Earth Ritual

A WORLD PREMIERE FROM COMPOSER ROBERT KYR
Helping Texans
is at the heart of H-E-B.

Over 115 years ago, we opened our doors to help make the lives of hard-working Texans better. We were a family business back then. We remain a family business today with a passion for - and a helping hand in - every community we serve.

From fighting hunger and providing disaster relief to honoring Texas educators and our Nation’s military, we’re firm believers in Texans helping Texans. We do this for one simple reason. We are from here, so we are helping here.

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Earth Ritual

Earth Ritual by Robert Kyr
World Premiere
Craig Hella Johnson
Artistic Director & Conductor

St. Martin's Lutheran Church | Friday, May 6, 2022 at 8 pm

Tonight’s performance is being recorded for future release.

With gratitude to the University of Oregon, Robert Kyr, and Anonymous donors for their support of Earth Ritual.
When I was a child,
My grandmother told me a creation story.
Our grandmothers passed it on
From generation to generation.
It begins with an urgent plea
To all the forces of light.
Dear Friends,

Thank you for joining us! We are grateful you are here for the world premiere of Robert Kyr’s Earth Ritual and excited to gather with you for this important moment in the life of Conspirare. Originally scheduled to premiere two years ago, it is especially moving that we are back here two years later to finally experience Robert’s sound world.

We continue to be moved by the power of music to speak from the deepest parts of ourselves. In this time, when so many are feeling the extreme urgency of the climate crisis and hearing the cries of our imperiled planet, we receive this new composition with tremendous gratitude. Earth Ritual tells a tender and moving story of two characters and their dramatic journey amidst great challenges caused by the intensifying climate crisis. Ultimately, this work and their story invite us to remember the wonder and beauty of the natural world and of our lives together on this planet. In the final scene, they compel us forward with a profoundly hopeful and emboldening song.

Our long-time relationship with Robert has yielded important contributions to the choral field. Earth Ritual is the sequel to A Time for Life, also an environmental oratorio, which was the first of my works that Craig performed in 2009. This led to a decade of collaborations and recordings with Conspirare, including Songs of the Soul, The Cloud of Unknowing, Freedom Song, and an arrangement of Samuel Barber’s The Lovers for baritone, chorus, and chamber ensemble.

As a work of musical storytelling, Earth Ritual traces the journey of two individuals—a woman, Alesha, and a man, Tallis. As an oratorio, Earth Ritual is an alternation of narrative sections with solo and duo arias, and choral movements. In the work, the narrative sections are conversations (“Convos”) between Alesha and Tallis through which they tell their story and reflect upon their experiences. Over the course of the work, they are drawn together through their love of nature and their concern for the environment, which is suffering from the devastating impacts of global climate change.

Alesha is a writer who has written a book that includes poetic reflections about her experience of living in a profoundly beautiful canyon. The environment in which she lives is comprised of mesas that extend for 12 miles along a vast flood plain through which flows a turbulent river. She is deeply in love with the place in which she resides, through which she experiences the beauty and mystery of Nature, as she writes in her book in the form of a haiku, “Countless shades of green / more than one can imagine: / from red earth, new life.”

Tallis is a scientist, photographer, and videographer who is making a film about the effects of climate change on the lives of those who live in remote wilderness areas. He asks Alesha if she will consent to being interviewed and she agrees, which begins their relationship and establishes the premise from which the oratorio unfolds. Since I don’t want to ruin the plot of the story for you, I will let this synopsis suffice for the moment, so that you can have a fresh experience of Earth Ritual when you hear it.

The oratorio also features an extensive multimedia component, which was created from a selection of photographic and video images that I took in a remote mesa canyon between August 2021 and March 2022. These images depict the extraordinary terrains and environments within the canyon about which the vocalists are singing, thus broadening the audience’s experience of the majesty and beauty of Nature that is at the heart of the oratorio.

With gratitude,

Craig
Earth Ritual was created in direct response to the dire condition of the global environment, which has continued to worsen during the initial period of the coronavirus pandemic (2020-2022). Fortunately, though, it is dawning on a much larger number of individuals and communities that humans do not control the planet. Instead, we are at its mercy in the face of catastrophic natural events, which are frequently triggered by how we have interacted with Nature. The sustainable solution to our predicament is to learn the best ways to live in harmony with the natural world rather than abusing it through over-consumption and attempts to dominate it. We are gradually learning that our actions have consequences, and perhaps even more drastically, so does inaction.

