



CRAIG HELLA JOHNSON'S

CONSIDERING MATTHEW SHEPARD

Saturday, April 25, 2026 | 7:05 PM  | Orpheum Theater



BLUEBARN THEATRE
PRESENTS

MAY 14 THRU
JUNE 14, 2026



A CHORUS LINE

Winner of 9 Tony Awards and the Pulitzer Prize

Conceived and Originally Directed & Choreographed by Michael Bennett | Book by James Kirkwood & Nicholas Dante | Music by Marvin Hamlisch, Lyrics by Edward Kleban

Susan Clement - Director
Melanie Epps - Co-Director | Choreographer
Mark Kurtz - Music Direction
Scott Glasser - Dramaturg

Sponsored by Devin Fox & Rob Block, Laura Peet Erkes & Corey Erkes,
Jim & Kathy McKain, Ben & Mel Teply, Ruth H. Keene

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AN ICONIC MASTERPIECE.**

**One shot. One line. One audition.
God I hope I get it!**

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ART BY ANTHONY DEON BROWN



WELCOME

WELCOME, AND THANK YOU FOR BEING HERE TONIGHT



PG
02

This evening, we invite you into Craig Hella Johnson's *Considering Matthew Shepard* – a powerful, deeply human work that asks us not only to remember, but to reflect; not only to grieve, but to reckon; not only to mourn, but, more importantly, to imagine something better.

At its core, this three-part oratorio is about love: love denied, love taken, and love that stubbornly refuses to disappear even in the face of unimaginable cruelty. In 1998, Matthew Shepard's life was violently taken, but his story – his humanity – became a catalyst for a national and global conversation about who we are, how we treat one another, and what responsibility we hold to stand against hatred in all its forms. Almost three decades later, in the year that Matthew Shepard should be turning 50 years old, that conversation is far from over.

Tonight's music does not attempt to offer easy answers or simple comfort. Instead, it creates space – for sorrow, for anger, for empathy, and for hope. Through the voices of the choir, the soloists chosen from within the ensemble, and our guest orchestra, composer Craig Hella Johnson weaves together texts that range from the sacred to the contemporary, from poetry to protest, reminding us that compassion and cruelty alike are woven into the fabric of our shared history. This is music that bears witness and invites participation – not as passive listeners, but as thoughtful, feeling members of the community.

For the River City Mixed Chorus as artists, performing *Considering Matthew Shepard* is both an honor and a responsibility. It demands vulnerability, courage, and a willingness to sit with discomfort. It also demands belief that feeds our mission: belief that music can foster connection, that telling the truth matters, and that remembrance is a form of action. Every rehearsal has been shaped by the knowledge that this story is not abstract – it is personal, and it is present.

We are profoundly grateful to our collaborators (our off-stage technical support, our guest musicians, our donors who support this live performance, and so many more) who bring this work

to life with such care and integrity. But to you, our audience, a special thank you for choosing to engage with the piece and with us. By being here, you become part of the act of remembrance and reflection that this piece calls for. Your presence matters.

You can continue to support River City Mixed Chorus by your presence at our final concert of the 2025-2026 season, *Express Yourself: An 80's Celebration* at the Holland Performing Arts Center on June 27. While the music may be wholly different from the styles you hear tonight, the messages are exactly the same – we sing out peace, we sing out love, we sing out joy. We stand for many but sing as one, and we sing out.

It is our hope that tonight offers more than a musical experience – that it becomes a moment of collective witnessing. May it encourage you to listen deeply, to hold one another gently, and to recommit, in whatever ways you can, to building a world rooted in dignity, equity, and love.

Thank you for sharing this space with us. May the music stay with you long after the final note fades.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in white ink that reads "A. Barron Breland".

KATIE KRESHA



On October 18, 1998, at the age of 15, I attended my first candlelight vigil. It was for Matthew Shepard and planned by a young, 16-year-old boy from Omaha who had so much in common with Matt. He loved theater and music and driving, had braces and a small frame, his middle name was Matthew, and he also happened to be gay. As Westboro Baptist Church spread hate and fear, we tried to make our message of peace and acceptance even louder. We could not have foreseen that three years later, Fred Phelps would

send his hate to Omaha to protest the funeral of this ordinary (and extraordinary) boy from Omaha, Brad Fuglei.

These stories of the beautiful human beings who have been lost to hate and division are incredibly painful to remember and to tell. But we continue to bear witness—holding the truth of who we have been, reflecting on where we are now, and imagining who we can become as a people. When we do not protect those most vulnerable, it is a reflection not just of the evil of the perpetrators, but of our failures as a society as a whole.

It is a lesson that needs repeating again and again, unfortunately, as it is a lesson we have yet to learn. The power to create a better world remains in our hands, but we must build it together.

We are so grateful for your presence here today and your willingness

to immerse yourself in Matthew’s story. I tell everyone that River City Mixed Chorus not only has the most amazing, talented singers, but the most incredible patrons and donors. If you don’t know the person sitting next to you, I can guarantee you will love them.

