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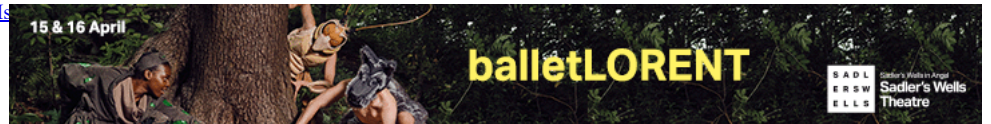
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It's a rewind to 1960s Hampstead for Pentameters play

US students help stage Léonie's work

Thursday, 14th April



In the bedsit: Léonie Scott-Matthews with Peyton Otis, Zoe Healey and Weronika Maria

TWO American drama students are helping bring 1960s Hampstead back to life as they stage a play penned by the owner of a fringe theatre.

Bedsit Girls, by the owner of Pentameters Theatre, Léonie Scott-Matthews, is based on her experiences living in Hampstead Hill Gardens during the decade when The Beatles were king and the West was going through its sexual revolution.

Zoe Healey from Austin, Texas, and Peyton Otis from Charlotte, North Carolina, are directing and stage managing the play.

They are doing a placement with Ms Scott-Matthews during a year abroad with the Foundation for International Education. They study at Elon University in North Carolina.

Along with cast members Weronika Maria and Emma Veares, they had been getting their heads around the Hampstead of 60 years ago, when Ms Scott-Matthews had first arrived in Hampstead and was sharing a bedsit with an artist.

Ms Scott-Matthews has provided photographs of Hampstead at the time to help set the scene, and the stage in the theatre, in Oriol Place, has been turned into the bedsit.

“It’s great to see and hear about what life was like in Hampstead in that era, and how much has changed and how much has stayed similar,” said Ms Healey.

Ms Maria, 29, a graduate of the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama in Swiss Cottage, has been cast to play Jan, an artist who lives with actress called Ellie.

She said: “When I first read the play I was at a jazz night in Bristol, and it was so magical, I fell in love with both characters.

“It is something we need at the moment, full of life and positivity. But at the same time, it’s about the past and how history changed and had such an impact.”

Her character is depicted as a darker, more brooding poet in contrast to Ellie, who, based on Ms Scott-Matthews, is more optimistic and cheerful.

The play references the murder of the youthful US president John F Kennedy, whose assassination made the world stand still in November 1963.

It adds an extra connection for Ms Healey, 20, whose boyfriend’s grandfather was one of the initial suspects interviewed by police.

“He was an FBI agent and they thought it could have been an inside job,” she said.

Fringe theatres are not unknown to the Americans, with similar venues in New York termed “off-off-Broadway” for the more avant garde.

As well as its plays, Pentameters also has a regular open mic night and hosts live music.

Since opening in 1968, it has witnessed performances by actors including Clive Swift, poet Roger McGough and comedians French and Saunders.

“Theatres always feel calm to people to people who work here, but the armchairs here take it to a whole new level,” said Ms Otis, 21. “It’s an incredible family vibe, everyone here knows each other and is super-accepting of new people.”

Ms Scott-Matthews said: “It’s great to have this on, and I love having young people around and helping them. It keeps you young.”

• *Bedsit Girls* had been set to open this weekend, but due to Ms Veares testing positive for Covid, it has now been delayed until May, with dates to be confirmed.

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