



CONSIDERING MATTHEW SHEPARD

by CRAIG HELLA JOHNSON



Jeffrey Benson, Artistic Director

SATURDAY • MAY 16 • 2026

7:30 PM

First Congregational Church, Palo Alto

peninsulacantare.org

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A MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to the final concert of our 2025-2026 season. Tonight's performance of Craig Hella Johnson's *Considering Matthew Shepard* is both a profound artistic experience and an invitation to reflection, compassion, and community. Through music, poetry, and testimony, this remarkable oratorio explores themes of humanity, dignity, loss, and hope. It reminds us of the power of music not only to move us emotionally, but also to inspire understanding and connection. We believe deeply in the ability of choral music to bring people together across differences and to create spaces for empathy and dialogue. Presenting this work reflects our commitment to meaningful musical storytelling and to the values of inclusion, respect, and shared humanity.

This evening would not be possible without the extraordinary dedication of our musicians, artistic staff, volunteers, patrons, and community supporters. Their passion and generosity sustain Peninsula Cantare and make performances like this one possible. We are especially grateful to you, our audience, for joining us tonight and for supporting the arts in our community. Your presence affirms the importance of music that challenges, comforts, and connects us. Thank you for being part of this special evening. I hope tonight's performance resonates deeply and stays with you long after the final notes are sung.

With gratitude,



Chair, Board of Directors



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A MESSAGE FROM THE MAESTRO

Tonight we begin with an invitation: to be "open to hear this story." As we consider our shared humanity with Matthew, we are called to reflect on our own stories in an ever more complicated world. More than just a poignant memorial for Matt, this work of art endures because of its power to renew our love and compassion for one another. It's a call for justice. It's a call to stand for love.

As part of that call for justice, we are thrilled to partner with the Matthew Shepard Foundation for this evening's concert. A portion of our ticket sales will be donated directly to the foundation as they focus on providing hate crimes prevention training to law enforcement and prosecutors across the United States. Their mission of embracing the dignity and equality of all people is vital to our society now more than ever. If you'd like to offer additional support, you can find information in this program and in the lobby tonight.

We're glad you are here. Be kind to yourself and continue to make our world better!

Jeffrey Benson

Artistic Director

THE PUZZLER!

Peninsula Cantare Puzzler

by Ted Clifford

After filling in the words, flood fill the numbered regions.

Total the number of filled boxes per region in order.

Translate to letters (A=1...). Some regions may be disconnected.

M			M		C				S			14
		I						4				I C S
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I			M					S				3 I
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		7			5			S	7			
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1			9 C							6		5
						M						

WORD BANK

aria	leitmotif
arpeggio	lyrics
cadence	madrigal
chorale	marcato
coda	measure
conductor	modulation
counterpoint	mosso
crescendo	musicality
diction	octet
diminuendo	pitch
duet	solo
fermata	syncopated
handel	tenor
harmony	tessitura
hymn	unison

CONSIDERING MATTHEW SHEPARD

music by Craig Hella Johnson

stage direction by Lofn Young

PROLOGUE

Cattle, Horses, Sky and Grass

Travis Reece-Nguyen, tenor

Ordinary Boy

Anne-Marie Strohman, Amy Worden,

Oliver Chiang, Jeremy Ryan, soloists

We Tell Each Other Stories

Ginger Piersol, soprano

PASSION

Recitation: *Melanie Flint*

The Fence (before)

Mark Lewis, tenor

Recitation: *Travis Reece-Nguyen*

The Fence (that night)

