



LETTER FROM THE FOUNDER

Discovering Handel

On May 18, 2014 the CCC Concert Choir (45 sixth–twelfth-graders) performed Handel's *Messiah*. Despite the length and difficulty of the piece, the children were magnificent, and their performance was by far the most impressive they've ever given. Our journey to learning and loving Handel began seven years ago—and it did not begin well.

By spring 2007, I was sure we had sung enough classical music to appreciate and learn the "Hallelujah" Chorus, the most familiar piece in the Western classical canon. I remember the Saturday afternoon rehearsal in which I anticipated the children's enthusiastic approval of the piece. After I explained the importance of the "Hallelujah," the children slowly and dutifully began learning this monument, when, after 30 minutes, Destiny Sharp (now a college



junior) raised her hand and commented, "John, this is boring. All we do is sing 'hallelujah' over and over." I asked the other choristers if they agreed with Destiny, and they did, rather eagerly. I still remember my disappointment and tears welling in my eyes.

Our second try happened two years later. We learned "Hallelujah" during our 2009 summer learning program. This time the children loved the drama, the powerful rhythms, and triumphal melodies. During the pre-concert warm-up, I told them that the audience would

reward their performance with a standing ovation (the first, but not last, they would receive for singing a piece of classical music). When the audience stood and cheered wildly, I shouted at the singers with delight, "I told you so! I told you so!"

In spring 2013, I shared with the Concert Choir the difficulty of finding music as great and accessible as Mozart's *Requiem*, which we had performed the semester before. Aliyah Tanner (now a college sophomore) casually suggested that we "learn the piece that 'Hallelujah' was from." I was more than a little embarrassed that I didn't think of this.

We spent the next 10 months learning 13 more *Messiah* choruses, while also working on R & B and gospel music for our regular concerts. The children really enjoyed struggling with and mastering this glorious and difficult music. (The closing 'Amen' was particularly challenging.) For the performance, we invited



"WHAT WE DID THIS SUMMER..."

See other side.

**November 15, 2014,
7:30 p.m.**

Malvern United Methodist Church
16 Monument Ave, Malvern, PA 19355

**December 12 and 13, 2014,
7:30 p.m.**

"Etz Chayim/Tree of Life"
Written by Thomas Whitman
World Premiere commemorating
the Chorus's 20th anniversary
Lang Concert Hall, Swarthmore College

Admission is free!
Donations support CCC programs.

FALL CONCERTS



35 community friends of the CCC to join us as part of our 20th anniversary celebration. During the dress rehearsal and concert, the children were captivated by the powerful orchestral overture, the beautiful solo singing, and most of all, by the brilliant trumpet playing in "Hallelujah" and "The Trumpet Shall Sound" (thank you, Barbara). After the final bars of the "Amen," I did not need to shout, "I told you so!" to the children. It was their finest musical moment, and they all knew they had experienced and accomplished something extraordinary.

—John Alston

20TH ANNIVERSARY BENEFIT GALA COMING UP!

Join us on Oct. 11 at Sharples Dining Hall, Swarthmore College for a fun evening to celebrate our first two decades. Tickets are \$175 per person. Please contact Kirsten Halker-Kratz at 610-328-8286 ASAP!

TICKETS STILL AVAILABLE!

I am pleased to make a contribution to the Chester Children's Chorus in the amount of \$ _____.

Enclosed is a check (Check should be payable to "Swarthmore College" with "Chester Children's Chorus" in memo field.)

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Give online at www.swarthmore.edu. Choose "other fund," and specify "Chester Children's Chorus." For information, call Executive Director Kirsten Halker-Kratz at (610) 328-8286.

Please mail to: Chester Children's Chorus, Swarthmore College, 500 College Avenue, Swarthmore PA 19081

THANK YOU!



"I don't believe I've ever had so much FUN at a CCC concert!"

Attendees of the culminating summer concerts were truly in for a treat when John and the 140 members of the Chorus performed a 12 minute tribute to '70s hits from "YMCA" to "Killing Me Softly With His Song" and ending with a rocking version of "Joy to the World."



But the CCC didn't just do the '70s. This summer was busier than most in recent history. The Concert Choir members performed as part of Swarthmore College's Sesquicentennial Alumni Weekend on June 7 to an amazing audience of 300 college alums. Thirty CCC members formed a chamber choir to sing John's tribute to the 22 victims of gun violence in Chester last year, "If I Had Known" at Delaware County's Rally for Sensible Gun Policy on June 27.

And it didn't stop there. 140 students, ages 7-19, participated in the six-week Summer



Learning Program that incorporated academic classes such as math, science, horticulture, creative writing, history, and critical thinking with classes in visual art, drama and dance. We were honored to have author Becky Birtha read her published books to the newest Training Chorus members.

At camp's end, students presented their science experiments at a science fair, showcased their artistic flair at a gallery exhibit, demonstrated their grace and flexibility in a dance program, and performed three full-length chorus concerts.



On their own initiative, Concert Choir altos, Kaya Banton and Jordan Sarinana, led a team of Chorus members in a car wash that generated a lot of enthusiasm and raised \$430 for CCC!

None of this would have been possible without many community and campus supporters including the following departments and personnel who graciously shared their space, time and expertise with us for the Summer Learning Program: Lang Performing Arts Center-English department, Parrish Career Services, Sharples Dining Hall, Scott Arboretum, the Science Center, and Lang Music Building; the staff at Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility, Facilities, Media Services, and Public Safety, Swarthmore Borough Building, and the more than 50 volunteers who helped us in countless ways. *Thank you!*

CCC "Note-ables"

★ **KAYA BANTON** has been a leader of the Concert Choir altos and just made her debut as an accompanist at the summer concert series. She is also the youth organizer for the Energy Justice Network and the Chester Environmental Justice group. In August, she and other Chester residents held neighborhood meetings and passed out flyers to alert neighbors about a planned contract with New York City and the Chester incinerator to accept one million tons of garbage by rail and truck. In a city where childhood asthma rates are already three times higher than the nation's average, their efforts did alter the plan by eliminating the rail portion of the trash delivery. Kaya noted, "We have punctured the incinerator balloon." Her goal: Shut down the incinerator in 20 years.

★ **DEONDRE JORDAN**, a senior at Shipley High School, had the opportunity to attend Drexel University College of Medicine Mini-Med Summer Camp. He was also elected school president this year and is co-captain of Shipley's Cross Country team! Deondre is a Concert Choir bass section leader and has sung with the Shipley High School Chorus and the Swarthmore College Chorus. He appeared on the Spring 2014 cover of *The Shipley Magazine* and was awarded the Haverford College Book Award at the upper school for his "highly distinguished record of scholarship."

★ In July, **JOHN ALSTON** and **KIRSTEN HALKER-KRATZ** were both awarded citations from Mayor Linder and his office for "their commitment to the socioeconomic development and humanitarian efforts in service to the city of Chester."

In Memoriam

The CCC mourns the passing of special friends Bill Ravdin and Vera "Mama" Skitarelic. Bill and Mama were dear advocates of Chester's beautiful children. They helped spread the good word about the Chorus to their friends and colleagues. We will miss their presence in our audience and treasure them always.

CHESTER CHILDREN'S CHORUS

John Alston, founder & artistic director
Kirsten Halker-Kratz, executive director
Sean Tripline, assistant music director
Elisa DeNofio, administrative assistant

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If you have received an extra copy of this newsletter, please notify us at 610-328-8180 and share the copy with a friend.

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www.chesterchildrenschorus.org

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"Strong Voice, Strong Mind, Strong Spirit"

Celebrating 20 Years



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