

# VOICE



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE CHESTER CHILDREN'S CHORUS

SPRING 2023



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## A COMPILATION OF HIGH NOTES

Audiences were up on their feet cheering wildly for our Chester children at every one of their performances this school year.

In January, our children performed a concert in tribute to the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Song selections included, "O Love," "In Remembrance," and "If I Had Known," which CCC Executive and Artistic Director John Alston wrote in 2014 in response to gun violence claiming the lives of several siblings of CCC children.

"What I hope people take away from this performance is that the work is not done," said Alston.

In March, 25 CCC teenagers, along with 30 adult singers, professional orchestra, and soloists, gave a thrilling performance of Mozart's *Requiem*, which is performed every four years due to its complexity and cost. Our children and adults sang beautifully, the orchestra played immaculately, and the soloists were exquisite. Most notably, CCC sophomore Daniel Peterkin, conducted the *Requiem*'s second movement, the famous *Dies Irae*.

Just last month, all of our talented children gave some of their best performances at the spring concerts

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# HIGH NOTES

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that featured a jazz repertoire, classical selections, and the debut of two new songs arranged by CCC Assistant Music Director Sean Tripline.

"Beautiful Night" is based on Langston Hughes' poem, "My People" that marks its 100th anniversary this year.

"I Will Be There," also based on a poem, was written less than 100 days ago by CCC fifth grader, Ava Walker. This is the first time a student's work has been used to create a song in a decade!

One particular line in the poem about friendship—"I will be there for you until we both pass away; even if we fall together, I will be there for you."—inspired Tripline to transform it into a song.



Ava Walker with Sean Tripline

"I just thought that was incredible coming from a 10-year-old mind," said Tripline. "I think we all pray and hope that we have people in our lives who are as committed to us as we are to them. I think that people from every age and demographic can connect to those words so when I read that line, I was both shocked and comforted."

Ava and Tripline collaborated to ensure the piece matched her vision.

"The poem is about friendship," explained Ava. "You want to tell them that you'll be there all the way through until death. A real friend should always be there, not just once in a while."

In a few short weeks, our children will be back in rehearsals preparing for three summer concerts. Mark your calendars for July 27, 28, and 29! 🎵

**You can rewatch all of the performances on our YouTube channel at [youtube.com/ChesterChildrensChorus](https://youtube.com/ChesterChildrensChorus)**







# I Will Be There

By Ava Walker

I will be there for you  
even when the sun comes up  
even when the moon collapses  
I will be there for you until we both  
pass away even if we fall together  
I will be there for you.

I will I will and even if I fail  
will you forgive me? Even if I fall  
down will you pick me up like I  
would do for you?

Even when the sun comes up  
even when the moon collapses  
I will be there for you. Even if  
I fall down please be there for  
me. Even when the sun comes up  
even when the moon collapses  
I will be there for you.





# A SUMMER OF LOVE, LEARNING, AND LAUGHTER



The SLP is designed with specific priorities for each age group of children, who, as they grow, are given more independence and input on how they spend their days.



**If you've ever planned a family trip then you know how tedious the process can be—it's a true labor of love.**

Everyone wants to know what they'll be doing, where they'll be doing it, and at what time. Oh, and most importantly, what's on the menu? Don't forget that Grandma wants lots of pool time and Dad wants to see the sights.

Sound familiar? Now, imagine doing that for more than 100 children!

That's exactly what the CCC team does to prepare for our Summer Learning Program (SLP) that kicks off on June 26.

Planning began in January and involves multiple departments at Swarthmore College where the five-week, full-day program is held Monday-Friday at no cost to CCC families.

What once started with three dozen children and 10 staff members, has become our largest budget item at \$400,000 annually. This includes the temporary hiring of more than 60 staff. We hire 15-20 math coaches; 8-10 rising CCC seniors/graduating seniors as junior counselors; 8-10 program assistants who are CCC alumni; and 9 lead teachers all of whom have an education background. Not to mention dozens of volunteers.

