



**CHESTER
CHILDREN'S
CHORUS**

VOICE

Summer 2025 Newsletter

ROCKING AND ROLLING THIS SPRING

With the excitement of our spring concerts still fresh, CCC Executive and Artistic Director John Alston shares a behind-the-scenes look at the months of preparation that made them possible. You can experience the magic by watching the encore online at ChesterChildrensChorus.org.

If you've attended a CCC performance, you know they are joyful, exuberant, and humorous (thanks to our choreography). They are also precise, thoughtful, and intense. You might not know how hard we work in rehearsals to put on a great show. Audiences continue to be surprised that 110 children, ages 8 to 18, sing with such grace and precision.

Part of my job as music director is obvious—I run the rehearsals: teaching the notes, tuning the harmony, defining the articulation, etc. I often sound like a coach: 'Good job, but let's fix this phrase and try again.' Throughout most rehearsals, the children and I are laughing. At a recent soprano rehearsal, Izzy and Cyneathia ran circles around me with a delightful barrage of witty and well-timed one-liners. We still managed to memorize "Jailhouse Rock" and learn half of "Lacrymosa" from Mozart's Requiem. What the students bring to rehearsals may surprise you.

The older children will tell me when a phrase isn't quite right, or ask to hear it again before singing it. When they're learning a new piece, they'll let



me know when they've got it and no longer need more practice. I trust them. So much so that during concerts, you'll often see me check a tempo with a Concert Choir member before starting a tune because a few students memorize the tempos better than I do.

The Rossini "Barber of Seville Overture" and Elvis set were one of our best performances. We worked up lots of choreography in rehearsals—democracy at its messiest.

The Rossini choreography was a delight to work up. It took us three months of sectionals and full rehearsals to reach a point where we could think about the emotion and drama rather than fussing with notes. We created characters (not from the opera) to articulate the music. Appearances included a spoiled princess with "Black girl attitude," Rosie the Riveter, and teenage boys as themselves.

And the boys' attempt at snapping their fingers, tapping their feet, and shaking their hips when they lead "Hound Dog" is endearing, to put it gently. I hope you enjoy watching this concert as much as we enjoyed rehearsing and performing it.

CCC = Love, Laughter, and Practice...lots of practice. 🎵



Photography by John Wehmiller



A NEW MOVE FOR THE CCC

The CCC is undoubtedly unique for a children's chorus—we have a full-time math teacher and offer summer science classes to start! Now, we boast a 12-person chess club that meets weekly to learn the game of strategy and skill. During the pandemic, the CCC held its music and math classes remotely and offered virtual chess lessons to several children.

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Chess helped me get better at planning ahead and being perceptive to my opponents' moves. I hope more kids join next year.

Chloe, 10th grade

“Chess is a game of patience, strategy, and critical thinking. As a math teacher, it helps reinforce the topics we often cover in class: patterns, logic, and calculations, while also touching on geometry and probability,” said Downs. “Hopefully, by using these concepts in the real world, the children will see how helpful math really is.”

Downs began by teaching the children the basics of chess: terminology, piece movement/value, and the end game. Now, the children are learning to

“They have been clamoring for an in-person club ever since,” said CCC Lead Math Teacher Kevin Downs, who runs the club comprised of children in grades 4-10.

implement tactics and strategies needed to win matches. Students play a full, untimed match against each other every session. Notably, the club starts and ends each game with a handshake because winning and losing with humility and resilience are character traits that Downs doesn't often see in other games or sports.

Downs also called in an expert to help teach the game. Sho Glashauser, a Swarthmore College sophomore and CCC math coach since 2023, is a United States Chess Federation (USCF) National Master with a peak rating of 2200 and winner of the 2022 St. Louis Open.

“Most of the kids join the chess club with only basic knowledge of the rules, but week by week, they learn new tactics and strategies,” said Glashauser. “A great aspect of chess is that it is ageless—we work with kids from elementary, middle, and high school, and they can enjoy playing among themselves, with family members, or with their math coaches.”

The club is already preparing to compete in a chess tournament next fall.

