

Poems read on March 26, 2026, at Raise Our Voice

Poems written by Craig Hella Johnson for 'Raise Our Voice' are dedicated to the passionate members of FORWRD ATX and the extraordinary singers of Conspirare Symphonic Choir.

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WHY I SING I.

I sing because of her.
Because she held her ground when the ground gave way.
Because her voice was taken and she sang anyway —
under her breath, in the kitchen,
walking home in the dark.

I carry her in my throat.
When I open my mouth it isn't only me.
It is everything she refused to surrender.

I sing because she did.
I sing so she isn't finished.
- Craig Hella Johnson

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WHY I SING II.

I sing because they sang before me —
before microphones, before permission,
in fields and churches and holding cells,
in every room where the door was locked
and the spirit wasn't.

I sing because song outlasts silence.
Because the voice that rises
is the one they cannot catalog,
cannot confiscate,
cannot bury deep enough.

I sing so the line continues.
I sing to say: I am here.
We are here.
We have always been here.
- Craig Hella Johnson

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WHY I SING III.

Not to fill the silence —
The silence is full already,
full of what we carry.

I sing to lay it down.
To let the sound carry
what words cannot hold.

I sing because love asks to be heard,
even when no one is listening.
Especially then.
- Craig Hella Johnson

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WHY I SING IV.

Because they said hush.
Because they said not now,
not here,
not you.

Because somewhere right now
A child is learning what she is worth
by how she is treated —

and I want my voice

to be part of what she hears.

I sing because this world is still being made.
And I intend to have a hand in it.

- *Craig Hella Johnson*

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WHY WE SING V.

Not because it fixes everything.
Not because the hurt goes away.

We sing because we're here together.
Because your voice and mine
make something neither of us could make alone.

We sing because beauty is an act of resistance.
Because hope is not passive —
It opens its mouth.

We sing to remember.
We sing to reach.
We sing because we are not done yet —
not one of us,
not tonight.

- *Craig Hella Johnson*

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SONG PRAYER FOR THOSE WHO SANG BEFORE

We sing because of those who sang on this ground —
the Tickanwa·tic, the most human people,
who danced around a central fire
and sang their songs to the Creator
on this very earth beneath our feet.

We sing because of the Coahuiltecan
who sang for eight days without ceasing
when the prickly pear ripened,
when the stars turned,
when the rains came or did not come —
singing the human voice
as the first and most sacred instrument.

We sing because they sang at the springs of Barton,
at the Colorado's edge,
at the cedar-broken hills we know as home.

We sing knowing their language
has grown almost silent,
knowing the ceremonies were interrupted,
knowing there are those who cannot gather
at their own sacred places even now —

and so, we hold their silence inside our singing.
We carry what they carried.
We add our voices to the long river of voices
that began here,
long before this city,
long before this name.

We sing because they sang.
We sing so their singing is not lost.

- Craig Hella Johnson