

## National Anthems Online

REPUBLIC OF ICELAND: Lofsöngur (*Song of Praise*)

The Icelandic national anthem was originally a hymn, written for part of the ceremonies celebrating the first thousand years of Iceland's history. It was first performed during the commemoration services at Reykjavík Cathedral in 1874.

The words were written during the winter of 1873-74 by Matthías Jochumsson, considered one of the most important Icelandic poets. The melody was written by Sveinbjörn Sveinbjörnsson: the son of one of the highest officials in the country. The composer spent the greater part of his life abroad. His music education began in Copenhagen, later in Edinburgh and then in Leipzig. He returned to Edinburgh to make a living as a music teacher and pianist. In 1873, Jochumsson showed Sveinbjörnsson the opening verse of the poem, who eventually set the words to music, evidently with difficulty and considerable delay. The choral arrangement arrived just in time for the national celebrations.

It probably never occurred to the poet and the composer (who were old school-friends) that the song might eventually become the national anthem of their country. Sveinbjörnsson made many musical settings of Icelandic poems but became better-known as a composer in Britain than in his home country. He lived in Edinburgh for much of his life, but the last eight years were spent in Winnipeg, Reykjavík and Copenhagen.

In 1918, Iceland became a sovereign state in union with Denmark and finally became an independent republic in 1944. When sovereignty was proclaimed, the song was played as the national anthem at the ceremony, and has remained so ever since. During 1948-49, the Icelandic Government acquired the copyright of the melody, which had previously been held by a Danish publisher. When performed by a choir it is often taken at a much slower pace than indicated here. Although the original poem had three verses, only the first is normally sung. The translation of the title is often given as "Our Country's God", taken from the first line of the text.

Sveinbjörn Sveinbjörnsson (1847-1926)  
Arranged by Colin Kirkpatrick

♩ = 72

19

Cym. *ff* *f* *a tempo*

S.D. *mf* *rit. e cresc.* *ff*

B.D. *ff* *f* *a tempo*

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