






# Audience

Barbara Sammeth

Just saw #velvetermination with Cynthia Shaw & I'm SO glad I did! Sitting in that small theatre with Cynthia & only her portable piano (!! ) I felt as though I was sitting in a private home with just the two of us as she told me her story of how she was determined to become a concert pianist; weaving it with her family, her teachers, her auditioning in NYC. She's magical   She creates an intimacy with each audience member, as she includes us in some audience participation. The sound of her voice is so light & lily & even calming. Her piano skills along with her story are sweet, funny, sad & endearing.   A highlight of my day along with the Sticky Toffee Pudding  She was standing at the door of her space greeting everyone. Like guests into her home. She's lovely. I introduced myself then & told her how you told me about the show. (Joanne Dorian). I loved it & HER!

Mara Sherman

Cynthia Shaw is such a charming and engaging performer!

Ashley Ford

about 16 hours ago

Absolutely beautiful performance! Such a dazzling performer who brought so much joy to the stage. I was thoroughly absorbed every minute, completely enraptured by both her piano playing and storytelling. Cynthia Shaw has an inspiring and positive message to share with the world. If you have ever

dared to dream of the impossible... but need a bit more encouragement – this IS the show for you! Don't wait. Go! Before it leaves Edinburgh to return to New York City.

## Jeff Ahern

2 days ago

Wow! Such a great show. Let me start by saying Cynthia is an amazing pianist. Playing difficult pieces with an effortless flow. But that is really only half the show. She takes the audience on an amazing journey about her life that is both vulnerable and poignant. Can't recommend it enough!

## Hilary and Michael

4 days ago

Cynthia took us on a whistle stop tour through her musical career. From first to last she was entertaining, humorous and genuine. Her musical interludes were beautiful. This was a show that will stay with us. Thank you Cynthia

## Pauline Clancy

7 days ago

What a wonderful show. Such a talented pianist it was a delight to listen to Cynthia playing. She also told her story which was full of highs and lows and very thought provoking. Cynthia creates a very intimate, friendly and engaging atmosphere. This should be on everyone's list of shows to see. Thanks Cynthia, my friend and I thoroughly enjoyed ourselves.

## Carla

9 days ago

Such a sweet and wholesome performance. Cynthia's lovely piano repertoire complements her endearing storytelling and invites the audience to journey with her. Would fully recommend catching this performance if you're able!

Arielle Lehmann

10 days ago

A Personal story, beautifully told and played, about a girl from a little town arriving to the big city facing internal demons as well as external barriers and overcoming both. Pianist Cynthia Shaw is honest and relatable. Her courage and passion for music touch the heart and create a performance that will stay with you.

Roger Peltzman

12 days ago

This show is absolutely charming. Cynthia's descriptions of growing up in the middle of nowhere and her experiences in New York after moving there are both touching and humorous. Her portrayals as her young self as a student at the music conservatory are truly lovely. As a pianist I can attest to her really first rate playing. I recommend this show highly!

CINDY D'ANDREA

12 days ago

Got to see Cynthia's show yesterday and I loved it! I met Cynthia only via Zoom and couldn't wait to meet her in person and see her show. What was immediately special was that she greeted us at the door, was so lovely and gracious and then treated us

to her delicious combination of brilliantly played piano music accompanied with her stories of growing up in Pueblo, CO and hitting it big in NYC. I loved that she taught us (or attempted to) teach us certain rhythms and beats and choral notes by using our own appendages. I felt like I was sitting right there with a master teacher at the piano. How Cynthia weaves her stories into her soulful, soothing, mesmerizing playing is unique and heartwarming. It made me want to start taking piano lessons again. Cynthia is truly a gifted musician and storyteller. Brava!

## Aaron Angeloni

12 days ago

Yesterday I went to see Velvet Determination by Cynthia Shaw and her show deserves every set of eyes it can get. All us performers owe it to ourselves to see it.

Cynthia is a natural and comedic performer who tells her surprisingly relatable life story which will connect with everyone who watches. Her talent on the piano is mesmerizing and blends so well with every line of her story. Congrats Cynthia

## Callum Duggie

13 days ago

Attended her show, and it was brilliant. Her story telling, accompanied with her beautiful piano playing, made a captivating show. I loved it.

## Jennifer Roxburgh

14 days ago

Talk a walk down Cynthia's musical memory lane. A charming and poignant insight to her life and interspersed with beautiful piano playing. Often moving, always interesting. Definitely see it. \* \* \* \* \*

## Carol Lesley-Green

15 days ago

Cynthia is a wonderful story teller and a very accomplished pianist. She shares many stories about her life journey, how she became a classical pianist and how she built her self-confidence and learned to overcome her personal demons in order to realise her passion and potential.

