A song sung from the heart can change any person’s tune.

And, this is why the power of music can change lives. Conspirare, you are an inspiration in our community. Thank you for all you do to inspire change. We at University Federal Credit Union also strive to inspire positive change in the lives of our members; we work hard to provide for their well-being.

As partners in our community, we will encourage you to continue giving the gift of inspiration every day.
Diversify Your Assets: Invest in the Arts.

We applaud the artists and patrons who invest in our community.

Considering Matthew Shepard

Composed by Craig Hella Johnson

Saturday, February 20, 8:00pm
Austin Independent School District Performing Arts Center

Sunday, February 21, 4:00pm
Austin Independent School District Performing Arts Center

Pre-Concert Talks
Elizabeth Neeld & Jason Marsden

After the Music: Post Concert Conversation
Craig Hella Johnson, Jason Marsden & Robert Kyr (moderator)

Tuesday, February 23
Travis County Correctional Complex
Facilitated by Paula D’Arcy

Thursday, February 25, 8pm
American Choral Directors Association Western Division
First United Methodist Church, Pasadena, CA

Saturday, February 27, 8pm
First Congregational Church of Los Angeles
Pre-Concert Talk
Elizabeth Neeld

This program will be rebroadcast on KMFA 89.5 & KMFA.ORG on February 28th at 3pm.
Welcome

Like so many people, I was deeply moved and affected by the death of a young Wyoming man, Matthew Wayne Shepard. The events surrounding his death created an enormous feeling-world in me which continued to reverberate for months and years after the event. I felt such a strong inner desire to respond somehow, especially musically. This feeling stayed with me many years. But it was not until somewhat recently that I felt ready to give voice to this inner response. In some ways, I feel that Matthew as a subject for this composition chose me rather than the other way around, as it seems is so often the case when we feel a strong inner calling. This story holds so many layers of meaning and raises many questions. My own journey with Matt and his story has proven to be an inspiring, challenging and deeply meaningful exploration that continues.

Surprisingly and remarkably, although remembering the suffering of Matthew Shepard can be intense and very dark, I continue to also experience a call to the inner light which this story profoundly transmits.

As a choral musician, I am very connected to the Passion settings, especially those of J.S. Bach, the St. Matthew Passion and the St. John Passion. At first I felt called to compose a Passion setting of Matthew Shepard. I followed that instinct and created Passion music which now makes up some of the central section of this work. It has evolved and expanded from that point to include additional music including a prologue and epilogue. I very much wanted Matt’s voice to be heard, even if in a small way, and to include a few musical snapshots of his strong life force. Additionally, I also especially wanted to provide a space for reflection, consideration and unity within this musical framework.

For the formation of the libretto, rather than setting the words of a single writer, I chose to gather and shape a collection of texts from several writers whose words span several centuries and represent significant cultural and geographic differences. Their writings both contribute to the telling of the story and also help create the poetic and musical structure which holds this musical meditation and reflection.

I am enormously indebted to Lesléa Newman for the poems from her extraordinary collection, October Mourning, which created the inspiration and foundational structure for the Passion music. At just the right moment, the poem which became Matthew’s aria appeared—“In Need of Breath,” a beautiful Daniel Ladinsky rendering of the Persian mystic Hafiz. Other poetic voices woven into the texture include the German mystic Hildegard von Bingen, the Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore, W.S. Merwin and several others whose words were building blocks within certain texts, including William Blake, Rumi, Dante and a passage from the Old Testament.

Because the American West is so important to the telling of this story and our consideration of it, I include two Wyoming poets, John Nesbitt and Sue Wallis. For me, the expression of contrasting intimacy and grandeur along with contrasting images of both the enduring and the ephemeral evoked in Sue Wallis’ “Cattle, Horses, Sky and Grass” creates a space in which all of the other texts can dwell. For some of the sections, I created texts myself.

Finally, a very huge and special shout of acclamation goes out to Michael Dennis Browne, the remarkably gifted writer from Minneapolis who brought all of his gifts to bear in one of the most memorable and life-giving collaborations imaginable. From the beginning, he understood my passion for creating a very special song in large form for Matthew, and he met me wherever I felt there was a need in the content or the pacing of the work. Several of the texts are his, and I had the pleasure of co-writing others with him as well. He was a true partner in this work, and my heart is full of gratitude for all that he brought to Considering Matthew Shepard.

I am deeply grateful to Dennis and Judy Shepard for their incredible generosity in continuing to support all of our remembrances of their beloved son Matt, and for being such extraordinary warriors for Love in the world.

Thank you so much for your presence and participation in this performance. We are grateful to be here with you.
Prologue

All.

Yoodle—oooh, yoodle-oooh-hoo, so sings a lone cowboy,  
Who with the wild roses wants you to be free.

Cattle, Horses, Sky and Grass

Cattle, horses, sky and grass  
These are the things that sway and pass  
Before our eyes and through our dreams  
Through shiny, sparkly, golden gleams  
The value of this special glow  
That only gleams for those who bleed  
Their soul and heart and utter need  
Into the mighty, throbbing Earth  
From which springs life and death and birth.

I'm alive! I'm alive, I'm alive, golden. I'm alive, I'm alive, I'm alive . . .

These cattle, horses, grass and sky  
Dance and dance and never die  
They circle through the realms of air  
And ground and empty spaces where  
A human being can join the song  
Can circle, too, and not go wrong  
Amidst the natural, pulsing forces  
Of sky and grass and cows and horses.

I'm alive, I'm alive, I'm alive . . .

This chant of life cannot be heard  
It must be felt, there is no word  
To sing that could express the true  
Significance of how we wind  
Through all these hoops of Earth and mind  
Through horses, cattle, sky and grass  
And all these things that sway and pass.

