

## MEDIA RELEASE

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## World Premiere Recording of New American Works from Alex Berko, Shara Nova, Kevin Puts, Michael Schachter, and Derrick Skye to be Released September 8

### ***House of Belonging features long-awaited collaboration with the Miró Quartet***

AUSTIN, Texas (August 8, 2023). Conspirare, the GRAMMY® Award-winning choir known for expanding the boundaries of choral performance, will release *House of Belonging* on September 8 on the Delos label as they begin their 30<sup>th</sup> Season.

*House of Belonging* is a dynamic and timely collection of American music for voices and with instruments featuring a collaboration with the internationally-renowned Miró Quartet. Craig Hella Johnson and Conspirare commissioned composers Alex Berko, Shara Nova, Kevin Puts, Michael Schachter, and Derrick Skye especially for the collaboration with the Miró Quartet and the resulting album. Music of Margaret Bonds, Ross Lee Finney, Craig Hella Johnson, and Moira Smiley completes the album.

Curated and conducted by Craig Hella Johnson, the album showcases the unique combination of choral virtuosity and extraordinarily beautiful human expression in works by composers and poets diverse in age, geography, and ethnicity who speak to our internal and external sense of home and belonging. Each composer, in their unique voice, offers a reflection point for listeners.

Conspirare's ongoing commitment to commissioning and performing music of today's most vibrant living composers is reflected in these world premiere recordings:

- [Shara Nova's](#) (My Brightest Diamond) setting of David Whyte's poem "The House of Belonging" and the emotionally potent lullaby "I Have Never Loved Someone," heard here in a new arrangement for choir.
- GRAMMY®-winning [Kevin Puts'](#) "Home," composed for the Miró Quartet and recorded here in a new arrangement for string quartet and choir, and "Evergreen," a setting of text by Hildegard of Bingen for choir.



- [Alex Berko](#)'s "Sacred Place" is inspired by the traditional Jewish grieving rituals. This "ecological service" acknowledges our sacred connection to the earth and is performed with acclaimed violinist [Sandy Yamamoto](#), cellist [Daniel Kopp](#) and pianist [Carla McElhaney](#).



Berko's "You Through Me", about New York's Elizabeth Street Garden, tells a story about how a physical place is linked with our experiences and memories of it.

- [Derrick Skye](#)'s "Black Ocean" explores the human experience of the universe as being simultaneously vast and open, yet intimate and personal on an individual level, incorporating multiple vocal, string, and percussive approaches.
- [Michael Schachter](#) describes "O Vorsehung" as a "work of creative musical archeology" that incorporates the Heiligenstadt Testament and the slow movement from Beethoven's String Quartet No. 15 (op. 132) as sources.



- Craig Hella Johnson's "Reaching" was written as a compassionate response to the Uvalde mass shooting and reflects the yearning to return to what we understand as home.

The musical texts are written by a diverse group of writers and poets including Ludwig van Beethoven, Wendell Berry, Hildegard of Bingen, Langston Hughes, Kobayashi Issa, Rūta Kuzmickas & Alex Berko, Andrew Marvell, John Muir, Kiara Skye, William Stafford, Rabindranath Tagore, Euan Tait, and David Whyte.

Conspirare singers Simon Barrad, Meg Dudley, Haitham Haidar, Chelsea Helm, Michael Jones, Lauren McAllister, Savannah Porter, Kathlene Ritch, and David Kurtenbach Rivera are featured as soloists on the album.

Conspirare gratefully acknowledges the following for their support of this recording: Tejemos Foundation, Lynne Dobson and Greg Wooldridge, The Joel Brauer Fund for New Music and Mary and Phil Delk, Dale and Tina Knobel, DeeAnne and Steven Paulson, The Eva and Marvin Womack Foundation, H-E-B, Anonymous, Legacy of Sound 2, Hella Circle, Texas Commission on the Arts, and St. Martin's Lutheran. This project is supported in part by the National Endowment for the Arts. To find out more about how National Endowment for the Arts grants impact individuals and communities, visit [www.arts.gov](http://www.arts.gov).

### **ATTENTION MEDIA REPRESENTATIVES**

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

## ABOUT THE ARTISTS

[Conspirare](#) is a professional choral organization under the leadership of Artistic Director 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 14 commercial albums and 20 self-produced live albums. Johnson and Conspirare were awarded a 2014 GRAMMY® for Best Choral Performance for *The Sacred Spirit of Russia* and their recordings have received 10 total nominations. *The Singing Guitar*, was nominated for a 2022 Best Choral Performance GRAMMY® and features music of Nico Muhly, Kile Smith, Reena Esmail and Craig Hella Johnson. Conspirare has performed throughout the United States and internationally, including appearances as a featured choir at the American Choral Directors Association annual conference and regional ACDA conventions. At home, Conspirare performs a full annual season in Austin where it has received ongoing recognition from local organizations and critics. Conspirare has been the subject of PBS documentaries and was awarded a Texas Medal of Arts and garnered international recognition such as the Dutch Edison Award. The group is also committed to an ongoing outreach program which includes free community Big Sings. The organization also includes the Conspirare Symphonic Choir, a large, auditioned ensemble that performs works for chorus, often with instrumental ensemble.

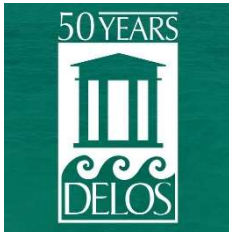


The [Miró Quartet](#) is one of America's most celebrated and dedicated string quartets, having been labeled by *The New Yorker* as "furiously committed" and noted by the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* for its "exceptional tonal focus and interpretive intensity." For over twenty-five years the Quartet has performed throughout the world on the most prestigious concert stages, earning accolades from critics and audiences alike. Based in Austin, TX, and thriving on the area's storied music scene, the Miró takes pride in finding new ways to communicate with audiences of all backgrounds while cultivating the longstanding tradition of chamber music.



[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 University as Artist in Residence in fall 2016 and was awarded the 2022 Presidential Award for Excellence in Scholarly/Creative Activities. He is a published composer and arranger, guest conductor and educator. Johnson's first concert-length composition *Considering Matthew Shepard* was premiered and recorded by Conspirare for a 2016 CD release. *Considering Matthew Shepard* continues to be performed around the

world, most recently in Berlin and around the United States. 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. In 2021, the Matthew Shepard Foundation recognized him with the Dennis Dougherty Award for Community Leadership.



Founded in 1973, [Delos Productions](#) celebrates its 50th anniversary in 2023, having released nearly 700 albums featuring top artists. A pioneer in digital recording, Delos is known as a label with a strong personality that attracts a host of major performers and has also garnered acclaim for the technical excellence of its recordings.