Our LGBTQIA+ and allies chorus has dedicated the last three months to exploring the meaning of Matthew’s story and we know you will find it as transformational as we have. Choral singing is a constant reminder that there is power in the collective. When we work together towards a common goal, we can achieve something much great than we can alone. We hope that by witnessing the story of Matthew Shepard today, you feel encouraged to speak your own truth, to find the courage to stand up for your beliefs, and to experience the beauty and joy found in community with others.

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On behalf of the members of River City Mixed Chorus, I would like to welcome you to tonight's performance of *Considering Matthew Shepard*.

Tonight we share the story of Matthew Shepard, a work that not only asks us to remember, but to reflect and renew our commitment to build a world where all of us can put aside our fears and embrace love. It is at once a deeply personal yet painfully universal experience. It is a story about loss, about

humanity at its worst, but also the possibility of compassion, understanding and transformation.

I had just turned 17 a few weeks before Matthew died. I remember not only the tragedy of the story, but the fear it stirred in me. I was an ordinary boy, like Matthew, growing up in a very rural, very conservative place where it was not okay to be different, especially gay. His story was a stark awakening to the violence that could result from the taunts and hateful words I heard all around me; from classmates, from family, even from the pulpit. It could have been me tied to that fence. Not in a Wyoming prairie, but on a tree-covered hillside in West Virginia.

To be honest, this is one of the most challenging works we have ever taken on, not only musically, but also emotionally. As you listen tonight, know that we have lived with this music for months. Not just learning notes and words,

but confronting our fears, finding ourselves, and sitting with the full weight of Matthew's life and death. I won't pretend otherwise; I have cried many times during this process. I'm crying as I write this. And I will probably be crying tonight on stage. We all have cried throughout this process. We have not only rehearsed, but watched, read, and listened to learn about Matthew. We even had the privilege of speaking with Matthew's father, Dennis, to better understand the ordinary boy behind the story. This music has changed us.

As you listen tonight, we invite you to be present with the music and with yourself. You may find moments that are heavy, moments that are beautiful, and moments that ask something of you. Let them.

Thank you for allowing us to share this experience with you. It is an honor to stand before you and to tell Matthew's story together.



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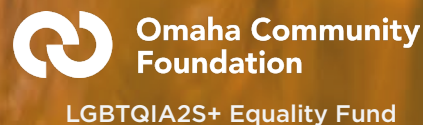
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Grant Support Provided by:

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The Nebraska Arts Council, a state agency, has supported this program through its matching grants program funded by the Nebraska Legislature, the National Endowment for the Arts and the Nebraska Cultural Endowment. Visit www.artsCouncil.nebraska.gov for information on how the Nebraska Arts Council can assist your organization, or how you can support the Nebraska Cultural Endowment.

Congratulations on another inspiring season!



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CONCERT



DR. A. BARRON BRELAND
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

With degrees in Music Theory and Choral Conducting from the University of Georgia and the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music, Dr. A. Barron Breland has emerged as a conductor set apart from others by his eclectic skills equipped to perform music from masterworks of the Baroque and Classical eras to great contemporary works of art, including repertoire in various popular styles. Recent choral performances conducted include Considering Matthew Shepard, the Mozart C-minor Mass, Mozart Requiem, Hagenberg's Illuminare, Forrest's Requiem for the Living, and Beethoven Mass in C; critics have praised the warmth and communicative power of his performances and choruses.

Breland is in demand throughout the country as a conductor, chorusmaster, clinician, and adjudicator, and he has prepared choruses for Grammy and Tony-winning artists such as Andrea Bocelli, Laura Benanti, John Mellencamp, Norm Lewis, Brian d'Arcy James, and conductors Dale Warland and Ted Sperling. Breland has also served as chorusmaster and prepared numerous works for the Omaha Symphony, including Beethoven's 9th Symphony, Carmina Burana, Elijah, Messiah, and many others.

Currently, he is the Vice Provost for Faculty & Academic Affairs and Dean of the Graduate School at Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska, where previously he was Professor of Music and Chair of the Department of Fine & Performing Arts. He conducted their premiere ensemble, the Creighton University Chamber Choir, and taught classes in music theory, history, and conducting.

Singing from the age of 6, Breland's first exposure to professional choral music was in 1990 as a member of the Atlanta Boy Choir, where he performed with Robert Shaw and the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, as well as in tours and festivals throughout Europe. Since 2011, he has been the Artistic Director of the River City Mixed Chorus, and in his 15-year tenure with the organization the ensemble has grown to over 170 active singing members, has headlined conferences, performed alongside Grammy-winning Conspirare, and has taken the stages of historic and iconic venues around the region. He is also the Principal Guest Conductor of Résonance, a semi-professional chorus whose debut album Pilgrimage was released in July 2020 on the MSR Classics label. All the ensembles under Breland's leadership perform regularly with the Omaha Symphony, and all have performed at state and regional ACDA and NMEA conferences.