Truesten Tautolo, baritone

Recitation: *Gabrielle McColgan*

A Protestor

Recitation: *Ginny Grant*

Fire of the Ancient Heart

Truesten Tautolo, baritone

Recitation: *Dylan Platt*

Stray Birds

We Are All Sons

I Am Like You

Amy Spencer, Pia Satana,

Cody Scott, Andrew Ford, quartet

The Innocence

Cody Scott, tenor

Recitation: *Leslie Cardiasmenos*

Stars

Steve Boisvert, speaker

Amanda Koobatian, Marina Box, Michelle Montoya, Sam Siegel,

Troy Davis, Jeremy Ryan, Andy Sundquist, David Marsh, octet

Recitation: *Michelle Montoya*

Deer Song

Marina Box, Ginger Piersol, Gabrielle McColgan, soloists

Recitation: *Mark Lewis*

The Fence (after)/The Wind

Pilgrimage

Amy Nasci, Sam Siegel, Marina Box,

Amanda Koobatian, soloists

EPILOGUE

Meet Me Here

Lofn Young, soprano

All of Us

Lofn Young, Amy Spencer, Simone Horne, trio

Reprise: This Chant of Life (Cattle, Horses, Sky and Grass)

Travis Reece-Nguyen, tenor

Please join us for a reception immediately following the concert!

INTRODUCTION

"INTRODUCTION" from OCTOBER MOURNING: A SONG FOR MATTHEW SHEPARD by Lesléa Newman

On Tuesday, October 6, 1998, at approximately 11:45 p.m., twenty-one-year-old Matthew Shepard, a gay college student attending the University of Wyoming, was kidnapped from a bar by twenty-one-year old Aaron McKinney and twenty-one-year-old Russell Henderson. Pretending to be gay, the two men lured Matthew Shepard into their truck, drove him to the outskirts of Laramie, robbed him, beat him with a pistol, tied him to a buck-rail fence, and left him to die. The next day, at about 6:00 p.m. – eighteen hours after the attack – he was discovered and taken to a hospital. He never regained consciousness and died five days later, on Monday, October 12, with his family by his side.

One of the last things Matthew Shepard did that Tuesday night was attend a meeting of the University of Wyoming's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered Association. The group was putting final touches on plans for Gay Awareness Week, scheduled to begin the following Sunday, October 11, coinciding with a National Coming Out Day. Planned campus activities included a film showing, an open poetry reading, and a keynote speaker. That keynote speaker was me.

I never forgot what happened in Laramie, and around the tenth anniversary of Matthew Shepard's death, I found myself thinking more and more about him. And so I began writing a series of poems, striving to create a work of art that explores the events surrounding Matthew Shepard's murder in order to gain a better understanding of their impact on myself and the world.

What really happened at the fence that night? Only three people know the answer to that question. Two of them are imprisoned, convicted murderers whose stories often contradict each other (for example, in separate interviews both McKinney and Henderson have claimed that he alone tied Matthew Shepard to the fence). The other person who knows what really happened that night is dead. We will never know his side of the story. This book is my side of the story.

While the poems in this book are inspired by actual events, they do not in any way represent the statements, thoughts, feelings, opinions, or attitudes of any actual person. The statements, thoughts, feelings, opinions, and attitudes conveyed belong to me. All monologues contained within the poems are figments of my imagination; no actual person spoke any of the words contained within the body of any poem. Those words are mine and mine alone. When the words of an actual person are used as a short epigraph for a poem, the source of that quote is cited at the back of the book in a section entitled "Notes," which contains citations and suggestions for further reading about the crime. The poems, which are meant to be read in sequential order as one whole work, are a work of poetic invention and imagination: a historical novel in verse. The poems are not an objective reporting of Matthew Shepard's murder and its aftermath; rather they are my own personal interpretation of them.

There is a bench on the campus of the University of Wyoming dedicated to Matthew Shepard, inscribed with the words *He continues to make a difference*. My hope is that readers of *October Mourning: A Song for Matthew Shepard* will be inspired to make a difference and honor his legacy by erasing hate and replacing it with compassion, understanding, and love.

LIBRETTO

PROLOGUE

All.

*Yoodle—ooh, yoodle-ooh-hoo,
so sings a lone cowboy,
Who with the wild roses
wants you to be free.*

Cattle, Horses, Sky and Grass

Cattle, horses, sky and grass
These are the things that sway and
pass
Before our eyes and through our
dreams
Through shiny, sparkly, golden gleams
Within our psyche that find and know
The value of this special glow
That only gleams for those who bleed
Their soul and heart and utter need
Into the mighty, throbbing Earth
From which springs life and death and
birth.

