

The background features a large blue circle at the top containing two hands reaching towards each other. Below this is a large white eye with an orange sunburst iris. At the bottom, a silhouette of a person with arms raised is set against a purple circle. The text is centered in white, flanked by black and orange bars.

/ TIMELESS COMFORT /

/ MODERN WITNESS /

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/TIMELESS COMFORT/ /MODERN WITNESS/

Johannes Brahms *Ein deutsches Requiem* (A German Requiem)
Joel Thompson *Seven Last Words of the Unarmed*

FRIDAY MAY 22 2026

BATES RECITAL HALL

Fireside Chat with **Craig Hella Johnson** and **Water Your Plants**



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Craig Hella Johnson Artistic Director & Conductor

Chelsea Helm Soprano

Tim O'Brien Baritone

Orchestra

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This project is supported in part by an Elevate Grant
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This program is dedicated to *Fran Collmann, Robert Harlan, and William C. Bednar for their exemplary board service.*

Seven Last Words of the Unarmed (2015)

JOEL THOMPSON (b. 1988)

Dedicated to the victims and their families

- I Kenneth Chamberlain Sr., 68** — “Officers, why do you have your guns out?”
- II Trayvon Martin, 17** — “What are you following me for?”
- III Amadou Diallo, 23** — “Mom, I’m going to college.”
- IV Michael Brown Jr., 18** — “I don’t have a gun. Stop shooting!”
- V Oscar Grant III, 22** — “You shot me!”
- VI John Crawford III, 22** — “It’s not real.”
- VII Eric Garner, 43** — “I can’t breathe.”

— INTERMISSION (15 minutes) —

Ein deutsches Requiem (A German Requiem), Op.45 (1868)

JOHANNES BRAHMS (b. 1833–1897)

Chelsea Helm *Soprano*

Tim O’Brien *Baritone*

- I Selig sind, die da Leid tragen** (Blessed are those that mourn)
- II Denn alles Fleisch, es ist wie Gras** (For all flesh is like the grass)
- III Herr, lehre doch mich** (Lord, teach me that I must come to an end)
- IV Wie lieblich sind deine Wohnungen** (How lovely are your dwellings)
- V Ihr habt nun Traurigkeit** (You now have sorrow)
- VI Denn wir haben hie keine bleibende Statt** (For here we have no permanent place)
- VII Selig sind die Toten** (Blessed are the dead)

Joel Thompson *Seven Last Words of the Unarmed*

Dear Listener,

In November of 2014, a Staten Island grand jury chose not to indict the officer who murdered Eric Garner. To me, the message was clear: if I were to be killed in some interaction with authority figures, my loved ones should not expect justice. There could be a video recording of my futile attempts to describe my distress – “I can’t breathe” – with the arm of the law around my neck and the life fading from my eyes, and still, my death wouldn’t matter. My death wouldn’t matter enough to warrant a formal charge of even manslaughter or negligent homicide. This was not an isolated incident – this was a trend. The color of my skin is a capital offense. *Seven Last Words of the Unarmed* wasn’t written to be heard. It was essentially a sonic diary entry expressing my fear, anger, and grief in the wake of this tragedy. I was serving as a choral conductor at a small college in south Georgia, but I occasionally composed pieces and hid them away. Finishing this work in early January 2015 was a much – needed catharsis; I felt exorcised of the emotions that had drained my spirit. However, Freddie Gray’s death the following April impelled me to try to bring *Seven Last Words of the Unarmed* to life. A Facebook post asking musician friends to sightread the work, a phone call by a friend to Dr. Eugene Rogers of the University of Michigan, a commission from Andre Dowell to fully orchestrate the work for the 20th anniversary of the Sphinx Organization, and the piece is alive several years later and I am very grateful.

Liturgical settings of the *Seven Last Words of Christ* are not trying to demonize the Roman soldiers that orchestrated the crucifixion, but they are designed to stir within the listener an empathy towards the suffering of Jesus. Inspired by that template, this piece is a meditation on the lives of seven Black men and an effort to focus on their humanity, which is often eradicated in the media in an attempt to justify their deaths.