“In an age of shrinking attention spans, I hope our chess students develop the patience and discipline it takes to succeed not just in chess, but in their everyday lives,” said Downs. 🎵

A WICKED GOOD TIME

In March, 38 of our middle and high school students in the Concert Choir took an exciting trip to New York City to see Wicked on Broadway, thanks to the generous support of the Tiger Baron Foundation. The day was packed with sightseeing, dinner, the show, and plenty of selfies. For many students, it was their first visit to NYC. 🎵

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As someone who dreams of living in New York City and being on Broadway, this trip felt like that dream came true for a day.

Amari Winder, Sophomore





THE CCC SURPRISES CHESTER'S "GUARDIAN ANGELS"

We recently teamed up with Life360, a location-sharing and family safety app, to show our appreciation for Chester's incredible crossing guards. These everyday heroes—or guardian angels as we call them—keep our children safe on their journeys to and from school. We surprised three local crossing guards, who thought they were part of a training video, but were instead met with a chorus of nearly 100 children singing in their honor. Watch the unforgettable moment unfold on our YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/ChesterChildrensChorus>. 🎵



CCC CHAMPION RECEIVES HONORARY DEGREE

Maurice Eldridge '61, a longtime supporter of the CCC, was recognized this spring with an honorary degree from Swarthmore College. Eldridge has been deeply involved in the Chester

community, and his initial support and advocacy helped make the Chester Children's Chorus a reality.

"Without Maurice, there would be no CCC," said Executive and Artistic Director John Alston, who, in 1994, was a music professor at Swarthmore when he approached Eldridge, then vice president for college and community relations and executive assistant to the president.

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**Without Maurice,
there would be
no CCC.**

John Alston, Executive
and Artistic Director

"He was very patient—and that's an understatement—with me when I walked into his office with my man purse, ponytail, and vision for the Chorus. He asked me if I was a student. The rest is history." Eldridge has served as a member of the CCC advisory board since its founding.

"Maurice has been a steadfast supporter and advocate of everything CCC. He has hardly ever missed a concert," said Cordelia Delson, CCC emerita board member. "Maurice's willingness to support John's original vision of a boys chorus helped lay a foundation for a CCC program that, 31 years later, is unparalleled." 🎵



WATCH OUR NEWEST MUSIC VIDEO

In February, the CCC released its newest music video, "If You Knew," written by Executive and Artistic Director John Alston. The video highlights the potential that lives in all children. Our children loved spending two days "on set" filming the video, which was shot in Lang Concert Hall at Swarthmore College and several murals in Philadelphia, and produced by Ben Kalina of Mangrove Media.

Watch it now at
[ChesterChildrensChorus.org](https://www.ChesterChildrensChorus.org).

Thanks to the Pincus Family Foundation for making this video possible.

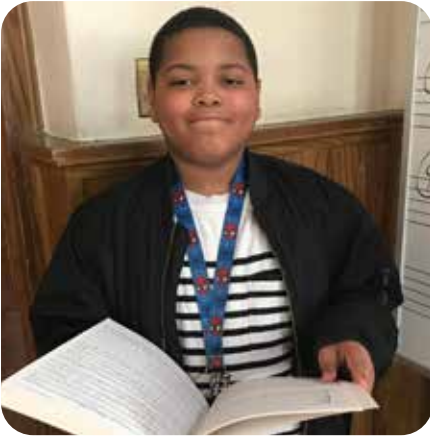
Left Page, Top Left: Swarthmore College student and USCF National Master Sho Glashauser with CCC fifth grader, Eli Byrd, Jr. Top Right: The chess club with a stunning oak chess table and chairs gifted by an anonymous donor. Bottom: Amari Winder outside the Gershwin Theatre in New York City. Right Page Top: In true CCC style, our children burst into song to surprise three of Chester's crossing guards with a musical thank you. Middle: Maurice Eldridge '61. Above: Producer Ben Kalina with CCC members on set in Philadelphia.



FIRST NOTES TO FINAL CONCERTS: A TRIBUTE TO OUR BASSES

The bass section forms the backbone of any choir, grounding the music with rich, resonant tones. At the heart of this powerhouse section are four seniors, each of whom has spent nearly a decade with the CCC. It's been a privilege to witness their musical, academic, and personal growth, and we're excited to see where their next chapters will lead.