ADAM WITTE
ASSISTANT ARTISTIC
DIRECTOR

Adam Witte has never been one to shy away from a music genre or musical instrument. His tastes, talent, and curiosity run far and wide, taking him on adventures across Europe playing euphonium solos with the University of Nebraska-Omaha Symphonic Wind Ensemble, offering him the chance to play piano on a piece with the Omaha Symphonic Chorus and Omaha Symphony, and leading him to conduct both the University Chorus and Chamber Choir at Creighton University. He is now the Designated Director of Worship and Arts at Countryside Community Church in Omaha, Nebraska, the Christian partner of the Tri-Faith Initiative. In his role there, he conducts the choir and handbell choir in addition to supervising the worship jazz ensemble. After joining as a singing member of River City Mixed Chorus in 2015, he was named Assistant Artistic Director a short year later. River's Edge, the RCMC small group he conducts, made its Festival debut at the international GALA Festival in Minneapolis in July of 2024. In addition to his work with RCMC and Countryside, Adam is also Assistant Conductor with local semi-professional chorus Résonance.



CECILIA JENSEN
COLLABORATIVE PIANIST

Cecilia Jensen is a multidisciplinary musician who's thrilled to be the collaborative pianist for River City Mixed Chorus! She believes one of the best ways to connect to community is to make music together, and couldn't be more excited to do so! Since 2015, she has been a collaborative pianist with various choirs, including several Omaha-area high school choirs, choral festivals, and the Creighton University Chamber Choir and University Chorus. She also enjoys serving as the current music director for Creighton's theater department. Cecilia earned bachelor's and master's degrees in viola performance from the University of Nebraska-Omaha and spent eleven seasons with the Sioux City Symphony Orchestra, playing masterworks alongside celebrated musicians like Gil Shaham, Leila Josefowicz, and Audra McDonald. She continues to enjoy playing viola with her trio, Ruckus Strings.

CONCERT CREDITS

ARTISTIC & PRODUCTION TEAM

Dr. A. Barron Breland

Artistic Director &
Conductor

Adam Witte

Assistant Artistic Director

Cecilia Jensen

Collaborative Pianist

Stephanie Vik

ASL Interpreters

Meghann Cassidy

ASL Interpreters

Bill Van Deest

Lighting & Set Designer

Lara Marsh

Production Manager

Kenzie Jensen

Assistant Stage Manager

Katie Kresha

Executive Director

Travis Mullins

Operations Manager

Valerie Haynes

Librarian

Jared Cunningham

Attire/Costume
Coordinator

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Videographer &
Video Production

Craig Marsh,

Pink Giraffe Audio

Audio Advising & Sound
Recording

IATSE Local 42

Stagehands & Electricians

Thomas Grady

Photography

Event Photographer

INSTRUMENTALISTS

Vince Krysl

Percussion

Chunyang Wang

Bass Guitar

Colin Duckworth

Guitar

Emily McIvor

Clarinet

Melissa Holtmeier

Violin

Michael Frey

Viola

Andrew Bukowinski

Cello

SECTION LEADERS

Soprano

Sarah Chamberlin
Brittany Wineinger

Alto

Michaela Baumeister
Rose Uhrich

Tenor

Dr. Donald Callen Freed
Micah Oswald

Bass

Dylan Phelps
Eric Rodine

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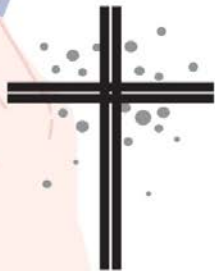
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SINGERS

SOPRANO

- Natalia Alamdari# | 5
- Anne Barker* | 25
- Sam Bates | 13
- Katya Brunette | 15
- Sarah Chamberlin | 8
- Amy Dirgo | 7
- Gina Durfee* | 6
- Miri Elliott# | 5
- Jules Ervin* | 1
- Arlo Foster-White# | 8
- Carolyn Gehringer | 13
- Dakota Ghegan | 12
- Janet Goodman | 7
- Connie Grant-Leanna | 25
- Rita Grossenstein | 18
- Sarah Hannigan# ^ | 2
- Naomi Harrison | 9
- Valerie Haynes* | 19
- Emme Hooks | 2
- Micaela Hoyer# | 23
- Sarah Keeney* | 6
- Emily Koenig-Barker* | 19
- Katie Kresha | 5
- Marcy Laack | 1
- Erin Malm# | 5
- Kaylei Margheim | 5
- Julie McCabe | 5
- Jillian McCall | 25
- Jaime Mendenhall | 1
- Hannah Lee Miller | 11
- Noelle Miscinski | 2
- Alyssa Nelson# | 18
- Crystal Olson* | 25
- Shaelyn Oswald# | 9
- Heather Pash* | 7
- Anita Pecor* | 8
- Aubrey Rawles | 2
- Deanna Reilly# | 9
- Christina Rommelfanger | 1
- Rebecca Rotert Shaw* | 11
- Stephany Rother | 2
- Laurie Salonen | 4
- Caryn Scheer | 12
- Randi Scoggins | 2
- Robin Sheldrake# ^ | 23
- Brittany Shiraki | 1
- Shannon Shultz-Thomas# | 2
- Lane Sidebottom | 1
- Melody Simpson | 4
- Katie Spicka# | 2
- Lynell Stafford | 21