Listening to *Seven Last Words of the Unarmed* can be uncomfortable. As you listen, I ask that you try to remain open. It can be easy to let a spirit of defensiveness pollute the experience of the piece. I ask that you revisit the last moments of these men with fresh hearts:

Kenneth Chamberlain Sr., 68 — the retired Marine who accidentally pressed his Life Alert necklace which recorded the police calling him a n***er before he was killed. (“Officer, why do you have your guns out?”)

Trayvon Martin, 17 — the teenage boy with his bag of Skittles being chased in his own neighborhood. (“What are you following me for?”)

Amadou Diallo, 23 — the young immigrant who called his mother in Guinea after he had saved up enough money to pursue a degree in computer science. (“Mom, I’m going to college.”)

Michael Brown Jr., 18 — the recent high school graduate and amateur musician whose body lay baking in the street for four hours before being taken to the coroner. (“I don’t have a gun. Stop shooting!”)

Oscar Grant III, 22 — the young father (of a 4-year-old girl) who was shot in the back while handcuffed in a prone position at Fruitvale Station. (“You shot me! You shot me.”)

John Crawford III, 22 — another young father who was purchasing a BB gun in a Wal-Mart in the open carry state of Ohio. (“It’s not real.”)

Eric Garner, 43 — the 43-year-old grandfather who was choked to death on camera on the streets of New York City. (“I can’t breathe.”)

When the music is over, let us continue to listen. Let us listen to each other with love and hope for a more just future. Thank you.

– With love, **Joel Thompson** (2015)

Conspirare asked Joel Thompson to write an addendum in the context of our current time:

In the last 10 years, the social and political landscape of this country has been overwhelmed by metastases of cruelty, hatred, and fear. It feels even more dangerous to sing this piece now than it did in 2015 when it premiered.

We have since heard the echoes of Eric Garner’s last words in the dying breath of George Floyd. We have seen pledges to change and the ensuing backlash against those same pledges.

We now see a willful self-induced amnesia of our country’s past sins and a purposeful blindness to our precarious fascist present, so it seems selfish and cruel at this point to consider bringing another Black child into this world. But that despair evaporates when I realize that my very existence is evidence of the impossible hope of my ancestors who were stolen from everything they had ever known, crammed into the hull of a ship and smuggled to another world.

It is that hope that sustains me now and it is the hope that we all need to persist and resist in this unjust world. *Seven Last Words of the Unarmed* is still a difficult listen, but I invite you today to hold on to the hope that this piece will no longer be relevant 10 years from now.

Let us sing it until that day comes.

Scan QR code to read
Joel Thompsons’ bio



Johannes Brahms **Ein deutsches Requiem** (A German Requiem)

In *Ein deutsches Requiem* (1865-1868), Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) created a masterful unification of voice and orchestral instruments—at times majestically expansive, at times delicately intimate. Both extremes vividly magnify the lyrics. The title *A German Requiem* foreshadows that the lyrics are in Brahms' native language. Moreover, Brahms set not the traditional Latin text of a Requiem Mass, as Mozart had in the previous century and Duruflé would in the next. Brahms set Biblical passages from both the Old and New Testaments; while some texts comfort grieving mourners, others describe the fragility of life and portray death as a peaceful rest from one's earthly work.

The tender beginning features a barely audible single repeating pitch sounding in the lowest registers. Above, a simple motive—constructed only of scalar motion, ascending two steps and descending—enters in the cello and repeats twice in the violas. The instrumental phrase extends to prepare the first choral entrance. The initial choral phrases themselves voice a transparent texture, alternating with the low strings' first stepwise motive. Only later do the four vocal parts become more independent to create a richly thick texture. Though the choir and orchestra originally present their own distinctive musical ideas, by the end of the first movement, they cooperatively quote each other.

