



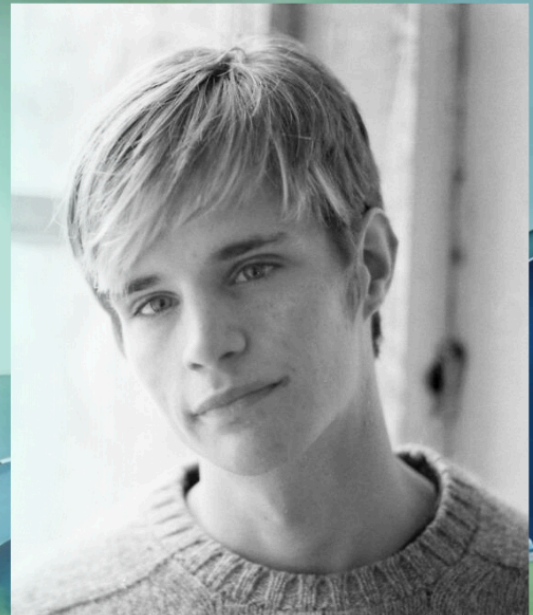
Converging Arts Columbus

# CONSIDERING MATTHEW SHEPARD

A fusion oratorio by Craig Hella Johnson

February 22, 2025

FORT HAYES  
PERFORMING ARTS  
CENTER



GREATER COLUMBUS  
ARTS COUNCIL



# Considering Matthew Shepard

## **Stage Director**

Brian Granger

## **Music Director**

Jason Hiester

## **Stage Manager**

Lauren Spavelko

## **Theater Coordinator & Sound**

Ryan Van Bibber

## **Light Design & Operation**

Eric Burns

## **Follow Spot**

Kera Diggs

## **Cast**

Rhonda Rom  
Rhuna Byrne  
Abby Jenkins  
Liz Files  
Carolyn Redman  
Emily Totodo

Emily Winegard  
Heather Chute  
Gretchen Rutz Leist  
Andrew LeVan  
Ryan Jenkins  
Austin Wood

Matthew Mac Manus  
Billy Edwards  
Coshel Caudill  
Will Schott  
John Schlabach  
Anita Chiu (piano)

# PRESIDENT'S NOTE

**Rachel Parfenchuk, President of Converging Arts Columbus**

Dear Friends,

As President and Co-Founder of Converging Arts Columbus, I sincerely thank you for choosing to spend your afternoon with us. Your presence and support make it possible for us to continue bringing meaningful art to Columbus.

Founded in 2020, Converging Arts Columbus aims to connect the wide variety of musicians, artists, and performers in our community to create meaningful experiences for audiences and performers alike. Rooted in that mission, our past productions—*Astronomer Dreaming*, *The Journey: Civil Rights*, and *Echoes of Tradition*—have all explored history, identity, and the human experience through music, dance, visual art, and storytelling. We believe in the power of the arts to foster connection and understanding and are grateful to have you on this journey with us today as you experience the depth of Matthew Shepard's story.



As a small nonprofit, we rely heavily on the generosity of supporters like you to continue our work. If you also believe in the mission and impact of Converging Arts Columbus, I invite you to consider making a donation. Every contribution—big or small—helps us create future performances and expand the arts in Columbus.

Please visit <https://www.convergingartscolumbus.org/donate/> to donate, or speak to one of our volunteers after the performance.

Thank you for being part of the Converging Arts Columbus community!

Warmly,

**Rachel Parfenchuk**

President & Co-founder, Converging Arts Columbus

# DIRECTOR'S NOTE

**Brian Granger, Stage Director**

Laramie, Wyoming—the place where tonight's drama unfolds—sits on a latitude line only slightly north of Columbus, with Toledo being our closest match to that city. Yet Laramie is over 6,000 feet higher than we are here in terms of elevation above sea level. In other words, it's a colder place than Columbus, typically a full ten degrees or more colder there for its highest and lowest temperatures in October than it is here. In my mind, I associate any place colder than Columbus with winter clothing and the kind of year-round gear that people in cold climates seem to love: flannels, parka vests, boots and scarves.

