

JAMMING WITH THE REYKJAVÍK NIGHTLIFE FRIEND

by Pádraig Mara

At seven o'clock on a Saturday evening I got the call. After a few weeks of telephone tag and scheduling problems, I was finally going on an excursion with Jón Kári, Chairman and CEO of Reykjavík Nightlife Friend. I was told he was taking out a group of three Americans for their second night in a row of jamming, and would I like to tag along? I kissed my wife goodbye, saying I would be home early Sunday morning, probably somewhat less than sober. The spirit of journalism demanded it.

As I purchased my litre of Becks (a mere apéritif) and an extra box of smokes (ammunition for a long night) and walked down to meet this evenings' team, I wondered exactly how this 'Nightlife Friend' was going to be. I imagined a sort of Icelandic Keith Richards, all barroom pallor and bloodshot eyes, skull ring and pirate bandana included. Helping foreigners jam in a city known for its nightlife has to take its toll. I expected a Reykjavík vampire.

9 o'clock

Answering the door at Jón Kári's Laugavegur apartment was a rather clean cut, bespectacled man in his late thirties wearing an NYPD T-shirt. He introduced himself as Jón Kári. Vampire he was not; I could have easily taken him for a business man. Or a marketing degree holder, a respected professional of some kind. He introduced me around. The Americans, who I'll call James, John and Bill (partly out of respect for their privacy, and also because I can't recall their names), were all from Chicago. James and John were both in the field of finance and

investment, and looked it.

Bill, who happened to be wheelchair-bound, was the District Attorney for the State of Illinois. Not at all the calibre of folks I'm used to getting pissed with. Curious, I pulled up a chair, opened my beer and listened.

As the crew from Chicago went over the drunken details of the previous nights amusements ('Are those twins going downtown tonight?'... 'One is, the other can't get a babysitter'), Jón Kári played the gracious host, pouring beers and cocktails, selecting the music, and making call after call arranging the nights activities. While he topped off my second pint, he explained that though the Reykjavík Nightlife Friend was only four months old as a business, he had been doing exactly this type of thing for years, for free. He explained that while he worked for Icelandair, visiting business people would be referred to him to show them the most popular places to drink, dance, and so on; a sort of nocturnal urban tourguide. He decided to take his

hobby and make it his profession. Soon after, Jón Kári's batphone rang. There was a birthday party in progress somewhere in Reykjavík that we were, if not invited to, not specifically not-invited to, either. The night was just about to jump off.

11 o'clock

We found ourselves in an expansive warehouse on the west side of Reykjavík. The party, winding down by the time we got there, was still fairly full of people. I immediately grabbed myself a healthy dose of free wine, and set about checking the place out. As I inspected the premises, I noticed candles, altar-like installations and pictures of bearded individuals looking decidedly guru-esque. People were walking about in occult costume. I wondered just what the hell was going on here. Then I met the birthday girls' sister. We introduced ourselves. STÍNA: Hi, my names Stína (gesturing to a woman walking passed dressed, well...like a witch) and we're all witches (she starts to

laugh). ME: Hi, my name's Pádraig (gesturing to my countrymen as they chatted up girls at the party). We're all Americans.

I was quite excited to learn this particular birthday party was in fact a witch-type birthday party. I waited eagerly for a Dionysian orgy to break out, or a blood-spattered invocation of the Horned God, anything. I kept asking people when 'the witch stuff' would start. Unfortunately, there would be no occult rites that night. Unless shakin yo ass to 'Daddy Cool' counts.

At one point in the night Jón Kári grabbed me by the arm and said I had to go out on the balcony. I stepped outside, parted the crowd, and witnessed ex-Icelandic Parliamentary man and convicted embezzler Árni Johnsen strumming a guitar and leading the group of witches and friends-of-witches in a spirited version of 'Ó, María mig langar heim', or 'O María I want to go home.' Kinda nice, coming from an ex-convict. I tried to explain the significance of this little scene to one of my fellow Americans, saying it was a bit like Marion Barry (ex-mayor of Wash. D.C. and champion crack smoker) showing up at your party and singing 'Big Rock Candy Mountain'. They still weren't sufficiently impressed. I sat on the railing, lit a smoke and joined in the song. Sometimes real life is more

surreal than fiction.