## Ciara

15 days ago

Wow. What a beautiful show. I feel honoured to have heard the life story of Cynthia and it moved me to tears! So beautiful and everyone should see it! 5 stars! \*\*\*\*\*

## Michele Eaton

15 days ago

Cynthia, thank you for a wonderful evening. The making of a performer is frequently such a fraught journey, and you tell your story eloquently and candidly. I was moved to tears more than once. Looking forward to seeing and hearing more of your work!

## Stef Rummel

16 days ago

Cynthia Shaw, a brilliant pianist, tells her story about her life as a pianist through music and autobiographic stories. It is an excellent show.

## David Catt

16 days ago

A very well presented and amusing autobiography Illustrated with skillfully played music. Deserves a bigger audience

## Marjorie Ellis

17 days ago

A great show !! really enjoyed it and highly recommend it. Not only is Cynthia a very talented musician, she is also a talented actor and playwright with an endearing story to tell. Go see this show.

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The Wee Review – Three Stars

Clare Wood 28 August 2022

**Cynthia Shaw** grew up in Pueblo, a tiny town in Colorado, scattered with cacti and sweet old ladies in colourful clothes who'd bake you cookies and regale you with ancient stories. Her mom loved classical music so Cynthia was despatched to a fierce, chain-smoking piano teacher to learn. She made her way through school, nagged continually

about her musical technique when all she wanted to do was play. *Velvet Determination* tells of Cynthia's struggle to have her talent recognised as her inner demons tormented her, telling her she didn't have any talent at all.

This is a sweet show. Simply staged by director **Peter Michael Marino**, the keyboard is centre stage. Cynthia's story is interspersed with and accompanied by her piano performance. She's a skillful pianist. She skips from Brahms to Beethoven to Bach to Brubeck to snatches of songs from musical theatre. She parodies other players, deftly charts her own growing confidence as a musician and simultaneously manages to land a good amount of information about the challenges inherent in playing the piano. The tummy / head trick is a smart, funny way to make the point.

Shaw brings a self-effacing charm to her story-telling, talking with touching honesty about being beset by doubts, even as her talent is acknowledged and recognised over again. She has an astute eye

for detail – she’s astounded when she finally arrives in New York that everyone but everyone is wearing black – that she also brings to her account of her family history. Her ongoing frustrations with her father cause friction among her whole family and are never really resolved.

In some ways, this is a story with a happy ending. Cynthia fulfills her dream – though at what cost? It would be nice to see more of the ends, if not tied up, at least revisited by way of some sort of closure. But this is a fun, informative and interesting fifty minute window into an incredibly talented artist’s development as a performer – with live piano music on the side: a wee Fringe treat.

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North West End UK-Dylan Mooney 16th August  
2022 - 5 Stars

Velvet Determination is an autobiographical performance about, and starring, Cynthia Shaw, detailing her experience as a pianist growing up in Colorado with aspirations of making it to New York.



Despite being the only performer on stage throughout the piece, Shaw retains the audience's attention from the get-go through both her dialogue and live piano playing. Dressed in a bright, floral dress, Shaw's costume matches her warm, friendly personality, helping the audience to tune in to her story.

Shaw is not an actor – but this is not a piece of theatre. Velvet Determination is a real story and Shaw is able to be genuine and vulnerable in such an intimate setting, something even the finest of actors struggles to get right at times.

Throughout the piece, Shaw ensures to look each member in the audience in the eye, creating a strong and lasting connection with everyone attending. She even invites spectators to participate at various points of the performance. Again, this is no mean feat and shows she has real assurance over what she is doing without it coming across as being over-confident.

You cannot help but smile as Shaw discusses her journey from a small town in Colorado, to a tiny New York apartment and her lack of care for learning her scales and arpeggios or feel genuine sympathy for her complicated relationship with her father.

Dialogue and music are combined excellently and equally without either outshining the other. Shaw often underscores herself, managing to play perfectly while projecting text and still maintaining focus from her audience.

Cynthia Shaw's Velvet Determination is a true story, her story. The very real story of a musician chasing her dreams. I cannot fault this production. I left feeling uplifted, inspired and with the strong urge to play some piano. This show deserves a big audience!

Velvet Determination is on until the 27th of August at the Fern Studio, Greenside, Nicholson Square and tickets can be found [HERE](#).

