

Proposal for a new children's opera

**One of our  
Brothers is a Lion!**



### **From the musical director**

I am proud to be associated with James's opera for the Beckenham choirs. He wrote a terrific piece in the early days of Beckenham Junior Choir (*The Golden Touch*) and I am immensely looking forward to this opportunity for our young musicians to work alongside a composer who has been proved to write for enormously varied groups and individuals. James and I go back a long way and this is a very exciting project.

John Webber



### **From the composer**

It's not only a great privilege for me to be asked to compose a new children's opera for the Beckenham Junior Choir and Beckenham Youth Voices—it brings me back to where everything started for me.

My experiences with the BJC, including being its first assistant director during my secondary school years, fostered in me a love for making music with young people and amateurs which is still very much part of why I'm a composer today. There's a special British tradition of composers writing for communities, following Benjamin Britten, of which I'm proud to be a part.

With the kind support of musical director John Webber and the choirs' committee, I've developed a proposal for a children's opera which would involve both choirs, and which is on course to be completed and performed in summer 2017. However, the choirs do not receive any Government funding, so this project can only get off the ground with the generous support of individuals and businesses.

This is where you come in. Commissioning new music, and creating something unique and long-lasting, is always an exciting experience; in the case of this project, there will also be huge benefit to a young musical community. Plus, as the opera will be published, you'll have the added satisfaction of knowing that you helped create something which will give memorable experiences to many more young people in the future.

I appreciate that there are all kinds of demands on our money these days, which is why we're giving people the opportunity to contribute as little as £50 in the hope that as many as possible can participate. For those able to contribute more, I'm very pleased to offer a number of additional benefits, including—continuing the opera's lion theme!—complimentary involvement in ZSL London's valuable conservation work with lions.

Thank you for taking the time to read this, and I very much hope you can help us to make this project happen.

James Olsen

*Cover: Detail from Vittore Carpaccio, Saint Jerome and the Lion (1502)*

*Above: James Olsen and John Webber, September 2016*

## **The project**

The children's opera is to be titled *One of our Brothers is a Lion!* and tells the story of Saint Jerome and the lion, as recounted in the 'Golden Legend' by Jacobus de Voragine (c. 1260).

Saint Jerome is said to have removed a thorn from a lion's paw—a subject familiar to art lovers from numerous paintings of this subject, including the 'Prendella Panel' by Fra Filippo Lippi in the National Gallery. What these paintings do not show is that, after the thorn is removed, the lion joins the monastery, and is even given a job by Saint Jerome. Man and beast live in harmony until, one day, the monastery's donkey goes missing, and the brothers blame the lion for eating him...

The work, to be approximately 15 minutes in length, will comprise spoken dialogue for individual child actors, interspersed with songs for younger children's choir (for children aged Years 3 to 6) and older children's choir (for children aged Years 7 to 13), with piano accompaniment. This will provide an opportunity for the Beckenham Junior Choir and Beckenham Youth Voices to perform together. The work can be performed fully staged or as a concert piece; it is planned that the first performances will be fully staged, to take place on 20 May 2017 in Beckenham and 1 July 2017 in Broadstairs.

## **Synopsis**

Setting: a monastery in the Syrian desert, fifth century CE.

Saint Jerome and the Brothers (younger children's choir) are going about their daily business in the monastery when the Lion, who at this point is a lion cub, enters. The Brothers are terrified, but Jerome points out that the Lion is only young, and appears to be in discomfort. Fearless, Jerome approaches the Lion and removes a thorn from its paw. The Lion is delighted, and Jerome and the Brothers welcome the Lion to live with them in the monastery.

Because everyone must contribute to the monastery's life, Jerome gives the Lion a job, which is to lead the Donkey back and forth each day to fetch wood. The Lion does his job well, and becomes friends with the Donkey. Over time, the Lion gradually grows in size and stature, and develops a fine mane. Some of the Brothers become uneasy about having a lion living with them.

