BY TRACK

‘My My’ By ROKKY

Looking for a bit of sexy, effortless mystery?

Words: **Hannah Jane Cohen** Photo: **Kim Izquierdo**



ROKKY first burst onto the scene in 2018 with her electro-pop banger “My Lips.” Now, she’s back with her long-awaited first EP. We sat down to talk with the Berlin-based chanteuse about it track by track.

My Lips

This song is the party starter and therefore rightfully so, the EP starter. Some people have asked me what exactly I’m referring to with “My Lips,” but I love a bit of mystery—it makes things more exciting, so I’d like to leave that open to interpretation. But one thing’s for sure, it’s sensual!

Somebody Else

The day I wrote this nugget, I realised I’d been worrying too much about what other people thought of

me. So I wrote it to remind myself that I am happy with who I am, I don’t have to act or dress according to what other people want, and I can be with whomever I want to be. I’m sure many people can relate to this.

Feel good about yourself and who you are. Don’t let other people get you down or tell you what to be or not to be—just love yourself!

Sunshine

“You’re my sunshine, everybody knows”—this is the EP’s other cutie. Most of us know that feeling of being completely infatuated with someone. They mean absolutely everything to you in that moment.

I spent a few months in France learning to surf a few summers ago. After only a month, I managed to somehow crack some ribs, which meant no more surfing. To say I was sad is an understatement, but it gave me more time to record music. I’d often played around with “Sunshine” on the guitar and even busked with it in the Berlin U-Bahn stations. It seemed to always make people smile, so while I was recording in France, I decided to try it out as an electronic song and there it was born! I returned to the exact same beautiful place to film the music video so I could capture

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some of the atmosphere that had helped create the song.

deux

I love French electronic music. The way they sing is so sexy and effortless. I had the language stuck in my head after staying there, so when I started improvising the lyrics and melody to this song, it simply came out best in French.

My Lover

“My Lover” is pure power. Having a lover isn’t always easy or simple— it can be confusing and messy, but it’s also a lot of fun and makes you smile. This song is all of those things mashed together and blasted out all at once.

My My

My mum’s favourite. She’s been waiting for this one to be released and here it is, just in time for her birthday! “My My” is filled with empowering emotion that makes me close my eyes, clench my fists and wave my arms around. The song is slightly heartbreaking because there’s not always a happy ending to every love story and there’s a chance that the answer to your questions could actually end up hurting you. I think people can connect to this feeling and the chorus’ uncertain lyrics: “When you see me there, will you love me more?”

This song is packed with emotions and allows you to release them while you sing along as loud as you can. 🎧

Music



Bára in her natural habitat

The Core Of The Winter

Turn off the lights and get claustrophobic for Bárka Gísladóttir’s newest release

Words: **Hannah Jane Cohen** Photo: **Art Bionick**

Album

‘HÍBER’ will be released on Sept. 4th.

“The funny thing is that I wasn’t even planning on releasing this album,” Bárka Gísladóttir says, a wide, animated smile taking over her face. The composer and double bassist is only weeks away from releasing her newest solo album, ‘HÍBER,’ a piece in eight movements for double bass and electronics. “I’ve been working on it for three years so it’s been a lot of time just thinking and digesting rather than actually working,” she admits. “The musical part is just the tip of the iceberg, which is always the case [for us all], but it’s even more so than usual here.”

In person, Bárka’s somewhat of a contradiction. Musically, her works tread the line between discomfort and beauty. Harsh, unrelenting and at times even uncomfortable, Bárka’s tonal creations require active, focused listening in the most primal sense. Before meeting her, based solely on her art, I expect to find an intense, sullen Edgar Allen Poe-esque character. Instead, I’m treated to a vivacious, expressive woman whose prose and reflections on her works—and music in general—embody the word thoughtful. Not to mention, she’s pretty funny too.

Words before music

“‘HÍBER’ is an exploration of texture and darkness, where core serves as a common thread. The title itself is a word stem referring to hibernus, meaning wintry, or of pertaining to winter or suitable for getting through winter,” Bárka explains. “I wanted ‘HÍBER’ to boast the idea of winter lasting longer than a semester. ‘HÍBER’ also refers to hibernation, portraying both the process and the content of the album itself.”

And this entomological research, Bárka emphasises, goes much deeper than you’d expect. “In fact, a lot of these pieces had titles before they were even written,” she reveals.

For instance, the fifth movement—an affecting, almost apothecotic polar track—is entitled “tvíhirta.” “The word ‘tvíhirta’ may sound Icelandic, but it is sort of a made-up word. Tví meaning ‘two of something’ and hirta [is reminiscent] of ‘hjarta’ (heart). Somehow I also relate hirta to ‘flétta’ (braid), which does not really make much sense at all, but is important to understand the content of the movement itself,” she explains. “‘Tvíhirta’ deals with the concept of an organism having two hearts, but perhaps not naturally. Tvíhirta is spun out of the thoughts on a body being—even unwillingly—given an extra heart with a somewhat horrific transplant.”

Playing physical

The bass might be—to those unfiliated with contemporary composition—an unusual choice for a solo instrument. But for Bárka, though, it’s the most fitting one for her nature.

“The bass invites you to dig deep, both literally and figuratively. It has the most intense and also the most diverse soundscape of the string instruments,” she says, before laughing and joking that she hopes her violinist friends don’t get angry at her boldness. “I also think I’m a bit physical in what I do. I just feel that I can merge with my instrument and I don’t know if I could feel that way with, say, a trumpet.” She smiles. “Then of course I know a lot of fantastic trumpet players! People find what works for them.”

But, while listening to Bárka’s works, it’s clear she has an affinity for the droning instrument, and the album—mixed by her long-time collaborator Skúli Sverrisson—is the epitome of this. So how should one prepare to experience ‘HÍBER’? “I’d personally want to be in a small, dark room with huge speakers and listen to it really loud,” she says. “Then sit and close your eyes.” And enter hibernation. 🐻

“The bass invites you to dig deep, both literally and figuratively. It has the most intense and also the most diverse soundscape of the string instruments.”



MUSIC NEWS

Sigur Rós has announced that they’ll be **producing their own brand of CBD tinctures** in collaboration with Icelandic CBD company, Vona. The two types on offer are entitled SLEEP and WAKE. The first is meant for relaxation, the latter for improved concentration. Each are 1,000 mg and, as their official statement explains, made from craft organic hemp and grown from hand-picked seeds. While the legality of CBD has been a source for much recent discussion here, there is no explicit ban on the chemical (though cannabis itself is illegal.) “As the world spins ever faster, our collective hope is for a better life: healthier, less stressful, more benevolent and inspiring, for others and ourselves,” the statement concludes. Good guy Sigur Rós: doing their part to make 2020 a bit chillier. Cue the didgeridoos.



Rejoice! Ya boi **Ólafur Arnalds** has been **nominated for an Emmy Award in the ‘Outstanding Original Main Title Theme Music’** category for his work on the Apple TV+ show **Defending Jacob**. Ólafur has long been a Grapevine favourite, so you could say we’ve known what’s up for a long time. In fact, he was named the ‘Artist Of The Year’ at the 2019 Grapevine Music Awards, which is arguably just as important as the Emmys. The composer is known for his experimental/minimalist piano tunes, and if you’ve somehow gone your entire life without listening to Óli, go stream his newest album ‘re:member’ right now. Right. Now. The awards will be presented on September 20th. Fingers crossed.



Put the CBD down. Production duo **Rat:io**—winner of the ‘One To Watch’ award at the 2020 Grapevine Music Awards—have **dropped their first solo album ‘DANS’**. Composed of Bjarki Sigurðarson and Teitur Helgi Skúlason, the duo burst onto the scene in 2018 with their debut production release, GDRN’s ‘Hvað ef,’ later collaborating with ClubDub, una schram and more. ‘DANS’ serves up seven songs with features from Birnir, Lil Binni, Bríet, Logi Pedro, GDRN, krassasig, una schram and Young Karin. The final song on the album, “Dans Við Mig,” even sees Bjarki and Teitur making their own singing debut. Rat:io, please remember us when y’all are famous. **HJC**

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Our Picks



GDRN Album Release Concert ★

September 4th - 20:00 - Háskólabíó - 4,990 ISK

Known for her smooth, groovy tunes set to steady trap beats, GDRN is unquestionably one of the current Icelandic music scene's reigning queens. Last February, she dropped her eponymous second album. Though some songs like "Vorið" and "Augnablik" stay true

to the relaxed, quiet vibes of her previous album 'Hvað ef,' most of the songs on the new album such as "Af og til," "Upp," and "Höfin" show off newer, jazzy sorts of upbeat sounds and rhythms that one can't help but sway along to. Having already rescheduled the release concert due to the original gathering ban, she looks forward to hopefully definitively celebrating its release by welcoming fans to Háskólabíó in September. **NB**



Record Store Day! ★

Aug. 29th - All Day - Everywhere!

Take your music home after celebrating with your local record store. There'll be events everywhere! **CM**



Elin Hall Album Release Concert ★

Aug. 21st - 20:00 - Flóran Garden Bistro - 2,500 ISK

Describing her own music as "having a retro soundscape and timeless sincerity with a focus on candid story-telling," Elin Hall will be celebrating the release of her debut album 'Með Öðrum Orðum,' an assortment of thoughtful and sentimental tunes. **NB**



Lord Of The Rings Movie Pubquiz ★

Aug. 18th - 19:00 - Stúdentakjallarinn

Where was Gondor when the Westfold fell? Not with Rohan, that's for sure. We will never forget... **HJC**



Hipsumhaps ★

Aug. 28th - 21:00 - Gamla Bíó - 3,990 ISK

Riding on the success of their autumn release 'Best gleymdu leyndarmálin' ("Best Forgotten Secrets"), the group will be playing the soft and melodic album in its entirety, mixed with new and unreleased material. Not convinced? Listen to "Lifið sem mig langar í." You'll be obsessed. **NB**

August 14th—September 10th

Concerts & Nightlife

Events listed are all live performances, shows and DJs. Venues are listed by day. For complete listings and detailed information on venues visit grapevine.is/happening. Send your listings to: listings@grapevine.is.