Clothing is an aspect of the Shepard case that has always lingered in my mind. When his killers left Shepard for dead, they took his wallet and his shoes with them, thinking the shoes might be worth something. The removal of his belongings always seemed particularly gross to me, for it reminds me of the way the Christian Bible describes how Jesus Christ's clothes were stripped from him and divided up (John 19:24). This abuse of a body not only violates nearly every ancient culture's laws against the treatment of a dead body (including that of criminals) but seems so unnecessarily mean to the people that person has left behind, as if to say the value of the deceased was summarized in these objects that the deceased's love ones did not even have the right to claim. So from the beginning, I knew that winter clothes needed to be part of my artistic statement about this piece—a kind of first and last statement, on comfort and protection, on the forms of physical and moral coldness that we encounter in life.

I've mentioned the Bible (I feel I must, as a P.K.—"preacher's kid"), but something I was also drawn to in this piece is its non-preachy quality. Yes, if you are a person who ascribes to a faith you will be able to hear the piece speaking to you. And also, yes, if you are not a person of faith—if you draw more inspiration from science, or from a personal sense of the great and beautiful, unfolding mystery of the universe—you will still hear the piece speaking in a language that says "I see you" and is for you. Because you are alive. You are here. You are meant to consider this story with us.

Craig Hella Johnson, Johnson's fabulous writer-collaborators Michael Dennis Brown and Lesléa Newman, along with their Conspirare artists, asked the world in 2016 to consider what an imaginative witnessing of Shepard's story means. I believe that Theatre is a community conversation, and so as we come in from the cold tonight to engage with a story that is nearly two decades past, we ask our fellow community members for this same moment of shared consideration.



I'm so thankful to have been able to take part in this gathering, and to hear in our rehearsals the passion and beauty of these voices. As you will see, they do great justice to this already powerful work. I simply hope that, long after our evening of community consideration ends, that these words and melodies, and whatever stirrings of peace and hope they raise in you, stays with you. Tuck yourself in them as protection in these cold times, and carry them with you on your journey.

## CONTENT & TRIGGER WARNINGS

*Considering Matthew Shepard* references **murder & assault**. While there are no graphic portrayals of these acts in our staging, we feel it is important to remind the audience of this sensitive content.

Please be aware that the **F-word slur** is briefly sung in "**A Protestor**."

## COPYRIGHT ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Several poems from Lesléa Newman are included in the musical setting of Craig Hella Johnson's *Considering Matthew Shepard*: The Fence (That Night), A Protestor, The Fence (One Week Later), Stars, and The Fence (After). These poems are contained in the collection *October Mourning*.

"October Mourning: A Song for Matthew Shepard" by Lesléa Newman  
Used by permission of Curtis Brown, Ltd.  
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All Rights Reserved.

Find book retailers for *October Mourning* and other works by Lesléa Newman at [this link](#).

# AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE

You are welcome to take photos (no flash please!)

You can record videos except for the following numbers, due to additional copyright considerations for texts by Lesléa Newman:

- A Protestor
- The Fence (That Night)
- The Fence (One Week Later)
- Stars

Please remember to dim your phone screens. If you share on social media, please remember to tag us so others can find our work.

IG: @convergingartscbus  
#ConvergingArtsCbus #columbusmakesart

If you need to come or go from the theater, please do so between scenes as possible to minimize disruptions for our guests.

Enjoy the show!

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## Considering Matthew Shepard

Craig Hella Johnson

### Prologue: Cattle, Horses, Sky, & Grass

Text: John D. Nesbitt, Sue Wallis, & Craig Hella Johnson

Musical quotation: *Prelude in C Major, Book 1, Well-Tempered Clavier*  
(J.S. Bach)

### Ordinary Boy

Text: Craig Hella Johnson, with additional text from Judy Shepard & Matt Shepard

### We Tell Each Other Stories / I Am Open



## **Passion – Recitation I**

Text: Michael Dennis Browne & Craig Hella Johnson

## **Recitation II**

Text: Michael Dennis Browne & Craig Hella Johnson

## **The Fence (That Night)**

Text: Lesléa Newman

(no film)

## **Recitation III**

Text: Michael Dennis Browne & Craig Hella Johnson

## **A Protestor**

Text: Lesléa Newman

(no film)

## **Recitation IV**

Text: Michael Dennis Browne & Craig Hella Johnson

## **Fire of the Ancient Heart**

Text: Michael Dennis Browne & Craig Hella Johnson

## **Recitation V**

Text: Michael Dennis Browne & Craig Hella Johnson

## **The Innocence**

Text: Michael Dennis Browne & Craig Hella Johnson

## **Recitation VI**

Text: Michael Dennis Browne & Craig Hella Johnson

## **The Fence (One Week Later)**

Text: Lesléa Newman

(no film)

