



HIT THE NORSE

PART TWO

Continuing from last week's story on the Reykjavik music festival, STEVEN WELLS looks at the history of Icelandic music, from a post-Viking prohibition on melody to hippies, punks and thrash metal. Plus, he meets the hippest president in the world.

Icelandic culture, as you know, is about more than just The S**** c****. There's sculpture and literature and poetry and Jon Gnarr.

Jon Gnarr looks like the Milky Bar Kid if the Milky Bar Kid was on several. He works in the wing of a mental hospital set aside for junkies. It already contains the first few crack addicts. He is writing a porno book with Braggi and Thor from The Sugarcubes.

In the story, a 13-year-old farm boy is screwed by three women. Forty years later he meets one of the women — now aged 70. She is wearing national costume and when they have sex her teeth fall out.

This is a country where they hold *Carry On* film festivals. Welcome to Iceland.

AN INCREDIBLY COMPRESSED HISTORY OF ICELANDIC POP MUSIC

THE LUTHERAN Church banned music because the post-Viking equivalents of the PMRC and Mary Whitehouse were afraid that melody would lead to teenage suicide, devil worship and incest.

After prohibition, Iceland had its jazz bands and the jazzers jumped on the rock 'n' roll bandwagon but when they swapped their DAs for Beatle wigs they ran into a slight problem. There was a surreal period when all the pop groups were singing 'I Wanna Hold Your Hand' whilst the audience, in typical Icelandic fashion, were

shagging like rabbits.

The two Icelandic stars of the '70s who retain their credibility are **Megas** and **Buppi**. Megas is known cheekily as the 'The Granddad of The S**** c****'. Bjork appears on several of his records. His career was severely damaged by his gay lifestyle when the 'AIDS is a gay plague' hysteria put Icelandic gay liberation back by at least 20 years.

Buppi is described to visiting British rock journalists as 'the Icelandic Bruce Springsteen'. He isn't. He started performing after years working in the fishing industry. "The way we were living was disgusting. We worked and slept in the stinking fish factory. One shower for 65 people. Fifty per cent of the wages went on food and never left the factory. People in Reykjavik still don't know this . . ."

Outside of Reykjavik Icelanders are still grossly exploited and underpaid. As a political pop star Buppi fouled up on too many drugs — it's claimed that he staggered onstage at a Swedish 'Peace' festival and roundly insulted the assembled rich scum. This may or may not be true — he can't remember.

For a while **Buppi And The Outsiders** were managed by the 16-year-old Einar who was constantly nagging Buppi to get real, get rock 'n' roll and drop the political principles (according to Buppi).

Einar is credited for "intellectualising punk" for Icelanders. Iceland started taking punk seriously around the same time as the US. Crass played and nobody got it. Various S**** c**** joined various punk outfits, most of the bands chucking out Buppi's "boring politics" along with the hippy bathwater. For the burghers of bourgeois Reykjavik, punk was genuinely shocking — they'd just spent the last 100 years dragging themselves out of mud huts and fish heads and these BARBARIANS were threatening to drag them back into the abyss.

"They were used to smooth pop melodies," says Megas, "and here was their one and only little boy going to a garage and possibly smoking hashish and sniffing glue and their little baby girls were probably getting sexually abused!"

By 1983, Bjork, Siggi and Einar were in **Kukl** — a 100 per cent committed screaming pack of situationist wolfings. "Kukl were no compromise — very heavy music," says ex-member and S**** c**** biographer **Gestur Gudmonson**. "We had to tear out our hearts every time we played. It was exhausting and in part explains why The S**** c**** are like they are . . . why they use ironic distance rather than rhetoric . . ."

100 THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT ICELAND

- When 'Birthday' was first released it sold just 299 copies in Iceland.
- Einar is remembered fondly by his old school chums: "He always had a girl on each arm. He just walked up to me and said — 'You are an idiot.'"

PICTURE: KEVIN CUMMINS

ICE ONE!



