

VOICE



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE CHESTER CHILDREN'S CHORUS

Fall 2019

UPCOMING CONCERTS

2019

WINTER CONCERTS

Friday, December 13, 7:30 p.m.

Saturday, December 14, 7:30 p.m.

Lang Concert Hall

Lang Music Building, Swarthmore College

Lang Music Building opens to the public at 6:00 p.m., and seating for the concert hall begins at 6:45 p.m.

2020

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. WEEKEND, COLLABORATIVE PERFORMANCES OF THE CCC & PLAY ON PHILLY

Saturday, January 18, 3:00 p.m.

Broad Street Ministry, Philadelphia

Monday, January 20, 4:00 p.m.

Lang Concert Hall

Lang Music Building, Swarthmore College

HANDEL'S MESSIAH

Sunday, March 15, 4:00 p.m.

Lang Concert Hall

Lang Music Building, Swarthmore College

CCC & MUSIC TRANSFORMS

Sunday, March 29, 4:00 p.m.

Wayne Presbyterian Church

Please note tickets are not required for these concerts. Donations benefit the CCC. **ADMISSION IS FREE—All welcome!** 610-328-8180 ccc@swarthmore.edu



JOHN AND JOSH: 25 YEARS OF CCC CONNECTION

IN THE SPRING OF 1994, John Alston, then a third-year assistant professor of music at Swarthmore College, started a boys' chorus in Chester. Wanting to begin small, he auditioned boys at a single elementary school in Chester and found seven who wanted to join. One of those boys was Joshua Shockley. This is the 25 year journey of John and Josh. Their story is the story of the Chester Children's Chorus, a story of commitment, determination, and love.

He wasn't supposed to make the choir. He hadn't passed the audition. The next day he came up, "Hey, Mr. Alston." He's a rising third grader, all bright and shiny. I said, "I'm sorry Josh, but you're not on my list. You didn't make it." In a tiny high-pitched voice, he shouted, "I'm staying. I made it. I'm in the choir."

JOHN: John let me stay. After that, we just began building this incredible relationship. My dad was on drugs and in and out of my life. John was the light. The choir was the light for me.

JOHN: That first summer, every morning I drove around Chester in a borrowed College van, picked up the boys, and brought them to the music building. I taught them the simple songs I'd learned while in the Newark Boys Chorus; mostly spirituals and other folk songs. I had no idea what I was doing, but the boys and I were so comfortable with each other. After rehearsal, we'd eat—lunch meat or the occasional pizza—and then hit the field for a game of baseball or football.

One evening in the middle of that first summer camp, Josh called me on my cell. I was startled, thinking that there was an emergency. He just wanted to say hi.

"Today John is part of the reason why, after ten and a half years of incarceration, even after all my fails, that I still had enough sense, I still had enough love and motivation to want to do better. He helped me realize that, 'Hey, I'm much bigger than what people say I am.'"
—JOSH



JOHN: We managed to learn a few songs. During rehearsals I said to the boys repeatedly, "come on guys, sit up straight, we gotta do this. We can do this."

JOHN: It was his love and admiration for some kids in Chester, who he didn't know, who came with so much baggage, so much drama. He never made us feel bad for coming from Chester. He never made us feel bad for giving up at times. He never made us feel bad for being bad. It was like, "C'mon guys. Let's go. We're young men. This is how we do it."

JOHN: By the time Josh is a sixth grader, we were perhaps 20 boys and two girls, who were older sisters. Josh and I were like family, now, and he told me that he wanted to go to school in Swarthmore, where I was living at the time. The simplest way to do it was for me to become his legal guardian. His mom and I talked, we hired a lawyer, we signed the papers, and he moved in with me.

JOHN: I didn't hesitate. I remember going to the lawyer's office and watch my mom and John sign the paperwork. It was probably the happiest day of my life.

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JOHN AND JOSH CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

JOHN: On weekends he went home, but Sunday through Thursday Josh is in my house struggling to do homework. We argued a lot about writing down and completing assignments, but that fall was the first time he passed all his classes.

Then it all fell apart. Josh moved out, but he continued to sing in the CCC.

JOSH: I was growing older and I was rebelling. One day I ran away from John's house. That's when I got into the street stuff.

JOHN: Josh's two oldest brothers were drug dealers, and he and another brother followed in their footsteps. Josh quit the CCC after ninth grade, and we didn't see much of each other for a while. Then, I ran into him and he told me that he had shot a rival drug dealer and the police were looking for him. Soon after, he was in prison.

I was so angry with him, but still went to visit him a few times in prison,

JOSH: I felt like, "man, even though I'm in jail, he made me feel like I was still somebody, like I was bigger than my cell."

