THIS DELICATE UNIVERSE
New Works for Our World

FRIDAY, MAY 8, 7:30 PM
St. Luke's United Methodist Church, Houston

SATURDAY, MAY 9, 8:00 PM
SUNDAY, MAY 10, 4:00 PM
St. Martin’s Lutheran Church, Austin

Pre-concert talk one hour before each Austin performance
With composers Eric Banks and Jake Runestad
Facilitated by Joelle Zigman

CRAIG HELLA JOHNSON
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR & CONDUCTOR

World premiere of This Delicate Universe by Eric Banks, commissioned by Conspirare with support from The Dale Warland Singers Commission Award of Chorus America and American Composers Forum

World premiere of Come to the Woods by Jake Runestad, commissioned by Conspirare

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SONG OF THE STARS

When the radiant morn of creation broke,  
And the world in the smile of God awoke,  
And the empty realms of darkness and death  
Were moved through their depths by his mighty breath,  
And orbs of beauty and spheres of flame  
From the void abyss by myriads came,  
In the joy of youth as they darted away,  
Through the widening wastes of space to play,  
Their silver voices in chorus rung.

And this was the song the bright ones sung:

“Away, away, through the wide, wide sky,  
The fair blue fields that before us lie.  
Each sun with the worlds that round him roll,  
Each planet, poised on her turning pole;  
With her isles of green, and her clouds of white,  
And her waters that lie like fluid light.

“For the source of glory uncovers his face,  
And the brightness o’erflows unbounded space,  
And we drink as we go to the luminous tides  
In our ruddy air and our blooming sides:  
Lo, yonder the living splendors play;  
Away, on our joyous path, away!”

“Look, look, through our glittering ranks afar,  
In the infinite azure, star after star,  
How they brighten and bloom as they swiftly pass!  
How the verdure runs o’er each rolling mass!  
And the path of the gentle winds is seen,  
Where the small waves dance, and the young woods lean.

“And see, where the brighter day-beams pour,  
How the rainbows hang in the sunny shower;  
And the morn and eve, with their pomp of hues,  
Shift o’er the bright planets and shed their dews;  
And ’twixt them both, o’er the teeming ground,  
With her shadowy cone the night goes round!

“Away, away! in our blossoming bowers,  
In the soft airs wrapping these spheres of ours,  
In the seas and fountains that shine with morn,  
See, Love is brooding, and Life is born,  
And breathing myriads are breaking from night,  
To rejoice, like us, in motion and light.

“Glide on in your beauty, ye youthful spheres,  
To weave the dance that measures the years;  
Glide on, in the glory and gladness sent  
To the furthest wall of the firmament  
The boundless visible smile of Him  
To the veil of whose brow your lamps are dim.”

-William Cullen Bryant (1794-1878)
Going in.” Finally concluded to stay out till sundown, for going out, I found, was really vital importance in our lives. As Muir writes, “I only went out for a walk, and discovery and sustenance one encounters while exploring the outdoors and its “amber light” when the clouds begin to clear. I hope it captures the self-whispering of wind, the rejuvenating power of a storm, and the calming the work ventures from the boisterous joy of a “glorious day” to the quiet found in the natural world. Using a collage of fragments from his writings, explores Muir’s inspirations and the transporting peace Come to the Woods

Famed Scottish-American naturalist and conservationist John Muir had a giddy, child-like excitement for the natural world. After a youth spent in Scotland and Wisconsin, he found himself transformed by his first visit, at around age 30, to California’s Yosemite Valley. With the vast mountainous landscape and the surreal size of the sequoia and redwood trees, the woods captured him and became his playground, classroom, and sanctuary. Muir was an avid saunterer and profound thinker who would venture into the woods for days with a bit of food and a book of Emerson poetry in hand. Inspired by the beauty of the wilderness and his lifelong love for words, Muir penned a vast collection of eloquent and vivid writings. In one quintessentially Muirian account, he is so fascinated by a windstorm that he climbs up a tall Douglas fir to experience it more intensely.

