

Iceland is not only known for its natural beauty but also for its artistic life. I have heard that many people who visit the country almost expect every Icelander to be an artist of some kind.

Iceland has been known for many years for its literature from the Sagas to present day writers. The country is also known for its musicians. Many pop-groups are known world-wide; many singers, instrumentalists and composers in the field of “classical” music are also known internationally. We have a symphony orchestra which recently played at the “Proms” in London; we have an opera company and many, many chamber groups which perform at many concerts. There are an amazing number of music festivals, both pop and “classical” which take place every year. In fact, most people are amazed at the diversity and wealth of the music life here.

There is, however, one thing that most people forget: all of these Icelandic musicians were not born with the ability to perform and compose. They had to learn these skills. Where did they do that? Of course from music teachers. These teachers are, for the most part, very much “back-stage” figures who are dedicated to passing on their knowledge to future generations so as to keep music alive.

Most of these teachers work in one or more of the 70+ specialist music schools which are situated all over the country. (A system which is the envy of many other countries.) These schools have made it possible for the music life in the country to blossom but something strange is now happening. These dedicated teachers have had to go on strike to attract the attention of the administration in the land.

These teachers are asking for a pay system which reflects the value of their work and is on a par with other teachers in the country and not some 30% less. They are, in fact, asking that the very specialized job of teaching music be recognized by the authorities in the land.

It is surprising that, after all the research which has been done into the advantages of teaching music, and the help that it gives to people in their general education, the authorities seem loathe to recognize the results of this research and continue to treat music education as a luxury for the few.

Music is no longer a luxury in our education system it is a necessity.

John Speight, composer