No one is powerless along the road of this journey since each of us has the capability of choosing a wise path forward. We are not separate from Nature nor are we separate from each other—there is only one human family. New possibilities will emerge if we interact with Nature in whatever way has the most creative meaning for us — not to dominate, but to collaborate, and above all, to participate as a co-creative partner with the very life force that sustains us. In the long run, nothing else will work.

The life force of Nature sustains us and we need it to survive, far more than it needs us. The more we attempt to subjugate its life force, the further we will be from finding meaningful solutions to our problems. If we choose to cooperate with it as a colleague with whom we collaborate through responsible action, then new opportunities will arise. If we can learn better ways to live in harmony with each other and with Nature, then there is much hope for our future.

As a universal language, music has a crucial role to play in addressing the current environmental crisis, because it powerfully connects all of us to each other, and to our innermost beliefs and convictions. Through developing a better understanding of who we truly are and the needs of our planet, we will become more deeply committed to living in harmony with nature as the basis for our survival.

Earth Ritual is dedicated to Craig Hella Johnson and Conspirare, and soloists Awet Andemicael, Stephen Lancaster and Simon Barrad with my profound gratitude for their artistry and for their ongoing commitment to commissioning and performing music that reflects their most deeply held beliefs and convictions. More than ever, we need the vision and beauty of their music-making and co-creations, and spiritual issues related to love, compassion, and forgiveness.

Robert Kyr (b. 1952) is a composer, writer, and filmmaker, who has composed twelve symphonies, three chamber symphonies, three violin concerti, a piano concerto, chamber music, and more than 100 works for vocal ensembles, including nine oratorios, fifteen cantatas, two passions, five motet cycles, and All-Night Vgï. His music often explores themes related to conflict and reconciliation (peace-making), the environmental crisis (living in harmony with nature), and spiritual issues related to love, compassion, and forgiveness.

Kyr’s music was recognized with an Arts and Letters award for distinguished artistic achievement by the American Academy of Arts and Letters. The award citation stated, “Robert Kyr’s powerful vision of fostering peace through music shines brightly and steadily in all his work, from the passionate and often ecstatic polyphonic motets of his Songs of the Soul, to the triumphant close of his trilogy of violin concertos, On the Nature of Peace. Kyr’s music is intensely concerned with the human condition and the soul in its search for beauty and transcendence.”

In 2021–2022, the premieres and recordings of Kyr’s music will include two large-scale works: Earth Ritual with Conspirare Company of Voices (Craig Hella Johnson, conductor), and All-Night Vgï with Cappella Romana (Alexander Lingas, Conductor). In 2021, Bridge Records released a recording of ten choral works by Kyr (In Praise of Music), performed by the Antioch Chamber Ensemble (Joshua Copeland, Director). All his music is published by ECS Publishing, and his recordings are available on the Bridge, Harmonia Mundi, Telarc, New Albion, Albany, and Cappella Romana labels.

A dedicated mentor and teacher of composition, Kyr is Professor of Composition and Theory and Chair of the Composition Department at the University of Oregon School of Music and Dance. He directs the Oregon Bach Festival Composers Symposium (since 1994), the Music Today Festival, the Oregon Composers Forum, and the Pacific Rim Gamelan. Moreover, he is mentor and composer-in-residence for the Harvard Choruses New Music Initiative (since 2016) directed by Andrew Clark, which is committed to developing a comprehensive pedagogy for composers of choral music.
O Eternal Wonder
Arising before me,
Glory of Creation:
O Majesty of Nature,
O Beloved Earth,
O One Life!
Now and always,
Creation unfolding:
Light unto Light,
Life unto Life!

EARTH RITUAL

PROGRAM

Part 1: Connection
Scene 1) Prologue: The Ballad of Good Mind
Scene 2) Land of the Shining Stones

Part 2: Separation
Scene 3) Hail, One Life
Scene 4) Trial by Water
Scene 5) Trial by Fire
Scene 6) Trial by Water & Fire

Part 3: Reconciliation
Scene 7) Hail, One Life
Scene 8) Lament & Aria: I Will Go On
Scene 9) Circle of Arms
Scene 10) Tree of Life Song
Scene 11) Epilogue: Hope & Resilience

Performing Note:
Conspirare is honored to perform in a variety of beautiful venues that best enhance choral performances. While our performing venues and the texts 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.
Principal Soloists
A: Alesha Awet Andemicael, soprano
T: Tallis Stephen Lancaster, baritone

Characters (The Ballad of Good Mind)
ST: Storytellers
Soprano, altos, tenors & basses
G: Grandmother Lianna Wimberly Williams, alto
Sn: Son Wilson Nichols, tenor
F: Father

PART I: CONNECTION
1) Prologue: The Ballad of Good Mind

1.1 Invocation: Creation Story
A: When I was a child,
My grandmother told me
A creation story.
Our grandmothers passed it on
From generation to generation.
It begins with an urgent plea
To all the forces of light.

