

CONSPIRARE MEDIA RELEASE

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Grammy-winning Conspirare Presents: Songs for Seasons Featuring the World-Premiere of *April Showers*

Streams **Friday, June 11 at 7:30pm** and **Sunday, June 13 at 4:00pm Central**.

Singers will be live in the chat.

FREE! In-home concert streaming at *Songs for Seasons* [event webpage](#)

AUSTIN, Texas (May 20, 2021) Conspirare will close this season with [Songs for Seasons](#), a concert centered on hope and renewal and hosted by artistic director Craig Hella Johnson. Conspirare singers [Stefanie Moore](#), soprano, [Laura Mercado-Wright](#), mezzo-soprano, [Dann Coakwell](#), tenor, and [Simon Barrad](#), baritone will be performing. The concert features the world premiere of [April Showers](#), a song cycle by composer [Kile Smith](#). Smith says of the music, "I am composing brand-new music to popular songs from after the Spanish Flu epidemic and World War I. They tell of loss, loneliness, dreams, love, and hope, and speak just as strongly now—in our physical and emotional separations—as they did then." Austin Haller will join the quartet of Conspirare singers at the piano for the world premiere of *April Showers*. *April Showers* the second commission Kile Smith has created for Conspirare. His first Conspirare commission, *The Dawn's Early Light*, sets text by Native American Sarah Winnemucca and Francis Scott Key's "Star Spangled Banner" and is included on Conspirare's most recent album, [The Singing Guitar](#).

The concert evokes late Spring and early summer, exploring the sense of conclusions and beginnings with music. The Conspirare quartet will be featured as soloists in music from G. F. Handel, Marc Blitzstein, Aaron Copland and Samuel Barber. Craig Hella Johnson will serve as pianist. In the spirit of the times and this commissioned work, these solo presentations will feature music and texts that balance the desire for hope and the promises of spring during this time laden with great loss and unprecedented disruption to "normal" life. Craig Hella Johnson reflected on these solo songs, saying that "our artists share solo songs spanning a century, each song reflecting an aspect of the seasons and cycles of our lives. This intimate vocal art form has the capacity to draw us in for a closer view and to stir our imaginations. As we look toward live concerts next season, we close this season with a special vocal chamber music experience, highlighting the expressive range of the human voice and the beautiful talents of these Conspirare artists. We are excited to share this fresh and innovative new work by Kile Smith and we look forward to coming together with you for a sweet early-summer music gathering."

Artists captured their videos remotely. Robert Harlan and John Stinson, who previously collaborated with Conspirare for Conspirare Christmas 2020, will create the concert video.

Each concert stream will be followed by a live post-concert talk with Craig Hella Johnson, Kile Smith, and the artists.



About the Artists:

Los Angeles, CA-based [Stefanie Moore](#) is a longtime Conspirare singer and is featured in “We Tell Each Other Stories” from *Considering Matthew Shepard* and on numerous Conspirare albums. Stefanie Moore’s vocal spark and flexibility are accompanied by a musicality, intelligence, and sense of humor that make her performances “standout” (San Antonio Express News), “soothing and lovely” (Austin American Statesman), and “graceful” (Santa Fe New Mexican).

[Laura Mercado-Wright](#), an Austin, TX-based mezzo-soprano, appears regularly with Conspirare and has performed as a soloist on numerous occasions, including on the Grammy®-nominated album, Pablo Neruda: The Poet Sings. Her work has been lauded by the New York Times as “superb”, “dramatically astute” and “stunningly agile”.

[Dann Coakwell](#), tenor, has been praised as a “vivid storyteller” (*The New York Times*), with “a gorgeous lyric tenor that could threaten or caress on the turn of a dime” (*Dallas Morning News*). Coakwell has performed as a soloist across Europe, Japan, and throughout the Americas, under many renowned conductors. He can be heard as a soloist on the Grammy-winning album *The Sacred Spirit of Russia*, Grammy-nominated *Hope of Loving*, and *Considering Matthew Shepard* (Harmonia Mundi 2016).

The versatility of “gorgeous voiced” baritone, [Simon Barrad](#), has been heard across the United States and Europe in opera, Lieder, and oratorio concerts. He has recently sung with such companies and festivals as the Marlboro Music Festival, Tanglewood Music Center, Cincinnati Opera, Cincinnati Chamber Orchestra, and the Los Angeles Bach Festival.

Hailed as “always remarkable” by the Austin Chronicle, [Austin Haller](#) is a music director, conductor, organist, pianist, arranger, vocal coach, and tenor, based in Austin, TX. Particularly recognized for his artistic creativity and deep sensitivity at the keyboard, Austin serves as Organist for the Austin Symphony, and he performs regularly with the Grammy®-winning choir Conspirare.

ABOUT OUR SPONSORS

Conspirare Season Sponsors:

Conspirare is grateful for H-E-B’s season underwriting.

Conspirare’s season is supported in part by the Cultural Arts Division of the City of Austin Economic Development Department, Texas Commission on the Arts Arts Respond and National Endowment for the Arts, St. Luke’s UMC Friends of Music, Per Stirling, Quartz Financial, Texas State University Choral Department, Big Medium, Chorus Austin, Hella Circle and Legacy of Sound 2.

ATTENTION MEDIA REPRESENTATIVES

To arrange interviews, access high-resolution images please contact Ann McNair at 512-740-6932 or amcnair@conspirare.org.

About Conspirare

Conspirare is a professional choral organization under the leadership of 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 13 commercial albums and 19 self-produced live albums. Johnson and Conspirare were awarded a 2014 Grammy® for Best Choral Performance for *The Sacred Spirit of Russia* album and have been nominated seven other times. Conspirare’s most recent recording, *The Singing Guitar*, was recorded with the Los Angeles, Texas and Austin

Guitar Quartets. The BBC's Andrew McGregor featured the album on [Record Review](#), saying, "The singing of Craig Hella Johnson's ensemble Conspirare combined with the delicacy of shifting textures of twelve guitars is intriguing and emotionally effective... I found this a really moving setting for an unusual ensemble." Conspirare was awarded the Texas Medal of Arts in 2019. Based in Austin, Texas, they perform an annual concert series and tour in the United States and abroad.

About Craig Hella Johnson

Craig Hella Johnson is the Founding Artistic Director and Conductor of Conspirare and Music Director of Cincinnati's Vocal Arts Ensemble. 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 as Artist in Residence in fall 2016 and is currently Professor of Practice. A composer and arranger, 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 awarded 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.

[Conspirare Press Kit](#) (images for download, info pdf)