*I'm alive! I'm alive, I'm alive, golden.
I'm alive, I'm alive, I'm alive ...*

These cattle, horses, grass, and sky
Dance and dance and never die
They circle through the realms of air
And ground and empty spaces where
A human being can join the song
Can circle, too, and not go wrong
Amidst the natural, pulsing forces
Of sky and grass and cows and horses.

I'm alive, I'm alive, I'm alive ...

This chant of life cannot be heard
It must be felt, there is no word
To sing that could express the true
Significance of how we wind
Through all these hoops of Earth and
mind
Through horses, cattle, sky and grass
And all these things that sway and
pass.

Ordinary Boy

Let's talk about Matt—

Ordinary boy, ordinary boy...

Born in December in Casper, Wyoming

*Ordinary boy
to a father, Dennis
and a mother, Judy
Ordinary boy, ordinary boy
Then came a younger brother, Logan
Ordinary boy
His name was Matthew Wayne
Shepard. And one day his name came
to be known around the world. But as
his mother said:*

Judy Shepard: You knew him as
Matthew. To us he was Matt.

He went camping, he went fishing,
even hunting for a moose
He read plays and he read stories and
especially Dr. Seuss
He wrote poems with illustrations for
the neighbors on the street
And he left them in each mailbox till
he learned it was illegal
He made friends and he wore braces
and his frame was rather small
He sang songs his father taught him

*Frere Jacques ...
Row Row Row Your Boat ...
Twinkle Twinkle Little Star ...*

Judy: He was my son, my first-born,
and more. He was my friend, my
confidant, my constant reminder of
how good life can be—and ... how
hurtful.

How good life can be, how good life
can be

Judy: Matt's laugh, his wonderful
hugs, his stories ...

Matt writes about himself in a
notebook:

I am funny, sometimes forgetful and
messy and lazy. I am not a lazy person
though. I am giving and
understanding. And formal and polite.
I am sensitive. I am honest. I am
sincere. And I am not a pest.

I am not a pest, I am not a pest ...

LIBRETTO

I am my own person. I am warm.
I want my life to be happy and I
want to be clearer about things. I
want to feel good.
I love Wyoming ...
I love Wyoming very much ...

I love theatre
I love good friends
I love succeeding
I love pasta
I love jogging
I love walking and feeling good

I love Europe and driving and music
and helping and smiling and
Charlie and Jeopardy
I love movies and eating and
positive people and pasta and
driving and walking and jogging
and kissing and learning and
airports and music and smiling and
hugging and being myself
I love theatre! I love theatre!
And I love to be on stage!

Such an ordinary boy living ordinary
days
In an ordinary life so worth living
He felt ordinary yearning and
ordinary fears
With an ordinary hope for
belonging

He felt ordinary yearning and
ordinary fears
With an ordinary hope for
belonging
(Born to live this ordinary life)
Just an ordinary boy living ordinary
days with extraordinary kindness

extraordinary laughter
extraordinary shining
extraordinary light and joy
Joy and light.

I love, I love, I love ...
Ordinary boy, ordinary boy

We Tell Each Other Stories

We tell each other stories so that
we will remember
Try and find the meaning in the
living of our days

Always telling stories, wanting to
remember
Where and whom we came from
Who we are

Sometimes there's a story that's
painful to remember
One that breaks the heart of us all
Still we tell the story
We're listening and confessing
What we have forgotten
In the story of us all

We tell each other stories so that
we will remember
Trying to find the meaning ...

I am open to hear this story about a
boy, an ordinary boy
Who never had expected his life
would be this story,
(could be any boy)

I am open to hear a story

Open, listen.
All.

PASSION

Recitation

Laramie, southeastern Wyoming, between the Snowy Range and the Laramie
Range. Tuesday, October 6, 1998.