Ordinary Boy

Let's talk about Matt

Ordinary boy, ordinary boy, ordinary boy . . .

Born in December in Caspar, Wyoming

Ordinary boy

to a father, Dennis
and a mother, Judy
Ordinary boy, ordinary boy

Then came a younger brother, Logan

Ordinary boy

His name was Matthew Wayne Shepard. And one day his name came to be known around the world. But as his mother said:

Judy Shepard: You knew him as Matthew. To us he was Matt.

He went camping, he went fishing, even hunting for a moose
He read plays and he read stories and especially Dr. Seuss
He wrote poems with illustrations for the neighbors on the street
And he left them in each mailbox till he learned it was illegal
He made friends and he wore braces and his frame was rather small
He sang songs his father taught him

Frère Jacques . . .
Row Row Row Your Boat . . .
Twinkle Twinkle Little Star . . .

Judy: He was my son, my first-born, and more. He was my friend, my confidant, my constant reminder of how good life can be—and . . . how hurtful. ^

How good life can be, how good life can be

Judy: Matt's laugh, his wonderful hugs, his stories . . .

Matt writes about himself in a notebook:

I am funny, sometimes forgetful and messy and lazy. I am not a lazy person though.
I am giving and understanding. And formal and polite. I am sensitive. I am honest.
I am sincere. And I am not a pest.
I am not a pest, I am not a pest . . .
I am my own person. I am warm.
I want my life to be happy and I want to be clearer about things and I want to feel good.
I love Wyoming . . .
I love Wyoming very much . . .

I love theatre
I love good friends
I love succeeding
I love pasta
I love jogging
I love walking and feeling good
I love Europe and driving and music and helping and smiling and Charlie and Jeopardy

I love movies and eating and positive people and pasta and driving and walking and jogging and kissing and learning and airports and music and smiling and hugging and being myself
I love theatre! I love theatre!
And I love to be on stage! +

Such an ordinary boy living ordinary days
In an ordinary life so worth living
He felt ordinary yearning and ordinary fears
With an ordinary hope for belonging

He felt ordinary yearning and ordinary fears
With an ordinary hope for belonging
(Born to live this ordinary life)
Just an ordinary boy living ordinary days with extraordinary kindness
extraordinary laughter extraordinary shining
extraordinary light and joy
Joy and light.

I love, I love, I love . . .
Ordinary boy, ordinary boy

We Tell Each Other Stories

We tell each other stories so that we will remember
Try and find the meaning in the living of our days
Always telling stories, wanting to remember
Where and whom we came from
Who we are
Sometimes there's a story that's painful to remember
One that breaks the heart of us all
Still we tell the story
We're listening and confessing
What we have forgotten
In the story of us all
We tell each other stories so that we will remember
Trying to find the meaning . . .

I am open to hear this story about a boy, an ordinary boy
Who never had expected that his life would be this story,
(could be any boy)

I am open to hear this story
Open, listen.
All.
Passion

RECITATION I

_Laramie, southeastern Wyoming, between the Snowy Range and the Laramie Range. Tuesday, October 6, 1998._

The Fence (before)

Out and alone
on the endless empty prairie
the moon bathes me
the stars bless me
the sun warms me
the wind soothes me
still still still
I wonder
will I always be out here
exposed and alone?
will I ever know why
I was put (here) on this earth?
will somebody someday
stumble upon me?
will anyone remember me
after I’m gone?
Still, still, still . . . I wonder.

RECITATION II

Tuesday night. Matthew attended a meeting of the University of Wyoming’s Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Association, then joined others for coffee at the College Inn. Around 10:30, he went to the Fireside Bar, where he later met Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson. Near midnight, they drove him to a remote area, tied him to a split-rail fence, beat him horribly and left him to die in the cold of night.

The Fence (that night)

Most noble evergreen with your roots in the sun:
you shine in the cloudless sky of a sphere no earthly eminence can grasp, enfolded in the clasp of ministries divine.

You blush like the dawn,
you burn like a flame of the sun.^

I held him all night long
He was heavy as a broken heart
Tears fell from his unblinking eyes
He was dead weight yet he kept breathing

He was heavy as a broken heart
His own heart wouldn’t stop beating
The cold wind wouldn’t stop blowing
His face streaked with moonlight and blood

His own heart wouldn’t stop beating
The cold wind wouldn’t stop blowing
His face streaked with moonlight and blood
I tightened my grip and held on

The cold wind wouldn’t stop blowing
We were out on the prairie alone
I tightened my grip and held on
I saw what was done to this child

We were out on the prairie alone
Their truck was the last thing he saw
I saw what was done to this child
I cradled him just like a mother

_Most noble evergreen, most noble evergreen, your roots in the sun . . ._

Their truck was the last thing he saw
Tears fell from his unblinking eyes
I cradled him just like a mother
I held him all night long

_Most noble evergreen . . ._

RECITATION III

The next morning, Matthew was found by a cyclist, a fellow student, who at first thought he was a scarecrow. After several days in a coma and on life support, Matthew Shepard died on Monday, October 12, at 12:53 am. At the funeral, which took place on Friday, October 16, at St Mark’s Episcopal Church in Casper, Fred Phelps and the Westboro Baptist Church protested outside.

A Protestor

_God Hates Fags, Matt in Hell_
– Signs held by anti-gay protestors at Matthew Shepard’s funeral and the trials of his murderers

kreuzige, kreuzige!               (translation: crucify, crucify)
the wound of love
keep this all away from me
the wound of love
you take away
the wounds of the world
keep it away from me

RECITATION IV
National media began to broadcast the story. As the news began to spread, many people across the country gathered together in candlelight vigils, moved to (silently) speak for life over death, love over hate, light over darkness.