1.2 Chorus: Hail, One Life
C: Hail, One Life,
Dwarf Lightning,
Green Lightning,
Hawk, Hunter,
Bearer, Engenderer,
Grandmother of Day,
Grandmother of Light,
As it is light,
As it is bright.
Hail, Former,
Hail, Shaper,
Look upon us,
Hear us.
Do not turn on us,
Heart of Heaven,
Heart of Earth!
Give us our sign,
Give us our word,
On the road of day,
On the road of light,
When it is light,
When it is bright.

G: Seek your father,
Who lives far to the east;
Go to the end of the island,
Go over the water

And behold a mountain
Rising from the sea.
Walk up the mountain;
Your father is there
Seated on top.

EARTH:
ST: Good Mind traveled there,
To the foot of the mountain,
He looked up and shouted,
Sn: Father, where are you?
F: My son can throw the cliff
To this peak.
ST: Good Mind seized the cliff
And hurled it to the top.

WATER:
Sn: Father, where are you?
F: My son can swim the rapids
From below to above.
ST: Good Mind jumped into the falls
And swam upward to its edge.

AIR:
Sn: Father, where are you?
F: My son can wrestle
With the wind.

ST: So Good Mind and Wind
Struggled to overturn each other;
But Good Mind overcame Wind
Who departed, moaning.

FIRE:
Sn: Father, where are you?
F: My son can survive the flame.

ST: Suddenly a great flame
Surrounded Good Mind,
And he leapt and ran
To the mountain top.
Where behold,
A being sat
In a blaze of light.

COUNSEL:
F: I am your father;
You are my son.
Sn: I am here to receive power,
To rule all things on earth.
F: You have power,
You have conquered;
Now I will give you
Living creatures
To bless the earth.
ST: Thus did father and son
Counsel together—
The son learned
What he should do.
Then the father spoke,
F: How did you find me
Since I am hidden in elements?

MUSIC:
Sn: Before my journey,
Grandmother gave me a flute;
I made music.
And when I stopped,
The flute said:
‘The Way you must go.’
When I make music,
The flute speaks.
F: Make music and listen,
Then you will know
The right way.
SUMMA:
C: Hail, Former, Hail, Shaper, Heart of Heaven, Heart of Earth
Give us our sign, Give us our word, When it is light, When it is bright.

Make music, And listen: Then you will know The right way.

A story told to me Based on the Mayan “Book of Counsel,” Popu’ Vuh, and a Seneca cosmological myth

2) Aria: Land of the Shining Stones

2.1 Convo I, Part 1: “I will always remember”
A: I will always remember The first time that I met him— It was over the phone. I felt as though We were together in the same room. He introduced himself as a filmmaker Who was living 40 miles north Of where I live. He knew my writing And wanted to talk with me About his new film. He said that later, He would interview me in person. [Turning towards Tallis:]

T: I’m so glad to finally meet you, Even on the phone. Your writing was one reason For making this film. It’s about learning to live In harmony with Nature. When I read About where you live, I felt that I knew That remote canyon.
A: Living there changed my life. I hope that my writing Inspires others to see Their own home in new ways.
T: You bring it to life— The beauty and mystery Of the high desert.
A: It takes time To get to know it. I accept it And never try to change it.
T: You live there On its own terms.
A: Always as a partner; I respect it, nurture it, and do no harm.
T: You honor its life.
A: Always…
T: Would you read From your book for me? The haiku poems about The spirit of the canyon…
A: Yes...where I live is called “The Land of Shining Stones” And I call those poems, “Shining Stonesong.”