LIBRETTO

The Fence (before)

Out and alone
on the endless empty prairie

the moon bathes me
the stars bless me

the sun warms me
the wind soothes me

still still still . . . I wonder
will I always be out here
exposed and alone?

will I ever know why
I was put (here) on this earth?

will somebody someday
stumble upon me?

will anyone remember me
after I'm gone?

Still, still, still . . . I wonder.

Recitation

Tuesday night. Matthew attended a meeting of the University of Wyoming's Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Association, then joined others for coffee at the College Inn. Around 10:30, he went to the Fireside Bar, where he later met Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson. Near midnight, they drove him to a remote area, tied him to a buck and rail fence, beat him horribly and left him to die in the cold of night.

The Fence (that night)

*Most noble evergreen with your roots in
the sun:
you shine in the cloudless sky of a sphere
no earthly eminence can grasp,
You blush like the dawn,
you burn like a flame of the sun.*

I held him all night long
He was heavy as a broken heart
Tears fell from his unblinking eyes
He was dead weight yet he kept
breathing

He was heavy as a broken heart
His own heart wouldn't stop beating
The cold wind wouldn't stop blowing
His face streaked with moonlight and
blood
I tightened my grip and held on

The cold wind wouldn't stop blowing
We were out on the prairie alone
I tightened my grip and held on
I saw what was done to this child

We were out on the prairie alone
Their truck was the last thing he saw
I saw what was done to this child
I cradled him just like a mother

*Most noble evergreen, most noble
evergreen, your roots in the sun . . .*

Their truck was the last thing he saw
Tears fell from his unblinking eyes
I cradled him just like a mother
I held him all night long

Most noble evergreen . . .

Recitation

The next morning, Matthew was found by a cyclist, a fellow student, who at first thought he was a scarecrow. After several days in a coma and on life support, Matthew Shepard died on Monday, October 12, at 12:53 a.m. At the funeral, which took place on Friday, October 16, at St Mark's Episcopal Church in Casper, Fred Phelps and the Westboro Baptist Church protested outside.

LIBRETTO

A Protestor

God Hates Fags, Matt in Hell

(Signs held by anti-gay protestors at
Matthew Shepard's funeral and the
trials of his murderers)

kreuzige, kreuzige!

(translation: crucify, crucify)

A boy who takes a boy to bed?
Where I come from that's not polite
He asked for it, you got that right
The fires of Hell burn hot and red
The only good fag is a fag that's dead

A man and a woman, the Good Lord said
As sure as Eve took that first bite
The fires of Hell burn hot and red

kreuzige, kreuzige!

Beneath the Hunter's Moon he bled
That must have been a pretty sight
The fires of Hell burn hot and red

C'mon, kids, it's time for bed
Say your prayers, kiss Dad good night
A boy who takes a boy to bed?
The fires of Hell burn hot and red

crucify, crucify . . . the light

crucify the light . . .

Recitation

National media began to broadcast the story. As the news began to spread,
many people across the country gathered together in candlelight vigils, moved
to (silently) speak for life over death, love over hate, light over darkness.

Fire of the Ancient Heart

Cantor:

"What have you done? Hark, thy
brother's blood cries to me from the
ground."

Choir:

Called by this candle
Led to the flame
Called to remember
Enter the flame

Cantor: all our flames now
swaying and free
all our hearts now
moving as one
every living spirit
turned toward peace
all our tender
hopes awake

Choir: Called by this candle
Led to the flame
Called to remember
Enter the flame

Fire: howl

Fire: broken

Fire: burst

Fire: rage

Fire: swell

Fire: shatter

Fire: wail

Fire

We all betray the ancient heart
Ev'ry one of us, all of us
His heart, my heart, your heart,
one heart

("In each moment the fire rages, it will
burn away a hundred veils.")
Burning Breaking Grasping Raging

how do we keep these
flames in our hands?
how do we guard these
fears in our hearts?
how long to hold these
griefs in our songs?

