



Joby Talbot

# SUNSTONE

Piedra de sol

conspirare

Craig Hella Johnson

# Piedra de sol (Sunstone)

Joby Talbot

Commissioned for Conspirare by the Joel Brauer Fund for New Music and the BBC Singers

## Creation

1. I. ...a crystal willow, a poplar of water...  
...*un sauce de cristal, un chopo de agua...* 5:34
2. II. ...a single presence like a sudden song...  
...*una presencia como un canto subito...* 3:15
3. III. ...I travel between galleries of sound...  
...*voy entre galerías de sonidos...* 1:23
4. IV. ...I travel your body as if through the world...  
...*voy por tu cuerpo como por el mundo...* 3:44
5. V. ...your skirt of corn ripples and sings...  
...*tu falda de maíz ondula y canta...* 4:33
6. VI. ...endless corridors of memory...  
...*corredores sin fin de la memoria...* 4:48
7. VII. ...I search for a real moment, as alive as a bird...  
...*busco una fecha viva como un pájaro...* 5:33
8. VIII. ...writing of fire on a slab of jade...  
...*escritura de fuego sobre el jade...* 3:54

## Despair

9. IX. ...there is nothing in front of me, only a moment salvaged from a dream...  
...*no hay nada frente a mí, solo un instante rescatado esta noche...* 4:02
10. X. ...while time snaps shut its fan...  
...*mientras el tiempo cierra su abanico...* 3:06

11. XI. ...oh life to be lived and already lived...  
...oh vida por vivir y ya vivida... 1:27
12. XII. ...facing an afternoon of saltpetre and stone...  
...frente a la tarde de salitre y piedra... 6:56
13. XIII. ...there is nothing left of me but a gaping wound...  
...no hay nada en mí sino una larga herida... 2:11

## Salvation

14. XIV. ...in clarity...  
...de claridad... 4:44
15. XV. ...life and death make a pact in you, lady of the night...  
...vida y muerte pactan en ti, señora de la noche... 2:34
16. XVI. ...open your hand lady who sows the seeds that are days...  
...abre le mano, señora de semillas que son días... 2:22
17. XVII. ...gateway of being: awaken me and dawn...  
...puerta del ser: abre tu ser, despierta... 4:05
18. XVIII. ...I want to go on, to go further...  
...quiero seguir, ir más allá... 2:56
19. XIX. ...a crystal willow, a poplar of water...  
...un sauce de cristal, un chopo de agua... 3:08

Total playing time 70:36

## Octavio Paz and *Piedra de sol* (1957)

Octavio Paz was born in 1914, ground zero year of the Mexican Revolution, when the troops of agrarian leaders Emiliano Zapata and Francisco Villa entered Mexico City, shaking the foundations of the Mexican Belle Époque. For many historians, 1914 marked the true end of the nineteenth century. In Mexico, this agrarian revolution and the rise of urban modernity would together shape the course of the twentieth century, the century of Octavio Paz, who died just two years before the dawn of our own twenty-first century.

When Paz died, the vox populi remarked that, finally, “la literatura mexicana descansa en Paz” (“Mexican literature rests in peace”). The wordplay was far from innocent. Paz had been an essential figure in Mexican society, one of the principal architects of modern national culture. In addition to his prolific oeuvre, Paz shaped the course of Mexican culture and literature by founding and editing influential literary journals such as *Plural* (1971-1976), and *Vuelta* (1976-1998). His impact extended through public interventions, through his prominent role in literary production, and through his career as a diplomat.

Some of Paz’s essays are deeply rooted in national concerns, most notably *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (1950), a widely quoted treatise on Mexican identity in which he weaves together myth and history to examine how the legacy of colonization shaped the national psyche. Yet at the core of Paz’s thought lies a sustained reflection on literature, particularly poetry. His poetic work investigates the role of poetry as a distinct, non-referential language that paradoxically illuminates the hidden meaning of the world. One of his most significant essays on the subject is *El arco y la lira* (1956, translated as *The Bow and the Lyre*), where he articulates his philosophy of poetic language, explores its connection to society, and offers readings of key modern poets, including Walt Whitman. In the prologue of this book, Paz wrote:

“From the time when I began to write poems, I wondered whether it was worthwhile to do so, would it not be better to transform life into poetry, than to make poetry from life? And poetry, cannot its proper object be, more than the creation of poems, the creation of poetic instants? Can there be a universal communion in poetry?”

This quote captures Paz’s central concerns with cyclical time and the meaningful instant: the ephemeral breakthrough from alienation that renders life substantial and significant. These ideas lie at the heart of his poetic masterpiece *Piedra de sol* (1957).