As he grows, the Lion becomes increasingly hungry, and his conversations with the Donkey frequently focus on the subject of food. One day, after a particularly large lunch, the Lion falls asleep while he is out with the Donkey. The Donkey is captured by the Bandits (older children's choir) and taken away. The Lion wakes up and, horrified that the Donkey has disappeared, returns to the monastery alone. The Brothers assume that the Lion has eaten the Donkey, and kick the Lion out of the monastery. Jerome is saddened but does not intervene. Distraught, the Lion flees into the wilderness, wondering if he really did eat the Donkey in a fit of hunger, and despairing of ever being able to live in harmony with humans.

While in his self-imposed exile, the Lion by chance sees the Bandits with the Donkey. The Lion decides to rescue his friend and ambushes the Bandits, terrifying them with his mighty roar and thrashing tail. The Lion leads the Donkey back to the monastery, and Jerome and the Brothers welcome them both back with delight. The Brothers admit they were perhaps a bit too hasty in judging the Lion.



*Above: Beckenham Junior Choir performing at Beckenham Baptist Church*

### **About the choirs**

The Beckenham Junior Choir and Youth Voices is a non-profit organisation working to promote music for young people in the local community. They meet to practise weekly during term time, and perform several concerts in different venues over the year.

The Beckenham Junior Choir was established in 1993. It gives children in the Beckenham, Bromley and surrounding areas a unique singing opportunity covering a wide variety of music in a non-competitive atmosphere. The musical director, John Webber, is an accomplished musician and teacher, and is currently Director of Music at St. John's, East Dulwich.

The popularity of the Beckenham Junior Choir subsequently led to the creation of Beckenham Youth Voices for boys and girls between 11 and 18 years old. It is a popular way for members of the junior choir to continue to sing and perform during their secondary education.

The choirs encourage all musical activities and young pianists to put their teaching to good use by accompanying the choirs in both practice and performances.

The choirs hold regular concerts at Beckenham Baptist Church, and have performed at retirement communities in Sydenham and West Wickham, and as far afield as Broadstairs, Eastbourne and Romney Marsh, Kent and Southwold, Suffolk.

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



### **About the composer**

'A striking musical imagination'  
— *The Sunday Times*

James Olsen, born in Lewisham, south London in 1982, has seen performances of his music by orchestras and ensembles in the UK and continental Europe including the London Symphony Orchestra, the London Sinfonietta, the Philharmonia Orchestra, the Britten Sinfonia, Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin and the BBC Singers, and by, amongst others, George Benjamin, Martyn Brabbins, Nicholas Cleobury, Clio Gould, Rolf Hind, Tim Mead and Paul Watkins.

James began studying piano with John Webber at the age of seven and was the first assistant director of the Beckenham Junior Choir from 1995 to 1999. At the age of 15, his *Imbroglia* for wind quintet was taken up by the Galliard Ensemble, who performed the piece at the London South Bank Centre and recorded it as part of their debut commercial recording on the Meridian label. *Gramophone* magazine wrote that it was 'an uncommonly assured and thoroughly engaging essay from a precocious figure'. In 2000, James's first children's opera, *The Golden Touch*, was first performed by the Beckenham Junior Choir.

James read music at King's College, Cambridge, where he gained a double starred first. He studied composition with Julian Anderson, Colin Matthews, Robin Holloway, Michael Finnissy and Adam Gorb in the UK, and with Wolfgang Rihm in Germany. He has received commissions from, amongst others, the BBC, the Britten-Pears Foundation, the Britten Sinfonia, Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, Klangspuren Schwaz, the London Sinfonietta, the London Symphony Orchestra, Tête à Tête opera and Wigmore Hall.

Three commercial recordings of his music have been released, including a recording of *Chameleon Concerto*, performed by Clio Gould, Rolf Hind and the London Sinfonietta and conducted by David Porcelijn, which was released as part of the London Sinfonietta's Jerwood Series on NMC. James's music has been broadcast by BBC Radio 3 in the UK and by DeutschlandRadio Berlin and Kulturradio in Germany.

Projects for 2017 include a piano trio commissioned by Trio Gaspard and new works for Trio Catch, Grammy-nominated pianist Vincent Corver and the choir of Kremsmünster Abbey in Austria (for whom Bruckner composed motets such as 'Locus iste' and 'Christus factus est').