LIBRETTO

remembering anger
weave it with hope
remembering exile
braid it with praise
longing past horror
longing past dread
dreaming of healing
past all our pain

Fire: living in me
Fire: purify
Fire: now hold me
Fire: seize my heart

(enter the flame, enter the flame
shatter my heart, shatter my heart
called to enter, burn a hundred veils)

Called by this flame
Fire of my heart:
Break down all walls
Open all doors
Only this Love
"Eyes of flesh, eyes of fire"
Lumina, lumina, lumina
Open us, All!
(In each moment the fire rages, it will
burn away a hundred veils.)

Recitation

Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson were arrested shortly after the attack and charged with murder, kidnapping, and aggravated robbery. The first of two trials began on October 26, 1999; both were convicted of the murder and sentenced to two consecutive life sentences.

We Are All Sons

*Stray birds of summer come to my window to sing and fly away.
And yellow leaves of autumn which have no songs flutter and fall there with a sigh.
Once we dreamt that we were strangers.
We wake up to find that we were dear to each other.*

we are all sons of fathers and mothers
we are all sons

we are all rivers
the roar of waters, we are all sons

I Am Like You

I am like you

Aaron
and Russell

When I think of you (and honestly I don't like to think about you)
but sometimes I do,
I am so horrified, and just so angry and confused (and scared)
that you could do things to another boy—they were so cruel and
so undeserved, so dark and hard and full of (I don't know)

am I like you? (in any way)
(I pray the answer is no)
Am I like you?
I bet you once had hopes and dreams, too.

LIBRETTO

Some things we love get lost along the way,
That's just like me, get lost along the way—
I am like you, I get confused and I'm afraid
and I've been reckless, I've been restless, bored,
unthinking, listless, intoxicated,
I've come unhinged,
and made mistakes
and hurt people very much.

Sometimes I feel (in springtime, in early afternoon)
the sunshine warm on my face;
you feel this too (don't you?),
the sunshine warm on your face.

I am like you
(this troubles me)
I am like you
(just needed to say this)
Some things we love get lost along the way.

we are all sons of fathers and mothers
we are all sons

sometimes no home for us here on the earth
no place to lay our heads
we are all sons of fathers and mothers

if you could know for one moment
how it is to live in our bodies within the world

if you could know

you ask too much of us
you ask too little

The Innocence

When I think of all the times the world was ours for dreaming,
When I think of all the times the earth seemed like our home—
Every heart alive with its own longing,
Every future we could ever hope to hold.

All the times our laughter rang in summer,
All the times the rivers sang our tune—
Was there already sadness in the sunlight?
Some stormy story waiting to be told?

*Where O where has the innocence gone?
Where O where has it gone?
Rains rolling down wash away my memory;
Where O where has it gone?*

LIBRETTO

When I think of all the joys, the wonders we remember
All the treasures we believed we'd never ever lose.
Too many days gone by without their meaning,
Too many darkened hours without their peace.

*Where O where has the innocence gone?
Where O where has it gone?
Vows we once swore, now it's just this letting go,
Where O where has it gone?*

Recitation

In the days and weeks after Matthew's death, many people came to the fence to pay homage and pray and grieve.

Matthew's father made his statement to the court on November 5, 1999.

Stars

By the end of the beating, his body was just trying to survive. You left him out there by himself, but he wasn't alone. There were his lifelong friends with him—friends that he had grown up with. You're probably wondering who these friends were. First, he had the beautiful night sky with the same stars and moon that we used to look at through a telescope. Then, he had the daylight and the sun to shine on him one more time—one more cool, wonderful autumn day in Wyoming. His last day alive in Wyoming. His last day alive in the state that he always proudly called home. And through it all he was breathing in for the last time the smell of Wyoming sagebrush and the scent of pine trees from the snowy range. He heard the wind—the ever-present Wyoming wind—for the last time. He had one more friend with him. One he grew to know through his time in Sunday school and as an acolyte at St. Mark's in Casper as well as through his visits to St. Matthew's in Laramie. I feel better knowing he wasn't alone.

