

# Ham & High

HAMPSTEAD & HIGHGATE EXPRESS

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## Courage of a Hollywood star

LILIA  
Pentameters Theatre  
Hampstead



SCAR-nominated Lilia Skala was a formidable actress and a formidable woman as demonstrated by her granddaughter Libby in her splendid one-woman play.

Despite being Austria's first female architect, Lilia became an actress, playing leading roles in Max Reinhardt's company until 1938 when her life changed completely. Hitler invaded Austria and her Jewish husband was taken prisoner. She arranged his release by bribing one of the guards with a golden cigarette case and he was able to escape across the border and make his way to New York.

Left behind with two children, Lilia, by sheer determination and persistence, managed to get a ticket on a steamship to the USA. Unable to follow her profession because of her lack of English, she worked as a factory worker in order to keep herself and her children alive. "I was not educated to be a refugee," she said. "I have a god-given talent and I want to



give" – and so she did.

People who undergo great hardship seem to live so long – and Lilia lived until she was 98. They say "if it doesn't kill you, it will make you strong" and Lilia's story proves it.

Her last words to her granddaughter were "Write a part for me" and, of course, Libby did. And what a privilege it is for those of us lucky enough to witness Libby's performance at the Pentameters after her rave reviews at the Edinburgh Festival.

Libby moves easily between various roles, predominantly those of herself and that of Lilia with her strong German

accent. There are many amusing exchanges between the two characters. One is to do with an olive green sweater in Libby's possession which Lilia lusted after and makes her granddaughter hand over, using the indomitable art of persuasion that had served her so well in escaping the Reich.

We are also treated to Lilia's unusual and humorous theories about love and marriage. She was a woman of strength and courage – deserving of the homage paid by her granddaughter.

*Until November 13.*

ALINE WAITES