Our Singers Become Composers

Our chorus members are becoming composers and arrangers as well as singers! At our spring concerts on May 11 and 12, you will hear six of our teens and pre-teens perform their original songs. “These children’s gifts—their creativity, willingness to work hard, and ability to perform—are a gift to the rest of us,” says director John Alston.

As members of our Composers’ Circle, they create, refine their work, and practice, knowing that at the end of the semester they will present their finished pieces in concert before 700 or more people.

The Composers’ Circle meets on Saturdays after chorus rehearsal. In the fall semester, John gave keyboard lessons to three members, Craig Robinson Jr., 16; Jennifer Foster, 12; and Ja’Quay Lundy, 11. The girls learned to build scales and chords, while Craig worked on arranging and improvisation. John and Craig worked with the girls on composition, and Craig created piano accompaniments for their pieces.

The girls’ powerful performances of their works, with Craig as accompanist, were a highlight of our December concert. They drew enthusiastic applause from the audience—and urgent requests from other chorus members to join the group.

The new members this spring are Alexis Watson, 12; Asia Cherry, 11; and Jazmin Sarinana, 11. John teaches piano to all the children. In composition, Craig collaborates with Jenny and Ja’Quay while John works with the other girls. The groups come together to listen to each other’s work and congratulate the team that produced the day’s best new creation. “This element of playful competitiveness motivates everyone to work hard,” John reports.

A Fortunate Accident, A New Direction

For 14 of the 16 years that I have been at Swarthmore College, I’ve been leading two lives, teaching College classes and conducting the College chorus while guiding and developing the Chester Children’s Chorus. As the children’s chorus grew, balancing those two calling is teaching the children of Chester. Since then, I have been working toward a major change, which happened in January; I became the vocal teacher for all the chorus members.

That’s the name I’ve given to the turkeys I ran over while bicycling downhill at 40 miles an hour. I spent 8 days in the hospital with a punctured lung, three broken ribs, a separated shoulder, and plenty of time to think and listen. What I heard, as I’ve said, was that my life’s work should be with Chester children. I’m sure my understanding of that was helped by the wonderful cards and good food that the cho-

An Honor—and a Mystery

What an honor—and what a surprise!—that Director John Alston was named as one of 13 finalists for the Philadelphia Inquirer’s Citizen of the Year Award. In a Dec. 30 editorial, the Inquirer cited John for mining “hidden acres of diamonds” in his work with the Chester Children’s Chorus. The citation quoted the person who nominated John as saying he “has fostered community, encouraged self-esteem and engendered hope in the students he directs.”

Who was that person? We don’t know. We learned of the nomination when it appeared in the newspaper. Thank you, whoever you are!

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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☐ My gift will be matched by my employer.

(please enclose your signed matching gift form.)

THANK YOU!
Adult Volunteers Needed
For Summer Reading
New time: 11 a.m. daily

Are you looking for a memorable summer experience? Become a Chester Children’s Chorus reading volunteer!

Each volunteer is paired with a child 8 to 10 years old. We try to keep pairs together so real bonds can develop, which is easiest when volunteers come for a full week or more. You’ll meet your child at 11 a.m. in Lang Music Building, choose books from our library, and find a quiet nook just right for reading and talking.

What’s New?

Chester School of the Arts: A New Kind of Charter School

In November, the Chester School of the Arts (CSA) board applied to the Chester Upland School District for an entirely new type of charter school. The planned school will be a model by using effective teaching methods, working with families, and finding creative ways to partner with the school district. The school will also bring new resources into the district.

CSA will open in 2008, starting with either K-3 or pre-K-2 and adding one grade a year through Grade 12. The school’s distinguishing characteristics will be a core arts curriculum, rigorous inquiry-based academics, mixed-grade classrooms, programs in character development and family learning, and partnerships with the district and the city.

These partnerships will include providing training for non-CSA teachers, expanding the Chester Children’s Chorus so more children from the district can receive music education, and increasing our role as artistic ambassadors for the district and the city.

The board has raised $500,000 toward the cost of starting the school and estimates its operation will require about $1 million a year of private support in addition to state and local subsidies.

To receive a 2-page executive summary with more detail, contact managing director Wendy Emrich at wemrich@comcast.net or (610) 328-1339.

Outreach Concert in Malvern, May 19

We want to spread the joyous singing of the Chester Children’s Chorus to audiences far and wide, starting with those of Philadelphia’s Main Line. We are very fortunate that St. Peter’s Church in the Great Valley has offered to sponsor our First Main Line concert on Saturday, May 19, at 7 p.m. St. Peter’s is a beautiful, historic church; we will sing in the congregation’s new Community Outreach Hall, and we look forward to filling it with song. We thank the church members and their outreach committee for creating this opportunity for us. Directions to the church are at www.chesterchildrenschorus.org under How to Get Here. Information about the church is at http://www.stpetersgv.org.

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

We cannot accept on-line payment. Please print out the order form and send it with your payment. Those without Internet access may call CCC administrative assistant Elisa Dukhoff at (610) 957-6049 for ordering information.

Our gospel CD is still available!

http://www.chesterchildrenschorus.org/cd/

Get on Up!

Our newsletters are free emails sent to over 10,000 addresses. Join the mailing list at GetonUp.org.

CHESTER CHILDREN’S CHORUS

John Alston, Founder and director
Andrea Knox ’94, managing director
Elisa Dukhoff, assistant director
Advisory Board
Andrea Knox, ex officio, manager
Cordelia Delson, president
Scott Keeler, vice president
and secretary
Leslie Price, treasurer
Maurice Eldridge ’61, ex officio,
Swarthmore College
Wendy Emrich
Edmund Jones ’39
Mary McLean
Sandra Robinson

Voice
The Newsletter of the Chester Children’s Chorus
Andrea Knox, editor
Phillip Stern ’94, designer
Photos by Andrea Knox and George Widman
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