



16 June 2020

## Hand of Hope – Anthem for the easing of lockdown

Today heralds the launch of *Hand of Hope*, an anthem to commemorate the progressive easing of lockdown in the United Kingdom and worldwide.

*Hand of Hope* celebrates the lives of those lost to COVID-19 and the key workers who continue to work tirelessly every day. *Hand of Hope* is a song for our times conceived to unite global communities in a harmonious mark of respect and to serve as a reminder for generations to come.

Inspired by public acts of solidarity – notably Clap for our Carers – and the resilient creativity of culture in quarantine, the anthem's creators, Nigel Short and Piers Schmidt, developed the simple idea of reinterpreting a much-loved tune to create an uplifting and rallying paean to mark the moment.

### Piers Schmidt explains the genesis of *Hand of Hope*

“On 12 April, I read a poem by Alexander McCall Smith in *The Sunday Times* and was struck immediately by its message. It perfectly captured the noble vocation of those who care for the sick: skill and courage partnered with empathy and humility. It inspired me to ask the author to write new words to a well known and popular melody and I was delighted when Alexander agreed to collaborate with us on the project.”

One of the world's most prolific and best-loved writers, McCall Smith, whose two daughters are doctors working within the NHS, gladly accepted the challenge of writing words to memorialise the effect that COVID-19 has had on all our lives. The moving text of his poem has been set to Gustav Holst's stirring tune 'Thaxted'.

Commenting on his work, McCall Smith says, “In verse one, I acknowledge the unexpected challenge that the coronavirus issued. In the second verse, I wanted to salute the carers that ‘never left our side’ and express our gratitude for the solidarity and compassion that has come to the surface in these trying times. In the final verse, I look forward to a ‘future victory’ when hopefully a vaccine will bring the awful disease back under our control.”

Between verses two and three, McCall Smith has penned four additional lines – an *in memoriam* for the many we have lost. This reflective interlude is sung *a capella* in a section of serene, eight-part harmony composed by Nigel Short, the founder and artistic director of world-renowned chamber choir Tenebrae. Tenebrae has given *Hand of Hope* its premiere performance in a lockdown recording featuring the exciting young South African soprano Vuvu Mpofo.

## **Nigel Short explains how the anthem was produced**

“Once we had found a tune with a real sense of national fervour but not overly grand or ostentatious, we were lucky that James Sherlock, who has accompanied Tenebrae on many of its recordings, was granted permission to record the organ part on the glorious Marcussen instrument of the Holmens Kirke in Copenhagen.

Next, the 19 singers of Tenebrae put down their individual vocal lines, which were recorded remotely during full lockdown and then mixed with the organ track.

The jewel in the anthem’s crown is the solo second verse sung by Vuvu, the 2019 recipient of Glyndebourne’s prestigious John Christie Award, who recorded her beautiful contribution in her home city of Port Elizabeth, South Africa.

Tenebrae is proud to be part of this inspiring project and hopes that this small musical contribution may help support the research efforts of the Jenner Institute and lead ultimately to the defeat of COVID-19.”

Reflecting on her participation on *Hand of Hope*, Vuvu Mpfu says: “This is an opportunity I shall always cherish. Like so many throughout this crisis I have found that sometimes I can face the world with great strength and moments later I am hanging on by a thread, but what I have always had is hope. At the moment, it feels brave to consider the future but it is what we must do, all of us together, wherever we may be and wherever we may be from. We stand together with hope in our hearts, working towards and hoping for a brighter future.”

Tenebrae and Vuvu Mpfu will re-record the anthem professionally when UK Government guidelines allow, after which a final version of *Hand of Hope* will be released as a track for download.

To enable community, church and school choirs to sing and record their own performances of *Hand of Hope*, sheet music and music tracks (click and organ) are available on the website.

100% of all proceeds (donations and monies raised from the downloads of *Hand of Hope*) will be used by the University of Oxford’s Medical Sciences Division to fast track the development of world-class research into understanding and developing tools to treat COVID-19.

ENDS

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## Notes to editors

*Hand of Hope* is a fundraising initiative created by Nigel Short and Piers Schmidt, two friends with a shared background in choral music spanning 35 years, having both been members of Westminster Cathedral choir and various ensembles from Cambridge University.

The University of Oxford is at the forefront of the endeavour to understand and beat the coronavirus (COVID-19) and protect our communities, both in the UK and throughout the world. Over 150 of Oxford's senior scientists have diverted their efforts towards facing this crisis and driving forward research across a number of key areas including drug development, immune response and antibodies as well as the vaccine itself.

As the Oxford Vaccine Centre's COVID-19 vaccine trial, run by the Jenner Institute and Oxford Vaccine Group, is well underway, researchers now urgently need philanthropic support to advance many critical strands of research, including developing new drugs to treat COVID-19; as well as testing existing drugs for their effectiveness against the virus. Flexible, fast-response funding has been, and still is, of paramount importance to support the university's work.

All money raised by *Hand of Hope* enables researchers to move rapidly and accelerate this time-critical development for the benefit of the world.

*Hand of Hope* is produced by Luxury Branding

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## Weblinks

University of Oxford Coronavirus Research  
Alexander McCall Smith  
Tenebrae and Nigel Short  
Vuvu Mpofo