## **Recitation VII**

Text: Michael Dennis Browne & Craig Hella Johnson







## Stars

Text: Dennis Shepard & Lesléa Newman  
(no film)

## Recitation VIII

### In Need of Breath

Text: Hafiz, translated/rendered by Daniel Ladinsky

## Recitation IX

Text: Michael Dennis Browne & Craig Hella Johnson

## Deer Song

### Epilogue: Meet Me Here

Text: Michael Dennis Browne & Craig Hella Johnson  
Music: J.S. Bach & Craig Hella Johnson

## Thank You

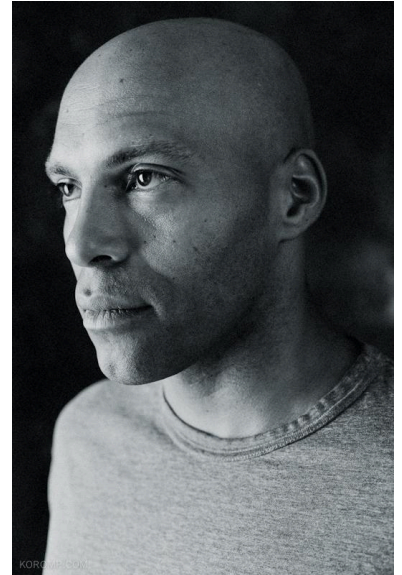
Text by Lesléa Newman  
(no film)

## Cattle, Horses, Sky, & Grass (Reprise)

Text: Sue Wallis & John D. Nesbitt

# CREATIVE TEAM

**Brian Granger (Stage Director)** is an LGBTQ and BIPOC preacher's kid (PK); an actor/director/singer; playwright/screenwriter and musical theatre maker; performance/theatre and film scholar; lover of pizza, puppets, and interior design; a social justice/environmental/animal advocate; and a lifelong consumer/nerd of comic books, science fiction, fantasy, and horror fiction. Granger is currently teaching at Ohio Wesleyan University. They hold degrees from Kenyon College (B.A.), The Ohio State University (M.F.A.), NYU/Tisch School of the Arts (M.F.A.), and the University of California, Santa Barbara (PhD).



**Jason Hiester (Music Director)** performs on both sides of the baton, having begun his career on the stage before moving into the pit. As a conductor, Dr. Hiester is well-versed in numerous genres, impressing audiences and musicians alike with the excellence he demands both from choirs and orchestras, generating vibrant performances with all levels of musicians. He is an Associate Professor of Music at Ohio Wesleyan University where he is head of the choral department and musical director of the opera/musical program, contributing his inventive musical ideas, which often include multi-discipline artistic productions. Combining the forms of dance, opera, choir, visual art, and poetry is a passion of his, and Dr. Hiester takes every opportunity to produce new and innovative works of this kind through collaborations with professionals across Ohio.





**Lauren Spavelko (Stage Manager)** is a composer & educator. She composes to inspire deeper connections with one another and ourselves—listeners find play, healing, joy, and catharsis. Her works have been performed across the United States, as well as in Italy, Singapore, Vietnam, and Canada. Her work has been awarded multiple prizes including the Spoleto Festival's Young Composers Prize (Italy, *Baby Book*), the American Prize in Vocal Chamber Music: Charles Ives Award (*From Edna, with Love*), and the Ruth Anderson Commission Prize (IAWM, *Black Box 2.0*). She has also been a finalist for the NATS Art Song Composition Award and the American Prize in Orchestral Music (*Kéyah*). In addition to composing, she operates her private studio Musical Life in Pickerington and teaches part-time at Otterbein University. Learn more: [www.LaurenSpavelko.com](http://www.LaurenSpavelko.com)



**Ryan Van Bibber (Theater Coordinator & Sound)** teaches audio production at the Fort Hayes Metropolitan Education Center and at Columbus State Community College. He holds music degrees from Ohio University and The Ohio State University, as well as a certificate in music production from the Berklee College of Music.



**Eric Burns (Light Design & Operation)** is the current technical theatre teacher at Fort Hayes Arts and Academics High School. He earned his theatre and educational degrees from Ohio Wesleyan University, and hopes that audience members will enjoy the clear time and effort put into every technical aspect of Echoes of Tradition.