Come to the Woods explores Muir’s inspirations and the transporting peace found in the natural world. Using a collage of fragments from his writings, the work ventures from the boisterous joy of a “glorious day” to the quiet whispering of wind, the rejuvenating power of a storm, and the calming “amber light” when the clouds begin to clear. I hope it captures the self-discovery and sustenance one encounters while exploring the outdoors and its vital importance in our lives. As Muir writes, “I only went out for a walk, and finally concluded to stay out till sundown, for going out, I found, was really going in.”

-Jake Runestad

This Delicate Universe

Constantine Cavafy (1863-1933) was the son of a wealthy Greek shipping magnate who spent most of his life in Alexandria and Istanbul. He is best known for his poetic recreations of classic images of ancient Greece, and is probably my favorite poet. In 2008, I traveled to Alexandria, Egypt, where I was able to visit Cavafy’s apartment (now a museum), sit at his desk, and look through his manuscripts.

Since then, I have immersed myself in Cavafy’s poetry in order to prepare three separate works: Voices (2009), commissioned by the Yale Glee Club in memory of my first conducting teacher, Fenno Heath; Approaching ecstasy (2012), a concert-length ‘tryst ballet’ for double chorus, string quartet, and harp (commissioned by Whim W’Him and Olivier Wevers); and finally This Delicate Universe (2015), a five-movement symphony for unaccompanied voices, commissioned by Conspirare and the ensemble’s founder Craig Hella Johnson.

In 2007, at the Chorus America conference in Los Angeles, Craig and I first spoke about my composing something for Conspirare. Later I found, set aside, and translated the five poems that would become This Delicate Universe. Conspirare and I applied for Chorus America’s Dale Warland Singers Commission Award to support the commission, and we won the award in June 2010 on our second try.

For me, each of these five poems creates a different universe. The etymology of this word has always fascinated me, as it breaks down into the Latin roots uni (“one”) and versus (“turning”). How can a word that is supposed to encompass everything come from such one-sidedness? Yet how we each define our own universe is a statement about how we focus our attention. Our universe could be macrocosmic, and contain the great sweeping spiral of a galaxy since the beginning of time. Or it could be microcosmic, and consist of a single gaze in the most intimate of moments. For this piece, my definition of universe has become synonymous with intimacy and/or meditation – we each have one spin in this life, and with it we can turn our attention toward a single focus.

In the first movement “I have brought to art,” Cavafy’s poem establishes an intimacy with art – how we lose ourselves in it, how we commit ourselves to it, and how it can consume our entire lives without our even noticing it. Obviously, this relationship with art is delicate and resonates deeply with me – my setting of this poem is both mysterious and dreamy.

The second movement “In this place” describes the intimacy we each have with our neighborhood and all the landmarks that guide us through our daily lives and accompany us on our emotional journey. We all have close associations with specific places that we have seen over and over again – especially, as older adults, with places from our childhood. Some of these reminders are comforting, and some are painful. In my musical setting of this Greek poem, a pair of voices represents
the steps of someone who is walking through their neighborhood. The other voices present shifting triads that represent the visual landmarks one encounters along the way, as well as their associations that change over time.

In his third poem “The morning sea,” Cavafy meditates upon nature: sea, sky, sun, sand, and all the brilliant colors and deep emotions they engender for him. He pleads: “let me stay here,” and “do not distract me.” If ever the poet wanted to be one with nature, this would be the poem that captured that desire. The natural world is like Cavafy’s lover in this poem, and his desire to be intimate with such vastness is compelling to me. The Greek sections of this movement undulate deeply with the rhythm of the surf and emotional undertow, and the English sections are blistering with sunshine, glistening sand, and those hard-to-ignore memories of past lovers.

Cavafy’s fourth poem “An epic in the heart” recreates the poet’s most intimate moments with a lover. I have read all of Cavafy’s work, and this is easily the most intimate of his love poems. It is especially enchanting to me because the lovers gaze upon each other without speaking. In his lifetime (and especially in the Muslim world), Cavafy was not able to speak of his love publicly. In this poem, there is a tinge of terror at the thought of being found out – but this transforms the gaze the lovers share into an entire universe all its own. Near the end of the poem, Cavafy even wonders if the intensity that he feels might overwhelm his lover. The desire to breathe in your lover’s breath – there’s not much that is more intimate than that. Through the Greek solo sections as well as the English portions of this movement, I have written melodies with complete inversional symmetry – to reflect the vision of Cavafy in his lover’s eyes.

