Twitter Thread by Palli Thordarson



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Radio silence for 1 hour, binge-watching cartoons for over an hour and other #Christmas memories from my childhood – a thread to the past in Iceland and Christmas there in the countriside #isolation in the 1970's where Radio and TV played a key role.



I grew up on a farm just outside the village of Vopnafjörður northeast-Iceland. The village with ca 600 people is surrounded by a few farms like ours but the next living soul is more than 40 km away! It is one of the most isolated places in Iceland (8 hours from Reykjavik).



Back in the 1970´s the roads out of Vopnafjörður were frequently closed for weeks, even months. So apart from flying in or out (not cheap!) via the airport, our only connection to the outside world was the radio and the TV. But until the mid 1980´s Iceland had one radio station!

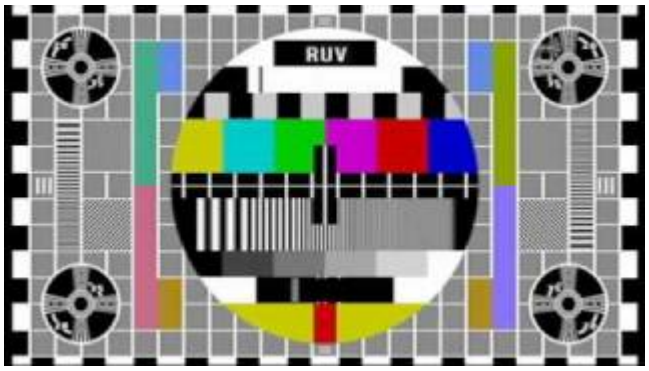


This sole station is still known as RUV @RUVohf an abbreviation which stands for the State Radio! And there was only one TV station – you guessed it, the State TV, established 1966 (available in colour from 1977).



The radio and TV were operated by the State to provide news and useful information and to promote culture (particularly Icelandic) to the public. The idea of “fun” was pretty low on the priority list. Being State owned meant also the State Employee Rep. Union had a strong say.

To save money the TV did therefore not broadcast on Thursdays. Or in July. YES, that was the whole month of July! The employees needed their summer break. And there was no money for extra shifts. The TV normally ran from 6 pm to 11 pm.



The radio station did obviously afford shifts as it did operate on a daily basis and in July as well. But normally only between 7 am and midnight – unless a natural disaster was unfolding. So this was setting for our Radio, TV and their importance at Christmas.

Iceland is formally a Lutheran country, with the (yes) the State Lutheran Church dominating. When I grew up +90% belonged to that church (considerably less now). The Scandinavian Lutheran churches generally celebrate the start of Christmas at 6 pm on Christmas Eve (24th Dec).



So Christmas Eve is the key moment in Iceland. The Christmas family dinner starts after 6 pm and the kids then get to open their present. For kids it is an incredibly long day!! Back in the 1970´s even more so thanks to fun-loving Radio and TV.

The TV did put on a special program for the kids from 2-4 pm! YES two hours of Children´s TV. Otherwise we had maybe one 5 minute cartoon on Wednesday and a half-hour kid´s show on Sundays. Christmas here we go (see TV and Radio program from 1978 below)!



Dagskrá útvarps og sjónvarps yfir jólin

Sjónvarp

Dagskrárliðir eru í litum nema annað sé tekið fram

Laugardagur 23. desember 1978

16.30 Íþróttir. Umsjónarmaður Bjarni Felixson.
18.30 Ullarbuxnatilskipun.
19.00 Enska knattspyrnan. Hlé.
20.00 Fréttir og veður.
20.25 Auglýsingar og dagskrá.
20.30 Lífsglaður lausamaður. Hjálp í viðlögum. Þýðandi Ellert Sigurbjörnsson.
20.55 Síðasta vígið.
21.20 Það hitnar í kolunum. s/h. (Black Fury). Bandarísk bíómynd frá árinu 1935. Aðalhlutverk Paul Muni, William Gargan og Akim Tamiroff.
22.50 Dagskrárlok.

