

# TOUCHED BY THE HAND OF COD

● Sniffing a new album in the pipeline by his fave Icelandic band, STEVEN WELLS pops up north and boldly tries to write the first ever SUGARCUBES feature where the pages don't stick together. Ace lensman BLEDDYN BUTCHER takes some very tasteful and definitely non-indie type piccies before he is dragged off and held to ransom by the pixies.

**W**hat is a hometown meal with The Sugarcubes like? Imagine eating a pie only to discover it contains the well cooked corpses of your children.

Imagine that when you were very, very small you had a very special puppy dog. One day it went missing and you cried and cried and cried. Many years later you are sat in an Icelandic restaurant. You order something unpronounceable from the menu. The waiter wheels out a steaming silver salver, whips off the cover and there, with a huge shiny apple in its mouth, is your puppy dog . . . .

"What," I ask the waiter, "is Heitt spinatt med rektum lunden og stokko becon?"

"That is, er, a warm spinach salad . . ." says the waiter with a smirk.

"Mmmmmm! Sounds delish!"  
" . . . with smoked puffin and crispy bacon."

"What?"  
"Smoked puffin and cris . . ."  
"SMOKED PUFFIN!"

I clutch at the tablecloth, totter in my chair, fight to breathe and struggle not to vomit. I stare at Thor and Bragi with undisguised contempt. I came to Iceland as a fan, ready to lick sweet cubist arse but now . . . Bastards! Prepare yourself for the first ever slugging of The so-called Sugarcubes in the Brit rock press — you *perverts!* These swine eat *puffins!*

Well, let me tell you, mate, that I was a founder member of the Puffin Club which was a kind of *Blue Peter* for book worms. I mean we are talking *Stig Of The Dump!* *Emil And The Detectives!* *The Otterbury Incident!* The Puffin Club taught me to write, for Christ's sake, and it also taught me that the amusingly orange-beaked black and white sea-parrot is our FRIEND!

"Actually", says Bragi, "it tastes quite delicious . . ."

"Really?"

"Really."

"Hm . . ."

## FLASHBACK! COWBOYS IN REYKJAVIK

**E**inar and Thor are the reception committee for the package trip of Brit rock press scum. Thor looks like a supporting character from *Thunderbirds*. Einar looks like Hell incarnate. He is wearing a black stetson on his boggly-eyed head and gunslinger boots on his feet. On his own Einar is very nice. In company Einar is brutally but pleasantly efficient.

Thor starts to explain the . . . Einar flashes him a deadly stare and tells us that we are only going to get ten minutes each with two Sugarcubes before rotating on to the next two Sugarcubes and it's going to happen *now*. No shit, no shower, no nothing — *now*.



Sugarcubes (clockwise from bottom left): Bjork, Bragi, Soggi, Thor, Einar, Magga

He's telling one of his brilliant fibs and he has us worried. What fiendish plot lurks in that devilish mind? Acid spiked orange juice? Will we be stripped naked, smeared with smoked puffin, be forced to wear huge orange beaks and left in the middle of the bleak lunar landscape to be eaten by the polar bears?

Later I tell Bjork that this would be a fun thing to arrange for the jourmos whose wank-stiffened copy has got up her "pert", "perfect" nose. She gives the suggestion serious consideration. She tells me that a lot of tourists die miserable deaths by underestimating just how much of a bastard Iceland can be. A bunch of Japanese tourists, feeling invulnerable in their moon-buggy wheeled super-jeep, recently tried to ford an Icelandic river. They flipped upside down within seconds and drowned.

**TRUE OR FALSE—THE SUGARCUBES ARE A BUNCH OF PISSEHEADS?**

Einar leads us out to his transit van. It looks very Einar—matt black with tinted windows. He opens a side door and a vodka bottle topples out and smashes. They drink a lot in Iceland. Before the weekend is over one photographer will be reduced to a heap in the corner of a disco after an unsuccessful trip round the dancefloor trying to find anyone willing to fight or frug with him. Two of the writers will hit each other.

I saw The Sugarcubes drink and drink and drink and drink but I never saw a Sugarcube drunk. Einar slumps on the floor of his van, brings forth a bottle from the depths of his Lee Van Cleef jacket and announces with a malignant grin—"It's Pernod time!" Pernod time for Einar is 12 noon. Einar has a reputation for being a shithead.

"I am arrogant and proud of it!" You get that sort of reputation by being clinically obnoxious. Professional shitheads (Norman Tebbit, Mark E Smith, Gerry Sadowitz, Bernard Manning, Hector from *Hector's House*) always do it better stone cold sober. I don't think that Einar is in that league, he's human enough to want people to like him.

