



**A Greeting
from
the President of Iceland
Guðni Th. Jóhannesson**

8 October 2018

We are fortunate in having many fine musicians in Iceland. The Iceland Symphony Orchestra is our flagship in the field of classical music. Other musicians have become well known in other genres. Internationally, the most famous Icelandic musician is probably Björk, who is renowned both for her unique voice and her enchanting compositions.

For centuries, music has been part of daily life in Iceland. On dark, cold winter nights, our ancestors enjoyed telling each other stories and chanting epic poetry. Still, the history of classical music in Iceland is short compared to our neighboring countries. When Chopin, Rachmaninoff and Sibelius composed their immortal works, there was no symphony orchestra in Iceland capable of playing them. It was only in 1926 that a symphony orchestra performed in the country for the first time. This means that the history of symphonic music there is less than 100 years old, and it was not until 1950, with the founding of the Iceland Symphony Orchestra, that people in Iceland had the opportunity of hearing the great orchestral masterpieces performed live on a regular basis.

Progress has been rapid. Perhaps no Icelander who lived 100 years ago would have dreamt that we would ever have our own symphony orchestra that travelled the globe and performed for people so far away from home. In this, we must not forget the vital contribution that was made by highly-trained European musicians who moved to our island. We gladly recognize, with pride and joy, that our progress and development in music has been largely thanks to input from our foreign friends. The most important of these has certainly been the world-renowned pianist and conductor Vladimir Ashkenazy. He was an active participant in Icelandic cultural life during the second half of the 20th

century, living in the country for a while with his wife Thórunn and their family, and did much to promote and support classical music in Iceland. Ashkenazy first appeared with the Iceland Symphony Orchestra as a piano soloist in 1964 and a few years later he took up the baton, making his first appearance as conductor with the orchestra.

The Iceland Symphony Orchestra is our national pride. In 2011, it got its own first-class concert hall, Harpa, which is situated by the harbor in central Reykjavík. Since the orchestra was founded, it has grown and flourished and can now stand comparison with many more famous orchestras throughout the world. I am very pleased that the orchestra is now touring Japan. I hope that it will bring joy to concert-goers and awaken the interest of the people of Japan in Iceland, Icelanders, and our musical culture.



Guðni Th. Jóhannesson
President of Iceland