Cavafy’s fifth poem “Beside an open window” is probably my favorite. In my reading, it creates an intimacy with the spiritual world, or with the great unknown. It begins with contentment around being alone – and as someone who loves to meditate (as well as compose), I know this desire all too well. Natural phenomena awaken the supernatural, and the poet experiences sights, smells, and sounds that transport him toward another universe, to embrace the mystery of the unknown. The image with which this poem ends – “the chorus of the stars” – is almost too beautiful to set to music. I gave it my best effort, and it is a great honor to hear it sung by Conspirare.

So, there you have it. This Delicate Universe is actually five universes (or intimacies, or meditations) on art, home, nature, love, and the great beyond. I have lived with these poems for many years, and to me, they are excruciatingly beautiful. I am so excited to hear them!

- Eric Banks

**TEXTS & TRANSLATIONS**

**See How the Earth**
See how the archèd Earth does here
Rise in a perfect hemisphere!
The stiffest compass could not strike
A line more circular and like;
Nor softest pencil draw a brow
So equal as this hill does bow.
It seems as for a model laid,
And that the world by it was made.

—Andrew Marvell (1621-1678) “Upon the Hill and Grove at Bill-borow”

**I Sing the Body Electric**
I sing the body electric
I celebrate the me yet to come
I toast to my own reunion
When I become one with the sun

And I’ll look back on Venus / I’ll look back on Mars
And I’ll burn with the fire of ten million stars
And in time / And in time / We will all be stars

I sing the body electric
I glory in the glow of rebirth
Creating my own tomorrow
When I shall embody the earth

And I’ll serenade Venus / I’ll serenade Mars
And I’ll burn with the fire of ten million stars
And in time / And in time / We will all be stars

—Dean Pitchford

**Come to the Woods**
Another glorious day, the air as delicious
to the lungs as nectar to the tongue.

The day was full of sparkling sunshine,
and at the same time enlivened with one of
the most bracing wind storms.
The mountain winds bless the forests with love. They touch every tree, not one is forgotten.

When the storm began to sound, I pushed out into the woods to enjoy it. I should climb one of the trees for a wider look.

The sounds of the storm were glorious with wild exuberance of light and motion. Bending and swirling backward and forward, round and round, in this wild sea of pines.

The storm-tones died away, and turning toward the east, I beheld the trees, hushed and tranquil.

The setting sun filled them with amber light, and seemed to say, “Come to the woods, for here is rest.”

- John Muir (1838-1914), adapted by the composer

Unclouded Day
O they tell me of a home far beyond the skies,
They tell me of a home far away;
And they tell me of a home where no storm clouds rise,
O they tell me of an unclouded day.

O the land of cloudless days,
O the land of an unclouded sky,
O they tell me of a home where no storm clouds rise,
O they tell me of an unclouded day.

O they tell me of a home where my friends have gone,
They tell me of that land far away,
Where the tree of life in eternal bloom Sheds its fragrance through the unclouded day.

O they tell me of a King in His beauty there,
And they tell me that mine eyes shall behold
Where He sits on a throne that is bright as the sun
In the city that is made of gold.

-Josiah K. Alwood

INTERMISSION

This Delicate Universe
Set to five poems by Constantine Cavafy (1863-1933)
Both the Greek poetry and its English translation are sung, as shown

I.
I have brought to art [Εκόμισα εις την τέχνη, 1921]
Κάθομαι και ρεμβάζω.
Επιθυμίες κ’ αισθήσεις
Εκόμισα εις την τέχνην.
Κάτι μουειδομένα,
Πρόσωπα ή γραμμές.
Ερώτων ατελέων
Κάτι αβέβαιες μνήμες.

I sit here, and I dream.
I have brought to art
Sensation and desire;
With some half-noticed images,
Faces and lines,
Incomplete loves
And uncertain memories.

