

# *Velvet Determination*

*a musical journey about wrong notes, hard knocks,  
and the keys to success...*

***...AND mostly, a story of HOPE!***

*Written and Performed by Cynthia Shaw*

*Directed by Peter Michael Marino*



[cynthiashawactor@gmail.com](mailto:cynthiashawactor@gmail.com) ~ [www.VelvetDetermination.com](http://www.VelvetDetermination.com) ~ 917-951-1767

Instagram [@VelvetDetermination](https://www.instagram.com/VelvetDetermination) [@CynthiaSings](https://www.instagram.com/CynthiaSings) ~ Twitter [@CynthiaSings](https://twitter.com/CynthiaSings)

## *About the Show...*

In this autobiographical solo show with classical piano playing, Cynthia tells how she enjoyed her cheerful Colorado childhood of playing the piano and making music. All it took was picking up a random New Yorker magazine in her pediatrician's office to awaken her artistic soul leading her to New York City and its *esteemed* Manhattan School of Music.

This journey proves to be a bit more difficult than she innocently expected when she realizes New York City is very different from her tiny Colorado hometown. As the student who struggles with shaky memorization, insufficient technique and the fear that no one truly wants to listen to her, she ultimately masters determination and resilience and overcomes the obstacles that confront this naive, wide-eyed young classical pianist who tackles the Big Apple!

Cynthia relates the youthful determination of her younger self as she confronts her own personal demons while meeting idiosyncratic characters who either inspired, helped or hindered her journey. She thrills her audience with musical impersonations of world-famous classical pianists as she remembers hearing them at the legendary Carnegie Hall, and she beautifully demonstrates her formidable piano technique and musical sensitivity as she performs the live classical piano music of Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, Chopin and Debussy. [www.VelvetDetermination.com](http://www.VelvetDetermination.com)

### *One Hundred Word Show Description...*

Cynthia grew up playing classical piano in a tiny Colorado town, but she was determined to achieve the keys to success by attending a prestigious New York City music school. In this autobiographical solo show, Cynthia shares tuneful tales of battling inner demons and nutty neighbors, hitting wrong notes, enduring hard knocks and meeting unique Manhattan characters who inspire, help and sometimes hinder her journey to Carnegie Hall, all illustrated by virtuoso live piano performance. "Best Festival Debut" NYC's Theatre Row United Solo Festival, "Best Solo Show" Pittsburgh Fringe, "...the biggest sell is Shaw's beautiful playing and whimsical storytelling." [www.allaboutsolo.com](http://www.allaboutsolo.com)

### *Forty Word Show Description...*

Cynthia grew up playing classical piano in a tiny Colorado town, but dreamed of attending a prestigious New York music school. She shares tuneful tales of musical resilience, from battling inner demons to nutty neighbors, through live piano performance. "Best Festival Debut" (NYC United Solo), "Best Solo Show" (Pittsburgh Fringe).

### *Alternative Forty Word for Social Media....*

A musical solo show about wrong notes, hard knocks and the keys to success. Pianist Cynthia endures music-hating neighbors, flamboyant teachers AND a falling piano with determination and resilience. "Best Festival Debut" (NYC United Solo), "Best Solo Show"(Pittsburgh Fringe).

### *Thirty Word Show Description...*

Musical solo show about wrong notes, hard knocks & keys to success. Cynthia's autobiographical show embodies youthful determination, idiosyncratic mentors and making it in NYC. Live classical piano. "Best Festival Debut" (NYC United Solo).

### *Ten Word Show Description...*

Musical show about wrong notes, hard knocks, keys to success.