This long poem embodies his transculturation of mythology and modernity.

Drawing on the symbolism of the Aztec calendar stone housed in the National Museum of Anthropology, *Piedra de sol* employs the techniques of modern poetry, particularly surrealist imagery, to meditate on cyclical time and the possibility of breaking its grip through poetry and love: "The world is born when two people kiss,/a drop of light from transparent juices,/the room cracks half-open like a fruit/ or explodes in silence like a star."

*Piedra de sol* invites the reader on a wandering journey through a spatio-temporal dimension where history and myth collide, and human consciousness searches for meaning through flesh and emotion. History reveals its perverse masks (political corruption, war, betrayal) and language becomes the divisive force that fragments the communion of the self with the whole. Yet it is the lovers, mythic or real, who alone can illuminate and momentarily suspend the corrosive effects of that empty, linear time, though only within the fleeting, universal instant. The poem never loses its cyclical rhythm; its structure allows the poetic voice to return, to incarnate endlessly, without exhaustion.

Although the underlying philosophical idea in *Piedra de sol* may be simple, the poem's beauty lies in its masterful use of poetic imagery. Influenced by surrealism, Paz's images move fluidly between abstraction and the concrete, offering moments both intellectual depth and sensory experience. *Piedra de sol*, like T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, José Gorostiza's *Muerte sin fin*, and *Primer sueño* by Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, belongs to the tradition of the long poem, a form that allows for the exploration of the metaphysical, the historical, and the personal. In this sense, *Piedra de sol* resonates universally.

*Adela Pineda Franco, The University of Texas at Austin*

## Composer's Note

*Piedra de sol* is a poem like no other. I vividly remember the visceral impact it had on me when I read it for the first time. The hugeness of the poet's vision; the cosmic immensity of the imagery; the febrile surrealist intensity of a sensory journey through space and time from reality to fantasy and back again; the sudden moments of heartfelt intimacy that never fail to surprise; the joyful disregard of conventional narrative structure – all combined to leave me feeling astonished and deeply moved when, 584 lines after lift-off, the opening stanza repeated itself and I realised that the whole poem is one enormous, never-ending circle.

Even when simply spoken, the words flow and seem almost to sing. There is a lucid, coiling lyricism to the text which invites music in. Although every single line of the poem has a relentless eleven-syllable structure, the stress patterns within the lines change constantly so that the poem has a shifting, restless, questing energy that moves it constantly forward. It was its sense of endless fluidity and ceaseless momentum that inspired me to turn *Piedra de sol* into a long-form choral piece.

I'd previously used an extract of the poem for the climax of my score to the ballet *Like Water for Chocolate* (The Royal Ballet and American Ballet Theatre, 2022). That song – scored for mezzo-soprano, guitar, and orchestra – was my first attempt at setting a substantial piece of Spanish-language text to music and was a revelation. The experience confirmed me in my resolve to create a larger choral piece around the text.

I selected the sections that I felt would work best for massed voices (about two-thirds of the poem's total) and constructed a seventy-minute-long, single movement musical structure that mirrored the poem's narrative journey from an ecstatic of vision of *Creation*, through profound emotional *Despair*, to the joy of eventual *Salvation* and enlightenment.

To do justice to the poem's cosmic scale, I wanted to explore as wide a range of vocal textures as I could conceive. There are extended passages of complex rhythmic interplay, exposed solo sections for a single voice, and episodes where slabs of sound colour reflect the poem's terrifying images. Underpinning much of the music is the role of the marimba which anchors the harmonies and rhythm and contributes to the otherworldly exoticism of the musical palette.

I would like to extend heartfelt thanks to the Estate of Octavio Paz for allowing me to pay tribute to this masterpiece of Latin American literature, to Dr. Tom Boll of the University of East Anglia for helping me in understanding the poem's historical and cultural significance, to Tomás Barreiro Guijosa, José Angel Salazar, and Pablo Zamora Mata for advice on pronunciation and word-setting, to Denise Connell for introducing me to the poem in the first place, to the Joel Brauer Fund for New Music, and, of course, to the indomitable Craig Hella Johnson, percussionist Tom Burritt, and the fearless singers of Conspirare for coming with me on this epic journey.

The piece is dedicated to its near namesake, my dear son, Peter.