2.2 Aria: Shining Stonesong
A: I. Dawn through dawn arising ev’rywhere you look—wonder— endless creation
II. Morning countless shades of green, more than one can imagine: from red earth, new life
III. Noon after canyon rains— smell of juniper and sage: piercing clarity
IV. Afternoon swift thunder of wings: a hummingbird above me thrumming the still air; whatever might be smallest, astonishes with great gifts
V. Twilight sunlight vanishing while an ancient mesa-face glows with primal light
VI. Deepest Night above the canyon, Orion pours itself out— heaven into earth, starlight shining into us from Alpha through Omega

2.3 Convo I, Part 2: “When I hear you read”
T: When I hear you read, I feel that I am there. I see mesas shining In ever-changing light.
A: Then come to visit As soon as you have time.
T: I’ll call you again soon To set up an interview In the “Land of the Shining Stones.”

A: [Turning to the audience…] We kept trying to connect, But it took longer Than we expected…

PART II: SEPARATION

3) Refrain I: Hail, One Life
C: Hail, One Life, Dwarf Lightning, Green Lightning, Hawk, Hunter, Bearer, Engenderer, Grandmother of Day, Grandmother of Light, As it is bright, As it is light.
Hal, Former,
Hal, Shaper,
Look upon us,
Hear us.
Do not turn on us,
Heart of Heaven,
Heart of Earth!
Give us our sign,
Give us our word,
On the road of day,
On the road of light,
When it is light,
When it is bright.

4) Aria: Trial by Water

4.1 Convo II, Part 1: “Finally, we found a time”
A: [Directly facing the audience]
Finally, we found a time
For our second call.
Again, it felt as though
We were in the same room...
[Turning towards Alesha]
How is your film going?
T: Extremely well—
I’ve decided to focus
On the personal suffering
Caused by climate change.
A: So it’s first person witness!
T: Absolutely...!
So please tell me
How climate change
Is affecting your life.

A: Let’s save that for later...
Why don’t you share
Your story with me?
T: Ah...turning the tables
On the interviewer...
A: No...just a curious writer.
T: It’s not what you expect.
A: Then surprise me!
T: I was living near New York
And all was well.
Plenty of work
Writing screen plays
And two of my films
in production.
Then a massive hurricane
Struck the Gulf Coast
And moved inland,
Aiming for where I lived.
A: I remember—
What a horrendous storm!
T: In the early ev’ning,
I was working in my basement.
Then rolling thunder
Was crashing over my head!
And pouring rain
And a loud rushing sound.
Water came surging
Through my windows:
So powerful,
I could barely move—
I started to panic!
A: I know
How terrifying that is—
I was a lifeguard!

A: I screamed for help—
Again and again—
But no one could hear me yelling
Against the rising flood!

4.2 Aria: Thunder Floodsong
T: O save me now
From rushing waters,
From the surging flood
Rising up to my neck.
I am falling
Into unknown depths;
Nowhere left to stand.
I cry out for help,
Screaming and wailing
Against endless torments;
Losing my mind,
Stolen by a raging sea.
I am falling
Into unknown depths;
Nowhere left to stand.
O save me now
T: But there is such
Beauty in the canyon:
When can we have our interview?
A: Next week would be ideal—
I’ll take you to the great flood plain.
I write there
Under a lone evergreen
That stands at its center— I
call it “The Tree of Life.”
T: That’s where I’ll film you:
At the foot of your muse.
A: [Turning towards the audience] We
set up a time to meet,
But he called back
A minute later;
T: Alesha! There’s fire near you!
Heavy wind!
Driving it!
Look to the south!
A: [Facing Alesha] We
shrouded in smoke!
T: You don’t have a car!
I’ll pick you up
Within the hour.

5) Duo Aria: Trial by Fire

5.1 Convo II, Part 2: “Your panic and anguish horrify me”
A: Your panic and anguish
Horrify me!
T: [Facing Alesha] I’m forever haunted
By my fear of water!

A: Ev’rything is
Changing very quickly:
Every storm, every flood,
Every new catastrophe!
We have abused Nature
And how helpless we are
In the face of its power!
T: And yet, Nature continues
To nurture and support us.
A: Yet we abuse the very life force
That sustains us...
How we betray ourselves!
T: But there is such
A: No!...I’ll start walking now—
Meet you halfway!
[Facing the audience directly-]
I packed,
Hurried down the long road!
Fire was ev’rywhere
And close by,
A wall of flame
Blocked the road…
Burning trees
Falling right and left…
Smoke billowing out
From the inferno…
If we can’t see,
Then how will Tallis find me
In this lowest circle of hell?

