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Refugee from apartheid is championing freedom

By **MATTHEW WILSON**

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ONE of the world's top double bass players is staging a fund-raising concert with a difference at the Kenton Theatre next Friday (January 11) in aid of the Mayor of Henley's charities.

Leon Bosch, who has performed on film soundtracks including Harry Potter, James Bond and the Lord of the Rings trilogy, was one of the first people Councillor Glen Lambert called after taking office back in May.

The software developer, of Greys Road, had originally got to know the South African-born musician more than a decade ago after being hired to build his website.

"We've been keeping it up to date and working with him ever since," said Councillor Lambert. "So whenever he releases a new album, for example, he sends us a copy and we extract the music to put clips on his website for him.

"Leon was one of the first phone calls I made when I became Mayor because he himself has done a huge amount of fundraising for charity. He runs what are called ultramarathons. I mean, the thought of running for a train terrifies me, but Leon can run 50 miles!

"He started running in his fifties. One day he decided to go on a sort of get fit campaign, so he started with a jog around the neighbourhood.

"He said afterwards that this was a sort of jolt of reality and made him realise just how out of shape he was — just how far from the picture of himself as a youth he'd become. And he just went on this fitness drive that culminated in him running this ultramarathon thing.

"So because I'd been working with him for all these years and I knew he'd done so much fundraising, I called him and asked if he'd do a charity concert for us — and he agreed immediately."

The concert, which starts at 7.30pm, will see Leon joined on stage by the award-winning pianist Rebeca Omordia, whose fans include the cellist Julian Lloyd Webber.

Writing in *The London Magazine*, he said: "Rebeca is half-Romanian and half-Nigerian — and it's a powerful combination! Her technique knows no bounds but, more importantly, she plays with a depth of insight and understanding that is all too rare today."

Much the same could be said of Bosch, whose route to becoming a world-renowned virtuoso was far from straightforward.

Born in Cape Town in 1961, the 57-year-old grew up under South Africa's authoritarian apartheid regime.

The son of a school teacher, he soon followed his father into the anti-apartheid movement.

Aged just 15, this saw him dragged from his bed and thrown into prison for organising school protests against the regime.

During his subsequent trial, he was inspired by seeing his legal team in action and later applied to read law at the University of Cape Town — seeing the profession as his way of contributing to the struggle for freedom.

But here his activist background told against him. Deemed a subversive by the authorities, his application was rejected.

Almost as a joke — "as a light-hearted prank," as he later put it — he instead applied to study music, which had the advantage of being considered politically neutral.

While he did not come from a musical family, Bosch had studied the piano and violin at school



Fit as a fiddle: double bass virtuoso Leon Bosch usually raises money for charity by running ultramarathons but next Friday he is in concert at the Kenton Theatre in aid of the Mayor's charities with pianist Rebeca Omordia (left)

before concentrating on the cello. In stark contrast with the repressive political environment of his upbringing, music provided an outlet for creativity and self-expression.

"After I'd been in prison I developed a need to sit in the bedroom I shared with my siblings and play the cello," he later told an interviewer for *Classical Music* magazine. "Whenever I was angry or frustrated, it was the cello that provided the means for me to express the turmoil going on inside."

Once enrolled at university, Bosch was taught by Zoltan Kovats, the principal double bassist with the Cape Town Symphony Orchestra. This eventually led him to switch to the instrument with which he would make his name.

"As well as teaching me to play the instrument he taught me the true value of hard work," recalls Bosch. "He was demanding, to the point of exhaustion — but the harder I worked, the more talented I became!"

This dedication to the double bass, which saw Bosch working from seven in the morning till ten at night, seven days a week, eventually

culminated in his being awarded the highest performance examination mark in the university's history.

On graduating, he was advised to continue his studies in Britain, but the apartheid laws meant he was ineligible to receive a grant.

Fortunately, with the help of private benefactors, Bosch was able to move to the UK and take up a place at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester, where he continued to shine.

After being offered his first professional engagement with the Scottish National Orchestra, Bosch was initially refused a work permit, but with the assistance of his MP, the late Gerald Kaufman, he was shortly afterwards granted political refugee status, enabling him to live and work in the UK.

Later gaining British citizenship, he has remained in the country ever since, combining orchestral work with chamber music and solo performing, both internationally and at home.

Bosch was principal double bass with the Academy of St Martin in the Fields until 2014 and has also held the post of principal with the Manchester Camerata. During his

career, he has been instrumental in reviving the work of the neglected Catalan double bass virtuoso Josep Cervera-Bret, helping to bring to light more than 60 original works for the instrument.

