

A man in a light-colored button-down shirt and dark pants stands on a dark, rocky ledge. The background is a misty, hazy landscape with a large, faint, pixelated figure of a man in the distance. The overall mood is atmospheric and ethereal.

# STARA

**The Music of  
Halldór Smárason**  
Siggi String Quartet & Guests

# STARA

## The Music of Halldór Smárason

- 1. draw + play** [7:51]  
Siggí String Quartet
- 2. stop breathing** [7:47]  
Siggí String Quartet, Emilía Rós Sigfúsdóttir,  
Geirþrúður Ása Guðjónsdóttir, Helga Björg  
Arnardóttir, Tinna Thorsteinsdóttir
- 3. Stara** [9:10]  
Siggí String Quartet
- 4. Skúlpúr 1** [4:38]  
Gulli Björnsson
- 5. BLAKTA** [11:23]  
Siggí String Quartet
- 6. \_a\_at\_na** [8:08]  
Siggí String Quartet, Geirþrúður Ása Guðjónsdóttir,  
Helga Björg Arnardóttir, Tinna Thorsteinsdóttir

**Total Time:** [49:02]



STARA is Halldór Smárason's debut album.

It was recorded in Halldór's hometown of Ísafjörður, in the Westfjords region in the northwestern part of Iceland.

Featuring works from different stages in the composer's life, ranging from his student years in New York to this day as a family man and freelance composer, STARA shows Halldór's development of a characteristic style and unique sense of narrative. All the works on the album are inspired by personal experiences, and are often dedicated to people close to the composer himself.

STARA features Halldór's three string quartets: *draw + play*, *Stara*, and *BLAKTA*; the guitar solo piece *Skúlptúr 1*; and the chamber works *\_a\_at\_na* and *stop breathing*.

Halldór's music has been described as atmospheric yet aggressive, characterized by a simmering energy just beneath the surface that erupts from time to time. His compositional voice is highly original and personal. In each composition, Halldór strives for a distinct approach, which is guided by the specifics of the composition (the occasions, the space, the instruments, the performer, etc.). As a result, his sonic repertoire is extremely rich. He often includes extra-musical and music-theatrical aspects, which create highly distinct artistic experiences. Additionally, Halldór has been acknowledged for high attention to detail in regards to sound and notation.

STARA is intended to be an insightful portrait of the composer, introducing Halldór's poetic sonic world.

# Halldór Smáráson



Halldór Smáráson was born in Ísafjörður in 1989. He completed an Advanced Level Piano Examination in 2009, a B.A. degree in composition from the Iceland University of the Arts in 2012 and an M.M. degree from the Manhattan School of Music in 2014. Through the years his teachers include composers Dr. Reiko Fütting, Atli Ingólfsson and Tryggvi M. Baldvinsson, and pianist Sigríður Ragnarsdóttir.

Halldór has received numerous grants and awards, including a six-week residency at Civitella Ranieri in Umbria, Italy, and a Fulbright grant. He has received the artist's salaries four times, which is a state-funded art support for a group of selected artists in Iceland. Halldór has worked with many renowned artists in Iceland and abroad, including the Iceland Symphony Orchestra, Stuttgart Radio Symphony, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France and many chamber ensembles, including Ensemble intercontemporain.

As a pianist, Halldór has performed on numerous occasions as a soloist or as part of various groups, including the band Albatross and the vocal quartet Sætabrauðsdrengirnir.

[www.halldorsmarason.com](http://www.halldorsmarason.com)



## draw + play

Commissioned in 2017 by Siggi String Quartet, *draw + play* is dedicated to Halldór's personal friends and notable accordion collectors Ásgeir Sigurðsson and Messíana Marzellíusdóttir. The piece is inspired by the instrument, and the title is extracted from an old Icelandic word meaning accordion.

