



VOICE



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE CHESTER CHILDREN'S CHORUS

SPRING 2024



Nehemiah (right) is thrilled to join his sister Nasya in the CCC this summer.

A FAMILY AFFAIR

After 30 years, the CCC has become a multi-generational experience

When third-grader Nasya boarded the CCC van headed to a Saturday rehearsal, she noticed a face that didn't belong—her little brother's.

Nehemiah had been watching her participate in the chorus this year and saw his chance to join in on the fun.

Luckily, Nehemiah is a rising third-grader, so he finally got his shot at auditioning with Assistant Music Director Sean Tripline later that day. He'll officially be joining his sister in the CCC beginning this summer.

"He is so excited that he's counting down the months and days until he starts," said Tonya, Nehemiah's mom.

They're not the only pair of siblings in the CCC. After 30 years, the program has welcomed brothers, sisters, cousins, nieces, grandchildren, and even children of CCC alumni.

This year, more than 40 siblings and relatives are in the chorus.

Junior Daniel Peterkin is the third in his family to participate. His sister Rachael is an alumna and his brother Isaiah is a senior.

"Having grown up in the CCC with Rachael and Isaiah only enhanced an already firm bond between the three of us," he said. "We each have had our own experiences in the CCC, but we



Brothers Isaiah (left) and Daniel (right) have been in the CCC together for nearly 10 years.

operated and continue to operate as a unit, and that connection is truly irreplaceable and undeniable."

Their mother, Celeste, has also performed with her children at the CCC's Mozart *Requiem* and Handel's *Messiah* concerts.

"My husband and I are infinitely grateful for the opportunities the CCC has afforded our children. The experience and community will stay with them long after graduation."



Devon with her children Prisceda (back), Gabriel (right), and incoming student, Luca.

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A FAMILY AFFAIR

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Aiya Brooks is following in the footsteps of big sister Skyy.

Sisters in Song

Third grader Aiya Brooks is following in her sister Skyy's footsteps and joining this summer. Skyy graduated in 2022 and will be working as a program assistant during the CCC's summer program.

"I'm so excited to see my little sister Aiya become a part of the next generation of the CCC," said Skyy. "She was so happy that she was accepted into the chorus that she called me at college immediately after her audition. We are both looking forward to riding together to Swarthmore for camp this summer."

A Gift Passed Down

For 19 years, Anita Dickerson has had at least one child in the CCC. Today, her youngest son, Quandre, is her fourth child to sing with the CCC. Anita's granddaughter, Brielle, is also in the chorus.

Her daughters even participated in John Alston's proposal to his wife at Lang Music Building where the children perform.

"John's not just their choir director because anyone can teach the kids to sing. He gets more on a personal level



CCC alumnus, Chris, now watches his daughter, Camari, perform with the CCC.

with those who need it. Kids need an outside person who they can turn to for support."

From Father To Daughter

When Chris Johnson joined in the mid-90s, the CCC was an all-boys chorus. He still remembers how much fun the group of 15 had, even taking karate classes between rehearsals.

Today, his seventh-grade daughter, Camari, is in her fifth year with the chorus.

"John (CCC executive and artistic director) looks at me in rehearsals and says, 'You look exactly like your dad.'"

Chris is thrilled to see how much the chorus has grown since he was a boy.

"When I see Camari on stage it's like seeing myself again," Chris said. "I love to see her up there smiling and enjoying herself."

The CCC family continues to grow as we prepare to welcome another 10 relatives this summer. 🎵



Left: DylanMarie inherited her musical talent from her mother, CCC alumna, Jenny. Right: Anita (middle) with her son, Quandre, and granddaughter, Brielle.

A LEGACY OF LOVE AND LEARNING

The CCC lost a cherished family member in April with the passing of Swarthmore College biology professor Elizabeth Vallen who established and led our Science for Kids (SFK) summer program since 2004.

Beginning this summer, the program will be renamed the Liz Vallen Science for Kids Program in honor of Liz.

The SFK program gives our children hands-on experiences in science

workshops taught by Swarthmore faculty and students. It has grown from one class with less than a dozen students to several classes with more than 40 students.

For Vallen, “doing science” with the CCC from year to year was a privilege and a pleasure.