5.2 Duo Aria: Wildfire Smokesong
T: One hour of madness and fear!
A: O Lord!
T: One hour of madness and fear!
A: Wild flames are round about me!
T: O smoke and flame, Confine me not!
A: Billowing ashes
And smoke encircles me!
T: Nothing will stop me!
A: I am choking and cannot breathe!
T: O smoke and flame,
Confine me not!
A: Hot embers falling ev’rywhere!
T: Nothing will stop me!
A: I am choking…cannot breathe!
Hot embers,
Searing and scorching…
Cannot breathe!
T: One hour of madness and fear!
A: [vocalise]
T: Driving straight through,
I must go on!
A: A sea of flames
Has stolen my dreams!
O save me! O save me now!
T: Alesha!
A: Tallis!
T: We must escape!
A: The river is our only hope…
Our only hope!
T: All I see is fire,
Stoked by furious winds!
Duo: Howl, you cruel winds and wall!
Stoking the flames while you torment us!
Nowhere to hide from fire!
Nowhere to escape
For runners from the flames!
There is no escape!
Woe to those who suffer
From burning forests and grasslands!

6) Duo Aria: Trial by Water & Fire
6.1 Convo II, Part 3: “There is only one way to escape!”
A: There is only one way to escape!
T: Flames and smoke ev’rywhere—
We can’t drive;
I’m leaving my car here!
A: Look down the hill!
T: Only fire and smoke!
A: Look at the river!
We’re jumping in
And shooting the rapids!
T: You know I can’t swim!
A: Then follow me!
When we reach the water
We’ll jump together!
T: But all I see is smoke!
A: Stay close!
We’re almost there
T: I can’t do it!
A: We’re at the river’s edge:
Grab my hand and jump!

You have not cared for them
And you will suffer
For your evil deeds
And your evil ways!
Howl, you cruel winds and wall!
Stoking the flames while you torment us!
Nowhere to hide from fire!
Nowhere to escape
For runners from the flames!
There is no escape!
Wail, you cruel winds and howl!

6.2 Duo Aria: Roaring Riversong
T: O save me now!
O save me from rushing waters!
A: Hold onto me!
And stay above the water!
T: O save me now!
From surging waters!
A: Rising up to my neck…
T: Water rising! O save me
From rushing water and fire!
A: From the river and smoke!
T: From the river!
A: From the red-hot flames
Burning all around me!
Hold on tight!
Do not panic!
T: I am sinking
Into unknown depths!
A: Hold onto me!
Keep your head up!
T: I cry out for help!
A: Hold onto me!
Hold on tight!
Duo: O endless burning torments!
T: I cry out for help,
Screaming and wailing
Against endless torments!
A: Hold on, hold onto me!
You are safe with me!
Duo: I cry out for help!
T: I cry out, wailing
Against endless torments!
PART III: RECONCILIATION

7) Hail, One Life: Refrain II
A: Wailing and screaming
Against endless torments!
T: Losing my mind...
A: Losing my mind,
Stolen by red-hot flames!
T: O losing my mind,
My mind!
A: Stolen by a roaring river!
T: Stolen by a roaring fire!
Duo: I am sinking into unknown depths!
A: You are safe with me,
Hold onto me!
T: I am drowning in these waters!
A: Hold onto me!
T: Drowning in the churning water!
Duo: [vocalise]

8.2 Lament: All is gone
A: All is gone.
   Everything that I loved:
   Gone is my home,
   Gone is the forest.
   Only cinders
   And embers remain.
   Only scorched earth:
   Ashes, only ashes.
   Gone are the birds:
   Nature’s music
   Has become silence.
   Sorrow on sorrow,
   Life is dissolving:
   This deepest agony,
   Unbearable grief.
   Desolation:
   All is gone.

8.3 The Joyless Land
C: The earth is laid waste;
   Stripped and barren.
   The world is polluted
   Because of its inhabitants,
   Who have broken many laws.
   They who dwell on earth turn pale,
   And only a few good people are left.
   Broken down are the cities in sorrow.