- Suzy Stark | 23
- Denneal Stauffer* | 12
- Jaimee Trobough | 9
- Alex Van Cleave# | 10
- Shannon Waite* | 1
- Rachael Watkins | 7
- Maret Wibel | 5
- Brittany Wineinger# ^ | 13
- Jenna Wirth# | 4
- Emma Woods# | 2
- Samantha Zarders | 5
- Emily Ertzner | 22
- Laura Finken | 31
- Mariah Frahm* | 22
- Sarah Graff# | 5
- Jasmine Harris-Wells# | 2
- Irene Hawkins* | 11
- Katherine Higbee* | 14
- Michelle Jansen-Griswold | 17
- Gloria Jensen | 34
- Claire Katan# ^ | 11
- Madelyn Kazmierski | 9
- Erika Kirby | 8
- Taylor Knopik | 2
- Laura Leeds | 22
- Ashley Lemke* | 7
- Jess Livingston | 4
- Julie Major-Frunz | 11
- Deb Manning# | 17
- Christa McCall* | 10
- Emily McConnell | 3
- Joyce McVicker# | 30
- Nancy Mealey | 29
- Katie Miller | 2
- Lora Miller* | 6
- Linda Moorman | 2
- Forest Pierce | 7

ALTO

- Anastasia Aydt | 1
- Michaela Baumeister# ^ | 11
- Ashe Bechtel# | 10
- Jordyn Bingham | 3
- Maya Brown | 1
- Katie Bruckman | 2
- Bud Budzowski | 2
- Jeanne Cahill# | 8
- Aster Canady | 1
- Karen Davidson-Fisher* | 39
- Freya Dunham | 8
- Danielle Emsick | 17
- Rebecca Erdman | 4

MEMBERSHIP PINS

The lapel pins worn by RCMC members are symbols of pride that showcase their singing appearances. The colors correlate to the number of concerts in which the member participated.

-  1-5 Concerts
-  30-39 Concerts
-  6-9 Concerts
-  40-49 Concerts
-  10-19 Concerts
-  50+ Concerts
-  20-29 Concerts

SINGERS



Grace Piteo | 4
 Rae Poulsen | 2
 Yolenna Regmi# | 2
 Vicki Rushlau | 32
 Kjersten Schuttler | 8
 Kelsey Scovill# | 12
 Kayleen Serfass | 7
 Julie Shaffer | 8
 Julie Sharp# | 15
 Cecily Shield# | 1
 Tori Strubbe | 5
 Carol Svolos# | 10
 Sally Swoboda* | 4
 Rebecca Townley* | 1
 CeCe Tuttle# | 2
 Ami Uribe | 4
 Madison Whitmore | 1
 Ali Williams# | 2
 Elizabeth Wood | 7
 Michele Yindrick* | 27
 Alex Young# ^ | 10

TENOR

Matthew Bang | 21
 Karma LiLoLa Bustillos, Jr.* | 2
 Lucie Case | 5
 Quinn Constantino | 2

Bryan Crawford# ^ | 31
 Jared Cunningham# | 10
 Lyric Davis* | 1
 David Ellis# | 10
 Dennis Fellhauer* | 18
 Zach Fisher# | 4
 Donald Callen Freed# ^ | 15
 Cornelius Glas-Miller | 2
 Mickey Grasmick | 1
 Chole Hawkins | 17
 River Hawthorne | 10
 Christopher Hill | 11
 Jon Holloway-Wallace# ^ | 30

BASS
 David Hoylman | 4
 Arnold Martin | 1
 LuAnn McClarnon | 17
 Josh McDougall | 2
 Kayla McKain | 6
 Jerry Meis* | 28
 Ricky Murphy | 18
 Cara Neufeld | 4
 Micah Oswald# | 11
 Sara Pecor | 10
 Lee Scott# ^ | 5
 Sam St. Clair | 2
 Harper Steadman | 1
 Logan Steiner# | 10

Junie Stonewood# | 10
 Michelle Tarantino# | 22
 Rose Uhrich# ^ | 12
 Mark Van Kekerix | 42
 Shaelle Velyrre* | 5
 Mark Weber* | 3
 Robin Welchans# | 8
 Chris Wicklund# | 2
 Kaitryn Williams# | 10
 Kalden Williams | 4
 Larry Wilson* | 45

Shawn Ammon | 4
 Trent Behr* | 1
 Isaak Belongia* | 3
 Stan Brown* | 78
 Nate Bunnyfield | 4
 Dan Cameron Burgdorf# | 5
 Bill Canney | 26
 Mitch Crouse | 7
 Isaac Elliott | 2
 Brendan Gepson | 2
 Fernando Guardado | 5
 Keith Hale* | 9
 Andrew Hillmer* | 3
 Maxwell Hobday | 7

