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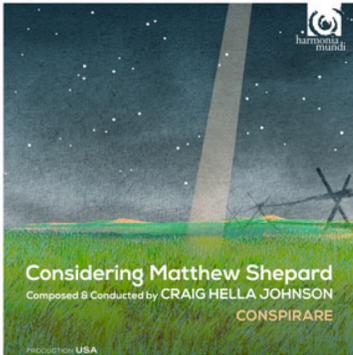
August 10, 2016

**Grammy®-winning founder and Artistic Director of Conspirare
 Craig Hella Johnson presents their world première recording of
Considering Matthew Shepard — Johnson's musical response to
 the tragic death of a young gay man who has become an
 American icon and a symbol for hope and empowerment.**

“Considering Matthew Shepard is by far the most intricate, beautiful and unyielding artistic response to this notorious anti-gay hate crime.” - Jason Marsden (Executive Director of the Matthew Shepard Foundation)

***Considering Matthew Shepard*
 Composed and Conducted by Craig Hella Johnson with Conspirare
 to be released September 9, 2016**

NEW RELEASE



Considering Matthew Shepard
 Composed and Conducted by
 Craig Hella Johnson, Conspirare
 SACD hmu 807638 (2 CD Set)
Release Date: September 9, 2016

This recording was funded in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

IN CONCERT 2017

JAN 29 & 30 - College Station, TX - Rudder Theatre, Texas A&M University
Considering Matthew Shepard will continue touring and will be filmed at Austin's Moody Theatre in partnership with **KLRU**.

[PROGRAM PAGE:](#)

In October 1998 a shocking hate crime was committed against **Matthew Shepard**, who was brutally beaten and left tied to a fence to die. Shepard’s story haunted **Craig Hella Johnson** for years and finally impelled him to compose a and chamber ensemble sets a rich variety of texts by Lesléa Newman, Hafiz, Hildegard von Bingen, and Michael Dennis Browne as well as by Matthew Shepard (from his own journal), his parents, and the composer himself. “It began as a passion setting and expanded from that into a fusion oratorio with a breadth of musical styles such as chant, choral movements, arias, folk songs and theater songs,” says Johnson. “The entire process has been about asking questions, particularly this enduring question of whether or not love itself is part of our essential nature, even amidst the many painful and confounding realities of our existence.”

Thousands have heard *Considering Matthew Shepard* in concert this year. The world premiere was held February 20 at the new, 1,200-seat state-of-the-art Austin ISD Performing Arts Center. Shortly after it was the centerpiece for the American Choral Directors Association conference in Pasadena with an additional performance in Los Angeles. After the Austin premiere, **Jason Marsden, Executive Director of the Matthew Shepard Foundation** said, "As a friend of Matt’s who lived through the dark days after his attack and observed first-hand the outpouring of grief, outrage and activism it spurred from coast to coast and overseas, it was deeply touching to sit amongst a thousand strangers, sharing tears and laughter and, ultimately, a sense that the hopes Matt had for a better world are very much still potential realities, if we can work together to achieve them.”

On June 12, 2016, Austin station [KMFA 89.5](#) aired a rebroadcast of the oratorio's first performance, drawing an estimated audience of more than 10,000 listeners in addition to those in 13 countries streaming online. At a time when the world is so troubled, the relevance of *Considering Matthew Shepard* is undeniable.

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 Grammy®-winning 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."

A 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, traditional and popular styles. Craig's first concert-length composition, *Considering Matthew Shepard*, was premiered in 2016 by Conspirare .

Conspirare is a professional choir under the leadership of Craig Hella Johnson. Inspired by the power of music to change lives, the Grammy®-winning ensemble engages singers from around the world who join forces to deliver extraordinary live musical experiences and recordings. Johnson and Conspirare were awarded the 2015 Best Choral Performance Grammy® for *The Sacred Spirit of Russia* – one of nine recordings released on harmonia mundi.

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For more information on **Craig Hella Johnson, Conspirare**, visit:

<http://conspirare.org>

Considering Matthew Shepard project page: [Considering Matthew Shepard](#)