Fire of the Ancient Heart

Cantor:
“What have you done? Hark, thy brother’s blood cries to me from the ground.”

Choir:
Called by this candle
Led to the flame
Called to remember
Enter the flame

Cantor:
all our flames now
swaying and free
all our hearts now
moving as one
every living spirit
turned toward peace
all our tender
hopes awake

Choir:
Called by this candle
Led to the flame
Called to remember
Enter the flame

Fire: howl
Fire: broken
Fire: burst
Fire: rage
Fire: swell
Fire: shatter
Fire: wail
Fire: Fire

We all betray the ancient heart
Ev’ry one of us, all of us
His heart, my heart, your heart, one heart
“In each moment the fire rages, it will burn away a hundred veils.”

Burning     Breaking     Grasping     Raging
I Am Like You

I am like you

Aaron

and Russell

When I think of you (and honestly I don’t like to think about you) but sometimes I do, I am so horrified, and just so angry and confused (and scared) that you could do things to another boy—they were so cruel and so undeserved, so dark and hard and full of (I don’t know)

Late one night I had a glimpse of something I recognized, just a tiny glimpse—

I don’t even like to say this out loud, it isn’t even all that true—

but I wondered for a moment, am I like you? (in any way)

(I pray the answer is no)

Am I like you?

I bet you once had hopes and dreams, too.

Some things we love get lost along the way,

That’s just like me, get lost along the way—

I am like you, I get confused and I’m afraid

and I’ve been reckless, I’ve been restless, bored, unthinking, listless, intoxicated,

I’ve come unhinged,

and made mistakes

and hurt people very much.

Sometimes I feel (in springtime, in early afternoon)

the sunshine warm on my face;

you feel this too (don’t you?),

the sunshine warm on your face.

I am like you.

(this troubles me).

I am like you

(just needed to say this).

Some things we love get lost along the way.

we are all sons of fathers and mothers

we are all sons

sometimes no home for us here on the earth

no place to lay our heads

we are all sons of fathers and mothers

We Are All Sons

Stray birds of summer come to my window to sing and fly away.

And yellow leaves of autumn which have no songs flutter and fall there with a sigh.

Once we dreamt that we were strangers.

We wake up to find that we were dear to each other.

we are all sons of fathers and mothers

we are all sons

we are all rivers

the roar of waters, we are all sons
they come in herds
they stand and stare
they sit and sigh
they crouch and cry
some of them touch me
in unexpected ways
without asking permission
and then move on
but I don’t mind
being a shrine
is better than being
the scene of the crime

RECITATION VII

Matthew’s father made his statement to the court on November 5, 1999.

Stars

By the end of the beating, his body was just trying to survive. You left him out
there by himself, but he wasn’t alone. There were his lifelong friends with him—
friends that he had grown up with. You’re probably wondering who these friends
were. First, he had the beautiful night sky with the same stars and moon that
we used to look at through a telescope. Then, he had the daylight and the sun to
shine on him one more time—one more cool, wonderful autumn day in Wyoming.
His last day alive in Wyoming. His last day alive in the state that he always
proudly called home. And through it all he was breathing in for the last time the
smell of Wyoming sagebrush and the scent of pine trees from the snowy range. He
heard the wind—the ever-present Wyoming wind—for the last time. He had one
more friend with him. One he grew to know through his time in Sunday school
and as an acolyte at St. Mark’s in Casper as well as through his visits to St. Mat-
thew’s in Laramie.

I feel better knowing he wasn’t alone.

The Innocence

When I think of all the times the world was ours for dreaming,
When I think of all the times the earth seemed like our home
Every heart alive with its own longing,
Every future we could ever hope to hold?

All the times our laughter rang in summer,
All the times the rivers sang our tune
Was there already sadness in the sunlight?
Some stormy story waiting to be told?

Where O where has the innocence gone?
Where O where has it gone?
Rains rolling down wash away my memory;
Where O where has it gone?

When I think of all the joys, the times that we remember
All the treasures we believed we’d never ever lose?
Too many days gone by without their meaning,
Too many darkened hours without their peace.

Where O where has the innocence gone?
Where O where has it gone?
Vows we once swore, now it’s just this letting go
Where O where has it gone?

RECITATION VI

In the days and weeks after Matthew’s death, many people came to the
fence to pay homage and pray and grieve.

The Fence (one week later)

I have seen people come out here with a pocketknife and take a piece of the fence,
like a relic, like an icon. – Rev. Stephen M. Johnson, Unitarian minister

I keep still
I stand firm
I hold my ground
while they lay down
flowers and photos
prayers and poems
crystals and candles
sticks and stones
Matthew was left tied to the fence for almost eighteen hours.

In Need of Breath

Matt:
My heart
Is an unset jewel
Upon the tender night
Yearning for its dear old friend
The Moon.

When the Nameless One debuts again
Ten thousand facets of my being unfurl wings
And reveal such a radiance inside
I enter a realm divine –
I too begin to sweetly cast light,
Like a lamp,
I cast light
Through the streets of this World.

My heart is an unset jewel
Upon existence
Waiting for the Friend's touch.

Tonight
Tonight
My heart is an unset ruby
Offered bowed and weeping to the Sky.
I am dying in these cold hours
For the resplendent glance of God.

My heart
Is an unset jewel
Upon the tender night

My heart is an unset ruby
Offered bowed and weeping to the Sky.