8.4 All of You Who Pass By
C: Of all of you
   Who pass by on the road:
   Pay attention and see!

8.5 Aria: I will go on
A: Though forests burn
   Though lakes are deserts
   Though the earth is scorched
   I will go on
   Through surging floods
   Through howling winds
   Through freeze and drought
   I will go on
   Through sweltering heat
   Through bitterest cold
   Through all afflictions
   I will go on
   In this darkest hour
   In the deepest night
   I seek the light
   I will go on
   Take nothing for granted
   Not the brilliant sunset
   Nor the star-filled night
   Nor the radiant dawn
   For I am the forests
   I am the rivers
   I am the earth
   I care for all
   I will go on

9) Aria: Circle of Arms
9.1 Convo III, Part 2 “Night was falling quickly”
T: Night was falling quickly
A: I led you away from my anguish
T: To part of the canyon
   Where the wind had cleared the smoke
A: Finally the heavens opened
EARTH RITUAL
SUNG TEXTS

T: The sky was alive with stars
A: The universe all around us
T: Orion shining brightly
A: And in my head,
   I wrote one more haku
In the silence of deepest night:
Light of the heavens
Always you are here with us
Joy of creation
T: Then we fell into a deep sleep
A: Until the first light...

9.2 Aria: Circle of Arms
A: In the dawning
and time to awaken
finally we embraced
pulling into each other
in a circle of arms
an embrace of seconds
seemed without time
in silence we stayed
and held each other closely
in our eyes
and even the ashes
stopped falling
refused to cross
our line of vision

10) Tree of Life Song
10.1 Convo III, Part 3: “In the early light”
T: In the early light,
You stood up,
Began walking,
Very slowly at first...
A: And when saw it,
I remembered it:
I was here before.
T: In the early light.
A: Then you began to run...
T: Toward the tree of life...
T: Still alive...

10.2 Tree of Life Song
A: I always love to be in Nature
on this plain of heaven
with its one tree
near the farthest horizon in sight.
C: The drop dies
In the river Pain goes so far
It cures itself
A/T: While walking, looking out,
I imagine sitting
Beneath the tree in solitude,
the sounds of life beyond human,
a vast music over it all,
and then my soul is free
in this waking dream.
A/T: The cloud disappears
That was nothing but tears
T: And as the wind rustles
through everything near me,
gratefully I release my thoughts
into thundering silence.
C: In the spring
The mirror turns green
Holding a miracle
Change the shining wind
A/T: And I encounter eternity
in this tree of life
and the present alive
in our being.
C: And in this immensity,
my thinking drowns,
and living is sweet to me
here and now.
All: This tree led us to our eyes
Let whatever be open.

11) Epilogue: Hope & Resilience
11.1 Convo III, Part 4 “You saved my life”
A: You saved my life
From the wildfires—
You are hope
T: You saved me
From raging waters—
You are resilience
A/T: We worked together
To save each other:
Now we must take action
To save ev’rything that we love.
Together in this journey—
To heal our earth To respect...
T: To honor...
A: To do no harm
T: To live in this world
A: In truth...
T: And peace...
A: In unity...
A/T: And wholeness...

11.2 Finale: Rejoice in the Light
C: We were divided.
We had forgotten who we are.
Now we must always remember
To walk again in wholeness.
Rejoice in the breath of winds!
Rejoice in the flow of waters!
Now is the time
To heal each other.
Now is the time
To preserve Nature,
In which we live and move
And have our being.
Rejoice in the breath of winds!
Rejoice in the flow of waters!
Rejoice together in living and being!
Now is the time
To take action,
To heal our planet,
To live again as one.
Rejoice in the greater changing!
Rejoice together in living and being!
Rejoice in the light!

11.3 Chorale: O Eternal Wonder
All: O Eternal Wonder
Arisin before me,
Glory of Creation:
O Majesty of Nature,
O Beloved Earth,
O One Life!
Now and always,
Creation unfolding:
Light unto Light,
Life unto Life!
SOLOISTS

AWET ANDEMICAEL, SOPRANO

Joy is the hallmark of soprano Awet Andemicael’s artistry. She has been acclaimed for her “sparkling solo verses” (Opera News), “vivid musical personality” (Boston Globe), “honeyed tone” (San Francisco Classical Voice), “fine comic interplay and […] superb singing” (Washington Times).

Awet has performed with ensembles like the Boston Symphony, San Francisco Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Knights at the Tanglewood and BRIC Festivals, the Sebastians Chamber Ensemble, and in concert halls including Carnegie Hall and the Kennedy Center, and festivals including the Tanglewood, Ravinia, and Aldeburgh Festivals.

Although she enjoys a wide range of repertoire, Awet is associated especially with sacred music. Her affinity for eighteenth-century sacred music has been featured in concerts with the Bach Collegium Japan, the Handel and Haydn Society, and the Colorado Bach Ensemble, and with symphony orchestras across North America, including Charleston, Pittsburgh, and Orlando. She has also premiered works of spiritual and religious significance, including Bernard Gilmore’s Journey to Freedom and Two Songs from Torah.