"This group of basses is the hardest-working and best-sounding group yet," said CCC Executive and Artistic Director John Alston. "They can sing anything and sing everything well. This year, they are our rocks."



Jaiden Denny

In second grade, Jaiden opened a large envelope from Swarthmore College in front of his classmates.

"Being the cocky second grader I was, I told everyone I was recruited extra early," recalls Jaiden.

The envelope contained an official invitation to the CCC following Jaiden's in-school audition with John Alston two weeks prior.

"I can't imagine my life without the CCC. Whenever I think about my life path without the Chorus, it seems much more bland, and I would have lost out on many

different opportunities. I probably would never have learned how to swim!"

Jaiden also credits the CCC with teaching him humility, honesty, patience, and responsibility and helping him find an unexpected passion.

"Being surrounded by so many intellectual people in the Chorus really deepened my interests. At school, there might be one or two people to talk to like that, but at CCC, I'm constantly engaging with others who are excited to learn and share ideas.

"Talking with John, Daniel, R.J., and others about history helped me see that not only do I enjoy it, but it's something I might want to pursue as a career one day."

Jaiden plans to study political science and history at Neumann University, hoping to become a lawyer, history professor, or politician. Jaiden's post-rehearsal talks with John Alston spurred the political science major.

"John Alston is like Mr. Miyagi. He's so surreal that I don't even believe he's an actual person I know personally. He has a PhD!

And this man, being so influential and prominent, created this organization for kids living where I live? I honestly can't imagine my life without John. He's the reason that I even looked into political science."



Robert "R.J." Ford

R.J. walked into a recent CCC rehearsal wearing a volleyball uniform while casually describing the chocolate-covered orange cake he had made the night before. "It had Swiss meringue, French buttercream, orange zest, and a back note of coffee that enhanced the chocolate flavor," he explained. Then, he went upstairs and rehearsed for the spring concert before heading

home to study. Talk about a multi-faceted student!

R.J.'s start with the CCC was just as unique, joining as a fifth grader.

"Everyone else met John [as second graders] when he visited their school, but I met John at the Dunkin' down the street. John had brought the choir in for ice cream, and my mom said to him, 'That's a lot of kids.' John laughed and said he runs a choir, and my mom immediately said, 'My son sings! Can he join?' I have been here ever since."

R.J. appreciates being among others who are passionate about music.

"What is not to love about music? I love learning difficult and intricate music like Mozart's Requiem. When everything aligns perfectly, it is so pleasing to the ear."

As his time with the CCC winds down, R.J. reminisces about some of the intangible lessons he's learned.

"The CCC has made me a better person. I have learned to take responsibility, ask for help, and help others."

This summer R.J. will help other members in the Chorus as a Program Assistant in the CCC Summer Learning Program before heading to Delaware Technical Community College to study culinary arts.

"The CCC has molded me and changed my life in ways I couldn't possibly have imagined for myself. I have been given more opportunities than I ever thought possible, ensuring I have the confidence to go to college. I can sit with my head held high because I know I can do anything that I put my mind to, and that is because of the values instilled in me here."



Brian Gainer

Brian has been a quiet presence at the CCC since joining as, by his admission, an excessively shy third grader.

"I didn't talk much. Most of the time, I would only speak to my best friends. Talking to people I didn't know felt awkward because I didn't know what to say. Since being in the CCC, I have learned to communicate better and find what makes me happy."

It's no surprise that music and friends bring Brian joy, especially his fellow basses in the CCC.

"When we're all in a group, we feed off each other. A core value in the CCC is unity, and knowing these guys for the past decade, I can call them family. We have seen each other's ups and downs."

Like many of the basses, Brian loves singing upbeat music and choral pieces and learning more about the history of the songs, something he learned from CCC Executive and Artistic Director John Alston.

"John taught me the idea of learning to understand things. When we're learning a classical piece, John takes the time to translate the language, often Latin, so that we can understand what we're singing. He even tells us more about the artist's life, which I find really interesting."

Brian is attending St. Joseph's University and is interested in marine biology.

"If I had to sum up what I learned in the CCC? Diligence and integrity."