Friday August 14th

Múlinn Jazz Club: Karl Orgeltrío
20:00 Harpa
Glerakur
17:00 12 Tónar
Friday Night Comedy Show
21:00 Secret Cellar
Harpa Guided Tour
14:00 Harpa
Open Piano Recital
15:00 Harpa

Saturday August 15th

Listahátið í Reykjavík:
FjarVera // NoShow
13:00 Secret Location
Saturday Night Comedy Show
21:00 Secret Cellar
Harpa Guided Tour With Live Music
15:30 Harpa

Sunday August 16th

★ Demonstration of Support for LGBTQ People In Poland
16:00 The Polish Embassy
NBA Sundays
17:00 Secret Cellar

Monday August 17th

Soulflow: Women & Queer Open-Mic Comedy Show
20:00 Gaukurinn
Open-Mic
21:00 Secret Cellar

Tuesday August 18th

Listahátið í Reykjavík:
FjarVera // NoShow
15:00 Secret Location
Karaoke Party!
20:00 Gaukurinn
Pub Quiz
20:00 Secret Cellar

Wednesday August 19th

★ Lord Of The Rings Movie Pub Quiz
19:00 Stúdentakjallarinn
All You Can Eat Wings Wednesday
All Day, BrewDog Reykjavík
Harpa Guided Tour
14:00 Harpa

Thursday August 20th

Halldór Smáráson 'STARA' Release Concert
20:00 Harpa
Dumplings Night!
17:00 Makake Restaurant
Listahátið í Reykjavík:
FjarVera // NoShow
15:00 Secret Location
Pub Quiz
21:00 Stúdentakjallarinn
Karaoke Night
19:00 Secret Cellar

Friday August 21st

★ Elin Hall Album Release Concert
All Day, Everywhere!
Friday Night Comedy Show
21:00 Secret Cellar
Harpa Guided Tour
14:00 Harpa

Saturday August 22nd

Lucy In Blue
21:00 Gaukurinn
Saturday Night Comedy Show
21:00 Secret Cellar
Listahátið í Reykjavík:
FjarVera // NoShow
13:00 Secret Location

Sunday August 23rd

NBA Sundays
17:00 Secret Cellar

Monday August 24th

Soulflow: Women & Queer Open-Mic Comedy Show
20:00 Gaukurinn
Open-Mic
21:00 Secret Cellar

Tuesday August 25th

Karaoke Party!
20:00 Gaukurinn
Pub Quiz
20:00 Secret Cellar

Wednesday August 26th

All You Can Eat Wings Wednesday

All Day, BrewDog Reykjavík

Thursday August 27th

Museum Free Thursdays!
17:00 Hafnarhús
Pub Quiz
21:00 Stúdentakjallarinn
Dumplings Night!
17:00 Makake Restaurant
Karaoke Night
19:00 Secret Cellar

Friday August 28th

★ Hipsumhaps
21:00 Gamla Bíó
Brött Brekka
17:00 12 Tónar
Friday Night Comedy Show
21:00 Secret Cellar

Saturday August 29th

★ Björk Orkestral Livestream
17:00 Harpa & Online
★ Record Store Day
All Day, Everywhere!
Reykjavik Ensemble International
Theatre: I Shall Always Return
16:00, 18:00 IDNÓ
Reykjavik Jazz Festival:
Rebekka Blöndal & Marina Ósk
15:00 Jómfrúin
Reykjavik Jazz Festival:
Charlie Parker At 100
19:30 Harpa
Reykjavik Jazz Festival:
Tómar R. Latin Party
21:00 Harpa
Reykjavik Jazz Festival:
Annes
22:30 Harpa
Saturday Night Comedy Show
21:00 Secret Cellar

Sunday August 30th

Reykjavik Ensemble International
Theatre: I Shall Always Return
16:00, 18:00 IDNÓ
NBA Sundays
17:00 Secret Cellar
Reykjavik Jazz Festival:
Hafdis Bjarnadóttir & Parallax
20:00 Harpa
Reykjavik Jazz Festival:
Silent Movie Concert 'The General'
20:30 Óháði söfnuðurinn
Reykjavik Jazz Festival:
Óskar Guðjónsson & Skúli Sverrisson
21:15 Harpa

Monday August 31st

Soulflow: Women & Queer Open-Mic Comedy Show
20:00 Gaukurinn
Open-Mic
21:00 Secret Cellar
Reykjavik Jazz Festival:
Kristjana Stefáns Quintet
12:00 Óháði söfnuðurinn

Reykjavik Jazz Festival:
Jónsson & Jónsson Quartet
17:00 Ráðhús Reykjavíkur
Reykjavik Jazz Festival: OKUMA
20:00 Mengi
Reykjavik Jazz Festival: Dalalæða
20:00 Harpa
Reykjavik Jazz Festival: HÓBÍT
21:15 Mengi
Reykjavik Jazz Festival:
Sunna Gunnlaugs Trio
21:15 Harpa

Tuesday September 1st

Reykjavik Jazz Festival:
Erik Quick 4tet
12:00 Óháði söfnuðurinn
Reykjavik Jazz Festival:
Anna Gréta Quartet
17:00 Ráðhús Reykjavíkur
Reykjavik Jazz Festival:
Meraki Trio
20:00 Harpa
Reykjavik Jazz Festival:
Agnar Már Magnússon - Mór
21:15 Harpa
Karaoke Party!
20:00 Gaukurinn
Pub Quiz
20:00 Secret Cellar

Wednesday September 2nd

All You Can Eat Wings Wednesday
All Day, BrewDog Reykjavík
Reykjavik Jazz Festival:
Gunnar Gunnarsson Featuring The Frikirkjan Choir
12:00 Frikirkjan
Reykjavik Jazz Festival: Gammar
17:00 Ráðhús Reykjavíkur
Reykjavik Jazz Festival:
Pórdís Gerður - Sonata & Songs By Kurt Weill
20:00 Harpa
Reykjavik Jazz Festival:
Sölvi & Magnús + Hilmar Jensson
20:00 Mengi
Reykjavik Jazz Festival:
Ingibjörg Turchi
21:15 Mengi

Thursday September 3rd

Dumplings Night!
17:00 Makake Restaurant
Hafnarhús Free Thursdays!
17:00 Hafnarhús
Karaoke Night
19:00 Secret Cellar
Reykjavik Jazz Festival:
Ingi Bjarni - Neither Folk Nor Jazz
12:00 Frikirkjan
Reykjavik Jazz Festival:
Túmi Árnason - Hljúnun
17:00 Ráðhús Reykjavíkur
Reykjavik Jazz Festival:
Sigmar Matthíasson - METAPHOR
19:30 Tjarnarbíó
Reykjavik Jazz Festival: Family Band
20:45 Tjarnarbíó
Reykjavik Jazz Festival:

ASA Trio & Jóel Pálsson
22:00 Tjarnarbíó

Friday September 4th

★ GDRN Album Release Concert
20:00 Háskólabíó
Volcanova Album Release Show
20:00 Hard Rock Café
Friday Night Comedy Show
21:00 Secret Cellar
Reykjavik Jazz Festival:
Jóel Pálsson & Eypór Gunnarsson
12:00 Frikirkjan
Reykjavik Jazz Festival:
LOS BOMBONEROS Y SUS BOMBASTICOS
17:00 Ráðhús Reykjavíkur
Reykjavik Jazz Festival:
Unnur Birna & Bjössi Thor
19:30 Tjarnarbíó
Reykjavik Jazz Festival: Hegge (NO)
20:45 Tjarnarbíó
Reykjavik Jazz Festival:
Iceland's Liberation Orchestra
20:00 Harpa

Saturday September 5th

Saturday Night Comedy Show
21:00 Secret Cellar
Reykjavik Jazz Festival:
Einar Scheving Quartet
19:30 Harpa
Reykjavik Jazz Festival: Melissa Aldana
21:00 Harpa

Sunday September 6th

Vikingur Ólafsson Performs
Debussy & Rameau
20:00 Harpa

Monday September 7th

Vikingur Ólafsson Performs
Debussy & Rameau
20:00 Harpa
Soulflow: Women & Queer Open-Mic Comedy Show
20:00 Gaukurinn
Open-Mic
21:00 Secret Cellar

Tuesday September 8th

Karaoke Party!
20:00 Gaukurinn
Pub Quiz
20:00 Secret Cellar

Wednesday September 9th

All You Can Eat Wings Wednesday
All Day, BrewDog Reykjavík

Thursday September 10th

Dumplings Night!
17:00 Makake Restaurant
Karaoke Night
19:00 Secret Cellar

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Art

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"There is this idea that Scandinavia is seen as this egalitarian kind of utopia..."

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Working Class Artist

Wiola Ujazdowska uses her voice to level criticism at the treatment of immigrants in Iceland

Words: Sam O'Donnell Photo: Provided by subject

ourful and it's not a dream. There is a lot of xenophobia and inequality."

Her own history is something that draws her to this topic. "I'm actually the first person in my family to have a higher education," she says. Her parents and the people she grew up with were all working class. She has experience as a housekeeper, which she feels is integral to the tone of her art. "Often the voice of other groups is not heard, and very often the art world doesn't want to hear it."

Recent and upcoming stuff

In September, she will be involved in an exhibition called Common Ground, which features Icelandic artists, as well as Polish and Lithuanian artists living in Iceland. She will be displaying artwork that is inspired by the fire on Bræðraborgarstígur. "It shows that there are some spots in the system that allow for people to be used, especially foreign and temporary workers," she says.

From now until the 24th of August, she is in the eastern part of the country, working as a producer-slash-curator-slash-artist of the VOR/WIOSNA festival featuring art from Polish people living in Iceland. The festival doesn't feature art from Poles in Poland. "We present and promote and talk about Polish minorities here because I think it's different circumstances."