*Joby Talbot, London, April 2026*



# Piedra de Sol (Sunstone) - Text & Translations

1 un sauce de cristal, un chopo de agua,  
*a crystal willow, a poplar of water,*

un alto surtidor que el viento arquea,  
*a tall fountain arching in the wind,*

un árbol bien plantado mas danzante,  
*a deep-rooted tree which dances still,*

un caminar de río que se curva,  
*the course of a river which bends,*

avanza, retrocede, da un rodeo  
*advances, recedes, comes full circle,*

y llega siempre:  
*and is arriving always:*

un caminar tranquilo  
*the silent path*

de estrella o primavera sin premura,  
*of the stars, or an unhurried springtime,*

agua que con los párpados cerrados  
*water behind closed eyelids*

mana toda la noche profecías,  
*welling over with prophesies all night long,*

unánime presencia en oleaje,  
*a single presence in a surge of waves,*

ola tras ola hasta cubrirlo todo,  
*wave after wave until all is covered,*

verde soberanía sin ocaso  
*an endless reign of green*

como el deslumbramiento de las alas  
*like the dazzle of a pair of wings*

cuando se abren en mitad del cielo,  
*unfolding in the middle of the sky,*

2 una presencia como un canto súbito,  
*a single presence like a sudden song,*

como el viento cantando en el incendio,  
*like the wind singing in a fire,*

una mirada que sostiene en vilo  
*a gaze that holds in suspense*

al mundo con sus mares y sus montes,  
*the whole world with all its seas and mountains,*

cuerpo de luz filtrado por un ágata,  
*body of light filtered through an agate,*

piernas de luz, vientre de luz, bahías,  
*thighs of light, belly of light, beaches,*

roca solar, cuerpo color de nube,  
*sun-drenched rock, cloud-coloured body,*

color de día rápido que salta,  
*the colour of daylight leaping rapidly forward,*

la hora centellea y tiene cuerpo,  
*time sparkles and has a body,*

el mundo ya es visible por tu cuerpo,  
*the world becomes visible through your body,*

es transparente por tu transparencia,  
*becomes transparent through your transparency,*

3 voy entre galerías de sonidos,  
*I travel between galleries of sound,*

fluyo entre las presencias resonantes,  
*I flow through resonant presences,*

voy por las transparencias como un ciego,  
*I go through transparencies like a blind man,*

un reflejo me borra, nazco en otro,  
*one reflection erases me, I am born in another,*

oh bosque de pilares encantados,  
*oh forest of enchanted columns,*

bajo los arcos de la luz penetro  
*under arches of light I penetrate*

los corredores de un otoño diáfano,  
*the corridors of translucent autumn,*

4 voy por tu cuerpo como por el mundo,  
*I go through your body as if through the world,*  
tu vientre es una plaza soleada,  
*your belly is a sunlit market square,*  
tus pechos dos iglesias donde oficia  
*your breasts two churches where blood celebrates*  
la sangre sus misterios paralelos,  
*its own parallel rites,*  
mis miradas te cubren como yedra,  
*my gaze covers you like ivy,*  
eres una ciudad que el mar asedia,  
*you are a city that the sea besieges,*  
una muralla que la luz divide  
*a rampart that the light divides*  
en dos mitades de color durazno,  
*into two halves the colour of peaches,*  
un paraje de sal, rocas y pájaros  
*a place of salt, rocks and birds*  
bajo la ley del mediodía absorto,  
*under the rule of oblivious noon,*

vestida del color de mis deseos  
*dressed in the colour of my desires,*  
como mi pensamiento vas desnuda,  
*like my thoughts you go naked,*  
voy por tus ojos como por el agua,  
*I go through your eyes as if through water,*  
los tigres beben sueño en esos ojos,  
*tigers drink their dreams from those eyes,*  
el colibrí se quema en esas llamas,  
*the hummingbird burns in those flames,*  
voy por tu frente como por la luna,  
*I go through your forehead as if through the moon,*

como la nube por tu pensamiento,  
*like a cloud I go through your thoughts,*  
voy por tu vientre como por tus sueños,  
*I go through your belly as I go through your dreams,*

5 tu falda de maíz ondula y canta,  
*your skirt of corn ripples & sings,*  
tu falda de cristal, tu falda de agua,  
*your skirt of crystal, your skirt of water,*  
tus labios, tus cabellos, tus miradas,  
*your lips, your hair, your gaze,*  
toda la noche llueves, todo el día  
*all night you rain, all day,*  
abres mi pecho con tus dedos de agua,  
*you open my chest with your fingers of water,*  
cierras mis ojos con tu boca de agua,  
*you close my eyes with your mouth of water,*  
sobre mis huesos llueves, en mi pecho  
*you rain on my bones, a liquid tree*  
hunde raíces de agua un árbol líquido,  
*sinking roots of water into my chest,*

voy por tu talle como por un río,  
*I travel the whole length of you like a river,*

voy por tu cuerpo como por un bosque,  
*I go through your body as through a forest,*  
como por un sendero en la montaña  
*as if on a mountain path*

que en un abismo brusco se termina  
*which ends at a sudden abyss*

voy por tus pensamientos afilados  
*I travel along the razor's edge of your thoughts*

y a la salida de tu blanca frente  
*and at the flowering of your white forehead*  
mi sombra despeñada se destroza,  
*my shadow is hurled down and breaks into pieces,*

recojo mis fragmentos uno a uno  
*I gather up the fragments one by one*  
y prosigo sin cuerpo, busco a tías,  
*and go on, without a body, groping my way,*