“I get to show them aspects of the world they might not otherwise have the opportunity to see,” she said in 2009. “The kids are very smart,

competent, enthusiastic, and thoughtful. And when we have the Science Fair at the end of the summer, we see them really take ownership of their projects

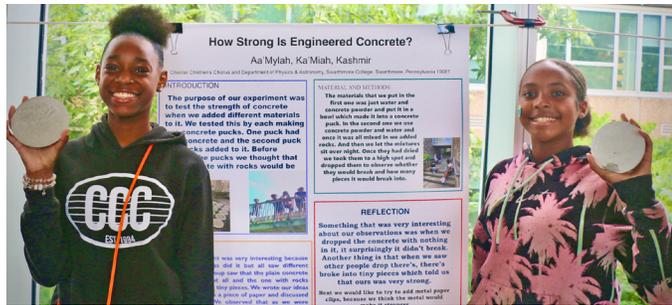


Liz Vallen

as they explain them to the other children so enthusiastically.”

Retired Swarthmore College math professor and CCC Board member, Deb Bergstrand, now coordinates the SFK program.

“Liz was a kind and generous friend and colleague. She considered SFK her proudest achievement, an acknowledgment that speaks to the importance of the CCC in her legacy.”



GOING THE EXTRA MILE

Did you know that we provide round-trip transportation to every child in the chorus? That's a lot of miles for our dedicated drivers, who are an integral part of the CCC family. On Saturdays, our drivers pick up and drop off at nearly 100 homes during the day!

Every driver goes above and beyond. They attend concerts and events, pick up weekly grocery orders, and even cook pounds of mac and cheese for our family night event.

Thank you for all your hard work and especially for keeping our children safe!



Left to right: Purcell, Geri, Doreen, Darryl, Anthony, Barbie and Sloan



Make a Gift Today!

Your generous support allows the CCC to continue providing our children with year-round music and math education at no cost to their families. Your gift helps to develop each child's many gifts so that they can reach their fullest potential.

Donate online at ChesterChildrensChorus.org/gift

Or mail to: CCC/Swarthmore College
500 College Ave.
Swarthmore, PA 19081

Donate with your smartphone by scanning this QR code:





OUR 30TH ANNIVERSARY IS HERE!



The Wehmillers

A Gift of Gratitude

At the CCC's 30th Anniversary Celebration in March, Executive & Artistic Director John Alston announced a gift made by The Eric P. & Evelyn E. Newman Foundation in honor of Swarthmore College alumni Paula Lawrence-Wehmiller '67 and John Wehmiller '66, the evening's honorees.

Lifelong friends of the Wehmillers made the generous gift, which will support and strengthen CCC music programs, including our Summer Creative Photography Program and spring concerts. This gift reflects the Wehmillers' decades of involvement in the CCC's mission of nourishing strong minds, strong voices, and strong spirits in the young people of Chester.

Congratulations and thank you, Paula and John!



PHOTO BY JOHN WEHMILLER

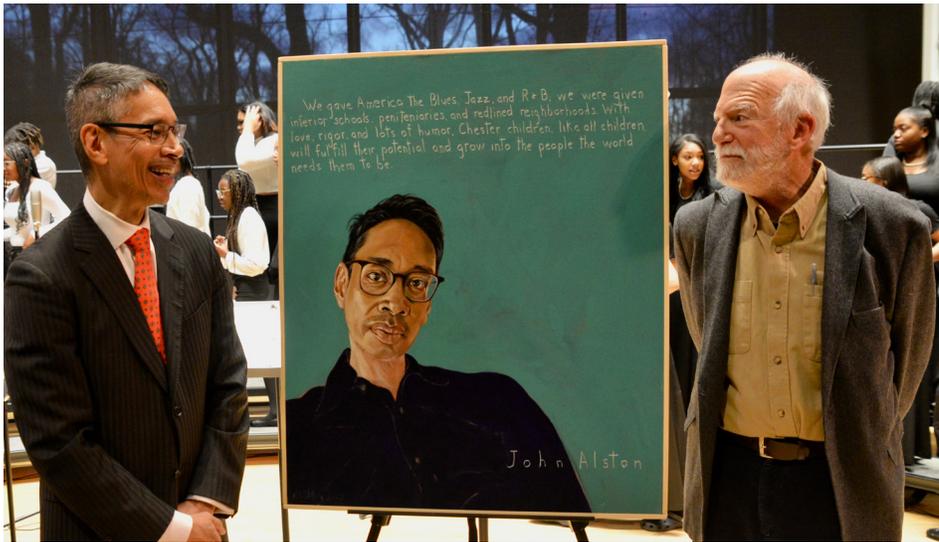
John Alston Portrait Unveiled

In honor of the CCC's 30th anniversary, artist Robert Shetterly unveiled a portrait of John Alston at our Martin Luther King, Jr. concert in January.

Shetterly has painted more than 450 portraits that are exhibited across the country to highlight citizens who courageously address issues of social, environmental, and economic fairness.