Inspirations

Joseph Beuys was a firm believer that everyone is an artist. He said his greatest work as an artist was education, and Wiola sees him as a mentor. "His works definitely had a huge impact on me," she says.

Mierle Laderman Ukeles was a New York based artist who created the idea of maintenance art. She worked as a janitor, cleaning museums in New York City. As a working wife and mother, she didn't have time to create art in a conventional sense, so she made these household actions an art. "Her works have influenced me

to focus on working-class immigrants and people who are usually invisible for art and society in general," Wiola says.

Perhaps the biggest impact Mierle's work has had on Wiola is 'Touch Sanitation,' a milestone of performance art in which she met over 8,500 employees of the New York Sanitation department, shaking hands with each of them and saying "Thank you for keeping New York City alive."

The Scandinavian Dream

This focus on the working class spoke directly to Wiola, and inspired her to make performance art. In June, she did a performance at the Reykjavik City Library where she vacuumed up the words "Scandinavian Dream." She says that this is a commentary on how Iceland treats the working class. "There is this idea that Scandinavia is seen as this egalitarian kind of utopia for many people," she says. "But the truth is that it's not so col-

"Often the voice of other groups is not heard, and very often the art world doesn't want to hear it."

Our Picks



★ Ókei, Au pair

Until October 24th - Hverfisgallerí

In his third solo exhibition, Stuttgart-based artist **Davíð Örn Halldórsson** showcases his signature unconventional methods of painting, most notably using found-furniture as a canvas for his bold, vibrant creations. We're talking old doors, random bits of ceilings—the contents of your grandma's garage have never looked this good. Davíð Örn trained as a visual artist at The Icelandic Academy of the Arts before relocating to Germany, but frequently exhibits his work here in Reykjavík. The curators at Hverfisgallerí sure do know their stuff, so if they rate Davíð Örn Halldórsson worthy, you should too! Right? **PA**



★ Flokk Til You Drop Clothing Market

Aug. 30th - 12:00-17:00 - Museum of Design And Applied Art
Selling treasures found while sorting out a ton of material from the Red Cross, as well as unique garments made from "ruined" textiles that are looking for a new home, this clothing market serves up sustainability. **CM**



★ Hverfandi

Aug. 22nd - Sept. 27th - Kling & Bang
María Rún Þrándardóttir's first solo exhibition presents her artistic take on contemporary concerns such as climate change, feminism, the relationship between nature and man. **CM**



★ Forests / Glaciers

Aug 22nd - Nov. 15th - Reykjavík Museum of Photography
Highlighting the delicate relationship between forests and glaciers, this photographic exhibition depicts the profound impact these two very different elements have on the Icelandic environment. **CM**

August 14th—September 10th

Art Listings

Events are listed by venue. For complete listings and detailed information on venues, visit grapevine.is/happening. Send your listings to: listings@grapevine.is

Opening

REYKJAVÍK MUSEUM OF PHOTOGRAPHY
Forest / Glaciers By Takashi Nakagawa
In this exhibition, award-winning photographer Takasi Nakagawa concentrates on the relationship between Icelandic forests and glaciers. Around the time of human settlement in Iceland more than a thousand years ago, nearly 40% of the country was covered by forest. That number quickly dropped to less than 1% because of deforestation. Reforestation began around 100 years ago, but still forests only cover around 2% of the land. What impact does this have?
• Opens on August 6th, 2020
• Runs until January 3rd, 2021

KLING OG BANG
Porous Tomorrow
Working across sculpture, video, sound, text and performance, Aniara Ömann's art explores the apparent boundaries of and between individual objects. Using shapes and materials found in manual special effects and prop productions, she draws on the aesthetic language of Science Fiction to reflect contemporary states of humanity.
• Opens on August 22nd, 2020
• Runs until September 27th, 2020
Hverfandi
Upcoming artist María Rún Þrándardóttir's first public solo exhibition presents her artistic take on contemporary concerns such as climate change, feminism, the relationship between nature and man, but also language in installations and video art.
• Opens on August 22nd, 2020
• Runs until September 27th, 2020

EINAR JÓNSSON MUSEUM
Permanent Exhibition
The museum contains close to 300 artworks including a beautiful garden with 26 bronze casts of the artist's sculptures.

REYKJAVÍK CITY MUSEUM
Settlement Exhibition
As Viking ruins meet digital technology, this exhibition provides insight into Reykjavík's farms at the time of the first settlers.

REYKJAVÍK ART MUSEUM - ÁSMUNDARSAFN
Ásmundur Sveinsson: Under the Same Sky
Ásmundarsafn is named after sculptor Ásmundur Sveinsson. This new permanent exhibition presents the artist in a new light. What dialogue does his works provoke?

A selection of over 80 works chosen from the national gallery's collection displays the evolution of art since the 19th century.
• Runs until October 4th, 2020
High Plane VI
Katrín Sigurðardóttir has for some years been exploring the effects of perception in her installations and works. Here, she dismantles a classic theme of Icelandic paintings: mountains, the blue of distant vistas, and the obsession with Icelandic nature.
• Runs until January 3rd, 2021
Mats Gustafson
Swedish artist Mats Gustafson has always had a special feeling for the transient nature of watercolour. This exhibition contains all his best-known works, including ones made with fashion houses Dior, Yohji Yamamoto, Comme des Garçons, and more.
• Runs until August 30th, 2020
Electromagnetic Objects
The "Electromagnetic Objects" are a collection of works by Woody Vasulka and the audio artist Brian O'Reilly. According to O'Reilly, "the works use sources excavated directly from the output of the Electromagnetic Objects, as well as further manipulations using Tom Demeyer's ImX software, developed with input from Steina." Sounds complicated, but we still stan.
• Runs until December 31st. 2020

• Runs until September 30th, 2020
Ásmundur For Families
Children get free entry to learn about Ásmundur Sveinsson, after whom the museum is named.
• Runs until September 30th, 2020

REYKJAVÍK MUSEUM OF PHOTOGRAPHY
Witness
The photographic exhibition Witness is opening in unusual times, when its subject has temporarily disappeared. The visitor, in Iceland to see cascading waterfalls, advancing glaciers and surf crashing on the shore, is absent. Iceland's nature is alone once more.
• Runs until September 13th, 2020
Obscure Presence
Coming from a small isolated island with extreme weather conditions and almost unearthly landscapes, Icelanders have a unique connection with the unknown. Here, Gunnlöð Jóna Rúnarsdóttir explores that unique connection.
• Runs until August 16th, 2020

REYKJAVÍK MARITIME MUSEUM
Fish & Folk
Name a better duo than fish and Iceland. You can't. So come learn about the history of Icelandic fisheries from row boats to monstrous trawlers.
Melckmeyt 1659
Melckmeyt was a Dutch merchant ship that crashed near Flatey Island in 1659. Explore the wreck here, with two images of different origins against each other.

MUSEUM OF DESIGN AND APPLIED ART
Paperflowers
The bookwork 'Paperflowers' was made by Rína Porkelsdóttir over a period of two years on a Rotaprint machine at her studio in Amsterdam. In 2007, she along with Tao Kurihara made fabric inspired by the work, along with a summer collection using that.
• Runs until September 6th, 2020
Sveinn Kjarval
This exhibition focuses on the pioneering work of Sveinn Kjarval, one of the most pioneering furniture makers and interior designers in the country. While many pieces have been lost in time, there will be photographs showing never-before-seen designs.
• Runs until August 30th, 2020
Recycle Til You Drop Workshop
This project hopes to raise awareness about Icelanders' consumer culture and the amount that people donate to the Red Cross. In it, one tonne of clothing needs sorting. Afterwards, it'll need to be analysed and creatively altered. What information can be read from one tonne?
• Runs until August 30th, 2020

REYKJAVÍK ART MUSEUM - HAFNARHÚS
Erró: Cyborg
This series of the great Erró was inspired by technology, science and the combination of the human and the mechanic. In particular, it examines how technology invades the body and how the human body adapts to the machine. The images offer questions concerning the borderlines between human beings and technology.
• Runs until December 31st, 2020
Gilbert & George: The Great Exhibition
For over five decades, British artist duo Gilbert & George have shaped contemporary art. At this special exhibition, come challenge the prevailing bourgeois ideas of taste and decorum while empowering gays and other minority groups. What else could you want?
• Runs until January 3rd, 2021

HAFNARBORG
DesignMarch: material:wood
Wood is an organic matter that bends equally to the laws of nature and chance. It does not yield easily and the material itself often affects the final outcome, whether in regards to shape or finish. It also composes trees, which we like to hug.
• Runs until August 23rd, 2020

WIND & WEATHER WINDOW GALLERY
Millihlustargátt / Auditory Intergate
Freyja Eilíf—a favourite of the Grapevine—serves up a site-specific mixed-medium installation made of wood, paint and clay. In it, abstract shapes in shades of green coalesce to make an aesthetic dream. Remember: The window is open all day, everyday, so stop by.
• Runs until August 27th, 2020

REYKJAVÍK ART MUSEUM - KJARVALSSTADIR
Jóhannes S. Kjarval: At Home
Jóhannes Sveinsson Kjarval (1885-1972) was one of the pioneers of Icelandic art (the museum is literally named after him) and is one of the country's most beloved artists. His connection to, and interpretation of Iceland's natural environment is thought to have taught Icelanders to appreciate it anew, and to have encouraged pride in the country's uniqueness and the world of adventure to be discovered within it.
• Runs until December 31st, 2020
What It Seems - Reality on Canvas 1970-2020
Many painters seek to achieve an impression of realism in their works. But is everything what it seems in paintings made in a realistic style? We don't know, that's why they made an exhibit about it.
• Runs until October 4th, 2020

DJÚPAVÍK & PINGEYRI
The Factory
A monument to a herring-era gold rush, 'The Factory' is a roadmap of how such buildings as the abandoned and remote Djúpa Vík herring factory can be used to foster community, culture and tourism. On the other side of the Westfjords, there will be a sister exhibition in Píngeyri.
• Runs until September 14th, 2020

GERÐARSAFN KÓPAVOGUR ART MUSEUM
After All
Twelve contemporary Icelandic artists show their take on everyday beauty, light and humour in reflection of the present situation in the world and what really drives and matters to us.
• Runs until August 23rd, 2020

MUSEUM OF DESIGN AND APPLIED ART

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COMIC



Atla Hrafney getting inspiration

The Summer Of Comics

The Icelandic Comics Society stays busy in the pandemic

Words: **Andie Sophia Fontaine** Photo: **Art Bicnick**

While the coronavirus pandemic has shut down a lot of events in Iceland this summer, the members of the Icelandic Comics Society (TICS) have been keeping themselves occupied nonetheless. Atla Hrafney, chairman and co-founder of the Icelandic Comics Society, and a comics author in her own right, tells us that this summer has given TICS plenty to do.

