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GRAMMY®-WINNING CONSPIRARE TO PERFORM AT WASHINGTON NATIONAL CATHEDRAL INTERMENT OF MATTHEW SHEPARD'S ASHES

Austin, TX, October 19, 2018. Grammy® Award winning vocal ensemble Conspirare has accepted an invitation to perform at the interment of Matthew Shepard's ashes at Washington National Cathedral on October 26. The service will be livestreamed at <https://cathedral.org/matthewshepard>. Conspirare, comprised of distinctive solo artists from around the United States who are also committed to the highest level of ensemble performance, will perform selections from *Considering Matthew Shepard* during the service and a suite of movements from the work as part of a postlude concert.

Artistic Director Craig Hella Johnson commented, "To be asked to sing at Washington National Cathedral is, for any occasion, a momentous invitation. To be invited by the Cathedral for this particular moment— this final laying to rest of Matthew's ashes— is a matter of the deepest and most meaningful significance. Tears came to my eyes when we first received the call. We have been singing "Matthew's song" now for four years — this dear Matthew Shepard, whose life and death have broken open the heart of our nation to a vision of a more loving world, past the hatred and divisive climate which troubles us all so greatly." Conspirare's appearance comes on the heels of a seven-city national tour that began in Laramie, WY 20 years to the day Matthew Shepard was brutally beaten. A nationally distributed special co-produced by KLRU, PBS-Austin and Conspirare featuring performance and documentary footage is now airing nationally (check local listings).

The critically acclaimed choir will perform selections from *Considering Matthew Shepard* during the service. This work was described by *The Washington Post* as "powerfully cathartic." At the conclusion of the public service the Shepard family will move directly to the Cathedral's Columbarium for a private Committal ceremony to place Matthew's remains in their final resting place. For the public who have attended the service, the Cathedral extends the invitation to stay and reflect in the space if they wish or to seek prayer with clergy in all of the Nave Chapels. During this time, Conspirare will perform a 45-minute program including a suite of movements from the work as well as a mix of familiar choral selections and classics.

The Cathedral's Canon for Worship, the Rev. Canon Rosemarie Logan Duncan, said, "We felt it important to allow people time to remain in the space for reflection and prayer as the moment of interment happens privately.

For all in the LGBTQ+ community and beyond, this is a significant moment as the Shepard family brings Matthew to his final resting place. It is our hope that a sense of comfort and peace will have a broader reach that day and we are grateful to Conspirare for creating a musical environment that may provide healing and peace for many in our community."

Considering Matthew Shepard is one 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* was featured in the documentary series *Arts in Context* and received critical acclaim across the country and world. After the world 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 firsthand the outpouring of grief, outrage and activism, as 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."

Conspirare recently completed appearances in 11 cities during their September and October tour. The final leg of the tour is in April 2019 with stops at Stanford University and Tucson's University of Arizona. Upcoming National Tour dates include:

4/13/19 Stanford University, Bing Hall

4/16/19 University of Arizona, Centennial Hall

The work was previously performed in Austin, TX; Boston, MA; Los Angeles, CA; Laramie, WY; Fort Collins, CO; Lexington, KY; Bowling Green, OH; Fargo, ND; Plymouth, MN; Pasadena, CA; Dallas, TX; Lincoln, NE; Hattiesburg, MS; Oxford, MS; and College Station, TX. The *Considering Matthew Shepard* album debuted at #4 on Billboard's Traditional Classical Chart after Harmonia Mundi released the album 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 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. 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)

Craig Hella Johnson is the Founding Artistic Director and Conductor of the Austin-based, internationally- renowned, Grammy-nominated choir Conspirare. Johnson is also music director of the Cincinnati Vocal Arts Ensemble and conductor emeritus of the Victoria Bach Festival. Known for crafting thought-provoking musical journeys that create deep connections between performers and listeners, Johnson is in frequent demand as a guest conductor of choral and orchestral works. Johnson joined the faculty at Texas State University as Artist in Residence in fall 2016 and continues to inspire his colleagues and students in innovative teaching and programming as Professor of Practice. A composer and arranger, Johnson is an editor for the Craig Hella Johnson Choral Series, featuring specially selected composers as well as some of his own original compositions and arrangements. His music is also published by Alliance Music Publications. Johnson's first concert-length composition, *Considering Matthew Shepard*, was premiered and recorded by Conspirare for a 2016 CD release.

Johnson's accomplishments have been recognized with numerous awards and honors. Notably among them, he and Conspirare won a 2014 Grammy® for Best Choral Performance, Chorus America granted him the Michael Korn Founders Award for Development of the Professional Choral Art in 2015, and the Texas State Legislature named him Texas State Musician for 2013. Johnson studied at St. Olaf College, the Juilliard School, and the University of Illinois, and earned his doctorate at Yale University.

MORE INFORMATION:

[More about *Considering Matthew Shepard*](#)

Considering Matthew Shepard PBS Special <https://www.klru.org/conspirare>
[Conspirare Press Kit](#) (images for download, info pdf)