



Speech
by
the President of Iceland
Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson
at the opening of
the Nordic – Baltic Choral Festival
Reykjavík
17 August 2010

Singers, Musicians,
Friends.

At the opening of this splendid and inspiring Nordic – Baltic Choral Festival, I welcome all of you who have made a long journey to join the community of Icelandic choirs in this land of ice and fire, where the creative forces of nature recently reminded Europe – and indeed the world – of their power. This festival celebrates our friendship and our rich musical traditions, which are deeply rooted in our respective cultures and histories.

For more than a century now, choral singing has forged special bonds between the Nordic peoples, and when the Icelandic nation decided, almost twenty years ago, to declare our support for Baltic independence, we were inspired by the rich tradition of song festivals which during the times of oppression had symbolized the yearning for freedom and democracy.

Choirs long been a formative influence in the social fabric of every district in Iceland: male choirs, women's choirs, mixed choirs; church choirs, children choirs, school choirs and other combinations in the rich range of the social groups that choral singing has called into being. Thus the people of Iceland rejoice in welcoming the Nordic – Baltic festival to our country and are indeed honoured by your presence.

Singing has in all our countries created strong bonds between generations. To be in a choir reveals to the young a deep understanding of the heritage, enshrined in their communities and nations. Choirs are both a manifestation of our traditions and a fertile venue for the creation of

new music, for both young and established composers to demonstrate the development of their talent, to meet the challenge of providing singers with new works and all of us with a new and invigorating musical experience.

The festival will demonstrate all these elements over a range of performances, and also in your mutual dialogue; not only will you be performing what has already been well rehearsed but also acquiring new experiences and mutual learning.

Above all, the Nordic – Baltic Choral Festival is a celebration of our musical traditions, of our modern creative arts, of the talent that resides in young and old alike; it is a manifestation of the deep friendship between our nations and of how the spirit of shared culture brings us together.

So, have a great time, make the most of the occasion and above all enjoy yourselves.