"We were very fortunate, up until this month, to be able to get every single event that we wanted to do off the ground," she says. "Covid was never an exceptional issue for us. It wasn't until August that we had to cancel anything."

To the libraries

"We had a week-long workshop with teenagers aged between 10 and 14 at the Reykjavik Art Museum," Atla says. "This was done as a way to do more long-form workshops. We then got an offer from Hitt Húsið to apply for their summer work, and two of our comics creators got in. This allowed us to push a couple of comics creators into a government-sponsored summer jobs."

They have been seeing a lot of success with more children-oriented events, such as their participation in the Children's Cultural Festival, but have also set their sights on expanding the readership of local comics creators

through Reykjavik area libraries.

"We've been trying to create zines sections in government and municipal libraries," she says. "There's already been a potential success in Garðabær, which we're still finalising, but they've agreed to have a zine section and we're excited to see that come to fruition. There have been talks with a lot of municipalities about this, to find a home for shorter-form comics in library systems. That's been our mission during the pandemic, when we don't really have a lot of energy to do a lot of different events. Experimenting with a lot of different infrastructure-building like that."

Islands in the stream

While they have had to cancel a couple of big events this month due to the pandemic, they're focusing more on "low-key events" while also moving towards streaming events.

In fact, they held a streaming event last spring featuring comics artists from all over the country engaging in "a digital comics jam, with the idea of our vice chairman Vigdís would draw up things we were talking about. We filled a whole board with doodles based on our comics conversation topics." They hope to bring in more international artists for these streaming sessions in the future.

For the new year, they're aiming to create "a shared space for comics creators and illustrators outside the capital area. If that comes to fruition, we would have a place to hold workshops in more of a wild setting, engaging both local and international artists."

But here in this year, they plan on translating Scott McCloud's 'Understanding Comics' into Icelandic, and will also release an anthology of the comics their members have done.

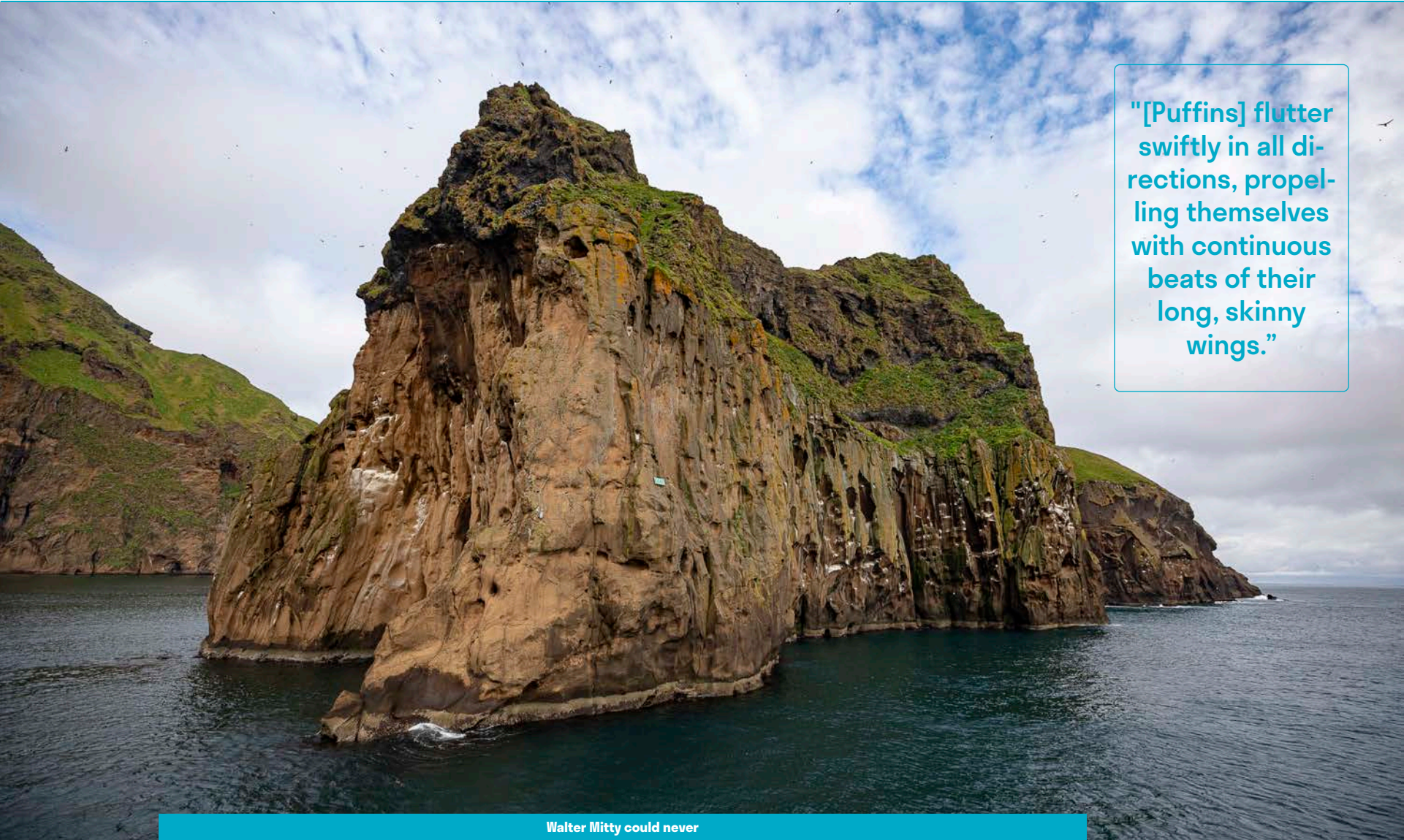
If they had it all

The goals that TICS aims for are within what they are able to do, but even if there were no limit to their available resources, their aims would still be altruistic.

"If we had all the money and resources in the world, we would probably be trying to find ways to help gently change structures in ways that are positive beyond comics," Atla says. "We would push for more festivals and more comics societies in Iceland. We've also run into a unique situation where comics are at the forefront of school literacy discussions, and if we had our way, we'd be able to help kids with reading disabilities to access comics on a more academic level. Beyond that, to be able to help every person to do comics, so that their personal expression could be heard."

As it is, TICS is doing everything they can within the confines of the pandemic.

"We're just trying to do as much as we can with the limited resources that are available to everyone right now, seeing what sticks and what doesn't, what actually engages people," she says. "And we've found surprisingly a lot of success given the restrictions of this year." 🐦



Walter Mitty could never



A Day In The 900

Food, folks, and fulmars in the Westman Islands

Travel distance
from Reykjavik:
150 km

Car provided by:
[gocarrental.is](#)

Ferry provided by:
[herjolfur.is](#)

Words:
Nico Borbely

Photos:
Art Bicnick

In a country already known for its isolation and dazzling nature, the Westman Islands (Vestmannaeyjar) still manage to feel especially far-flung. The archipelago shines bright under its green summer cloak, while grey seabirds called fulmars twirl and dance effortlessly through the gale, some of them soaring right alongside the ferry, which journeys daily from Landeyjahöfn to Heimaey, the largest island and home to the Westmans' only town. On the final approach to the harbour, the bright greens contrast starkly with the vibrant coppery and tawny browns of the cliffs flanking the harbour. My travel companion, Grapevine photographer Art Bicnick, has been to Heimaey numerous times and puts it quite aptly: "When the sun is out here,

it looks like somewhere in the Caribbean."

Lunch & learning

After the early morning, two-hour drive and forty-minute ferry ride to reach Heimaey, a good, substantial lunch is in order. Enter Gott. One of the Islands' best-known eateries, its owners make all sauces, stews, soups, bread, and cakes on site from local ingredients with great care. The cauliflower burger makes for a filling, but refreshing lunch, stuffed with a mixture of cauliflower, avocado, quinoa, and tomatoes, held together with fluffy mashed sweet potatoes and served with a side of small potatoes baked to absolute perfection.

With body and mind reenergized, it's off to the Sagnheimar Folk Museum, which features exhibits on many surprising and peculiar episodes of the Islands' history: for example, the importance of the annual festival, its 1627 invasion by Ottoman pirates, its numerous inhabitants who converted to Mormonism and emigrated to Utah, puffin hunting traditions of yore (now largely abandoned), the 1973 eruption that saw the evacuation of all islanders for several months, and the numerous locals who represented Iceland in the 1936 Olympics. Museum curator Hörður Baldvinsson gestures to a notebook on the wall belonging to one of the athletes, filled with handwritten notes on its pages. "[He] was friends with Jesse Owens, who left him a note in this memory book of his," he explains. "We got it from his family."

Puffins & plant-based

After having amply experienced the island's gastronomy and history, it's time for some nature as a digestif. Thielittle peninsula of Stórhöfði winds outward from Heimaey's southern tip in a sinu-

ous semicircle, and is home to vibrant seabird colonies. Fulmars, kittiwakes, guillemots, Iceland gulls, and gannets all nest in great numbers here, but of course the Atlantic puffins, whose largest colony in the world can be found on this island, are the stars of the show. They flutter swiftly in all directions, propelling themselves with continuous beats of their long, skinny wings, ferrying catches of eels in their dazzlingly multicolored bills back and forth to their burrows to feed their young, who according to Hörður, will probably be fledging in the next week or so.