We expect 120 to 130 children to participate in SLP—at least 25 new



to the CCC—who are divided into six groups based on their Chorus section and age. Coordinating their schedules is like putting a puzzle together. We try multiple scheduling options until the picture comes into focus and we have a rich and fulfilling day planned for every child.

The SLP began the same year the CCC was founded, 1994. CCC Executive and Artistic Director John Alston realized that the children he was teaching during the school year didn't have much to do over the summer.

"The Summer Learning Program is the foundation of our year-round program. Our CCC community spends full, busy days together. We practice, practice—and practice some more—our music and math, and have fun learning science, cooking, photography, swimming, and reading," said CCC Managing and Education Director Dana Semos. "We play and laugh together, and tire ourselves out every day. Camp, as our kids call it, is a big undertaking, and worth every minute of planning and preparation."

Today, the children have robust and fulfilling schedules that vary based on age. However, each day includes one-hour of music rehearsals in preparation for summer concerts and one-hour of math instruction (read our story on page 7 for more about this program). 🎵



***"The Summer Learning Program is the foundation of our year-round program. Our CCC community spends full, busy days together. We practice, practice—and practice some more..."***



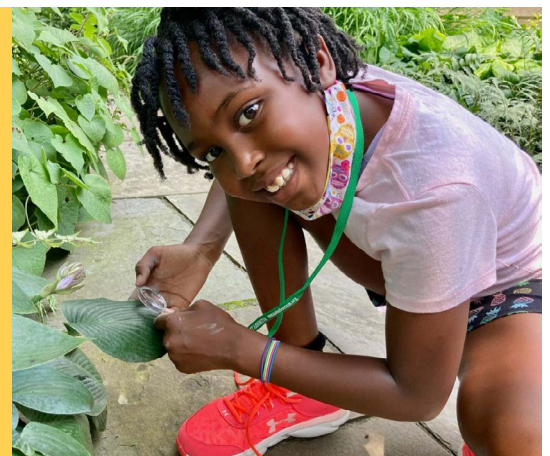
## **IT'S NOT TOO LATE TO SUPPORT THE SLP!**

***Did you know that we allocate \$4,000 per child to attend the SLP? There is still time to support the program by making a gift. We can't do it without you!***

**Donate online:** [ChesterChildrensChorus.org/Give](https://ChesterChildrensChorus.org/Give)

**Donate by mail:** Chester Children's Chorus  
Swarthmore College, 500 College Ave., Swarthmore, PA 19081

***Each child makes a difference, and each gift makes an impact.***





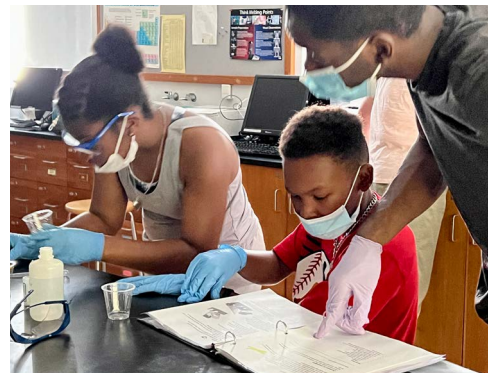
# WHAT PEAKS YOUR INTEREST?

**READING:** Learning to read can be both exciting and intimidating. Our youngest children spend 45-minutes a day alongside trained volunteers to practice reading aloud in a relaxed and encouraging environment.

**SWIMMING:** Our swimming program began in 2016 to ensure our children's safety during field trips to water parks. This year, our third-fifth graders will travel to Kids First Swim School Monday-Thursday where they will learn the life-saving skills needed to be comfortable and safe around water, including holding their breath, floating, and treading water. For many of the children, this will be their first time receiving formal water instruction and their first time swimming a lap in a pool.