[www.jamesolsen.eu](http://www.jamesolsen.eu)

(Photo: Yuli Gates)

## Get involved

The fee for commissioning the opera is £4,800, and we are seeking to fund the commission through crowdfunding from parents and friends of the choir, the local community in Beckenham, and others who might be interested in the project.

Commissioning music is a great way to participate in the creation of a unique new piece of art:

- **Give an unforgettable experience**  
This is an opportunity for children to participate in the first performance of a new work by a leading young British composer. The performances will be unique musical and theatrical experiences for a significant number of children, and hopefully adults too!
- **Create something unique**  
The opera will be tailored specifically for the needs of the Beckenham Junior Choir and Beckenham Youth Voices, and James is collaborating closely with the choirs throughout the process, from conception and composition through to rehearsal and performance.
- **Create something lasting**  
The opera will be commercially published, and will hopefully receive many more performances, benefitting a much wider number of children after its first performance.
- **Give a great gift**  
A commissioned piece of music makes a unique gift to a loved one for a birthday, anniversary or to commemorate a special occasion. You can specify a short "commission text" which will be reproduced alongside your name in the published score, and in the programme of every future performance and recording of the piece.



*Above: Beckenham Junior Choir performing at St. Michael and All Angels, Sydenham*

## Funding options

In order to allow as many people as possible to be involved, we are offering three levels of funding.

### Brother Patron

Minimum contribution: £50

Benefits:

- Your name and "commission text" (see above) appearing in the published score
- Your name and "commission text" appearing in programmes of performances and on recordings of the work
- Two complimentary tickets to the first performance
- One complimentary copy of the published full score, signed by the composer
- An opportunity to purchase further copies of the published full score a significant discount

### Lion Patron

Minimum contribution: £250

Benefits as for Brother Patron, plus:

- One complimentary ticket to James Olsen's annual Patrons' Event in central London
- One complimentary ZSL London lion adoption pack (worth £25.00) to aid ZSL London's worldwide conservation work for lions, and support the care for the lions at ZSL London and Whipsnade Zoo. Adopters receive a storybook style gift box containing:
  - a certificate of adoption
  - an information booklet all about lions
  - a notebook, pencil and postcards
  - fun stickers, badges and bookmarks



*Right: Jan van Eyck, Saint Jerome in His Study (1442)*

### **Saint Jerome Patron**

Minimum contribution: £1,000

Benefits as for Lion Patron, plus:

- Two complimentary tickets to James Olsen's annual Patrons' Event in central London
- One complimentary family ticket (two adults and two children, or one adult and three children) to ZSL London (worth £67.50) to see Bhanu, Rubi, Heidi and Indi, the Asiatic lions!

### **Funding by businesses**

Commissioning new music is an ideal way for organisations to contribute to their community while simultaneously raising their brand visibility. Businesses' logos and branding can be included on the published score, programme notes and recordings. We warmly encourage businesses to get involved: please contact us for further information.

### **How the crowdfunding process works**

- Individuals or organisations register their interest in being patrons. If the project is oversubscribed, patrons are allocated on a first-come, first-served basis.
- Successful patrons receive a commission agreement from the composer which both parties sign, specifying the amount that patron will contribute and their rights in relation to the work. Unlike a conventional commission, where 50 per cent of the fee is payable on signing of the commission agreement, no money is payable at this point. Instead, the agreement specifies a total funding threshold for the project. In this case, the funding threshold is £2,000, which we aim to have reached by **28 February 2017**.
- Once the funding threshold is reached, patrons receive confirmation that the project is going ahead, and are invoiced for 50 per cent of their fee, which is payable to the composer by bank transfer or cheque. The composer begins work on the piece.
- We aim to raise £3,500 by **31 March 2017** and the full fee by **30 April 2017**.
- Patrons are invoiced for the balance of their fee on completion of the work.

### **Further information**

If you have any questions or would like to participate, please email [bjc\[at\]jamesolsen.eu](mailto:bjc@jamesolsen.eu).

January 2017