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Celebrity artworks auction

An auction of artwork in aid of the Kaos Signing Choir for Deaf and Hearing Children is to be held in Alexandra Palace this month. Going under the hammer is a selection of specially drawn angels. The A5 pictures have been created by celebrities who, at the time of writing, include Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Jo Brand, Colin Jackson, Joanna Lumley, Sir Ian McKellen, Dame Evelyn Glennie, "Supernanny" Jo Frost, Jeremy Hardy, Geri Halliwell, Emma Thompson, Bernard Cribbins, Mike Leigh, Roger McGough and Sandi Toksvig.

Special guest auctioneer is Rowland Rivron, with live music provided by popular north London singers The Angels of Kaos.

The event will take place in The Palace

Suite, Alexandra Palace, from 7.30pm to midnight on Saturday 18 October. Tickets are available at £15 (including ambrosial buffet). For tickets, commissioning bids or telephone bids contact

Suzy

Davies on 07950 359199 or suzy@thekaos.org, or Ali Wood on 07950 359209 or ali@thekaos.org. For more details and artwork previews, contact Marcella Hampson, 07989 410314 or marcella@hampsonprojects.co.uk

Artworks up for grabs include offerings from Joanna Lumley (above left) and Sir Ian McKellen (above right)



Swimming with ducks

Linda Dolata has been a regular swimmer at the ladies' pond on Hampstead Heath since 1968. Here she explains what keeps her going back.

The awful weather this summer has not deterred the stalwarts from visiting the ponds. Indeed many of them, including some notable nonagenarians, swim throughout the winter, breaking the ice if necessary. I usually wimp out by mid-October.

During early September, the ladies' pond was a very acceptable 61F (16C), and thanks to all the rain, beautifully clean and fresh. Having said that, the ponds are checked constantly to ensure good water quality. They are part of a moving water system so are not stagnant at any time.

Many of the ladies who swim in the pond are serious swimmers, dedicated to outdoor swimming, but I suspect that many others go for the real sense of peace. Stress melts away within minutes of arriving at this beautiful place.

Radios and phones are banned on the meadow where one can sit, read, sleep, sunbathe or just think. It is a lovely place to have a snack, as long as you don't mind sharing it with the permanent residents who turn up hopefully. Among them are cheeky magpies, which bounce up as close as they dare, comical but shy ducks, and (more unusually) gentle moorhens.

I have my own special reason for going for a swim most days. I swim to the far end of the pond, choosing times when there is hardly anyone else in the water, and use a sort of elderly breaststroke that hardly disturbs the surface.

At the distant part of the

pond I hang onto one of the buoys and just look to see what is around. On a red-letter day I see a kingfisher. On one occasion this summer, I saw three, presumably this year's brood on an early outing. Equally exotic are the family groups of ring-necked parakeets calling from the trees (I know many people dislike these immigrants, but I like their cheerfulness).

Above the water, house martins circle. This year has seen

a family of kestrels practising their flying. There is often a heron spiralling down to hide at the far margin, looking like a prehistoric pterodactyl with its clumsy flight. For many years there was a beautiful Persian cat that lived wild and deigned to join the sunbathers in the summer.

To me there is no place quite like the pond. Do come and experience it for yourself, but do so quietly.

Silver cyber surfers

People aged over 55 who cannot afford a computer have a chance to receive one free in a scheme using reconditioned models formerly used by council staff.

The computers will be provided with the Windows XP operating system pre-loaded. Anyone over 55 will be able to apply by filling in an application form explaining why they need one and what they would use it for. The council is expecting to

be able to allocate around 10 a month to residents. A panel of council officers and a representative from the Barnet Voluntary Service Council (BVSC) will administer the scheme. For more information, contact the council's Grants Unit on 020 8359 2020.

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