The interplay between the choir and orchestra sparkles throughout. Although articulating text might seem to privilege voices, instruments deliver emotionally evocative themes. The introduction to the middle movement (often extracted as a stand-alone anthem or concert piece “How Lovely is Thy Dwelling Place”) features the upper woodwinds playing a theme that departs from its highest pitch before descending almost entirely by step more than an octave. It concludes by stepping upward twice. In response, the soprano melody mirrors the woodwinds in reverse, ascending more than an octave mostly by step. It concludes by stepping down, only to turn around to reach for a new apex. The lyrics from Psalm 84 suggest that the descending theme represents an ethereal abode reaching to earth, while the ascending theme depicts the opposite, unifying two worlds by dissolving the distance between them.

The penultimate movement, with its finale-like characteristics that include a fugue, betrays the presence of one last movement. Like the first, the last movement begins in the lowest registers; and reminiscent of the middle movement, the initial choral phrase—introduced by the Sopranos—descends from a melodic highpoint. The second phrase ascends to the same apex, only to reach beyond in an ornamental embellishment, thus fulfilling a common expectation that a melody project one unique apex, perhaps near the end, followed by a descent. Many Brahms melodies do exactly this, including the Soprano solo in the fifth movement.

Composer Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951) reportedly boasted that he could understand what a song was about only by listening to the music, even before reading its lyrics. Given Brahms' masterful compositional craft uniting words with music, may this performance allow you to experience fully the communicative power of music.

– Cynthia I. Gonzales

Seven Last Words of the Unarmed

I
Kenneth Chamberlain Sr., 68 — *“Officers, why do you have your guns out?”*

II
Trayvon Martin, 17 — *“What are you following me for?”*

III
Amadou Diallo, 23 — *“Mom, I’m going to college.”*

IV
Michael Brown Jr., 18 — *“I don’t have a gun! Stop shooting!”*

V
Oscar Grant III, 22 — *“You shot me!”*

VI
John Crawford III, 22 — *“It’s not real.”*

VII
Eric Garner, 43 — *“I can’t breathe.”*

Ein deutsches Requiem (A German Requiem), Op.45

I
**Selig sind, die da Leid tragen;
 denn sie sollen getröstet werden.**

(Matthäus 5,4)

**Die mit Tränen säen,
 werden mit Freuden ernten.
 Sie gehen hin und weinen
 und tragen edlen Samen,
 und kommen mit Freuden
 und bringen ihre Garben.**

(Psalm 126,5-6)

II
**Denn alles Fleisch, es ist wie Gras
 und alle Herrlichkeit des Menschen
 wie des Grases Blumen.
 Das Gras ist verdorret
 und die Blume abgefallen.**

(1 Petrus 1,24)

**So seid nun geduldig, liebe Brüder,
 bis auf die Zukunft des Herrn.
 Siehe, ein Ackermann wartet
 auf die köstliche Frucht der Erde
 und ist geduldig darüber.**

(Jakobus 5,7)

Aber des Herrn Wort bleibet in Ewigkeit.

(1 Petrus 1,25)

**Die Erlöseten des Herrn werden
 wiederkommen und gen Zion kommen
 mit Jauchzen; ewige Freude wird über
 ihrem Haupte sein; Freude und Wonne
 werden sie ergreifen, und Schmerz und
 Seufzen wird weg müssen.**

(Jesaja 35,10)

I
*Blessed are those who mourn,
 for they shall be comforted.*

(Matthew 5:4)

*Those who sow with tears
 will reap with joy.
 They go forth and weep,
 bearing precious seeds,
 and return rejoicing,
 bringing their sheaves.*

(Psalm 126:5-6)

II
*For all flesh is like the grass,
 and all the magnificence of mortals
 is like the flowers of the grass.
 The grass has withered,
 and the flower has fallen away.*

(1 Peter 1:24)

*So now be patient, dear friends,
 until the life hereafter.
 Behold, a farmer waits
 for the precious fruit of the earth
 and is patient until he receives the early
 and later rain.* (James 5:7)

But the word of the Lord endures forever.