6 corredores sin fin de la memoria,  
*endless corridors of memory,*  
puertas abiertas a un salón vacío  
*doors that open into an empty room*  
donde se pudren todos los veranos,  
*where all the summers come to rot,*  
las joyas de la sed arden al fondo,  
*where jewels of thirst burn in the depths,*  
rostro desvanecido al recordarlo,  
*a face that fades as it is remembered,*  
mano que se deshace si la toco,  
*a hand that comes undone as it is touched,*  
cabelleras de arañas en tumulto  
*hair woven by spiders in turmoil*  
sobre sonrisas de hace muchos años,  
*above the smiles of many years ago,*

a la salida de mi frente busco,  
*at the flowering of my forehead I search,*  
busco sin encontrar, busco un instante,  
*I search without finding, I search for a memory,*  
un rostro de relámpago y tormenta  
*for a face of lightning and torment*  
corriendo entre los árboles nocturnos,  
*running through the trees of night,*  
rostro de lluvia en un jardín a oscuras,  
*for a face of rain in a garden of shadows,*  
agua tenaz que fluye a mi costado,  
*relentless water flowing by my side,*

busco sin encontrar, escribo a solas,  
*I search without finding, I write alone,*  
no hay nadie, cae el día, cae el año,  
*there is no one here, the day falls, the year falls,*  
caigo en el instante, caigo al fondo,  
*I fall in an instant, I fall to the bottom,*  
invisible camino sobre espejos  
*an invisible pathway over mirrors*  
que repiten mi imagen destrozada,  
*which repeat my shattered image,*  
piso días, instantes caminados,  
*I walk down the days, the well-worn memories,*  
piso los pensamientos de mi sombra,  
*I walk down the thoughts of my shadow,*  
piso mi sombra en busca de un instante,  
*I walk along my shadow in search of a moment,*

7 busco una fecha viva como un pájaro,  
*I search for a real moment, as alive as a bird,*  
busco el sol de las cinco de la tarde  
*I search for the sun of five in the afternoon*  
templado por los muros de tezontle:  
*tempered by walls of red volcanic rock:*  
la hora maduraba sus racimos  
*the hour was ripening its clusters of fruit*  
y al abrirse salían las muchachas  
*and when they opened girls came running out*  
de su entraña rosada y se esparcían  
*from their pink underbellies and spread out*  
por los patios de piedra del colegio,  
*on the stone schoolyard,*  
alta como el otoño caminaba  
*tall as autumn she walked,*  
envuelta por la luz bajo la arcada  
*sheathed in light beneath the arches*

y el espacio al ceñirla la vestía  
*and the space that encircled her dressed her*  
de un piel más dorada y transparente,  
*in a skin even more golden and transparent,*

tigre color de luz, pardo venado  
*tiger, the colour of light, grey-brown deer*

por los alrededores de la noche,  
*on the outskirts of night,*

entrevista muchacha reclinada  
*girl glimpsed leaning*

en los balcones verdes de la lluvia,  
*on balconies green with rain,*

adolescente rostro innumerable,  
*adolescent, incalculable face,*

he olvidado tu nombre, Melusina,  
*I have forgotten your name, Melusina,*

Laura, Isabel, Perséfone, María,  
*Laura, Isabel, Persephone, Mary,*

tienes todos los rostros y ninguno,  
*you have all those faces and none of them,*

eres todas las horas y ninguna,  
*you are all those hours and none of them,*

te pareces al árbol y a la nube,  
*you seem like a tree, a cloud,*

eres todos los pájaros y un astro,  
*you are all the birds and a single star,*

te pareces al filo de la espada  
*you are the edge of a sword*

y a la copa de sangre del verdugo,  
*and the executioner's cup of blood,*

yedra que avanza, envuelve y desarraiga  
*the ivy that advances, envelops and uproots,*

al alma y la divide de sí misma,  
*the soul that divides itself from itself,*

8 escritura de fuego sobre el jade,  
*writing of fire on a slab of jade,*

grieta en la roca, reina de serpientes,  
*a cleft in the rock, the queen of serpents,*

columna de vapor, fuente en la peña,  
*a column of mist, a mountain spring,*

circo lunar, peñasco de las águilas,  
*a circle of moonlight, an outpost of eagles,*

