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New Year's Honours: Leonie Scott-Matthews appointed an OBE for work on Pentameters Theatre and services to Hampstead

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Leonie Scott-Matthews, who founded Pentameters Theatre in 1968 and has run it ever since, has been given the gong for services to British Theatre and services to the community in Hampstead.

The 78-year-old, who has lived in the area since 1961, said she was "over the moon" at the news.

She said: "Always doing things my way, the alternative way, it can be quite isolating. You think 'Am I right, or am I wrong?'. I've done it in a unique way, single handedly.

"We've had our ups and downs in the 51 years we've run it, with no financial aid, but we've made it work."

Ms Scott-Matthews started the theatre after holding poetry sessions in the cellar of the Freemasons Arms in Downshire Hill. She then held performances in a temporary home in the former Haverstock Tavern, before making the final move to Pentameters home above the Horseshoe Pub in Heath Street where it has remained ever since. She lives a stone's throw away with her partner Godfrey Old, with whom she has a 31-year-old daughter, Alice.

She grew up in Mapperley near Nottingham before escaping to the bright lights of London and the Royal Academy of Music and Drama in the 1960s.

She said: "When I was in drama school in the early 1960s I fell in love with Hampstead. It took me to its soul. I decided I wanted to live in and work in Hampstead and do it my way."

Generations of British acting and literary talent have trodden the boards at her theatre. Among them were poets Ted Hughes, Stevie Smith and Roger McGough, as well as actors Nigel Havers, Patrick Bergin and Celia Imrie. Alternative comedy was also given a turn with Rik Mayall, Adrian Edmondson and Alexei Sayle pitching a show to Leonie. She said she would think about it, and the trio along with Nigel Planer and Christopher Ryan went on to great success in *The Young Ones*.

Leonie said Mr Hughes was a unique performer. She added: "He had this amazing voice. He was hypnotic on stage. The way he read work. He had magic and charisma. What amazing times they were."

Her trip to Buckingham Palace next year will be her second visit, after going with her actress mother Josephine in 1960 for a garden party held by the Queen. Her father Alfred, who was from the Channel Islands, also had an artistic background.