Gently Rest (Deer Lullaby)

Gently rest now, you the child of angels
Spirit shining, resting in creation
Universe is holding you so deeply
Gently rest now, you the child of angels

Deer beside you, hear your brother breathing
With you always in your starry shelter
Dreaming in the holy home of wonder
Universe is holding you so deeply
Light of every sun you felt around you
Blessing bringing our own hearts of longing
Spirited sleeping in the arms of ages
Gently rest now, you the child of angels
Universe now dreaming you so deeply
Spirit shining, home within creation
Dreaming in eternal light of wonder
Gently rest now, you the child of angels
Spirit sleeping in the arms of angels
Gently rest...

RECITATION IX

Sheriff’s Deputy, Reggie Fluty, the first to report to the scene, told Judy Shepard that as she ran to the fence she saw a large doe lying near Matt — as if the deer had been keeping him company all through the night.

Deer Song

Deer:
A mist is over the mountain,
The stars in their meadows upon the air,
Your people are waiting below them,
And you know there’s a gathering there.
All night I lay there beside you,
I cradled your pain in my care,
We move through creation together,
And we know there’s a welcoming there.

Welcome, welcome, sounds the song,
Calling, calling clear;
Always with us, evergreen heart,
Where can we be but there?

Matthew:
I’ll find all the love I have hoped for,
The home that’s been calling my heart so long
So soon I’ll be cleansed in those waters,
My fevers forever be gone;
Where else on earth but these waters?
No more, no more to be torn;
My own ones, my dearest, are waiting
And I’ll weep to be where I belong.

Welcome, welcome, sounds the song,
Calling, calling clear;
Always with me, evergreen heart,
Where can I be but here?

RECITATION X

The fence has been torn down.

The Fence (after)/The Wind

prayed upon
frowned upon

North Wind, South Wind, East Wind, West Wind
(Splintered, scarred, weathered, worn, broken down, gone)

Winds of the World: carry him home.

Pilgrimage

The land was sold and a new fence now stands about fifty yards away. People still come to pay their respects. — Jim Osborn, friend of Matthew Shepard

I walk to the fence with beauty before me
The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want
I walk to the fence with beauty behind me
Yit’gadal v’yit’ kadash (may his great name grow)
Epilogue

Meet Me Here

Meet me here
Won't you meet me here
Where the fence ends and the horizon begins
There's a balm in the silence
Like an understanding air
Where the fence ends and the horizon begins
We've been walking through the darkness
On this long, hard climb
Carried ancestral sorrow
For too long a time
Will you lay down your burden
Lay it down, come with me
It will never be forgotten
Held in love, so tenderly

Meet me here

Won't you meet me here
Where the fence ends and the horizon begins
There's a joy in the singing
Like an understanding air
Where the fence ends and the horizon begins.

Then we'll come to the mountain
We'll go bounding to see
That great circle of dancing
And we'll dance endlessly
And we'll dance with all the children
Who've been lost along the way
We will welcome each other
Coming home, this glorious day

We are home in the mountain
And we'll gently understand
That we've been friends forever
That we've never been alone
We'll sing on through any darkness
And our Song will be our sight
We can learn to offer praise again
Coming home to the light . . .

I walk to the fence with beauty above me
Om Mani Padme Hum  (Om! the jewel in the lotus, hum!)
I walk to the fence with beauty below me
Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit
I reach the fence surrounded by beauty
wail of wind, cry of hawk
I leave the fence surrounded by beauty
sigh of sagebrush, hush of stone
(Beauty above me, beauty below me
By beauty surrounded)

Still, still, still, I wonder . . .
  wail of wind, cry of hawk
Still, still, still, I wonder . . .
  wail of wind, cry of hawk

Still, still, still
Thanks

Choir: Thank you

Listen
with the night falling we are saying thank you
we are stopping on the bridges to bow from the railings
we are running out of the glass rooms
with our mouths full of food to look at the sky
and say thank you
we are standing by the water thanking it
standing by the windows looking out
in our directions

Thank you, thank you

Hohou, hohou (Arahapo—thank you)

Yontonwe (Huron—thank you)

back from a series of hospitals back from a mugging
after funerals we are saying thank you
after the news of the dead
whether or not we knew them we are saying thank you

over telephones we are saying thank you
in doorways and in the backs of cars and in elevators
remembering wars and the police at the door
and the beatings on stairs we are saying thank you
in the banks we are saying thank you
in the faces of the officials and the rich
and of all who will never change
we go on saying thank you thank you

Hohou, Yontonwe . . .

Thank you

with the animals dying around us
taking our feelings we are saying thank you
with the forests falling faster than the minutes
of our lives we are saying thank you
with the words going out like cells of a brain
with the cities growing over us
we are saying thank you faster and faster
with nobody listening we are saying thank you
we are saying and waving
dark though it is

All of Us

What could be the song?
Where begin again?
Who could meet us there?
Where might we begin?
From the shadows climb,
Rise to sing again;
Where could be the joy?
How do we begin?

Never our despair,
Never the least of us,
Never turn away,
Never hide our face;
Ordinary boy,
Only all of us,
Free us from our fear,
Only all of us. Only in the Love.

Only in the Love,
Love that lifts us up,
Clear from out the heart
From the mountain’s side,
Come creation come,
Strong as any stream;
How can we let go? How can we forgive?
How can we be dream?

Out of heaven, rain,
Rain to wash us free;
Rivers flowing on,
Ever to the sea;
Bind up every wound,
Every cause to grieve;
Always to forgive,
Only to believe.

[Chorale:]

Most noble Light, Creation’s face,
How should we live but joined in you,
Remain within your saving grace
Through all we say and do

And know we are the Love that moves
The sun and all the stars? +
O Love that dwells, O Love that burns
In every human heart.
Only in the Love, Love that lifts us up!

