

CamdenNewJournal

New Year's Honour for Pentameters' Léonie Scott-Matthews

'I had a eureka moment and ever since it has been my life's work'

03 January, 2020 — By [Tom Foot](#)



Léonie Scott-Matthews

SHE has run an independent theatre in the heart of Hampstead for more than 50 years and now Léonie Scott-Matthews can add a British Empire Medal (BEM) to her list of achievements.

The Pentameters theatre artistic director has been recognised for “services to British theatre and the community in Hampstead” in the New Year's Honours.

Her 60-seat playhouse above The Horseshoe pub in Heath Street is a remnant of the old bohemian Hampstead she first fell in love with as a young actress in 1968.

Ms Scott-Matthews said: “When you are alternative, when you are doing something against the norm, when you are not interested in money, corporate stuff, designer handbags – people find it difficult to know whether you have been a success or a failure. They have no yardstick to judge success. But now they are thinking oh she was a success. I have never known people react like they have done to this – they almost wet themselves. I didn't realise the power of it. I feel like I have loads of energy and I am going to go on forever.”

She added: “The reason this means so much to me is that Hampstead took me to its heart. I moved here from Nottingham looking for a sense of identity. There I was in my denim shirt, hipster trousers, with long hair, a sort of slouch – and there were all these sorts of people, bricklayers to poets. I had a eureka moment and ever since it has been my life's work.”

Ms Scott-Matthews said she lived an “extraordinary life” with her mime artist and musician partner Godfrey Old, adding: “We don't watch television, we don't have washing machines, don't have social media or email. We live surrounded by books, poetry and we know thousands of people here.”

Her singer daughter Alice Old is currently performing in Berlin. She has not seen her son Durrell Scott-Cooper since he went missing, aged 25, in 2003. “I have very much taken it on board to accept that I will never know in my lifetime what happened to him,” said Ms Scott-Matthews. She also works with young writers, some at risk of suicide who need to express themselves, and she runs literary groups and poetry classes with elderly residents of nearby Munro House.

Pentameters was founded in 1968 in the cellar of the Freemasons Arms pub in Downshire Hill, before moving the operation briefly to the Haverstock Arms and then the Three Horseshoes. Famous writers, actors and comedians who have worked there include Dannie Abse, Kingsley Amis, Margaret Drabble, Ted Hughes, Edna O'Brien, Harold Pinter, Celia Imrie, Rik Mayall and Alexei Sayle.

Others honoured include Dr Henrietta Hughes, a GP at the Brunswick Medical Practice, who is also the National Guardian for the NHS. She runs the “Freedom to Speak Up” project which aims to make it easier for whistleblowers to come forward. Ruth Barnett has become an MBE for services to Holocaust Education.

The education charity Transformation Trust's chief executive Amy Leonard was recognised for her services to “Young People and Education” with an MBE, while the chief executive of Citizen's Advice Gillian Guy becomes a Dame.

Léonie lionised

17 January, 2020



Pentameters founder Léonie Scott-Matthews

- FOR Léonie Scott-Matthews on her British Empire Medal:

*Don't be afraid: she's still a human being.
It's just that someone noticed her, and seeing
How many and how worthy are her deeds
On Art's behalf or how she's nurtured seeds
That subsequently grow
up straight and tall
To the great joy and benefit of all
In our community proud and intense,
Concluded it was only common sense
To notify those findings to our Queen,
Who took account of them and what they mean:
That she among the crème of Britain's crème
Belongs by right: Léonie, BEM.*

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