



**CHESTER  
CHILDREN'S  
CHORUS**

# VOICE

Spring 2026 Newsletter

## A LEGACY OF LOVE AND LEADERSHIP

*Editor's note: Earlier this year, Alston announced that he would retire in August 2026 as Founder and Executive & Artistic Director.*

The Chester Children's Chorus began in 1994 with seven boys, a borrowed Swarthmore College van, and founder John Alston's belief in what children could achieve. "None of us could sing a lick," John says, "but we recognized and loved each other almost immediately."

Three decades later, that love overflowed from Lang Concert Hall, where dozens of CCC alumni – many now with children and even grandchildren in the Chorus – surrounded John on stage with thunderous renditions of "I Go to the Rock" and his own original work, "The Lord Is My Shepherd."

The moment was a living portrait of what John built over the past 32 years. The CCC became much more than a chorus. It grew into a second home where children are challenged, supported, and deeply loved. It became a place where children are expected to strive for excellence not only in music and math, but in every part of their lives.

For former CCC members like Jabree Reaves, now 35-years-old, the Chorus shaped far more than musical ability.

"John taught me not just about music, but he also helped me understand at a young age that just because we come from a city that has a bad reputation, according to those on the outside looking in, we're still capable of changing the world and accomplishing great things. John could have established this choir anywhere, but he chose Chester, and for that I am forever grateful."

CCC alumnus, Darrin Wood, says that sense of belonging and belief shaped his experience as well.



"When I first joined the CCC, I thought it was a fun place to sing. But as time went by, I felt it was more of a community where I could sing, thrive, and be myself. For me, there weren't a lot of places where I felt at home, but the CCC was a place I did. That is a testament to how John ran, directed, and led all of us. He not only made me a better musician but also a better man."

For Alston, the goal of the CCC was always more than music. It was to help the children develop strong voices, strong minds, and strong spirits.

"I know that these beautiful children and this program have been my life's work," said Alston. "From the very beginning, the children have created a profound love that has sustained and nourished us all. It has been my greatest privilege to learn alongside these extraordinary children and to witness what happens when they are challenged, supported, and truly believed in." 🎵

**Read John's letter at [ChesterChildrensChorus.org](https://www.ChesterChildrensChorus.org).**

Above: John Alston celebrates his final moments on stage during the CCC's spring concert in May.

# FAMILIAR FACES, NEW LEADERSHIP

Spend even five minutes at CCC “HQ,” and you’ll hear the same question again and again: “Where’s Ms. Dana?”

Sometimes the words are excited. Other times, they carry disappointment, worry, or urgency. But the result is always the same when Ms. Dana appears: comfort.

“Dana recognized and loved our children immediately, and they adore her,” said Alston. “For many of our children, their time with Dana is the most important part of the program.”

Though children – and even staff – frequently ask where Dana is, she is almost always nearby, “steering the CCC ship with clarity and care,” as Alston says. At any given moment, she may be teaching math, supporting staff, organizing programming, or comforting a child after a difficult day.

For Semos, those relationships are at the heart of what makes the CCC special.



**An educator for 35 years, Dana Semos will become Executive Director in July while continuing to teach in the Math Practice Program.**

“John created a space where children discover not only their voices, but their confidence, curiosity, and sense of belonging,” said Semos. “While leadership titles will change, the focus remains the same: showing our children what is possible when they are surrounded by excellence, discipline, and love.”



**Longtime Assistant Music Director Sean Tripline will become the CCC’s Artistic Director.**

After interviewing more than 50 applicants for the Assistant Music Director position in 2013, John knew the right person was still out there. Then Sean Tripline auditioned.

Sean has since led the CCC’s third-, fourth-, and fifth-graders who adore him. What makes Sean special – especially with younger children – is that

he meets them with genuine delight, silliness, energy, and wonder. Rehearsals are filled with laughter, playful banter, and high expectations, as Sean brings out the very best in children who are still learning not only to sing but also to focus, listen, and work together.

“Music pours out of Sean,” said Alston. “With constant encouragement and humor, he instills pride and confidence in our children. In every rehearsal, Sean inspires our children to master unfamiliar music that they eagerly devour.”

Sean will assume the role of Artistic Director in July, helping shape the CCC’s musical identity while leading its middle- and high-school singers.

