



Come Celebrate with Us!



Annual Holiday Concert

Saturday, Dec. 16, 8 p.m.

First Pentecostal Holy Church, 324 Pusey Street, Chester, Pa.

Admission free—Tickets not required

Reaching Out, John Alston Teaches Public School Students

Forty Chester children whose school had eliminated music teaching are singing this fall with a volunteer teacher: Chester Children's Chorus director John Alston.

Alston has formed a chorus of third- and fourth-grade students at Stetser Elementary School. He spends 3 hours each week with the children, teaching them "fun, rhythmic stuff, mostly spirituals and gospel," and solfeggio, or singing by do-re-mi syllables, which is the first step in learning to read music. The children are eager to give their first performance at the end of the semester.

Alston volunteered to teach at Stetser after he visited a progressive school in Harlem with several Chester-Upland School District administrators, including Stetser principal Henrietta Shelton. In that school, music was a powerful force, and the experience encouraged Alston to ask if he could try teaching at Stetser.

"It's time for people with expertise to begin using their expertise to make the system better, and I want to do my part," he said.

Chester-Upland is one of many districts throughout the nation that have reduced or eliminated music and art classes to focus on meeting the reading and math goals of the federal "No Child Left Behind" law.



Director John Alston teaches solfeggio at Stetser Elementary School in Chester.

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Chorus Members Teach Each Other and Learn the Joy of Helping

Much of the power of our program—and of music—comes to life in our concerts. The children stand tall, concentrate, sing with confidence and joy, show off a bit when they have the chance, and joke comfortably with me—all in front of a packed concert hall.

Something equally special happened this past summer in our keyboard lessons, with no audience—and even better, without my even being in the room. Children began to teach and learn from each other, forming small communities in which everyone contributed knowledge and support.

The impetus was a Concert Choir so large that I could not teach all the children myself.

Craig Robinson becomes a teacher

First, I set up 16-year-old bass Craig Robinson Jr. in a room with three pianos to

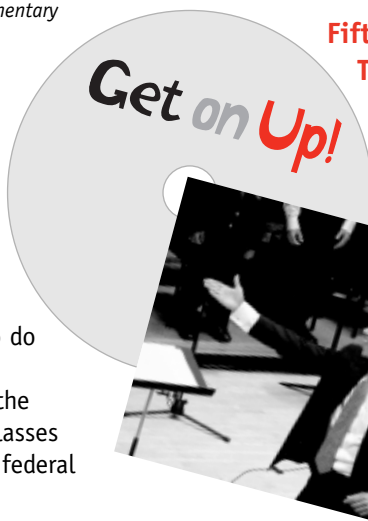
work with two gifted middle schoolers. Craig, an 8-year veteran of the chorus, has studied piano for 2 years with me and with Swarthmore jazz pianist Ward Marston.

Unable to teach all the children at the same time because of their disparate skill levels, I divided the remaining children into two groups, each in an improvised piano studio in Lang Concert Hall. One group worked on stage and the other in the balcony, and every child had a keyboard with earphones to allow undisturbed practice. In one group, I asked 13-year-old Stefan Cassell to help Glenn Simpson, 11, with note reading.

Children Share their Knowledge

In the slightly more advanced group, teachers emerged spontaneously. Marquise Miles, 13, whose mother has taught him some piano,

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Fifty joyful young singers!
Twelve original gospel songs
by John Alston!

They're together on our first CD,
recorded last summer!

ORDER IT NOW!

Ordering information, lyrics, and a musical excerpt are on the Web at www.chesterchildrenschorus.org/cd/

It will be a great help to us if you print out the order form on the Web site and send it with your payment. Those without Internet access may call CCC administrative assistant Elisa DeNofio at (610) 957-6049 for ordering information.

See page 2 for summer photos and update on school in Chester!

To make a tax-deductible contribution, please detach this coupon, complete, and mail to the following address:

Chester Children's Chorus, Swarthmore College, Department of Music and Dance, 500 College Avenue, Swarthmore PA 19081

Enclosed is a check in the amount of \$35 \$75 \$100 \$250 \$500 \$1,000 Other: _____.