grano de anís, espina diminuta  
*a grain of anise, a poisoned thorn*

y mortal que da penas inmortales,  
*that brings undying punishment,*

pastora de los valles submarinos  
*shepherdess of underwater valleys*

y guardiana del valle de los muertos,  
*and gatekeeper of the valley of the dead,*

liana que cuelga del cantil del vértigo,  
*tendrils hanging from the cliffs of vertigo,*

enredadera, planta venenosa,  
*creeper, venomous plant,*

flor de resurrección, uva de vida,  
*flower of resurrection, grape of life,*

señora de la flauta y del relámpago,  
*lady of the flute and the lightning flash,*

terrace del jazmín, sal en la herida,  
*terrace of jasmine, salt in the wound,*

ramo de rosas para el fusilado,  
*bouquet of roses for the man gunned down,*

nieve en agosto, luna del patíbulo,  
*snowfall in August, gallows moon,*

escritura del mar sobre el basalto,  
*writing of the sea on basalt,*

escritura del viento en el desierto,  
*writing of the wind on the desert,*

testamento del sol, granada, espiga,  
*testament of the sun, pomegranate, ear of corn,*

9 no hay nada frente a mí, sólo un instante  
*there is nothing in front of me, only a moment*

rescatado esta noche, contra un sueño  
*salvaged this night, from a dream,*  
de ayuntadas imágenes soñado,  
*of dreamed images shackled together,*  
duramente esculpido contra el sueño,  
*harshly hacked out from a dream,*  
arrancado a la nada de esta noche,  
*plundered from the emptiness of this night,*  
a pulso levantado letra a letra,  
*lifted by hand, letter by letter,*  
mientras afuera el tiempo se desboca  
*while outside time runs amok*  
y golpea las puertas de mi alma  
*and, beating at the doors of my soul,*  
el mundo con su horario carnicero,  
*the world with its bloodthirsty schedules,*

sólo un instante mientras las ciudades,  
*only a moment while cities,*  
los nombres, los sabores, lo vivido,  
*names, tastes, the experience of life itself,*  
se desmoronan en mi frente ciega,  
*crumble away inside my blind forehead,*  
mientras la pesadumbre de la noche  
*while the enormous weariness of this night*  
mi pensamiento humilla y mi esqueleto,  
*crushes my thought and my skeleton,*  
y mi sangre camina más despacio  
*and my blood runs more slowly*  
y mis dientes se aflojan y mis ojos  
*and my teeth loosen and my eyes*  
se nublan y los días y los años  
*cloud over and the days and the years*

sus horrores vacíos acumulan,  
*accumulate their empty horrors,*

10 mientras el tiempo cierra su abanico  
*while time snaps shut its fan*  
y no hay nada detrás de sus imágenes  
*with nothing stirring behind its images*  
el instante se abisma y sobrenada  
*the moment plunges down and floats*  
rodeado de muerte, amenazado  
*surrounded by death, threatened*  
por la noche y su lúgubre bostezo,  
*by night and its dismal yawn,*  
amenazado por la algarabía  
*threatened by the furious gibberish*  
de la muerte vivaz y enmascarada  
*of death, masked and alive,*  
el instante se abisma y se penetra,  
*the moment plunges down and penetrates itself,*  
como un puño se cierra, como un fruto  
*like a closing fist, like a fruit*  
que madura hacia dentro de sí mismo  
*which ripens from within*  
y a sí mismo se bebe y se derrama  
*and, drinking from itself, bursts open,*  
el instante translúcido se cierra  
*the translucent moment closing itself off*  
y madura hacia dentro, echa raíces,  
*and ripening within itself, sending out roots*  
crece dentro de mí, me ocupa todo,  
*that grow inside me, taking me over entirely,*  
me expulsa su follaje delirante,  
*its delirious foliage flinging me out,*  
mis pensamientos sólo son su pájaros,  
*my solitary thoughts are its throng of birds,*

su mercurio circula por mis venas,  
*its mercury goes circulating through my veins,*  
árbol mental, frutos sabor de tiempo,  
*tree of the mind, fruits tasting of time,*

11 oh vida por vivir y ya vivida,  
*oh life to be lived and already lived,*  
tiempo que vuelve en una marejada  
*time that comes back as a swell of the sea*  
y se retira sin volver el rostro,  
*and withdraws without turning its head,*  
lo que pasó no fue pero está siendo  
*that which passed is not passed but is coming now*  
y silenciosamente desemboca  
*and silently flows, breaking into*  
en otro instante que se desvanece:  
*another moment which immediately disappears:*

