



MEDIA RELEASE *For Immediate Release*

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**Conspirare Sings Songs of Belonging in *The Muse Speaks*
Featuring New Music by Alex Berko, Shara Nova, Kevin Puts, and Moira Smiley**

AUSTIN, Texas (March 2, 2023). Conspirare, the GRAMMY® Award-winning choir known for expanding the boundaries of choral performance, presents *The Muse Speaks: The House of Belonging* on **March 31 at 8 pm and April 1 at 4 pm at St. Martin's Lutheran Church, 606 W. 15th Street in Austin.** Tickets are available at: www.conspirare.org/the-muse-speaks.

The Muse Speaks: The House of Belonging brings together new and lasting works by composers who explore and express themes around the ideas of unity and belonging. In such fragmented times, what can possibly reflect a sense of interconnectedness amongst and within the diverse and disconnected global human family? It is precisely from within this diversity of experience and expression that this concert program is shaped. The concert will include world premieres of extraordinary Conspirare commissioned-music by Shara Nova and Alex Berko. Conspirare is also thrilled to present new settings of cherished works by Pulitzer Prize and GRAMMY®-winning composer Kevin Puts. New works by long neglected composer Margaret Bonds are also highlighted.



Johnson shares that, "Listening deeply within is an essential part of the creative process. In crafting this program, it energized me to experience this emerging sense of unity and interconnectedness through a collection of many disparate voices and wildly varied perspectives. This awareness that this seemingly disjunct and chaotic world is actually the *foundation* of our common life, this tapestry of so many

diverse layers is the container for our *House of Belonging*."

Johnson adds, "The Muse, that inner creative guiding voice, speaks from all corners of Creation. The collection of music for The Muse Speaks concert series provides several snapshots and expressions of this idea that *Everything Belongs*. I am so excited to share these works with listeners. "

About the Music

The Muse Speaks: The House of Belonging was inspired by David Whyte's poem "The House of Belonging" which composer [Shara Nova](#) has set in a new piece for choir. Johnson selected a program of choral music that feels moving to the ear and either soothing or provocative to the mind, body, and spirit.



The program also features music by [Kevin Puts](#) who was awarded a 2023 GRAMMY® for Best Contemporary Classical Composition.

[Alex Berko](#)'s "Sacred Place," occupies the center of the program and is inspired by the traditional Jewish grieving rituals. This "ecological service" acknowledges our sacred connection to the earth. Berko draws on texts by poet and pacifist William Stafford and Wendell Berry, writer and farmer. Berko's "You Through Me," which was part of last fall's *Hear Me Out* concert, will also be performed. Acclaimed violinist [Sandy Yamamoto](#) and cellist [Daniel Kopp](#) will join Conspirare for this world premiere.



Songs by women composers Margaret Bonds, Alysia Lee, and Moira Smiley are included in the diversity of expression at the center of the program.

Music from "The Muse Speaks: The House of Belonging" will be recorded and released next year.

Conspirare's music is for everyone. Ticket prices range from \$25-\$75 with discounts for Hella Circle members. \$10 Student tickets are available. Anyone serving our community (such as but not limited to teachers, military, first-responders, and service industry pros) or with a limited income may order tickets at half off with the code WELOVEYOU. Tickets are available at: www.conspirare.org/the-muse-speaks.

Some people wonder why we perform in churches. It's simple--choral music sounds amazing in these spaces. Dress up, wear jeans. Whoever you are, wherever you come from, you are welcome here.

About Our Sponsors Conspirare thanks Season Underwriter is H-E-B. Conspirare Season Sponsors include BlackFeather Vintage Works; Still Water Foundation; Tejemos Foundation, Lynne Dobson & Greg Wooldridge; National Endowment for the Arts; Texas Commission on the Arts; Hella Circle; and Legacy of Sound 2. KMFA Is Conspirare's Media Sponsor and Gusto/Flavor is this season's Hospitality sponsor.

The National Endowment for the Arts awarded Conspirare a \$35,000 grant for Arts Projects to support recording the music included on this concert. Conspirare's project is among the more than 1,100 projects across America totaling nearly \$27 million that were selected during this second round of Grants for Arts Projects fiscal year 2022 funding.

ATTENTION MEDIA REPRESENTATIVES

To arrange interviews or access high-resolution images please contact Ann McNair at 512-476-5775 or amcnair@conspirare.org.

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

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 20 self-produced live albums. Johnson and Conspirare are nominated for a 2022 GRAMMY® for Best Choral Performance for *The Singing Guitar* and were awarded a 2014 Grammy® for Best Choral Performance for *The Sacred Spirit of Russia*. 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.

Inspired by the power of music to change lives, Conspirare offers audiences extraordinary musical experiences through world-class choral performances, recordings, and teaching. We open hearts and minds through music.

We Sing Life.

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.

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