



16 September 2024

Sutton Valence Choral Society

Sutton Valence Choral is seeking to appoint a new Musical Director to take over from Bryan Gipps who will be retiring on 15 November 2025, after more than 20 years with the choir. During Bryan's tenure as Musical Director, the choir became one of the foremost amateur choirs in Southeast Kent, described by the Church Times as the leading large vocal ensemble in Maidstone. We are looking for a musically talented, highly skilled, and inspirational Music Director who will help us to continue to pursue our Vision – which is simply to share the pleasure of music-making by providing members with the opportunity to learn and perform choral music to a high standard.

The choir, which performs in the classical tradition, was formed in 1990 and currently has about 60 singers. Membership of the choir is not dependent on an audition although a smaller chamber choir within the larger choir is auditioned.

We rehearse in a hard-working and happy atmosphere for two hours on Monday evenings during school term time at Sutton Valence School and perform in venues local to Sutton Valence and occasionally further afield, such as in Rochester and Canterbury Cathedrals. Our repertoire is ambitious and challenging. We perform a minimum of two major concerts per year usually in November and March, when we engage the Beresford Sinfonia and professional soloists. Two further concerts, in July and December, generally involve a collection of shorter pieces accompanied by piano or organ. We also undertake workshops, social events and charitable functions and occasionally join with other choirs to perform major choral works.

Each year we choose a local charity and raise money for it throughout the year. This year we are supporting the Kent and Medway Young Musicians Trust.

If you would like to explore this opportunity, we should be glad to hear from you. In this document you will find more details about the choir, the role and the essential skills and qualities we are seeking, as well as the application process and how to contact us.

Margaret Jordan

Chair
Sutton Valence Choral Society

<https://www.suttonvalencechoral.com/>

Registered Charity: 1119160

Sutton Valence Choral – An Overview

The Choir, which performs in the classical tradition, was formed in 1990 by the Director of Music of Sutton Valence School. Bryan Gipps, the Society's current conductor is well known in the South-East as a conductor, violinist, organist, and singer. He has brought a wealth of experience and enthusiasm to the chorus with which he has worked for over 20 years. Under his guidance, the choir went from strength to strength and became one of the foremost amateur choirs in Southeast Kent, performing to a high standard. According to the Church Times' review of our performance of *The Armed Man* "entries were almost frighteningly precise, dynamics were cleverly varied, and the enunciation was a constant treat".

As was the case for many choirs, the Covid pandemic prevented us from singing together in person on more than a handful of occasions for almost 18 months. During that period, we embraced new and innovative ways to continue our learning and singing – even singing together in a field on one occasion! Despite this, our numbers sadly dwindled as a result of the pandemic. However, the choir has endured, which is a testament to the success of the choir since its inception. We currently have about 60 singers, and our numbers are slowly increasing again.

During his tenure, Bryan has challenged us to learn, improve, and tackle demanding works and new repertoire. He also taught us to give of our best and, above all, to enjoy what we do. Some singers can read music easily, others are on a learning curve, but Bryan helps us to learn, and we help each other. Members join for a variety of reasons – some to continue their love of singing, others to try something they have always wanted to do. Whatever the reason, we bond together as a choir in our love of music. Many members have formed great and lasting friendships. As we look forward, we want to ensure that Sutton Valence Choral continues to provide singers with the opportunity to perform to a high standard and to bring enjoyment to our audiences.

Our repertoire is ambitious and challenging. You can find a list of all the major works we have sung on our website (see below). Our repertoire ranges from Bach, Haydn and Mozart to Dvorak, Britten and Bernstein as well as including living composers like Karl Jenkins and Cecilia McDowall. Our Christmas and summer concerts are altogether lighter affairs - we have performed folk songs, Gilbert and Sullivan, opera choruses and even pop songs.

We perform a minimum of two major concerts per year usually in November and March with rehearsals during school term time from September to June. Our concerts usually take place in venues local to Sutton Valence, such as St Mildred's Tenterden but we have also performed further afield for example in Rochester and Canterbury Cathedrals. We engage the Beresford Sinfonia and professional soloists for both major concerts.

Two further concerts, in July and December, usually involve a collection of shorter pieces accompanied by piano or organ. We also undertake workshops, social events and charitable functions and occasionally join with other choirs to perform major choral works. Each year we choose a local charity and raise money for it throughout the year. This year we are supporting the Kent and Medway Young Musicians Trust.

Sutton Valence Choral is a registered charity. Our finances are well managed, and we attract sponsorship from local businesses as well as donations. We have a thriving Committee of experienced members who expertly manage all aspects of the choir. We consult our members on repertoire and planning is done by the Committee alongside the Music Director.

Lastly, we are a very sociable band of singers, and we run several social events during the year including our annual “Walk and Sing” when we walk between several local churches singing at each one and then ending with a picnic together.

You can find more information about the choir on our website:

<https://www.suttonvalencechoral.com/>

Music Director - Overview

We are looking for a musically talented, highly skilled Music Director with experience, commitment and enthusiasm who shares our vision – which is simply to share the pleasure of music-making by giving members of the choir the opportunity to learn and perform choral music to a high standard. The principal responsibility of the new Music Director is to develop further the choral singing of the choir in both repertoire and performance.