12 frente a la tarde de salitre y piedra  
*facing an afternoon of saltpetre and stone,*  
armada de navajas invisibles  
*armed with invisible razor blades,*  
una roja escritura indecifrable  
*in a red, indecipherable script*  
escribes en mi piel y esas heridas  
*you write on my skin, and these wounds*  
como un traje de llamas me recubren,  
*cover me like a suit of flames,*  
ardo sin consumirme, busco el agua  
*I burn without being consumed, I search for water,*  
y en tus ojos no hay agua, son de piedra,  
*but in your eyes there is no water, only stone,*  
y tus pechos, tu vientre, tus caderas  
*and your breasts, your belly, your hips*

son de piedra, tu boca sabe a polvo,  
*all are of stone, your mouth tastes like dust,*  
tu boca sabe a tiempo emponzoñado,  
*your mouth tastes of a poisoned time,*  
tu cuerpo sabe a pozo sin salida,  
*your body tastes like a sealed well,*  
pasadizo de espejos que repiten  
*a passageway of mirrors which reflect*  
los ojos del sediento, pasadizo  
*these thirsty eyes, a passageway*  
que vuelve siempre al punto de partida,  
*which always leads back to the point of departure,*  
y tú me llevas ciego de la mano  
*and you take me, a blind man, by the hand*  
por esas galerías obstinadas  
*through these relentless galleries*  
hacia el centro del círculo y te yergues  
*towards the centre of the circle and you rise up*  
como un fulgor que se congela en hacha,  
*in a brilliance which freezes into an axe,*  
como luz que desuella, fascinante  
*like a light which flays alive, as entrancing to me*  
como el cadalso para el condenado,  
*as the gallows are to the condemned,*  
flexible como el látigo y esbelta  
*flexible as a whip, and slender*  
como un arma gemela de la luna,  
*as a weapon twinned with the moon,*  
y tus palabras afiladas cavan  
*and your sharp words dig out*  
mi pecho y me despueblan y vacían,  
*my chest and depopulate and empty me,*  
uno a uno me arrancas los recuerdos,  
*one by one you tear out my memories,*  
he olvidado mi nombre, mis amigos  
*I have forgotten my name, my friends*

grüen entre los cerdos o se pudren  
*grunt among the pigs or rot away*  
comidos por el sol en un barranco,  
*eaten by the sun in a ravine,*

13 no hay nada en mí sino una larga herida,  
*there is nothing inside me but a gaping wound,*  
una oquedad que ya nadie recorre,  
*an empty cavity that no one visits,*  
presente sin ventanas, pensamiento  
*a windowless present, a thought*  
que vuelve, se repite, se refleja  
*which comes back, repeats, reflects itself*  
y se pierde en su misma transparencia,  
*and loses itself in its own transparency,*  
conciencia traspasada por un ojo  
*a consciousness pierced by an eye*  
que se mira mirarse hasta anegarse  
*which watches itself watching until it is drowned*

14 de claridad:  
*in clarity*

sigo mi desvarío, cuartos, calles,  
*I follow my delirium, rooms and streets,*  
camino a tientas por los corredores  
*I grope my way through corridors*  
del tiempo y subo y bajo sus peldaños  
*of time, climb and descend stairs,*  
y sus paredes palpo y no me muevo,  
*touch the walls and do not move,*  
vuelvo adonde empecé, busco tu rostro,  
*I return to where I began, I search for your face,*  
camino por las calles de mí mismo  
*I walk through the streets of myself*  
bajo un sol sin edad, y tú a mi lado  
*under an ageless sun, and you, by my side,*

caminas como un árbol, como un río  
*walk like a tree, like a river*

caminas y me hablas como un río,  
*you walk with me, talking like a river,*  
creces como una espiga entre mis manos,  
*you grow in my hands like an ear of corn,*  
lates como una ardilla entre mis manos,  
*you tremble like a squirrel in my hands,*  
vuelas como mil pájaros, tu risa  
*you fly like a thousand birds, your laughter*  
me ha cubierto de espumas, tu cabeza  
*dashes me with sea spray, your head*  
es un astro pequeño entre mis manos,  
*is a tiny star in my hands,*  
el mundo reverdece si sonríes  
*the world becomes green again when you smile*  
comiendo una naranja,  
*eating an orange.*

el mundo cambia  
*the world changes*

si dos, vertiginosos y enlazados,  
*if two, dizzy and entwined,*

caen sobre las yerba: el cielo baja,  
*fall onto the grass: the sky falls,*

los árboles ascienden, el espacio  
*the trees rise, space becomes*

sólo es luz y silencio, sólo espacio  
*just light and silence, just space*

abierto para el águila del ojo,  
*for the eagle of the eye to cut across,*

pasa la blanca tribu de las nubes,  
*a white tribe of clouds goes by,*

rompe amarras el cuerpo, zarpa el alma,  
*the body breaks its moorings, the soul sets sail,*