Daniel Peterkin

Very few high schoolers have stood before an audience to conduct Mozart's *Dies Irae*—but Daniel has. He joined the CCC in third grade, following his siblings' lead while forging his own remarkable path.

"Music has an impact on the human spirit in a way not many other things do," said Peterkin. "Although I'm a very logical-minded person, I've noticed over the past 10 years that music has helped me become more in touch with my emotional and spiritual side. I've been able to understand myself and the different things I believe in, grow my knowledge of music, absorb it, and make it a part of myself."

Daniel resonates with the CCC's strong voice, mind, and spirit motto.

"When we walk on stage and sing in front of hundreds of people, our whole posture changes. It's almost like we're offering gifts to everyone in the audience, saying, 'this is our gift to you. Whatever is happening in the world, these 55 minutes are just for you. We've spent a semester or a summer

Continued on page 6.



working on it.' And that gift is more than just sound waves, it's a spiritual gift."

Daniel also believes much of his growth and maturity came from working under John and Assistant Music Director Sean Tripline.

"Being in the CCC helped me realize who I am as a musician and what I can offer when I leave – have patience, be humble, and serve others."

For the second year, Daniel will participate in the Philadelphia

International Music Festival Piano Studies Program this summer. The program is designed for intermediate-to-advanced-level pianists and offers a comprehensive curriculum, including weekly private lessons, daily master classes, and piano seminars. Highlights include a concerto competition and a chance to perform with members of the Philadelphia Orchestra.

Daniel plans to study music performance at Swarthmore College on a full scholarship. 🎵

THEY'RE LEAVING ON A JET PLANE

Our seniors have quite a summer ahead of them! Three are preparing to travel internationally with AFS Cultural Programs, thanks to the Richard S. and Doris M. Cohen Scholarship, which covers all program and travel costs, provided by Open Horizon, a CCC partner.

Lisa Cohen, co-founder of Open Horizon, believes international travel is a valuable experience for students.

"Particularly for young people living in intentionally under-resourced communities, it's important that investments are made for their education, including experiential education. Traveling abroad has traditionally been reserved for well-off, white students, and all students can benefit from the learning that happens when crossing cultures."

Open Horizon connected the CCC with AFS, which provides intercultural learning opportunities to help people develop the knowledge, skills, and understanding needed to create a more just and peaceful world.

Adriana Miladinovic, AFS-USA senior study abroad manager, visas and scholarships, hopes that our seniors will return home with a broader worldview, stronger intercultural communication skills, and a deeper sense of confidence in their ability to navigate new environments.

"AFS-USA values partnerships with organizations that are committed to expanding learning opportunities for young people. Collaborating with groups like the Chester Children's Chorus helps ensure that motivated, curious, and capable students from a wide range of backgrounds can access meaningful global education experiences. These partnerships help us reach youth who are eager to learn and grow, and who bring important perspectives to the international communities they join during their AFS program." 🎵

“...all students can benefit from the learning that happens when crossing cultures.”

Lisa Cohen, Co-Founder
Open Horizon



Jaiden Argentina

Jaiden will study in Argentina for eight weeks, developing his Spanish skills in an environment entirely different from an American classroom. Staying with a host family and attending a local high school will immerse him in daily life and allow him to experience the many layers of this varied culture.



R.J. Kenya

He'll explore national parks, visit wildlife reservations, and tour urban centers, including downtown Nairobi, for two weeks. R.J. will also meet and live with the semi-nomadic Maasai tribe, who live on a breathtaking national reserve, and learn about the Maasai way of life and their work.



Brian China

This four-week intensive language study gives Brian the unique opportunity to improve his language skills (he's nearly fluent in Mandarin), explore some of China's most famous historical sites and cities, and immerse himself in Chinese culture through a homestay experience.



THE VALUE OF A GREAT COACH

Our four basses aren't the only students leaving the CCC nest this year. Ten Swarthmore College students, who serve as math coaches, are graduating this spring. Our math coaches work one-to-one with our middle and high school children and provide much more than academic guidance. These coaches offer consistency, encouragement, and a belief in each child's potential. Many of our math coaches work with the same students for years, developing relationships built on trust and mutual respect. The impact is clear—improved assessment scores and greater confidence both in and outside the classroom.