# CAST

**Rhuna Byrne (soprano)** holds a degree in Choral Music Education from Miami University and a Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Kent State University. Residing in Dublin, Ohio, she teaches Scottish Highland dance and serves as a vocalist at St. Brigid of Kildare. Mrs. Byrne works as a soloist for a variety of liturgical services and is a singer with the professional chamber ensemble ProArteOHIO. She has also sung with the schola at St Joseph Cathedral, Ensemble Una Voce and Capital University's Choral Union.



**Coshel Caudill** is a senior at The Ohio State University, pursuing a Bachelor's in Vocal Music Education. During his time at Ohio State, Mr. Caudill has received numerous accolades and awards for academic and choral excellence. At Ohio state, he served as section leader of the Ohio State University Men's Glee Club, as well as a rehearsal assistant in Chorale. He has studied with Dr. Robert Ward, Dr. Colin Knoth, and Jordan Saul. Mr. Caudill currently student teaches at Hilliard Darby, where he assists with day-to-day logistics and classes. He currently serves as Choir Director at Hilliard United Methodist Church. In addition, he is a Section Leader and regular soloist with the New Albany Symphony Chorus. He has toured domestically and internationally as a chorister and as a soloist, most recently at Lincoln Center in New York City, Germany, Austria, and the Czech Republic.



**Heather Chute (alto)** is a graduate of Capital University where she received her Bachelor's and Master's degrees in vocal music education. She has taught her entire career with Hamilton Local Schools, leading the choirs in grades 7-12. She is celebrating her 25th year as the alto section leader at St. Mark's Episcopal Church. Her other performance endeavors include ProArte Ohio, The Columbus Choral Artists and Fior Angelico. Heather was also a 2023 recipient of the Manilow Music Project Award.



**Billy Edwards (bass)** is excited to return to the stage with Converging Arts Columbus having previously appeared in Astronomer Dreaming. A native of Newark, OH, he studied music at Alderson-Broaddus College in West Virginia before moving back to the area. Over the past several years, Billy has served as Director for Newark's Land of Legend Barbershop Chorus, and has been involved with music leadership at several churches including Bremen United Methodist Church, Maple Street United Methodist in Lancaster, and currently at Holy Trinity Lutheran in Upper Arlington. He has also been in productions at Opera Columbus, Weathervane Playhouse in Newark and performs with Fior Angelico, and Lancaster Chorale. Billy is looking forward to telling this powerful and important story of Matthew Shepherd.



**Liz Files (soprano)** is a middle school Intervention Specialist who works with a variety of diverse learners. Outside of the school day, she teaches voice, piano, and violin lessons, she helps lead her school's Drama Club, and she is a section leader and choral librarian at Trinity United Methodist Church. Liz has experience singing in a variety of ensembles including multiple chamber groups, women's choirs, musical theater groups, show choir, and a quartet. She has also performed with the Southeastern Ohio Symphony Orchestra as a violinist. She holds two undergraduate degrees in education from Muskingum University, one in Music Education and one in Special Education, where she also completed research exploring the effects of music and music therapy on individuals with disabilities.



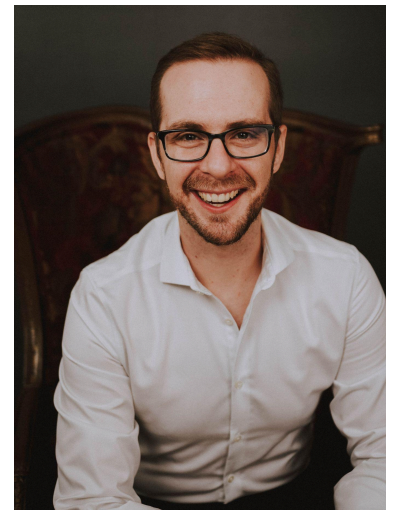
**Abby Jenkins (soprano)** is a music educator, conductor, and vocalist from Columbus, OH. She currently teaches 6th grade choir and high school choir at Delaware City Schools. Abby graduated from The Ohio State University (BME in Choral Music) in 2017. She sings with ProArteOhio (Lancaster Chorale), and is a soprano section lead at Trinity United Methodist Church. Abby has also been involved in local community musical theater productions.