**SCIENCE FOR KIDS:** Not many children can say that they took a science class designed and taught by Swarthmore College faculty and students but ours can! Our fifth, sixth, and seventh graders spend an hour inside a science lab learning science through fun and exciting hands-on activities.



**ARBORETUM:** Fun fact—Swarthmore College is a designated arboretum that our fourth graders explore for an hour during their botany class taught by a staff member from the Scott Arboretum.

**PHOTOGRAPHY:** Our middle and high schoolers can choose this elective to learn basic and advanced photography techniques that culminates in a student exhibit at the summer concerts.



**COOKING:** How many high school students do you know who are whipping up eggs Benedict in the morning? Our older children who choose this elective do that and more in the CCC kitchen.



**LUNCH:** Obviously, this isn't a class but our children say eating lunch at Swarthmore College's Dining Center is one of their favorite perks of the SLP.



# RAISING THE BAR

Over the course of four days in May, all of our children participated in a diagnostic assessment to measure their progress in our Math Practice Program, which became a requirement in 2019.

Yes, you read that correctly!

CCC children practice math as much as they practice music. In fact, our children's choir is likely the only one with a full-time math teacher on staff.

The need is great—especially after the pandemic—with less than two percent of Chester children being proficient in math.



***"I feel the math program challenges me a lot more than being in school. I got that push that I needed and a head start on what I am going to be learning in college."*** —CCC GRADUATING SENIOR



Starting casually as homework assistance in 2017, our Math Practice Program has grown into a rigorous and individualized program that includes instruction from our lead math teacher, managing and education director, and more than 40 Swarthmore College student math coaches.

"We measure the success of our program by looking at the children's growth over time which we're in a unique position to do because we work with the same children year after year," said Kevin Downs, CCC's lead math teacher.

On our annual assessment this spring, CCC middle and high school students made an average of a year's progress overall. On math concepts they focused on with their math coaches, their growth averaged two full grade levels.

"Mathematical fluency is a gateway to post-secondary choices. We want our children to have every option for success beyond the CCC and high school, whether they choose college, a trade, or go directly into the workforce," said CCC Managing and Education Director Dana Semos. 🎵



***"I've always been someone who struggled with math. It always takes me a little longer to get the hang of it. The Math Practice Program has been really helpful for me because we don't have tutors in my school and outside you have to pay other people. Having a math program in the choir is very beneficial because it's already there and it's people who I already know who are helping me to become better with it."*** —CCC GRADUATING SENIOR



# SENIOR SPOTLIGHT: CELEBRATING OUR 2023 GRADS

## Wayne Browne III

Wayne has come a long way since his days playing on a toy keyboard. Today, he has gigs across Greater Philadelphia to play bass, piano, and drums. Wayne credits his love of music to his dad, a drummer, who Wayne remembers accompanying to many gigs.

"Wherever he was, I was there too, tagging along watching and listening," Wayne recalls.

The CCC, which Wayne joined as a third grader, was a perfect complement to his budding passion.

"The choir gave me the ability to express myself and at the same time stretch my brain because outside of choir I didn't really have anything

going on. It was just school and then home—there wasn't anything interesting like an outlet that I could pour myself into," he explains. "But with choir, I felt it was a good idea to join because I was able to explore so many different genres of music."

After more than 10 years in the CCC, Wayne has performed those different genres in dozens of concerts. He especially appreciates learning to sing classical music in other languages including Latin, Spanish, and Italian.

"The more that we did it with choir the more I began to understand it easier. I thought that was a pretty cool thing to learn. Different styles of music aren't really shown around Chester."

Wayne has also served as a junior counselor during the CCC's Summer Learning Program, helping to guide the younger children including his little brother, Ayden.

"I am absolutely proud of myself for who I've become and how far I have come. I think everyone who has been around me watching me grow up can say the same."

Upon graduating from The Christian Academy, Wayne plans to pursue a career in music.

