

# Leonian Resolve

Setting out on a shared musical journey **Leonie Prater** talks to **Fergus Byrne** about the challenges and the joys of collaboration



In a world where democracy often appears to be under threat, the benefits of the democratic processes required to be part of a rock band are not something many people might consider. However, Leonie Prater, the frontwoman of the Westcountry-based band *Leonian Dream*, highlights how a new set of artistic hurdles created by moving from a solo artist to sharing writing and composing with other musicians can have lasting benefits.

Reflecting on how her musical direction as a solo singer-songwriter has changed since forming a band, she says, 'Musically, it's definitely shifted, because we all bring different influences, and it's adding a completely different dimension to the sound and what we want to achieve'. Most importantly, she recognises that collaboration opens up new horizons for musical output. 'It's very much becoming our sound, as a band.'

However, democracy doesn't come easily. 'You've got more people involved, you've got more opinions, you've got more ideas,' Leonie admits. 'So you have

to find the balance.' While she admits that constant dialogue can be challenging, she says the band works really well together. 'Because everyone's bringing in their input, and everyone is sort of open to change. And that can be sometimes really good—and sometimes also not so easy.'

If ever there were a metaphor for collaboration rather than division, perhaps musical combos might be it.

It's been many years since I first spoke with Leonie. The pandemic lockdown was in full swing, and she had just completed a highly personal, stripped-back acoustic solo record, *Metamorphosis*—a body of work forged during a period of personal transition and grief as she navigated losing her mother and looked towards an uncertain creative path. Today, wearing a casual black hoodie and a warm smile she engages with a subject that no doubt consumes her life.

That creative path has undergone a profound change. Somewhat like a metamorphosis, Leonie has moved towards a collective and shared identity.

*Leonian Dream* began as a two-piece with guitarist Thomas Rogers, then with bass player Megan Greenland and drummer Harry Sibley. But, she explains, ‘Meg and Harry left—Harry became a Dad and Meg got married’. Today, the line-up has changed to Leonie on guitar, violin, and vocals, along with guitarist Thomas Rogers, bassist Bran Pick, drummer Toby Irlam, and Ben Webster on keyboards.

The line-up evolved when Leonie and Tom recorded an EP with producer John Robertson, featuring songs Leonie had written. The first single, *Gloomy Room*, shows Leonie remaining intensely vulnerable, even as her narrative focus has expanded. She fearlessly confronts heavy societal and personal themes. ‘The EP was very much a mixture of topics that I was writing about,’ she says. ‘It sort of touched on personal experiences with—and this is hard to talk about, but I’m happily open to talking about it—sexual assault and women who go through that. That was one thing that I wanted to get in there with *Gloomy Room*.’ She sees it as a ‘core message’ that is ‘important for me.’

Other tracks balance this darkness with profound light. ‘*Greenhouse*—I wrote that in the actual greenhouse,’ she tells me. She sees it as offering hope, ‘like there’s better, better things ahead.’ Meanwhile, the track *Red Water Lily* emerged from the ashes of a difficult breakup, written during a transitional period of solo travel in Wales.

The new collaborative friction has pushed Leonie to approach her craft from entirely fresh angles. On the band’s upcoming material for a planned album, songs are no longer born solely on an acoustic guitar. ‘There’s one track on the new demos, which Tom actually wrote a whole musical arrangement for, and then I set my lyrics to the song. It’s nice to have other people’s input and do it together.’

Leonie is also pushing her own instrumental boundaries. As a classically trained violinist, taking up the guitar in a rock format was daunting. ‘Tom’s a really established guitarist, and I’m still sort of finding my feet when it comes to guitar playing—I’m a violinist. So it’s challenged me in a really good way.’

As for the highly anticipated upcoming album? Leonie is keeping the finer details under wraps for now, but hints at a somewhat flexible narrative thread. ‘We are seeing a certain concept, mood boards that we want to follow. I think when we go into the studio, it might change again, or we might think, “Oh, actually, it’s more about this.”’

Having said that, the band is leaving no room for hesitation. In July, they will head to the prestigious Somerton Castle studio for a seven-day locked-in residency to record the new album. They are partnering with acclaimed producer Steve Grainger, known for his work with northern artist *Lizzzie*, who made waves at Boardmasters and Glastonbury.

Some of the new material has already had a live testing. Following a self-organised UK tour last year, which Leonie calls ‘a really big learning curve,’ the band has been gradually road-testing the new material, including a recent gig in Seaton.

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Audiences will get a prime opportunity to witness this evolution firsthand via a high-profile, three-date residency at the Bridport Art Centre this year. Dubbed *Leonian Dream Presents*, the band has completely curated the lineups for July 17th, September 26th, and November 21st, selecting premier talent from the Southwest music scene to join them, including Saf Juno, Lotta, Cosm, and Rattrap. The November date will also serve as the grand finale to a mini-tour that will see the band play London and Oxford for the very first time.

Hearing Leonie speak, it becomes undeniably clear that music is not just a career path or a hobby—it is a vital lifeline. I remind her of Sir David Attenborough’s famous assertion that ‘music is not a cultural construct, it’s a biological necessity.’ Leonie stops, visibly moved. ‘Wow. What a great comment... I would agree. Within everyone, really, you know, it’s there.’

Her relationship with music is woven into her identity, anchoring her through an international upbringing that includes a late Swiss mother from Zurich, time spent in foster care in St. Gallen, and a multicultural heritage connecting her to Sri Lanka and Malaysia. Today, alongside her ascending rock career, she also works on the front lines of musical education as a teacher.

Teaching music helps her see its value in many forms. She says she can see ‘what a difference it can make to those children... how beneficial it is, not just listening to it, but also for them to grow in confidence, for them to be able to face difficulties or mental health issues. I just think it’s such a vital part of everyone.’

With an album on the horizon, a residency booked, and a collective sound locked in, the dream is no longer just a concept for Leonie. It’s an unfolding reality.

*Leonian Dream Presents will take place at the Bridport Art Centre on July 17th, September 26th, and November 21st. Tickets are available now from <https://www.bridport-arts.com>.*