

Breaking the ice; Sigur Ros wrestle with the pop aesthetic in a language few speak but everyone can understand.

"Have you ever tasted whale?" asks Geog Hólm, the lanky bass player of Sigur Ros, standing before a dormant row of whaling ships in Reykjavik's fishing harbor. It's 11:30pm, and the sun is still shining, thanks to the white nights of summer. "Whale is delicious," he continues. "They're going to bring back whaling here, you know, because the whales are eating up too much fish." In a sense, these abandoned, rusted ships are the ideal description of Sigur Ros' music, which is as easy as it is obliquely Icelandic. Far more so than their predecessors, The Sugarcubes and Guð Guð, Sigur Ros reflect the barren, lunar landscape of the peculiar country. As the name (borrowed from a Nordic

literature) implies, they've made the impractical decision to sing in a weird form of Icelandic that even the locals don't understand. It's a risk the Sugarcubes were understandably reluctant to take before talent was on the music map, re-naming "Árnauti" as the "Witchy" that most of us got to know.

Aside from being impossible to pronounce, *Ágætisbyrjun* (A Good Start, just released in Iceland, you can see songs under seven minutes, which should make things all the more challenging for Sigur Ros).

Joni Blöndin sings these spaced ballads, and plays his guitar with a violin bow, creating something of his alter-ego as a mad symphony conductor. "That's a great description of our music," he says, pondering the sinking ship comparison. "One Icelandic journalist came to our show and wrote that it was as beautiful she had to run to the bathroom and throw up." We assume she meant it as a compliment.

Ágætisbyrjun is out now on Fat Cat. Hear Sigur Ros on www.confused.co.uk