**Ryan Jenkins (tenor)** is a high school choral director, an active choral conductor, and vocalist from Columbus, Ohio. He has been teaching choral music since 2017 and is currently the Choral Director at Columbus Academy where he teaches middle school and high school choir. Along with his teaching, Ryan is the Director of Traditional Music at Trinity United Methodist Church. As a vocalist, Ryan has sung with Opera Columbus, ProArteOHIO (formerly Lancaster Chorale), the Sacred Music Institute of America, Trinity Lutheran Seminary, and the National Anthem for the Columbus Crew. Prior to his current appointments, Ryan has experience working with a wide variety of groups including chamber ensemble, children's choir, competitive a cappella and show choir, community choir, sacred music, and high school/collegiate groups. Ryan holds degrees from The Ohio State University (B.M. in Vocal Performance) and University of Toronto (M.M. in choral conducting) where he studied with Dr. Hilary Apfelstadt.



**Andrew LeVan (tenor)** is from Dublin, Ohio. He attended The College of Wooster and received his Master's Degree in vocal performance from Indiana University where he studied with Dr. Brian Horne. Andrew premiered the role of Nô in P. Q. Phan's opera The Tale of Lady Thi Kính and has performed as Mayor Upfold (Albert Herring), a Priest in Philip Glass' Akhnaten and others in performances with the Indiana University Opera Theater, The Indiana Festival Theater and the Ohio Light Opera. He was most recently seen as Henry Ford in CCT's production of Ragtime, and as a soloist in Gallery Player's production of Sondheim on Sondheim. He currently studies with Dr. Daniel St, Professor of Music at Ohio University.





**Matthew Mac Manus (tenor)** most recently appeared as Crook Finger Jack in The Threepenny Opera and will portray Don Basilio and Don Curzio in Le Nozze di Figaro with Opera Columbus this spring. Last winter, he was the tenor soloist for Opera Columbus' Messiah Sing-Along tour and portrayed Le Remendado in Carmen to open Opera Columbus' 2023-24 season. In summer 2022, Mr. Mac Manus made his international debut as Rinuccio (Gianni Schicchi), Bardolfo (Falstaff), and Don Curzio (Le Nozze di Figaro) at the Festival of International Opera Italia. Other engagements include singing in Opera Project Columbus' Un ballo in maschera chorus and numerous scenes performances: Gabriel von Eisenstein (Die Fledermaus), Nemorino (L'elisir d'amore), Ferrando (Così fan tutte), Jaquino (Fidelio), and Banquo (MacBeth). In spring 2022, he portrayed the Tenor in the world premiere of Arseny Gusev's The Blind. Mr. Mac Manus earned his Bachelor's from Miami University (studying with Dr. Alison Acord and Dr. Christina Haan) and a Master of Music in Vocal Performance from the Cleveland Institute of Music, studying with American baritone Jesse Blumberg.



**Carolyn Redman, mezzo-soprano (alto)** is originally from Bellevue, Ohio and received a MM and DMA in vocal performance from the Ohio State University. She has performed operatic roles as well as musical theater roles with various professional companies including Des Moines Metro Opera, Opera/Columbus, Opera Project Columbus, Columbus Light Opera, Cincinnati Opera, Weathervane Playhouse, and Lyric Opera Cleveland. She was selected as an apprentice artist with both Des Moines Metro Opera and Cincinnati Opera Young Artists programs and was also chosen to perform in masterclasses and performances at the Instituto Superior de Arte of the Teatro Colon in Buenos Aires, Argentina. She has been a winner or finalist in four competitions, including a first place finish in the Opera/Columbus vocal competition. Recent roles include Ruth in The Pirates of Penzance, La Badessa in Suor Angelica, Berta in Il Barbiere di Siviglia, Miss Todd in The Old Maid and the Thief, Zita in Gianni Schicchi, Gertrude in Roméo et Juliette, Martha/Ayah in The Secret Garden, Golde in Fiddler on the Roof, Jo in Mark Adamo's Little Women, Second Lady in The Magic Flute, and Countess Charlotte Malcolm in A Little Night Music. She has also been a featured soloist in oratorios and other concert works with groups such as Cantari Singers, Denison University, Columbus Bach Ensemble, Marion Civic Chorus, Master Singers, Inc. Chorale, New Albany Symphony, Saint Joseph Cathedral, Westerville Symphony, and the American Institute of Musical Studies in Graz, Austria. In addition to performing, she serves on the voice faculty of Denison University.

