

Reykjavik Rocks to Joe Boxer's Frenetic Beat

Nick Graham's caravan puts Iceland on the fashion map

BY CATHERINE CURAN

REYKJAVIK, Iceland — Like the rock star he always wanted to become, at 2 a.m. Sunday morning, Nick Graham, Joe Boxer front man, stood at the head of a tour bus rapping into a microphone for an audience of journalists, friends, Icelandic groupies and assorted hangers-on. Grabbing the mike, 18-year-old Gunnar, a round-faced Icelandic

parachuting Santas. Though they never appeared, no one seemed to miss them because of a multitude of entertainments outside the airport hangar where the actual runway show was held. A choir of Icelandic children sang traditional songs in angelic voices, a counterpoint to the grunts of "Vikings" in leather tunics and chain mail engaging in swordplay.

The show kicked off to the sound of Nordic music, as models in faux-fur Viking pants, icy white lipstick and white Viking horns glided down the runway. It was produced by Icelandic talent, and featured only Icelandic models, who managed to wow the crowd without looking completely emaciated. The themes were vintage Joe Boxer, with a Viking twist. Underwear was "clean and fresh" in white, as well as bold in brights and animal prints. For his "Chinese Lounge Act," Graham offered bubble dot silk pajamas that called to mind the game "Twister," slot-machine patterns and even argyles — in bright colors, of course. Activewear, swimwear and jeans were the newest portions of the line, and the show closed with a surreal segment featuring rubber aprons and ice-blue hot pants. The finale included the Fashion Targets Breast Cancer Iceland launch.

In addition to the press, executives from Joe Boxer's licensees, including Timex's Suzy Watson and Salant's Nick DiPaolo, were on hand, along with actress Finola Hughes of *Pacific Palisades*.

The parade of Prada bags and cutting-edge fashion couldn't eclipse the high-school-field-trip feeling as assorted cliques cozied up on board, snapping Polaroids of one another with cameras provided

with Graham's own frenetic style, the pace ran at high speed, and nearly every minute contained a new opportunity for sensory overload. Some straggled off the plane and onto activities ranging from horseback riding in the Icelandic countryside to snowmobiling over ancient volcanoes and craters to nature tours of Iceland's waterfalls and active geysers. Others opted to catch up on sleep.

Window shopping along Laugavegur, Reykjavik's main shopping strip, revealed familiar brands such as Fruit of the Loom and Wrangler jeans. An Original Levi's store stood next to a Vivienne Westwood boutique.

The only retailers present were a five-person team from Dayton Hudson. Jim Lansing, senior buyer for men's furnishings, said he liked the animal prints, while Greg Van Bellinger, manager, men's and chil-

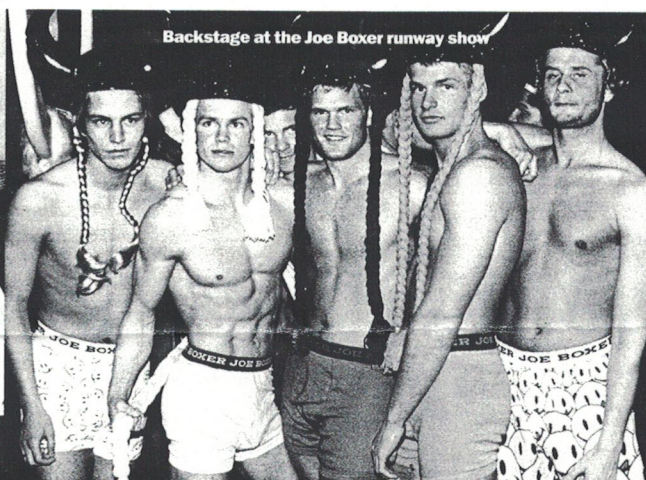
ander overwhelmed by the hype, began to chant Joe Boxer's in the house, Joe Boxer's in the house." Welcome to Joe Boxer's Iceland invasion.

It was billed as a fashion show, the off-site closing event of the New York women's collections. One-hundred-fifty-seven editors and friends of the company took the bait, packing onto an Icelandair flight Friday evening to experience Joe Boxer's takeover of this tiny nation of 270,000.

Further down the road, 4 You Men's Wear's windows featured Russell Athletic and Dutch Label 4 You. According to Raynir Elis at 4 You, Joe Boxer is "too American. It's like Hilfiger. They're wearing their flag. We don't do that here." Elis listed Paul Smith and Diesel as popular brands for younger customers, while Armani is popular among older



The pre-show warmup



Backstage at the Joe Boxer runway show



Nick Graham goes Viking.

Photos by PATRICK McHILLAN

men. "Look on the streets, and you won't see lots of logos," he said, adding that American labels are favored by the skate and snowboarding crowd.

Graham admits he wasn't there to break into the Iceland market, and couldn't recall the name of the only store in Iceland that carries his brand. "That's one of the ironies of this event, that we're not here to open up Reykjavik," he said. "We're here to gain recognition in the U.S. by going to Iceland." Graham termed it not only a fashion event but a diplomatic event, and before the fashion show, he took his guests to meet Olafur Ragnar Grimsson, the president of Iceland, at his unassuming, and unguarded, private residence, Bessastadir.

The pre-show events were supposed to include

dren's trends, said the kids' products looked great.

Graham declined to disclose a price tag for the event, which grew out of conversations with his friend Joni Siggvattson, an L.A.-based film producer from Iceland. Saying he was certain the event was worth the hefty price tag, Graham estimated 10 million people had heard about the show, whether through print or visual media, last week alone.

Joe Boxer's team got high marks for running a first-rate operation, which culminated in a visit to Blue Lagoon Spa. Fashion editors slathered themselves with healing mud while dipping in the balmy waters of a natural hot spring.

Even Nick Graham doesn't know how he'll top this one. ■

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with the hype, Graham later told DNR: "The key to this whole event was Seventh on 6th approving the venue."

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