



More Than the Music

One Thursday afternoon last spring before rehearsal, a few of the basses asked me if I had seen the YouTube video of Eric Garner being choked to death by police officers. I told them, honestly, that I couldn't bear to watch it. But after some serious conversation, the boys and I sat down together and watched the video. It was a horrible, shocking, and thought-provoking experience for all of us.

The older CCC children are all too aware of incidents of excessive force used by law enforcement throughout the country against African-Americans, mostly male; and it is both fortunate and unfortunate that so many of these incidents are captured on video for public viewing.

Later that spring, in response to the Garner video and all of the related conversations between the children and me, I wrote a song, "I Still Can't Breathe" (lyrics at right). We performed it in May, and the children sang it so well that I decided to make a professionally produced video. With the help of Darkslide



Media's Domenic Malandro, we began production during the 2015 Summer Learning Program. In the fall, Dom and I added images, mostly drawn from collections of public domain images during The Civil Rights Era, as well as modern images of violence against Black Americans. The video is now finished, and when the copyright is secured, we will send you a video link.

The children are moved by the video and proud of their work. They are equally proud that preconceived notions about Chester have dramatically changed after seeing and hearing our children sing. The CCC children are well aware of their role as ambassadors, opinion-changers, and representatives of their culture and heritage, and I am proud that they embrace this role so willingly, and perform it so well.

When you cheer wildly for the CCC children, you know you are applauding for more than the music. *They* know it, too.

John Alston
CCC Artistic Director

LYRICS TO "STILL CAN'T BREATHE"

*Can you hear me? I still can't breathe.
Can you hear me? I still can't breathe.*

*When you see me walking down the street,
why are you afraid of me?
I'm the one who ought to run to a place
where I'd be free.
You taught me how to sing your song,
"Sweet land of liberty."
I smiled and gave the world the blues.
Why are you afraid of me?*

*Can you hear me? I still can't breathe.
Can you hear me? I still can't breathe.*

*My tears are just like yours,
but they last a little longer.
My fears are just like yours,
but they're so much stronger.
My love, my love is just like yours.
In the One we both believe.
If you watched your children disappear,
would you find it hard to breathe?*

*I gave you such sweet poetry;
gave you your Renaissance.
I gave America its music;
taught you how to dance.
I fought for you, I died for you;
helped make the whole world free.
When you see me walking down the street,
why are you afraid of me?*

*Can you hear me? I still can't breathe.
Can you hear me? I still can't breathe.*

*I can't breathe. I can't breathe.
I can't breathe....*

UPCOMING CONCERTS

Friday, May 13 & Saturday, May 14, 7:30 p.m.

Lang Concert Hall, Swarthmore College
Doors open at 6:45 p.m. Seating is limited to the first 425 guests.

Saturday, May 21, 7:30 p.m.

Collaboration with Media Chamber Chorale
St. Matthew Evangelical Lutheran Church, 400 Lynbrooke Road, Springfield
Tickets will be available in April • \$15 for adults and \$12 for seniors

Thursday, July 21, 2:00 p.m.

Open Dress Rehearsal • Lang Concert Hall, Swarthmore College

Friday, July 22 & Saturday, July 23, 7:30 p.m.

Lang Concert Hall, Swarthmore College

**ADMISSION IS FREE TO CONCERTS AT SWARTHMORE.
DONATIONS SUPPORT CCC PROGRAMS!**





VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Concert and Meal Sponsorship

A number of faith communities have embraced the CCC and sponsored concerts and meals, each their own vital form of nourishment. Two churches with stories to tell are Reformation Lutheran Church, Media and St. Luke Greek Orthodox Church, Broomall.

Christel Badey, John Chesters, Kathy Ewens, Carol McAllister, Joyce McNally, and Carol Steinbrecher formed a team in Media. We asked them to share their thoughts:

We had the privilege of hosting the Chorus twice in 2011, once in April and again in December. When the CCC outgrew our sanctuary space, we hosted a dinner prior to the 2012 Holiday Concert. The 2015 Holiday Concert was our FIFTH meal sponsorship—and we look forward to many more.

As you can imagine, hosting a concert dinner requires considerable planning and organization, but everything comes together, thanks to the hard work of a group who are totally committed to the mission of the Chorus. We are also lucky to have the financial backing of the Reformation congregation, the Pastors and the Church Council who supported the dinner, as well as the Chorus itself.

