



UMERI

DRAKE UNIVERSITY ALUMNI CHOIR

AIMEE BECKMANN-COLLIER, CONDUCTOR

CONSIDERING MATTHEW SHEPARD

by Craig Hella Johnson

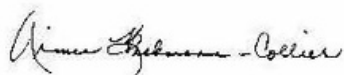
Saturday, June 4th, 7:30 PM
Sheslow Auditorium
Drake University

Notes from ABC

I have conducted hundreds of meaningful, beautiful, terrifying, and powerful pieces of music in my long career as a conductor. But, truthfully, few pieces have touched me as deeply as *Considering Matthew Shepard*. Although it could be accused of overreach, with its enormous span of musical styles, structural elements modeled on the passions of J.S. Bach, and texts written by such diverse poets as Hildegard of Bingen (twelfth century Benedictine abbess), Hafez (fourteenth century Persian poet), and modern writers including Lesléa Newman, Michael Dennis Browne, and John Nesbitt (a cowboy poet), as well as recitations shaped from news accounts of Matthew Shepard's death, its power to assist us in considering a range of ideas and feelings is remarkable. Indeed, the word "considering" provides an important clue to both the strength of the work and its goals.

Considering Matthew Shepard uses the death of a single college student, who would probably have lived his life in relative anonymity, but for the horrific manner of his death, as a lens to consider the origin of violence as a companion to hatred; the recurrence of "man's inhumanity to man;" the prevalence of "otherizing," not just in history, but in contemporary life; the particular bigotry faced by members of the LGBTQ+ community; our common humanity; the connection (or disconnect) between humans and the natural world; the importance of "entering the story" to build understanding and empathy; and the nature of reconciliation.

In listening to this piece, you may be shocked, angered, saddened, exhilarated, made uneasy, inspired, and even, perhaps, led to new insights. The purpose of this oratorio is not to present lovely sounds, catchy rhythms, or dramatic musical effects, to overwhelm the audience with textual cleverness or sonic surprises. Its purpose truly is to inspire change by focusing on the horrific effects of hate and the redeeming power of love.



About the Music

Called a “fusion” oratorio, this piece uses an amazing amalgamation of musical styles and influences, including blues, gospel, jazz, chant, Broadway, country/western, minimalism, hymn-like passages, and aleatoric elements, along with straight-up quotations from the works of such diverse composers as Benjamin Britten, J.S. Bach, and Manuel de Falla, to engage contemporary listeners.

Its unusual instrumental ensemble of violin, viola, cello, bass, electric and acoustic guitars, clarinet, percussion, and piano expands the possible musical vocabulary, creating a soundscape that is at once contemporary, attentive to historical compositional structures and styles, and capable of connecting the listener to musical ideas across space and time.

About the Texts

The majority of the sung texts come from a collection of poems called *October Mourning: A Song for Matthew Shepard* by Lesléa Newman. Michael Dennis Browne, professor emeritus of poetry at the University of Minnesota and libretto creator for illustrious composers such as Stephen Paulus, wrote additional texts specifically for *Considering Matthew Shepard*. He and the composer shaped the structure of the work by including texts by Matt Shepard, his parents, Wyoming poet John D. Nesbitt, and Sue Wallis, a member of the Wyoming House of Representatives, as well as Rabindranath Tagore, Hafez, and Hildegard of Bingen. The piece also contains excerpts from Kaddish, the Jewish prayer of mourning, Psalms from the Jewish Scripture, quotations from Christian Scripture, and a Buddhist mantra. The recitations are compilations of news reports crafted by Browne and Johnson.

Lesléa Newman’s introduction to her collection of poems provides context for an understanding of the oratorio and challenges performers and listeners to work every day to replace bigotry, prejudice, and hatred with listening, compassion, and love.

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 pm—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.

OCTOBER MOURNING: A SONG FOR MATTHEW SHEPARD. Copyright © 2012 by Lesléa Newman. Reproduced by permission of the publisher, Candlewick Press, Somerville, MA.