This evergreen, this heart, this soul,
Now moves us to remake our world,
Reminds us how we are to be
Your people born to dream;
How old this joy, how strong this call,
To sing your radiant care
With every voice, in cloudless hope
Of our belonging here.

Only in the Love,
Love that lifts us up,
Clear from out the heart
   From out the mountain’s side,
Come creation come,
Strong as any stream;
How can we let go? How can we forgive?
   How can we be dream?

Out of heaven, rain,
   Rain to wash us free;
Rivers running on,
   Ever to the sea;
Bind up every wound,
   Every cause to grieve;
Always to forgive,
   Only to believe.

Reprise: This Chant of Life (Cattle, Horses, Sky and Grass)

(This chant of life cannot be heard
It must be felt, there is no word
To sing that could express the true
Significance of how we wind
Through all these hoops of Earth and mind
Through horses, cattle, sky and grass
And all these things that sway and pass.)

Yoodle—ooh, yoodle-ooh-hoo, so sings a lone cowboy,
Who with the wild roses wants you to be free.


CONSIDERING MATTHEW SHEPARD CREDITS

Prologue
Cattle, Horses, Sky and Grass (compilation with additional text by Craig Hella Johnson)
Opening couplet © John D. Nesbitt
Music citation: Musical excerpt which precedes Cattle, Horses, Sky and Grass is from the Prelude no. 1 in C Major from the Well-Tempered Clarinet, Book 1 by J. S. Bach.
Cattle, Horses, Sky and Grass by Sue Wallis © by Estate of Sue Wallis. Used by kind permission.

Ordinary Boy (Craig Hella Johnson)
Quotes from:
* From The Meaning of Matthew, by Judy Shepard p. 206
+ Matthew Shepard journal

We Tell Each Other Stories (Craig Hella Johnson)

Passion
The Fence (before)* (Lesléa Newman)
The Fence (that night)* (Lesléa Newman)
A Critical Edition of the “Symphonia Armonie Celestium Revelationum” (Symphony of the Harmony of Celestial Revelation) (Lesléa Newman)
A Protestor* (Lesléa Newman)
Additional italicized text by Craig Hella Johnson

Keep It Away From Me (The Wound of Love) (Michael Dennis Browne and Craig Hella Johnson)

Fire of the Ancient Heart (Michael Dennis Browne and Craig Hella Johnson)
*Genesis 4:10
#Humi
-William Blake
With thanks to Tom Burritt – percussion consultation and special arrangement

We Are All Sons** (Michael Dennis Browne)
* Stray Birds by Rabindranath Tagore
I Am Like You** (Craig Hella Johnson)
The Innocence (Michael Dennis Browne and Craig Hella Johnson)
The Fence (One Week Later)* (Lesléa Newman)

Stare* (Lesléa Newman)

A Dennis Shepard Statement to the Court
In Need of Breath (Daniel Ladinsky)
Hafiz Irzacs (based on “In Need of Breath” from the Penguin (New York) publication The Ghazals: Poems by Hafiz by Daniel Ladinsky. Copyright © 1999 Daniel Ladinsky and used with his permission.)

Gently, Rest (Door Lullaby)** (Michael Dennis Browne and Craig Hella Johnson)
Door Song (Mist on the Mountains)** (Michael Dennis Browne and Craig Hella Johnson)
The Fence (after)? (The Wind)** (Lesléa Newman)

Pilgrimage* (Lesléa Newman)

Epilogue
Meet Me Here** (Craig Hella Johnson)

Thanks (W. B. Merwin) from The Rain in the Trees. From the Rain in the Trees, by W. B. Merwin, copyright 1986 by W. B. Merwin, used by permission of The Wylie Agency LLC

Music citation: Musical foundation for “Thanks” is the complete Prelude no. 1 in C Major from the Well-Tempered Clarinet, Book 1 by J. S. Bach.

All of Us: Michael Dennis Browne
+ from Divinity Comedy, from the Parodies by Dante, adapted by Michael Dennis Browne
Reprise: This Chant of Life Cattle, Horses, Sky and Grass (Sue Wallis)

Recitations compiled from news reports and crafted by Craig Hella Johnson and Michael Dennis Browne.

CREDITS

Craig Hella Johnson would like acknowledge:

Matt Alder
Nicole Lummartme
Nancy Owen Burton
Jacin Marston
Nicholas J.L. Beudert
Ann McNair
Jennifer Braham
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“Introduction” from OCTOBER MOURNING: A SONG FOR MATTHEW SHEPARD by Leslie Newman

On Tuesday, October 6, 1988, at approximately 11:45 p.m., twenty-one-year-old Matthew Shepard, a gay college student attending the University of Wyoming, was kidnapped from a bar by twenty-one-year-old Aaron McKinney and twenty-one-year-old Russell Henderson. Pretending to be gay, the two men lured Matthew Shepard into their truck, drove him to the outskirts of Laramie, robbed him, beat him with a pistol, tied him to a buck-rail fence, and left him to die. The next day, at about 6:00 p.m. – eighteen hours after the attack – he was discovered and taken to a hospital. He never regained consciousness and died five days later, on Monday, October 12, with his family by his side.

One of the last things Matthew Shepard did that Tuesday night was attend a meeting of the University of Wyoming’s Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered Association. The group was putting final touches on plans for Gay Awareness Week, scheduled to begin the following Sunday, October 11, coinciding with a National Coming Out Day. Planned campus activities included a film screening, an open poetry reading, and a keynote speaker.

That keynote speaker was me.

I never forgot what happened in Laramie, and around the tenth anniversary of Matthew Shepard’s death, I found myself thinking more and more about him. And so I began writing a series of poems, striving to create a work of art that explores the events surrounding Matthew Shepard’s murder in order to gain a better understanding of his impact on myself and the world.

