

A rustic wooden fence made of weathered logs and branches runs across the middle of the frame. The background is a vast field of purple flowers, likely lavender, stretching to the horizon under a bright, slightly hazy sky. The overall mood is peaceful and pastoral.

ORLANDO SINGS

CONSIDERING MATTHEW SHEPARD

SOLARIA SINGERS

ANDREW MINEAR, CONDUCTOR

KATRINA PLOOF, DIRECTOR

JUNE 1 | 8 PM & JUNE 2 | 2 PM

ALEXIS & JIM PUGH THEATER

THE DR. PHILLIPS CENTER

A LETTER FROM THE CONDUCTOR

Dear Friends of Orlando Sings,

"We've been walking through the darkness... For too long a time."

I will never forget waking up the morning of June 12, 2016 to notifications of friends and former students marking themselves as safe on social media. To hear the name Orlando, my magical hometown, the City Beautiful, associated with the deadliest mass shooting in United States history put a pit in my stomach. I watched the news coverage that evening and wept for the shattered lives of victims and their families, for my friends in the LGBTQ+ community and the pain and fear they were feeling, and I wept over the loss of my (mis)perceived distance from the hatred and violence of the world. *"Where O where has the innocence gone?"*



We had made so much progress towards equality since 1998, when Matthew Shepard became the victim of one of the most notorious anti-gay hate crimes in the nation's history. The tragedy led a decade later to the passage of the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act in 2009. Almost exactly one year before Pulse, the United States Supreme Court granted same-sex couples in all 50 states the right to full, equal recognition under the law. Progress is certainly not steady. *"You ask too much of us. You ask too little."*

How do we respond to tragedy? We must begin again. In the days that followed the Pulse tragedy, I was so proud of how our city came together with massive showings of hope and love. We can love one another and build a community where *"all of us"* find belonging. *"Only in the Love, Love that lifts us up."*

Today as the dehumanizing effect of "othering" fractures our communities and poisons our political discourse, it seems especially important that we are presenting art and music that is about reconciliation and seeing ourselves in each other. Choral music is a powerful medium to remind us of our common humanity. I hope our performance of *Considering Matthew Shepard* reverberates beyond the walls of the theater and out into our community and world.

Thank you for being part of the community we are building together. At Orlando Sings, everybody is welcome. Together we strive to create spaces where everyone can be fully themselves and to build an inclusive culture that values and celebrates the diverse voices and life experiences of our community. Our mission is to elevate the choral art form and enrich the cultural fabric of Florida through extraordinary shared experiences for audiences and singers. If today's experience inspires you, please consider donating at orlandosings.org. Thank you so much for your support of the arts and professional choral music in Orlando.

Andrew Minear, D.M.A.
Artistic and Executive Director

SPECIAL THANKS TO

All Saints Episcopal Church
The Garden Theater
Philip King
Peter & Jennifer Rodrigues

ORLANDO SINGS ANNUAL CAMPAIGN

Help us create a thriving choral community by
giving at orlandosings.org/support!

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**In memory of Ashley Minear*

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Yani Araujo
John Cavazos
Lex Goity
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MATTHEW SHEPARD

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Daniel Cortes

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Scan the QR code for artist biographies

CONSIDERING MATTHEW SHEPARD

CRAIG HELLA JOHNSON

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 Caspar, 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

*Frère 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 and 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
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 split-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 am. 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! [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

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: 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
grief 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.
Their trial began on October 26, 1999;
both were convicted of murder and
sentenced to two consecutive life
sentences.*

We Are All Sons

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

we are all sons of fathers and mothers
we are all sons
we are all rivers
the roar of waters, we are all sons

I Am Like You

I am like you
Aaron
and Russell

When I think of you (and honestly I
don't like to think about you)

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

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
I 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.

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

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 hoped 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 Hum
[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 . . .

Thanks

Choir: Thank you
Thank you, thank you
Hohou, hohou [Arahapo—thank you]
Yontonwe [Huron—thank you]

signs of You everywhere,
signs in the darkness
signs in the fires
signs of You in the hurt streets
signs in the tents, the tunnels
signs of You in the tiniest beating heart
thank you our cry to be sung

even in this rain
out of the mouths of visions torn open
out of abandoned tongues
out of the mouths of children lost in
the furnaces
out of the bloody lullabies
out of the beaks of buried eagles
the forests wrapped in rags

wires of lightning loose and writhing
out of skies as stained as the seas
we cry our song to be sung

even in this rain
sit with her now, old earth
hear her stories
all we have already been given
all we have yet to do
on watch
keeping our hands in the wounds

even in this rain
how might we ever say to You
we have ceased to dream
never forgetting
remembering how every breathing
remembers
to build the world
thank you our cry to be sung

nobody
no one
turned away
nobody
no one
unworthy
nobody
no one
ashamed

yes each silence
yes each radiance
yes each shadow
yes each praise
mind into heart, mind into heart
each dream walks on
even in this rain
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,
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.
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.

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.*

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

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

That keynote speaker was me.

I never forgot what happened in Laramie,

and around the tenth anniversary of Matthew Shepard's death, I found myself thinking more and more about him. And so I began writing a series of poems, striving to create a work of art that explores the events surrounding Matthew Shepard's murder in order to gain a better understanding of their impact on myself and the world.

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

This book is my side of the story.

While the poems in this book are inspired by actual events, they do not in any way represent the statements, thoughts, feelings, opinions, or attitudes of any actual person. The statements, thoughts, feelings, opinions, and attitudes conveyed belong to me. All monologues contained

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

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

CREATIVE TEAM

DR. ANDREW MINEAR is the founding Artistic and Executive Director of Orlando Sings (orlandosings.org) where he conducts the Orlando Sings Symphonic Chorus and the professional vocal ensemble Solaria. Minear also serves as Director of Music Ministry at All Saints Episcopal Church of Winter Park, FL. Dr. Minear's passion for expressive music-making has been cultivated through over two decades of experience in children's, church, community, middle school, high school, university, and professional choral settings.



Director **KATRINA PLOOF** is a native of Maine, and the daughter of a music teacher and a vocalist. Ms. Ploof performed throughout the U.S. and Canada as an actor, and shifted to directing in the 1980s. Directing credits include works for many professional, educational and community theatres including Tampa Players, Ocala Civic Theatre, Theatre South, Columbia Artists, Theatre Winter Haven, Civic Theatre of Central Florida, Ice House Theatre, and the Orlando-UCF Shakespeare Theatre. Ms. Ploof has been helping to tell Matthew Shepard's story since it became

international news. As an intern with Tectonic Theater Project, Ms. Ploof was involved in the creation of the 2000 play *The Laramie Project*.

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