## Kanazja Carpenter

The CCC is a home away from home for Kanazja who joined the program as a third grader.

"During my time in choir I learned how to be more myself and to not care as much what people think," said Kanazja, who describes herself as outgoing, goofy, creative, and silly.



She is grateful for CCC Executive and Artistic Director John Alston's vision to create the CCC.

"If it wasn't for the choir, I feel like I would be doing nothing with my time," said Kanazja. "I am really thankful that John started the CCC. He doesn't give up on the kids. He really cares about us and does a lot for us. We weren't all great singers at first but John really helped bring the music out of us."

When she's not singing at the CCC, Kanazja is participating in the Math Practice Program.

"The math tutoring helped me a lot. At school, there have been many times when our math teachers left. For a whole semester I didn't have a statistics teacher, but the tutors and Kevin (CCC's Lead Math Teacher) helped me learn the things I didn't even know."

Kanazja aspires to be a dental hygienist and plans to attend Harcum College after graduating from Chester Charter Scholars Academy.



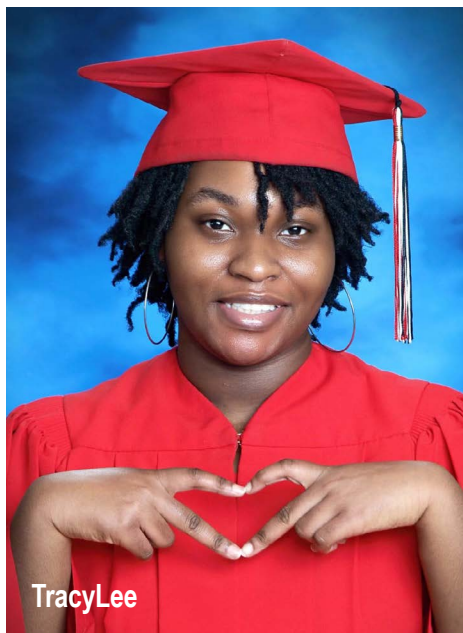


## TracyLee Dennis

One of TracyLee's fondest memories of her 10 years in the CCC happened after a summer field trip to Six Flags.

"We all sang on our way home even though everybody was tired. We all felt connected and shared our stories, different moments and memories. It was really cool."

Those connections are what makes the CCC feel like family to TracyLee.



"Family doesn't always have to be blood. Your family is the people who you meet in life. Being able to sing with everybody—we all technically grew up together—I consider them a second family. I think that's a big lesson. Being able to love each other even though we all have our differences."

For a second year, TracyLee will serve as a junior counselor during the CCC's Summer Learning Program. She looks forward to continuing the tradition of singing on the bus home from camp—and getting a boost of energy from the younger children who she will spend the mornings with.

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## PARTNER SPOTLIGHT THE PRESSER FOUNDATION

*Editor's note: We're launching a new feature that will be included in each edition of VOICE to highlight the work of our amazing partners who allow us to continue serving the children of Chester.*

The adage "it takes a village" is certainly accurate when it comes to teaching music and math to hundreds of Chester children for nearly 30 years! We rely on and are truly grateful for the continued support of those in the CCC family—teachers, volunteers, van drivers, Swarthmore College students, faculty, and staff, individual and corporate donors, and family foundations.

For 20 years, The Presser Foundation has been a dedicated CCC partner. Created in 1939 in honor of philanthropist Theodore Presser, the foundation provides philanthropic support of music and serves a broad and diverse community of musicians, educators, and music lovers.

