



PRESS CONTACTS:

Niki Blumberg, Tim Choy, Davidson & Choy Publicity
323-954-7510; n.blumberg@dcpublicity.com
t.choy@dcpublicity.com

Ford Theatres
2018 Season — IGNITE @ the FORD!

Considering Matthew Shepard

Performed by 30-member GRAMMY®-winning Conspirare choir
Conducted by GRAMMY®-winning composer Craig Hella Johnson

Presented in association with Chris Isaacson Presents;
Taking place as part of the City of West Hollywood and WeHo Arts'
***One City One Pride* LGBTQ Arts Festival**

Friday, June 15 and Saturday, June 16 at 8:30pm

Tickets on sale now at www.FordTheatres.org

Commemorating 20 Years Since Matthew Shepard's Tragic Death

May 1, 2018, Los Angeles, CA — On the occasion of the 20-year mark of Matthew Shepard's tragic death, the Ford Theatres presents *Considering Matthew Shepard*, on Friday, June 15 and Saturday June 16 at 8:30pm, in association with Chris Isaacson Presents. Part of the 2018 Season and the IGNITE @ the FORD! series, *Considering Matthew Shepard* is performed by the 30-member GRAMMY® Award-winning Conspirare choir, and composed and conducted by its GRAMMY® Award-winning artistic director, Craig Hella Johnson.

Twenty years ago, in October of 1998, Matthew Shepard, a young gay student at the University of Wyoming in Laramie was kidnapped, severely beaten, tied to a fence and left to die. Five days later, when Matt passed away, the world was watching.

Approaching the 20-year mark of his death, acclaimed conductor Johnson has created a musical response to Shepard's tragic and untimely death that seeks to both celebrate his life and explore our common humanity. Led on the piano by Johnson, this choral drama features the full 30-member Conspirare choir, a small instrumental ensemble and projected imagery. The backdrop of the Ford Theatre, evocative of the Wyoming landscape, will make for an intimate, unique presentation.

These performances are a part of the City of West Hollywood and WeHo Arts' *One City One Pride* commemoration of this tragedy, which has become one of the touchstone moments of the American Civil Rights movement. *Considering Matthew Shepard* joins the ranks of many significant artistic

responses to Matthew Shepard's legacy. Most noteworthy is *The Laramie Project* by Moises Kaufman and the Members of the Tectonic Theater Project, which has been seen by more than 30 million people.

Considering Matthew Shepard is part of IGNITE @ the FORD!, a series presented by the Ford Theatre Foundation comprised of world-renowned contemporary artists whose work is thought-provoking and reflects the world in which we live. Supported by Los Angeles County Supervisor Sheila Kuehl. Tickets are available by visiting FordTheatres.org or by calling 323.461.3673.

Johnson said, "It is an extraordinary privilege and honor to be able to bring this piece to Los Angeles and to many cities across the country. It feels essential and urgent that we share this message of love and inclusiveness in the midst of these challenging cultural times. The Ford Theatres is the ideal setting for what we anticipate will be two especially memorable evenings together."

He continues, "Matt Shepard and his story have led me on an inspiring, challenging and deeply meaningful journey that I continue to this day. While composing and performing *Considering Matthew Shepard*, 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. I wanted to create, within a musical framework, a space for reflection, consideration and unity around his life and legacy."

After the world premiere in Austin, Texas on June 12, 2016, 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 spread 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 work together to achieve them."

This three-part oratorio incorporates a variety of musical styles seamlessly woven into a unified whole. Johnson sets a wide range of poetic and soulful texts by poets including Hildegard of Bingen, Lesléa Newman, Michael Dennis Browne, and Rumi. Passages from Matt's personal journal, interviews and writings from his parents Judy and Dennis Shepard, newspaper reports and additional texts by Johnson and Browne are also appointed throughout the work.

The Washington Post said, "Johnson conducts [the] voices of *Conspirare* with an eight-piece instrumental ensemble in a brilliant, heartfelt performance. Like Bach's large-scale choral works, this spellbinding piece draws on many styles masterfully juxtaposed, though Johnson's sources are the American vernacular ... combin[ing] spoken text, cowboy song, American hymnody and popular song, spirituals, jazz and dazzling polyphony, all woven into a seamless tapestry. Not unlike John Adams's post-9/11 masterpiece, *On the Transmigration of Souls*, Johnson's *Considering Matthew Shepard* demonstrates music's capacity to encompass, transform and transcend tragedy. Powerfully cathartic, it leads us from horror and grief to a higher understanding of the human condition, enabling us to endure."