One of Awet’s most cherished musical experiences was performing at a reenactment of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2014, at the invitation of Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, and later singing at St. George’s Anglican Cathedral in Cape Town.

A writer and theologian as well as a musician, Awet holds degrees from Harvard, Yale, UC Irvine, and the University of Notre Dame. She currently serves as Associate Dean for Marquand Chapel and Lecturer in Theology at Yale Divinity School and the Institute of Sacred Music. For more information, visit www.awetandemicael.com and https://independent.academia.edu/AwetAndemicael.

STEPHEN LANCASTER, BARITONE

“A fine storyteller” (American Record Guide), “varied in tone and alive to feeling” (Fanfare Magazine), baritone Stephen Lancaster engages audiences through a diverse repertoire of vocal music. Winner of the Nico Castel International Master Singer Competition and The American Prize for men in art song and oratorio, he has been featured as a soloist in venues around the world, including Carnegie Hall, Chicago Cultural Center, Chiang-Kai Shek Memorial Hall, and Centro Cultural de Belém.

A passionate recitalist, Lancaster has performed recital programs for Musique dans le Grésivaudan, Festival Musique d’Uzerche, Les Grandes Heures de Saint-Emilion, Atlantic Music Festival, and Brooklyn Art Song Society. His solo discography includes Le Menu des Méodies with pianist Martin Katz (Centaur), Sacred Song with organist Kevin Vaughn (Albany), and Dichterliebe & Liederkreis, Op. 39 with fortepianist Laure Colladant (Blue Griffin). His recital on the Dame Myra Hess Memorial Concert Series was broadcast live by WFMT Chicago.

Concert credits include the Fauré & Duruflé Requiems at Carnegie Hall presented by Distinguished Concerts International New York; Carmina Burana with Lisbon Summer Fest; Le bal masqué with South Bend Symphony; Five Mystical Songs with UMS Choral Union; Ein Deutsches Requiem with Chicago Bar Association Symphony Orchestra; The Bells and Belshazzar’s Feast with Holland Symphony. Operatic appearances include roles with Eugene Opera, Apotheosis Opera, and Arbor Opera Theater and creating the role of Jaques in As You Like It by Roger Steptoe.

As an ensemble singer, he performs with the Grammy award winning vocal ensemble Conspirare and the Sphinx Organization’s EXIGENCE vocal ensemble. He serves as an Associate Professor of the Practice in music at the University of Notre Dame. www.stephenlancaster.com
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JOSEPH CHOI
Rehearsal pianist – Austin, TX

BRUCE WILLIAMS
Viola – Austin, TX

CREATIVE COLLABORATORS

CAMILLA TASSI is a projection designer from Florence, Italy. Coming from formal backgrounds in computer science and music, she has worked as a designer, singer, producer, and translator. She has created projections for works including Monteverdi’s L’Orfeo (Apollo’s Fire), Pollock’s Stinney (PROTOTYPE Festival NYC), Stravinsky’s Le Rossignol (Yale Opera), Glass’ Fall of the House of Usher (MASS MoCA), Tesori’s Fun Home (Yale School of Drama), Carissimi’s Jephte (Hopkins Center for the Arts) and Mozart’s Magic Flute (Berlin Opera Academy). Tassi is particularly passionate about bringing theatrical design to traditionally unstaged compositions (choral, art song, chamber, orchestral) as a re-contextualization of the work and layer of accessibility to the music and its relation to the performance space. As a video designer, Tassi has filmed and produced for groups including the Washington Chorus, Les Délices, Yale Cabaret, Princeton Festival, Nasty Women Connecticut, and the Chicago Ear Taxi Festival.

She has directed and produced performances of period and contemporary works, including a joint theater and opera project of Tennessee Williams and Larry Delinger’s Talk to Me Like the Rain and the US Premiere of Morricone’s Se questo è un uomo. As an Italian coach and soprano, she has created program translations for Carnegie Hall (L’Arpeggiata) and sings with the Yale Schola Cantorum. Tassi holds degrees in Computer Science and Music from the University of Notre Dame, Digital Musics from Dartmouth, and is currently an MFA Candidate at Yale in Projection Design under Wendall Harrington. http://camillatassi.com
CREATIVE COLLABORATORS

VIERA BUZGOVA  Viera Buzgova’s experience in the world of music is multi-faceted: she studied piano for 12 years, received her bachelor’s degree in church music, sings in choir and plays percussion, and is experienced in many aspects of choral music production. Her lighting design and theatrical production career began in 1998 while working as Technical Director with Concordia University at Austin theater program. During her 10-year tenure there, she directed lighting design, set design and construction, and stage crew management. Since 2012, she has been a member of Grammy-winning Conspirare’s production team, serving as stage manager and lighting designer for local and touring concerts including the national Considering Matthew Shepard tour. Outside of her production life, Viera is an owner and managing partner of an Austin-based immigration law firm.