For anyone thinking of hosting a concert or other event, such as a dinner, just DO IT!



Singing for St. Luke in appreciation of their support.

It will be one of the most rewarding things you will ever do!

Anna Hadgis knew about the CCC for many years before her hopes to be a concert host came into fruition. She introduced Lisa Palmieri, Co-Advisor to St. Luke's Greek Orthodox Youth Association (GOYA), with the idea to host this past October.

As Anna said, "Seeing the CCC in our Community Center was a dream come true for me. We made sure they felt welcomed, and we thoroughly enjoyed getting to know them. What pleased me the most is that members of the CCC felt truly appreciated and communicated with our GOYANS in so many positive ways. The leaders of GOYA showed a lot of support to young adults of the congregation and helped to make the event such a success."

Lisa commented, "In planning the evening, we realized that we would have to 'plant the seed,' by introducing Dr. Alston and his vision to other ministries of our church. Our parish priest, Father Christ Kontos, was also very supportive of the CCC and was helpful in getting the word out to our community. To any organization considering sponsoring a concert, I can assure you that the experience will be unforgettable—Dr. Alston, the children and their music will lift YOU up!"

GOOD LUCK, GRADUATES!

We are thrilled to honor this year's CCC high school graduates. Seven students will be recognized this coming May and have some exciting goals to pursue. We thank them for their leadership and wish them continued success.

RUSSELL COVINGTON

7 years in the CCC

Favorite song: *I Can*

Favorite memory: Trip to Round Top

Aspiration: Attend Williamson Trade School to learn paint, staining and coating



NIESHA DAVIS

1 year in the CCC

Favorite song: The 50's Tribute

Favorite memory: 2015 summer camp

Aspiration: Become a chef



SHAMAR FOSTER

10 years in the CCC

Favorite song: *Alleluia* by Randall Thompson

Favorite memory: John's birthday when we hit him in the face with a pie

Aspiration: Personal chef



DEMAH JONES

10 years in the CCC

Favorite song: Mozart's *Requiem*

Favorite memory: Bonfire on the beach

Aspiration: Nurse practitioner



CHYNA-BROWNE STEVENSON

10 years in the CCC

Favorite song: *The Lord is My Shepherd*

Favorite memory: Bonfire on the beach

Aspiration: Be a musician



WILLIAM TAYLOR

10 years in the CCC

Favorite song: *Dear Martin*

Favorite memory: Playing drums for *Love Train*. It was the first time I got to perform in concert.

Aspiration: Become a full-time musician and music producer



DARRIN WOOD

10 years in the CCC

Favorite song: Mozart's *Requiem*

Favorite memory: Science classes because they gave me a love of physics and engineering

Aspiration: Engineer and/or a DJ/producer



CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS

The 2016 Summer Learning Program Needs You!

"I'm looking forward to my third year as a summer reading volunteer because it provides me with a way to make a direct, personal connection with a child in the Chorus. Each summer, I get to know another rising third-grader and see the program through the wide eyes of an 8-year-old. It's such an inspiration to watch Neleh as



Karen and Neleh, Summer 2014

Please contact us for more details at 610-328-8180.

she grows up with the CCC!"

Join reading volunteers like Karen for the 2016 Summer Learning Program reading hour from June 20-July 21, 2016. We are also looking for swimming volunteers to help us on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons.

Should You Give Stock Instead?

The CCC is always grateful to receive your generous checks! But some donors find that giving appreciated stock is a good alternative to consider since it may reduce taxes and enable a larger gift. The stock must be publicly traded and held for at least a year prior to donation. You should always consult your own tax advisor, but generally a donor is eligible for a deduction for the full market value of the stock and does not have to pay capital gains tax on the growth. More information can be found on Swarthmore College's website at: www.swarthmore.edu/giving.



A Note of Thanks

Thank you to John Alston, Ian Wilcox, and the Chester Children's Chorus for a beautiful concert at St. David's Episcopal Church, Wayne, Pennsylvania on February 21st. We were truly honored to sing with all of you and had a great time preparing for and presenting this concert. We would love to collaborate again in the future! Best wishes for your upcoming concerts.