Reptile: pushed not fell

- The S**** c**** are hated by a local newspaper editor who always doctors any charts to exclude them. In return The S**** c**** bombard the bastard with obscene anonymous postcards from wherever they are in the world.
- Tilli, titlingur (small puffin), lokur, bollur, retur, skaufi, saelusulu (joy stick), gletipinni (stick of pleasure), lilli and gandur (fast running horse) are all Viking names for the male sexual organ.
- Einar has, on occasion, strapped crystals to his head for that 'New Age' buzz.
- Next to The S**** c****, Iceland's biggest star is **Siggi Jonson** — a Louis Armstrong impersonator who has recently enjoyed a comeback.
- The ethical code at the heart of Icelandic life — apparently based on lust and friendship — is called 'Edda'.
- After the utterly brilliant **Reptile**, the next Bad Taste band to get the big push will probably be **Ham**. This could be a big mistake.

Not only are Ham totally and utterly crap musically but at least two members of the band think it's tremendously rock 'n' roll to go round talking about how Iceland is "pure" because it has no "niggers or Jews".

"What do I do?" whined a totally pissed Ham boy.

You dump the racist scumsuckers!

"And then what? This is the only band that will have me!"

Rough Trade have already warned the band that they will cease to distribute their records if they make any more racist comments in public. Both Rough Trade and Bad Taste should drop the shepherds NOW!

● Bad Taste band **Oxtor** play a curious art-school rockabilly — kind of Marc Almond meets The Stray Cats.

● Speed metal merchants **Bootlegs** are as spotty, as inarticulate and as derivative as only a truly great speed metal band can be. Their album 'WC Monster' (produced by Einar) is

well cool. One of them works in a bank.

● The third best band in Iceland after The S**** c**** and **Reptile** is **Bless**. Tell the world what you sound like, boys.

"We are clattering, power, very lyrical . . ." says Gunni.

"We are clisher rock 'n' roll!" says Biggi.

Clisher?

"Clisher rock 'n' roll!"

Classic rock 'n' roll!

"No! Clisher!"

Clisher?

"The same old phrases, nothing new in it!"

You're telling me that you're clichéd?"

"No, not really, I was just trying to say something different from Biggi. Really we are poppy but with a few surprising ingredients."

● It is often claimed that if you can't get laid in Iceland you just can't get laid. Not one of the hundred or so English music journalists who have so far visited Iceland has even had a sniff of sex.

THE PREZ

VIGDIS FINNBAGADOTTIR is the President of Iceland. In 1983 she was active in attempts to rid Iceland of its US military base. Now she has to watch what she says so she says things like: "I am extremely interested in what is being produced for young people — on this globe, not just in Iceland."

"Everything is radical in art in Iceland. Pop is the art of the moment and it is a mirror of the creativity. Everything in art is flourishing in Iceland. You mention that The Sugarcubes are radical. I like that because artists in Iceland are not pedestrian, they are courageous and I have a theory about that. I think it is partly because we live in a country that is on the move, we live in a country that we have had to conquer."

Are The S**** c**** ambassadors of Icelandic Culture?

"Of course! They are just like our beauty queens."

I visited the tourist board office and there was no mention of The S**** c**** in any of their literature.

"Oh, they will wake up!"

Einar once told me that the tourist board don't want loads of spotty S**** c**** fans turning up with rucksacks and no money . . .

"I think my dear Einar is putting words or thoughts into the heads of others. The S**** c**** know that their President has known about them from the beginning and that she's a friend."

Are they likely to be given Beatles style MBES for their services to the Icelandic economy?

"No, in Iceland it's different . . ." And there's always the danger that they might give them back?

"Ah yes . . ."

What's your favourite current pop record?

"The latest one I like? What have I been listening to? The S**** c****, let's say The S**** c****. I follow what they are doing quite closely. I have all their records or my youngsters have."

You have a daughter . . . ?

"Yes, 17 she is. I can assure you I am following what is going on. I was sent to Selfridges the other day when I passed through London with a list of records to buy. I am very popular in the record store in Selfridges . . ."

THE PAGAN

SVEINBJORN BENTEINSONN looks about 200 and is the main mover and shaker in the 'old' religion in Iceland. When the Vikings were forced to become Christians a belief in elves, trolls and the old Norse gods lingered on. Sveinbjorn spoke through a translator . . .

Is Einar Loki?

"Ha ha ha ha. No I do not think so!"

What are your religious beliefs? "We try to live in tune with nature, we don't believe in God Almighty. We believe that we are responsible for our own actions."

Tell me about the elves.

"Their nature is very good, very sweet but they can get angry."

So you don't f— with the elves?

"Ha ha ha ha . . ."

He didn't need a translator for that last question.