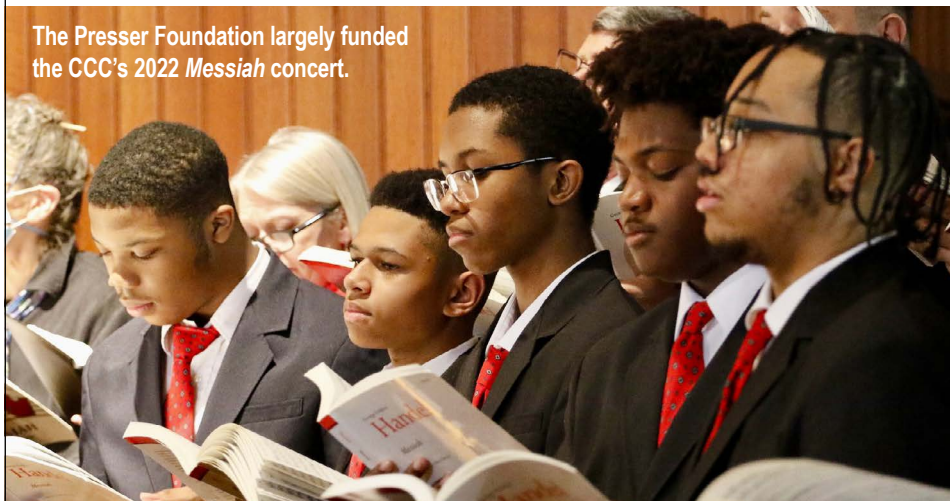
"Music transcends words and speaks directly to the human experience," said Teresa Araco Rodgers, executive director of

The Presser Foundation. "Music also provides one of the strongest and most fertile platforms for social justice and the work to create a more humane and inclusive future. We know that the CCC views the power of music much in the same way."

Most recently, The Presser Foundation largely funded the CCC's 2022 performance of Handel's *Messiah*.

"The Presser Foundation appreciates that singing great classical music is a profound experience that enriches the lives of our Chester children," said CCC Executive and Artistic Director John Alston. "With the Foundation's help, CCC children know and love Mozart's *Requiem*, Handel's *Messiah*, and lots of exquisite Renaissance and modern choral works. We are grateful to The Presser Foundation for its continued generous support."

The Presser Foundation largely funded the CCC's 2022 *Messiah* concert.



To learn more about The Presser Foundation visit [thepresserfoundation.org](https://thepresserfoundation.org).



## ALUMNI FEATURE: JESSE BRITTAIN

Unlike most children who join the CCC as third graders, Jesse Brittain was the new kid on the block when he joined as a sixth grader in 2014 after moving to Chester several years earlier.

"I was immediately put in the Concert Choir and so that's different from a lot of kids because they got to go up through all the ranks but I was just dropped right where expectations are the highest," recalls Jesse.

All of the children already knew one another, causing Jesse to wonder if he'd acclimate or stand out.

"Everyone was really welcoming. It's surprising how open they are to new people who come in. You just have to prove that you want to be there for the betterment of the choir and also for your future."

Since graduating from The Christian Academy in 2020, Jesse's future has been bright. He currently studies marketing at Cairn University where he plays collegiate level soccer. Upon graduation, he hopes to combine the two interests and pursue a job in sports marketing.

In addition to working full-time, he will be spending a fourth summer working for the CCC Summer Learning Program where he first started as a junior counselor in 2019. He'll spend the majority of his days with the Junior Choir (4th graders).

"The kids are really great and really open to learning," said Jesse. "Being able to connect with each kid



and work with them through their particular journey is lots of fun for me. I especially enjoyed my time as a junior counselor because they specifically are the people who you look up to because they came through the choir. It's a different level when you see people who've actually been through what you've been through."

There's no doubt that the children see Jesse as a role model. And as he builds his future, he has advice for current choir members considering their futures.