(1 Peter 1:25)

*The redeemed of the Lord
 will return and come to Zion
 with shouts of joy; eternal joy will be upon
 their heads; joy and delight
 will overcome them, and sorrow and
 sighing will depart.*

(Isaiah 35:10)

III

**Herr, lehre doch mich,
dass ein Ende mit mir haben muss
und mein Leben ein Ziel hat
und ich davon muss.**

**Siehe, meine Tage sind einer
Hand breit vor dir,
und mein Leben ist wie nichts vor dir.
Ach, wie gar nichts sind alle Menschen,
die doch so sicher leben!**

**Sie gehen daher wie ein Schemen
und machen sich viel vergebliche Unruhe;
sie sammeln und wissen nicht,
wer es kriegen wird.**

**Nun, Herr, wes soll ich mich trösten?
Ich hoffe auf dich.**
(Psalm 39,4–8)

**Der Gerechten Seelen sind in Gottes Hand
und keine Qual rühret sie an.**
(Weisheit 3,1)

IV

**Wie lieblich sind deine Wohnungen,
Herr Zebaoth!**

**Meine Seele verlangt
und sehnet sich nach den Vorhöfen
des Herrn;
mein Leib und Seele freuen sich
in dem lebendigen Gott.**

**Wohl denen, die in deinem Hause wohnen;
die loben dich immerdar.**
(Psalm 84,1–2,4)

III

*Lord, teach me
that I must come to an end,
and that my life has an end,
and that I must pass away.*

*Behold, my days here are but a
handbreadth before you,
and my life is nothing before you.
Ah, how insignificant all mortals are,
and yet they live so confidently.*

*They go about like a phantom
and create much vain disquiet;
they gather things and know not
who will receive them.*

*Now, Lord, in whom shall I find consolation?
I trust in you.*
(Psalm 39:4-7)

*The souls of the righteous are in God's hands,
and no torment touches them.*
(Wisdom 3:1)

IV

*How lovely are your dwellings,
O Lord of hosts!*

*My soul yearns
and longs for the courts
of the Lord;
my body and soul rejoice
in the living God.*

*Blessed are those who dwell in your house;
those who praise you forever more.*
(Psalm 84,1–2,4)

V

**Ihr habt nun Traurigkeit;
aber ich will euch wieder sehen,
und euer Herz soll sich freuen,
und eure Freude soll niemand
von euch nehmen.**

(Johannes 16,22)

Sehet mich an:

**ich habe eine kleine Zeit Mühe
und Arbeit gehabt
und habe großen Trost gefunden.**

(Sirach 51,27)

**Ich will euch trösten,
wie einen seine Mutter tröstet.**

(Jesaja 66,13)

VI

**Denn wir haben hie keine bleibende Statt,
sondern die zukünftige suchen wir.**

(Hebräer 13,14)

**Siehe, ich sage euch ein Geheimnis:
Wir werden nicht alle entschlafen,
wir werden aber alle verwandelt werden;
und dasselbige plötzlich,
in einem Augenblick,
zu der Zeit der letzten Posaune.**

**Denn es wird die Posaune schallen,
und die Toten werden auferstehen
unverweslich,
und wir werden verwandelt werden.**

**Dann wird erfüllt werden das Wort,
das geschrieben steht:
Der Tod ist verschlungen in den Sieg.
Tod, wo ist dein Stachel?
Hölle, wo ist dein Sieg?**

(1 Korinther 15,51-55)

V

*You now have sorrow,
but I will see you again,
and your heart shall rejoice,
and no one shall take your joy
from you.*

(John 16:22)

Look upon me:

*I have toiled and labored
a brief time,
and have found great comfort.*

(Ecclesiasticus 51:27)

*I want to comfort you,
as one is comforted by his mother.*

(Isaiah 66:13)