2 o'clock

At some point it was decided that we should move the festivities to Thorvaldsen, a popular bar in the town square. We arrived just after nearly 60 people had begun lining up to get in. I resigned myself to a good half hour wait. I had not counted on the extent of the Nightlife Friend's mysterious powers. Jón Kári went and had a brief chat with the doorman and, like magic, we moved to the head of the line and right inside. Evidently, when you jam with the Nightlife Friend, you get treated like a minor celebrity.

Thorvaldsen was packed full of elegant people getting, slowly but surely, elegantly shit-faced. I grabbed another pint, found a free bit of wall to lean against and watched as Jón Kári went into social overdrive. He moved from group to group, kissing cheeks and shaking hands introducing and chatting with nearly everyone in the bar.

It's always a pleasure to witness a professional at work... Time passed, drinks were drained. Toward the end of the night the entire bar gathered at the dance floor right by the exit. Everyone danced, spilled drinks, enjoyed themselves in inebriated good spirits. Even I did my 'Monster Mash'. Teeth-bared, lurching back and forth in time to the beat. Well, almost. Its the only dance I know. I noticed however, that its not a dance known at Thovaldsen, or particularly appreciated. At 5 o'clock the exit doors popped open, and we spilled, literally, out into the gathering dawn and the town square.

One of my compatriots demanded I use the phrase 'Worth its weight in gold' to describe the Reykjavík Nightlife Friends services. And so I have.

For more information on rates check out the website at nightlifefriend.is.

MUSIC and NIGHTLIFE LISTINGS : may 28 - june 10

Music and nightlife events usually start around 23:00, unless otherwise noted.

FRIDAY

MAY 28

Café 22

DJ Matti form X-ið radiostation

Dubliners

Rock band Atómstöðin play it loud!!

Dubliners

Troubadour Bjarni Tryggva does his best as a human jukebox

Prikió

Band Búðarbandið play like they feel like.

Kapital

DJ Kered

Grand Rokk

Electro pop night: Funk Harmony Park, Tonic & Conor

Miðbar

Troubadour Siggí, an Icelandic/Canadian drummer plays his favorites with a guitar

Nasa

Band "Í svörtum fötum" or in english: "men wearing less clothes than you want them to" play covers.

Gaukur á Stöng

Band Buff plays whatever, however and all over

Dillon

DJ Andrea Jóns plays rock classics

Hressingarskálinn

DJ Atli Skemmtanalögga

Hverfisbar

DJ Benni, plays a record

Felix

DJ Doktorinn

De Palace

DJ Extreme / Devious plays Psy-Trans music

Prikió

DJ Gísli Galdur

Kaffibarinn

DJ Kári

Sirkus

DJ Maggí Lego, 1/4 of GusGus

Nelly's

DJ Nonni 900

Vegamót

DJ Rampage

Amsterdam

DJ Steini

Glaumbar

DJ Þór Bæring

Café Sólón

DJ Þróstur 3000

Thorvaldsen bar

DJ's Daddi Disko & Hlynur Mastermix

Ari í Ögri

Troubadour duet Dralon play covers

SATURDAY

MAY 29

Café 22

DJ's Palli & Biggí from band Maus, 1/4 of Grapevine will show up like usually, drunk

Dubliners

Rock band Atómstöðin play it loud!!

Grand Rokk

Band Blúsbyltan

Dubliners

Troubadour Bjarni Tryggva does his best as a human jukebox

Kapital

DJ Galactica, Njasta Tækni og Vísindi

Miðbar

Troubadour Siggí, an Icelandic/Canadian drummer plays his favorites with a guitar



PICKS MUSIC and NIGHTLIFE

Grand Rokk. June 3-6

Grand Rokk Arts Festival

Held at a chess/rock bar, this should offer events you're not likely to see anywhere else, including preview of a documentary film about horses, a short film competition with a 1st prize of 350.000ISK, rock band Lokbrá playing traditional Icelandic folk songs in rock versions, cocktails, happenings, art exhibitions, short story contest and an auction where both books and paintings will go to the highest bidding, look for details in the listings.



Bar 11

Heiða og heiðingjarnir

The irrepressible Heiða, whose repertoire goes from pop punk to the Velvet Underground, plays songs from her albums at one of Iceland's premier rock venues. The setting is small but intimate and the band rarely disappoints.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Weekend 28-29th of May

Upstairs: Band 3some plays covers

Downstairs: Band Spilafíklarnir play covers

Weekend 4-5th of June

Upstairs: Troubadour Ómar Hlynsson

Downstairs: Troubadour Garðar Garðarsson

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