

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – 26 May 2021**

**ST GEORGE'S BRISTOL ANNOUNCES SAMIR SAVANT, FESTIVAL DIRECTOR OF THE LONDON HANDEL FESTIVAL, AS NEW CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

St George's Bristol today announced Samir Savant as its new Chief Executive, following the 15-year tenure of Suzanne Rolt. Samir has been Festival Director of the London Handel Festival since 2016 and will take up his new role at St. George's Bristol on 1 September 2021.

During his 5-year tenure as Festival Director, Samir broadened the reach of the London Handel Festival and Handel Singing Competition through innovative programming and partnerships. His commitment to reaching new audiences saw the Festival present performances in Peckham's Bussey Building with Festival Voices, as well as initiating a successful partnership with the Royal Opera House across multiple seasons. Samir led the Festival's creative response to the COVID-19 pandemic, presenting two performances of *Messiah Reimagined*, a 'blended' digital and live version of Handel's masterpiece involving 500 singers from five continents, and attracting a global digital audience of more than 300,000.

The Chair and Board of the London Handel Festival has confirmed that Samir will step down as Festival Director on 30 July 2021. The London Handel Festival are now beginning the search for a new Festival Director to join the organisation at an exciting time in its development who can build on Samir's work and continue to grow the Festival as an artistically vibrant, successful and internationally recognised charity.

**Ben Heald, Chair, St George's Bristol, said:**

*'Samir has a deep love of music, is a musician himself and won us over with his energy, ideas and vision for St George's. You might think he's a baroque specialist, coming from the London Handel Festival, but dig a little deeper and he's brimming with ideas and insights from his wide love of music and the performing arts. He's also got a very strong set of skills from his roles at the English National Opera, Royal Academy, Shakespeare's Globe, Royal College of Music and most recently the London Handel Festival. I'm hoping Bristol is going to give him a warm welcome, following his very good decision to join us all in the west country.'*

**Samir Savant, incoming Chief Executive Officer, St George's Bristol, said:**

*'I am thrilled to accept this prestigious position and to build on the excellent work done by Suzanne and the team over the past fifteen years. I will miss the London Handel Festival of course, but I am proud of everything I have achieved over the past five years, culminating in our award-winning 'Messiah Reimagined' project.*

*St George's already has a wonderful reputation for classical music, and I am particularly drawn to its eclectic programme which is expanding in many interesting directions, a rich calendar of events with everything from Qawwali to Armistead Maupin. I look forward to getting to know the audiences and artists, supporters and stakeholders. I am keen for St George's to be considered the natural home for a broad range of creative communities, from local to international.'*

**Richard Hopkin, Chairman of the London Handel Festival said:**

*'We are sorry to see Samir go, but thank him for everything he has done over the past five years. The Festival has been transformed under his leadership, with broader audiences and an impressive range of artistic partners, international critical acclaim, a revitalised Handel Singing Competition and enviable fundraising success.*

*We wish him well in his new role at St George's, Bristol. While we are recruiting a new Festival Director to take us forward and develop the Festival further, it is business as usual as we plan to emerge from the pandemic.'*

**ENDS**

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**St George's Bristol**

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**Notes to Editor**

**Samir Savant**

Samir Savant has over 20 years' experience as a senior manager in the arts, including at Shakespeare's Globe, Royal Academy of Arts, English National Opera and the Royal College of Music. He started his role with the London Handel Festival in 2016 and has presented highly successful Festival events from 2017 to 2021, attracting critical acclaim: "Under the direction of Samir Savant, London Handel Festival has expanded exponentially" (Sunday Times, April 2018).

He is an experienced mentor, writer and public speaker and has chaired the Chartered Institute of Fundraising's Cultural Sector Network national conference on several occasions. He sings with Pegasus, the chamber choir he co-founded, and is a trustee of Harrison Parrott Foundation, which champions diversity and inclusion in the arts.

**London Handel Festival**

The London Handel Festival is an annual celebration of the life and work of composer George Frideric Handel, who made his home in London and wrote most of his major works there. Since its inception in the 1970s, the Festival has established a firm place in the nation's cultural calendar, with loyal audiences, critical acclaim and international recognition and reach. The base for the Festival is St. George's, Hanover Square in the heart of London's Mayfair, where Handel was a parishioner, and it also presents concerts across the capital at a range of venues, from Wigmore Hall and Royal Opera House to the Bussey Building in Peckham.

The London Handel Festival is a registered charity and is passionate about reviving the interest in Handel's music through presenting his rarely-performed operas and oratorios, nurturing emerging talent and providing access for all members of the community. The Festival is increasingly widening its output of educational activities and initiating new partnerships to encourage people of all ages to enjoy Handel's music. The Handel Singing Competition was established in 2002 to continue Handel's tradition of nurturing talent by providing meaningful and sustained support of exceptional young singers in addition to offering performance opportunities. The Festival is internationally renowned and attracts applicants from all over the world each year.

[www.london-handel-festival.com](http://www.london-handel-festival.com)

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## St George's Bristol

St George's Bristol is an independent charity and acclaimed 580-seat live music venue in the heart of Bristol that creates magical experiences for music lovers and music makers. We believe that culture plays a vital role in celebrating debate, difference and solidarity in our communities.

Each year, St George's presents over 300 performances, talks, workshops and events, engaging with over 120,000 people. We present critically acclaimed artists, support emerging musicians, create opportunities for artists to experiment and collaborate, and engage with diverse communities across Bristol and beyond.

[www.stgeorgesbristol.co.uk](http://www.stgeorgesbristol.co.uk)

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St George's Bristol is a registered charity, number 295178