Ας αφεθώ σ’ αυτήν.
Ξέρει να σχηματίσει
Μορφήν της καλλονής.
Σχεδόν ανεπαισθήτως
Τον βίον συμπληρούσα,
Συνδυάζουσα εντυπώσεις,
Συνδυάζουσα τες μέρες.

Let me surrender myself to art.
For art can give shape
To any form of beauty;
And almost imperceptibly
It can fulfill one’s life,
While composing impressions,
And arranging the days.

II.
In this place [Στον ίδιο χώρο, 1929]
Ουκιας περιβάλλον,
Κέντρων συνοικίας,
Ποιο ήλέπω
Κι όπου περπατώ.
Χρόνια και χρόνια.

This is my home, the heart of my neighborhood,
The houses and the cafés of my quarter.
These are the buildings that stand all around me,
And the streets that I wander every day;
In this place, year after year.
I have recreated these surroundings
In my joy and in my sorrow:
Through a lifetime of experience,
And in abundant detail.
This place has been entirely transformed
Into pure emotion, for me.

III.
The morning sea

I will tell you honestly
That this is what I saw when I arrived.
And I will not be distracted
By my daydreams,
By my memories,
And those images of my past delights.

IV.
An epic in the heart

Stay here, my light,
For I have not yet told you
Even half of the things
That seize my heart with passion
And rush to my lips
After a single glance from you.

If you do not want me to speak,
Then do not try to charm me
With your words of love and adoration.

It is enough for me that you are here,
So I can tell you that I want you,
So I can touch you, and in the morning,
So I can breathe in the air that you exhale;
And if you find my attention
Just too much to take,
Then stay here anyway, and let me look at you.
Beside an open window

By Deshon Aaron

On this clear autumn night,
Beside an open window,
For hour after hour, I remain,
In the perfect, voluptuous quiet.

The rain drips lightly from the leaves.
A sigh from this delicate universe
Resounds within my own vulnerable nature;
It is a sweet sigh, and rises up like a blessing.

My window looks out upon an unfamiliar world.
A murmuring spring evokes memories
That are fragrant and indescribable to me.

Near my window, a pair of wings flutters by;
The dewy spirits of autumn
Approach and encircle me,
And in the purest of languages, they speak.

I begin to feel a vague and widespread hope;
And in the sacred silence of creation,
My ears encounter faint and distant melodies,
I hear a crystalline, mystical music,
From the chorus of the stars.

THANK YOU

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The Sunday, May 10 performance recording will be available for purchase as an instant download at set.fm, beginning immediately after the concert.
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COMPOSERS

ERIC BANKS
Composer, conductor, clinician, linguist, translator, and singer Eric Banks has garnered international acclaim for his creative direction and unwavering commitment to new music and voices gathered in song. In 1992, after studying at Yale and while earning master’s and doctoral degrees in music theory and choral conducting at the University of Washington, Banks founded The Esoterics, a professional-caliber chamber chorus that has now performed over 400 concerts and commissioned over 150 world premieres. It has drawn international acclaim for its sixteen recordings on the Terpsichore label, annual international choral competition Polyphonos, and annual composer residency Harmonia. In 1997, Banks was awarded a Fulbright Fellowship to Stockholm, where he performed with the Swedish Radio Choir and the Eric Ericson Chamber Choir. As a composer, Eric harnesses passions for foreign languages, poetry, social justice, and natural science to create works that reach beyond the established a cappella canon. He has been commissioned by Boston Children’s Chorus, Philippine Madrigal Singers, Seattle Opera, Singapore Youth Ensemble, Voces Nordice, and others. Eric has received composition grants from National Endowment for the Arts, NewMusicUSA, the Seattle and San Francisco Arts Commissions, and the Dale Warland Singers Award from Chorus America and the American Composers Forum, which supported the composition of This Delicate Universe. ericbanks.com