(Check should be payable to Swarthmore College with Chester Children's Chorus in memo field)

Please charge my gift to my:

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Expires: _____ / _____

Amount to charge: \$ _____

My gift will be matched by my employer.

(Please enclose your signed matching gift form.)

THANK YOU!

School Development Pace Quickens

Creating a school in Chester continues to be a challenging and exciting endeavor. Hoping to open the school in fall 2007—2008 at the latest—chorus director John Alston and board members of the Chester School of the Arts are working extraordinarily hard on the details. What will the curriculum look like? How will music be taught to kindergartners? Will the dance program include ballet? Is it feasible to start with pre-K, or should we wait? How much money do we need to raise to do the things we want to do?

We continue to talk with the school district and others about the kind of school that will be best for the children. We have hired consultants to help us with school design, the educational program, business and budget planning, and fund-raising. Interviews with chorus members and parents are featured on our nearly-finished fund-raising video.

In sum, things are hopping. More to come in the next newsletter!

—Wendy Emrich, managing director,
Chester School of the Arts

... Joy of Helping

(continued)

learned pieces and played them for the other three. But he didn't understand key signatures or how to build a major scale. Aliya Tanner, 11, volunteered to teach him. Aliya and Demar McKoy, 13, worked as a team, one playing the right hand and the other the left hand of a given piece. Bruce Blanding, 12, and Marquise teased each other in a gently competitive spirit, cheering when they played well and laughing when they played badly. When I once asked Marquise if he preferred to have Aliya or me explain something to him, he wisely chose Aliya.

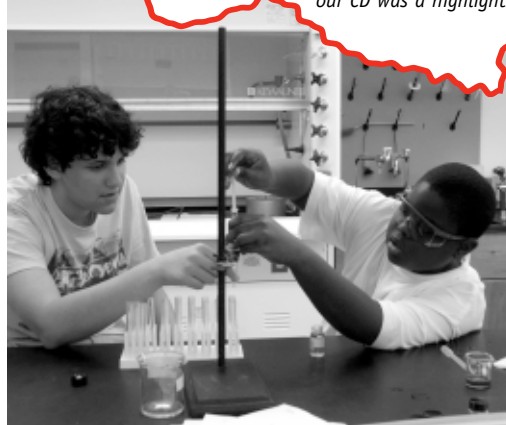
And so, for half an hour each day, I walked up and down stairs, working with one group and then the other, teaching as well as watching the children teach and be taught. The children were engaged, happy, and growing musically and personally. I was giddy.

The Joy of Helping Others

Craig, already a fine musician, demonstrated that he is also a talented teacher. One of his students, 12-year-old Asr McCready, whipped through his piano book and played easily with both hands. Jennif-



What a summer we had! Sixty-six children, ages 8 to 16, came to Lang Concert Hall at Swarthmore College each day for 5 weeks to learn music and enjoy a host of other educational and character-building activities. Our program was enriched with the addition of art as an elective for Concert Choir members and daily sessions in building relationships for the younger children. In science classes led by Swarthmore College faculty, Concert Choir members dissected worms, built and launched rockets, and designed buzzer circuits. As always, African dance and drumming was a hit, and the younger children looked forward to daily one-on-one reading with adult volunteers. New teachers Jeannine Osayande in building relationships, Helen Mangelsdorf in art, and Julian Ovalle in recreation strengthened the program. And the week spent recording our CD was a highlight!



fer Foster, also 12, made good progress in learning to read music, which she resists because her ear is so good. She surprised me by playing a 12-bar blues that I had taught Craig 6 months earlier.

The flowering of these children as teachers and mentors to each other was beautiful to watch. They have learned to sing really well, and now they were learning the joy of helping others. Watching them, I became confident that, as they grow up, they will be able to teach others some of the lessons they learn with us: How to care for others, how to pay attention, and maybe even how to play the piano.

—John Alston

HESTER CHILDREN'S CHORUS

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and secretary

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Voice

The Newsletter of the
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