

Inspired by Iceland

Kate Wellham

Iceland may be twirling speedily down the pan if headlines are to be believed – simultaneously exploding and bankrupting. But watching the Inspired By Iceland gig in Reykjavik this weekend one is struck by the fact that there are surprisingly few people running around in rags on fire.

Musically, Iceland's reputation has been in fine standing for many years, and remains untouched as Iceland's most famous export. How can any place so inextricably linked with Sigur Ros, Emiliana Torrini and Bjork possibly be anything but some sort of Nordic utopia?

So as part of a campaign to lure tourists back to the country – which, by the way, is neither covered in ash, unreachable by plane nor so poor that Reykjavik jail needs more than a seven-person prison to contain all the desperate thieves – they decided to put on a gig to show the rest of the world that it's still a beautiful place to be. And looking at the crowd, that's a fair point to labour.

Among the artists who play live from the centre of the city are Damien Rice, Glen Hansard and Spiritualized. Notably not Icelandic, but they share much of the eerie folk and dreamlike sounds synonymous with Icelandic music, so we'll let it slide.

Opening band Amiina are a beautiful instrumental lot who seem to be calling the gathering crowds over like sirens on glockenspiels.

Steindor Andersen and Hilmar Orn are spectacular, in an understated sort of way. Steindor is a fisherman who chants shivers up the spine (I secretly hope he's just reading out his shopping list), whilst Hilmar is an experimental musician apparently famous for pioneering the use of computers in music, although today has an analogue orchestra to play with.

Parabolur are a bizarre sight; imagine Stomp but instead of dustbin lids they're hitting old telecommunication radio disc covers. It may seem silly at first, but when the addictive synth kicks in we're too busy dancing to pass judgment.

Because I'm an ignorant Brit who needs to be physically brought here to understand that Iceland isn't on the brink of the apocalypse, I shall now describe the other acts only in relation to the pop stars they reminded me of:

- Seabear is The Libertines with fiddles - the frontman looking like he's just been punched in both eyes and done a few shots immediately before coming onstage. Just to clarify, this means they are good.
- Hafdis Huld is somewhere between Cerys Matthews and Laura Marling, with a beautiful voice and charming stage presence.
- Dikta is just enough Ed Harcourt to make up for the large helping of James Blunt.
- Mammut, that's easy; pure Yeah Yeah Yeahs, minus the electro, but with extra accordion which – if you're reading this, Karen O – does add a little something.

Far from a fiery wasteland, the worst thing we have to deal with all day is the drizzle, which has already seen the gig moved from its original location by a waterfall to the safer confines of a public park. So if you're surviving fairly well in Britain right now, you've got very little to fear from a visit to this beautiful place.

