

## Pride of Iceland

**Harpa, Reykjavík's Concert Hall and Conference Centre, concludes opening season on 20 August with inauguration of the building and Olafur Eliasson's acclaimed glass façade**

**International artists, Gustavo Dudamel, Björk and Elvis Costello among them, to headline Harpa's 2011/12 season**

*"Just a miraculous Hall."*  
Maria Joao Pires, 8 July 2011

*"The Harpa Concert Hall is a true wonder. It was a wonderful experience."*  
Maxim Vengerov, 8 July 2011

Iceland gained an architectural icon and one of the finest of all modern concert halls when Harpa opened its majestic doors in May. The striking addition to Reykjavík's skyline celebrates its official inauguration on Saturday 20 August with a showcase of artistic excellence, invention and diversity. Harpa, which attracted one tenth of Iceland's population to its inaugural run of events, brings its curtain-raising season to a close in suitably spectacular fashion. "We will focus on the building itself and inaugurate the breathtaking glass façade by Danish-Icelandic artist Olafur Eliasson," explains Steinunn Ragnarsdóttir, Harpa's Music Director. "Our programme on 20 August is about welcoming the world to Harpa." It also complements Reykjavík's annual Culture Night, when the city stages a cultural fiesta to celebrate its birthday. "People open their homes and invite guests to attend evening performances and enjoy hospitality. We want to share this unique Reykjavík occasion with our visitors."

Harpa's combination of local spirit, national pride and international welcome unfolds on 20 August with matinee and early evening concerts by the Icelandic Symphony Orchestra, the world premiere of two pieces for seven harps by composers Mist Þorkeldsdóttir and Atli Heimir Sveinsson, and a display by Chinese acrobats on the piazza fronting the venue's magnificent south side. "The Reykjavík Jazz Festival also opens with performances in and outside the hall," explains Ragnarsdóttir. "This collection of events is symbolic of Harpa's meaning to Iceland. We have been waiting in Reykjavík for a hundred years, not always patiently, for a concert hall. And now we have one that is remarkable for its architecture, appearance and acoustics. The excitement we are experiencing now is indescribable."

Earlier red-letter dates in Harpa's debut season include its gala opening on 13 May and the resident Icelandic Symphony Orchestra's Beethoven performances with its Conductor Laureate, Vladimir Ashkenazy. The venue's 1800-seat Eldborg Hall hosts its first visiting orchestra on 18 September when the Gothenburg Symphony and Gustavo Dudamel come to Reykjavík. The venue's Master Pianists series, meanwhile, opens on 4 September with a recital by the prodigious Jussen Brothers and continues later in the year when Maria João Pires makes her second visit to Harpa. Björk's latest live show, *Biophilia*, opens the annual Iceland Airwaves festival at Harpa on 10 October, while Elvis Costello performs there on 21 November. "Although Harpa is the venue for the best that Icelandic music life has to offer, we are determined that it should also open an international window," notes Steinunn Ragnarsdóttir. "This will bring a new dimension to music in Iceland."

The Icelandic Symphony Orchestra, based for the past half century in Reykjavík's less than ideal University Cinema, has swiftly settled into its new home. The ISO's internationally acclaimed work, immediately enhanced by the qualities of Harpa's acoustics, enters a new phase in September when Ilan Volkov begins his tenure as Music Director and Chief Conductor. Highlights of the orchestra's 2011/12 include the season opening concert with Ashkenazy and Iceland's rising star Víkingur Heidar Ólafsson as soloist in Rachmaninov's Third Piano Concerto on 8 September. The Icelandic Opera, Harpa's other resident company, presents its first production there on 22 October with Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. The

cast comprises internationally recognised Icelandic singers, including tenor Garðar Thór Cortes and soprano Þóra Einarsdóttir.

“This building displays courage,” Steinunn Ragnarsdóttir comments. “Despite the economic landscape that has surrounded us in the past years, we are very grateful to those politicians who made the courageous decision to continue with Harpa. Now we are developing a bold programme of performances by Icelandic and international artists. Harpa’s main hall is acoustically magnificent, as our visiting artists have already confirmed. We want all our visitors to have a great time here and share with musicians and audiences of the world their experiences. “

## Notes for Editors

Harpa – Reykjavík Concert Hall and Conference Centre ([www.harpa.is](http://www.harpa.is)) opened its doors in May 2011. The venue unites Iceland’s most important classical and popular music and performance venue with an international conference centre. Harpa offers a diverse range of performances, from classical to contemporary music, and is home to the Iceland Symphony Orchestra (ISO) and The Icelandic Opera. It also serves as a tourism and business hub, providing flexible facilities for national international events.

Harpa’s façade was designed by renowned artist Olafur Eliasson and Henning Larsen Architects, the building by Henning Larsen Architects and Batterið Architects, and the performing arts venues’ acoustics and theatre design by Artec Consultants Inc. Harpa is a landmark in the redevelopment of Reykjavík’s historic harbour and waterfront area, and a symbol of Iceland’s renewed dynamism.

## 2011 Concert highlights

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|----------------------|--|
| 20 August 2011       | Finale opening of Harpa / Culture night in Reykjavík   |
| 27 August 2011       | Danilo Perez (Reykjavík Jazz Festival)   |
| 3 September 2011     | Mezzoforte (Reykjavík Jazz Festival)   |
| 4 September 2011     | Jussen brothers  |
| 7 & 8 September 2011 | Iceland Symphony Orchestra (season opening concert) <a href="http://www.sinfonia.is/english">www.sinfonia.is/english</a><br>Vladimir Ashkenazy (conductor), Víkingur Heiðar Ólafsson (piano) |
| 18 September 2011    | Gothenburg Symphony / Gustavo Dudamel  |
| 1 October 2011       | Charlie Murphy stand up comedian   |
| 6-9 October 2011     | Nordic Music Days <a href="http://www.nordicmusicdays.is">www.nordicmusicdays.is</a>   |
| 12-28 October 2011   | Björk Biophilia  |
| 12-16 October 2011   | Iceland Airwaves   |
| 22 October 2011      | Icelandic Opera: Mozart <i>The Magic Flute</i> (performances until 29 November)  |
| 21 November 2011     | Elvis Costello   |

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