perdemos nuestros nombres y flotamos  
*we forget our names and float*

a la deriva entre el azul y el verde,  
*adrift between the blue and the green,*

tiempo total donde no pasa nada  
*total time where nothing happens*

sino su propio transcurrir dichoso,  
*but time's own blessed passing,*

15

vida y muerte  
*life and death*

pactan en ti, señora de la noche,  
*make a pact in you, lady of the night,*  
torre de claridad, reina del alba,  
*tower of clarity, queen of the dawn,*  
virgen lunar, madre del agua madre,  
*virgin of the moon, mother of the mother waters,*

cuerpo del mundo, casa de la muerte,  
*body of the world, house of death,*

caigo sin fin desde mi nacimiento,  
*I have been falling endlessly since my birth,*

caigo en mí mismo sin tocar mi fondo,  
*I fall into myself without touching the bottom,*

recógeme en tus ojos, junta el polvo  
*gather me up in your eyes, collect the scattered dust*

disperso y reconcilia mis cenizas,  
*and reconcile my ashes,*

ata mis huesos divididos, sopla  
*bind together my divided bones, breathe*

sobre mi ser, entiérrame en tu tierra,  
*upon my being, bury me in your earth,*

tu silencio dé paz al pensamiento  
*let your silence bring peace to the thought*

ontra sí mismo airado;  
*that rages against itself;*

16

abre la mano,  
*open your hand*

señora de semillas que son días,  
*lady who sows the seeds that are days,*

el día es inmortal, asciende, crece,  
*the day is immortal, it rises, it grows,*

acaba de nacer y nunca acaba,  
*it has just been born and its birth never ends,*

cada día es nacer, un nacimiento  
*every day is to be born, every dawn*

es cada amanecer y yo amanezco,  
*is a birth and I am dawning,*

amanecemos todos, amanece  
*we are all dawning, the sun dawns*

el sol cara de sol, Juan amanece  
*with the face of the sun, John dawns*

con su cara de Juan cara de todos,  
*with the face of John, the face of everyone,*

17

puerta del ser: despiértame, amanece,  
*gateway of being: awaken me and dawn,*

déjame ver el rostro de este día,  
*let me see the face of this day,*

déjame ver el rostro de esta noche,  
*let me see the face of this night,*

todo se comunica y transfigura,  
*everything transmits and transfigures,*

arco de sangre, puente de latidos,  
*arch of blood, bridge of heartbeats,*

llévame al otro lado de esta noche,  
*take me to the other side of this night*

adonde yo soy tú somos nosotros,  
*where I am you, where we are each other,*

al reino de pronombres enlazados,  
*in the kingdom where pronouns are laced together,*

puerta del ser: abre tu ser, despierta,  
*gateway of being: open your being, awaken,*  
aprende a ser también, labra tu cara,  
*so that you too may be, carve your face*  
trabaja tus facciones, ten un rostro  
*develop your features, hold up your face*  
para mirar mi rostro y que te mire,  
*to gaze at my face which gazes at you,*  
para mirar la vida hasta la muerte,  
*to gaze at life until death,*  
rostro de mar, de pan, de roca y fuente,  
*face of the sea, of bread, of rocks and the fountain,*  
manantial que disuelve nuestros rostros  
*the wellspring that dissolves our faces*  
en el rostro sin nombre, el ser sin rostro,  
*in a face without name, the being with no face,*  
indecible presencia de presencias . . .  
*an indescribable presence among presences...*

18 quiero seguir, ir más allá, y no puedo:  
*I want to continue, to go further, but cannot:*  
se despeñó el instante en otro y otro,  
*as each moment plunged into another and another,*  
dormí sueños de piedra que no sueña  
*I slept, dreaming the dreams of dreamless stones*  
y al cabo de los años como piedras  
*and, at the end of all the stone-like years,*  
oí cantar mi sangre encarcelada,  
*oh my imprisoned blood sang,*  
con un rumor de luz el mar cantaba,  
*the sea sang with a rumour of light,*  
una a una cedían las murallas,  
*one by one the walls collapsed,*  
todas las puertas se desmoronaban  
*all the doors crumbled*

y el sol entraba a saco por mi frente,  
*and the sun came bursting through my forehead,*  
despegaba mis párpados cerrados,  
*unsticking my closed eyelids,*  
desprendía mi ser de su envoltura,  
*freeing my being from its casing,*  
me arrancaba de mí, me separaba  
*pulling me out of myself, separating me*  
de mi bruto dormir siglos de piedra  
*from my animal sleep and its centuries of stone*  
y su magia de espejos revivía  
*and its magic of mirrors resurrected*  
19 un sauce de cristal, un chopo de agua,  
*a crystal willow, a poplar of water,*  
un alto surtidor que el viento arquea,  
*a tall fountain arching in the wind,*  
un árbol bien plantado mas danzante,  
*a deep-rooted tree which dances still*  
un caminar de río que se curva,  
*the course of a river which bends,*  
avanza, retrocede, da un rodeo  
*advances, recedes, comes full circle,*  
y llega siempre:  
*and is arriving always:*