VI

*For here we have no permanent place,
but we seek the one to come.*

(Hebrew 13:14)

*Behold, I tell you a mystery:
we will not all die,
but we will all be transformed,
and transformed suddenly,
in an instant,
at the time of the last trumpet.*

*For the trumpet will sound,
and the dead will rise
incorruptible,
and we will be transformed.*

*Then will be fulfilled the word
that is written:
Death is swallowed up in victory.
Death, where is your sting?
O grave, where is your victory?*

(1 Corinthians 15:51-55)

**Herr, du bist würdig zu nehmen
Preis und Ehre und Kraft;
denn du hast alle Dinge geschaffen.**

(Offenbarung 4,11)

*Lord, you are worthy to receive
praise and honor and might,
for you have created all things.*

(Revelation 4:11)

VII

**Selig sind die Toten,
die in dem Herrn sterben, von nun an.**

**Ja, der Geist spricht,
dass sie ruhen von ihrer Arbeit;
denn ihre Werke folgen ihnen nach.**

(Offenbarung 14,13)

VII

*Blessed are the dead
who die in the Lord from now on.*

*Yea, the Spirit says
that they may rest from their labor,
for their works follow after them.*

(Revelation 14:13)

English translation adapted from *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 6th ed., edited by Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1980), s.v. "Johannes Brahms," by Heinz Becker.



Photo: Sandy Carlson



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Timpani

Thomas Burritt

Harp

Elaine Barber



Chelsea Helm soprano

Chelsea Helm's "gleaming soprano" is sought-after for the concert works of Brahms, Mozart, Haydn, Handel, and Bach. She was heard most recently with Opera Lafayette and the Omaha Symphony; next, she debuts with the Spoleto Festival. A champion for art song and vocal chamber music, she presents recitals each season that return to favorites from the standard repertoire while highlighting American voices and uplifting living composers. Known for her versatile instrument, she also appears regularly as a choral ensemble artist. In addition to a private voice studio, she teaches workshops and lectures on flexible vocal technique across genres. chelseahelmsoprano.com



Tim O'Brien baritone

Dr. Tim O'Brien has sung with Austin Opera, Austin Symphony, Austin Shakespeare, the Minnesota Opera, LOLA, Conspirare, Texas Early Music Project, Ensemble VIII, the Dale Warland Singers, and toured nationally and internationally with the Rose Ensemble. Past performances include *Le nozze di Figaro*, *Into the Woods*, *Ariadne auf Naxos* and *Sweeney Todd* with the Butler Opera Center, as well as Verdi's *Don Carlo* and The Elixir Project with Austin Opera. Dr. O'Brien's "vibrant and subtle" singing was praised by Oregon Artswatch, Willamette Week noted his "rich, dark palette,"

and the St. Paul Pioneer Press praised his "strong, yet vulnerable" portrayal of Purcell's Aeneas. A four-time Grammy nominee, Tim's performances can be heard on more than a dozen commercial recordings, and recently on HBO's Emmy-winning show, *White Lotus*. Tim is Director of Music at St. Martin's Lutheran Church and serves on the faculty of Texas State University. He has held prior posts on the faculties of Gustavus Adolphus College, Concordia University, and St. Edward's University. Tim holds a Master's degree in Musicology from the University of Minnesota, and a doctorate in vocal performance from the University of Texas.

Water Your Plants (WYP) is a culture-forward creative studio that designs intentional, story-driven experiences rooted in community. Through event production, media storytelling, curated programming, and experience design, our work creates environments that help people feel more connected to themselves, to each other, and to the spaces they enter.

We blend conversation, content, and experience design to reduce social barriers and invite meaningful engagement. In collaboration with Conspirare, we support the social and emotional experience surrounding the music, helping audiences more deeply connect with both the performance and one another.

/WE SING FOR.../

We invited our singers, board and staff to dedicate this concert to someone or something meaningful to them.

