

## Self-effacing story-telling and live piano performance The Wee Review - Claire Wood 25 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 fulfils 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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