



MEDIA RELEASE

Contact:

Ann McNair, Conspirare Managing Director
amcnair@conspirare.org
512-740-6932

Acclaimed Composer's *Piedra de Sol* to be Released on CD & Digital

Grammy® Award-Winning Choir Sings New Life Into Literary Masterpiece

AUSTIN, TX — July 10, 2026 – On August 21 GRAMMY® Award-winning choir **Conspirare** will release its **recording of *Piedra de Sol (Sunstone)***, featuring acclaimed composer [Joby Talbot's](#) choral setting of Mexican poet **Octavio Paz's** epic masterpiece.

[View the *Piedra de sol* EPK.](#)

Conspirare recorded *Piedra de Sol* following its Austin premiere in January 2026. Directed and conducted by [Craig Hella Johnson](#), this modern, large-scale choral performance will be available on August 21 to global audiences on CD and digital from [Divine Art Records](#).

Talbot and Hella Johnson will be in live conversation to celebrate the release with a global audience on Thursday, August 20 at 2 pm Central on Conspirare's YouTube channel.

Octavio Paz's epic poem *Piedra de Sol* (1957) is considered a surrealist masterpiece reflecting on time and the universal human experience. It draws on the symbolism of the Aztec calendar stone and meditates on the possibility of breaking time's grip through art and love. *Piedra de Sol* is widely regarded as Paz's greatest and most famous poem. It was a touchstone for his Nobel Prize in Literature, awarded in 1990 to recognize his complete body of work.

“This poem had a profound emotional impact on me when I discovered it,” said Joby Talbot. “Even when simply spoken, the words flow and seem almost to sing. Its ambition and scope is unlike anything I’ve ever read... with an endless circular sense of movement. This is what I hoped to capture in setting it for the wonderful voices of *Conspirare*.”

The result of Talbot’s literary inspiration is a 70-minute continuous musical structure that mirrors the poet’s narrative from visionary creation to deep despair to eventual salvation and enlightenment. It features a range of vocal textures, passages of complex rhythms, passages for a single voice, and slabs of sound reflecting the poem’s vivid images.

“This piece has confirmed what I truly believe, that even in this modern age where most listeners are bombarded with short bits of music and video, people do still have the wiring in us for longer forms,” said Craig Hella Johnson. “It brings great fulfillment and satisfaction to be with a larger work.”

“To do justice to the poem’s cosmic scale, I wanted to explore as wide a range of vocal textures as I could conceive,” said Talbot. “It’s a crazy, mystical, psychedelic, spiritual journey. And it’s for anybody, really. I invite listeners to leave your expectations behind and let it all wash over you. Away from a hurried way of listening.”

Piedra de Sol’s voices are underpinned by just one instrument: the marimba, performed by Tom Burritt, contributing to an otherworldly musical palette.

“When you listen to this performance, you think about how cool it is that this is all with the human voice,” said Hella Johnson. “Not everyone carries around a trumpet, but everyone listening has this human voice. And in this piece, you get to hear Joby’s imagination for what voices can do. It’s a magical experience.”

The piece’s commissioning, performance, and recording was made possible by the [Joel Brauer Fund for New Music](#), which was recently renewed by Mary and Phil Delk.

“It feels meaningful to hear a piece that doesn’t provide any final answers, any easy solutions, any clear black and white,” said Hella Johnson. “The poem and this piece feel in alignment with the truth of our own lived human experience.”

Conspirare is a professional choral organization under the leadership of Artistic Director **Craig Hella Johnson**. Inspired by the power of music to

change lives, this ensemble engages singers from around the world who join voices to deliver world-class, extraordinary live musical experiences and recordings. Their discography includes 17 commercial albums and 20 self-produced live albums. Hella Johnson and Conspirare were awarded a 2015 GRAMMY® for Best Choral Performance for *The Sacred Spirit of Russia*, and their recordings have received 12 total nominations. Conspirare has performed throughout the United States and internationally. On this recording, the choir includes tenor Haitham Haidar (whose recently released debut album *Zaytoun* on Athene was nominated for a JUNO Award), **Savannah Porter** of Voces8, major early music specialists Jonathan Woody and Dann Coakwell, and the incredible Basso Profundo Glenn Miller.

London-born **Joby Talbot** is a leading composer for concert, stage, and screen. He has written widely for voice and choir, setting poetry, sacred, and historical texts for varying ensembles. Prominent within Talbot's catalogue are his works for stage and screen. His operas *Everest* (2014) and *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* (2020) both explore themes of despair and endurance, while his collaboration with leading choreographer Christopher Wheeldon has produced original full-length narrative ballet adaptations of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (2010), *The Winter's Tale* (2013), *Like Water for Chocolate* (2021), and the life of Oscar Wilde (*Oscar*, 2024). Talbot has also scored major feature films *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (2005), *Sing* (2016), *Sing 2* (2021), and *Wonka* (2023).

For more on *Piedra de Sol*, visit [the concert webpage for the world premiere](#) and [view Joby Talbot and Craig Hella Johnson discussing Piedra de sol](#).

Photography from performances is available on request.