Marilyn Koontz / Verna Pochop / Jane Marcoux / Melissa Garza / Carol Lungren

Those affected by war, and those who are afraid to speak out

My mom, **Maxine Seay**. The strongest woman I have ever known!

Jerry Martin In loving memory of an amazing father who loved fully and completely.

My dad, **Gomer Lesch** and my sister, **Connie Foster**

Esther Osborn / John L. Neva / Albert Wayne Hepp / Dr. Donald Bailey / Mary Ann

Mary Sue Koontz Nelson, who at nearly 95 years of life has a timeless energy and a deep love of beauty in our world.

“For the Irish balladeer **Gerry Carthy** of County Mayo, Ireland and Santa Fe, New Mexico. “And we’ll all go together to pull wild mountain thyme all among the blooming heather.”

The river of life that is music has always run deep through my family of origin. Though they are gone, that never ending river continues to flow through me. I dedicate this performance to them – **my two younger brothers**, taken from this earth too soon, and to those who love them and must carry on without them. To **my mother**, whose voice many say I inherited, and to **my father**, whose gift of pitch, (humor!) and timing were impeccable. May we all experience peace, and rest beside this river.

Honorable David B. Rosen / Pat Woolston / Samantha Duncan / Leslie Brittan

Rev. Louis E. Drew, favorite grandfather of my boys, minister, and friend to all, who left behind a legacy of faith, kindness, humor, and service that touched countless lives.

Peter / Sandy Fivecoat / Michael Clohesy / Shirley Krueger / Nancy Hughes

Those longing to be seen, heard and loved...

All the plant and animal species who are losing their homes due to human encroachment.

Ben King / Breonna Taylor / Sandra Bland / Jessica Valls / David Schwerin

Anyone who has died in or survives incarceration at Dilley, CECOT, or anywhere else.

In loving memory of **Dean Collmann / Janet Ray** - Wie Einen seine Mutter tröstet

Roberto M. Lara / Pierre Beauvais / Gregory Stone and **Chelsea Dog**

To my dear wife **Rebecca**, without whom I am nothing.

In loving memory of **Ben Richard King**

Anyone who has died in or survived war crimes

Anyone who has died from lack of access to healthcare

Renee Good and **Alex Pretti**

Deirdre Ragan / Jasenn McNair / Mike and Marie Connolly

survivors of sexual violence

The women, children, and civilians who died in conflict zones.

Duke / Dennis / Jean Beeson / Robert Ziegler / Susie Best / John Gatlin

Those who died or survived human trafficking

Glenda Wilde / Ninfa Peralez / Steve & Beth Usher / Glenda Goehrs / Kevin White

Anyone who has to work in a hostile work environment

Adam Nelch / L. Linton Luetje / George and Marilyn Carlisle / JP Allen

Oleh Wolansky / Paul Simone / Elizabeth Carnavale / B. Claire Mickelson

Intersectionality, #SayHerName, #MeToo

The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Peoples

To those who live in fear



CRAIG HELLA JOHNSON is the founding artistic director and conductor of Conspirare. Beloved for crafting thought-provoking musical journeys that create deep connections between performers and listeners. Recent additional leadership roles include serving as Artistic Partner with the Oregon Bach Festival and Music Director for Cincinnati Vocal Arts Ensemble. Hella Johnson is a celebrated guest conductor of choral and orchestral works, a published composer, arranger, and educator. Hella Johnson is an Artist in Residence at Texas State University, earning the 2022 Presidential Award for Excellence in Scholarly/Creative Activities.

Hella Johnson's concert-length composition *Considering Matthew Shepard* was premiered and recorded by Conspirare and continues to have broad national and international reach.

Hella 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. His honors also include Chorus America's Michael Korn Founders Award, Texas State Musician, the Matthew Shepard Foundation's Dennis Dougherty Award for Community Leadership, Wartburg College's 2023 Graven Award, and induction into the Austin Arts Hall of Fame.