Considering Matthew Shepard has had performances in Austin, TX; Boston, MA; Los Angeles, CA; Pasadena, CA; Dallas, TX; Lincoln, NE; Hattiesburg, MS; Oxford, MS; and College Station, TX. Following the Ford Theatres engagement, *Conspirare* will perform the work at Chicago's Ravinia Festival, Stanford University; The University of Arizona (Tucson, AZ); DePauw University (Greencastle, IN), North Dakota State University (Fargo, ND); Phillips Academy (Andover, MA); Goshen College (Goshen, IN), Midland

Center for the Arts (Midland, MI); Bowling Green State University (Bowling Green, OH) with dates in two additional states to be announced soon. KLRU, Austin-PBS and Conspirare are co-producing a *Considering Matthew Shepard* television special for national distribution in Fall 2018. The *Considering Matthew Shepard* album debuted at #4 on Billboard's Traditional Classical Chart after Harmonia Mundi released the 2-CD Set recording in mid-September, 2016.

About Conspirare

Established in Austin, Texas in 1991, Conspirare is a GRAMMY® Award-winning and internationally recognized choir with a reputation for “expanding the boundaries of choral performance” (*Wall Street Journal*). Conspirare, which translates from Latin as “to breathe together,” is led by founder and Artistic Director Craig Hella Johnson, and is comprised of soloists from around the country. Conspirare’s extensive discography includes 11 releases on the Harmonia Mundi label. The 2014 album *The Sacred Spirit of Russia* won the GRAMMY® for Best Choral Performance. Conspirare’s ambitious mission is to engage the power of music to change lives. Through its artistic excellence, creative programming, commissioning, and educational endeavors, the organization has established itself as an agent of change and a bedrock of the Texas arts community and beyond.

Conspirare has commissioned works from wide-ranging composers including David Lang, Tarik O’Regan, Jocelyn Hagen, Donald Grantham, Eric Whitacre, Nico Muhly, Mark Adamo, Robert Kyr, Jake Heggie, and Eric Banks. A commitment to new music and willingness to showcase a broad context through diverse programming is evident from the first recording in 2004. *Through the Green Fuse* features a Gaelic hymn, African-American spirituals, and works by Sibelius, Stephen Foster, Eric Whitacre, among others. *Green Fuse* was followed in 2006 by *Requiem* (works by Howells, Whitacre, and Pizzetti) which received two GRAMMY® Award nominations. In 2008, *Threshold of Night* (music by Tarik O’Regan) also received two nominations, including Best Classical Album.

The 2009 PBS television special “A Company of Voices: Conspirare in Concert” received the GRAMMY® Award nomination for Best Classical Crossover, and *Pablo Neruda: The Poet Sings* was nominated for Best Choral Performance in 2016. Conspirare’s “astonishing” (*Bay Area Reporter*) 2012 recording of works by Samuel Barber includes two new arrangements for chamber choir and orchestra by Robert Kyr. In Europe, Harmonia Mundi’s re-release of *Requiem* in 2009 won the Netherlands’ prestigious 2010 Edison Award. In 2015, *Path of Miracles* was awarded the Preis der Deutschen Schallplattenkritik in Germany.

Conspirare represented the U.S. at the Eighth World Symposium on Choral Music in Copenhagen in 2008, joining invited choirs from nearly 40 countries. In 2012, the group was invited to France for six performances at the Polyfolia Festival and a public concert in Paris. In 2016, the Olavsfestdagene festival, in Trondheim, Norway, presented the group in a collaboration with the internationally acclaimed ensemble Trondheimsolistene.

At home, Conspirare performs a full annual season in Austin and Central Texas where it has received ongoing recognition from local organizations and critics, and Artistic Director Craig Hella Johnson was named Texas State Musician. The group is also committed to an ongoing outreach program which includes free community Big Sings and performances at Travis County Correctional Facility. In 2013, Conspirare became a Resident Company of Austin’s Long Center for the Performing Arts.

About Craig Hella Johnson (Founding Artistic Director, Conspirare)

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.” Of Johnson’s performance of Beethoven’s *Missa Solemnis*, the *San Antonio Express-News* wrote: “Through all the amazing ebbs and flows of dynamics, the radiant balances, the seamless connection of episodes, the theatrically astute tempo relations, the unified structural arc, the music shone forth with organic naturalness. Nothing sounded fussed over. Everything just sounded right.”