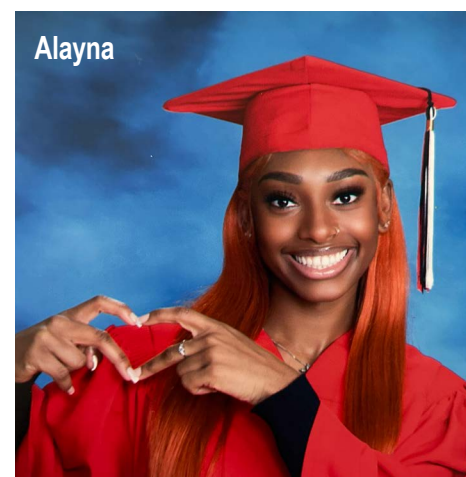
"I'd say absolutely do make an effort in school and make an effort in pursuing the things that you want to pursue. But, also know that just because you don't necessarily succeed at everything that you're trying to do doesn't mean that you've failed. Just because you don't ace the class that you put all of your effort into, that doesn't make you a failure. That doesn't mean that there isn't a future. It just means that you have the opportunity to take a new path to get there."

## SENIORS

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"We are a little message of hope. Every time you look at the news somebody's child is dying from violence. There is some hope for kids to be able to do things that they actually enjoy that are safe, and you can find that in the CCC. We all became our tight knit group that helps each other grow."

After graduating from the Chester Charter Scholars Academy, TracyLee plans to pursue Biology at Lincoln University with a goal of becoming a veterinarian.



Alayna

### Alayna Guy

Despite being extremely shy as a child, Alayna found the courage in the second grade to audition for the CCC and has never looked back.

"I am surprised that I even auditioned because around that time I barely spoke," recalls Alayna. "But I feel like it's probably the best decision that I've made."

Over the next 10 years, Alayna credits the CCC with developing her into a woman she is proud to be today.

"I don't think that I would be who I am today without being in the CCC."



It just changed a lot of aspects of my life. Being able to learn how to be comfortable in different environments, it got me out of my comfort zone, it got me to literally speak more. To see how far I've come to actually stand in front of people and sing and act is what I'm most proud of."

Being in the choir has helped Alayna get in touch with her creative and artistic side, sparking an interest in musical theater. She has since acted and sung in four musicals, complementing her private CCC voice lessons with Tracy Sturgis.

Upon graduating from Chester Charter Scholars Academy in June, Alayna plans to major in pre-physical therapy at Neumann University with a possible minor in music. She is a recipient of the Chester Friends Meeting Quaker Scholarship.

"The CCC shines a positive light on our community," said Alayna. "For a long time and still today, Chester isn't always shown in the best light. A lot of people focus on the negatives. There are a lot of positive things in our community and the CCC is one of them."

## Brianna Sammons

Ask Brianna how a Venus flytrap and science experiments relate to a children's choir and she'll tell you all about it. Some of her favorite CCC memories happened in a science lab during our Summer Learning Program held at Swarthmore College.

"The Science for Kids program is really cool," said Brianna. "We went into a plant lab and we got to see different types of plants including the Venus flytrap. We watched videos on different plants, and then conducted experiments like adding food coloring to water to watch the petals change colors. We even dissected a mink when I was 10!"

Now, Brianna is ready to help the younger children make memories by serving as a junior counselor this summer.

"I do feel like a role model," said Brianna. "One of my math coaches asked me to write a song for the younger kids so I wrote a song about telling time and it was really good. They'll sing it this summer."

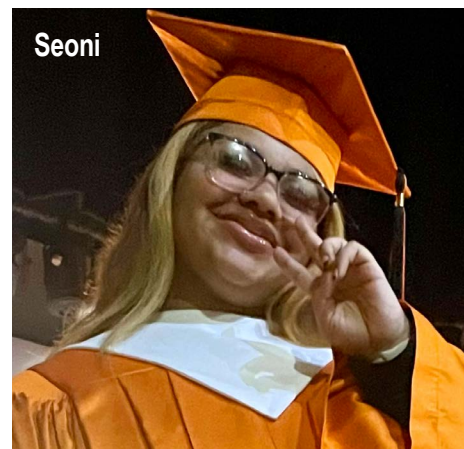
Brianna feels that her time in the CCC taught her to think outside the box, to be more outgoing, and to not to give up.