**Reviewer: Dylan Mooney**

**Reviewed: 16th August 2022**

**North West End UK Rating: ★★★★★**

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**The Reviews Hub - Helen Tope 14/08/2022**

Writer: Cynthia Shaw

Director: Peter Michael Marino

Founded in 2018, PRO.ACT Fest is a Ukrainian theatre festival. It specialises in theatre performances and workshops. This year, its theme is “Unbreakable”. While the festival cannot take place in Kyiv, the organisers are offering online performances from around the world. [Editors note – this production was reviewed via online stream but the production is also showing at this year’s Edinburgh Fringe]

Leaning into the festival’s theme of tenacity and perseverance is one-woman show, Velvet Determination. Written and performed by American pianist Cynthia Shaw, she walks onto a bare stage, just a keyboard and stool. She briefly introduces herself to the audience, and plays an excerpt of Bach. The effect is spellbinding and joyous.

The show is part-performance, part-autobiography as Shaw retells her life story, and how she became a pianist. Shot through with dark humour, Shaw's journey into the world of classical music is far from straightforward. Growing up in small-town America (Pueblo, Colorado), Shaw remembers her first introduction to the allure of New York City – a copy of *The New Yorker* in a doctor's office. She thumbs through the pages to find listings of concerts and recitals taking place all over the city. This is a place where music thrives.

Shaw also delineates her background. Coming from a musical family, her interest in music was coupled with feelings of inadequacy. The spectre of Shaw's father haunts the show: a jazz musician of real skill, he bottled a pivotal audition early in his career and ended up staying in Pueblo. Shaw is left determined not to make the same mistake: her life becomes devoted to mastering the piano and getting the hell out of her hometown. But in the back of her mind, there is a niggling question. If her distant, unfulfilled father isn't interested in hearing her play, who else would want to listen to her? Shaw's talent starts getting her noticed, with scholarships and grants. Her mission is to secure a place at the prestigious Manhattan School of Music. But as Shaw puts it: "my world was getting bigger, but so were my insecurities".

*Velvet Determination* details Shaw's struggle to be heard – personally and professionally. Shaw is an engaging presence onstage, as she plays for us. She mimics the great pianists (Vladimir Horowitz's flashy *Stars and Stripes Forever* is a particular highlight), and she wows us with a fiendish piece of Brahms; an audition piece for the Manhattan School.

This is a show built for classical music fans – it is stuffed full of goodies from Beethoven to Brahms. But behind the pyrotechnics, there is real psychological insight at work. Shaw's enigmatic father, and his coolness towards his family, means he is frustratingly out of

reach and unaccountable. It is Shaw's missing piece of the puzzle and it never quite resolves itself.

An artist plagued with self-doubt is hardly breaking new ground, but Shaw keeps us entertained with a lightness of touch and self-deprecating jokes – but not too many. Her ability at the keyboard is dazzling and formidable. The confidence she feels is lacking announces itself on the keys. As she plays, everyone listens.

Available Online until 21 August 2022 via Scenesaver | 27 Aug at Edinburgh Fringe

The Reviews Hub Score 5 stars - dazzling and formidable

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**Fringe biscuit**  
@fringebiscuit

Velvet Determination. Warm & wholehearted, [@CynthiaSings](#) entwines her musician's memoir with delightful, effortlessly played classical pieces. Simple staging— a lone keyboard— focuses

the drama, centring characters, struggles & self-doubts on an inspirational road to success. 4/5

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Fringe Review - EXCELLENT SHOW  
Patricia Silver August 9, 2022

**Edinburgh Fringe 2022**

**Velvet Determination**

*Cynthia Shaw*



Genre: [Theatre](#)

Venue: [Greenside @Nicolson Square](#)

Festival: [Edinburgh Fringe](#)

**Low Down**

*Despite the lack of family support and challenges along the way, Cynthia Shaw is determined to make a career as a pianist. This is her journey.*

## **Review**

Cynthia Shaw knows what she wants – a life as a classical pianist. Her mother was a music lover but not a music maker. Her father was a jazz player who didn't think much of classical music. But Cynthia's love was for Bach, Debussy, and Brahms, so she stayed focused and pursued her dream. *Velvet Determination* is the story of a hugely talented musician who battled personal demons and discouragement to achieve her goal of becoming a concert pianist.

Shaw was born and raised in the small desert town of Pueblo, Colorado, definitely not a classical music centre. Shaw's journey began as a small child at the piano. She was expected to train like most young piano students: Hanon exercises, scales, arpeggios, John Thompson piano pedagogy. But she had her own way of learning. She could master the music without having to endure the boring technique, despite the insistence of her teachers. Playing the pieces brought her joy and inspiration.