Blessings,
Elaine Sonnenberg and
the St. David's Youth Choir



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

- Enclosed is a check (Check made payable to "Swarthmore College" with "Chester Children's Chorus" in memo field.)
- Please charge my gift to
- Visa Mastercard
 - Discover American Express

Card # _____

Expires: _____ / _____

- My gift will be matched by my employer. (Please enclose your signed matching gift form.)

Name _____

Street _____

City, State, Zip _____

Email _____

Phone number _____

To give online, visit our website www.chesterchildrenschorus.org, and select "Volunteer or Give!"

For information, call Executive Director Kirsten Halker-Kratz at (610) 328-8286.

Please return this form to our address below.



THANK YOU!

CHESTER CHILDREN'S CHORUS

John Alston, founder and artistic director
Kirsten Halker-Kratz, executive director
Sean Tripline, assistant music director
Elisa DeNofio, administrative assistant
H. Yasmine Lee, program assistant

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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Get to Know the CCC GERI YOUNG



CCC could not function without our efficient transportation team. We are so grateful to our van drivers. This past December, we celebrated with Geri Young for her decade of service to the CCC. Geri can recall when there were only two drivers. (Now we have 8.) We spent a few moments asking her about her time with the CCC:

What do you enjoy the most about working with the CCC? I love listening to the children talk about how much they enjoy moving up—from training chorus to junior choir and so on. Seeing the growth of the children is such a joy and when they leave after the summer program, I'm always excited to see them again in the fall. The kids are excited when I'm there. The kids and parents notice that I have been here a while now, and they know I care about them. I am always looking out for them. I want to do what I

can to move the organization forward. I enjoy children, and this is a blessing to me.

Do you have a favorite song?

Yes, I absolutely love *Take Me to the Water*, *Psalm 23*, and *Oh Freedom*.

Do you remember your first CCC concert?

I do, mostly I remember the children—Jabree, Craig, Jenny, Nkenge, Jamillah... they were my first group. It's amazing what John does for the kids. They respect him and listen to him. It is a hard job. I am proud of what he's done.

CCC "NOTE-ABLES"



WE ARE ENJOYING SPRING REHEARSALS

at Catholic Social Services, 137 N. 7th Street in the old St. Michael's School. We are grateful for their generosity and thank Amy Stoner, Rick Pytlewski, Jesse Hall, Nate Hilyard, Belvie Hilyard, and Father Anthony for all of their assistance.

THE CHESTER CHILDREN'S CHORUS LOST FOUR CLOSE FRIENDS in the past few months—Neil Gilmour, '45; Toshiyuki Fukushima, '51; Phoebe Rosenberry, '55; and Veronica Wyller. We will miss seeing them in our audience, and we send our condolences and deepest appreciation to their families.

THE CCC IS GLAD TO HOST INTERNS FROM PROFESSOR SHARON FRIEDLER'S THE ARTS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE CLASS.

Sonja Dahl is a sophomore at Swarthmore College majoring in Sociology and Spanish. She first heard the CCC at the 2015 holiday concert this past December. A pianist, Sonja remarked, "I'm excited by the enthusiasm I heard at the concert and the huge impact the CCC has had on so many singers."

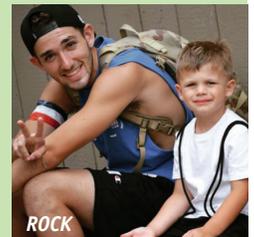


SONJA

Dakota Gibbs is a freshman majoring in Economics and Philosophy. He has yet to hear the CCC in concert, but "with just audio I could hear the power and passion of their harmonized voices—it all sounded like a good time. I can't wait to hear them live!" Dakota, a jazz and rock guitarist noted, "What interests me most about the CCC is its story and their message... I love that the CCC is not just about singing but it is truly for the children's complete growth."



Rock Ward is a junior special majoring in Political Science and Education and minoring in Environmental Studies. Rock sang with the Church Farm School choir and the Pennsylvania All State Men's Choir. A tenor, he said, "I am interested in seeing how music can build up a community that's been knocked down." He has worked in after-school programs for three years at Drexel Neumann Academy and Frederick Douglass Christian School, both in Chester.



ROCK



www.facebook.com/ChesterChildrensChorus



www.youtube.com/user/CheChiChorus