Compelling tale from the underrepresented

**LILI**

Etcetera Theatre

The life of transwoman Lili Elbe, the first known person to undergo full surgical reassignment, will soon receive the Hollywood touch in Tom Hooper’s new movie *The Danish Girl*. But the Camden Fringe has beaten him to it with this short play based on Lili’s diaries and developed by Theatre Writers Workshop, with input from the trans cast and crew reflecting their own challenging journeys.

That sympathetic reading lends the piece strong authenticity. However, with only 50 minutes in which to cover a complex tale, it’s more whistle-stop tour than satisfying drama.

Danish artist Lili, born Einar Mogens Wegener, underwent five experimental operations in the early 1930s, causing a media sensation. She managed to get her sex and name legally changed, but her marriage to Gerda Gottlieb was invalidated by the King of Denmark.

Lili focuses on the intimate rather than the epic, hinting at the wider public reaction, but centring on a fracturing relationship. It’s a nice study in contrasts, with Victoria Elizabeth’s Gerda (here Greta) bustling and practical, while Simona Contentine’s Lili is a capricious prima donna, all sharp cheekbones and languid sensuality. Refreshingly, this pioneer is not painted as a saint, but a flawed human being who trod an extraordinary path while still indulging in reckless fantasies.

There’s a veritable feast of ideas, sadly left undeveloped in Liz Lees’ rather clunky production, including the couple’s creative rivalry, grieving Greta’s stoic support and sacrifice, and Lili’s changing artistic viewpoint, identity confusion, subsequent depression, and desire to become a mother as the ultimate symbol of womanhood.

The groundbreaking team is hamstrung by a script featuring inelegant exposition, broad generalisations and a timeline that rivals Moffat-era Doctor Who in its confounding haziness. Nevertheless, this is a compelling story passionately voiced by an underrepresented community.

Until August 2.

Marianka Swain

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**Event Listings**

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**Comedy**

Hampstead Comedy Club, Camden Head, 100 Camden High Street, NW1 0LU. Enquiries: 07722 832635. www.hampsteadcomedy.co.uk

Saturday, July 26 (Early show)

*Ocean Camden Town*

9pm. Enquiries: 020 7722 0059. 3pm-5pm. Fridays.

*The Sir Richard**


This year, the venue returns to its jazz and blues roots, with an evening of blues and jazz greats from the 1950s onwards. The lineup includes pianist Louis Johnson, the late guitarist Howlin’ Wolf, and saxophonist Sonny Stitt. The event also features a performance by the Jazz à la Folie Quintet, a group known for their energetic and soulful renditions of classic jazz standards.

The evening will begin with a special screening of the documentary *The Jazz Age*, which explores the history of jazz music and its impact on society. Following the screening, the audience will be treated to a live performance by the Jazz à la Folie Quintet, who will play a mix of blues and jazz standards from the 1950s onwards.

The event is open to all ages, and tickets are available for purchase online at the venue’s website. For more information, please visit www.jw3.org.uk.

**Weekly Clubs and Classes**

Hampstead Heath Croquet Club.

Croquet lawns, near the tennis courts, Golders Hill Park. Details at hampsteadheatchroquetclub.org.uk

Energy Healing – Highgate Healing Centre, Highgate United Reformed Church, Pond Square, Highgate. £6.50 donation. Details on 07597 190296. 6pm-8pm. Tuesdays.

Abbey Community Centre. 222c Belzle Road, NW6. 07477 852264. Over-50 Men’s IT. Computer and internet basics. Free. No booking required. 11.30am-1.30pm Wednesdays. Coffee morning. 10.30am-noon. Fridays. Bingo. 20p a game. 2pm-3pm. Tuesdays.

Earth, Twig and Fire, 341-351 Finchley Road, London, NW3. Mainly classical music. Contact 020 7722 0059. 3pm-5pm. Fridays.


Ivy House Toddlers. London Jewish Cultural Centre, 94-96 North End Road, Golders Green, NW11. 9.30am-10.45am. £3. Fridays.

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