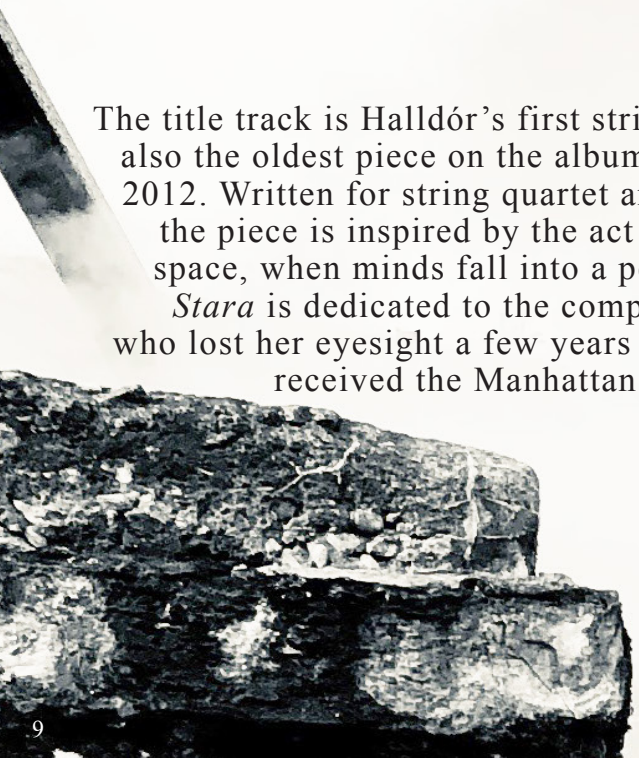


## stop breathing

Written for bass flute, violin, piano, violoncello, viola and clarinet, *stop breathing* is based on an earlier composition by Halldór, *Pólypsar* for solo violin. It was commissioned by Time of Music - Musiikin aika festival in Viitasaari and premiered by Talea Ensemble, conducted by James Baker, on July 8th 2017.



## Stara



The title track is Halldór's first string quartet and also the oldest piece on the album, composed in 2012. Written for string quartet and electronics, the piece is inspired by the act of staring into space, when minds fall into a peaceful trance.

*Stara* is dedicated to the composer's mother, who lost her eyesight a few years ago. The work received the Manhattan Prize in 2012.

## Skúlptúr 1

In this short piece for guitar and electronics written in 2013, the performer portrays a sculptor carving an ice sculpture in a race with the clock before the ice melts. If the performer can't finish the score in time, an alarm built in the electronic component will go off and end the piece.

# BLAKTA

The most recently composed piece on the album, *BLAKTA*, was commissioned by the Museum of Jón Sigurðsson in Hrafnseyri celebrating Iceland's 100 years as a free and sovereign state. *BLAKTA* is inspired by a flag fluttering in various weather conditions and is characterized by distinctive vibratos of different speed and density. The piece was written during Halldór's residency at Civitella Ranieri in Umbria, Italy in the spring of 2018.

# \_a\_at\_na

The last, and perhaps the most ambiguous composition on the album is based on the composer's personal struggle with anxiety. In the music, Halldór portrays various objects, locations and emotions that are connected to the inspiration. Even the stage setup is affected by this very personal subject. Thus, during live performances the piano is isolated in the middle of the audience whereas the rest of the performers surround the audience. This can be realized in the fully immersive audio version of the album.

The missing letters in the title form a sort of puzzle. The first three letters of the word anxiety in Icelandic will reveal the true title of the piece.