Sunnudagur 24. desember

aðfangadagur jóla

14.00 Mió og Maá Leirkettirnir bregða á leik.
14.05 Einu sinni á jólanótt Bandarísk teiknim. byggð á kvæði eftir Clement Moore.
14.30 Lærisveinn galdrameistarans.
14.40 Þegar Trölli stal jólunum.
15.05 húsið á sléttunni. Jól á Plómubakka Þýðandi Óskar Ingimarsson.
15.55 Hlé.
22.00 Aftansöngur jóla í sjónvarpssal. Íslands, Herra Sigurbjörn Einarsson, þjónar fyrir altari og prédikar. Kór Menntaskólans við Hamrahlíð syngur undir stjórn Þorgerðar Ingólfsdóttur. Orgelleikari Hörður Askelsson. Stjórn upptöku Örn Harðarson. Aftansöng jóla er sjónvarpað og útvarpað samtímis.
23.00 Jól í landinu helga Dagskrá um ferð Kirkjukórs Akraness til Israels jólin 1977.
23.35 Dagskrárlok

Mánudagur 25. desember 1978

jóladagur

17.00 Amahl og næturgestirnir s/h Sjónvarpsópera eftir Gian-Carlo Menotti.
18.00 Stundin okkar. Jólatrésskemmtun í sjónvarpssal. Hlé.
20.00 Fréttir og veður
20.15 Jólasaga. Leikin, bresk kvikmynd, byggð á hinni kunnu sögu Charles Dickens.
21.15 Helgisögur af heilögum Nikulási.
21.45 Níunda sinfónía Beethovens. Fílharmóníuhljómsveitin í Los Angeles leikur.
23.20 Dagskrárlok.

Þriðjudagur 26. desember 1978

annar dagur jóla

17.00 Borin frjáls (Born Free) Bandarísk bíómynd frá árinu 1965, byggð á bók eftir Joy Adamson.
18.30 Hlé.
20.00 Fréttir og veður.
20.25 Auglýsingar og dagskrá
20.30 Silfurtunglið. Leikrit eftir Halldór Laxness í sjónvarpsgerð Hrafns Gunnlaugssonar. Frumsýning. Persónur og leikendur: Lóa, Sigrún Hjálmtýsdóttir. Óli, Þórhallur Sigurðsson. Laugi, Steindór Hjörleifsson. Nonni, Egill Ólafur Egilsson. Feilan, Egill Ólafsson. Ísa, Björg Jónsdóttir. Samson, Kjartan Ragnarsson. Mr. Peacock, Erlingur Gíslason. Þrjár dansmeyjar, Henný Hermannsdóttir, Helga Möller, Ingunn Magnúsdóttir. Róri, Arnar Jónsson. Sjónvarpsleikritið silfurtunglið byggir á yrkisefni sviðsverksins, en leikritið hefur verið umritað og því breytt eftir kröfum tækninnar. Mikilvægasta breytingin er sú, að sviðsverkið gerist í fjölleikahúsi um 1950, en sjónvarpsleikritið í sjónvarpsstöð í tímalausum nútíma, þar sem skemmtiþátturinn Silfurtunglið er í vinnslu og undirbúningi. Förðun og gervi Ragna Fossberg. Leikmynd og búningar Björn Björnsson. Hljóðupptaka Böðvar Guðmundsson. Lýsing Ingvi Hjörleifsson. Myndataka Vilmar Pedersen. Tæknistjóri Örn Sveinsson. Dansarar Henný Hermannsdóttir. Tónlist Egill Ólafsson og Jón Nordal. Leikstjóri Hrafn Gunnlaugsson. Stjórn upptöku Egill Eðvarðsson.
22.20 Desember í Moskvu. Bresk mynd um daglegt líf Moskvubúa í desembermánuði.
23.10 Dagskrárlok.