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## Craig Hella Johnson

Beloved for crafting thought-provoking musical journeys that create deep connections between performers and listeners, CRAIG HELLA JOHNSON is the founding artistic director and conductor of *Conspirare*. Recent additional leadership roles include serving as Artistic Partner with the Oregon Bach Festival and Music Director for Cincinnati Vocal Arts Ensemble. Hella Johnson is a celebrated guest conductor of choral and orchestral works, a published composer, arranger, and educator. Hella Johnson is an Artist in Residence at Texas State University, earning the 2022 Presidential Award for Excellence in Scholarly/Creative Activities. Hella Johnson's concert-length composition *Considering Matthew Shepard* was premiered and recorded by *Conspirare* and continues to have broad national and international reach. Hella Johnson's accomplishments have been recognized with numerous awards and honors. Notably among them, he and *Conspirare* won a 2015 GRAMMY® for Best Choral Performance. His honors also include Chorus America's Michael Korn Founders Award, Texas State Musician, the Matthew Shepard Foundation's Dennis Dougherty Award for Community Leadership, Wartburg College's 2023 Graven Award, and induction into the Austin Arts Hall of Fame.

## Conspirare

[Conspirare](#) is a professional choral organization under the leadership of Artistic Director Craig Hella Johnson. Inspired by the power of music to change lives, this ensemble engages singers from around the world who join voices to deliver world-class, extraordinary live musical experiences and recordings. Their discography includes 17 commercial albums and 20 self-produced live albums. Hella Johnson and *Conspirare* were awarded a 2015 GRAMMY® for Best Choral Performance for *The Sacred Spirit of Russia* and their recordings have received 12 total nominations. *Conspirare* has performed throughout the United States and internationally. At home, *Conspirare* performs a full annual season in Austin where it has received ongoing recognition from local organizations and critics. *Conspirare* has been the subject of PBS documentaries and was awarded a Texas Medal of Arts and garnered international recognition including the Dutch Edison Award. The group is also committed to lifelong singing through the Symphonic Choir and robust community offerings including the Big Sing.



Craig Hella Johnson

## Joby Talbot

Born in London in 1971, Joby Talbot is a leading composer for concert, stage and screen.

Talbot has written widely for voice and choir, setting poetry, sacred and historical texts for varying ensembles. *The Wishing Tree* (2002), passes the lines of contemporary Scottish poet Kathleen Jamie's short poem between six solo male voices, while *The Song of Wandering Aengus* (2026) sets W. B. Yeats' celebrated poem for choir. *A Sheen of Dew on Flowers* (2018), explores the meaning and history of Queen Victoria's sapphire and diamond coronet in a setting of eight poems, written by women across different cultures over three thousand years and translated by Jane Hirshfield, for mezzo soprano, baritone, choir and orchestra. *Piedra de Sol* (2026) is Talbot's first work based on a modern language other than English, following the dreamlike flow of Octavio Paz's circular poem, while *Path of Miracles*, also for a cappella choir, describes the ancient Christian pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela through a collage of sacred, mediaeval and original texts assembled by poet Robert Dickinson, whose various languages and tones reflect both the diversity among pilgrims and the experience of pilgrimage itself. Talbot has also set the traditional liturgical texts *Ave Verum Corpus* (2006) and *Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis* (2022) for choir and organ.

Prominent within Talbot's catalogue are his works for stage and screen. His operas *Everest* (2014) and *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* (2020) both explore themes of love and endurance, while his collaboration with leading choreographer Christopher Wheeldon has produced original full-length narrative ballet adaptations of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (2010), *The Winter's Tale* (2013), *Like Water for Chocolate* (2021) and the life of Oscar Wilde (*Oscar*, 2024). Talbot has also scored major feature films *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (2005), *Sing* (2016) and *Sing 2* (2021) and *Wonka* (2023).



# conspirare

Craig Hella Johnson + COMPANY OF VOICES

Craig Hella Johnson, Artistic Director & Conductor

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\*denotes soloist

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