JAKE RUNESTAD
Considered “highly imaginative…with big ideas” (Baltimore Sun) and “stirring and uplifting” (Miami Herald), award-winning composer Jake Runestad has received commissions and performances from leading ensembles and organizations such as Washington National Opera, the Netherlands Radio Choir, the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra, Seraphic Fire, the Dayton Philharmonic Orchestra, the Virginia Arts Festival, the Rockford Symphony Orchestra, Craig Hella Johnson and the Cincinnati Vocal Arts Ensemble, Spire Chamber Ensemble, and the Master Chorale of Tampa Bay. Dubbed a “choral rockstar” by American Public Media, Jake is one of the most frequently performed composers in the U.S. and travels extensively to work with ensembles as a clinician and resident composer. Jake Runestad holds a master’s degree in composition from the Peabody Conservatory of the Johns Hopkins University where he studied with Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Kevin Puts. Prior to graduate school, he studied privately with acclaimed composer Libby Larsen. A native of Rockford, IL, Mr. Runestad currently lives in Minneapolis, MN and his music is published by Boosey & Hawkes and JR Music. jakerunestad.com

PRE-CONCERT TALK FACILITATOR

JOELLE ZIGMAN
Joelle Zigman is a journalist, composer, educator, activist, and new music advocate. She was the founder, producer, and host of a series of live broadcasts of the Shepherd School Symphony Orchestra for Rice University’s radio station KTRU, and a host and producer of “Music in the Making” for Houston public radio station Classical 91.7FM. Joelle is currently the founder, managing producer, and host of Austin, TX blog/radio program Nuts and Bolts Music on KVRX 91.7FM. Joelle’s journalism uses the broader lenses of social justice, music theory, musicology, research in music cognition, and music business/policy to take a critical and informational view of the contemporary music landscape.

PERFORMING NOTE
Conspirare has the privilege of performing in a variety of beautiful venues that best enhance choral performances. While our performing venues and the texts of some of our repertoire may be representative of specific traditions, it is in no way intended to be exclusive of any individual whose experience or set of beliefs is not represented. Conspirare respects and celebrates the great diversity of religious, artistic, and human experiences represented among our singers and audience members. The audience creates the space in which the music is held.
Latin con + spirare = to breathe together

Inspired by the power of music to change lives, Conspirare engages audiences in extraordinary musical experiences through world-class choral performances and recordings.

Conspirare is an internationally recognized, professional choral organization now in its twenty-second season. Led by founder and artistic director Craig Hella Johnson, Conspirare includes two adult performing ensembles and an educational program. Our flagship ensemble Conspirare (also known as Company of Voices) is a fully professional, Grammy® award-winning chamber choir of extraordinarily talented singers from around the country. Company of Voices performs an annual concert series in Austin and other Texas communities, and also tours in the U.S. and abroad.

Three other ensembles complete the Conspirare family. Conspirare Symphonic Choir, a large ensemble of both professional and volunteer singers, performs choral/instrumental works, often in collaboration with other organizations such as the Austin Symphony Orchestra. Conspirare Youth Choirs is an educational program for singers ages 9-18, who learn and perform in two separate ensembles, Kantorei and Allegro.

Conspirare’s 2014 album *The Sacred Spirit of Russia*, released on the distinguished Harmonia Mundi label, won the 2015 Grammy® for Best Choral Performance. The ensemble’s complete discography to date includes ten commercial albums and eleven self-produced live recordings of its popular holiday concerts. Conspirare made its first commercial recording *through the green fuse* in 2004. Its second album *Requiem* was released in 2006 and received two Grammy® nominations, followed in 2008 by *Threshold of Night* (Conspirare’s first recording for Harmonia Mundi), which also received two nominations. Harmonia Mundi’s international re-release of *Requiem* in 2009 won the Netherlands’ prestigious 2010 Edison Award for choral music, the Dutch equivalent of the Grammy. Conspirare’s 2009 PBS television special “A Company of Voices: Conspirare in Concert,” available on both DVD and CD, received one Grammy nomination.

The Conspirare organization and ensembles have received numerous honors and awards. All four ensembles have received local awards from Austin Critics Table. In 2005 Conspirare received the Margaret Hillis Award for Choral Excellence from national service organization Chorus America. In 2007, as one of the select choral organizations to receive a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts under its American Masterpieces initiative, Conspirare presented a four-day festival with a distinguished gathering of composers and conductors, three world premieres, and a gala closing concert with a 600-voice choir.