"Even through the trials and tribulations that I personally had outside the choir, the CCC has motivated me to keep trying and to look on the bright side. And that's what keeps me going, knowing that I am a part of this nice choir. I get to have friends and see them during my practices and in the summer. It shows that once you keep practicing that the outcome is so much better than trying once and giving up. You have to keep practicing and practicing to get the final result that you want."

Upon graduating from Cardinal O'Hara, Brianna plans to study Biology at Widener University in hopes of becoming a dentist.



Brianna



Seoni

## Seoni Williams

Home videos show Seoni singing and dancing at just three years old. Now, at age 18 and 10 years with the CCC, her favorite memories still include singing and dancing.

She has performed in dozens of concerts, singing everything from Mozart to Motown and in multiple languages.

As Seoni blossomed, so did her confidence. And with newfound confidence came new opportunities.

"I'm proud of how the choir has helped me with my singing," said Seoni. "I used to be scared, now I sing the National Anthem for Chester High football games. I did Mr. Mann's Youth Jam Session (a voice competition) at City Winery in Philadelphia on Super Bowl Sunday! It was fun. I was scared, but I met a lot of new people. I did good, even though I felt nervous. I sang 'Listen' by Beyonce."

As she reflects back on the past decade, Seoni is glad that she committed to being in the CCC.

"The chorus gave me freedom, gave me a get-away. It gave me a place to sing. My friends were there. Everyone is so nice."

Seoni will graduate from Chester High School in June. She has been accepted to Delaware County Community College. 🎵





## CCC STAFF

John Alston, *Executive & Artistic Director*  
Elisa De Nofio, *Program Coordinator*  
Kevin Downs, *Lead Math Teacher*  
Carolyn Marzo, *Director of Development*  
Christina Meehan, *Marketing & Development Associate*  
Dana Semos, *Managing & Education Director*  
Sean Tripline, *Assistant Music Director*

## VOICE SPRING 2023

Design: Karlyn Rosen Aires  
Photography: John Wehmiller and  
Swarthmore College Staff

**The Chester Children's Chorus  
is an affiliated program  
of Swarthmore College  
and receives generous in-kind  
support from the College,  
but raises its own funds to  
cover all direct expenses.  
Official tax receipts for charitable  
contributions to the Chorus come  
directly from the College.**

CHESTER CHILDREN'S CHORUS  
500 COLLEGE AVENUE  
SWARTHMORE, PA 19081  
610-328-8180

## STAY IN THE KNOW— JOIN OUR EMAIL LIST!

Get concert and program news  
as well as a behind-the-scenes look  
into the CCC when you sign up  
for our email list.

Sign up online at  
[ChesterChildrensChorus.org/signup](https://ChesterChildrensChorus.org/signup)

or scan this QR code  
with your phone's  
camera:



## SAVE THE DATES! 2023 SUMMER CONCERTS

Thursday, July 27 at 2:00 p.m.

Friday, July 28 at 7:30 p.m.

Saturday, July 29 at 7:30 p.m.

Lang Music Building, Swarthmore College

*Admission is free. Seating is limited  
and on a first-come, first-served basis.*

Visit [ChesterChildrensChorus.org](https://ChesterChildrensChorus.org)  
for more information.



## PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

**A**s the CCC approaches its 30th anniversary in 2024, we have begun the strategic planning process to take us in a continued direction of sustainability and growth for the next three to five years.

We have hired a consultant who has been conducting one-to-one and group discussions with members of the CCC family including families,

children, staff and board members, volunteers, and donors, to understand where we're succeeding and where we can improve.

That information will be used to create a vision for the future and identify new goals and objectives.

We anticipate that the process will be complete by the end of 2023. 🎵



## DON'T FORGET TO FOLLOW US!



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ChesterChildrensChorus

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**STRONG VOICE • STRONG MIND • STRONG SPIRIT**

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