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**BIJOU**

**A CABARET OF SECRETS AND SEDUCTION**

**by CHRISSIE SHAW**

**Presenters Information Package CONTENTS**

1. **Show Overview, Tour Dates**
2. **Company Profile, Cast/Crew Biographies**
3. **Long & Short Descriptions, Sample Media Release**
4. **Review Extracts**
5. **Target Audience and Marketing Suggestions**
6. **Useful Links: Images, Social Media**

**Hello!**

**Welcome to the world of BIJOU. In this press pack you’ll find everything that you need to promote this show: photos, trailers, text, and marketing suggestions for a variety of demographics.**

**However, if you have any questions or require information that isn’t included here, give me a call!**

**Alan and I are available to be interviewed where required. Interviews can be arranged for other crew but will require more time.**

**Looking forward to meeting you all!**

**Kind regards,**

**Chrissie Shaw**

**SHOW OVERVIEW**

1. Madame Bijou, a former beauty, now in her later years, enters a café-bar in Paris in 1933. She is decked in her faded finery and abundant fake jewellery, still believing she is queen of the demi-monde. On the wall is aphotograph of her taken by Brassai. Seeing this shatters her self-image and shocks her into unleashing a string o**f** memories. Her rich and tumultuous life story unfolds, backwards in time, from 1933 to the 1870s**.** Each piece of her jewellery triggers a story, as does the music, and Bijou relives her life from vagrant, to brothel-keeper, high-class courtesan, performer of risqué stage acts, and as a child prey to the attentions of a trusted authority figure. She finally leaves the bar, determined to extract compensation for Brassai’s insult.
2. The work oscillates gracefully between French chanson repertoire, Chat Noir songs, German songs of the era, and music by French composers. All of these awaken memories orbecome part of the stories.

**COMPANY PROFILE AND PERFORMER BIOGRAPHY**

**Performers**

Bijou: Chrissie Shaw

Bar Pianist: Alan Hicks

**Other Credits**

Writer: Chrissie Shaw

1. Director: Susan Pilbeam
2. Design: Set: Imogen Keen, Costumes: Victoria Worley
3. Lighting: Gillian Schwab
4. Choreography: Liz Lea
5. Musical Direction: Alan Hicks, Chrissie Shaw

**Small Shows**

**SmallShows** encompasses the independent work of Canberra-based performing artist, writer and producer Chrissie Shaw. Since 1991, Chrissie has produced seven original plays, in collaboration with other producers and artists, all initially funded by artsACT (the ACT Government’s arts funding program).

They include ***About Face*** (by Merrilee Moss, directed by Tessa Bremner), ***Footprints on the Wind*** (by Chrissie Shaw, directed by Camilla Blunden), ***A Sweeter Fern – That’s Red!*** (by Chrissie Shaw and Lynne Ellis, directed by Lynne Ellis), ***Drumming on Water*** (by Geoff Page, directed by Kate Gaul), ***The Keeper*** (by Chrissie Shaw and Penelope Bartlau, directed by Penelope Bartlau), ***Flotsam and Jetsam,*** (for children aged 6 – 12, originally a Jigsaw Theatre production, written by Greg Lissaman, directed by Cathy Roach), ***Gran’s Bag*** (for children, written and directed by Greg Lissaman), and ***Bijou – A Cabaret of Secrets and Seduction*** *(by Chrissie Shaw, directed by Susan Pilbeam)* (2013 Equity Green Room Award, and Critics Circle Award).

**Chrissie Shaw: Writer, performer.**

Chrissie Shaw’s performing career began in Sydney in the 1960s at University of Sydney, and in the NewTheatre. In the '70s and '80s she toured around Australia with Pipi Storm Theatre Company, doing group-devised shows and workshops for children. Two independent productions ***THE DRESSES***  and ***THE NOT TOO LATE SHOW***  both toured in Sydney and interstate (including the ACT) in 1983 and 1986/7. Chrissie has worked as an actor/musician in many productions in Canberra, for TAU Theatre, Canberra Theatre Company, Women On A Shoestring Theatre Company (touring with, and asmusical director and composer of four shows), The Street Theatre (five shows), Social Division, CIA/Stopera and Jigsaw Theatre Company (five shows, all touring). She has written, produced, composed music for and performed in several independent shows, all premiering in Canberra and touring extensively. These are: ***ABOUT FACE***, ***FOOTPRINTS ON THE WIND***, ***A SWEETER FERN – THAT’S RED!***, ***THE KEEPER***, ***BIJOU – A CABARET OF SECRETS AND SEDUCTION,*** and two children’s shows, ***GRAN’S BAG***, (premiered in QLD in 2008) and ***FLOTSAM AND JETSAM*.** She appeared in ***ROLLING HOME*** by Greg Lissaman for The Canberra Theatre Centre and Riverside Theatres Parramatta.

***LAWRIE AND SHIRLEY*** by Geoff Page was produced by The Street Theatre in 2013 and Chrissie won a Critics Circle award for her performance. Her new show ***BIJOU – A CABARET OF SECRETS AND SEDUCTION,*** premiered in 2013 at The Street Theatre ACT to full houses throughout the season, and to critical acclaim***.*** ***BIJOU*** has toured since to regional NSW and Riverside Theatres Parramatta, had a return season in Canberra September 2015 and a performance in the Famous Spiegeltent, March 2016..

Chrissie has worked in Adelaide for VITALSTATISTIX (***TRIP TO THE LIGHT FANTASTIC***, and ***ROSE ABOVE THE ODDS***), has performed in training videos for Government departments, as well as independent films including ***JOY FLIGHT*** (part of the LOCKS OF LOVE series), and for ***JINDABYNE*** (scenes not in final cut). She has been musical director of several community choirs, and is a founding member of A BUNCH OF POSERS, a musical troupe. Musical instruments: Piano Accordion, piano, guitar, ukulele, recorder, clarinet.