“Being part of the CCC for the past 12 years has been one of the great privileges of my life,” said Tripline. “John has given the CCC a foundation that is both bold and beautiful, rooted in

discipline, artistic and academic excellence, and joy. I’m honored to carry that vision forward.”

This spring, the very first class of third graders Sean taught at the CCC will graduate from high school.

“I’ve watched children grow from nervous third graders into confident young adults, and in some cases, I’ve walked alongside families through that entire journey. Musically, it has shaped me tremendously, but even more than that, it has deepened my belief in what music and math can do in the life of a child and a community.” 🎵



# SENIOR SPOTLIGHT: A HARMONIOUS FRIENDSHIP

High school seniors David Berry and Makayla Davis aren't related, but after 10 years in the CCC together, they consider one another family.

Both joined the CCC as quiet third graders and blossomed during their time in the Chorus – individually and as friends.

“From strangers to friends to her being my big sister, Mak has always been there and never left my side,” said David. “Coming to the CCC as an only child, I learned that it’s not always about you. Sometimes, other people are your happiness, and sometimes family isn’t by blood, it’s by choice.”

Makayla gets teary-eyed when discussing her friendship with David.

“I don’t think I would be who I am right now without David. He has helped me through some of the hardest points in my life. When something is going on, I first think to share with David. Although we’re going to different colleges, I think we’ll always be in each other’s lives.”

## David Berry

While David has always loved singing, his years in the CCC have given him a deeper understanding of music.

“I never listen to a song ‘normally’ anymore. Every time a song is on, I am either harmonizing with it or pinpointing stuff out about it. It’s just a different aspect when you start to understand music.”

David has grown to appreciate classical music, which CCC Executive and Artistic Director, John Alston, intentionally incorporates into the CCC curriculum.

“Classical music can be difficult [to learn] because you have to be very precise,” explained David. “The way that John teaches it is really good. He makes sure that we hit everything hard, and then we do it over and over again until it becomes muscle memory.”

During his time in the CCC, David has sung dozens of classical works, including one of his favorites – *Lacrimosa* from Mozart’s *Requiem*.

“I feel like *Lacrimosa* is a beast-like song. There aren’t 13- and 17-year-olds singing *Lacrimosa* on the daily like our choir does. It is a powerful moment for us to memorize all those harmonies and notes.”

David plans to study music at Rowan University and hopes to become a music education teacher.



Seniors David and Makayla sit outside Lang Concert Hall before their spring performance.  
Photo by: John Wehmiller

## Makayla Davis

Before auditioning for the CCC, Makayla never imagined herself as a singer. In fact, for nearly three years, she was reluctant to stay in the program.

“My mom was like, ‘No, I think you’re going to like it. You should stay.’ And since around the sixth grade, I’ve chosen to stay. I love music now.”

Today, Makayla shares her mother’s advice with the younger children in the CCC.

“I love being one of the oldest in the choir because I can teach the younger kids so much. Some might feel unsure, like I did. I tell them, ‘Give it a little time. At first, it can feel like a lot of work, but if you like what you’re doing, then give it a chance.’”

Off stage, Makayla also developed confidence in her math skills.

“I think with math being required, the people who need help but don’t want to ask still get it,” Makayla said. “I used to be one of those people, but you don’t always have to figure it out alone. The CCC math teachers and coaches really pay attention to what you need and adjust to help you understand.”

As she prepares to become a CCC alumna, Makayla has some advice for her younger self and incoming students.

“Branch out more and remember there’s always room to improve. We’re not Beyoncé.”

This fall, Makayla will attend Delaware State University, where she plans to study political science and pursue a career in family law. 🎵



Round-trip transportation is provided for every child in the CCC.