Stars
scattered across the
sky
blinking in
unable dismay
being to help
light years
away

Recitation

Matthew was left tied to the fence for almost eighteen hours.

Sheriff's Deputy, Reggie Fluty, the first to report to the scene, told Judy Shepard that as she ran to the fence she saw a large doe lying near Matt—as if the deer had been keeping him company all through the night.

LIBRETTO

Deer Song

Deer:
A mist is over the mountain,
The stars in their meadows upon the air,
Your people are waiting below them,
And you know there's a gathering there.
All night I lay there beside you,
I cradled your pain in my care,
We move through creation together,
And we know there's a welcoming there.

Welcome, welcome, sounds the song,
Calling, calling clear;
Always with us, evergreen heart,
Where can we be but there?

Recitation

The fence has been torn down.

The Fence (after)/The Wind

prayed upon
frowned upon

revered
feared

adored
abhorred

despised
idolized

splintered
scarred

weathered
worn

broken down
broken up

ripped apart
ripped away

gone
but not forgotten

Matthew:
I'll find all the love I have longed for,
The home that's been calling my heart
so long
So soon I'll be cleansed in those waters,
My fevers forever be gone;
Where else on earth but these waters?
No more, no more to be torn;
My own ones, my dearest, are waiting
And I'll weep to be where I belong.

Welcome, welcome, sounds the song,
Calling, calling clear;
Always with me, evergreen heart,
Where can I be but here?

The North Wind
carried his father's laugh
The South Wind
carried his mother's song
The East Wind
carried his brother's cheer
The West Wind
carried his lover's moan
The Winds of the World
wove together a prayer
to carry that hurt boy home

prayed upon
frowned upon

revered
feared

North Wind, South Wind, East Wind,
West Wind

(Splintered, scarred, weathered, worn,
broken down, gone)

Winds of the World: carry him home.

LIBRETTO

Pilgrimage

The land was sold and a new fence now stands about fifty yards away. People still come to pay their respects. — Jim Osborn, friend of Matthew Shepard

I walk to the fence with beauty before me
I walk to the fence with beauty behind me
I walk to the fence with beauty above me
I walk to the fence with beauty below me

I leave the fence surrounded by beauty
sigh of sagebrush, hush of stone

(Beauty above me, beauty below me
By beauty surrounded)

Still, still, still, I wonder....
wail of wind, cry of hawk

Still, still, still, I wonder...
wail of wind, cry of hawk

Still still still

EPILOGUE

Meet Me Here

*Meet me here
Won't you meet me here
Where the old fence ends and the horizon
begins
There's a balm in the silence
Like an understanding air
Where the old fence ends and the horizon
begins*

*We've been walking through the darkness
On this long, hard climb
Carried ancestral sorrow
For too long a time
Will you lay down your burden
Lay it down, come with me
It will never be forgotten
Held in love, so tenderly*

*Meet me here
Won't you meet me here
Where the old fence ends and the horizon
begins*

*There's a joy in the singing
Like an understanding air
Where the old fence ends and the
horizon begins.*

*Then we'll come to the mountain
We'll go bounding to see
That great circle of dancing
And we'll dance endlessly
And we'll dance with all the children
Who've been lost along the way
We will welcome each other
Coming home, this glorious day*

*We are home in the mountain
And we'll gently understand
That we've been friends forever
That we've never been alone
We'll sing on through any darkness
And our Song will be our sight
We can learn to offer praise again
Coming home to the light...*

LIBRETTO

All of Us

What could be the song?
Where begin again?
Who could meet us there?
Where might we begin?
From the shadows climb,
Rise to sing again;
Where could be the joy?
How do we begin?

Never our despair,
Never the least of us,
Never turn away,
Never hide our face;
Ordinary boy,
Only all of us,
Free us from our fear,
Only all of us.

What could be the song?
Where begin again?
Who could meet us there?
Where might we begin?
From the shadows climb,
Rise to sing again;
Where could be the joy?
How do we begin?

Never our despair,
Never the least of us,
Never turn away,
Never hide your face;
Ordinary boy,
Only all of us,
Free us from our fear.