Miðvikudagur 28 desember 1978

18.00 Kvakk — kvakk
18.05 Gullgrafararnir. Nýsjálenskur myndaflokkur í
18.30 Könnun Miðjarðarhafsins. Fjórði þáttur. Þýðandi og þulur Gylfi Pálsson.
18.55 Hlé.
20.00 Fréttir og veður.
20.25 Auglýsingar og dagskrá.
20.30 Nýjasta tækni og vísindi. Umsjónarmaður Sigurður H. Richter.
20.55 Þættir úr sögu Jussi Björlings. Hin fyrri tveggja sænskra mynda, þar sem rifjaðar eru upp minningar um óperusöngvarann Jussi Björling. Í fyrri myndinni er lýst ferli söngvarans frá því er hann hóf nám hjá föður sínum og þar til hann hlaut fyrst frægð undir handleiðslu Johns Forsells. Síðari myndin er á dagskrá miðvikudaginn 3. janúar.
21.45 Ég. Kládíus.
22.35 Dagskrárlok

Útvarp

Sunnudagur 24. desember

Aðfangadagur jóla

8.00 Fréttir
8.05 Morgunandakt. Séra Sigurður Pálsson vígslubiskup flytur ritningarorð og bæn.
8.15. Veðurfregnir. Forustugr. dagbl. (útdr.).
8.35. Létt morgunlög. Hallé hljómsveitin enska leikur tónlist eftir Suppé, Strauss og Grieg; Sir John Barbirolli stj.
9.00 Hvað varð fyrir valinu? Kafli úr viðtalsbók Valtýs Stefánssonar og séra Friðriks Friðrikssonar: Séra Friðrik segir frá. Þórhildur Ólafs cand. theol les.
9.20 Morguntónleikar
10.00 Fréttir. 10.10 Veðurfregnir.
10.25. Óskalög sjúklinga Kristín Sveinbjörnsdóttir kynnir.
11.25 Ljósaskipti. Tónlistarþáttur í umsjá Guðmundar Jónssonar pianóleikara (endurtekinn).
12.15 Dagskráin. Tónleikar.
12.25 Veðurfregnir. Fréttir. Tilkynningar. Tónleikar.
13.15 Jólakveðjur til sjómanna á hafi úti. Sigrún Sigurðardóttir og Ása Jóhannesdóttir.
15.00 Miðdegistónleikar: Jólalög, a. Kór barnaskólans á Akranesi syngur. Söngsjóri: Jón Karl Einarsson. b. Lúðrasveit Hafnarfjarðar leikur. Stjórnandi: Hans P. Franzson. c. Kvennaskólakórinn í Reykjavík syngur. Söngstjóri: Jón G. Þórarinsson.
16.00 Fréttir.
16.15 Veðurfregnir. Jólakveðjur til íslenskra barna. Lesnar jólakveðjur frá börnum á Norðurlöndum. Börn lesa: Signý Irsa Pétursdóttir, Hulda Hjartardóttir, Jón Björn Skúlason og Gunnar Skúlason.
17.00 (Hlé).
18.00 Aftansöngur í Dómkirkjunni, Prestur: Séra Hjalti Guðmundsson. Organleikari: Marteinn H. Friðriksson.
19.00 Jólatónleikar Sinfóníuhljómsveitar Íslands, Stjórnandi: Páll P. Pálsson. Tónlist eftir Antonio Vivaldi, a. Concerto í a-moll op. 3 nr. 8. Einleikari á fiðlur: Mark Reedman og Kolbrún Hjaltadóttir. b. Fagottkonsert í e-moll. Einleikari: Sigurður Markússon. c. Óbókonsert í a-moll. Einleikari: Kristján Þ. Stephensen. d. Flautukonsert nr. 3 í g-moll. Einleikari: Manuela Wiesler. e. Konsert í C-dúr fyrir tvo trompeta og hljómsveit. Einleikari: Lárus Sveinsson og Jón Sigurðsson.
20.00 Jólin mín. Gunnar Kristjánsson ræðir við Áslaugu Stephensen og Pétur Sigurðsson á Selfossi.
20.30 Einsöngur og orgelleikur í Akraneskirkju. Ágústa Ágústsdóttir og Ágúst Guðmundsson syngja jólasálma. Haukur Guðlaugsson leikur á orgel. Dr. Páll Ísólfsson leikur einnig af hljómböndum orgelverk eftir Bach, Pachelbel og Buxtehude.
21.40 „Kær mér lýsa kerta-

Seriously, as a kid I would look forward ALL YEAR to binge watching on the Kids TV on Christmas Eve. Usually 1 hour cartoon plus 1 hour of a child-friendly show, like a Christmas special of the Little House on the Prairie – the most popular show in Iceland back then.


