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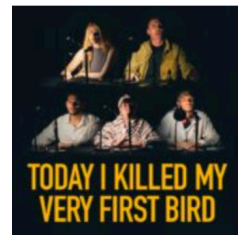
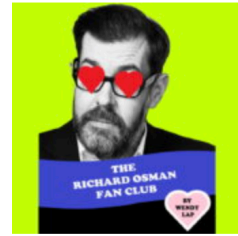
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Edinburgh Fringe 2022

Velvet Determination

Cynthia Shaw

FringeReview
EXCELLENT SHOWGenre: [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](#)

<https://www.velveterdetermination.com/>