Only in the Love,
Love that lifts us up,
Clear from out the heart
From the mountain's side,
Come creation come,
Strong as any stream;
How can we let go? How can we forgive?
How can we be dream?

Out of heaven, rain,
Rain to wash us free;
Rivers flowing on,
Ever to the sea;
Bind up every wound,
Every cause to grieve;
Always to forgive,
Only to believe.

*Most noble Light, Creation's face,
How should we live but joined in you,
Remain within your saving grace
Through all we say and do
And know we are the Love that moves
The sun and all the stars?
O Love that dwells, O Love that burns
In every human heart.*

(Only in the Love, Love that lifts us up!)

*This evergreen, this heart, this soul,
Now moves us to remake our world,
Reminds us how we are to be
Your people born to dream;
How old this joy, how strong this call,
To sing your radiant care
With every voice, in cloudless hope
Of our belonging here.*

Only in the Love ...
Only all of us ...

(Heaven: Wash me ...)

All of us, only all of us.

What could be the song?
Where do we begin?
Only in the Love, Love that lifts us up.

All of Us

All.

LIBRETTO

Reprise: This Chant of Life (Cattle, Horses, Sky and Grass)

(This chant of life cannot be heard
It must be felt, there is no word
To sing that could express the true
Significance of how we wind
Through all these hoops of Earth and mind
Through horses, cattle, sky and grass
And all these things that sway and pass.)

*Yoodle—ooh, yoodle-ooh-hoo, so sings a lone cowboy,
Who with the wild roses wants you to be free.*

POETRY & TEXTS BY:

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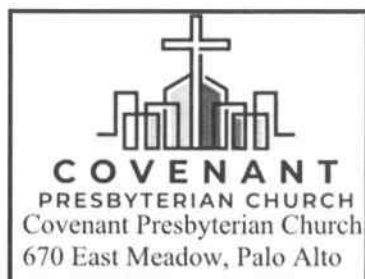
Our Vision: A world that explores the human experience through musical storytelling.

Our Mission: Forging connections between diverse communities in the pursuit of choral artistry.

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Ray Lin, guitar
Apple Gao, percussion



ARTISTIC STAFF



Jeffrey Benson

Jeffrey Benson (he/him) is Artistic Director of Peninsula Cantare and Director of Choral Activities at San José State University where he serves as the Charlene Archibeque Endowed Professor of Choral Music. The *Washington Post* hails his choirs for singing "with an exquisite blend, subtlety of phrasing, confident musicianship and fully supported tone."

Dr. Benson made his international conducting debut with the Irish Chamber Orchestra and the SJSU Choraliers in Limerick, Ireland in 2016, and made his Carnegie Hall conducting debut in 2015. He has served as cover conductor for the Grammy award-winning Washington Chorus, where he helped to prepare the ensemble for Maestros Leonard Slatkin and Marvin Hamlisch.

This season, Benson's professional engagements included conducting Mozart's *Requiem* at Carnegie Hall with orchestra and chorus and Craig Hella Johnson's *Considering Matthew Shepard* at the Washington National Cathedral with Berkshire Choral International. In recent years, the maestro's choirs have been invited to perform with the Rolling Stones, Josh Groban, Andrea Bocelli, and Sarah Brightman.

Dr. Benson is a published composer and arranger, and is the editor of the Jeffrey Benson Choral Series with Gentry Publications. His compositions are published with Colla Voce Music and Santa Barbara Music Publishing.



Emily Hsu

Emily Hsu began her piano and musical training at the age of three. By age ten, she had won several prestigious accolades as a soloist. After moving from Taiwan to the Bay Area in 1996, she studied with renowned pianist Rebecca-Sen Chan. In addition to having an extensive and accomplished solo career, Emily is a collaborative musician by nature. She has arranged numerous choral works for the Tzu Chi Foundation and Bo-Ai Chorus, she has performed with the Cambrian Symphony under the direction of Maestro Scott Krijnen, and she worked with distinguished music educator Jim Yowell for over a decade.