While the puffins relish their catch, we instead opt for mid-afternoon drinks at the Brothers Brewery. A wide selection of beers is on offer, with something on the menu for all tastes, from fruity IPAs to hearty lagers. One of the most notable drinks on the menu is the Óskar imperial stout, a strong brew with a hint of almond that gives it an almost coffee-like taste, the latest in a long-running series of annual house brews named after local sailors. The day ends with dinner at Éta, a burger restaurant newly opened by the owner of Slippurinn just across the street. Boasting a crisply cooked bean patty topped with generous quantities of pickled onions, served alongside cauliflower buffalo wings cooked to perfection, the vegan burger combo makes for a satisfying, filling, and delicious end to the day. ☺



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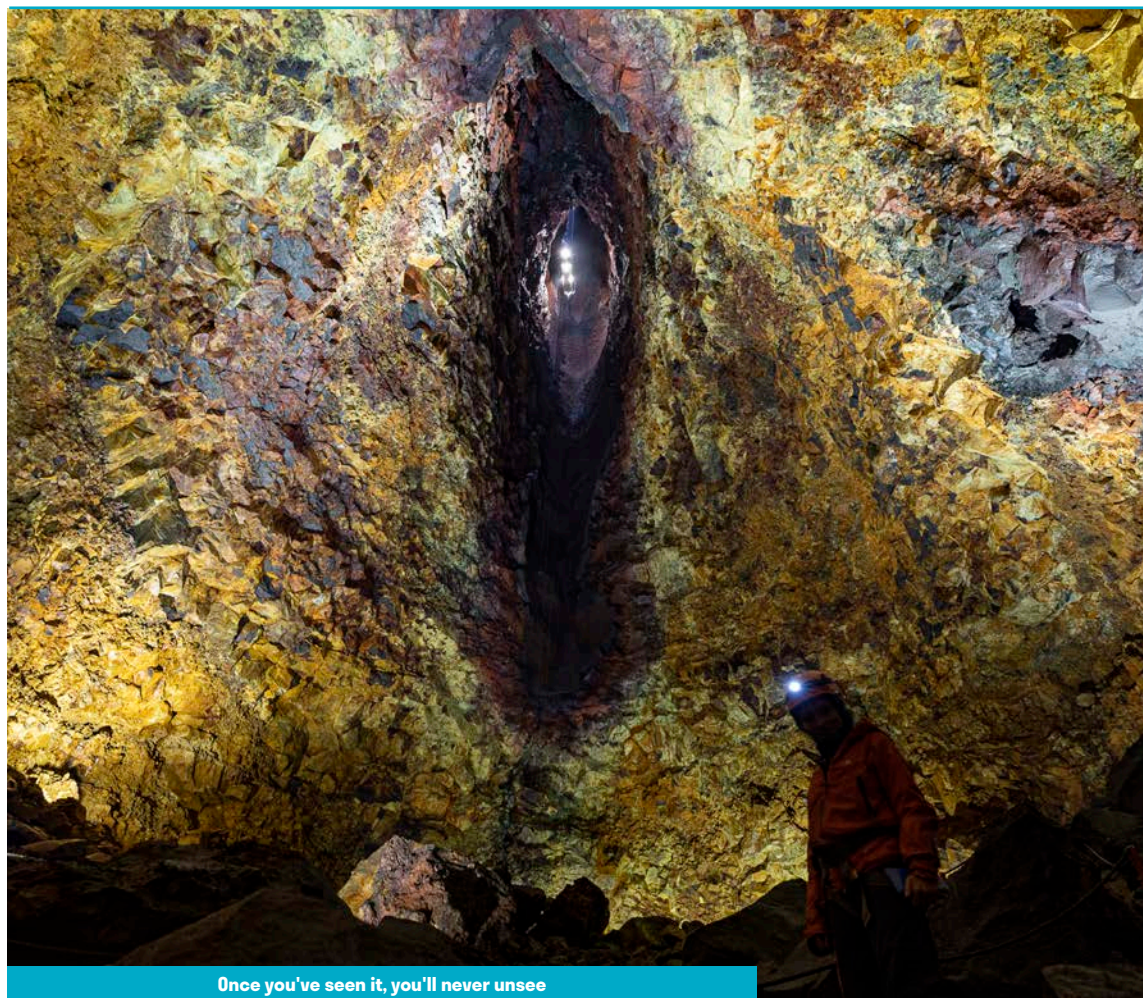


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Guide

The Reykjavik Grapevine 30
Issue 06—2020



Once you've seen it, you'll never unsee

Rifts, Rain And Rebirth

Getting up close and (very) personal with the
Þríhnúkagígur volcano

Words: **Poppy Askham** Photos: **Art Bicnick**

Childhood adventure books led me to believe that descending into a volcano would be a far more frequent occurrence than it has proven to be in my life so far. Today, with the help of the Inside The Volcano tour at Þríhnúkagígur, I will begin to right that wrong.

Þríhnúkagígur—which roughly translates to “try to pronounce that you English-speaking sucker” (or to be pedantic “three peak volcano”)—is a geological oddity. When magma cools after an eruption, it solidifies and fills the volcano's cone. But after Þríhnúkagígur erupted, the magma simply disappeared as though someone had pulled out the plug, leaving a uniquely preserved cavity, ready to be explored by wannabe spelunkers like myself.

When it rains, it pours

Much to my dismay, on arrival at Bláfiöll Nature Reserve, I discover that a 3.5 kilometre hike lies between me and my childhood fantasies.

“The Highlands are Iceland's wettest region,” our tour guide announces as we set out into the mossy lava field. As if to prove her point, the heavens promptly open, releasing that special kind of Icelandic rain that defies the laws of physics to ensure you get soaked from every angle.

Halfway through the trek we cross a small wooden bridge over an unassuming fissure in the lava field. In fact, we learn, it's the architect of today's escapade: the Mid-Atlantic Ridge—a diverging tectonic plate boundary that is pulling Iceland in half at a rate of roughly two centimetres a year, thrilling geography nerds in the process.

Journey Towards The Centre Of The Earth

Eventually we reach base camp

and promptly don our unflattering mustard-yellow helmets and harnesses, ready for the real adventure. Sartorial concerns are soon replaced with a giddy excitement as we reach the crater. A metal bridge juts out over the abyss, leading to a souped-up window-cleaner's lift that will transport us into the bowels of the earth.

It's at this point that fear should probably kick in. We are suspended in a tiny open-lift above a 198 metre drop—for reference that's the height of 666 puffins—but it appears my self-preservation instinct has momentarily stopped functioning. There is in fact little to be scared about; we are trussed up in safety equipment and accompanied by a trained rescue worker. What's more, Þríhnúkagígur is dormant; the most recent eruption occurred some 4,000 years ago. Somewhat disappointingly, it seems the greatest threat to my life throughout the trip is probably my own clumsy feet—a detail I shall neglect to include in future dramatic retellings of this adventure.

After six minutes of steady descent through the layers of the

earth's surface, we are untethered from the metal cage and can step out into the chamber. Free to roam the cavern's rock-strewn paths, I marvel at the shadowy lava tubes and jewel-toned mineral deposits daubed on the walls. It's hard to imagine the cathedral-like cavity once filled with magma, especially given the fact that the temperature has dropped to just 2°C.

A turn for the hipper

“When you get to the lowest point, look up at the vent, you might recognise the shape,” our guide says with a mischievous twinkle in her eye. “Well?,” she demands when I return. My British prudishness suddenly kicks in. What if I'd misinterpreted the long thin slit in the ceiling surrounded by layers of rock tinged red with oxidised iron? I mumble something lame about a certain anatomical likeness.

“Exactly!,” she enthuses. “I like to think that we're standing in Mother Nature's womb and that when you emerge from the volcano it's like being reborn”.

It's an image that is impossible to dislodge from my brain as we make our shuddering ascent back to rain-soaked reality. Spiritual rebirth was conspicuously missing from the trip's online itinerary. I guess it's just another one of those thrilling unexpected extras—like the bowl of steaming vegetable soup that awaits us at base camp. 🍲



Just some spelunkers spelunking

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Every day from
20:00 to 22:00.
Beer 650 ISK,
Wine 1,000 ISK.

LOFT
Every day from
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Beer 750 ISK,
Wine 750 ISK.

MIAMI
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free for kids





Pórey and Dögg in non-animated form

ship and distribution opportunities along the way. Dögg and Pórey emphasise that they want the series to remain free though. They're entertaining various ideas for promoting the series—one idea is to screen an episode before movies in the theatre—but Patreon is currently the best way for fans to support the show. The creators can be found and supported under the username Sköp there, where it's possible for supporters to donate in order to unlock new content, get stickers and of course make the web series production possible.

And even though the dreaded YouTube algorithm poses a constant threat of swallowing up content like theirs—especially since the project's still at an early stage—Dögg and Pórey see the value in their work and already have lots of ideas for future episodes.

For example, the "Born Sexy" trope: a woman with no knowledge of the world but a sexy bod, whom the hero can protect but also pursue. Or the "Buffoon Husband," a more or less lovable bumbling idiot who often has to be parented by his wife as much as their children.

That said, the next planned episode is about "Women In Refrigerators", those female characters who are considered disposable and often get killed in a gruesome way to provide drama—usually for more "Man Pain."

Dögg hopes the series will provide more opportunity to open up a conversation about these topics. "It's kind of our [contribution] to a healthier film industry I guess," she concludes, "and for a healthier representation of women. That's nice to leave behind." 🍷

Flip The Switch On Those Sexy Lamps

Pórey Mjallhvít Ómarsdóttir and Dögg Mósedóttir on their new web series "Sköp"

Words: Catherine Magnúsdóttir
Images: Art Bicnick & Provided by Sköp

"Sexy Lamp": a female character that is so unimportant to the plot that she could easily be replaced by a curvy lamp carried off by the manly man hero instead.