About the Structure of *Considering Matthew Shepard*

This piece is an oratorio; that is, a large-scale musical composition for choir, orchestra, and soloists. Unlike an opera, which contains the same elements, an oratorio is not staged and thus doesn't include costumes and props. Historically, the chorus has played a central role in oratorios. Unlike operas, the subject matter of oratorios is sacred. A musical form that is a subset of the oratorio genre is the Passion, which uses the Gospel accounts of Christ's life from the Last Supper to the Crucifixion as the basis for composition. Christ's passion was a favorite subject in Medieval dramas and there are numerous examples of plainchant settings of these Scriptural texts, dating back to the fifth century. Polyphonic settings of the passion texts were gradually introduced in the late Renaissance and the Passion genre began to take shape with elements that remained intact for centuries, including the use of a narrator, a Christ figure, a variety of kinds of musical writing (solos, duets and small ensembles, choral movements, instrumental interludes), contrasts between bold and meditative moments, the use of chorale tunes, and the central role of the "turba" or chorus. J.S. Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* and *St. John Passion* are perhaps the two most famous examples of this genre.

Composer Craig Hella Johnson based the structure of this oratorio on Bach's Passions and all of the elements discussed above are present in *Considering Matthew Shepard*. Johnson bookends the piece with a quotation from Bach's *Prelude in C Major*, from Book I of the *Well-Tempered Clavier*. In this piece, the narrator is a speaker, rather than a singer. All of the narrations were crafted by Craig Hella Johnson and Michael Dennis Browne from actual news accounts of Matt Shepard's murder. Soloists from the choir provide commentary on the murder and its aftermath, as well as reflection on various images and themes. In addition, members of the choir are often called upon to sing in trios, quartets, and semi-choruses, as well as treble and bass clef choruses. This results in a huge variety of musical textures and that variety is further enhanced by the musical styles employed in solo, small group, and large-scale movements, such as country/western (#1, 5, 33), blues (#10), Broadway and pop (multiple movements), chant-like (#7, 16), hymnody (#32), and minimalism (multiple movements).

About Images that are Central to the Work

Five images are central to the work:

- **the fence**, which forms a continuing connection throughout the work. Each “Fence movement” (#5, 7, 19, 28) takes the listener deeper into the story and provides abundant opportunities to “consider” the effect of Matthew’s life and death; various responses to his murder, both shameful and beautiful; and the consequences of hate, love, remembrance, and healing.
- **evergreen**, which symbolizes faith and hope and positive change
- **wind**, which is associated with the landscape and environment of Matt’s beloved Wyoming, and symbolizes both the cruelty of his murder and the cleansing reconciliation made possible by the response to it
- **deer**, which stands for both innocence and the connection to nature that was such a central part of the life of Matthew Shepard and his family
- **fire**, which serves as a connective element among those who mourned Matt, those who felt drawn to honor his memory, and all those for whom the eternal flame of love is central to their understanding of life

About Matthew Shepard's Impact

Matt Shepard’s death was viewed as a hate crime and it precipitated discussion and legislation at both state and national levels. In 2009 Congress passed the *Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act*. His murder inspired conferences, discussions, a scholarship program, and numerous works of art, including *The Laramie Project*. His ashes are interred at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C.

Now, from the vantage point of almost a quarter century later, Matthew’s complicated life and death, as well as all that has taken place in our country with regard to those who are seen as “other,” provide us with an opportunity, through this oratorio, for reflection, reconciliation, and resolution. As we consider our individual and collective relationship with those who are marginalized, whether they are LGBTQ+, people of color, immigrants, poor, or simply people whose experiences and faces are unlike our own, perhaps we can rearrange our world view from arguments over ideas and concepts into a world of encounter, relationship, and presence to the face of the other. As Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas said, “the only thing that really converts people is ‘the face of the other,’ that transforms us, converts us, and gives us our deepest identity.