Johnson is also Music Director of the Cincinnati Vocal Arts Ensemble and conductor emeritus of the Victoria Bach Festival. He was Artistic Director of San Francisco-based Chanticleer (1998-1999) and has served as guest conductor with the Austin Symphony, San Antonio Symphony, and many others in Texas, the U.S., and abroad. As the Director of Choral Activities at the University of Texas at Austin from 1990-2001, Johnson led the graduate program in choral conducting. He remains an active educator, teaching nationally and internationally with professionals and students at conferences and universities. He is also a frequent speaker at regional and national conferences of the American Choral Directors Association. In Fall 2012, he became the first Artist in Residence at the Texas State University School of Music.

About Chris Isaacson Presents

Chris Isaacson Presents (Co-Presenter) has created, produced and promoted over 700 events since the company's founding in 2004. From small clubs to major theatres, CIP has presented some of the most influential stars of this generation. CIP's summer event in 2016 — *Broadway Under the Stars: Celebrating the 35th Anniversary of Dreamgirls* — was a complete sellout at the Ford Theatres in Hollywood. In early 2017, CIP coordinated and produced an elaborate kick-off event at the Pacific Design Center celebrating the premiere of Ryan Murphy's *FEUD: Bette and Joan* (FX Networks). The *Drag-Tacular Live Concert* event featured Tony Award-nominee Sam Harris as host. Niki Haris and Bianca Del Rio were only two of the many stars in the show, which played to a standing room only crowd. For more information on upcoming CIP events, visit: http://www.chrisisaacsonpresents.com/public_html/.

About the Ford Theatres

At 1,200 seats, the Ford Theatres creates an intimate concert experience that is a favorite among Angelenos. Each summer, the Ford hosts music, dance, theatre, film and family events reflective of the communities that comprise Los Angeles County. Proceeds from IGNITE @ the FORD! events benefit the

Ford Theatre Foundation. The Ford is owned by the County of Los Angeles and operated in partnership with the Department of Parks and Recreation and the Ford Theatre Foundation. Nestled in a canyon of a County regional park in the Cahuenga Pass, the Ford Theatres has a rich history dating back to the 1920s. Audiences attending the 2018 Season will enjoy a fully revitalized Ford after the completion of a nearly three-year renovation project, including improved lighting and sound and the Ford Terrace Café on the new terrace – dubbed The Zev - with a menu by Crumble Catering.

The 2018 Season at the Ford Theatres is made possible through the support of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors. Additional support provided by Los Angeles County Supervisor Sheila Kuehl, along with ABC7; the Caruso Family Foundation; the Department of Cultural Affairs, City of Los Angeles; Chamber Music America; City National Bank; Discover Hollywood; First 5 LA; Fusicology; The James Irvine Foundation; KCETLink; KCRW; LAArtsOnline.com; Motev; The National Endowment for the Arts; NBC Universal; Southern California Edison; Union Bank; Univision; The Wasserman Foundation; Wells Fargo; and Yelp.com.

For Calendar Section

WHAT: Considering Matthew Shepard

WHEN: Friday, June 15 at 8:30pm and Saturday, June 16 at 8:30pm

PRICES: Start at \$25. Prices subject to change

WHERE: 2580 Cahuenga Blvd. East, Hollywood, CA 90068

Just off the 101 Hollywood Freeway between Hollywood and Universal Studios in the Cahuenga Pass

PARKING: On site, stacked. \$12 per vehicle. Carpool and save: three or more people per vehicle save \$5 on parking. A FREE shuttle to the Ford services the Universal City/Studio City Metro Station lot at Lankershim Blvd. and Campo de Cahuenga. The Ford shuttle stops in the “kiss and ride” area and cycles every 20 minutes. For non-stacked off-site parking, a FREE shuttle services the parking structure located at 3330 Cahuenga Blvd. West, Los Angeles, CA 90068; parking is \$14, cash only.

TICKETS:

Online: FordTheatres.org

Phone: (323) 461-3673

Box Office Hours: Now through June 1: Tuesdays – Fridays, noon – 5:00 p.m.; June 5 – October 28: Tuesdays – Saturdays, noon – 5:00 p.m. for phone and window sales. On show days, including Sundays, the box office opens two hours before the start of the show. Visit the website for more info.

TICKETS CAN BE PURCHASED AT FORDTHEATRES.ORG OR (323) 461-3673.

MORE INFORMATION: FordTheatres.org, [Facebook.com/FordTheatres](https://www.facebook.com/FordTheatres), [Twitter.com/FordTheatres/](https://twitter.com/FordTheatres/) conspirare.org/project/considering-matthew-shepard/