

God in the Abstract

Sigur Ros and the Metaphysical Fantastic



I can't get [Sigur Ros](#) songs out of my head. I wish I could remember the names. I wish I could pronounce the names. They're Icelandic, ya know. Lots of letters and symbols I've never seen before. Is it Cyrillic mixed with Roman characters, or do I just have no clue? And that's just the *first* two LPs from the band.

With Sigur Ros, concrete language becomes irrelevant, transcended by a beautiful abstraction beyond any physical plane, truly ethereal. It is no wonder that their latest LP eschews not only a title for the collection itself, but titles for the individual songs, leaving the listener with only references to Track 1, Track 2, Track 3, etc. Yet the standard assignment of the electronic machine - with all of its analogies to the atomic universe and subparticles, quarks intact - is still too entrenched in the physical world to render Sigur Ros its due. Perhaps randomly generated garbling of randomly created characters could come close to well-serving Sigur Ros, but the point is moot. Daring to reach beyond my intellectual limits, I would venture that the Barthes and Lacans of this mortal coil would deem Sigur Ros sign beyond signifier or even vice versa.

But I venture forth nonetheless, the naïve listener, more so naïve for wanting so desperately to tell any and all reading this page that Sigur Ros are the greatest event in rock music since Buddy Holly ripped his three chords in a Lubbock, Texas skating rink. Buddy at the skating rink was a seminal moment that reverberated faster, harder and higher than Elvis or all of his Colonel Klinks could have dreamed. From Sr. Presley came teeny boppers and, eventually, heavy metal, hardly a bloodline of which to be proud - not to mention the legions of rock/country Nashville dreck which rose amoeba from the sewage of his wake, now pervading the country's misbegotten midsection like a rampant cancer on the national psyche. If one should question the superiority of his Hollyness to that of the Tupelo Gigolo, listen closely and you'll know that Buddy begat the Beatles, Stones, the Who - a holy trinity if there ever was one, though this scribbler tends to deflate the father in favor of the holy ghost and thinks the Son has become nothing but an aging boob who can't seem to bring himself to accept his own obsolescence. Yes, I know, blues gave rise to Mr. Holly and his cohorts, but time and space herein preclude such historical waxing.

But departing from this Genealogical Gerrymandering, redirecting the eardrums to Sigur Ros, it is as though Iceland exists in some sort of ethereal near- vacuum - in light of its top musical sons and daughters that have resonated worldwide - first Bjork (né Sugarcubes) and now Sigur Ros. I'm certain there's a Reyjavik scene with many more past and present where that came from. One could only wish.

Though the groups' similarities in ethereality are undeniable, the paths taken once those leaps into the metaphysical have been made are quite the opposite. While Bjork and friends frantically shout for the heavens and demand that god show his ambivalent face in show-stopping spasms of rhythm and sorrow - thrashing as though in death throes, Sigur Ros vibrate highly, yet gently, and certainly not linearly. While Bjork yearns upward,

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Sigur Ros emanate in all directions at once. Within this seeming omniscient resonance appears to be (perhaps in no small part projected by this listener) a concept of god as not a singular being, but a vibrating molecular presence in all things physical and all things beyond, a sort of *god in the abstract* - everywhere at all times - a muse waiting to be heeded or ignored. Sigur Ros, its slow, meandering melodies wafting through the air like smoke from some unseen raging fire of the subconscious heartily heeds this muse, only momentarily pausing to say to Bjork - "what are you looking for? Stop screaming '*Deus Deus Does Not Exist*' and looking for some guy in a beard. It's not a he. It's an *it*, and it's right here and everywhere."

If this is the Icelandic sensibility, so let it be, and may Sigur Ros be the breath that blows the dandelion of that temperament into the world's cultural wind. Let a thousand Icelanders bloom.

Sigur Ros will be at the Paramount in Oakland on 4/8/03. See other [U.S. dates.](#)

[BJR](#)

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