The Music Director is expected to:

- Take all, or most, weekly choir rehearsals (usually about 30 per year) as well as rehearsals on the day of each concert.
- Conduct all public performances by the choir, unless agreed otherwise. These usually take place on a Saturday or Sunday.
- Take the musical lead in other choral events organised by SVCS, such as choral workshops.
- Liaise with the Accompanist and Committee to ensure high quality musical leadership of all rehearsals and performances.
- Plan all rehearsals to ensure the choir sings to the best of its ability and delivers a high-quality performance at all concerts and other events. This includes preparing a detailed rehearsal schedule for members prior to the start of each term.
- Audition and periodically re-audition all members of the SVCS Chamber Choir to ensure they meet the standard agreed by the Music Director and the Committee.
- Advise on the vocal balance of the choir and whether any action needs to be taken to maintain a balance.
- Work with the Committee to select and plan the programme for future seasons to ensure that over time the choir tackles works from different eras of classical music.
- Liaise with the Librarian on the editorial versions and availability of scores.
- Advise on the replacement of the Accompanist as and when this role becomes vacant.
- Recommend and appoint all professional musicians engaged by SVCS, such as soloists and orchestral players, subject to the Committee’s approval.
- Attend Committee meetings. (The Music Director is not a member of the Committee but is invited to attend all meetings). There are usually four or five meetings a year.
- Actively promote the choir wherever possible e.g. through personal networks, interviews etc.

Music Director – Professional Requirements Experience & Skills

- Professional musical training and qualifications.
- Experience in training and conducting large mixed choirs for excellent public performance.
- Experience in conducting professional orchestras, both chamber and full sized.
- Experience in conducting a varied repertoire of choral music.
- Ability and knowledge to recommend suitable and balanced musical programmes, including players and soloists, which will engage and challenge the choir and draw a sizeable local audience.

- Good knowledge of vocal technique and ability to encourage and develop members' vocal skills and musicality
- Ability to work within the financial constraints of an amateur choir and to tailor the repertoire accordingly.
- Focus on continual training and improvement of the choir's vocal sound.

Music Director - Personal Qualities

- Committed, energetic, enthusiastic and adaptable.
- Patient and willing to work with singers with varied sight-reading abilities to bring them to performance standard.
- Ability to work with the Committee to improve and maintain musical standards, whilst respecting that SVCS is an amateur choir formed with the objective of sharing the pleasure of music making.
- Willingness to compromise when agreeing musical programmes.
- Willingness to work within the financial and governance constraints to which the Society, as a charitable body, is subject
- Punctual, reliable and well organised.
- Good communication skills.
- Good sense of humour and a positive and motivational approach to rehearsals.
- Comfort working with a choir, orchestra and soloists in performance.
- Ability to make a positive impact on the choir, whilst inspiring and challenging members to tackle unfamiliar and challenging repertoire as well as well-known choral works.
- Willingness to make a strong commitment to SVCS and participate in occasional social events.

Music Director - Contract

Initially for a period of one year, thereafter renewable for further periods of three years on a rolling basis, subject to agreement between the Music Director and the Committee. The contract may be terminated by either party giving at least one year's written notice to the other.

Music Director - Remuneration

The current remuneration structure for the Music Director is £103 per rehearsal plus £38 per rehearsal if the Accompanist is absent and £412 for each concert performance including the dress rehearsal. This will be reviewed annually in line with RPI and Government statistics on average earnings.

Application Process and Planned Timescale

- Vacancy advertised from 16 September 2024
- Applications to be received by midnight on 16 December 2024
- Applications reviewed and shortlisted for interview end January 2025.
- Interviews for shortlisted applicants early February 2025.
- Selected shortlisted candidates take trial rehearsal with the choir 24 February 2025.
- Successful candidate offered Music Director position no later than 31 March 2025.
- Successful candidate appointed April 2025
- April to October 2025 onboarding process when the successful candidate will work alongside the existing Music Director.
- New Music Director takes sole control of the choir 16 November 2025

Applications

Please send your application by email to: svchoralsoc@gmail.com

If you need further information or you have questions about the application process, please do contact our Chairman Margaret Jordan, at the same email address. Your application must be sent in MS Word or PDF format and attached to your email. We will acknowledge receipt promptly.

Your application should include the following:

- A covering letter explaining why you are applying for the role and what you feel you can bring to Sutton Valence Choral.
- Personal details, contact information, education and background.
- CV including all relevant experience.
- References and testimonials – ideally, references from two music professionals and testimonials from at least two choirs with which you have worked. (Please note shortlisted candidates will be asked to consent to the Committee contacting their referees directly).
- Your vision for Sutton Valence Choral in five years' time.

Candidates shortlisted for interview will be asked to submit a proposed musical programme for the 2026/27 season.

Thank you for your interest in Sutton Valence Choral and we look forward to receiving your application. A reminder that the closing date for applications is midnight on **16 December 2024**. Applications received after that date may not be considered