In July 2008 Company of Voices represented the U.S. at the Eighth World Symposium on Choral Music in Copenhagen, joining invited choirs from nearly forty countries. The choir has performed at the American Choral Directors Association annual convention and for several regional ACDA conventions. Conspirare received the 2010 Dale Warland Singers Commission Award from Chorus America to support the commission of a new work by Seattle composer Eric Banks, being premiered in this May 2015 concert. In February 2011 Conspirare gave three invited performances in New York City under auspices of the Weill Music Institute of Carnegie Hall, and in fall 2012 traveled to France for six invited performances at the Polyfollia Festival and a public concert in Paris. Conspirare became a Resident Company of the Long Center for the Performing Arts in 2013.
Grammy®-winning conductor Craig Hella Johnson brings unparalleled depth of knowledge, artistic sensitivity, and rich imagination to his programs. As Conspirare’s founder and artistic director, Johnson assembles some of the finest singers in the country to form a world-class ensemble. In addition to his work with Conspirare, Johnson is artistic director of the Victoria Bach Festival, a major regional summer festival that attracts audiences from all over the state, and music director of the Cincinnati Vocal Arts Ensemble. He has also served as guest conductor with the Austin Symphony, San Antonio Symphony, and many others in Texas, the U.S., and abroad. Through these activities as well as Conspirare’s recordings on the internationally distributed Harmonia Mundi label and performances in multiple Texas communities and beyond, Johnson brings national and international recognition to the Texas musical community.

Beloved by audiences, lauded by critics and composers, and revered by vocal and instrumental musicians, Johnson is known for crafting musical journeys that create deep connections between performers and listeners. A unique aspect of Johnson’s programming is his signature “collage” style: programs that marry music of many styles from classical to popular to create profoundly moving experiences. The Wall Street Journal has praised Johnson’s ability to “find the emotional essence other performers often miss.” 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.” Composer and collaborator Robert Kyr observed, “Craig’s attitude toward creating a community of artists … goes beyond technical mastery into that emotional depth and spiritual life of the music.”

Johnson was Director of Choral Activities at the University of Texas at Austin (1990-2001) and remains an active educator, teaching and giving clinics statewide, nationally, and internationally at conferences and universities. In fall 2012 he became the first Artist in Residence at the Texas State University School of Music. As composer, arranger, and music editor, Johnson works with G. Schirmer Publishing and Alliance Music Publications; his works have sold thousands of copies.

Johnson’s accomplishments have been recognized with numerous awards and honors. Notably among them, he and Conspirare won a 2015 Grammy® for Best Choral Performance and the Texas State Legislature named him the Texas State Musician for 2013. Other honors have included 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 international professional music fraternity Mu Phi Epsilon. Johnson studied at St. Olaf College, the Juilliard School, and the University of Illinois, and earned his doctorate at Yale University. He has been a Texas resident since 1990.
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Lynne and Greg have been making a positive impact in Austin and around the world with the many charitable and humanitarian causes they support locally and globally. As avid Conspirare fans, they wanted to make an extra-special gift to honor their 25th wedding anniversary, and they decided to make a generous gift of $25,000 at Conspirare’s Hidden Music Gala in February.

“We chose to spend our 25th anniversary at the Hidden Music event because celebrating our love with beautiful music and many dear friends was the most meaningful way we could imagine to honor our marriage,” said Lynne. “It was held on the very day we married, Valentine’s Day, and it became a serendipitous and lovely affirmation of our devotion to Conspirare. This special, sweet night surpassed our dreams!”

This important support of Conspirare’s mission will keep the music and love flowing out to the greater Austin community. We are grateful for the love Lynne and Greg share with each other and the world.
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We thank each individual, foundation, business, government and city agency for your investment in
Conspirare and in our mission to change lives through the power of music. This list represents gifts made in
this fiscal year between July 1, 2014 and March 23, 2015. When we make music, we make it together.

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As partners in our community, we will encourage you to continue giving the gift of inspiration every day!