Chris Holst | 65
 Jason Hsi# ^ | 7
 Maj Jafari* | 1
 Donald-Brian Johnson* | 13
 Rowan Joy Jolkowski | 1
 Ryan King | 5
 Zeke Krejci-Hyde# | 2
 Cameron Koenig-Barker* | 24
 Andrew McCullough# | 10
 Scott Miller* | 25
 Stephen Moore | 16
 Gedi Murauskas# | 12
 Jack Noden# | 10
 RJ Noriega# | 2
 Riley O'Brien | 1
 Bastian Inara O'Gorman# | 1
 Marcus Pennell | 6
 Dylan Phelps# | 11
 John Porter# ^ | 17
 Eric Rodine# ^ | 17
 Rob Rutar* | 5
 Jacob Schultz-Cummins* | 8
 Devin Smith* | 2
 Steven Spencer | 12
 John St. Clair# | 1
 Grae Steele* | 10
 Adam Steinbach# | 17
 Brett Toay* | 18
 Cody Van Dorin# | 7
 Joachim Voss* | 4
 Adam Witte# ^ | 24
 Jordan Wood* | 1
 Tony Wredt | 14
 Phil Zellner* | 18

Featured Soloist/Performer
 ^ River's Edge
 * Leave of Absence

CONSIDERING MATTHEW SHEPARD

CRAIG HELLA JOHNSON

COMMISSIONED BY FRAN AND LARRY COLLMANN AND CONSPIRARE

Program

Prologue

Cattle, Horses, Sky and Grass

Ordinary Boy

We Tell Each Other Stories

Passion

The Fence (before)

The Fence (that night)

A Protestor

Keep It Away From Me (The Wound of Love)

Fire of the Ancient Heart

We Are All Sons

I Am Like You

The Innocence

The Fence (one week later)

Stars

In Need of Breath

Gently Rest

Deer Song (Mist of the Mountains)

The Fence (after)/The Wind

Pilgrimage

Epilogue

Meet Me Here

Thank You

All of Us

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

Prologue

Cattle, Horses, Sky and Grass

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
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, 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:

CONSIDERING MATTHEW SHEPARD

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 . . . 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 I

Laramie, southeastern Wyoming, between the Snowy Range and the Laramie Range.

Tuesday, October 6, 1998.

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 II

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 III

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.

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 . . .

Keep It Away From Me (The Wound of Love)

*don't wanna look on this
never get near
flames too raw for me
grief too deep
keep it away from me
 stay out of my heart
 stay out of my hope
some son, somebody's pain some child gone
child never mine
born to this trouble
don't wanna be born to this world
world where sometimes yes*

*world where mostly no
 the wound of love
smoke round my throat
rain down my soul
no heaven lies
keep them gone
keep them never
grief too deep, flames too raw
keep them away from me
 stay out of my heart
 stay out of my hope
don't try any old story on me
no wing no song
no cry no comfort ye
no wound ever mine
close up the gates of night
 the wound of love
keep this all away from me
 the wound of love
 you take away
 the wounds of the world
keep it away from me*

Recitation IV

***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?

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 V

**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

CONSIDERING MATTHEW SHEPARD

*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)*

*Late one night I had a glimpse
of something I recognized,
just a tiny glimpse—
I don't even like to say this out loud,
it isn't even all that true—
but I wondered for a moment,
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.*

*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?*

*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 VI

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

The Fence (one week later)

I have seen people come out here with a pocketknife and take a piece of the fence, like a relic, like an icon.

—Rev. Stephen M. Johnson, Unitarian minister

I keep still

I stand firm

I hold my ground while they lay down

*flowers and photos
prayers and poems
crystals and candles
sticks and stones*

*they come in herds
they stand and stare
they sit and sigh
they crouch and cry*

*some of them touch me
in unexpected ways
without asking permission
and then move on*

*but I don't mind
being a shrine
is better than being
the scene of the crime*

Recitation VI

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

across

scattered

the

sky

in

blinking

dismay

unable

to help

being

light

years

away

Recitation VIII

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

In Need of Breath

Matt:

My heart

Is an unset jewel

Upon the tender night

*Yearning for its dear old friend
The Moon.*

*When the Nameless One debuts again
Ten thousand facets of my being unfurl wings
And reveal such a radiance inside*

*I enter a realm divine—
I too begin to sweetly cast light,
Like a lamp,
I cast light
Through the streets of this
World.*

*My heart is an unset jewel
Upon existence
Waiting for the Friend's touch.
Tonight*

*Tonight
My heart is an unset ruby*

*Offered bowed and weeping to the Sky.
I am dying in these cold hours
For the resplendent glance of God.*

*My heart Is an unset jewel
Upon the tender night*

*My heart is an unset ruby
Offered bowed and weeping to the Sky.*

Gently Rest (Dear Lullaby)

*Gently rest now, you the child of angels
Spirit shining, resting in creation
Universe is holding you so deeply
Gently rest now, you the child of angels*

*Deer beside you, hear your brother breathing
With you always in your starry shelter
Dreaming in the holy home of wonder
Universe is holding you so deeply
Light of every sun you felt around you
Blessing bringing our own hearts of longing
Spirit sleeping in the arms of ages
Gently rest now, you the child of angels*

*Universe now dreaming you so deeply
Spirit shining, home within creation
Dreaming in eternal light of wonder
Gently rest now, you the child of angels
Spirit sleeping in the arms of angels
Gently rest . . .*

Recitation IX

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.

