



JÓN MÚLI ÁRNASON

AN EXHIBITION COMMEMORATING
HIS CENTENARY 31 MARCH 2021



Jón Múli Árnason (1921-2002) was nationally known in Iceland for his work as a radio broadcaster and songwriter. He wrote many popular songs that live with the nation and he is one of the nation's most beloved composers. Jón Múli wrote various musicals with his brother Jónas and most of his songs were composed for the brothers' revues: *Delirium Bubonis* (premiered on radio in 1954, on stage in 1959), *Rjúkandi ráð* (1959), *Allra meira bót* (1961) and *Járnhausinn* (1965).

Jón Múli was born in Kirkjuból in Vopnafjörður, 31 March 1921. His father, Árni Jónsson from Múli, was a merchant in Vopnafjörður 1917-1924, later an editor, journalist and member of the Althing. Jón's mother was Ragnheiður Jónasdóttir, a housewife, called Ranka in Brenna in Bergstaðastræti.

The family moved to Reykjavík in 1924, when Jón was three years old, and he lived there for a while, then in Seyðisfjörður until 1933, and after that their home was in Reykjavík.



Jón Múli's music career

Jón Múli graduated from Reykjavík High School in 1940 and tried his hand at the University of Iceland but dropped out after one year. The music attracted Jón Múli and he studied music and trumpet playing at the Reykjavík Music School and also studied singing for a while. Jón Múli also worked as a fisherman, fish worker and general laborer in his younger years.

Music played an important role in Jón Múli's life from an early age. He studied musicology and trumpet playing at the Reykjavík Music School, was one of the founders of the Workers' Trumpet Orchestra in 1953 and played cornet with the ensemble for two decades. He also studied singing, worked in various choirs and performed as a soloist at numerous concerts.

Jón Múli was a passionate jazz enthusiast and a sea of knowledge about that type of music. He mediated the information to the nation in his jazz shows on RÚV, almost tirelessly for half a century, from 1945 to 1995, in addition to which he wrote articles in newspapers and magazines. Jón Múli taught jazz history from the founding of the FÍH Music School in 1980 and published the book *Jazz* in 1985.

Fruitful cooperation of brothers

The collaboration between Jón Múli and his brother Jónas Árnason was extremely fruitful for a decade, when they composed songs and comedies that were very popular in Iceland. Their collaboration on playwriting began in 1954. Shortly before Christmas, RÚV premiered their comedy musical, *Delerium Bubonis*. They



were co-authors, but Jón Múli had of course composed the songs, Jónas the lyrics. During these years, RÚV was a powerful medium and the play attracted a lot of attention and was soon rebroadcast. The director was Einar Pálsson, who at the time was one of the main directors of Reykjavík Theatre Company and as director had the honor of various of the company's most popular comedies. People's reaction to the radio play *Delerium Bubonis* led the brothers to continue working on the play to put it on stage. It was performed in a very revised version by Reykjavík Theatre Company in Iðnó at the beginning of 1959 under the direction of Lárus Pálsson. That show also received excellent reviews and was shown a total of 45 times, which was considered very good at the time. Erik Bidsted, the National Theatre's ballet master, was invited to work on the songs with the actors and received much praise from critics. *Delerium Bubonis* became one of the most popular plays in the country and later on it has been staged widely by amateurs, as was the case with more of the brothers' plays. It was staged at the National Theater in 1968 under the direction of Benedikt Árnason and was also well received. On December 20, 1973, RÚV rebroadcast the original radio version of *Delerium Bubonis* from 1954. On that occasion, Þorsteinn Ö. Stephensen, theater director of RÚV, read foreword and a letter from Jón Múli about the origins of the play.

The brothers were fruitful in the following years, as it is obvious to follow up on such a good victory. Their next musical, *Rjúkandi ráð*, was shown in Framsóknarhúsið in the autumn of 1959, now the National Gallery of Iceland. The brothers did not want to go public with the offspring, but called themselves Pír Ó. Man. Stefán Jónsson, a reporter at RÚV took part in writing the play. Most likely the director, Flosi Ólafsson, also contributed something to the play.

In the spring of 1961, Gísli Halldórsson's Summer Theater showed the brothers' next work, *Allra meina bót*, and the author's pseudonyms were Patrekur and Páll. The game premiered in Austurbæjarbíó, but was again on stage in Iðnó in the autumn, where it was a relatively short time. Songs that became

popular from the play include "Augun þín blá" and "Gettu hver hún er".

In the spring of 1965, the fourth comedy musical was added, *Járnhausinn*, which premiered at the National Theater on its fifteenth anniversary, and was well received. The play was shown for full house in the spring, was put on stage again in the autumn and received a total of 27,000 spectators in 55 performances. The director was Baldvin Halldórsson, but the dance and song performances were in the hands of the Dane Sven Åge Larsen, who had previously staged operettas and musicals in Iceland with great success; The most famous of these shows was *My Fair Lady*. All the main actors of the National Theater took part in *Járnhausinn* and in addition Ómar Ragnarsson played a big role, but he sang "Aukavinnusöngur" which was a hit.

Radio broadcaster at RÚV

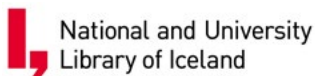


Jón Múli worked for RÚV from 1946 to 1985. He first started working as a reporter, then he worked in the theater department and as a representative in the music department making programming. For the longest time, however, he worked as a broadcaster. An impressive tone, elaborate rhetoric, humor and excellent articulation were used extremely well in the work of a radio broadcaster and Jón Múli's voice was one of the hallmarks of RÚV for decades.

Jón Múli married Þórunn Scheving Thorsteinsson in 1947. They had a daughter, Hólmfríður, on August 6, 1947. Þórunn and Jón Múli broke up in 1950.

Jón Múli was married to Guðrún Jóna Thorsteinsson from 1954 to 1969. They had two daughters, Ragnheiður Gyða, b. 15 January 1957, and Oddrún Vala, b. October 3, 1962. Jón Múli and Ragnheiður Ásta Pétursdóttir married in 1974. They had one daughter, Sólveig Anna, b. May 29, 1975. Ragnheiður Ásta's children from a previous marriage are Pétur (deceased), Eypór and Birna Guðrún Their father was Gunnar Eypórsson.

Jón Múli wrote his memoirs that were published in the years 1996-2000 by Mál og menning in three volumes under the title Þjóðsögur Jóns Múla Árnasonar.



Exhibition in cooperation with the family of Jón Múli Árnason, Vopnafjarðarhreppur and Múlastofa

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Design of banners: Björn G. Björnsson. Curated by Ólafur J. Engilbertsson

31 March 2021