## *About the Artist...*

**Cynthia Shaw**, actor, pianist and singer, lives in Brooklyn, NY. She was born and raised in Colorado and moved to New York to attend the esteemed Manhattan School of Music. Since graduating, she has dedicated her life to music and acting. She has musical directed over 30 regional and off-Broadway shows and acted in New York City and regional theatres. ACTING HIGHLIGHTS: Mrs. Winemiller (*Summer & Smoke*, Terry Schreiber, director), Liz Fuller (*Me and Jezebel*, Kentucky Repertory Theatre), Arkadina and Ranevskaya (*Mr. Chekov and Mr. Porter*, Medicine Show Theatre) and many other Off-Broadway theatres in New York. MUSICAL HIGHLIGHTS include: backup vocals for Paul McCartney (Carnegie Hall) and Björk (Riverside Church), singing with the New York Philharmonic when they won three Grammy Awards and playing piano for Garrison Keillor and *The Prairie Home Companion* at Town Hall and on NPR. Her film work has been presented at Cannes Festival Corner, The Film Society of Lincoln Center, The Soho International Film Festival and The Big Apple Film Festival, to name a few. Her one woman show, *Velvet Determination*, won 2018 "Best Festival Debut" at NYC's United Solo Festival and many other awards in the festival circuit. [www.cynthiashaw.us](http://www.cynthiashaw.us)

### *Short Biography...*

**Cynthia Shaw**, actor, pianist and singer, lives in Brooklyn, NY. She has acted and been musical director in many off-Broadway and regional theaters. Her award-winning one woman show, *Velvet Determination*, won 2018 "Best Festival Debut" at NYC's United Solo Festival at Theatre Row and other awards in the festival circuit. [www.cynthiashaw.us](http://www.cynthiashaw.us)

*“...an amazing journey...that is both vulnerable and poignant.”*



2018 NYC's United Solo Festival (Theatre Row) "Best Festival Debut"  
(photo credit: David Simonoff)

*“Truly moving and inspiring.”*



2019 Pittsburgh Fringe "Best Solo Show"  
(photo credit: David Simonoff)

*“Her courage and passion for music touch the heart and create a performance that will stay with you.”*

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# Press



"Dialogue and music are combined excellently and equally without either outshining the other. I left feeling uplifted, inspired and with the strong urge to play some piano. This show deserves a big audience!" Dylan Mooney, 16 August 2022 [North West End UK](#)



*"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. The light-hearted hour is thoroughly enjoyable...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."* Patricia Silver, 9 August 2022 [Fringe Review](#)



"Shaw is an engaging presence onstage, as she plays for us. She wows us with a fiendish piece of Brahms, an audition piece for the Manhattan School [of Music]. 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 a real psychological insight at work. Shaw's enigmatic father, and his coolness towards his family, means he is frustratingly out of reach and unaccountable."

Helen Tope, 14 August 2022 [The Reviews Hub](#) ★★★★★ "Dazzling and formidable"



"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. Nicolson Square [Edinburgh venue] is a world away, but she fills it with story and music, playing classical excerpts alongside her own tale of growing up. Shaw's formative years were in the 1970s, and her description of New York is...a place and time of great personal

and musical growth for her. Her story is as melodic as the music she plays." David Pollock, August 27 2022 [The Scotsman](#) ★★★★★

"Warm & wholehearted, @CynthiaSings entwines her musician's memoir with delightful, effortlessly played classical pieces. Simple staging-a lone keyboard-focuses the drama, centering characters, struggles & self-doubts on an inspiration road to success."

4/5 August 25 2022 [FringeBiscuit](#) ★★★★★





"This is a sweet show...the keyboard is centre stage. Cynthia's story is interspersed with and accompanied by her piano performance. She's a skillful pianist and...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. 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 recognized over again. She has an astute eye for detail. Cynthia fulfills her dream - though at what cost? ...this is a window into an incredibly talented artist's development as a performer - with live piano music on the side: a wee Fringe treat."

Claire Wood, 25 August 2022 [The Wee Review](#) ★★

"...Shaw's lovely performance...charismatic allure that keeps you smiling and wanting more...earnestness and passion...authenticity and honesty...youthful exuberance that keeps the work light yet sincere....excellent piano playing...beautiful playing and knack for whimsical storytelling...the play is a delight...if you're looking for an uplifting affirmation of the rewards of hard work, look no further than "Velvet Determination.""

James Bartholomew [All About Solo](#), September 30, 2018



"Every story Shaw tells rings with authenticity and honesty. That is a prerequisite for any autobiographical performance, to be sure, but Shaw has a beautiful way of recapturing her own youthful exuberance that keeps the work light yet sincere." Article in All About Solo "Believe Women: Female Voices in Solo Performance" by Alex Miller, October 29, 2018

"...earnestly tells her story, full of a quiet energy...she clearly knows her way around the keys, and she shows us what a little perseverance can accomplish."