Quotations that may be helpful in your own consideration

- **Richard Rohr:** The suffering that we carry is our solidarity with the one, universal longing of all humanity, and thus it can teach us great compassion and patience with both ourselves and others.
- **Stephanie Spellers:** Solidarity is love crossing the borders drawn by self-centrism, in order to enter into the situation of the other, for the purpose of mutual relationship and struggle that heals us all...Solidarity is the voice that finally comprehends: "You are not the same as me, but part of you lives in me. Your freedom and mine were always inextricably entwined."
- **Richard Rohr:** The root of violence is the illusion of separation...from being one with everyone and everything. When we don't know we are connected, we will invariably resort to some sort of violence to get the dignity and power we lack.
- **Oscar Romero:** I will not tire of declaring that if we really want an effective end to violence we must remove the violence that lies at the root of all violence: structural violence, social injustice, exclusion of citizens from the management of the country, repression...the desperate violence of oppressed persons is not overcome with one-sided laws, with weapons, or with superior force...As long as there is not greater justice among us, there will always be outbreaks of revolution.
- **Pamela Cooper-White:** All violence begins with the personal, with the I, and with a point of decision, a crossing of a line, where each of us choose momentarily to view another living being as an It rather than a Thou. The ultimate purpose of each act of violence, each reduction of another person from a Thou to an It, is to control the other...Our choices matter, even on what seems like a small scale. They have resonance in the universe.
- **David Brooks:** The fact is, moral behavior doesn't start with having the right beliefs. Moral behavior starts with an act—the act of seeing the full humanity of other people. Moral behavior is not about having the right intellectual concepts in your head. It's about seeing other people with the eyes of the heart, seeing them in their full experience, suffering with their suffering, walking with them on their paths. Morality starts with the quality of attention we cast upon another. If you look at people with a detached, emotionless gaze, it doesn't really matter what your beliefs are, because you have morally disengaged. You have perceived a person not as a full human but as a thing, as a vague entity toward which the rules of morality do not apply.

CONSIDERING MATTHEW SHEPARD

by Craig Hella Johnson

Prologue

Cattle, Horses, Sky and Grass
Ordinary Boy
We Tell Each Other Stories

Passion

Recitation 1
The Fence (before)
Recitation 2
The Fence (that night)
Recitation 3
A Protestor
Keep it Away from Me (The Wound of Love)
Recitation 4
Fire of the Ancient Heart
Recitation 5
Stray Birds
We Are All Sons
I Am Like You
The Innocence
Recitation 6
The Fence (one week later)
Recitation 7
Stars
Recitation 8
In Need of Breath
Recitation 9
Deer Song (Mist on the Mountains)
Recitation 10
The Fence (after)/The Wind
Pilgrimage

Epilogue

Meet Me Here
All of Us
Reprise: This Chant of life (Cattle, Horses, Sky and Grass)

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, 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 . . .

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 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 song 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)

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 VII

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.

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.

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 . . .*

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.

[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.

SUPPORT

If you have enjoyed this evening's concert, we hope you'll consider donating to *Umeri*.

You may donate online at <https://alumni.drake.edu/umeri> or give your contribution to singers stationed at the doors following the concert.

**Contributors who have made this
performance possible include:**

Ann Anderson
Darren Henson
Bob Scarborough
Joyce Smith
David Watson
and two anonymous donors

ABOUT THE CHOIR

Founded in November 2019, *Umeri* is an ensemble of alumni of the Drake Choir, Drake University. Singers who have participated in the choir since its inception graduated from Drake in 1992 through 2022, majored in a wide variety of academic disciplines, and are contributing to the Greater Des Moines community in many professional areas, including education, health care, public relations, finance, marketing, accounting, sports administration, and the arts. Among their employers are a number of school districts, as well as the Meredith Corporation, Wells Fargo, Nationwide Insurance, US Cellular, Des Moines Performing Arts, the Iowa Arts Council, Iowa Public Radio, ACLU of Iowa, Principal Financial Group, Drake University, Target, the Iowa Events Center, Make-a-Wish Iowa, the Iowa Center for Economic Success, the Iowa High School Girls Athletic Union, the West Des Moines Chamber of Commerce, and Veterans Hospital of Central Iowa.

