

# Horizons

## Creative Collaboration with Care Home staff

Welsh National Opera is now in year 2 of Horizons, a three year project in which professional opera and film makers collaborate within a care setting in Birmingham to devise a new opera film, exploring the experience of people with dementia and those who care for them. The piece has been created collaboratively with residents and staff at The Ridings Care home in Birmingham.

Composer John O'Hara, librettist Karen Hayes, care staff and relatives had a growing relationship in year 1, which saw them all negotiate care priorities and work together creatively as joint advocates for people with dementia.

The creative sessions produced a mass of raw text and ideas for music. Existing songs were the starting point, with relatives often present at singing sessions and encouraged to take an interest as this phase of the project evolved. Now that the libretto is complete and the score on the road to a full through-composition the team are working with a dancer, choir mistress, filmmaker and creative producer to involve staff and relatives at production level by enabling and training them as a community choir who will sing the chorus roles in the finished piece.

[wno.org.uk](http://wno.org.uk)

There is much to share about the growing trust between staff, relatives and artists. By sharing our experiences and methodology we wish to create discussions around the possibilities of this kind of collaboration to encourage creative advocacy for people with dementia. To work creatively with staff toward extremely high production levels with increased self confidence and ultimately to have a positive effect on the quality and delivery of care, creative activity in a busy care home environment and to promote a real sense of community within the setting.

### Creative Team

Composer **John O'Hara**

Librettist **Karen Hayes**

Filmmaker **Mathew Beckett**

Movement Director **Lee Fisher**

Producer **Claire Marshall**

Project Assistant **Viv Jones**

### Libretto extract by Karen Hayes

How much life can you fit in a box?  
How many years can you cram inside?  
Between the base and the lid  
Filled with everything you did  
Or from side to side  
Or end to end.  
This box is neither wide  
Nor deep  
And in the end  
How much of a life can you keep?  
Unborn again I sleep.

### Libretto extract by Karen Hayes

This house is full of life.  
The rooms with endless views  
The dust its residue.  
So many voices whirling inside my head.  
So many hands to hold and hum and want.  
So many faces breaking near my surface.  
We talk of questions to be asked  
We talk of busy beating time,  
A drone amongst the proofs of life.  
We talk of angels,  
Hanging just out of sight.  
Who tell us no one is partial,  
No one is finished.  
Every breath a sound,  
A sound, expressive of joy,  
And able and able and able.  
And undiminished.