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?
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?*

Recitation X

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*

*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.

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
The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want*

*I walk to the fence with beauty behind me
Yit'gadal v'yit' kadash (may his great name
grow)*

*I walk to the fence with beauty above me
Om Mani Padme Ham (Om! the jewel in the
lotus, hum!)*

*I walk to the fence with beauty below me
Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit*

*I reach the fence surrounded by beauty
wail of wind, cry of hawk*

*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 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 the 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 . . .*

Thank You

Choir: Thank you

Choir: Thank you Thank you, thank you

*Hohou, hohou (Arahapo—thank you)
Yontonwe (Huron—thank you)*

*Hohou, Yontonwe . . .
Thank you*

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,*

CONSIDERING MATTHEW SHEPARD

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.

[Chorale:]
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.

**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



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Laughter
& Music.

And It's
ALL True!



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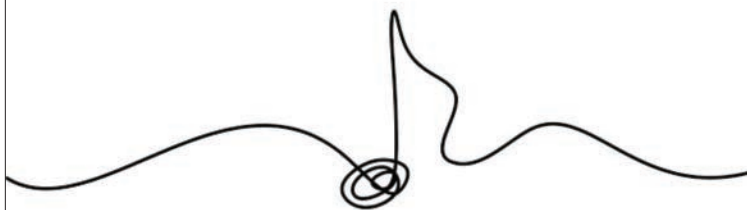
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85th & Maple



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SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

FOUNDING MEMBERS for bravely putting into motion their dream of a more inclusive Omaha.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS, COMMITTEE CHAIRS, AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS who donate their time to ensure that our organization continues to thrive through every season.

KEITH HALE AND CLAIRE KATAN for volunteering many hours in support of our marketing and social media and helping us spread our message of inclusivity as far as the internet reaches.

MICHELLE JANSEN-GRISWOLD for arranging the standing chart for singers for the 25-26 season and simplifying tech week planning for RCMC and our singers.

NANCY MEALEY for coordinating volunteers to setup and strike RCMC's rehearsal space every week and to all of our singers who arrive early to help.

CHOLE HAWKINS for running the weekly raffle fundraiser during rehearsals in support of RCMC's GALA Fund.

CHRIS ACKER OF MIXING ROOM STUDIOS AND HANK KUHLMANN for creating the pre-concert greeting.

MADI ELLIS, DANIELLE DAVIDSON, AND ANITA PECOR for volunteering to serve dinner to singers during Tech Week.

CHUCK MARTENS AND BRENDA MOSKOVITS for volunteering at the RCMC info table at tonight's concert.

BUD BUDZOWSKI, LUCIE CASE, MITCH CROUSE, GEDI MURASKAS, RICKY MURPHY, LOGAN STEINER, AND CAROL SVOLOS for volunteering to support concert preparations during an already busy tech week!

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, PASTOR MORITA TRUMAN, AND STAFF for providing RCMC with weekly rehearsal space and storage for RCMC's music library and other materials critical to our success as an organization.

OMAHA SYMPHONY AND UNO SCHOOL OF MUSIC for use of their equipment and percussion instrumentation for tonight's performance.

MIKE HOGAN AND AMY SHARPE for enabling us to get the word out about RCMC and our mission to your KIOS and WOWT audiences.

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT OMAHA BARBARA WEITZ COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT CENTER for providing space and use of virtual meeting equipment for RCMC's monthly Board meetings.

GORDON KRENTZ, DEB MANNING, AMY CAREY, JAIMEE TROBOUGH, KEITH HALE, CLAIRE KATAN and board members for leading the planning for RCMC's fundraising gala, Momentum, held on March 28th.

ALL OF OUR DONORS AND PATRONS for another successful Momentum gala. Whether you attended, donated, bid on an item, or are here tonight, we are so grateful for your ongoing support.

NATE DODGE for providing RCMC with storage space for our stage decorations and other large items.

DEB MANNING for proofreading and editing this particularly long and important program.

STANDING FOR MANY. SINGING AS ONE.

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As a non-profit organization, we rely on the generosity of our allies to help us continue our mission to create exceptional musical experiences to support diversity, inspire change, and empower communities. We are so grateful for the support of our Producer Circle of Giving. To become a member and take advantage of our donor benefits, make a donation online at rcmc.org.

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RYAN-KNICELY SCHOLARSHIP FUND

The Ryan-Knicely Scholarship Fund was created to ensure that there are no financial barriers to being a member of the Chorus for anyone who wishes to sing. Chorus members in need of financial assistance can apply to the Board of Directors for help from the Fund with covering Chorus-related expenses.

