

Björk

We went all the way to London to hang with Björk, the **coolest pop star** ever to come out of **Iceland**. Her English may not be perfect, but her **music** is.

I am on a pilgrimage—a flight from New York to London to meet my hero, Björk. While the other members of her former band, the Sugarcubes, have virtually faded away, the lovable but reclusive Björk (pronounced BYORK) just can't seem to hide from the spotlight. This is not a recent phenomenon. When Björk was an 11-year-old music student, she was already a singing sensation in her native Iceland. Figuring out that fame wasn't her thing, she quit the pop music scene and eventually started a fiercely hard-core band called Kukl. Since those punk-rocker days, Björk has had a son, helped form a publishing company, fronted the Sugarcubes and recorded two totally magical solo albums, *Debut* and her latest, *Post* (both on Elektra).

On the plane, listening to Björk's excellent single "Army of Me," I wonder how I'll break the ice with this supercool Iclander. As it turns out, the weird but wonderful singer warmed right up to me.

1 Without giving a complete geography lesson, can you describe what Iceland is really like?

It's a small country, but at the same time Reykjavík is a European capital. It's a country with very, very strong nature. One day there could be blizzards—it could snow higher than the rooftops. I think it's not far from that TV program in America, *Northern Exposure*.

2 Did you watch a lot of TV?

Literature is to Iceland what television is to America. It's only recently that we had television on every day of the week. And then it's on only three hours a day. In July there's no telly at all because the TV people take off for holiday and go ride in their Jeeps.

3 Is that what people do for fun in Iceland, ride around in Jeeps?

There's only one hobby in Iceland, and that is getting a big Jeep—most people have four-wheel drives—and driving into the wilderness with the glaciers and the hot springs and having an Indiana Jones session. Some get killed, but not many. It's a bit of a survival test. ▶



4 What were you like as a little kid?

I took the bus by myself from age five because Iceland is very safe and there is no way anyone would do anything to you. In a way, I brought myself up. If I didn't feel like eating for two days, that was fine. If I wanted to wear a pink paper dress I made myself, that was fine. It was the best childhood you could imagine.

5 You have an eight-and-a-half-year-old son. Are you raising him the same way?

In a lot of ways, he's similar to me because he disciplines himself. If he wants to eat this, I let him. If he says he wants to do that, I let him. Kids know pretty well what they need, and you should trust them.

6 What kind of music did you listen to growing up?

I got very mixed musics. I was raised by hippies, so I listened to Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin. Then I was in a classical-music school for 10 years. My grandparents listened to jazz. And then there's the Iceland music. We consider ourselves the first rappers of Europe because a thousand years ago we memorized all the sagas of the Vikings of Scandinavia by rhyming all the things that happened. They were half-sung, half-spoken.



7 What kind of music do you like to listen to now?

For the last two years, when I'm bored, I turn the radio to the jungle channel. It's this English thing. I don't know how to describe it, but it's like hip-hop sped up, like, four times.

8 You've often said your last album, *Debut*, was like inviting someone over to your house. Is your new recording as personal?

Debut was more private, almost shy. Since I moved to London two years ago, I changed from being an introvert to being an extrovert. This album is my reaction to living in the middle of London and its high energy.

9 Why did you move to London from Iceland?

Because it's cosmopolitan and it's only two hours to fly to Iceland and my son likes to go there for weekends.

10 Those buns you used to wear on top of your head became a major fashion trend. What are you going to do next?

I used to wear my hair like that for karate—to keep my hair out of my way. But if you do it a lot, your hair gets broken. So I'm going to have it straight for a while. But my friend is making this hat for me. It's going to be like the little trolls with the orange hair that goes up. I'll wear it when I sing something angry.

11 Do you make your own clothes?

I used to do it all the time, but I don't

have time anymore, even though it's so easy! I come from a place where everyone is self-sufficient, where you never call a maintenance man—you repair your car yourself.

12 How do you decide what clothes to put on in the morning?

I just try to dress for the mood I'm in. Mostly I'm still wearing the kinds of clothes I wore as a kid. It's really funny when I go shopping. I always end up walking out with something I had when I was five. Like, I had this orange shirt. It's just a bit bigger now.

13 Do you consider yourself a fashion queen?

I find it very boring to be stylish. [Björk did her own hair and makeup for our photo shoot.] To look all glamorous and sexy, I can do it, like, three times a year. It's like a game.

14 I heard a woman had a heart attack when she saw your former music group, Kukl. True story or rock myth?

I was in this band that was very experimental, very, very hard-core sort of jazz punk. I mean, Nine Inch Nails could go to bed compared to our music. We were on a television show, and I was seven months pregnant and wore a T-shirt that said "Like A Virgin" and did all these belly-button moves, and this 75-year-old woman had a heart attack when she watched us on TV.

15 Do you like touring?

I used to hate it very much, but I did it anyway because the Sugarcubes were six people and if I hadn't toured I would have let down five of my best friends. But now I can't wait! I wrote this new album so I could actually play it live.

16 I love the tattoo on your arm. What does it symbolize?

It's a compass. It's from a 1,500-year-old ruin from Viking mythology. I got it when I was 16.

17 Are you still glad you got it?

Oh, definitely. With this tattoo, I don't feel lost. —Amy Talkington