"I do need assurance from my friends. I do ask them—have I done anything wrong? If Siggy is in a bad mood I say—what's wrong? Did I do something? I am not a bully, I am a fascist. The last time I headbutted a person was a drunk guy in a bar in Reykjavik. He was pestering everybody in this cafe. Everybody.

"He kept pestering me to read to me some of the poems of his. Yes! So he read me a poem and I said, Thank you very much, I appreciate it. Then he came up to me again, he kept on. I said, F—off! and he said, I want to read you one more poem. I said no way. BOK! I broke his nose. He started bleeding on the floor and all the people in the bar started clapping . . ."

So far we've done little to contradict the image we have of Einar as the aggressive drunk. The image is crap, one that he's totally bored with, one concocted out of the fact that the other Sugarcubes are quiet chaps . . . and that a crazy Keith Moon character is a music hack's Godsend. If Bjork is Sue the Panda (eek, eek) then Einar is Sooty and Sweep and Ramsbottom the snake rolled into one CRASHBANGTHUMPSLITHER-THUMP! . . .

Except, of course, that there's no one under the table with their hands up The Sugarcubes arses . . . When Liz, the One Little Indian press officer, rolls her eyes and says "The Butthole Surfers were bad enough but this lot are on another f—ing planet!" you can guess she's only half joking. Later on she'll try and kick me in the bollocks. Press officers this good are very rare indeed.

**THE SUGARCUBES ARE SEXIER THAN PRINCE?**

Einar is not the best looking, the cutest, the most intelligent or the most talented Sugarcube. But he's definitely the most shaggable. Bjork may fit neatly into the steamy spectacled indie fan's vision of the perfect and untouchable boy/woman (nearly all the wank-manifestos written on this subject have come from the trembly and wart encrusted hands of ex-public schoolboys) but without Einar The Sugarcubes would not be able to claim, as they often do, that without The Sugarcubes there is no sex.

The sexiest thing about this Nordic Madonna? He's a walking bullshit detector. He's the sort of person who headbutts boring drunken poets where most of us would just cringe with embarrassment. At the New Music Seminar he sat through enough sanctimonious bullshit on "Rock and Drugs" to kill any normal human being. When asked to comment he raised his head off the table and said—according to one of the half dozen versions that have now entered rock legend—"I really like your slogan, 'Just Say No'. If someone says to you, 'Give me your drugs!—Just say no' . . ."

"I was just getting so tired of these self confessed f—ing addicts . . . They were glorifying themselves in their own shit. I just said that rock music would not exist without drugs, which is true. You've got this bunch of Americans—or US because you can't call them Americans—coming out with this shit. Like I am a pop star and I am an alcoholic, yeah, and half the audience came to the microphone and said the f—ing same thing!

"What can I do? . . . We drink sure, but we control our drink. We might drink long hours but we don't get pissed out of our heads. It's controlled alcoholism if that exists. We don't drink that much even though we've got an enormous rider (48 bottles of beer, three of champagne, one Campari, one Cognac, six cartons of orange juice, eight litres of Perrier . . .) but that's to take with us to drink on the road . . ."

**FLASH FORWARD TO DINNER WITH THE PUFFIN KILLERS**

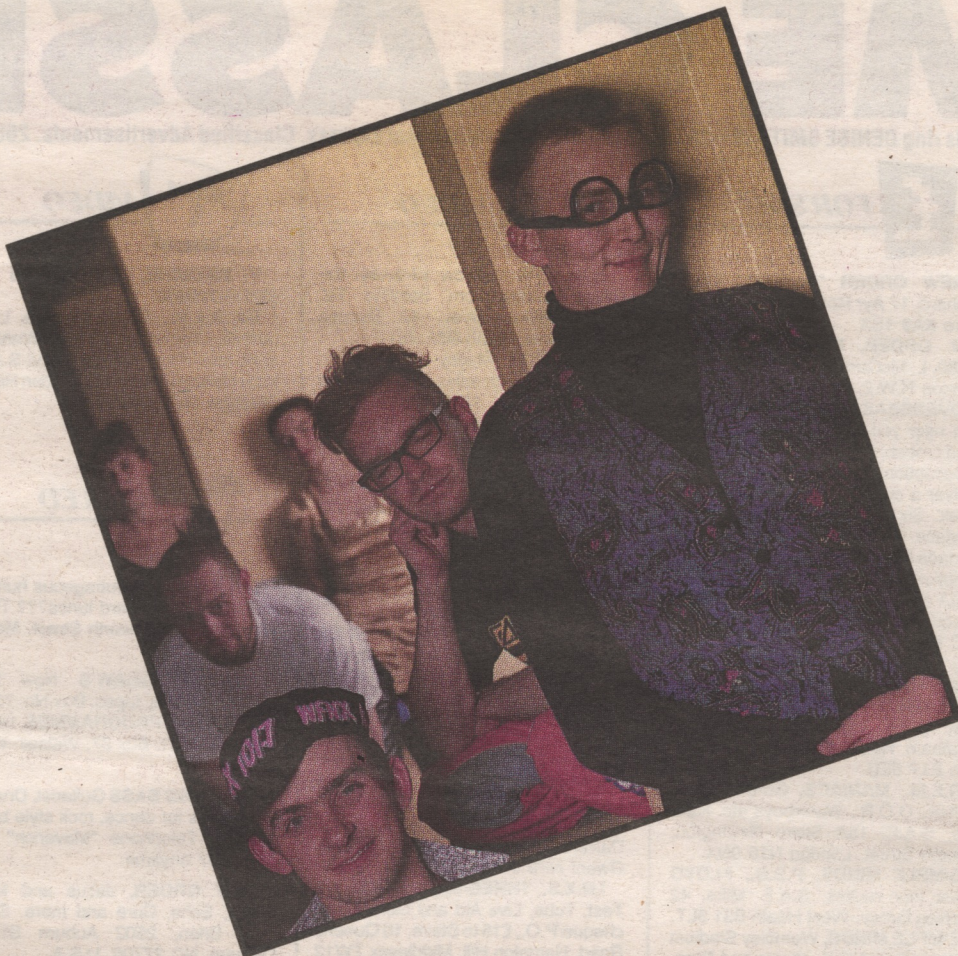
Bjork was telling me that Iceland is run by a mafia of grandmothers and I know that "F— your grandmother" is a popular Icelandic term of abuse. Have you ever f—ed your Grandmother?