CONSPIRARE is a GRAMMY®-winning choir and nonprofit performing arts and music education organization that believes in the power of music to change lives, inspire peace, and foster belonging.

Conspirare was established in 1991 in Austin, Texas, by Craig Hella Johnson and a band of dedicated supporters.

OUR IMPACT

Every day, Conspirare brings life-changing music to Austin and beyond. We come together in Song — to create art, to take risks, to play, to express something unique — to breathe together. **In the last year, we:**

Received our **12th GRAMMY®-nomination** for latest recording, *advena: liturgies for a broken world*.

Gathered with **5,898 audience members** through **14 performances** across 4 cities and 3 states and 1 country.

Lifted the voices of **156 singers** and the artistry of **86 composers**.

570,772 listeners streamed Conspirare's music 2,510,413 times on Spotify!

Production Team

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Conspirare is grateful to our Artist Hosts for providing artist accommodations.

If you have a spare bedroom (or more!) and would like to learn more about hosting an artist, please contact **Meri Krueger** at mkrueger@conspirare.org.

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Conspirare is grateful to our Ambassadors for serving as ushers, providing office and storage assistance, and many other jobs that keep us singing!

To learn more about becoming an Ambassador, contact **André Trahan** at info@conspirare.org.

Performance Note

Conspirare performs in a variety of venues designed to enhance choral sound. Choral music has a rich history in religious and cultural traditions. In performing such works and in such places, Conspirare is committed to the vastness of human expression, belonging, and love. We value and celebrate the great diversity of religious, artistic, and human experiences that our musicians and audience members bring. All are welcome here. Come, create the space in which the music is held today.

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Emergency Exit Instructions

In an emergency, please listen for instructions from the stage. Most patrons will exit towards the back.



Board Chair Nancy Lesch and Vice Chair **Robert Harlan** preparing dinner at a recent board retreat.

Craig Hella Johnson and **Fran Collmann** backstage at the Austin ISD Performing Arts Center before the world premiere of *Considering Matthew Shepard* on February 20, 2016.



Bill Bednar participates in the flag lowering ceremony at the American Cemetery in Normandy during Conspirare's 2012 tour to France.

Dear Friends,

As we conclude this season, we are honored to recognize three members for their longtime service on the Conspirare Board of Directors.

As Conspirare's trusted legal counsel and a cherished partner in leadership, Bill brought both his booming voice and his quiet wisdom to every challenge — always the steady hand we needed most.

Robert has been part of Conspirare since before there was a Conspirare — a singer, a producer, a Board member, and a literal shoulder to lean on — whose hard work, warmth, and laughter have been woven into every chapter of this journey.

There are no words adequate to describe what Fran means to Conspirare — only gratitude for her extraordinary attention to detail, her warmth and openness, and her faithful presence on the Board and through every rehearsal, every concert, every season.

As we honor Fran, Robert, and Bill, we also extend our deepest gratitude to all members of our board — past and present — for their exemplary service.

– **Nancy Lesch**, Board Chair

Thank You,

Fran Collmann

For twenty-eight years — fourteen of them as Board President — Fran Collmann has been the radiant heart of Conspirare, lovingly known to so many of us as "Our Lady of Conspirare." She became one of our most gifted and dynamic fundraisers not through technique or training, but simply by sharing her passion for our mission, her deep love of this music, and the extraordinary warmth and welcome she extended to every artist, patron, committee member, and friend who crossed our threshold. Her humility was its own kind of genius; she never claimed expertise, only human connection — and through that connection, she inspired countless others to fall in love with this work alongside her. Together with her beloved Larry, who became another wise and guiding voice among us, Fran opened her home, her resources, and her boundless generosity to Conspirare again and again. In my own life, she has been an extraordinary support — believing in me and in our mission with unwavering faith, especially through the most challenging seasons. She is the rare and beautiful soul any nonprofit could only hope and pray to encounter, and though it is hard to imagine Conspirare without her direct presence, she will remain a forever-honored part of who we are and who we are still becoming.