ROBERT HARLAN is a founding member of Conspirare and has also served as Technical Director for the last ten years, where he has assisted in producing, designing, and executing all of Conspirare’s tours, concerts, recordings and films. Robert performs with professional choirs around the country and has a background in musical theater, art and engineering. Robert designed the Considering Matthew Shepard touring set and fence and designs the Conspirare Christmas concert stage annually at the Long Center. He is co-producer of the Conspirare Christmas recordings and spearheaded the technical aspects of remote audio/video recording for in-home video concerts. Robert co-produced the 2017 International Beard and Mustache Competition, as well as the White Coat Ceremony for Dell Medical School and the annual Bastille Day Celebration in Austin.
CONSPIRATE 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. Conspirare’s recent recording, 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 and performances at Travis County Correctional Facility. The organization also includes the Conspirare Symphonic Choir, a large, auditioned ensemble that performs works for chorus, often with instrumental ensemble.
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PRODUCTION TEAM

Robert Kyr, Composer, Writer, Photographer, Videographer & Multimedia Director
Robert Harlan, Technical Director/Stage Manager
Viera Buzgova, Stage Manager and Lighting Designer
Camilla Tassi, Projection Design and Mapping
Jennifer Cump, Assistant Lighting Design
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Our ambassadors are critical for welcoming audiences, promoting upcoming concerts, thanking Conspirare donors, and assisting in the office. We welcome music lovers of all ages to participate. If you're interested in giving back to Conspirare and enjoying a free performance as our thank you please visit our volunteer web page or email Kathy Leighton at kleighton@conspirare.org.

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AMBASSADOR SPOTLIGHT

DELL LAWHEAD

WE ARE EXCITED TO INTRODUCE YOU TO CONSPIRARE AMBASSADOR DELL LAWHEAD.

My first Conspirare concert was about 15 years ago, the year I met my partner, Bud. It was a Christmas concert at the Carillon. I remember how the music filled the space. It was like the walls, statues and roof were all singing. Music provides hope and buoyancy to life and that is why we attend nearly every concert and why I volunteer for Conspirare.

I don’t consider myself a very social person, but when I find a cause or a passion, I am all in. Being an ambassador fulfills the need to give in a different way than offering financial assistance. Giving from the wallet is necessary but giving from the heart is what is triggered when becoming a volunteer. I am in business sales as a profession, so I enjoy making “Thank You” calls to donors and engaging with other ambassadors.

I am grateful for the work and passion of Craig, the singers, and the staff that makes Conspirare possible.

Launched to celebrate 25 years of Conspirare’s artistry, Hella Circle is a community of supporters who believe in the transformative power of music. Inspired by the visionary performances, recordings, and special projects of Craig Hella Johnson and Conspirare, Hella Circle members are joined by their commitment to sustained support of Conspirare.

conspirare.org/donate/hella-circle/

“It is profoundly meaningful to see Hella Circle bring together an extraordinary group of passionate people to support and surround the visionary work of Conspirare in an ongoing way.”

– Craig Hella Johnson

“Sustainability and financial predictability. These are two key reasons giving through the Hella Circle is meaningful for me. Please join us in one of the best ways to keep Conspirare bringing inspiring, imaginative, and connecting performances to our audiences.”

– Fran Collmann, Hella Circle Co-Chair

“I know that music doesn’t just ‘happen.’ I want to give back what I receive as a performer and audience member. I know any gift I give will be used to benefit Conspirare audiences, technical staff that makes us look and sound great, and everyone else who keeps Conspirare’s song going.”

– Andrea Pobanz, Hella Circle Member
IN GRATITUDE

We are deeply grateful to every individual, foundation, business, and government agency for your investments in Conspirare’s mission to change lives through the power of music. This list represents cash and in-kind gifts made from January 1, 2021 through March 31, 2022.

Your Generosity Brings Our Song to Life.

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