Contributions from January 1, 2025 - April 15, 2026

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SUPPORT THE ENDOWMENT

The River City Mixed Chorus Endowment Fund was established by the Board of Directors in 2015. Administered by the Omaha Community Foundation, the Endowment Fund is a resource that will help ensure the long-term financial health of the Chorus. The Fund is set up so that the principal is not used, but proceeds from the principal will help fund the annual budget.

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OMAHA TO DES MOINES AND BACK AGAIN.

Approximately 260 miles on an unexceptional stretch of I-80 that left plenty of time for life-altering discussions, six friends went to see the Twin Cities Gay Men’s Chorus’ one-night-only performance in Des Moines. The year was 1984 — the same year that GALA Choruses, the Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses, was founded.

That night changed everything.

On the drive home, the friends discussed the need to spread the same messages of love, unity, inclusion, acceptance, and empowerment within their own community. They organized The Mid City Chorus with three other friends, nine men and one woman, and had their first performance at a variety show for the Metropolitan Community Church of Omaha. The reception was overwhelming. Their second performance was a Christmas concert at The Max. Around that time, the founding members officially changed the name of the Chorus to River City Mixed Chorus (RCMC) and solidified their place in GALA.

Since our humble beginnings, we’ve grown to more than 160 singing members, with hundreds of performances and sold-out holiday shows. We’re determined to make you laugh, make you think, and, more importantly, give you a sense of belonging.

HOW GAY CHORUSES CAME TO BE

There are times when unimaginable acts of tragedy unleash our inner courage and fuel us to act. This was such a time.

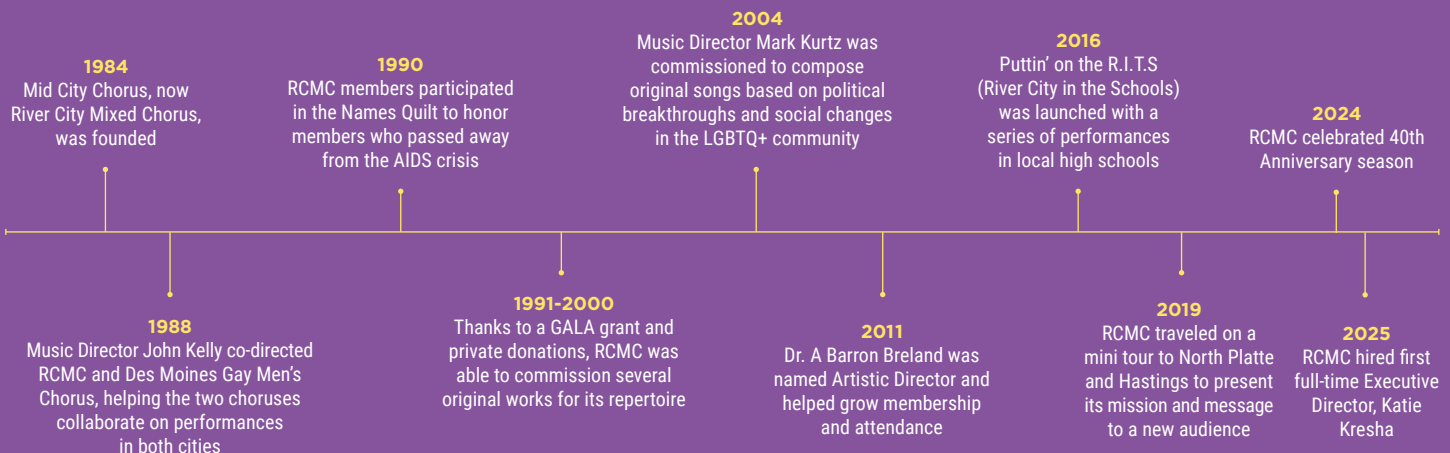
In the fall of 1978, San Francisco Supervisor Harvey Milk, the first openly gay politician in American history, and Mayor George Moscone were heartlessly assassinated in San Francisco City Hall. The event sent shockwaves through the gay and lesbian community. That evening, the San Francisco Gay Men’s Chorus gathered on the steps of City Hall and held it’s very first public performance. At the time, the word “gay” in a chorus name was unheard of.

Three years later, the San Francisco Gay Men’s Chorus toured the US, forever changing the lives of millions of people and inspiring the formation of many new gay and lesbian choruses.

By 1984, fourteen of those choruses bonded together to found what is now the largest gay and lesbian choral organization in the world —the Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses (GALA Choruses). GALA Choruses has since grown to more than 10,000 singers from more than 190 choruses, all sharing in the common mission of empowering LGBTQ+ Choruses as they change the world through song.

It was because of that fateful day and heartbreaking tragedy that many choruses were able to find their voices.

TIMELINE



Italian, meaning “final song.” In our hearts they will always live. Their love, their voices, and their smiles are forever imprinted in our minds. The River City Mixed Chorus remembers past members who have sung their canto ultimo.