Another cliché trope? "Man Pain", where the male protagonist tragically loses the woman in his life to provide him with motivation for his revenge quest. These cliché tropes can be found in everything from indie flicks to blockbusters and are now up for dissection in a new web-series entitled "Sköp" by Pórey Mjallhvít Ómarsdóttir and Dögg Mósedóttir.

The slopes of tropes

Pórey and Dögg co-founded the production company Freyja Filmwork, which has brought out works like Tinna Hrafnadóttir's short film 'Munda' and their own documentary "Höfundur óþekktur / Author unknown," which is about women and music in Iceland. "Sköp" is Freyja's first animated series and features Pórey and Dögg as cartoon versions of themselves, tackling gender tropes, clichés and stereotypes in movies and TV.

"I think it's a worthy pursuit. It's funny and it's needed to open up this discussion," Pórey says. "I think that for budding filmmakers or anybody who's in the creative

business, being aware of these things is essential. You cannot just leave people to just pretend that they're not responsible for the stuff that they create."

Usually one has to search the depths of the internet before coming across content that investigates the slippery slopes of cinematic tropes. It's niche—you have to know exactly where to look for it and even then, it's usually just video essays between 15 minutes and an hour in length, which can be fun and interesting, especially if the viewer is already into the topic, but there are hardly any comedic bite-size clips.

Pórey though, with 'Sköp', hopes to make the discussion a bit more graspable and maybe less dry. "Gender discussion doesn't have to be super-serious and uninviting. It can just be something where you kind of go: 'Oh wow I didn't realize that!' and nobody feels threatened in the process," she says.

"Why haven't I heard about this?"

The idea behind the web-series actually came to the two creators in a casual discussion about a movie, where the term "Man Pain" was brought up by Pórey.

"[It was] basically, almost exactly like it was in the first episode," Dögg remarks. "I mean I thought I knew a lot about gender issues in film because I was a president of Women in Film and Television in Iceland for six years and I'd been to lectures all over the world. I had heard all kinds of concepts around this and I thought 'Why haven't I heard about this ['Man Pain'] and all these tropes?'"

And given that Pórey is an animator, the two decided to follow in the cartoon-style footsteps of

artists like Alison Bechdel and have their animated counterparts discuss film and TV tropes.

More "Man Pain"

The duo also provides the dubbing for their characters in Icelandic and English. They have also received help from an actress for a Norwegian version and are very open to the idea of more dubs in the future. But right now, it's all about funding the series to ensure it continues and hopefully securing partner-



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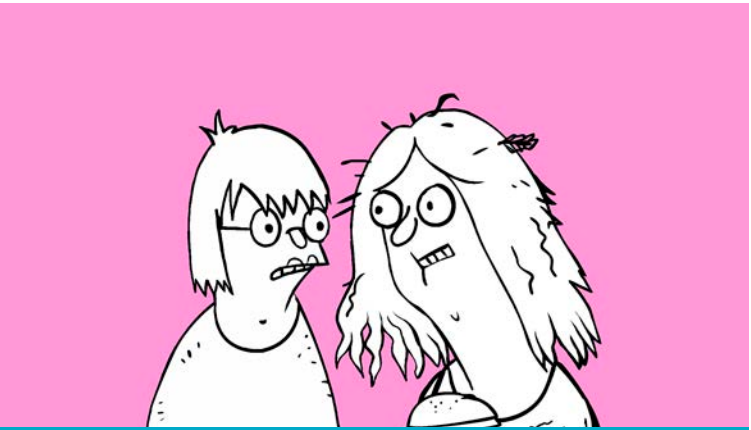
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Pórey and Dögg in animated form

FANCIES is where we talk to Reykjavík's most fashion-forward figures about style

Countess Malaise

Words: Hannah Jane Cohen Photo: Art Bicnick



Countess Malaise (28) is Reykjavík's premier horror-rap-goth-bitch-goddess.

Wearing:

- Chain from Harajuku Chains
- Gloves customised by me to feature the Countess Malaise logo
- To be honest this is an ugly-ass dress, but it kinda looked cute with everything else in the outfit
- Goth lil' skirt, which in this case is paired with a belt to cinch in the waist
- Custom handbag made by my wifey and stylist Sofie, the creator of Puer Parasitus
- High-heeled boots from Queer POC-owned company SYRO that sells shoes for big foots like myself

Describe your style in 5 words:

My style is chaotic. It's dirty scene kid x dominatrix x DIY glamour x hand-me-downs x literal garbage from the streets.

Favourite stores in

Reykjavik: Fatamarkaður Jörmundar—that lil' crowded second-hand store in a basement somewhere in the middle of Laugavegur that this stylish old man runs on his own. It's like a "gentlemen's wear"-type store. There is a lot of quality stuff down there but navigating through the clothes is like re-enacting an episode of Hoarders.

Favourite piece: My sweatsuit from SOTO. I would have worn it today but it's too hot out.

Something you would never wear: Those stretchy tie-dye euro-hippie pants. The ones with the extra long crotch situation, like past the knees. I can not get behind them....choices.

Lusting after: Stef Van Looveren's dick/pussy/ass handbag. 🍆

FJALLKONAN

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Fjallkonan is a new lively restaurant & pub in the heart of Reykjavík offering a selection of Icelandic and international dishes from local ingredients.

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- > Lamb tartar, chive mayo

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Food



Is your mouth watering yet?

Bounties of the Westfjords

A day with Nora Seafood, an innovative seafood company that hand-picks sea urchins and scallops

Words: Shruthi Basappa Photos: Provided by Nora Seafood

If like me, you haven't got over the scallops at Óx and the glistening medallions of cod at Dill, or been enthralled by the sea urchin at the three Michelin-starred Frantzen in Stockholm, chances are you've sampled some of the best seafood Iceland has to offer.

It is with these memories swirling through my mind that I excitedly reach out to Nora Seafood, a Westfjords-based seafood processing company that has in its six-year reign made gainful strides in the world of fine dining while also straddling concerns about sustainability and innovation.

Its young founder and CEO, Viðir Ingþórsson, has graciously offered me a tour of their fishing operations, topped off by a meeting with Sveinbjörn Hjalmarsson a.k.a. Simbi, their famed diver who hand-harvests sea urchins from local fjords. An educational, gastronomic afternoon awaits me.



Curated quality

The phrase "lífíð er saltfiskur" ("life is salted fish") frequents my mind while in the Westfjords. Currently ranked 15th globally in production, Iceland has long been a fishing nation. It isn't an exaggeration to say that it is a saturated market, so how does one stand out here?

Viðir admits that the industry is rife with many that lack the education and/or skill to handle seafood efficiently. "The majority are driven



by volume and not necessarily quality," he confesses. "To use Icelandic products in a creative fashion, there was definitely a window there. We take great pride in our fish."

"[Every fish] is so precious, you have to handle it like a treasure," he continues. "You have to cool it down and get it in the hands of your customer as soon as possible." Nora prides itself on these speedy deliveries, regularly transporting live shellfish from Iceland to the swankiest restaurants in Europe.

"At Nora, everything starts for us at the very beginning. For a beautiful cod going to the finest restaurants in the world, it's a matter of one hour in the sun. That determines whether it's going to be the best meal you will serve for your clients or something insignificant."

Sustainable epicurean delights

By now we've arrived in Ísafjörður, where Nora Seafood has its operations base. It's but a quick stroll onto the dock, where a sprightly Simbi is waiting for us, all smiles.

"[Every fish] is so precious, you have to handle it like a treasure."

One of Nora's unique offerings are their sustainably harvested sea urchin, scallops and mahogany clams. Simbi single-handedly scours the ocean floors throughout the year, no matter the weather, for these decadent delights.

In their quest for sustainability, Simbi only picks sea urchins to order. He cracks a still-alive urchin open to reveal persimmon-hued uni. It is such an incredible privilege to be able to savour fresh uni for its floral, briny sweetness that we all enjoy it in a moment of silence and smiles. "These are quite the aphrodisiac," Simbi winks.

We also sample some 'Princess Scallops', so called for their palm-sized size. The glistening morsels are miles apart from their sorry cousins, which most of us encounter in restaurants. Mahogany clams, the grand dame of the shellfish world, are like crunchier scallops—their feisty muscles snapping shut tight making it quite a feat to open them.

How such an enterprise will adapt to a COVID or post-COVID reality is clearly on Viðir's mind. "Life is just sweet and sour you know? The times before COVID were incredible and we learnt a lot, but now it is sour and we will continue to use that knowledge to experiment and grow," he smiles.

On my way home, something Viðir said earlier plays over in my mind. "I choose to respect nature and respect the raw material, each tail of the fish, each eye of the fish. I'm blessed to be able to do this everyday," he relayed. This drive and attention to detail is what sets Nora Seafood apart from its competition.



For those who might be left with a hankering to try some of Nora's fares, Fiskinn Heima home-delivers a selection of frozen seafood from the Westfjords across the country. 🐟



Alex, in a rare moment of stillness

Joy & Jollof Rice

Introducing Ogolúgo, 101's only African restaurant

Words: Poppy Askham Photos: Art Bicnick

Ogolúgo means “welcome” in Hausa and the name couldn’t be more fitting for Laugavegur’s latest culinary arrival. Since its early July opening, the team behind the restaurant have been determined to deliver a taste of Africa to 101 by offering a host of authentic dishes from attie-ke to domuda, all served with a generous helping of laughter and hospitality.

Filling a gap in the market

“I want it to feel like home, that was the main idea,” explains Alex Jallow, Ogolúgo’s owner, waiter, and resident TikTok superstar. “The taste of the food, the smell of the spices, the crowds of people—when you walk in you feel like you’re home, like you’re in Africa.”

Alex hails from the Gambia and Senegal region of West Africa, but grew up in the U.K. and has been living in Iceland for over ten years. “I love Iceland, but I just felt that that African touch was missing in this country, so when I was able to make it happen, it was a dream come true.”