What really happened at the fence that night? Only three people know the answer to that question. Two of them are imprisoned, convicted murderers whose stories often contradict each other (for example, in separate interviews both McKinney and Henderson have claimed that he alone tied Matthew Shepard to the fence). The other person who knows what really happened that night is dead. We will never know his side of the story.

This book is my side of the story.

While the poems in this book are inspired by actual events, they do not in any way represent the statements, thoughts, feelings, opinions, or attitudes of any actual person. The statements, thoughts, feelings, opinions, and attitudes conceived belong to me. All languages contained within the poems are figments of my imagination; no actual person spoke any of the words contained within the body of any poem. Those words are mine and mine alone.

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Because of what I do, I'm often asked to share what Matthew Shepard's life, death and legacy mean to me and to our community and nation today. The passage of time has made it harder to give a short answer.

**Jason Marsden**

Executive Director, Matthew Shepard Foundation

Matt – as his friends invariably called him – was a friend, one of several I have lost over the years to one tragedy or another. His larger-than-life presence made him hard to forget and his continuing life as a historic figure and symbol stands alone amongst those of my loved ones who left us too soon. In that sense, his legacy means to me what it means to so many – a fixed point in the path toward LGBT acceptance in our society, ultimately being achieved despite, or because of, fallen heroes.

What means the most to me to say, though, is that the importance of Matt Shepard was his humanity. He was a man who lived. He had a family, aspirations, friendships, dates, photographs, diaries, foods he disliked, politicians he disliked more, and always, the opinions. So many opinions, so rich, so passionately advanced and skillfully defended in debate. He was also gay. It’s sad that’s all so many people ever knew of him.

Matt loved the theatre, films and music, and so it is fitting that a growing part of how he is honored and remembered is through the artistic achievements of those who, like myself, mourned his passage and refused to fully heal from the shock we all felt at his violent, needless death. His life and the scar that holds its place for many of us is also a wellspring for our noblest intentions and inspirations. It is a gateway to action, a fitting place of pilgrimage for our passion.

**Matt’s life tells us, live yours as you.**

**Be authentic. Follow your head and your heart and celebrate where it leads.**

What we will hear in this performance is the sound of a place that went undiscovered for a long time. It lived in a composer’s heart and mind and it took nourishment from the life of one young man who once was here among us. Matt’s legacy is many things.

This event, this moment, us together here, is one of its faces. I hope when you leave here, you take this moment with you, and look for the next one. Keep Matt and his story in your heart, and you will surely find it.

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Jason Marsden has served as Executive Director of the Matthew Shepard Foundation since 2009. He was an environmental and political reporter for the Casper Star-Tribune, Wyoming’s statewide newspaper, at the time of the 1998 murder of Matthew Shepard, a personal friend. Jason came out publicly in the newspaper’s pages and spoke frequently to journalism conferences and schools nationwide about coverage of hate crimes in local communities. In 2001, he founded Wyoming Conservation Voters, a political and lobbying organization for wildlife and environmental conservation. He is a former member of the boards of directors of the Alliance for Historic Wyoming, the Wyoming Wilderness Association and the Wyoming Chapter of the Sierra Club, and continues to serve on the board of the Equality State Policy Center. Jason and his husband live in Denver, Colorado.

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**Light in Darkness: Considering the Universal Meaning of Matthew Shepard**

By Robert Kyr, Composer

This essay is a co-creation that I have composed from several sources, including three hours of interviews with Craig Hella Johnson, and various recitations and texts from the libretto of Considering Matthew Shepard. I have created this essay in the way that I might compose a piece of music, that is, by weaving together motives and themes into a polyphonic tapestry. Through these means, I have explored the breadth and depth of Craig’s oratorio as the result of the highly personal and profound creative forces that have brought it to life.

Laramie, southeastern Wyoming, between the Snowy Range and the Laramie Range. Tuesday, October 6, 1998…Matthew attended a meeting of the University of Wyoming’s Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Association, then joined others for coffee at the College Inn. Around 10:30, he went to the Fireside Bar, where he later met Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson. Near midnight, they drove him to a remote area, tied him to a split-rail fence, beat him horribly and left him to die in the cold of night. [Recitations I & II from Considering Matthew Shepard (CMS) by Craig Hella Johnson (CHJ)]

One of the questions for me personally in exploring and creating this work is a need to go into this suffering and to look into it and not to look away—to see it, to experience it. I need to experience what it stirs in me with a basic question of one wanting to understand it. A question that doesn’t have an answer: “At the bottom of all of this suffering, the suffering in this story, the suffering in the world, the daily sufferings and deaths…At the bottom of this, is the flame of love present?” “It’s a tricky thing to use that word—love… not “I love you because of your personality traits” or “because of that nice thing that you did,” but it’s really love as a burning flame, as a presence that’s underneath all of life, as the river that we live in, and that we swim in and move in… [Interview with Craig Hella Johnson, hereafter “CHJ”, by Robert Kyr (RK)]

The next morning, Matthew was found by a cyclist, a fellow student, who at first thought he was a scarecrow. After several days in a coma and on life support, Matthew Shepard died on Monday, October 12, at 12:53 am. At the funeral, which took place on Friday, October 16, at St. Mark’s Episcopal Church in Caspar, Fred Phelps and the Westboro Baptist Church protested outside. [Recitation III from CMS]