Robert Harlan

Robert Harlan has been part of Conspirare since the very beginning — thirty-plus years of wearing more hats than any of us can count, holding the organization with a love so deep and steady that it has quietly shaped the DNA of who we are. As a board member, he has always had our back in the truest sense, never forgetting why we are here: for the music, for the community we serve, for the transformational impact this work carries into the world. When difficult questions came to the table, Robert was the one who would find his way to the deeper “yes” — bringing strategic clarity, big vision, and a child’s heart that has kept him fresh and alive within this mission for nearly three decades. He is a weaver of community fabric, hosting gatherings at his and his family’s property in East Austin, organizing the meals and shared time that remind us fellowship is not a luxury but a foundation. To so many of us, he is a cherished brother and father figure — generous with his time in every direction, whether tackling crucial strategic issues, fixing a fellow artist’s car, or simply showing up with that cordial, brotherly warmth that makes everyone feel held. Though we will feel his absence at the board table, we are deeply grateful that Robert continues with us as singer and production chief, and his legacy of dedication will live on in the rest of us — a true cultural builder, a man who loves music and loves people and is determined to draw every drop of richness from this one beautiful life.

Bill Bednar

Bill Bednar came to us already a pillar of the community — a man of deep integrity, an attorney whose special gifts as a listener and negotiator made every board meeting richer for his presence. His ratio of listening to speaking was something like ninety to ten, and yet when he did speak — often after long discussion had unfolded around the table — he would offer a single distilled sentence that could summarize an issue from every angle, contextualize what was at stake, and quietly point toward a way forward. I always sensed that this gift was inseparable from his deep, lifelong love of poetry and the formation of words; his contributions were not only content-rich and concise but often genuinely poetic, as if he were sharing a teaching from some friendly oracle — and always offered with humility and warmth, never with any trace of self-concern. He loved choral music especially, I suspect, because of its essential marriage to poetry — the way words and music become one breath — and his care for that art form was of a piece with his care for the world around him as an engaged, intelligent, active citizen. His presence on this board has been a unique gift: poet, statesman, diplomat, friend — and through that quiet strength he helped move beautiful projects forward, navigating tricky passages from board table to stage with a grace that smoothed every step. We will carry his poetic sensibility and steady wisdom with us as a lasting legacy, and we are profoundly grateful for all he has given.

– Craig Hella Johnson

STILL WE SING

Friday, April 17, 2026 at 6 pm
ASSEMBLY HALL



Thanks to everyone who made *Hidden Music: Still We Sing* a **Success!**



Hidden Music: Still We Sing reminded us again that no matter what is going on in the world, still we sing. Singing transformative songs of hope – and building community in the process – is what Conspirare is all about. All proceeds support Conspirare’s mission, including world-class performances, award-winning recordings, and community outreach through choral music.

This year we honored **Marvin Britzman** for his broad and deep commitment to Conspirare’s Song – and for the way he brings together communities of fellow arts lovers to deepen our experience and create a thriving community right here in Austin.

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Amplify Austin 2026

Your gift co-creates transformative musical experiences.

Thank you to everyone who participated in Amplify Austin Day

Together, we raised an incredible **\$16K** from 128 generous donors to support our mission of creating transformative musical experiences.

Thank you to **Symphonic Choir** singers for amplifying our reach! Congratulations to the Altos for winning the sectional competition for getting the most donors engaged.

Our generous **Amplify Austin** donors moved us with these reflections about **Conspirare**:

“Conspirare is magical music of the soul. Always!” – Katy Nail

“When we all breathe together, life is better” – Eileen Houston

“Thank you for touching our souls with music.” – Simone Talma Flowers

Thank you to these **Amplify Austin** donors!

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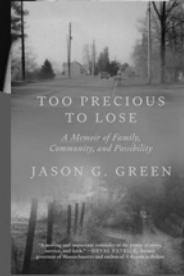
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