

**Richings Players**  
**The Rise & Fall of Little Voice**  
**7<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> May 2008**  
**Iver Village Hall**  
**Stephen Jarrett area rep 11A**

## **An overview**

This was my first stage encounter with LV, I have seen the film and bought the DVD and watched it many times and I couldn't see how you were going to do it!

Forget the other 5 characters on stage (who are very important but probably any society could cast those roles – no offence meant!) and how are you going to set it, with a terraced house required on two levels, a street and a night club without huge long scene changes which I hate, but the lead role itself! It has to be an actress who can be a repressed, shy, introvert, down trodden daughter with OCD and then turn into a mimic – who can not only really sing, but imitate - Shirley Bassey, Marilyn Munroe, Judy Garland, Cilla Black, Dinah Washington and others which I may have missed, would be impossible? I saw Jane Horrocks do it and I remember thinking that this is a one off!

Set primarily in a lower-middle-class home where the fuses constantly blow and what little food there is in the refrigerator has turned rancid, the play tells the story of lonely, shy, agoraphobic young Laura, (film) commonly known as Little Voice, who seems to display many of the symptoms of Selective Mutism, a rare anxiety disorder similar to social phobia. She spends her time obsessively listening to her deceased father's extensive collection of vintage recordings by such all-time singing greats as Edith Piaf, Judy Garland, Billie Holliday, Ethel Merman, Marlene Dietrich and Shirley Bassey. Impersonating their performances is her only source of joy, life, and escape from her boozy, abusive mother Mari.

Her life of solitude is turned upside down when Ray Say, a manager of third-rate acts, becomes involved with her mother and, upon recognizing Little Voice's amazing talent, attempts to make her the star she doesn't want to be. He convinces Mr. Boo to showcase her at his seedy nightclub, where the girl, overcoming her fear by imagining her father is in the audience; although this didn't come across as your interpretation, presents a succession of show-stopping numbers that has the crowd clamoring for more. Complications ensue when the girl retreats into her private world and refuses to participate anymore after a few appearances and then the fire!

Little Voice's soul mate, meek telephone installer and pigeon fancier Billy, ultimately saves her both literally and figuratively.

The set was wonderful and the way you used the limited space and cheated on the stairs and the street and used the curtains for the night club was brilliant – well done to designer and builders alike. My only criticism was there were one or two wobbly flats.

Another lovely programme – as always excellent!

Then onto the sound and lights which were just brilliant - you probably have the best sound and lighting team in our area and that includes the Swann at Wycombe and the Elgiva, which are both professional theatres and I am always complaining of dark areas on stage, under rehearsed and badly cued sound and lighting, mics off when they should be on and the other way round; which is worse! So well done, lovely effects from both of you it was excellent and is consistently excellent over the last few shows. My only criticism here was the fire effect which for me needed smoke as well but on the positive I loved the sparking and shorting plugs and sockets brilliant!

All in all I loved this show! It was bloody brilliant! Were there any bad bits? Well if you want me to nit-pick; and this is my opinion only, I didn't like Mr. Boo's voice, and it went right through me and grated from start to finish, I would have liked a less throaty guttural voice than we had.

The face slaps were poor and you must do these properly; when I was in Hobson's choice as Willie Mossop I was beaten with a leather belt across my back and one day the actor playing Hobson used the buckle end! It drew blood but at least it was real! You can off a proper slap, you can't off a face stroke.

You missed a magic moment with the kiss between LV and Billy; it wasn't long enough or clumsy enough and didn't give us the one moment in this play we wanted. They say every play has moments, and you need to spot them, highlight them and then really bed them in.

Although the costumes were very good, I didn't like what LV wore – it was too modern and not the sort of stuff that she would have worn, as with the various conditions, covering up, over layering, hiding behind cardigans and probably dull colours as well and boring shoes and no legs showing.

The above is really nitpicky because this was a wonderful show of the highest standard and these tiny things would have taken it even higher in my opinion.

Mari Hoff was played by Angela Strach was the unsung hero for me as she had to create the platform for LV, she had work tirelessly and with high tempo and energy and yet, hold back, just ever so slightly underplaying and so this was a masterly performance of the highest order – all eyes were on LV, but only because this actress gave us a selfless performance of more like Julie Walters than Brenda Blethyn.

Phil Mison as the phone man was very good as was his performance as Mr. Boo (apart from the accent and tone he chose!) I also think he could have got us to be more involved when he was MC in the night club; he rushed onto the next line instead of encouraging us to be the “real audience”.

Michael Lucas as Billy was lovely and played off LV well, differing his own levels of confidence with other actors almost like he knew his pecking order in society, so well done a very good performance indeed.

Sadie played by Linda Bainbridge was terrific and I couldn't help thinking of Heather in East Enders - sorry Linda! But it was brilliantly under played and again this actress knew exactly how to act off all the time!

Warren Palmer as Ray Say gave us lovely performance and was another strong member of the team, he had good stage presence and his facial expression were a real strength, I would have liked to have seen a bigger change over a longer period of the play from nice Ray to nasty Ray, I felt that even when being horrid to Mari, he should have built that from earlier and hit a climax here to create another dramatic moment. He should have been more irritated by her earlier on and then built from there.

And now onto Joe Gibbs' performance as Little Voice – Wow! Wow! Wow! This was one of the best performances I ever seen from any actress. She acted as the shy and downtrodden LV faultlessly, and her acting off (watch the video) was wonderful, all the repetitive behaviors and voice pitch, tone and volume were there from the start and when she changed into Big Voice, well what can I say – not only did she sing like a cabaret act but imitating some of the greats and in body and voice. The intonations and diction along with the annunciation were near perfect and for each voice we were totally sure who was who and I saw the audience looking at each other in amazement. What can I say Joe except you have to reprise this ASAP either with another society or putting it on again on a larger stage. Well done! Brilliant! Fantastic!

This was a team effort with everyone strength from lights, sound, set, costumes, cast, direction, music and LV herself – I loved it and all my criticisms here are largely aimed on not picking to improve the quality even more!

Thank you for inviting me and I cannot wait for the next installment of Richings Players productions and if you can spare a copy of the DVD I would like to show some of my colleagues?

Stephen Jarrett