I didn’t set out to go on a poetic journey of asking questions. It was the precise event of Matthew Shepard being beaten and dying that cracked this question open for me at some point so that this event forced me to raise this question. It’s absolutely about this question, and yet, in another sense, it’s a strange mystery of life that this loss has generated love in people’s hearts and generated poetry and sculpture and musical pieces and essays… [CHJ]
National media has begun to broadcast the story. As the news began to spread, many people across the country gathered together in candlelit vigils, moved to (silently) speak for life over death, love over hate, light over darkness. [Recitation IV from CMS]

It is what his suffering embodied and enacted—that hostility and hatred—that so concisely, brings decades of generations of people’s suffering to a head: it lances a boil… And in this way, if this very terrible act lanced a boil, and in many pockets of the world began a healing process, then I find it to be a very beautiful thing, a very beautiful yield from something that’s very terrible. [CHJ]

“Sometimes no home for us here on the earth. No place to lay our heads.” [From “I Am Like You,” CMS]

I chose to finish “I Am Like You” with a noble male chorus, almost a mens’ glee club-type of statement, “If you could know for one moment/how it is to live/somewhere far away/a place of unity.” It’s a momentary vision that makes me weep on the inside. My image in this moment of the piece that of Tagore—it’s a momentary vision that makes me weep on the inside. My image in this moment that of All and One, and the many manifestations of the One. [CHJ]

Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson were arrested shortly after the attack and charged with murder, kidnapping, and aggravated robbery. Their trial began on October 26, 1999; both were convicted of the murder and sentenced to two consecutive life sentences. [Recitation V from CMS]

One of his murderers—Aaron—expressed that this was a gay murder, so that’s obviously very much a part of the story. They had difficulty with it and there’s an issue of maleness in this… Right after we perform “I Am Like You,” we say, as singers (and as members of the audience), “Some things we love get lost along the way… I’ve been reckless, restless, bored, unthinking, listless, intoxicated, I’ve come unhinged; And someone falls in love with us, and we don’t really need to hear it,” each of us gets to say, “I’ve got to sing the song that I was given; that’s why I’m here.” The only way to say thanks back to the Creator is to sing that song and that’s what Matt has compelled me to do… to come out as a fuller human being. But the biggest surprise is the joy at the center of all of this. There’s something beautiful yield from something that’s very terrible. [CHJ]

In the days and weeks after Matthew’s death, many people came to the fence to pay homage and pray and grieve. [Recitation VI from CMS]

I just hope that it will be something that people can experience, reflect on, and allow to spark within their own lives and in their own meditation, to lead them forward and to call them forth. I hope that all of us will awaken more fully to return home to the whole fire of this ancient heart. That we might actually return home to it and that this piece might serve as a meditation along the way… [CHJ]

And through it all he was breathing in for the last time the smell of Wyoming sagebrush and the scent of pine trees from the snowy range. He heard the wind—the ever-present Wyoming wind—for the last time. He had one more friend with him. One he knew through his time in Sunday school and as a youth at St. Mark’s in Casper as well as through his visits to St. Matthew’s in Laramie. He had God. I feel better knowing he wasn’t alone. [Statement to the court (November 4, 1999) by Dennis Shepard, Matthew’s father; quoted in “Stars,” CMS]

And if Matthew was here now with us, what would you say to him? [RK]

Thank you… the deepest most profound thank you. Thank you for being so ordinary, thank you for loving to be on stage, thank you for being ornery and stubborn, thank you for your opinions, thank you for struggling with things as you did, thank you for being a unique and generous child, filled with light, thank you for being… Thank you for experiencing everything you did… Thank you, thank you for being a friend in absenta… [CHJ]

And what surprises you the most about your creative journey? [RK]

I grieve for all of us who have let the light flicker down and for some even get snuffed out… For those who were told by some outside person who was deeply invested in the separate self that they weren’t OK… For those who were told that their own being was unworthy. Even when all of those other voices say, “Don’t sing your song, we don’t really need to hear it,” each of us gets to say, “I’ve got to sing the song that I was given; that’s why I’m here.” The only way to say thanks back to the Creator is to sing that song and that’s what Matt has compelled me to do… to come out as a fuller human being. But the biggest surprise is the joy at the center of all of this. There’s actually light underneath it all, because we’re facing the ultimate in this story, and it brings a very large space through difficult means, which actually brings joy as well…” [CHJ]

Robert Kyr (b. 1952) is a composer, writer and filmmaker. He has composed twelve symphonies, three chamber symphonies, three violin concertos and a piano concerto, chamber music, and numerous works for vocal ensembles of all types. His Songs of the Soul was premiered and recorded by Conspirare under the direction of Craig Hella Johnson, with whom he collaborates frequently. The work was hailed in the Wall Street Journal as “a powerful new achievement in American music that vividly traces a journey from despair to transcendence.” Kyr is Philip H. Knight Professor of Music at the University of Oregon School of Music, where he is chair of the composition department and director of the Oregon Bach Festival Composers Symposium, Music Today Festival, and Vanguard Concert and Workshop Series. Kyr holds degrees from Yale (B.A., 1974), the University of Pennsylvania (M.A., 1980), and Harvard (Ph. D., 1989).
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Dann Cookwell* (Hamden, CT)
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Joe Milton (Oxford, MS)
Eric Neville (Seattle, WA)
Wilson Nichols (New York, NY)

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Dadon Burton (New York, NY)
David Farwig (Denver, CO)
Rick Garibllo* (Boulder, CO)
Robert Harlan (Austin, TX)
Sam Kreidenweis (Boston, MA)
John Prout (Sacramento, CA)
Thann Sroggin (Austin, TX)

Instrumentalists (cont’d)

Jessica Valls (Austin, TX) double bass
Mitch Watkins (Austin, TX) guitar
Thomas Burritt (Austin, TX) percussion
Michael Dennis Browne

Michael Dennis Browne’s latest collection of poems is *The Voices*, published in 2015 by Carnegie Mellon University Press. His poems have been published in many magazines and anthologies, and his awards include fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Bush Foundation, the Jerome Foundation, and the McKnight Foundation. Two of his collections have won the Minnesota Book Award for poetry. As a librettist, he has written many texts for music, working for almost four decades with composer Stephen Paulus. Their post-Holocaust oratorio, *To Be Certain of the Dawn*, was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize in music by the Minnesota Orchestra. Browne is a professor emeritus of English at the University of Minnesota, where he taught for thirty-nine years and was a member of the Academy of Distinguished Teachers.