## Siggi String Quartet

SIGGI STRING QUARTET was founded in 2012 around the UNM Festival, Ung Nordisk Musik. Since then the members Una Sveinbjarnardóttir and Helga Þóra Björgvinsdóttir violinists, violist Þórunn Ósk Marínósdóttir and cellist Sigurður Bjarki Gunnarsson have premiered several works and collaborated with a number of composers as well as exploring older repertoire with schwerpunkt Beethoven. The members of Siggi String Quartet have worked with Björk, Jóhann Jóhannsson, Ensemble Modern, Atli Heimir Sveinsson, Caput, Slátur, Bedroom Community and Errata Collective as well as being key members of Reykjavík Chamber Orchestra and Iceland Symphony Orchestra. The Quartet plays a major role in the Nordic music scene. The classical string quartet repertoire is of great importance to the members of Siggi and a dominant part of their journey of research. Previous projects include the Iceland premiere of the 5 hour long *2nd String Quartet* of Morton Feldman, Jón Leifs Quartets, Beethoven Quartets, Philip Glass recordings for Deutsche Grammophon with pianist Víkingur Ólafsson and the oeuvre of Atli Heimir Sveinsson. Their debut album “South of the Circle” DSL-92232 (2019 on Sono Luminus) includes works of Daníel Bjarnason, Mamiko Dís Ragnarsdóttir, Valgeir Sigurðsson, Una Sveinbjarnardóttir and Haukur Tómasson. Siggi String Quartet received “Performer of the Year” at the Icelandic Music Awards in 2018. Siggi String Quartet has premiered nine new compositions in the first three months of 2020.

[www.siggistringquartet.com](http://www.siggistringquartet.com)

## Emilía Rós Sigfúsdóttir

Flautist Emilía Rós Sigfúsdóttir has in the past years established a career as one of the leading flute players in Iceland. Her performances have been praised by many critics and her debut CD, *Portrait*, received a stunning review in Gramophone and three nominations for the Icelandic Music Awards. Emilía Rós appears widely as a soloist and plays regularly with the Iceland Symphony Orchestra, the Icelandic Opera and her chamber group Elektra Ensemble. In 2018 she performed widely across Europe with Björk and the flute septet Viibra.

[www.emiliaros.com](http://www.emiliaros.com)

## Geirþrúður Ása Guðjónsdóttir

Ása Guðjónsdóttir began her violin studies at the age of 3. She finished her undergraduate degree from Iceland Academy of the Arts before furthering her studies in Vienna with Boris Kuschnir, and in the United States with Routa Kroumovitch at Stetson University. She graduated with a Masters in Violin Performance from the Hartt School under the guidance of Anton Miller. Ása is a member of the Icelandic Symphony Orchestra and regularly performs as a chamber musician and soloist in Iceland, Europe and the United States.



# Gulli Björnsson

Gulli Björnsson holds degrees in guitar from Manhattan School of Music, Yale and is currently a candidate for the Ph.D. degree in composition at Princeton University. Gulli's music typically blends electronics, acoustic instruments and visuals and has been described as “Hypnotic” (News Gazette) and “virtuosic [...] modern, occasionally discordant, but still accessible” (Classical Guitar Magazine).

[www.gullibjornsson.org](http://www.gullibjornsson.org)

# Helga Björg Arnardóttir

Helga Björg Arnardóttir graduated from Hogeschool voor de Kunsten, Utrecht in 2003 as a clarinet performer. After graduation she has been active in the Icelandic music scene as a soloist as well as playing with chamber ensembles and orchestras. She performs regularly with her chamber group, Elektra ensemble, which focuses on contemporary music and was awarded the Icelandic music awards “best classical and contemporary group” in 2019.

# Tinna Thorsteinsdóttir

Tinna Thorsteinsdóttir has a broad experience with new music and has premiered a vast amount of works written for her. She works on a regular basis with composers in Scandinavia. Prepared piano, electronic, toy piano and performance works are part of her repertoire. Tinna studied in Germany and at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston. She received a Fulbright scholarship and a grant from the American-Scandinavian Foundation. She was awarded the DV Culture Prize for Music in Iceland in 2013.

[www.annit.is](http://www.annit.is)

# Thank You...

All performers

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Friðrik Hagalín Smáráson

Elin Smáradóttir

Guðmundur Muggur Guðmundsson

Anna Lind Jónsdóttir

## Composition Commissions:

Podium Festival Iceland: *\_a\_at\_na*

Museum of Jón Sigurðsson: *BLAKTA*

Siggi String Quartet: *draw + play*

Time of Music - Musiikin aika: *stop breathing*

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4. Select audio files to download from the Blu-ray to your computer.

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[legacyaudio.com](http://legacyaudio.com)



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**Editing Engineer:** Dan Merceruo

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