



CONDUCTING A LABOR OF LOVE

BILL PAYN is dedicated to running daily and working out under the guidance of a trainer.

"I feel it's necessary for a conductor to be physically fit to present the things I want to do," he said simply.

At 70 years old, Payn, a rural Middleburg resident, is in his 20th year as music director and conductor of the Susquehanna Valley Chorale, having taken over for Cyril Stretzansky, former professor of music at Susquehanna University, who served in the position from 1972 to 1996.

With an impressive musical resume, Payn took the helm of the community choral group when Stretzansky stepped down.

Payn grew up in Ohio, in a small town on Lake Erie near Cleveland.

"I started playing piano when I was 5," he said. "I think my parents recognized that there might be some talent there. They encouraged

me to continue playing and performing."

He began taking organ lessons in high school and was "immediately grabbed up by a church to be their organist," Payn said with a laugh. Many recitals followed.

But it wasn't until he was a student studying organ performance at Westminster Choir College in Princeton, New Jersey, that his love for choral music and conducting began.

Payne was professor of music and director of choral studies for 32 years at Bucknell University, leading his choirs to international recognition. He retired in 2014.

Payn has published more than 50 compositions, and has received numerous prestigious honors, most recently the Elaine Brown Award for Choral Excellence by the American Choral Directors Association for outstanding lifelong work in choral arts.

— TRICIA KLINE

120 singers from 50-mile radius in Susquehanna Valley Chorale

By **Tricia Kline**
For *The Daily Item*

MIDDLEBURG — For nearly half a century, the love of music performance has brought together residents of the central Susquehanna Valley from all walks of life to present the mostly rural region with top-quality concerts normally only found in more metropolitan areas.

Long thought of as a "hidden gem" in the region, the Susquehanna Valley Chorale has been gaining accolades and larger audiences with each high-class performance.

The chorale is currently made up of 120 singers who live within an approximately 50-mile radius in the central Susquehanna Valley.

These singers include music teachers, but also people from various professions who still see music and singing as an important part of their lives.

Chorale Executive Manager Kelly Beard loves to watch audience members come to hear them for the first time, and to see people they know — their doctor, dentist, postal worker, for example — singing so beautifully and professionally.

And singing songs that they might otherwise have never heard.

"When we debut something new, it's more than

likely music that people in this area would never have a chance to go to," Beard said. She explained that the music they perform is typically heard in places like the New York Met or Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

"To be able to bring something like that here, and hear volunteer singers sound like professional singers is absolutely amazing," she said.

Conductor Bill Payn agreed.

"When you consider we're in a rural area for the most part, and we don't have the number of people that one would have available to them in a metropolitan area," he said, "it's pretty amazing."

Payn regularly auditions people to be in the ensemble. He said he first looks for a person to have a good voice, and then, be able to read a musical score.

"And then," he said, "just their energy and desire to be a part of an ongoing group that is turned on by good choral music."

"My standards are quite high," he said. "I think that's what sets it apart from other organizations which are totally volunteer and take in everybody."

He has found passionate singers that not only inspire the crowds that come to hear them, but encourage him, as well.

IF YOU GO

What: The Susquehanna Valley Chorale fall concert

When: 7:30 p.m. Saturday and 3 p.m. Sunday

Where: Mid-West High School, 540 E. Main St., Middleburg

Tickets: \$20 for adults, \$8 for students, and free for children 12 and under, and may be purchased online at svcmusic.org

More info: 570-547-0455

"Their enthusiasm for the performances and the concerts and rehearsals... really infects me," Payn said. "It gives me the energy to want to do my best for them and to make it work for the Valley. I think in the Susquehanna Valley, the chorale is an important artistic venue. People seem to be attracted to this very human element of singing."

"To be a part of that, and to perform music, traditional music from the past as well as new music written by living composers and to see people get excited about it... is very, very special," Payn said.

Beard sang for five years with the ensemble. She has been manager for seven.

"I'd love to have packed

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