Elizabeth Harper Neeld

Dr. Elizabeth Harper Neeld has focused her professional career on the creative process, the centrality of story in human existence, and the interdisciplinary study of making and creating. When Dr. Neeld designed a new PhD and Master’s program centering on the writing process in the English Department at Texas A&M University, studies from architecture, mathematics, music, art, and linguistics were among the disciplines integrated into that course of study. Her books, since she left academia to become a full-time writer, have demonstrated her ability to tell a powerful story at the same time that she melds research from far-ranging fields into a meaningful whole. Two public television documentaries have been filmed focusing on Dr. Neeld’s work. She is the first woman to receive tenure and full professor in the English Department at Texas A&M and the first woman faculty member to serve as Assistant to the President at Texas A&M.

Lesléa Newman

Lesléa Newman is the author of seventy books for readers of all ages, including the children’s books *Heather Has Two Mommies* and *Ketzel, The Cat Who Composed*. Her newest poetry collection, *I Carry My Mother* explores a daughter’s journey through her mother’s cancer battle. Ms. Newman, a former poet laureate of Northampton, Massachusetts has received poetry fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Massachusetts Artists Foundation. She teaches at Spalding University’s low-residency MFA in Writing program. *October Mourning: A Song for Matthew Shepard* received an American Library Association Stonewall Honor and the Florida Council Teachers of English Joan F. Kaywell Books Save Lives Award. Ms. Newman works closely with the Matthew Shepard Foundation as a member of their speakers bureau. She has visited schools all over the country giving her presentation “He Continues to Make a Difference: The Story of Matthew Shepard.” She lives in Holyoke, Massachusetts. *Photo credit to Mary Vazquez*

Craig Hella Johnson

Grammy® award-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 music director of the Cincinnati Vocal Arts Ensemble and conductor emeritus of the Victoria Bach Festival. 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, 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 states “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 (1999-2001) 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. A 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; Chorus America recognized his achievements with the Michael Korn Founders Award for Development of the Professional Choral Art in 2015, and the Texas State Legislature named him the Texas State Musician for 2015. Other honors have included 2008 induction into the Austin Arts Hall of Fame, Chorus America’s 2009 Louis Boto 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.
ABOUT CONSPIRARE

Conspirare is an internationally recognized, professional choral organization now in its twenty-third season. Led by founder and Artistic Director Craig Hella Johnson, Conspirare includes two adult performing ensembles and an educational program. Our flagship ensemble is a Grammy® award-winning chamber choir of extraordinarily talented singers from around the country. They perform an annual concert series in Austin and other Texas communities, and also tour in the U.S. and abroad. Three other ensembles complete the Conspirare family. Conspirare Symphonic Choir, a large ensemble that performs works for chorus and instruments, and Conspirare Youth Choirs, 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 Grammy for Best Choral Performance and the 2015 album Pablo Neurda: The Poet Sings was also nominated in this category the following year. The ensemble’s complete discography to date includes twelve commercial albums and seventeen self-produced live recordings of its popular holiday concerts. Conspirare made their first commercial recording through the green fuse in 2004. The second album, Requiem, was released in 2006 and received two Grammy nominations. In 2008 Threshold of Night (Conspirare’s first recording for Harmonia Mundi) 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 2015 release Path of Miracles was awarded the Preis der deutschen Schallplattenkritik, a most respected German CD award.

ABOUT CONSPIRARE

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

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 the 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 Conspirare 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, premiered in May 2015. 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.

www.conspirare.org

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 text 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.
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Production Team
Rod Caspers, Production Consultant
Andrew Carson, Lighting Design
Jon Haas, Projection Design (Austin)
Kandy Glass, Face/Kandy Makeup (Austin)
Robert Harlan, Stage Manager

Sven Ortel, Projection Design Advisor
Director, Integrated Media for Live Performance Program
Dept. of Theatre and Dance, College of Fine Arts
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Michelle Habreck, Lighting Design Advisor
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Crew
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In 2014, almost 700 cities and counties in Texas reported zero hate crimes. More than 10 million Texans live in these places.

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The Anti-Defamation League Austin would like to congratulate Conspirare on the thoughtful production of Craig Hella Johnson’s *Considering Matthew Shepard*.

For information on the Anti-Defamation League Austin, please visit austin.adl.org.

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We congratulate our friends at Conspirare on the world premiere of Craig Hella Johnson’s passion, Considering Matthew Sheppard.

To honor and memorialize Matthew in this way is a fitting tribute and we are honored to partner with you on this endeavor.

For 26 years, Out Youth has offered sanctuary and support to over 5,000 LGBTQ+ youth - ensuring that they are loved, accepted, and acknowledged for exactly who they are, not in spite of it.

May Matthew’s story live on as a reminder of how much we have lost, how much we have gained, and how much work we have ahead in order to create a world where people of all sexual orientations and gender identities can live with dignity.

For more information about Out Youth’s programs and services for youth ages 12 to 23, please visit our website, give us a call, or join us for our monthly open house which is held every second Sunday from 3:30 to 5:00 p.m.

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