This is the stupidest question I have ever asked. Bragi and the hack are hungover to hell and in no mood to dissect the dichotomies and contradictions of quasi-pop. So it's time to put a Sugarcube on the couch for some Freudian analysis. What makes these bastards tick—I mean *really* tick? Also I figure that if I can make a Sugarcube puke I should have the interview sewn up. Bragi squints at me across the table. Well? Have you? People get degrees for asking questions like this. They also get their heads kicked in.

"No. Not yet." Do you want to? "Yes. Um, no" Why not? "Both my grandmothers are dead." So?

"Hang on, I'm looking for my car. It's him with the hunch! No it isn't!" Er, who exactly? "The guy with the hunchback who goes around Reykjavik scraping his screwdriver down the side of cars."

Aha! Very interesting! I make a note in my notebook. I ask him if grannie ever gave him a goodnight kiss and stuck her tongue in his mouth. "No, she was usually too drunk."



**"If there are some bands that we would be categorised with it would be bands like Abba and Boney M."—Bjork**

Would you be totally surprised if at three in the morning there was a knock at the door and it was your grandmother risen from the grave with an axe?

"I would be surprised." Really? Is there a lot of voodoo in Iceland?

"There is much cursing somebody but not voodoo." Have you ever sacrificed anybody? "No."

Have you ever swum through a swimming pool of human entrails? "Er, no . . ." Would you like to? "Yes, why not?" Do you ever have that nightmare where you find you can fly but you start falling and you end up drowning in a sea of used condoms? Do you believe in collective psychosis or what?

"I don't know what that means." Are rabbits super-intelligent space aliens? "I don't like rabbits. I like the ant-eater." Is that latent homosexuality on your part? Are you maybe

confusing the ant-eater's schnozzle with your own penis? "Maybe, yes."

Do elephants excite you? "No, I am afraid of elephants. They are too big. It takes them two years to have a baby. Oh look, here comes your puffin salad."

But it's not the puffin salad. It's Thor. Thor is a complex, highly intelligent and extremely talented character who should really be interviewed in depth if we are to find out what really lies at the heart of the Sugarcubes experience. Alas, he is as hungover as we are but being a poet he is able to sum up the Sugarcubes phenomenon in just two sentences.

He says: "I always get stage fright except when I play Germany because then I just think—F— you!"

And, clutching a bottle, he says. "We're not the eating kind . . ."

**REWIND—THE SUGARCUBES TALK ABOUT THEIR NEW ALBUM! SORT OF . . .**

The Sugarcubes come off stage after delivering a set that contained few of their old songs but loads of the soon-come album including the brilliant new single—'Regina'.

"It's not 'Life's Too Good Part 2'," claims Einar before the gig. "A lot of people were expecting us to make 'Life's Too Good Part 2' but we didn't. It says a lot about our situation. When you spoke last to us, you know, you came like a breath of fresh air to us. We are here to stay and we're not gone tomorrow. We're not one hit wonders."

"We will continue to make music whether people like it or not. We don't need it, this front cover stuff. OK, so in a way we might need it but in the long term it just goes on our CV. It took a long time to mix because we had a clear idea of what it should sound like but we didn't know how to mix it . . ."