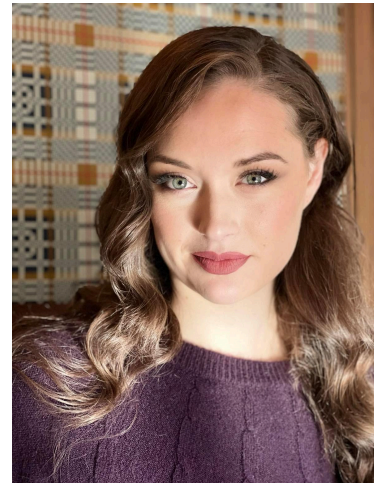




**Rhonda K. Rom (soprano)** holds a Master of Music degree in vocal performance from the University of Denver's Lamont School of Music and a Bachelor of Music in vocal performance from Arizona State University. Ms. Rom serves as the Worship Director at Peace United Methodist Church in Pickerington, OH where she leads traditional and modern worship. She enjoys teaching private voice in her home studio and has served on faculty at Kenyon College, Mount Vernon Nazarene University, Dallas Baptist University, and Texas Woman's University. As a soloist, Ms. Rom has performed major works such as Messiah, Magnificat, The Creation, and Faure's Requiem. She has special interest as a recitalist focusing on a wide variety of genres including art song, musical theater, and contemporary styles. Ms. Rom has also sung and recorded with renowned choral ensembles including The Santa Fe Desert Chorale, Orpheus Chamber Singers and central Ohio's premier choral ensemble ProArteOHIO.



**Gretchen Rutz Leist (alto)** is a distinguished professional based in Columbus, Ohio, with a diverse background in both music and law. She earned her Bachelor of Music Education from Capital University, where she focused on tuba and voice, and later received her Juris Doctor from the Ohio State University Moritz College of Law. As a mezzo-soprano, Gretchen has performed with notable musical groups such as ProArtOHIO, Opera Project Columbus, Fior Angelico, the Sacred Music Institute of America, the Columbus Symphony Chorus, and Converging Arts Columbus. Alongside her musical endeavors, she has built a successful legal career, specializing in commercial contracts and data privacy law.



**John Schlabach** is a native of the Columbus area and a graduate of The Ohio State University with a degree in Vocal Music Education. He has performed in the area for over 20 years with many organizations including ProArte Ohio, Fior Angelico, Opera Columbus, Opera Project Columbus, Columbus Symphony Chorus, Converging Arts Columbus, and the Sacred Music Institute. John is ever thankful to his wife and two children for allowing him the time to perform, as well as to Dr. Hiester for extending the invitation to be a part of this beautiful project.



**Emily Totedo (alto)** is delighted to be joining Converging Arts Columbus for Considering Matthew Shepard. Emily is a local singer in Columbus, singing with Trinity United Methodist Church Choir and event band, Bluewater Kings. Emily is a graduate of Capital University Conservatory of Music.

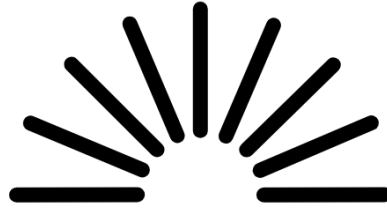


**Emily Winegard (alto)** is thrilled to be joining Converging Arts Columbus for Considering Matthew Shepard! She is a graduate of Capital University with a Bachelor of Music in Music Industry, with focuses in Theatre and Marketing. Emily is currently a choral artist with the Major 7 Singers and ProArteOHIO (formerly LancasterChorale.) She has also been a part of the Zelda: Symphony of the Goddesses chorus. She has received multiple accolades for her solo performance(s), such as placing 1st in the Upper College Music Theater Men and Women category at Ohio NATS, as well as winning the Concerto Competition at Capital University. You can also find her as the premiere soloist of composer Jake Runestad's Please Stay with the Capital University Chapel Choir on Youtube.



**Austin Wood (tenor)** is excited to be working with Converging Arts Columbus again after participating in Astronomer Dreaming in 2022. He can be found performing with choruses around the city, primarily for Opera Columbus and the Sacred Music Institute of America. Austin graduated from Ohio Wesleyan University in 2021 with a Bachelor's in Music Education. He currently works as the Asst. Operations Lead for GameU, an online program teaching students of all ages and abilities how to make video games.





Converging Arts Columbus

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