



10 September 2024

Dear All

As those of you who were at last night's rehearsal will have heard, Bryan has decided to retire after the Elijah concert in November 2025 after 22 years as our conductor. This is of course momentous news which I'm sure will take us all some time to digest. It is also a time to take a few moments to reflect on Bryan's work. Bryan brought a wealth of experience and enthusiasm to the chorus and under his guidance, the choir went from strength to strength and became one of the foremost amateur choirs in Southeast Kent, which the Church Times described as the leading large vocal ensemble in Maidstone. Bryan challenged us to learn, improve, and tackle demanding works and new repertoire. He also encouraged us to give of our best but, above all, to enjoy what we do. We owe him so much and to say he will be missed is a laughable understatement.

As was the case for many choirs, the Covid pandemic affected the choir. It of course prevented us from singing together in person on more than a handful of occasions between 2020 and 2022. During that period, we embraced new and innovative ways to continue our learning and singing – who remembers singing together in a field on one occasion?! Despite this, our numbers sadly dwindled. However, we should all be proud that the choir has endured, is slowly beginning to grow again and is financially stable. This is a testament to Bryan's wonderful work over the years and to the great and lasting friendships within the choir that formed as we bonded together in our love of music. As we look forward, I'm sure we all want to ensure that SVCS continues to thrive and provide both us and all future members with the opportunity to perform to a high standard, bring enjoyment to our audiences and, most important of all, to come together to sing for the sheer joy of it!

Two things follow from Bryan's announcement. First, we will immediately start the process of recruiting his successor. The Committee already has a detailed plan of how we intend to do this, and I can assure you that all our Members will be kept updated throughout and will be involved in the choice of a successor which we hope will happen next Spring. Because Bryan will not be retiring for over a year, we have time to recruit in a thoughtful and professional way someone who will build on Bryan's work, continue the traditions of the choir and take it forward to even greater success.

Secondly, we have an extremely exciting year ahead of us before Bryan retires. We will be singing the Armed Man and Rutter's Requiem in St Mildred's in Tenterden on 23 November and the Messiah at the Sinden Theatre on 5 April 2025, as planned. However, I am also delighted to tell you that we are planning to mark Bryan's retirement with what we hope will be a truly memorable concert. On 15 November 2025, we will be performing Elijah at the Benenden Centenary Hall. As many of you will know, this is a stunning concert hall with room for a large choir and orchestra – and of course a huge audience! Again, thankfully we have plenty of time to plan everything. Simon Thorpe has already agreed to sing the title role of Elijah, and we are hoping that many of our alumni will return to sing with us. We have also invited Lees Court Music (a highly accomplished chamber choir that sings in many cathedrals) and Bearsted Choral Society to join us to swell our numbers still further. Watch this space. I am already tremendously excited!

With very best wishes

Margaret