Before taking up the role of restaurant frontman, Alex worked as a chef. “I got my love for food from my mum. I was always in the kitchen, running in and stealing food from

her whilst she was cooking,” he explains. “When I was 11, I would always ask to go to the market. My mum would ask me what I wanted to buy, but I just wanted to go so that I could get close to all the different ingredients. That’s the kind of person I’ve been ever since I was little. I’ve always loved food.”

He suddenly jumps up from the table and disappears into the kitchen, emerging with a plate of jollof rice served with crispy plantain and grilled tilapia. He also brings the rather reluctant head chef Dawda in tow. “This is West Africa’s favourite dish, but it can be found all across the continent,” Dawda explains. “I have lots of favorite recipes to make and I’m always experimenting, but at the end of the day I’ll always love jollof rice.”

Service with a smile

Although the food is superb, what really stands out from a dining experience at Ogolúgo is the atmosphere, largely thanks to the overbrimming enthusiasm of the restaurant’s owner. Alex practically leaps from table to table, frequently breaking out into dance as he delivers steaming meat pies and huge bowls of okro soup. It’s this exuberance that has earned him hundreds of thousands of views on the

restaurant’s hit TikTok account—username ogolugo101—where he puts his own vivacious spin on the trends of the day. His cheerfulness is infectious; within moments of entering the restaurant, you’re grinning along with him and even agreeing to make a TikTok cameo.

“Trust me, I don’t even know where I get my energy from myself and I’m in here every single day,” he laughs. “It’s all about happiness. There’s so much positive energy in this restaurant. My customers look forward to coming here, and they love it when I’m dancing around the place. It makes me happy to make them happy so I don’t even notice that I’m running around and that time is going by. I can’t complain. I am happy, very happy.”

And there we find Ogolúgo’s secret: not only is it 101’s only African restaurant, it’s also the postcode’s most joyful dining spot. I leave the restaurant like every other diner, with a full stomach and a smile on my face, having promised a swift return. 🍴



Visit Ogolúgo at Laugavegur 85 and be sure to check out their TikTok ogolugo101.



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AWARDS

JimClaudia2016
Reviewed 1 week ago
Authentic Thai Food
I am surprised at the poor reviews because during our visit in August the service and food were both great. Maybe because we just arrived just before they opened at 6?
Actually, in hindsight, I am glad we did not read the reviews because we were so pleased with our meal and we were able to have lengthy conversations with both the owner and staff.
Show less
Date of visit: August 2019

Value **Service**
Food

Travel

It's Pronounced Breiðavík Not Benidorm

A “tropical” weekend getaway to the Westfjords

Words: Poppy Askham Photos: Art Bicnick



Travel distance
from Reykjavik:
440 km

Accommodation:
breidavik.is

Car provided by:
gocarrental.is

Support the Grapevine!
View this QR code in your
phone camera to visit
our tour booking site



Bienvenido to the Costa de Westfjords. Swap sandals for hiking boots, bikinis for anoraks, and ice-cold sangria for flasks of steaming coffee. And for the love of god, give up on any dreams of a sun tan.

Escape to the country

Gazing out of the office window on a drizzly Monday morning, I watch as tourists in ridiculously oversized pac-a-macs flee to safety of the nearest cafe. It's early August, a period I would usually spend passed out on a Spanish beach, but for obvious reasons this year is a different story.

Throughout the week my vitamin D deprived brain is haunted by dreams of golden sands and azure seas and so at 9:00 on a Saturday morning, I drag the Grapevine's resident photo wizard Art Bicnick on the ultimate summer road trip: a 6-hour drive to the wild, wild Westfjords, a mere 440 kilometres away.

First stop on the itinerary? Ice cream.

In one of the most remote regions in an already sparsely populated country, Erpsstaðir is a rare culinary oasis. Yes, it would've made more sense to enjoy an ice cream when we'd reached our coastal destination, but as I rapidly

learn, in the Icelandic countryside, you get your food whenever you can. And when the ice cream is made onsite by a farmer named Einar using rhubarb, blueberries and meadowsweet from the surrounding hills, how can you refuse?

The clue's in the name

Attempting not to spill ice cream in the rental car, we hit the road once more. Before long we reach a causeway across a moody blue fjord—we are now officially entering Iceland's least-visited region, the Westfjords. From here the broad highways of the south are replaced with winding, gravel-covered roads and the further we travel, the worse the weather gets. As we near our final destination, the scenery is all but obscured from view by an impossibly thick fog, until we turn a bend in the road and the clouds suddenly miraculously part to reveal Rauðisandur.

Unlike its more famous cousin Reynisfjara, Rauðisandur matured out of its emo phase. In a country famed for its black sands, Rauðisandur is, as the name would suggest, a copper-toned outlier. Thanks to a relatively thin layer of pulverised scallop shells, the beach's colouring morphs depending on light conditions. Today, under

a strip of weak sun peaking out between ominous clouds, the sands are a soft ochre, contrasting dramatically against the dark cliffs and deep turquoise Atlantic. After the highway's unfalteringly drab colour palette of greys, greens, yellows and blacks, the idyllic scene almost seems artificial.

A zeal for seals

Something about the Westfjords releases my inner child (though admittedly she's never far from the surface), so when I read the word “seals” on a wildlife information board, I let out an involuntary squeal. I now have one mission in life and I politely inform my ever-patient travelling companion Art that we cannot leave Rauðisandur until I have seen a seal. Yes, I've spotted them swimming in the murky waters of Reykjavík's harbour a hundred times, but this is different, I explain, becoming more impassioned by the minute.

Eventually he gives in and we set out across the sandbar towards the lair of the mighty mammals, some two kilometres away.

Around twenty minutes into the trek, another childhood emotion resurfaces: a deep-seated fear of being stranded at sea spawned by an ill-fated family picnic. “Did you check the tide times?” I ask trying to keep the panic out of my voice. Art shrugs and continues to stroll along at a painfully slow speed; he clearly has never had his sandwich cruelly snatched away by a rogue wave.

The only distraction from my sense of impending doom is a fun little game I like to call “Is it a seal or is it a rock?” On the 50th round, the answer is finally the former. One of the dark mounds suddenly flops off a neighbouring sandbar and into the rapidly rising waters.

Before us are around 50 seals, more than my inner 7-year-old can handle and by far outnumbering the number of people we have seen since our arrival in the Westfjords. Quest complete, we turn back, but though we may have finished examining them, the seals are not finished with us. We are escorted back to the safety of dry land by an



Application to replace Attenborough: submitted



It's puffin adorable!

inquisitive convey of glistening black heads bobbing in and out of the water.

Where the puffins at?

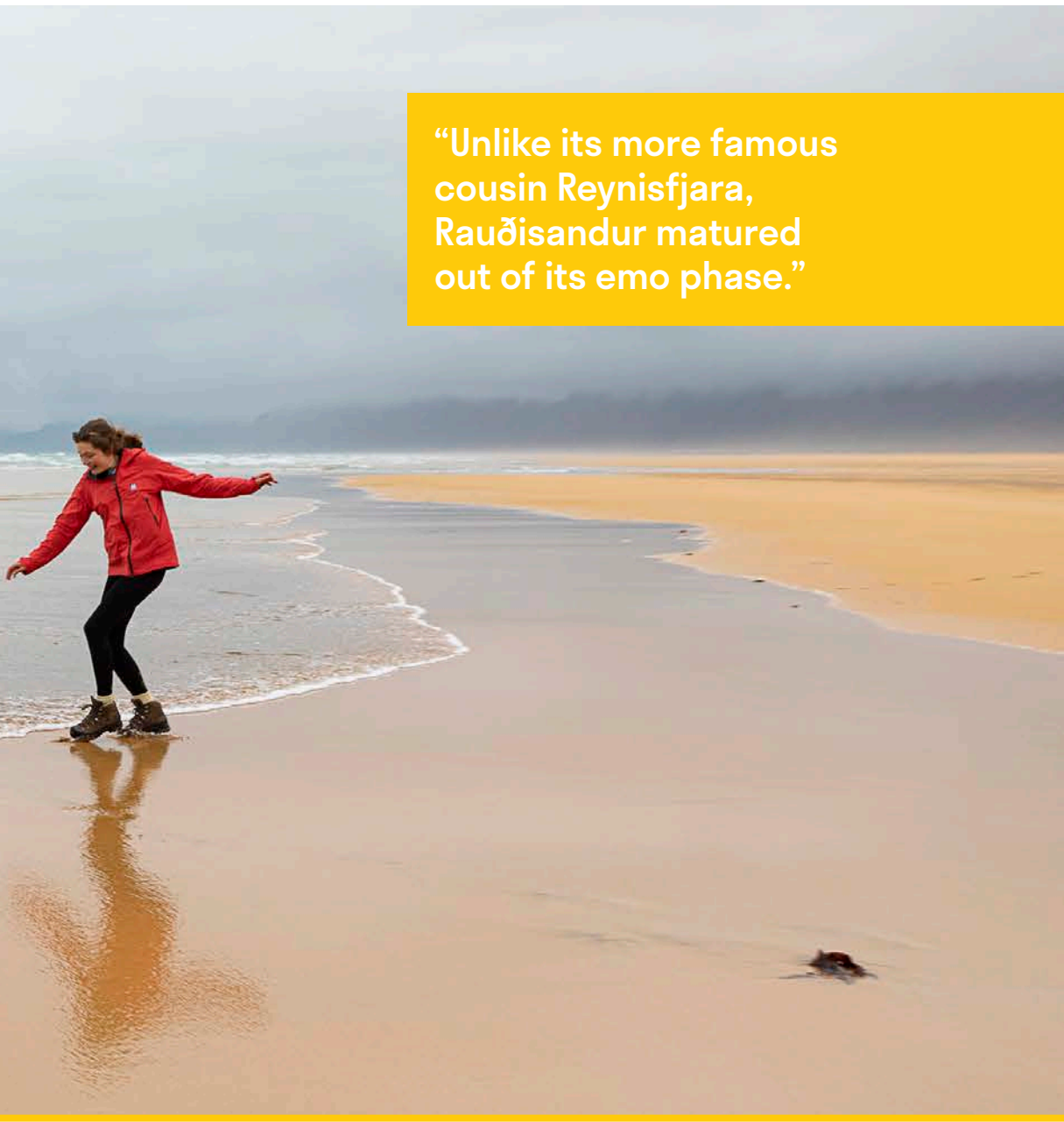
The moment we clamber back into the car, the rain resumes as if some good-tempered equally seal-loving god had held off the downpour on our behalf. The weather steadily deteriorates as we drive back over roads half-submerged in rusty-hued puddles towards our quite literal port in the storm: Hotel Breiðavík.

