

New director praises talent, looks forward to new experiences



Cindy O. Herman/For The Daily Item

Sitting in Barnes & Noble at Bucknell University, in downtown Lewisburg, Caleb Hopkins talked about taking on the director/conductor role of the Susquehanna Valley Chorale.

By Cindy O. Herman
For The Daily Item

LEWISBURG — The transition of directors for the Susquehanna Valley Chorale (SVC) could not have gone more smoothly — longtime director William Payn led his last classical concert, the “Verdi Requiem,” in collaboration with the Williamsport Chamber Choir, in March. The new director, Caleb Hopkins, joined the singing along with his wife, Susannah Stewart.

“Susannah and I were both soloists for that concert, so that was a nice introduction of us to the group,” Hopkins said as he talked about leading the SVC following Payn’s 30-year tenure.

An assistant professor of music and director of choral activities at Bucknell University, Hopkins and Stewart

moved to Lewisburg in 2022 after he received a visiting professor role there and reapplied for the job in a tenure-track line in 2023. They are parents of 16-month-old Rhodes.

Hopkins earned his Doctor of Musical Arts degree in conducting from the Eastman School of Music, in Rochester, New York. He praised the vocal talent he’s found in the SVC.

“It’s rare to have in a rural area like this a group of their caliber,” he said. “I feel honored to be taking them over and have been pleased with the level of musicianship and vocal ability of the people I have met so far.”

Kelly Beard, executive director of the SVC, said he’s begun meeting individually with the singers.

“Initially they were like, ooh, this is scary,” she said.

“But coming out, they were all thumbs up and big smiles saying, ‘He was great.’”

“My goal is to get to know each of them and get to know their voices a little bit,” Hopkins said. “I think that’s important for anyone coming in. I think some of them thought they had to re-audition. I’m not letting anyone go.”

The Susquehanna Valley Chorale has a unique tradition of performing pieces that are written for a big choir along with an orchestra, something Hopkins wants to continue. He also wants to expose the singers and audiences to some different musical aesthetics.

Payn said he is happy with Hopkins leading the singers.

“I am very pleased that Dr. Hopkins has been chosen to carry on the SVC tradition of choral excellence in the Susquehanna Valley,”

Payn said. “The singers and instrumentalists are in good hands, and our valued audience, friends and contributors will appreciate his expertise, knowledge and unique programming. I wish for him the same amazing support I received for 30 years.”

Along with music, Hopkins enjoys cooking, long-distance running, playing with his puppies and basking in the charm of living in Lewisburg with his wife and son.

“We really like it here,” he said, noting that he is from South Carolina and Stewart is from North Carolina. “We like this small town, and we have found good community here and are really excited about the prospect of raising a family here.”