Since 2016, Emily has performed with the California Choral Directors Association Honor Choirs, as well as with the ACDA All-State Honor Choirs. She has collaborated alongside Dr. Judy Bowers (2016), Dr. Jessica Nápoles (2017), Dr. Jeffrey Benson (2017), Dr. Anthony Trecek-King (2021), and Lori Marie Rios (2023). Emily currently resides in Los Gatos with her husband and daughter, and she works closely with Dr. Corie Brown at San José State University and Dr. Jeffrey Benson with both SJSU and Peninsula Cantare.

ARTISTIC STAFF



Brendan Lodge

A Michigander currently living in California, **Brendan Lodge** is a choral music educator, conductor, performer, and arranger. In 2014, he earned his Bachelor of Music in Vocal Music Education at Alma College under the tutelage of Dr. Will Nichols, where he had the opportunity to conduct multiple choirs as a student director. Brendan taught middle school choir for four years in Michigan and California before earning his Master of Music in Choral Conducting at San José State University in May 2023 where he was mentored by Dr. Jeffrey Benson and Dr. Corie Brown.

At SJSU, Brendan worked as an instructor in Music Appreciation, Music Fundamentals, Ear Training, and directed the Vocal Jazz Ensemble. In addition to his own coursework, he participated in all of the SJSU choral ensembles in various administrative, artistic, and performance capacities. Upon graduation, he was named the 2023 Outstanding Graduate Student in Music. Following his time at SJSU, he served for two years as the Director of Choirs at Livermore High School in Livermore, CA.

He resides in San José with his husband, Tyler, as well as their two Boston Terriers, Jan and Bob.



Lofn Young

Lofn Young (she/they/he) is in their 6th year as the vocal music director, guitar instructor, and site staff development lead at Monta Vista High School in Cupertino, CA. They are so proud to be involved with this production of *Considering Matthew Shepard*, having staged SJSU's production in 2023.

Lofn attended Florida State University and earned a Bachelor of Choral Music Education with a certificate in Music for Special Education. They taught Middle School and High School in Florida before attending San Jose State University where they earned a Masters in Choral Conducting. While at SJSU, Lofn was the recipient of the Bertha Kalm Memorial Scholarship, and the winner of several competitions including NATS classical, NATS contemporary/musical theatre, and the SJSU Music Study Club Scholarship.

Lofn has performed in over 20 musicals (regional credits: *Hello, Dolly!*, *Buddy: the Buddy Holly Story*, *This Magic Moment*) and directed/music directed over 20 more! Most recently at SJSU, they served as Maestro for *The Addams Family*, *Cabaret*, and *Company*. Lofn has found a home in many choirs as a singer, including the Festival Singers of Florida and Peninsula Cantare, and they have loved touring the world and performing at several conferences during their tenure. They continue to value music as a vehicle for connecting with others, self-expression, and furthering their humanity.

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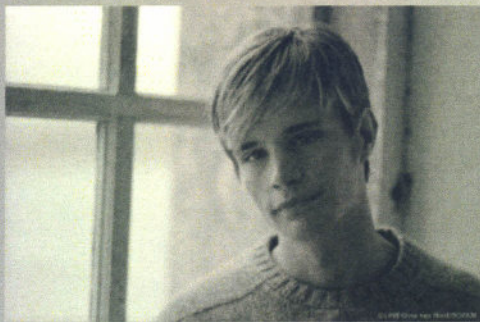
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The Foundation seeks to **Replace Hate with Understanding, Compassion, & Acceptance** through its varied educational, outreach and advocacy programs, and by continuing to tell Matthew's story.

Our mission is to encourage respect for human dignity and differences by raising awareness, opening dialogues, and promoting positive change.

Legacy Works play a vital role in keeping Matthew's story alive and promote the discussion of hate issues that continue to plague society.

The Board and staff of the Matthew Shepard Foundation thank you for coming to see this performance, and hope it will move you to commit to Erasing Hate in your own life, home and community.

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