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## **Léonie Scott-Matthews: In 1968, you wouldn't find women running theatres!**

19 November, 2021 — By [Léonie Scott-Matthews](#)

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*Léonie Scott-Matthews on the piano at the Pentameters*

I've been a woman in a man's world doing a man's job, but it's quite funny because men haven't noticed. I came to Hampstead, in 1962, I got this bedsit in Glenloch Road. I was looking for a sense of identity, I was reading the beats, On the Road, Kerouac, Burrows and all those sorts of off-beat writers, Lawrence Durrell, escapist.

My big thing was where did I belong?

Then suddenly there is this wonderful place called Hampstead. You had artists, writers, musicians, you had the Heath, I fell in love with this wonderful place and thought "this is where I belong".

I suppose you could call me a sort of tomboy – it's quite an old-fashioned phrase. There was nobody else as a woman doing what I did when I set up Pentameters in 1968.

I've always done my own thing in my own way. My mantra has always been if I live and work in this area for myself in something I'm passionate for, make sure I always pay my rent, then I'll be free.

There was a pub, the Rosslyn Arms, it's shut now. It was the panacea to my life. It was very male-orientated, as a woman you were a bit marginalised.

I stood by the shove ha'penny machine and just absorbed it all, so the men didn't notice me. They'd show me their poetry, and I loved being in this environment, loved the bonhomie of the glass of wine, and I thought "what did I really like, what did I want to do?" It was poetry, poetry, poetry.

I set myself a year, and won the Poetry Society's gold medal for verse speaking, but I never saw myself entering the poetry world as a poet, even though I'd written one or two poems. I saw myself as an interpreter and pushing other people.

When I came to the Horseshoe to ask about the room upstairs. The landlord said "come and have a drink", and then another, and then "come up to my office".

I went up and he had unzipped his trousers and exposed himself. I said "Er, could you put it away", and he did. He said "Okay, you can have the room, but don't tell the wife".

In lockdown, we opened up the windows and would play every day so people outside could hear us. We had no income at all.

Asher and Dan, a group of young men who I started off when they were at school, said: "We'll do a film of you and crowdfund", and raised the rent, so I was able to pay it.

We had people donate £5 and we even had someone put a packet of £1,000 through the door. We have no idea who it was, but that was wonderful.

During Covid I opened all my notebooks and all the poetry that I've never sent off tumbled out. I've got some books out of it, and a new album.

I've waited since I was 24, that was my dream, and it's happening now.

***Léonie Scott Matthews runs the Pentameters theatre in Hampstead***