Cayleigh Boniger Pittsburgh in the Round, April 8, 2019



The Pueblo  
Chieftain

"During her journey, Shaw encountered a plethora of obstacles. Some of those obstacles were frightening. Some were humorous. All became the inspiration for 'Velvet Determination.'" Luke Lyons in the The Pueblo Chieftain December 16, 2018

# DC METRO

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THEATER ARTS

“When Cynthia Shaw sits down at the piano and casually busts out Bach’s Allegro from Italian Concerto, you know Velvet Determination isn’t your average Fringe show. Her story is compelling...[her] tenacity in moving forward after failure is inspiring...[and her] mastery of classical piano is impressive...The moments in which Shaw is most vulnerable are really impactful.” Hilary Sutton in the [DC Metro Theater Arts](#) July 10, 2019

**Velvet Determination** is the story of one woman’s journey through her lifelong love of the piano. It’s that classic tale of a small-town girl who moves to NYC, is plagued by demons of self-doubt, drops a piano in the living room, and succeeds despite all of it. Colorado local Cynthia Shaw, born in Pueblo, displays a sweet on-stage innocence as she spins her tale through piano, song, and storytelling. I left her show asking the question, Do we succeed because of our demons, or despite them?

Sara Sahara, Boulder Fringe Show reviewer  
August 24, 2019



Winner “Best Personal Story”  
Boulder International Fringe Festival, 2019

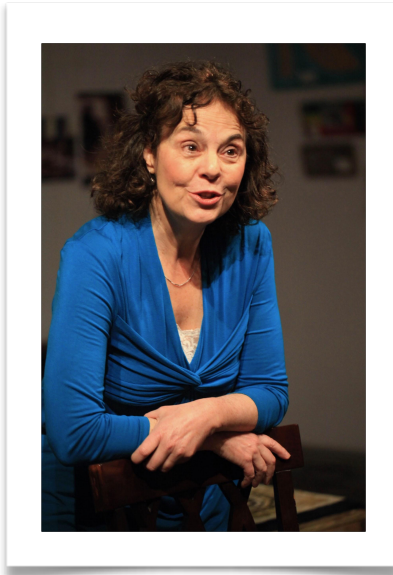
*“I left feeling uplifted, inspired and with  
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Dylan Mooney, North West End UK

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## *What Audiences say about Velvet Determination...*

- “How Cynthia weaves her stories into her soulful, soothing, mesmerizing playing is unique and heartwarming.”
- “Her courage and passion for music touch the heart and create a performance that will stay with you.”
- “She takes the audience on an amazing journey about her life that is both vulnerable and poignant. Can’t recommend it enough!”
- “Truly moving and inspiring. You’re terrific.” Austin Pendleton, actor, writing, director
- “You radiate much passion and talent and humanity.”
- “You were so youthful and full of delightful energy.”
- “Cynthia puts her heart and soul into her own story of coming to NYC to study piano.”
- “You were fabulous - honest, expressive, humorous - your story took me in and I went on your journey along with you.”
- “The Debussy took me to heaven and back.”
- “You’re overall message was inspiring. Cynthia is SO talented”
- “Where else can you get a great story about determination, resilience and following your dream? Plus listening to Cynthia’s fabulous skills at the piano shows the rewards in her journey?”
- “Very enjoyable show about the trials, tribulations, and joy of getting started in the arts. If you have been told ‘you are not good enough’ you will really resonate with this show.”
- “...honest and engaging...draws you in...leads you to a moment of dramatic truth...”



