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discoveries/00editor/02_Smarason_Stara.jpg)

It seems that I'm not the only one. **Sono Luminus** CEO Collin J. Rae is also enamoured of Iceland's music and that small Virginia-based label has become a major promoter of Nordic culture under his stewardship. Hot on the heels of *Atonement* comes **STARA**, a portrait of another, younger Icelandic composer **Halldór Smárason (DSL-92242 sonoluminus.com/store/stara)** featuring the **Siggi String Quartet and Friends**. Smárason, was born in Ísafjörður, Westfjords in the northwestern part of Iceland 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. Smárason has received the Artists' Salaries four times, a state-funded support for selected Icelandic artists.

Founded in 2012, 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 players of the Reykjavík Chamber and Iceland Symphony Orchestras.

The disc includes three string quartets, two mixed chamber works and *Skúlpturn 1* for solo guitar and electronics performed by Gulli Björnsson. The quartet *Stara*, the earliest work on the disc, dates from 2012 during Smárason's American studies, where it won the Manhattan Prize. *draw + play*, the second quartet, heard first on the disc, was commissioned by the Siggi quartet. It is inspired by the accordion and the title is extracted from an old Icelandic word for the instrument. I find it intriguing how the composer uses the string instruments to replicate the sounds of distinctive extended contemporary accordion techniques. *BLAKTA*, the third quartet, is the most recent piece on the album. It was commissioned to celebrate Iceland's 100 years as a sovereign state and depicts a flag fluttering in various weather conditions, characterized by distinctive vibratos of different speed and density. Very atmospheric.

For the mixed ensemble works *stop breathing* and the intriguingly titled *_a_at_na* the quartet enlists the help of "Friends" Emilía Rós Sigfúsdóttir (bass flute), Geirprúður Ása Guðjónsdóttir (violin), Helga Björg Arnardóttir (clarinet) and Tinna Thorsteinsdóttir (piano), as required. The latter piece is based on the composer's personal struggle with anxiety, and the title is a puzzle requiring the Icelandic word for anxiety to solve. Even the stage setup is affected by this very personal subject, with the piano isolated in the middle of the audience and the rest of the performers spread around the periphery. Evidently this can be heard in the fully immersive audio version of the album on the Pure Audio Blu-ray™ disc that accompanies the standard CD, although it is not available on the digital files from which I am working. Regardless of that, the angst certainly comes through convincingly, completing a very personal portrait of an important new voice.

It was in April 2003 that I had another "brush with greatness" thanks to New Music Concerts when **George Crumb** and his family came to Toronto to work with our musicians.