Umeri, which takes its name from the Latin word for “shoulders,” because Drake Choir members were frequently reminded that they stood on the shoulders of those who came before them, is a project-based ensemble. The choir rehearses 6-7 times preceding a concert, thus requiring a high level of musical independence and advance preparation on the part of each member. *Umeri* presents three concerts per year. For further information, contact Dr. Aimee Beckmann-Collier (aimee.beckmann-collier@drake.edu)

umeri

DRAKE UNIVERSITY ALUMNI CHOIR

AIMEE BECKMANN-COLLIER, CONDUCTOR

SUSAN IHNEN, ACCOMPANIST

Soprano

Kelly Friesleben
Anna Gebhardt
Meredith Moore
Heather Nail
Gabrielle Sarcone
Kelly Schnackenberg
Elizabeth Watson

Alto

Jo Dikkers
Kayleigh Koester
Emma Ksiazak
Maggie Parker
Samantha Peick
Betsy White

Tenor

Peyton Braun
Casey Cervený
Seth Hammond
Hunter Johnson
Justin Scheel
Scott Smidt
Tanner Smith

Bass

Benjamin Brodkey
Jacob Fross
Robert Graziano
Ian Ksiazak
Avery Luepker
Thomas Riordan
Ben Schultz
Bryn Start

Instrumentalists

John Helmich, violin
Rebecca Vieker, viola
George Work, cello
Steve Charlson, bass
Clarence Padilla, clarinet
Seth Hedquist, guitars
Robert Meunier, percussion
Susan Ihnen, piano

Auxiliary percussion for *Fire of the Ancient Heart*

Caitlyn Friesleben
Chad Friesleben
Chris Reck
Cooper Van Devander
Thomas Yang

Acknowledgments

Rick Chitty
David Collier
Chad Friesleben
Joni Kinnan
Jacob Lemons
Clarence Padilla
Gabbi Sarcone and Blue Frog Marketing

Considering Matthew Shepard

Text authors and publication credits.

All music composed by Craig Hella Johnson © 2016.

1. Cattle, Horses, Sky and Grass Compilation with additional text © Craig Hella Johnson / Please Come to Wyoming by John D. Nesbitt © by John D. Nesbitt. Used by kind permission. / Cattle, Horses, Sky and Grass by Sue Wallis © by Estate of Sue Wallis. Used by kind permission. Quoting Prelude in C Major Book 1, Well-Tempered Clavier by J. S. Bach
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
14. Stray Birds Stray Birds by Rabindranath Tagore
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.
23. Deer Song by Michael Dennis Browne and Craig Hella Johnson © 2015 by Michael Dennis Browne and Craig Hella Johnson. Used by kind permission.
24. The Fence (after)/The Wind* Lesléa Newman
25. Pilgrimage* Lesléa Newman
26. Meet Me Here © Craig Hella Johnson
27. Thank You "Thanks" from THE RAIN IN THE TREES by W. S. Merwin. Copyright © 1988 by W. S. Merwin, used by permission of The Wylie Agency LLC. Used by permission of Alfred A. Knopf, a division of Random House, Inc. Used by permission of Alfred A. Knopf, an imprint of the Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC. All rights reserved.
28. All of Us by Michael Dennis Browne and Craig Hella Johnson © 2015 by Michael Dennis Browne and Craig Hella Johnson. Used by kind permission. / + from Divine Comedy, from the Paradiso by Dante, adapted by Michael Dennis Browne
29. 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.

*All works authored by Lesléa Newman are from OCTOBER MOURNING: A SONG FOR MATTHEW SHEPARD. Copyright © 2012 by Lesléa Newman. Reproduced by permission of the publisher, Candlewick Press, Somerville, MA. Selections used by permission of Curtis Brown, Ltd. Copyright © 2012. All Rights Reserved.