Fast forward. I came home, I did good. I enrolled in community college. John got me a job at Swarthmore College. I became a Democratic ward leader and was the head of the

“I cannot imagine my life without Josh, without these children. They're like all children, right? They want to be teased and admired. They want to be seen, and praised, and respected.”

—JOHN

Young Democrats for the City of Chester.

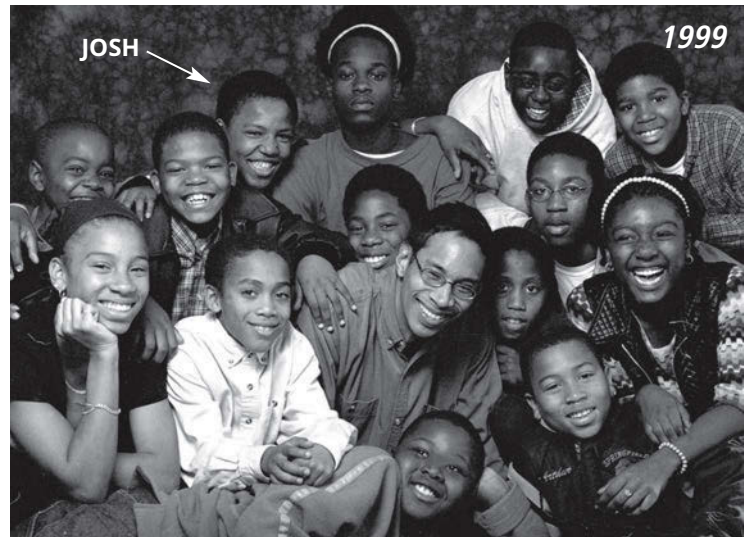
Unfortunately, at the time, I was still carrying a firearm. A year and a half later, I got pulled over and went back to prison for another six and half years.

JOHN: I was more heartbroken and angry the second time, and didn't visit Josh or accept his calls for several years. But then he was released and needed a place to stay.

JOSH: John found me a room with a shared bathroom. He paid four months' rent. I cried so many nights in that room.

JOHN: After his second release, Josh returned to improving himself. He is more determined than ever to become successful. Now, Josh is a caseworker, helping Chester folks find jobs and keep them. He has quickly become his employer's most successful caseworker and wants to become a motivational speaker.

JOSH: Part of my job is speaking in front of groups of my clients. One of the reasons I'm able to do this is because of singing at all those CCC concerts in front of hundreds of people. And here I am now, with a great job



helping people who really need it—even though I'm a convicted felon. I give my clients what John gave me, a belief in themselves. He made me feel like I was bigger than the world.

JOSH: He's still that light and hope for Chester's children, always reminding them, "You can be better, you can read, you can do math. It's okay to play. It's okay to be a kid."

JOHN: I don't know what made me go into Chester 25 years ago and start a boys' chorus. I didn't know anything about teaching children. But I know now that those seven boys were teaching me what I was supposed to do with my life.

JOSH: John gives us all hope. We can be a president, a doctor, a judge, or a police officer. We can change the world. What better place to learn that than in the CCC with John Alston as your director. It doesn't get any better that.

CCC RECOGNIZED BY COMMONWEALTH OF PA

The CCC received recognition from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in honor of its 25th anniversary. We extend our sincere appreciation to **State Representative Leanne Krueger** for sponsoring the citation, which states:

Throughout its history, the Chester Children's Chorus has made inestimable contributions to the welfare of society through a sense of fellowship and through its programs, which are designed to enhance the quality of life for all. A succession of dedicated leaders, staff members and participants has made this possible, keeping ever mindful of the noble maxims of the organization.

Now therefore, the House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania salutes the Chester Children's Chorus upon its richly deserved recognition, offers best wishes for continued growth and success in the years to come.

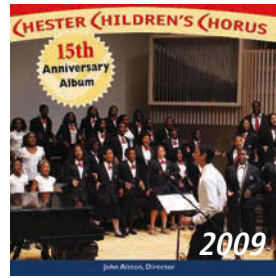




1994



2004



2009



2014



2016

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF MAKING BEAUTIFUL MUSIC

1994

Chester Children's Chorus founded by John Alston with 7 boys; first gift to CCC of \$2,000 for a keyboard

2004

CCC receives donation of 2 vans; African dance and drumming first offered at summer day camp

2009

15th Anniversary CD released; CCC sings with Singing City Choir

2014

CCC sings Handel's *Messiah* with community members and orchestra; 20th Anniversary CD released

2016

production of video of "I Still Can't Breathe," composed by John Alston for CCC; CCC sings Fauré *Requiem* with Media Chamber Chorale

2018

CCC sings Mozart's *Requiem* with community friends and professional orchestra; CCC hires its first education director

