

Information for LeftLion Magazine about SOUNDSWRITE PRESS

by Karin Koller, 2nd April 2019.

Soundswrite Press was founded in 2005, and grew out of **Soundswrite** which is an open network in the East Midlands for women enthusiastic about all aspects of poetry. Soundswrite was launched in October 2000 by Pat Corina and myself. We had both been actively involved in the local poetry scene in Leicester for a number of years (attending writing workshops, and in senior roles on the committee of the Leicester Poetry Society). Soundswrite grew out of a need to have a positive and safe space where women could share poetry and workshop their own poems in a mutually supportive way. It was not just about needing to defend our writing from accusations of ‘the mere domestic’, or ‘specialised interest’, it was about encouraging women to address topics that affected them in profound ways. We had seen poems brought for workshopping to mixed groups which had been misunderstood and the writer silenced. It felt important to have a space where no topic was out-of-bounds, where it was the poem that took precedence, not the poet’s ego or strength of personality. We started Soundswrite by booking a room in a community college in Leicester and placing flyers in local libraries, theatres etc. We had no idea if anyone would come.

The fact that Soundswrite is still going strong after 19 years shows it continues to fulfil an important need. Our original aim to keep Soundswrite open to all women is as true today as it ever was. Women have attended sessions in Leicester from all over the East Midlands – Nottingham, Derby, Oakham, Leicester, Market Harborough, Sutton Coldfield. We have even had women returning for sessions when they’ve moved out of the area, travelling from Cambridge and beyond! We meet fortnightly to discuss published poetry (by both women and men – the key is the quality of the poem), and to workshop our own poetry. It’s a formula that has served us well. The sessions run democratically, with a time-keeper designated to keep us on track, but no overall leader or ‘teacher’. Our aim has always been to learn from each other, and to stay focussed on the poem, not the poet. A number of Soundswrite attenders have links with other poetry groups, including Leicestershire and Nottingham monthly *Stanza* groups and Nottingham Poetry Society (at which 3 of our poets have given readings). We also attend and read at events in Five Leaves Bookshop, and are shortly to take part in the Nottingham Poetry Festival, and hopefully also the Lowdham Book Festival.

Soundswrite Press has grown out of this open and regional focus. By 2005 Soundswrite had settled down to a regular group of 12 attendees, and realised the quality of the poetry brought for workshopping was high. This led to the idea of publishing an anthology of four poems by each woman, a slim volume with the aim of raising funds for a charity of our choice (Parkinson’s Disease). Soundswrite Press was born, and we imagined it was for a one-off publication. How wrong we were! The anthology was endorsed by U A Fanthorpe, Catherine Byron, Kate Foley, Cathy Grindrod and Myra Schneider, and sold well. It received positive reviews, and led to further anthologies as Soundswrite attendance grew. We then branched out to single-author debut pamphlets and collections. When Yorkshire-born Pat Corina died in 2008 the group collectively found all the poems she had ever brought to Soundswrite, and with the help of her partner Werner we published a selection of her poetry: *Lines North*. A book of poems as strong and uncompromising as she was.

To date we have published 12 books and pamphlets of poetry by women poets, each very different. In addition to anthologies and *Lines North*, there are four single-author pamphlets: *Window on the Square* by Alice Beer, a teacher, poet, potter and political activist who lived to

be 98 years old, and went to Faslane to protest against Trident when well into her nineties. Her pamphlet raised significant funds for The Hamlin Fistula charity. *Negotiating the Days* by Lizzie Madder was an uncompromising look at what it's like to be diagnosed and treated for a rare malignancy (anal cancer). The sequence is full of grit and humour, and speaks quietly and directly of what happens when the world shrinks to what really matters. This was followed by *Primer* by Caroline Cook and *Beyond the Tune* by Jayne Stanton. More recently we published *Night Rider* by Marilyn Ricci and *This Dust* by Maxine Linnell, two short collections, both with a powerful sequence at their heart: Marilyn's about how the print and hosiery industries were ingrained into her parents' lives, and Maxine's about the life and sudden death of her son from epilepsy at the age of 37.

Our latest publication is the result of a new venture where we invited submissions from women writers in the East Midlands. There was no fee to submit, and the response to *Take Three, Soundswrite Press New Poets, Volume 1* showed how important it is to positively support women writers, still sadly under-represented when it comes to the world of poetry publishing and reviewing. There is a wealth of outward-looking poetry by women to be discovered, and we are keen this becomes the first in a series celebrating East Midlands' women poets. Our three Volume 1 poets are Tuesday Shannon from Derbyshire, Pippa Hennessy from Nottinghamshire and Elizabeth Hourston from Leicestershire. Their poetry couldn't be more different – taking us from hot summer nights in town, to what quantum theory can tell us about the human condition, to the wild landscapes of the Orkneys.

At its heart, Soundswrite Press is about promoting and encouraging women poets who have not yet had their work showcased. We care deeply about the whole process of publication - assigning individual editors to work with each poet, taking painstaking care over cover design and final book production. Soundswrite Press has no outside funding, or office. It is a labour of love, all work done by myself and a small editorial band of volunteers who share skills and support each other. For every publication we aim to at least break even, and ideally make a small profit which we now put back into the press. This has allowed us to pay a freelance graphic designer to help with some of the more complex cover designs. Plans for the future are focussed at the moment around promotion of *Take Three, Volume 1* with various readings throughout the East Midlands planned in 2019.

Dated: 2nd April 2019