Chuck	Fritz	Peggy Ryan	Michael Dantzle
Alan	Steven	Rich Ketter	John Hall
Chip	Jonathan D. Cole	Betty Dorr	Tim Smith
Jerry Kruse	Ronnie	Nan Knicely	Frank McKee
Jerry Peck	Bruce Beyersdorf	Alexandra Nather	Judy Hancock
Johnathan	Mark Farmer	Douglas Steinkruger	Mark Ledbetter
John	Aleta Fenceroy	Anne Boyle	Deb Melichar
Marilyn	Mike Maciejewski	Duane Lundeen	Wendy Wright
Norm	Elmorine McKiernan	Peggy Zellner	Vik Dainauskas
Tim	Aramando E. Andrade	Martin Hanna	Susan Adams
Joel	Kathy England	Dennis Pierce	Nick Behrens
Brandon	Craig Boetger	Brian D. Adams	Brent Thomsen
Vance	Pat Phalen	John Coe	





RIVER CITY
MIXED CHORUS



LOVED THE SHOW?

Found yourself bobbing your head and tapping your feet to the music? Pictured yourself on stage singing with our talented crew? You're in luck; we saved a spot just for you.

Our next round of auditions will be held April 26, 2026 at First United Methodist Church Omaha. Email us at audition@rcmc.org to reserve your spot.

In the meantime, you can peruse our commonly asked questions at rcmc.org.

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CONSIDERING MATTHEW SHEPARD

Considering Matthew Shepard

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2. Ordinary Boy © Craig Hella Johnson / From The Meaning of Matthew, by Judy Shepard p. 206. / + I Love Poem by Matt Shepard © by Judy Shepard. Used by kind permission.

3. We Tell Each Other Stories We Tell Each Other Stories © Craig Hella Johnson

5. The Fence (before)* Lesléa Newman

7. The Fence (that night) Material reproduced from Hildegard of Bingen from Symphonia: A Critical Edition of the "Symphonia Armonie Celestium Revelationum" (Symphony of the Harmony of Celestial Revelations), Second Edition, translated by Barbara Newman. © 1988, 1998 by Cornell University. Used by permission of the translator, Barbara Newman, and publisher, Cornell University Press. / The Fence (that night)* Lesléa Newman

8. A Protestor * Lesléa Newman / Additional italicized text by Craig Hella Johnson

10. Keep it Away From Me (The Wound of Love) by Michael Dennis Browne and Craig Hella Johnson © 2015 by Michael Dennis Browne and Craig Hella Johnson. Used by kind permission. / Gabriela Mistral

12. Fire of the Ancient Heart by Michael Dennis Browne and Craig Hella Johnson © 2015 by Michael Dennis Browne and Craig Hella Johnson. Used by kind permission. / ^Genesis 4:10 / #Rumi / -William Blake. With thanks to Tom Burritt – percussion consultation and special arrangement

PG **14. Stray Birds** Stray Birds by Rabindranath Tagore

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15. We Are All Sons (part 1) by Michael Dennis Browne © 2015 by Michael Dennis Browne. Used by kind permission.

16. I Am Like You/We Are All Sons (part 2) © Craig Hella Johnson

17. The Innocence by Michael Dennis Browne and Craig Hella Johnson © 2015 by Michael Dennis Browne and Craig Hella Johnson. Used by kind permission.

19. The Fence (one week later)* Lesléa Newman

21. Stars* Lesléa Newman / Dennis Shepard Statement to the Court

22. In Need of Breath Hafiz lyrics from "In Need of the Breath" from the Penguin (New York) publication The Gift: Poems by Hafiz by Daniel Ladinsky. Copyright © 1999 Daniel Ladinsky and used with his permission.

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30. Cattle, Horses, Sky and Grass (reprise) Cattle, Horses, Sky and Grass by Sue Wallis © by Estate of Sue Wallis. Used by kind permission. / Please Come to Wyoming by John D. Nesbitt © by John D. Nesbitt. Used by kind permission.

Recitations I-X compiled from news reports and crafted by Craig Hella Johnson and Michael Dennis Browne.

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“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 twentyone-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.

PG
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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.

CONSIDERING MATTHEW SHEPARD

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.

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Considering Matthew Shepard was developed with the support of Conspirare. Please visit conspirare.org to learn more about this project and learn more about the many individuals and organizations who support this work.

Conspirare, The Matthew Shepard Foundation, and KLRU-TV, Austin PBS are partnering to ensure that Considering Matthew Shepard reaches as many people as possible on the stage and screen. The Matthew Shepard Foundation has provided ongoing support in outreach and project development. Conspirare and KLRU-TV, Austin PBS have co-produced a Considering Matthew Shepard television special commemorating the 20th anniversary of Matthew Shepard's passing. KLRU profiled Craig Hella Johnson's creative process in their documentary series *Arts in Context* (available at artsincontext.org). The film has been accompanied by outreach and engagement programs.






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