"If anyone ever doubted that the arts can not only expose social injustice but become the force that corrects it, they need look no further than the work John Alston has done with the Chester Children's Chorus," said Shetterly. "With the portrait of John, we hope to call more attention to his work and promote it as a replicable model."

Learn more at americanswhotellthetruth.org.



A Surprise Rooted in Love

During the CCC's Anniversary Celebration, Paula and John Wehmiller surprised John Alston with a gift to represent the lasting impact of his work for both the Chester and Swarthmore communities.



"In gratitude for the love, hard work, and humor our brother John has poured out on the children of Chester, and for giving us a glimpse of the beloved community as the children's voices are raised in song, the Wehmiller family has arranged with the Scott Arboretum of Swarthmore College to dedicate a tree in John's honor.

The tree, to be planted in the future arts plaza near the Lang Music Building on the Swarthmore College campus, will welcome visitors to the place where John has done so much of his wonderful work. Thank you, John, for doing what you love and bringing joy to so many." —Paula and John

The tree is expected to be planted in 2025.

Thank You For Being a Part of Our Family

To celebrate our anniversary, many of you shared what you love most about the CCC. What do we love most? The amount of joy you feel when seeing our children, just as we feel every day!

“ I LOVE THE EXPRESSION OF JOY I SEE ON EVERY CHILD'S FACE WHEN THEY SING and the incredible variety of music that they sing with such perfection. —Godlind J., NY

THE CCC EXEMPLIFIES THE POWER OF MUSIC TO INSPIRE, UNITE AND UPLIFT, creating an amazing community of young voices. —Marc & Sarah P., PA

WE LOVE THE EMPHASIS ON BOTH THE ARTS AND MATH. We also love the enthusiasm of the students and how the chorus has thrived over the years. The singing is superb—thanks for sharing their gifts! —David and Alice K., MA

I LOVE THE CCC BECAUSE IT BRINGS ART, HISTORY, COMMUNITY, and the beauty of our Black young people to audiences enriched by its presence. I am rejuvenated whenever I have the opportunity to hear the chorus. —Syd C., PA

I LOVE THAT EACH INDIVIDUAL CHILD IS REACHING AND DISCOVERING NEW TALENTS and abilities through the path of music. —Debra M., PA

WHEN I WATCH THE CCC CONCERTS ONLINE, I AM COMPLETELY TRANSFORMED into being in the room and totally energized. What an amazing experience—thank you! —Robert S. and Susan P., MA

WE APPROACH EVERY CONCERT WITH GREAT ANTICIPATION and have never been disappointed. Attending each concert is pure joy! —Suzanne & Edwin W., PA

TELL US WHAT YOU LOVE ABOUT THE CCC at ChesterChildrensChorus.org/love

A SENIOR SEND-OFF

Congratulations to our four graduating seniors!

Alisa Dennis

Alisa Dennis admits she's come a long way in her 10 years with the CCC.

"It's been a journey. Some days were better than others but I made it, and I'm proud of myself for not giving up and pushing myself to keep going."

Alisa says the CCC isn't just about singing; it's also an outlet to express herself.

"What I love about the chorus is how I can be myself and get away from everything that's happening around me. The CCC staff cares so much about us and takes the time to help us grow."

Alisa's relationship with her peers also grew over the years.

"People here went from strangers to friends and now family. So many of them are like my brothers and sisters. We have each other's backs."

As her final CCC concerts near, Alisa knows she will miss performing.

"On stage, it feels like we're famous because everybody is coming to see us and hear how good we are."

Alisa plans to attend Cheyney University to study psychology in hopes of helping others to express themselves.



Armani Madden

Armani Madden began planning her life in the seventh grade for a school project. She hasn't looked back since.

"Knowledge is the most important thing you can ever have," said Armani. "They teach us a lot at the CCC; if you take it and use it correctly, you can make anything of your life."

Armani believes CCC teachers and students form relationships that are unique and special.

"Because we've grown up around them, the teachers are like an additional parent. Someone who understands you, who you are, and how you need to learn, which is different from a regular teacher because they only know whatever you show them in the classroom," she explains.

Throughout her 10 years with the CCC, Armani has seen growth in herself.

"My confidence has grown, and I believe in myself that I can do what I want in this world. When I was young, I thought I wasn't good enough or smart enough, but being here and having so many people telling me that I can do

this and that the world is my oyster has helped."

Armani plans to study biology at Villanova University to become an anesthesiologist, the same profession she chose for her school project.

Isaiah Peterkin

Isaiah Peterkin joined the CCC in 2015. Isaiah pours himself into his music and math studies with a quiet and reserved demeanor.