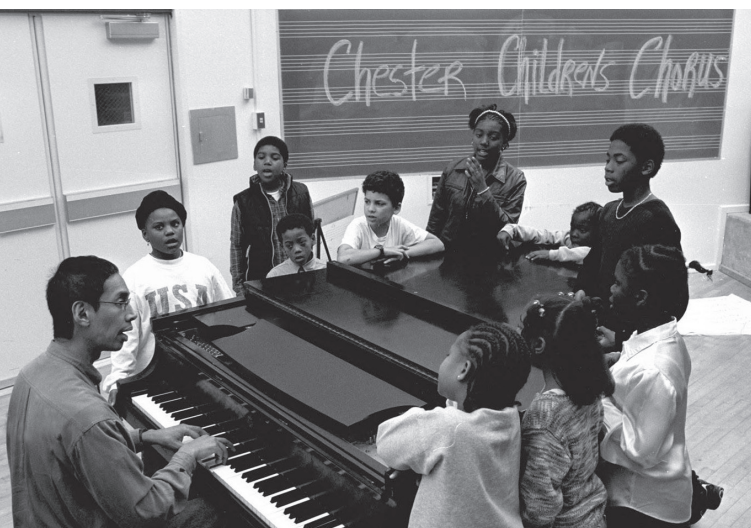


Generations of CCC alumni surrounded John on stage in May.



The CCC performed at PA Governor Tom Wolf's inauguration in 2015.

The final moment of the 2026 Mozart's *Requiem* performance.





**THANK YOU,  
JOHN**

The CCC began with seven boys, and now includes more than 100 children from every school in Chester.



Photos by: John Wehmiller

## HELP CARRY JOHN'S LEGACY FORWARD

If John's work has touched your life, we invite you to honor his extraordinary legacy by joining the John Alston Legacy Circle, created in celebration of John's lifelong commitment to Chester's children.

By including the CCC in your estate plans, you help ensure that future generations of children continue to experience the same music, mentorship, education, and community that have shaped so many lives through the Chorus. Your gift will sustain a place where children are challenged, supported, and deeply loved for generations to come. 🎵

To donate or learn more, visit [ChesterChildrensChorus.org](https://ChesterChildrensChorus.org).



Scan QR code to learn more.

# FINDING A COMMON DENOMINATOR



Through the CCC Math Practice Program, high school sophomore Sam (left) and Swarthmore College student Lena built a relationship that extended far beyond math.

Sam Kassa was in sixth grade when the COVID-19 pandemic shuttered schools, forcing all instruction to be held virtually. As with millions of children across the country, Sam made little progress without formal, in-person classes.

“The entire COVID year, most of the time, teachers would just send you a packet and tell you to do it, but nobody would remember because it was all online,” Sam said. “When we came back to school, I didn’t know what was going on in math. Months later, I was still struggling in classes. I needed a lot of help. I think I averaged between a 70 and 80.”



When in-person classes resumed at the CCC, Sam received more individualized attention and a new math coach named Lena. A first-year student at Swarthmore College

studying Political Sociology, Lena felt a connection to Sam before the two even met.

“When I saw Sam’s last name and his parents’ names on the contact sheet, I thought we might be from the same country,” Lena said. “Then Kevin [CCC Lead Math Teacher] confirmed Sam was from Tigray, which is where both of our families are from in northern Ethiopia. This was immediately in the wake of a war being waged on the region, so it meant a lot for me to meet someone from there.”

Lena was filled with excitement the day she first met Sam, dabbling in speaking and counting in

the Ethiopian language of Tigrigna (Sam could understand some of what Lena was saying).

“I think in any other context, we would have started to build a relationship outside of math much later on in the semester, but I felt, by virtue of this connection, we had something special from the outset,” Lena said.

Four years later, the pair still works together twice a week, tackling school assignments, CCC math curriculum, and now SAT prep.

“Since Lena started teaching me, I now average between an 85 and 95,” Sam said. “I like math now, but I didn’t when I first started. It’s easier to learn with Lena because we both come from the same background and have the same childhood stories to link us together.”

The connection continued to grow during a visit to an Ethiopian church in New York, where Lena discovered that another parishioner knew Sam and his father. Lena soon built a bond with Sam’s entire family.

“Sam’s family has been wonderful to get to know. His dad brought me Ethiopian food one time when picking Sam up from the CCC. We don’t get much of that in college; it was wonderful. He also put me in touch with a church in the Philly area that I later researched for my thesis on national identity in Ethiopian Orthodox Churches. It has been very impactful for me.”

Although Lena graduated this May, she hopes that more than their math lessons stay with Sam.