2002

CCC numbers 35 children; first administrative staff hired; CCC board established

2006

First CD released; CCC numbers 60 children; prestigious ongoing grants received from Hamilton Family Foundation, Presser Foundation, and Independence Foundation

2012

CCC sings Mozart's *Requiem* with Swarthmore College Chorus

2015

CCC sings at Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Wolf's inauguration; 9 of the graduating 12th graders were CCC members for 10 years; John Alston receives Honorary Degree from Swarthmore College

2017

Strategic Plan adopted, focusing on the whole child and continued music excellence

2019

25th Anniversary CD released; annual budget \$1,000,000; 570 children have been members of CCC since its inception



2002



2015



2019



2015

SUPPORT US! I am pleased to make a contribution to the Chester Children's Chorus in the amount of \$ _____.

Enclosed is a check (Check made payable to "Swarthmore College" with "Chester Children's Chorus" in memo field.)

I would like to make a monthly gift of \$ _____

I have remembered the CCC in my will.

Please charge my gift to

- Visa Mastercard
 Discover American Express

Card # _____

Expires: _____ / _____

My gift will be matched by my employer.
(Please enclose your signed matching gift form.)

Name _____

Street _____

City, State, Zip _____

Email _____

Phone number _____

To give online, go to chesterchildrenschorus.org and select "Make A Gift".

For information call Dana Semos, Managing & Education Director, at 610-328-1826.

Please return this form to our address below.



CHESTER CHILDREN'S CHORUS
STRONG VOICE • STRONG MIND • STRONG SPIRIT

John Alston, Executive & Artistic Director, and Founder
Sean Tripline, Assistant Music Director
Dana Semos, Managing & Education Director
Kevin Downs, Lead Math Teacher
Elisa DeNofio, Program Coordinator

Voice credits:

Editors: John Alston and Dana Semos
Designer: Karlyn Rosen Aires

Photography: John Wehmiller, Andrea Knox,
Jonathon Hodgson and CCC Staff

If you have received an extra copy of this newsletter, please notify us at 610-328-8180 and share the copy with a friend.

5 REASONS TO COME TO THE CCC'S DECEMBER CONCERTS:

- 1 **THE BEATLES**—*All You Need Is Love, Let It Be*
- 2 **BILLY JOEL**—*And So It Goes*
- 3 **WORLD PREMIERE** of Tom Whitman's *At Night/At Dawn*
- 4 **J. S. BACH**—*Air from the Third Orchestral Suite*
- 5 **(115 children giving you) A Perfect Hour of Music, Laughter... and Love.**

HAVE SOME MATH AND A SMILE

"Mr. Kevin, this is just too stressful," Ja'Naye fretted while trudging up the steps towards math class. She was exhausted—and who could blame her? A typical summer day for the rising sixth grader consisted of a spirited singing rehearsal, dancing in a lively hip-hop class, formulating and testing her hypotheses in an engaging science lab, and working to boost her math skills in the Math Practice Program.

This summer offered a glimpse of what's on the horizon for the evolving CCC math curriculum, designed by CCC Education Director Dana Semos and Kevin Downs (aka "Mr. Kevin"), the Chorus's new full-time math teacher. During the six-week program, several ambitious high school students undertook a rigorous SAT prep course. Meanwhile, each middle-school student received an individualized curriculum based on his or her past performance and then tackled their biggest challenges with a personal coach. The fun-based instructional

sessions included running around campus during a metric-unit scavenger hunt, sharpening recall of math facts with game-based learning, and squaring off in contests that tested geometry skills and creativity.



Ja'Naye's angst stemmed from one of those contests. The "mansion" she built for her Tiny House Project was carefully measured and constructed. After meticulously calculating the perimeter, area, and scale of her walls, furniture, and appliances, she went on to add her personal touches: colorful wallpaper, Louis Vuitton rugs, a state-of-the-art entertainment center, and a ceiling covered in sparkling lights.

When the contest winners were announced, Ja'Naye's worry was replaced with an ear-to-ear grin. Gripping the winning gift card in her hand, she joyfully acknowledged that all her hard work had been worth it. This fall, Ja'Naye is continuing with the CCC's school-year Math Practice Program because she has learned that nothing worthwhile comes easy.



KEVIN DOWNS, our new head Math Teacher, joined the Chorus full-time this fall. Kevin experienced a nomadic work life that has brought him, in his own words, "to a place he was intended all along." After a career in finance and then sports writing, he finally acted on a lifelong goal to become a teacher. He earned middle-school certification in 2014, and went on to work as a classroom teacher for four years, while also serving as the Math Coordinator for the CCC Summer Learning Program. He has built strong relationships with the students and staff, and creates a welcoming atmosphere where motivated students can reach their potential, especially in math fluency.