"The CCC is an environment centered around community, one that works to enable growth and development," he said. "The chorus has taught me how to be myself and has given me experiences that have helped develop my character."

Isaiah especially appreciates learning from CCC Executive and Artistic Director John Alston.

"John's teaching style works well. It's very relaxed but focused. After a while, that type of practice begins to add up, allowing you to see the results of your continuous efforts."

Isaiah plans to study computer science at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.





Mahkiah Rawls

Mahkiah Rawls gets teary-eyed when discussing her friendship with fellow CCC senior Armani Madden, both of whom joined as third graders.

"The thing I like most about being in the chorus is building relationships with people," said Mahkiah. "That's how I met Armani. We've been friends for the past 10 years. I believe we and everyone in the CCC are a family that you have for a lifetime."

Mahkiah also beams when talking about music, which has helped her build confidence and become less shy over the years.

"Music is my life. I never want to be without music. It's a thrill being on stage knowing that what you're singing other people are enjoying and can relate to. The CCC makes you love every different genre because we sing everything. It's wonderful!"

Another of Mahkiah's loves is numbers. She'll see many of them in the fall at West Chester University, where she plans to study finance and minor in music.

"I am proud of myself. Not only have I developed my voice in the CCC, but I have grown in a way that pushes me to become better because I know I am capable."

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

THE HAMILTON FAMILY CHARITABLE TRUST

The CCC family tree has many branches that not only includes our children and their families but also the many partners who help drive our mission forward. The Hamilton Family Charitable Trust (HFCT) has supported the CCC, specifically, the Summer Learning Program (SLP), for more than two decades.

In addition to music and math, the CCC's five-week SLP engages students in reading, science, art, swimming, and more.

"The steadfast support from the Hamilton Family Charitable Trust has allowed the CCC to plan and hold summer activities and experiences that are responsive to our children's

curiosity and needs," said Dana Semos, CCC managing and education director. "We are deeply grateful for their commitment to our programs and our children."

The HFCT focuses on supporting young people in their educational pursuits and removing barriers so that they can learn with dignity.

"I think the visibility, the acknowledgement, the reinforcement and encouragement that comes with being seen and heard is going to last the children [in the CCC] a lifetime," said HFCT President Chekemma Fulmore-Townsend. "Those are the ways in which you become unafraid to embrace who you are or what you think."



To learn more about the Hamilton Family Charitable Trust visit hfctrust.org.



CCC STAFF

John Alston, *Executive & Artistic Director*
 Becky Slate, *Program Coordinator*
 Kevin Downs, *Lead Math Teacher*
 Carolyn Marzo, *Director of Development*
 Christina Meehan, *Communications Manager*
 Dana Semos, *Managing & Education Director*
 Sean Tripline, *Assistant Music Director*

VOICE SPRING 2024

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

DON'T MISS A BEAT! JOIN OUR EMAIL LIST

Get concert and program news as well as a behind-the-scenes look into the CCC.

Sign up online at
ChesterChildrensChorus.org/signup

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



SAVE THE DATES!

SUMMER 2024 CONCERTS—NEW LOCATION!

Thursday, July 25—2:00 p.m. & Sunday, July 28—4:00 p.m.
 Our Mother of Good Counsel, 31 Pennswood Road, Bryn Mawr, PA 19010

THE SKYY BROOKS QUARTET PERFORMS

Sunday, August 4—5:00 p.m.

Park Avenue Community Center, Swarthmore, PA 19081

All concerts are free. Seating is limited and on a first-come, first-served basis.



PHOTO BY JOHN WEHMILLER

YOU'RE INVITED TO OUR FILM PREMIERE!

Join the CCC staff for an online watch party of our 30th anniversary film highlighting our children and their incredible accomplishments. You'll laugh, you'll cry, and you might even sing!

Exclusive Screening for Swarthmore College Alumni:
 Wednesday, June 5, 2024—6:30-7:30 p.m.

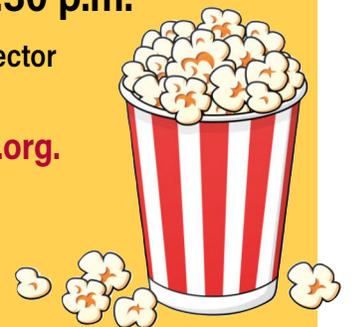
Screening for All CCC Friends:
 Wednesday, June 12, 2024—6:30-7:30 p.m.

A Q&A session with CCC Executive & Artistic Director John Alston will follow each free screening.

To register, visit ChesterChildrensChorus.org.

This film was made possible by the Pincus Family Foundation.

Don't forget the popcorn!



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