Watching Einar run around after the gig you get to thinking that he probably carries the buzz with him, shooting off sparks until he collapses into sleep. In the van

on the way home he tunes to a rock station that hammers out some AC/DC followed by The Sugarcubes' 'Luft Guitar'.

"THIS IS MY KIND OF STATION!" he yells, giving us the thumbs up.

In the dressing room Bjork approaches.

"Have you heard about the restaurant on the moon? Great food but it has no atmosphere. It was told to me by a robot in Denver?"

Despite the fact that with her a new crop she looks more like Marine Boy than an indie wanker dream gurdy, Bjork is cursed or blessed with a cute face, a cute voice and a cute manner. Which is all bollocks because she's no more of a gurdy than Einar is a macho nutter. She once spent the night in a Reykjavik police station after she smashed the windows of a disco "because it was full of boring people". Einar and Thor also had a brush with the law recently when Iceland's new and very eager drug squad stopped and searched them in the street. Einar is bemused:

"Does Iceland really need a drug squad?"

**FAST FORWARD—THE CUBE SQUARED**

It is a birthday for three of the Sugarcubes gang. One of their friends is an alcoholic so Bjork has bought him a king size liver from an anatomical model shop. Another friend is pregnant so Bjork has bought her a giant womb.

This is the Bjork who says: "I am a housewife. It's not an image or anything, it's just a fact. I cook porridge, I play with my kid, I go camping with my kid. All that sort of stuff, you know, housewife stuff."

She is onstage dressed in a mini skirt and what I think are, er, clogs. Backed by a geezer from Ham she is twisting and thrashing her way through Olivia and Elton's 'Don't Go Breaking My Heart' (Funny! It was the Kiki and Elton version that was a hit in this country!—Ed). This is Cleopatra, Bjork's other group. The radio here plays a lot of '70s disco pop. You might think that The Sugarcubes want to be The Sex Pistols. They think they want to be Abba.

Siggy: "I hope we will become pop stars. A proper pop band. We've been saying that we've been making pop music all along."

Bjork: "Pop music is underestimated, it is such a pure form. It's making music for people and it has become such a dirty word. Sumptuous lines that get to people. It's a very personal thing. Most of pop music today is very impersonal. Boney M is pure pop music."

Ra-Ra-Rasputin! Lover of the Russian Queen!

Bjork: "Russia's greatest love machine!"

But The Sugarcubes are a very knowing band. You can't possibly claim the same sort of manufactured added innocence as Boney M?

Bjork: "I don't look at myself as an intellectual."

Siggy: "We are not really taking the piss. It has something to do with our sense of humour . . ."

Bjork: "But there is still something pure about Boney M. I'm not being a hypocrite saying The Sugarcubes are like Boney M. It would be hypocritical to say—Listen to Boney M ha, ha—but if there are some bands that we would be categorised with it would be bands like Abba and Boney M, you know, and that sort of stuff. It's far away from what we want to be but it's still closest because to be called an indie band is even worse than being called a hippy band. Indie is a totally exhausted word."

And that's really it. The Sugarcubes come from an island miles from the mainstream and

# SUGARCUBES

FROM PAGE 43



perhaps as a result they are both cocky and defensive. In 1981, punk rock hit Iceland and fired up enough energetic monkeys to create a scene. Like most scenes it fell apart, the present day Sugarcubes stayed at its hard core even as their friends got mortgages and marriages and their parents asked them when they were going to grow up.

'Birthday' hit the Brits for six, indie pop advocates, nearly buried under an avalanche of crap plastic, hailed the band as the Messiah, come to lead them out of misery and into the broad, sunlit uplands of indie heaven. But The Sugarcubes did not come with the cringe and the timidity we expect of foreign (ie, non-US) indie popsters.

Think about it. There is one good French pop band. The rest of Europe scores nil. Iceland bulges at the seams with them. Having to be filtered through Britain to the US has caused them problems, many Yanks think The Sugarcubes are an invention of the Brit music press. That's the price they pay for the fact that they have the Brit music press stitched up like a kipper.

You've probably read a lot of crap about Iceland in the last three years. It is not a terribly weird place. The people drink, f—— and fight no harder than British proles (they're just better at it). The sense of humour is so familiarly sardonic and aggressive that it's frightening. That's why the Sugarcubes are invulnerable. They deal with the record industry with skilful contempt and handle journalists like master PRs. They know exactly how much the way they are viewed by their audience is moulded by the framework and the reference points of "indie" Britain.

The Sugarcubes have almost squared the circle between anarchopunk sensibilities and pure pop by refusing to be daunted by the staggering contradictions and by refusing to act like wide eyed foreigners. I mean, did the Vikings apologise to their victims for not being Anglo-Saxon enough? Not ruddy likely. Keep your puffins locked up — The Anarchopop Hezzbolah Boney Crass Crew (an Abba-ration if ever there was one) is not about to go away.