The next morning, after a hearty breakfast, we venture back out into the rain towards the final stop of our adventure: Látrabjarg, the westernmost point in Iceland and, if you forget the Azores (which we do), the westernmost point in the whole of Europe.

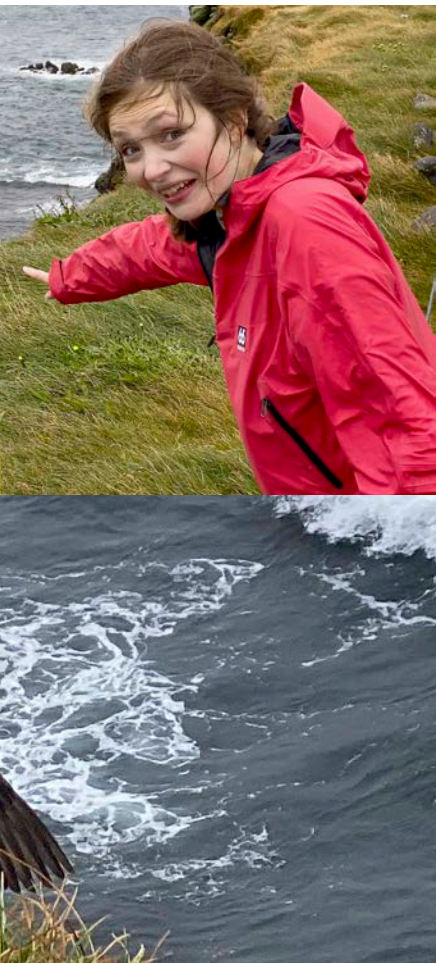
A small squat lighthouse perches on the cliff, modestly marking the landmark, as the Atlantic stretches



Mmmm... guano



“Unlike its more famous cousin Reynisfjara, Rauðisandur matured out of its emo phase.”



out before us all the way to Greenland. But the real attraction here is the 14 kilometres of 440 metre-high cliffs, home to Iceland’s biggest seabird colony.

Guillemots, razorbills, skuas and kittiwakes dive in and out of sight over the cliff top, gliding effortlessly through the air as if to mock our beleaguered struggle against the wind and rain. I squint down at the segregated bands in the cliff and the nesting birds, trying to take in the magnificent sight and simultaneously prevent myself from being swept into the sea.

The sweet fishy odour of guano fills the air. It’s this natural fertiliser made up of years-worth of bird excrement that is responsible for the soft mossy grasslands that top the cliffs and give puffins the perfect habitat to hide from nosy tourists. And sure enough, the unofficial mascots of Iceland’s recent mass tourism boom are nowhere to be seen. It’s just as we feared, the puffins had left the cliffs for a day’s fishing before we had even stirred ourselves out of bed and any remaining birds are

sticking wisely out of view.

Just as we resignedly turn back towards the car, we spot a flash of orange amongst the greys and blacks of the swooping gulls and fulmars. You guessed it, a puffin is triumphantly returning to its nest with a beak full of small silvery fish. And suddenly we spot the nests strewn along the cliff edge and a handful of puffins peering good-humouredly out at us.

With the final item on our itinerary ticked off, we return to the car, ready for the 6-hour drive home, beach fix sorted for another year. 🐔



Seal of approval (cringe)



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WELL, YOU ASKED



Undercover Librarians

Words: Catherine Magnúsdóttir

What happened to hardcore man bun-y hipsters?

The Icelandic climate presumably came for them. Man-bunnies are notoriously sensitive and can't handle the cold, especially when they get wet. Maybe some good souls took pity on them, brought them home and nurtured them back to health before adopting them and giving them a good home free of record players and cinema snobbery.

How much hair is an acceptable amount to be in a shower drain? I'm confused

None. Ew. Clean your bathroom, you animal. You're not a possum! At least, I presume you're not. We can never be sure about our readership though. Anyway, just get on it. And don't worry, I hear cleaning the pipes can actually be quite fun.

While cleaning my place, I discovered a long-lost library book. I legit thought I had returned it. Do I pretend I never found it and move on with my life? Or do I send it back to the library anonymously? Should I even feel this much guilt about it?

Well, I'm afraid you have no choice but to completely change your identity and leave the country. New name. New hair color. They're on to you now. You can't hope to escape them forever but you might be able to buy yourself some time. Don't burn the book, but under no circumstances take it with you. Keep it secret. Keep it safe. Don't talk to strangers. They might be undercover librarians. 🍷

HORROR-SCOPES

Taurus, You Nasty Witch

Why is there a 15th season of 'Supernatural'? The stars don't even know...

Words: Poppy, Cate & Hannah, Professional Psychics

In Horror-Scopes, the Grapevine's dedicated team of amateur astrologists give you their mystical insights on how to live a long and fulfilling life. Think of us as psychic grandmas. We love you.



Aries

Your best friend isn't actually vegan. She'll never admit to it, but the moment she puts her phone on 'Do Not Disturb' mode, she starts stuffing her face with Worcestershire sauce. Tomorrow night, at approximately 21:45, call her twice in a row to interrupt this slaughter-fest. She needs an intervention and God has called on you, you plant-based goddess.



Taurus

Taurus, you nasty bitch.



Gemini

Gemini, you're losing it, so we're going to vocalise your thoughts for you: It makes absolutely no sense that in 'Harry Potter and the Goblet Of Fire,' Barty Crouch Jr.—disguised as Mad-Eye Moody—can see Harry while he's under the invisibility cloak. Isn't the cloak a mf deathly hallow designed to elude Death? Does Crouch have powers that Death does not???? Apparently!!!! We're upset too, so please use the upcoming weeks to start your campaign. We're sure Reddit will be all about it.



Cancer

Cancel your wedding. He's garbage. Keep the wedding dress though, it'll come in handy for your upcoming 'Runaway Bride'

LARPing session. You'll be the belle of the field.



Leo

Do your laundry more regularly and maybe you'll finally feel better about yourself. Make your bed, too. Clean sheets, clean mind and all that. While you're at it, how about you finish that degree of yours before you start something new? Also, the plants on your window sill behind you are dying. Again. Get your life together, dude.



Virgo

Eat beans, like just fuck loads of beans. We once read that a can of beans a day will make you live til you're 105 or something—it's advice we live by and you should too. Woool beans!!!



Libra

That skin isn't gonna stay smooth forever so for the love of God, MOISTURISE.



Scorpio

Let me be real with you Scorpio. A lot of things in this life don't make sense. Supernatural is on its 15th season, some people drink water-based hot chocolate and Arkansas is pronounced like that. It's a mad scary world and sometimes all you can do is take a nap. Let me get you a blanket.



Sagittarius

Telling you this with love, but your banana bread recipe sucks. For your next tea party maybe opt for an EasyMix pack of brownies.



Capricorn

Buy a TV. We don't know why, but we anticipate you'll be spending a lot more time in your house soon. Why? Parasitic worms.



Aquarius

This is an intervention. Playing Taylor Swift's 'folklore' on repeat is not an adequate substitute for a personality, or therapy for that matter too. But we ain't gonna lie—it's fucking fantastic. ("Betty" <3!!!)



Pisces

You know when your mum told you that that girl—the really pretty and popular one who never invited you to her parties—was just jealous of you? Yeah, she was lying. That boy who was constantly throwing pencils at your head in class, guess what? No, he didn't fancy you. Sorry to break it to you, your mum is a big fat liar. Time to grow up Pisces. 🍷



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LAST WORDS

Disney Minus

Words: **Nico Borbely**

With the new 'Mulan' to hit Disney Plus in lieu of theatres on September 4th, and a live-action 'Hercules' recently announced, now's the perfect time to reflect on the veritable Pandora's box of live-action Disney remakes that have hit the screen in recent years. Though this phenomenon has its origin in the 1994 blockbuster 'Rudyard Kipling's The Jungle Book' starring Jason Scott Lee, it didn't start to really take off to the extent that we see now until 2015's 'Cinderella.' Remakes have been churned out at increasingly swift rates, coming to a head in 2019 with the release of four such remakes—'Dumbo,' 'Aladdin,' 'The Lion King,' 'Lady and the Tramp,' and 'Maleficent: Mistress of Evil,' a follow-up to 2014's 'Maleficent'.

But hot take: **stop.**

Disney movies are well-known not only for their beautiful animation, satisfying stories, and, of course, the childhood memories they have the power to invoke, but for the ways in which they combine old stories and new artistic mediums in innovative and imaginative ways. Which the remakes are not. They are at best okay, and more commonly contrived and unoriginal, deliberately tampering with the very elements that made the originals so wonderful. YouTuber and cinema critic Lindsay Ellis put it quite aptly in her refreshingly frank and illuminating review of 2017's 'Beauty and the Beast' remake, a comprehensive example of this trend. The film, as she emphasises and I agree with, is offensively useless in its existence in that filmmakers added seemingly calculated responses to pedantic, logic-obsessed viewers smugly pointing out plot holes in the original ("the whole castle was cursed because of the actions of a bratty ten-year-old?? ThAt'S nOt LoGiCaL!!!!"), but also kept elements from the original. Inevitably this clash damaged much of the intended morals of the story.

More attention should be given to developing and releasing new, original content, rather than constantly, cheaply rebranding old favorites to try to capitalize on childhood nostalgia. Let's hope that we get to see more such original content like the upcoming flicks 'Soul,' 'Raya and the Last Dragon,' 'Encanto,' and 'Luca,' rather than more of these pretty messes of nothing. 🍷



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