“This year has been the most future-oriented with Sam, where we started to look at what’s beyond high school. He is a curious and engaged student with so many interests and potential career paths. I hope that throughout the next two years, which can be especially stressful, Sam remembers how capable he is and that everything will work out.” 🎵



# MEASURING GROWTH BEYOND THE CLASSROOM



**Charlotte, a Swarthmore College student, works one-to-one with high school sophomore Princess during an afternoon math practice session.**

Over the past eight years, the CCC Math Practice Program has evolved into an intensive, individualized program that helps children strengthen foundational skills, build confidence, and set academic goals.

To do that, CCC staff assess children’s math skills using IXL, an online learning platform that tracks progress and helps teachers monitor growth over time.

“Conducting our own assessments helps us understand exactly where each child needs support,” said Kevin Downs, CCC lead math teacher. “Dana [CCC managing and education director] and I carefully choose the skills we focus on throughout the year, and the results help us provide much more individualized instruction than most children are able to receive in a traditional classroom setting.”

For the fourth consecutive year, CCC assessments show that every child in the program made at least one year of math progress overall, and an average of two years of growth in the skills practiced directly with Swarthmore College student math coaches.

The assessments help guide the work, but the relationships built over time are what allow children to thrive. Children can remain in the program for up to 10 years, allowing teachers and math coaches to gain a deep understanding of how each child learns, where they struggle, and how to help them succeed. 🎵

# STUDENTS SCORE BIG IN MATH MADNESS

Every spring, Lead Math Teacher Kevin Downs combines the excitement of the NCAA basketball tournament with the CCC’s math curriculum, creating a fun competition that turns math practice into Math Madness.

Over four weeks, children earned points for solving math problems correctly. Those points could then be exchanged for “free throws” during the basketball portion of the competition, where students had the chance to earn even more points for their teams.



Fourth grader Noah earned 217 points, setting a new CCC Math Madness record.

“I feel proud of myself. I had fun shooting all the 20-point shots. The best part is when you get extra points for getting math problems right.”

Fourth grader Zaria earned 155 points to claim the girls’ title.

“It was fun to do. You get to learn new things, shoot basketball, and cheer for people.”

In addition to bragging rights, Noah and Zaria won math madness belts and Wawa gift cards. Stay tuned to see if they can defend their titles next year. 🎵



**After weeks of friendly competition and challenging math problems, fourth graders Noah and Zaria emerged as this year’s Math Madness champions.**

# A CHESS “SHO-CASE”

While serving as a CCC math coach, Sho Glashausser, a Swarthmore College student, noticed that many of the children were interested in chess. A United States Chess Federation (USCF) National Master, Sho pitched the idea of creating a formal chess club where students could sharpen their skills while building focus, patience, and strategic thinking.

Through weekly practices before rehearsal, Sho taught children to think strategically, stay focused, and approach challenges thoughtfully, both on and off the board.

“What’s special about chess is that while being an enjoyable game in its own right, it trains crucial skills,” said Sho. “We are always encouraging students to notice more details, analyze their options, and think carefully about their decisions. Going forward, I hope that they carry this approach beyond the chessboard, too.”

Sho graduated in May and passed the club to fellow Swarthmore student Tully Ferris Wayne, who previously competed on a championship-winning high school chess team.

Thanks to Sho’s leadership and Tully’s enthusiasm to continue the program, the CCC Chess Club is already preparing for a summer tournament. 🎵



CCC chess club members celebrate another successful season. Insets: Founder Sho Glashausser (right) with incoming coach Tully Ferris Wayne and a plaque mounted on the chess board table honoring Sho’s leadership.



## YOU HELP EVERY NOTE & 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!**

Scan QR code or give online [ChesterChildrensChorus.org/gift](https://ChesterChildrensChorus.org/gift)



### By mail

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

## PERFORMANCES

### Summer Concerts-Totally 80’s

July 23, 2026 | 2:00 pm  
Our Mother of Good Counsel  
Bryn Mawr, PA 19010

July 25 & 26, 2026 | 4:00 pm  
Lang Concert Hall, Swarthmore College  
Swarthmore, PA 19081

### The Skyy Brooks Quartet

August 2, 2026 | 4:00 pm  
Lang Concert Hall, Swarthmore College  
Swarthmore, PA 19081

Admission to all performances is free.

## DONT MISS A BEAT!

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