2019 Pittsburgh Fringe (photo credit: JW Morar)



# *Performance History & Awards*

*“It was moving, inspiring, and funny. I related to so much of it.  
I didn’t want it to end.”*

## **2022**

Reykjavik Fringe Festival (Iceland) - June 27 & 28

59e59 Street Theatres “East to Edinburgh Festival” (New York, NY) - July 20, 21 & 22

Edinburgh Fringe Festival (Scotland) - Greenside, Nicolson, Fern - August 5-27

Rochester Fringe Festival (Rochester, NY) - The Spirit Room - September 13-16

## **2021**

Gene Frankel Theatre (New York, NY) - July 17

The Chain Theatre (New York, NY) - July 29, 30, 31 and August 7

## **2020**

New York Theatre Festival WinterFest at Hudson Guild Theater (NYC) - January 30 - February 2

The Marsh (San Francisco, CA) - online September 30

## **2019**

Millibo Art Theater (Colorado Springs, CO) - March 14-17

The Pittsburgh Fringe Festival (Pittsburgh, PA) - April 4-7

Winner “**Best Solo Show**”

Capital Fringe Festival (Washington, D.C.) - July 19-26

Galway Fringe Festival (Galway, Ireland) - July 22-28

Winner “**Best Theatre Production**”

Boulder Fringe Festival (Boulder, CO) - August 14-25

Winner “**Best Personal Story**”

## **2018**

The Philadelphian (Philadelphia, PA) - September 21

United Solo Festival-Theatre Row (New York, NY) - Sold-out September 27, October 5 & 7

Winner “**Best Festival Debut**”

The Arts Center (Sandwich, NH) - November 23

First United Methodist Church (Pueblo, CO) - December 22

*“If you’re looking for an uplifting affirmation of the rewards of hard work,  
look no further than “Velvet Determination.”*

James Bartholomew, [All About Solo](#) review

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## *Excerpts of piano music Cynthia plays and sings in the show...*

- Allegro from Italian Concerto. . . . . J.S. Bach (1735)
- Country Gardens . . . . . from "The Quaker's Opera" (1728)
- The Skater's Waltz . . . . . Emile Waldteufel (1882)
- Cossack Dance . . . . . Celia Aubert (1934)
- Tumbling Tumbleweeds . . . . . Bob Nolan (1930)
- Minuet in 'G' . . . . . J.S. Bach but attributed to Christian Petzold (1725)
- "I Don't Know How to Love Him" from Jesus Christ Superstar. . .Weber/Rice (1970)
- Solfeggietto . . . . . C. P. E. Bach (1714-88)
- Arabesque . . . . . Debussy (1888)
- "Do You Love Me?" from Fiddler on the Roof . . . . . Bock/Harnick (1964)
- Whispering Hope . . . . . Septimus Winner (1868)
- My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean . . . . .Traditional Scottish Folksong (c. 1746)
- c# minor Nocturne Op. 27, No. 1 . . . . . Chopin (1835)
- Chopin Ballade #3, Op. 47 . . . . . Chopin (1841)
- Maestoso Piano Concerto No. 1 in d minor . . . . .Brahms (1858)
- Fugue from Le Tombeau de Couperin . . . . .Ravel (1914-17)
- O Mio Babino caro (from opera Gianni Schicchi) . . . . . Puccini (1918)
- Funeral March (Piano Sonata #2, Op. 35) . . . . .Chopin (1840)
- Mr. Softee Theme, "The Whistler and his Dog" . . . William & James Conway (1956)
- "The Sun Will Come Out Tomorrow" from Annie . . . . . Strouse/Charnin (1977)
- Allegro con brio from Sonate Op. 2, No. 3 . . . . . Beethoven (1795)
- Theme from New York, New York . . . . .Kander/Ebb (1977)
- Ballade . . . . . Friedrich Burgmüller (1832)
- f# minor Rhapsodie Op. 79, No. 1 . . . . .Brahms (1880)
- Spinning Song . . . . . Albert Ellmenreich (1836)
- Sinfonia from Partita No. 2 in c minor . . . . . J. S. Bach (1726)
- Impromptu in Eb . . . . . Schubert (1827)
- Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2 in c# minor . . . . . F. Liszt (1847)
- Rondo alla Turca, Piano Sonata No. 11 in A major . . . . .Mozart (1783)
- Molto moderato from Sonata in B-flat major . . . . . Schubert (1828)
- Stars and Stripes Forever . . . . . J.P. Sousa (1896)
- Take Five . . . . .Paul Desmond (1959)
- g minor Rhapsodie Op. 79, No. 2 . . . . . Brahms (1880)
- L'isle joyeuse . . . . . Debussy (1904)