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I used to have Cs in math, and now I am getting As and Bs on my quizzes, which I've never done before.

D.J., Sophomore

In our most recent annual assessment, students in the Math Practice Program showed two years' progress in just one year, in the areas they worked on with math coaches.

Michele and Cyneathia

When Cyneathia joined the CCC as a third grader, she confessed to hating math. Now a high school sophomore in Honors math, she plans to pursue a career in the subject. What

caused such a turnaround? She has worked with Swarthmore College senior math coach Michele for two years. The pair is working on algebra, geometry, and SAT prep. “I hit it off with Michele right away. I saw her smile and knew I got a good one,” said Cyneathia. “I use the math skills that she teaches me at school, and then I show my classmates what I've learned from Michele because sometimes our teacher shows us a way we don't understand.”

“As a math coach, I try to set Cyneathia up for success,” said Michele. “It's about finding what works best for your student. Cyneathia is really good at doing things in a methodical way, so we focus on doing each step of math problems.”

“I just love math so much and can see it in my future,” said Cyneathia.

Steven and D.J.

Swarthmore College senior Steven and high school sophomore D.J. remember their rocky start when they met. D.J. would go as far as to hide behind a pole when Steven entered the CCC office.

“In the beginning, when D.J. and I started out, there was a lack of communication and

shyness on both of our parts,” said Steven. “We have grown in our relationship over the past two years, primarily because I have established an interest in D.J. outside of being just a ‘math student.’ I like to ask him about how his week is going, how he is doing in school, and about his extracurriculars—genuinely showing interest in him as a person, as opposed to someone I tutor two days a week.”

“I was in a shy and awkward phase when I met Steven,” recalls D.J. “But now that I've grown older and more mature, we've built a great relationship both in math and as friends.” D.J. has even contacted Steven for homework help on days the pair isn't scheduled to meet.

“I've reached out when I was struggling with homework because sometimes in school, I don't receive an explanation that helps me to do the homework or study for a test. I'll ask Steven for advice on solving the problems because he understands how I learn. Steven has helped me improve a lot in math over the years. I used to have Cs in math, and now I am getting As and Bs on my quizzes, which I've never done before.”

“I derive a lot of reward from seeing D.J. grow in his math skills and as a person,” said Steven. “When I see a math concept click for him, it's a feel-good moment.” 🎵

Top Left: Congratulations to three of our senior math coaches. L to R: Leo, Michele, and Sarah. Top Middle: Michele and Cyneathia. Top Right: Steven and D.J.



CHESTER CHILDREN'S CHORUS

YOU HELP EVERY NOTE—AND NUMBER—COUNT

At the Chester Children's Chorus, children engage deeply with music and math through intensive, year-round programs—at no cost to their families. Your donation directly funds this work, providing meaningful instruction and lasting opportunities for growth. Thank you for helping us continue to invest in the potential of every child.

**Donate today
and make a difference!**

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ChesterChildrensChorus.org/gift

By mail

Chester Children's Chorus
Attention: Gift Records
500 College Avenue
Swarthmore, PA 19081

Scan QR code below



CCC families enjoyed a night at the ballpark, courtesy of the Philadelphia Phillies Charities.

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT: PHILADELPHIA PHILLIES

Since 2015, the Philadelphia Phillies Charities have been a vital partner to the Chester Children's Chorus. Their support, which began with the help of longtime CCC advocate and former Phillies General Counsel Bill Webb, has allowed us to continue our year-round music and math education programs.

Beyond their financial contributions, the Phillies Charities recently hosted our families for a special night at the ballpark, giving them a chance to enjoy a fun evening together.

We're grateful for their continued support and look forward to the ongoing impact of this meaningful partnership. Thank you, Phillies Charities, for being such an important part of our work! 🎵

To learn more, visit: mlb.com/phillies/community/phillies-charities.

CONNECT WITH US!

**Stay connected with the
Chester Children's Chorus
beyond the stage!**

Follow us on Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube to see rehearsal snapshots, concert highlights, behind-the-scenes fun, and the joy our children bring to every note. Join us and help share their voices with the world!



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