In 2013, Bosch founded I Musicanti, a hand-picked ensemble dedicated to presenting distinctive programmes in a spirit of artistic freedom.

Describing his calling as a musician, he said: "It is the performer's solemn duty to seek to understand what the composer intended and then to express that unique personal understanding as if one's very life depended on it. What is the point otherwise? When I play the bass at least, I am a totally free human spirit."

Tickets for "An Evening with Leon Bosch" are priced £16, with the proceeds being donated to Gillotts School, Henley Music School and the Bluebells community club, which provides respite care for dementia sufferers.

The concert, which includes a Q&A, has been jointly organised by the Mayor and Henley Music School founder Laura Reineke, who said: "We have been busy encouraging local businesses to sponsor seats for the concert so that children can come along for nothing and be inspired. We so far have around 30 seats paid for, which is fantastic. If any kids want to come, they just need to email me at henleymusicschool@hotmail.co.uk."

The offer is open to school-aged children up to and including sixth-formers. Anyone interested in sponsoring one of the seats is invited to contact Laura on the above email address or email Councillor Lambert at cllrglambert@gmail.com

● To book tickets, call the box office on (01491) 575698 or visit www.kentontheatre.co.uk



Social: Rock Choir members regularly perform in public

Taster session offers a chance to rock out

HENLEY Rock Choir is inviting would-be singers to boost their natural high and beat the winter blues this month by taking part in a free taster session.

With no audition and no need to be able to read music, Rock Choir has already attracted nearly 30,000 members nationwide.

It is considered to be responsible for creating a cultural musical movement offering a unique and glamorous alternative to the traditional choir format.

Rock Choir's uplifting ethos of fun, friendship and community spirit is a huge part of its attraction and its inclusive and accessible teaching approach allows anyone who simply loves pop music to take part.

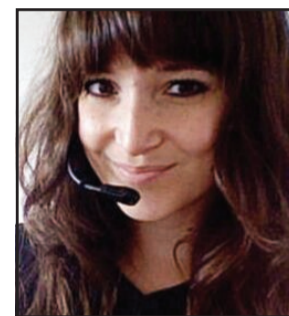
Recent scientific research has provided support for the belief that singing in a group creates a significant natural high.

A recent experiment carried out by the BBC's *Trust Me I'm a Doctor* ensemble dedicated to presenting distinctive programmes in a spirit of artistic freedom.

This compares to a 20 per cent uplift after the same people had taken part in dancing and cycling.

Henley Rock Choir leader Lucy Hewes thinks the findings should have a profound effect on the way our wellbeing and mental health is supported from now on — and could be the key to a happier new year for many.

She said: "I often receive personal communications from members who claim that their journey in Rock Choir has improved their lives or helped them in various ways to recover from personal issues and



Choir leader: Lucy Hewes

trauma. Rock Choir provides an exciting and life-affirming platform using music at its core and as a whole experience offers joy and friendship.

"No one can escape the challenges that life throws at us, but being on a positive, supportive, calm and happy platform will make those moments less painful.

"Targeting our mental health issues and finding healthy solutions is key and we can offer one solution and that is Rock Choir."

Henley Rock Choir members recently performed in the town's Living Advent Calendar and raised much-needed funds for Henley Regatta for the Disabled by singing outside Waitrose.

Lucy added: "Rock Choir members are offered a wide variety of social and performance events and can get involved in as much as they like from the busy Rock Choir calendar.

"Many Henley 'Rockies' travelled to Hyde Park in September to take part in a special BBC/Rock Choir flash mob at the iconic Proms in the Park.

"Drawing an audience of 40,000, it was the largest flash mob ever witnessed in the UK with over 12,500 Rock Choir members from across the UK taking part."

To book a free Rock Choir taster session, visit www.rockchoir.com or call 01252 714276.

Rat Pack show has a Brit in the ranks

A HIT-filled evening of songs made famous by Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin and Sammy Davis Jr is in store at the Kenton Theatre later this month.

The Rat Pack will be joined by special guest Kenny Lynch at the New Street venue on Sunday, January 27, at 7.30pm.

The Nettlebed-based singer had two top 10 singles, *Up On The Roof* and *You Can Never Stop Me Loving You*, and six other hits including *Mountain of Love* and *Stand by Me*.

A Kenton spokesman said: "This hit show perfectly captures not only the wonderful music and



Showbiz veteran: Kenny Lynch

comedy of these musical legends, but also offers the remarkable personalities of the stars who truly ruled the entertainment world with such timeless hit songs as *The Lady is a Tramp*, *My Way* and *New York, New York*."

Tickets are £21. To book, call (01491) 575698 or visit www.kentontheatre.co.uk