## *Press Release*

**Cynthia Shaw, Writer, Performer and Producer**  
**270 Fifth Street, Brooklyn, NY 11215**  
**Mobile: 917-951-1767**  
**Email: [cynthiashawactor@gmail.com](mailto:cynthiashawactor@gmail.com)**

### **VELVET DETERMINATION**

**A musical journey about wrong notes, hard knocks and the keys to success**

**Written and performed by Cynthia Shaw**

**Directed by Peter Michael Marino**

Growing up in a small desert town in Colorado, pianist/singer/actor **Cynthia Shaw** loved to play piano, and after her eyes were opened to the wider artistic world outside her hometown by a copy of *New Yorker* magazine she picked up in a doctor's waiting-room, she formed a burning ambition to study at a prestigious New York City music school.

Her award-winning solo show, **Velvet Determination**, tells the true story of her journey from Pueblo, Colorado, to the Big Apple in search of musical excellence. Virtuoso live piano performances of music by **Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, Chopin, Debussy** and many others illustrate tales of resilience and determination, as discouraging parents, disparaging teachers, disapproving neighbors and not least, her own inner demons threaten to destroy her dreams.

Shaw's career since graduation has been centered on music and performance. She has **musical directed over 30 regional and off-Broadway shows**, and **appeared in many off-Broadway shows herself**, while **her film work has been shown at numerous festivals**. In 2022 she made her cabaret debut with her show **Spark of Creation** at **Don't Tell Mama NYC**.

#### **Awards for VELVET DETERMINATION:**

- **Best Festival Debut, United Solo Festival NYC 2018**
- **Best Solo Show, Pittsburgh Fringe 2019**
- **Best Personal Journey, Boulder Fringe 2019**
- **Best Theatre Production, Galway Fringe 2019**

#### **Reviewers said:**

- '...her story is compelling... [and her] mastery of classical piano is impressive...' **DC Metro Theater Arts**
  - '...the biggest sell... is Shaw's beautiful playing and knack for whimsical storytelling.' **AllAboutSolo.com**
  - '...rigorous and personable storyteller...extremely talented pianist.' **The Scotsman**
  - 'Shaw brings a self-effacing charm to her story-telling, talking with touching honesty about begin beset by doubts, even as her talent is acknowledged and recognized over again.' **The Wee Review**
  - '...behind the pyrotechnics, there is a real psychological insight at work. ....dazzling and formidable.'
- The Reviews Hub**

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Watch the promo video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1yENvZIG0UI&t=1s>

###

# Videos

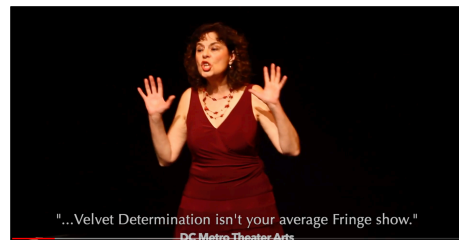
2022 Promotional Video

[View Video on YouTube](#)



Hudson Guild Theatre, New York, NY 2020

[View Video on YouTube](#)



Reykjavik Fringe Festival, 2022

[View Video on YouTube](#)



Millibo Art Theatre, Colorado Springs, CO 2020

[View Video on YouTube](#)



Galway Fringe, 2019 [View Video on YouTube](#)

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***“You radiate much passion and talent and humanity.”***

Audience member

***“Dazzling and formidable”***

The Reviews Hub



(photo credit: [Michael Bernstein](#))

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## *Contact Information*

Email ~ [cynthiashawactor@gmail.com](mailto:cynthiashawactor@gmail.com)

United States Phone ~ 917-951-1767

Velvet Determination Official Website ~ [www.velveterdetermination.com](http://www.velveterdetermination.com)

Cynthia Shaw Actor Website ~ [www.cynthiashaw.us](http://www.cynthiashaw.us)

Instagram ~ [@CynthiaSings](https://www.instagram.com/CynthiaSings) and [@VelvetDetermination](https://www.instagram.com/VelvetDetermination)

Twitter ~ [@CynthiaSings](https://twitter.com/CynthiaSings)

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