

## Search to begin for Ridings' replacement at Birmingham Concert Chorale

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For the first time in more than a decade, the Birmingham Concert Chorale is searching for a new director.

Mark Ridings, who has led the group since it became the Alabama Symphony's official chorus in 1997, will step down after preparing the choir for Gershwin's "Porgy and Bess" next month. Presented in concert format, the opera is a combined performance by BCC, ASO and Opera Birmingham.

Ridings, who is the full time music and arts minister at Vestavia Hill United Methodist Church, said it was time to call it quits.

"I'd gotten tired," he said. "Keeping up with the symphony schedule and all the details that involves, after 10 years it wears you out."

Ridings has prepared the 60-plus singers of BCC for annual "Messiah" performances with ASO, as well as large-scale choral works such as Verdi's "Requiem," Brahms' "A German Requiem," often joined by choirs from area universities and colleges. It also performs concerts on its own.

Pianist Dale Reynolds plans to stay on as the choir's accompanist.

A search committee, made up of board members and singers, will begin the process of finding Ridings' replacement.

"We're tentatively scheduling auditions with six to eight candidates," said Dan Bell, the organization's board chairman. "We'd like to narrow that down and have them conduct the choir. We're going to want some input from the ASO, either Justin Brown or Christopher Confessore, because the last time we went through this was 10 years ago."

Bell praised Ridings for his hard work and commitment to BCC.

"Mark has really raised the bar for our group," he said. "I've been illuminated by working with Mark, to see what he does behind the scenes. It's going to be tough to find someone as committed as he is."

The BCC director receives a small stipend, which Bell hopes to improve.

"We'd like to raise it," he said. "That money comes from corporate and individual donations and membership dues. Now that the position is open, we're looking at various alternatives."

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