She attended university but wanted more. By chance, she found a copy of the *New Yorker* magazine in a doctor's office and that set her on a new path. She was determined to study at the prestigious Manhattan School of Music in New York City. So she plotted out a plan: move to New York, engage one of the important teachers in New York City to prepare her for the grueling audition for the school, and then start her training. But things did not go as planned. She lacked confidence in her own ability and battled the inner demons that sabotaged her, preventing her from delivering what could have been winning performances. Difficult neighbours, a New York City blackout, and harsh teachers added to her challenges. But she never gave up. She changed teachers, learned her scales, passed the audition after three attempts, earned her Master of Music degree, and won the annual concerto competition with a piece by Brahms.

The light-hearted hour is thoroughly enjoyable and passes quickly, as Shaw handily weaves the story and musical excerpts into an engaging program. She is charming and relatable. There are moments of humour mixed with sadness, as we are silently cheering for Shaw to achieve her dream. Shaw deftly describes the characters that she encountered on her journey, from the harsh piano teacher to the neighbour that has decided at what hours Shaw is allowed to practice without disturbing him. The show is endearing and funny, but mostly so impressive as she glides effortlessly along the keyboard, brilliantly interpreting compositions in many styles, from Baroque to

Romantic. Shaw leaves the audience wanting more music from this terrifically talented pianist. The show is directed by the very talented Peter Michael Marino.

Shaw is now well-established in New York. She teaches piano, has performed at Carnegie Hall as a back-up singer for Sir Paul McCartney, musical directed more than 30 regional and off-Broadway shows, and appeared in many off-Broadway shows. Her film work has been shown at numerous festivals. Most recently, she made her cabaret debut with her show Spark of Creation! at Don't Tell Mama NYC in May.

Published August 9, 2022 by [Patricia Silver](#)

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Total Theatre (Reykjavik Fringe)

Dorothy Max Prior-July 26, 2022

## We Are Family – Reykjavík Fringe 2022

***Dorothy Max Prior goes to the Reykjavík Fringe 2022 and encounters a thriving community of artists from Iceland, from other Nordic countries, and indeed from across the globe – a 90-show extravaganza held over ten days, all lovingly pulled together by festival director Nanna Gunnars and her dedicated team***

Musician and theatre-maker Cynthia Shaw tells me about her solo show *Velvet Determination*, which weaves live piano playing and autobiographical anecdotes into an exploration of her childhood, coming of age and professional life as a musician. She tells me that playing the piano is the easy part – talking whilst playing is what makes the show a tour-de-force! I get to see it a few days later, and enjoy it greatly – a very well structured and beautifully performed work, with highly accomplished piano playing. Comedian and musician Nick Jameson, a US American now resident in Reykjavík, seems like a nice chap – we end up talking about Cynthia's amazing folding piano (not needed on this trip as the glorious old theatre space at Iðnó has a fine onstage piano), and about his own work as a musician and comedian – and how both come together in his Fringe show *A Crowd of One*.

## About Dorothy Max Prior

Dorothy Max Prior is the editor of Total Theatre Magazine, and is also a performer, writer, dramaturg and choreographer/director working in theatre, dance, installation and outdoor arts. Much of her work is sited in public spaces or in venues other than regular theatres. She also writes essays and stories, some of which are published and some of which languish in bottom drawers – and she teaches drama, dance and creative non-fiction writing.  
[www.dorothymaxprior.com](http://www.dorothymaxprior.com)

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The Scotsman

**Velvet Determination \*\*\***

### **Greenside @ Nicolson Square (Venue 209)**

Fringe debutante Cynthia Shaw presents a not atypical one-person Fringe show, in that she tells the story of her own life and struggles as a piece of live storytelling testimony.

What elevates Shaw's show above many of her contemporaries doing the same thing is that, as well as being a rigorous and personable storyteller, she's also an extremely talented pianist, whose career journey involves performing as a backing singer for Paul McCartney at Carnegie Hall and appearing with the New York Philharmonic.



This small room at Greenside's venue on Nicolson Square is a world away, but she fills it with story and music, playing classical excerpts alongside her own tale of growing up in the industrial city of Pueblo, Colorado; the "armpit of the West", as Midwesterners might call it. Her father was a musician and she was raised with music in the house, yet her attempt to get into the Manhattan School of Music still felt like a journey to another world.

Shaw's formative years were in the 1970s, and her description of New York is that of a city which is bankrupt and crime-ridden in the era of the *Son of Sam*, but still a place and time of great personal and musical growth for her. Her story is as melodic as the music she plays.

**David Pollock 27th August 2022**

