

About Craig Hella Johnson
Artistic Director, Conspirare

Renowned as one of today's most influential voices in choral conducting, Craig Hella Johnson brings unparalleled depth of knowledge, artistic sensitivity, and rich imagination to his programs. As founder and artistic director of Conspirare, Johnson assembles some of the finest singers in the country to form a world-class, award-winning ensemble committed to creating dynamic choral art. Beloved by audiences, lauded by critics and composers, and revered by singers, Johnson is known for crafting musical journeys that create deep connections between performers and listeners.

The Wall Street Journal praised his ability to “find the emotional essence other performers often miss,” and *Fanfare* wrote that “Craig Hella Johnson has assembled and molded a first-rate choir to be respected as highly as the best we have had.” Distinguished composer John Corigliano wrote, “I believe that [Johnson] has understood my music in a way that I have never experienced before. He is a great musician who understands everything about the music he conducts.” Composer and collaborator Robert Kyr observed, “Craig’s attitude toward creating a community of artists who work together to interpret the score ... goes beyond technical mastery into that emotional depth and spiritual life of the music.” Of Johnson’s performance of Beethoven’s *Missa Solemnis*, the San Antonio *Express-News* wrote: “Through all the amazing ebbs and flows of dynamics, the radiant balances, the seamless connection of episodes, the theatrically astute tempo relations, the unified structural arc, the music shone forth with organic naturalness. Nothing sounded fussed over. Everything just sounded right.”

Johnson is also artistic director of the Victoria Bach Festival, an annual event that draws musicians and critical praise from around the country. Previous positions included Director of Choral Activities (1990-2001) at the University of Texas in Austin and artistic director of Chanticleer (1998-1999). In demand as a clinician and conductor, he has been guest conductor with many ensembles including the Austin, San Antonio, and Santa Fe symphonies, Chicago’s Music of the Baroque, Oregon Bach Festival, Taipei Male Choir, and Berkshire Choral Festival, where he conducts Beethoven’s monumental *Missa Solemnis* in July 2012.

As composer and arranger, Johnson works with G. Schirmer Publishing on the Craig Hella Johnson Choral Series, featuring specially selected composers as well as some of his original compositions and arrangements. His works are also published by Alliance Music Publications. A unique aspect of Johnson’s programming is his signature “collage” style: through-composed programs that marry music and poetry to blend sacred and secular, classical and contemporary, classical and popular styles. In 2006 he was engaged to create a special peace-themed collage program for the North Central ACDA convention, and in 2007 by the famed St. Olaf Choir to create and conduct a collage program during a five-week residency.

Johnson has been honored with numerous awards, including 2008 induction into the Austin Arts Hall of Fame, Chorus America’s 2009 Louis Botto Award for Innovative Action and Entrepreneurial Zeal, and the 2011 Citation of Merit from professional music fraternity Mu Phi Epsilon, the organization’s highest honor for a non-member. In 2012 he was an invited speaker for TEDxAustin.

A Minnesota native, Johnson studied at St. Olaf College, the Juilliard School, and the University of Illinois and earned his doctorate at Yale University. As the recipient of a National Arts Fellowship, Johnson studied with Helmuth Rilling at the International Bach Academy in Stuttgart, Germany.