Little House
on the Prairie

But then the TV went off at 4 pm. And wouldn't come back on until 22 pm to broadcast a recording from the Christmas mass in Reykjavík Cathedral earlier that night. So now the worst 2 hours of the year for a child in Iceland in the 1970´s had started.

We used the time to get properly dressed for Christmas dinner. And by properly, I really mean that. Our finest clothes. Mum would ensure that my brother and I had our best clothes on – often specially bought for Christmas. N.b. that is not us on the photo (it is modern).



Dad would put a tie and a jacket on and mum her finest dress – having just cleaned the house high and low. But having put our finest clothes we could not even play any rough games anymore or go outside. Oh the wait!
To add insult to injury the Radio went off. See program below



Útvarp

Sunnudagur
24. desember
Aðfangadagur jóla

8.00 Fréttir
8.05 Morgunandakt. Séra Sigurður Pálsson vígslubiskup flytur ritningarorð og bæn.
8.15. Veðurfregnir. Forustugr. dagbl. (útdr.).
8.35. Létt morgunlög. Hallé hljómsveitin enska leikur

16.00 Fréttir.
16.15 Veðurfregnir.
Jólakveðjur til íslenskra barna. Lesnar jólakveðjur frá börnum á Norðurlöndum. Börn lesa: Signý Irsa Pétursdóttir, Hulda Hjartardóttir, Jón Björn Skúlason og Gunnar Skúlason.
17.00 (Hlé).
18.00 Aftansöngur í Dómkirkjunni, Prestur: Séra Hjalti Guðmundsson. Organleikari: Marteinn H. Friðriksson.
19.00 Jólatónleikar Sinfóníuhljómsveitar Íslands, Stjórnandi: Páll P. Pálsson. Tónlist eftir Antonio Vivaldi, a. Concerto í a-moll op. 3 nr. 8. Einleikari á fiðlur: Mark

YES, the State Radio station deliberately went silent at 5 pm on Christmas Eve. So we sat there listening to the silence on the radio. I kid you not. We even avoid talking much among ourselves. You were supposed to sit in silent if you could.

Now, I mention the State Lutheran Church. We were all members of the Church, even though my entire family is basically atheists. Mum is perhaps agnostics. This is quite common in Iceland. People are in the church because that is just what you do whether you believe in God or not.

Side note – the State Lutheran Church is pretty mellow now. Which is why it is happy to have atheists on board. It wasn't always so – Scandinavian Lutheranism was once very strict. In Iceland all dancing was banned for +200 years and the Church tried to ban non-religious singing!

From 1550 to late 1800's the Church in Scandinavia was very much against the idea of people having fun. Of any kind. This explains a lot about Scandinavians, I recon. Anyway, so what were we all waiting for in silence on the radio? The church bells!

Yep, just before 6 pm the radio came back to live with the sounds of the bells in Reykjavík Cathedral. Still, we as a family did not yet break our silence if it could be avoided. We just sat there listening to the Church bells on the radio. In silence.



On the stroke of 6 pm the bells stopped and the announcer went: Útvarp Reykjavík – Gleðileg jól (Radio Reykjavik – Merry Christmas). Finally, everyone in the family now all went and wished each other Merry Christmas, with a kiss, as is (or at least was) customary in Iceland.

We left the radio on and let the mass from the Reykjavík Cathedral play out loudly over in our case, this family of atheists. You just did that. We sat down over the most beautifully decorated dinner table ready for Christmas dinner. For kids the wait was though not 100% over.

We wished the grown up hurried up with the dinner but they didn't seem to be in any rush! And my mother then insisted that we would sit down and open all the Christmas cards first and read them out. Finally once we read out all the cards, the moment had arrived!

Me and my brothers could dive into that huge pile of Christmas presents! By 10 pm we were exhausted. If not already asleep, mum would then just send us all in front of the TV to watch the mass (the same we heard on the radio earlier!). Now that usually put us to sleep!

That was in the 1970’s in country Iceland. You could call it Christmas in #Isolation – something that way too many people have to experience now in 2020. But as the story shows, you can still make it memorable. With this little story I wish you all a Merry Christmas.