Daníel Bjarnason
Composer, Conductor

Daníel Bjarnason is one of Iceland’s foremost musical voices today, in demand as a conductor, composer and programmer. He is Artist in Collaboration with Iceland Symphony Orchestra, an appointment that follows his tenures as Principal Guest Conductor and Artist in Residence.

As guest conductor, recent highlights include debuts with Lahti Symphony Orchestra, Detroit Symphony Orchestra, Philharmonisches Orchester Freiburg and Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra alongside his regular presence in Reykjavik with Iceland Symphony Orchestra throughout the season.

He has previously conducted Gothenburg Symphony, Gävle Symfoniorkester, Aalborg Symfoniorkester and Turun Filharmoninen Orkesteri in Europe, while in North America he has appeared with Los Angeles Philharmonic and Toronto Symphony orchestras, and in Japan with Tokyo Symphony Orchestra.

Keeping a busy composing schedule alongside his conducting commitments, many of his works are taken up beyond their premieres and regularly programmed around the world. This season sees the world premiere of *Snow Songs* A Song Cycle for Soprano and Ensemble with Los Angeles Philharmonic as well as the premiere of the complete trilogy for orchestra *I Want To Be Alive* with Toronto Symphony Orchestra. He has also written the score for an animated film, *The Last Whale Singer*, to be released in Summer 2025. In 2023/24, Gothenburg Symphony premiered Bjarnason’s new work for orchestra, *A Fragile Hope*. In 2021/22, Concerto for Piano and Orchestra, *FEAST*, written for Víkingur Ólafsson, was performed at the Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles by Ólafsson and Esa-Pekka Salonen.

Bjarnason maintains a close connection with Los Angeles Philharmonic, having written *From Space I Saw Earth* for Gustavo Dudamel, Zubin Mehta and Esa-Pekka Salonen to conduct together at its Centennial Birthday Celebration Concert and Gala in 2019. In 2017 they premiered Bjarnason’s Violin Concerto with Pekka Kuusisto at the Hollywood Bowl, in a co-commission with Iceland Symphony. This was part of the orchestra’s Reykjavík Festival, an eclectic and multi-disciplinary 17-day event, curated by Bjarnason, and in which he featured as conductor and composer.

The Violin Concerto, which is titled *Scordatura*, became a success with audiences and orchestras and remains very popular. Kuusisto has performed it with Philharmonia Orchestra, Orchestre de Paris, New York Philharmonic, Detroit Symphony, National Arts Center orchestras, Swedish Radio and Finnish Radio symphony orchestras, Göteborgs Symfoniker, MDR Sinfonieorchester and NDR Elbphilharmonie. Bjarnason conducts the recording of the work with Kuusisto, as part of the final instalment of a three-album recording project with Iceland Symphony for Sono Luminus focussing on Icelandic music and composers.

In 2023, Bjarnason was named Guest Artist in Residence at Copenhagen Opera Festival, where a co-production of his opera, *Brothers*, was performed. Originally co-commissioned by Den Islandske Opera and Malmö Opera the opera was premiered in 2017, by its lead commissioner, Danish National Opera, and directed by Kasper Holten. *Brothers* is based on the Susanne Bier film of the same name, was also revived in Reykjavík by The Icelandic Opera in 2018, and subsequently opened Budapest’s 2019 Armel Opera Festival.

Bjarnason conducted the world premiere of Jóhann Jóhannsson’s *Last and First Men*, a multimedia work narrated by Tilda Swinton, at the 2017 Manchester International Festival with BBC Philharmonic, and subsequently at the Barbican with the London Symphony Orchestra the following year. Bjarnason also conducted Iceland Symphony Orchestra on Deutsche Grammophon’s latest release of Jóhannsson’s music.

A recipient of numerous accolades, in 2018 he was awarded the Optimism prize by the President of Iceland, won the 8th Harpa Nordic Film Composers Award for the feature film *Under the Tree*, and was nominated for the Nordic Council Music Prize. He also won Composer of the Year, Best Composer/Best Composition and Best Performer at the Icelandic Music Awards in recent years.

Bjarnason studied piano, composition and conducting in Reykjavík and pursued further studies in orchestral conducting at Hochschule für Musik Freiburg. He released several albums for the label Bedroom Community.