**Awards:**

First in NSW, Grade 5 Musical Perception, 1961

ACT MEAA Green Room Award, 1998 Professional Performer of the Year.

Shortlisted: Centre For Australian Cultural Studies Award, 1998.

2001 Edna Ryan Award for Creative Arts

Shortlisted 2002 ACT Government Creative Arts Fellowship.

Finalist, Senior Australian of the Year, ACT, 2005

Critics’ Circle Award 2006/7 for Drumming on Water.

Critics’ Circle Award 2011/12 for Lawrie and Shirley .

Critics’ Circle Award 2013 for Bijou

ACT MEAA 2013 Green Room Award for Bijou.

Chrissie is a proud member of Actors Equity.

**Alan Hicks: Pianist, musical Advisor**

**Alan Hicks** is one of Australia's foremost vocal coaches and accompanists. Graduate, staff accompanist and piano tutor at the Royal Northern College of Music UK, Head of Voice at the School of Music in Canberra (2008 – 12), he is currently a vocal coach in the Opera Unit at Sydney Conservatorium of Music, a freelance accompanist and Musical Director of the University of Canberra Chorale.  Alan performs regularly around Australia in recitals and Festivals with leading national and international artists, including duo partnerships with Geoffrey Lancaster and Alan Vivian.

In collaboration with the Friends of Opera he coordinates high-level performance opportunities for aspiring young singers at embassies and consular venues around Canberra. Theatrical credits include musical preparation for *Albert Herring, Dido and Aeneas, Grimm and the Blue Crown Owl, Die Zauberflöte, Suor Angelica/Gianni Schicchi, Die Fledermaus*, and chorus master for *Tosca, The Barber of Seville, La Traviata* and *From a Black Sky*.

 Alan has worked as a pianist for Opera Australia and appears regularly with the Canberra Symphony Orchestra and the Australian Flute Festival. At the Australian Flute Festival he has given recitals with Aldo Baerten (Belgium), Jane Rutter (Australia), Luca Manghi (Italy/New Zealand) and Roberto Alvarez (Spain/Singapore).

He makes regular appearances as an accompanist and soloist with ArtSong Canberra.In 2013 he made his stage debut at the Street Theatre as Alain/Claude in the award-winning *Bijou*, starring and written by Chrissie Shaw. In 2014 Alan was the winner of the Canberra Critics’ Circle Award.

**Susan Pilbeam: Director, Dramaturg**

**FORMAL QUALIFICATIONS**

* Bachelor of Arts – *University of Melbourne*, 1982
* Diploma of Education – *University of Melbourne*, 1983
* Graduate Diploma of Drama in Education – *University of Melbourne*, 1987
* Diploma of Direction – *British Theatre Association*, 1988
* Master of Education (Drama/Dance) – *University of Melbourne*, 1991
* Master of Arts (Performance/Women’s Studies) – *University of Melbourne*, 1993
* Cert IV Workplace Assessor, *Holmesglen TAFE,* 1994

**EMPLOYMENT HISTORY: Arts Industry**

* **Theatre Director and Dramaturge:** Australia/London

New works: *La Mama/Courthouse Theatre, Theatreworks, Dancehouse, Chapel off Chapel, Gasworks, The Storeroom,*  *Yarrowee Productions* and touring shows

*Australia House, Man in the Moon, Finborough Theatre* (London)

* **Development:** New writing, workshopping, set/costume/installation/publicity design
* **Artistic Director and Script Development:** Community events and Festivals for *City of Ballarat, City of Geelong, City of Glen Eira, City of Hamilton*
* **Management:** Gaining funding, schedules, budgets, creative teams, publicity
* **Arts Administration:** *City of Ballarat, City of Glen Eira, University of Ballarat*

**EMPLOYMENT HISTORY: Tertiary Education**

* **Teacher, Facilitator, Project and Curricular Designer, Co-ordinator**

Education/Acting/Music Theatre: *VCA, University of Ballarat, Victoria University*

Theatre/Visual Arts: TAFE *Ballarat Arts Academy, Holmesglen*

**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

* Augusto Boal, *Welfare State International*, Paolo Consiglio (mask), Chin Khan Yoke (dance), *Body Voice Centre*, Jill Greenhalge (*Magdalena International)*
* Presentations: *Australasian Drama Studies Association/*other conferences Multimedia, e learning, documentation, reporting and publications

**SKILLS/PROJECTS significant to this project:**

* Knowledge of historical and new works in Cabaret, Music Theatre and Dance

(Lecturer: *University of Ballarat Arts Academy, VCA Music Theatre)*

* Development of one/two performer shows for touring, including music

(*The Mark Twain you don’t know, An Unusual Life, Ada Cambridge)*

**CURRENT PROJECTS:**

***Bijou*** Funded development of cabaret/semi-fictional biography with Chrissie Shaw for *The Street Theatre* (Canberra) and subsequent seasons at the *Victorian College of the Arts*, *University of Ballarat Arts Academy* and *Victoria University*. Recent touring works include ***The Mark Twain You Don’t Know*** and ***Ada Cambridge****.*

**LONG AND SHORT DESCRIPTIONS for use in online, in press release, and flyers.**

**Brief Descriptions:**

**1. BIJOU - A CABARET OF SECRETS AND SEDUCTION**

You’re ina café-bar in Paris1933. A wine, a chat; the music plays… you become aware of a new face in the crowd.

A ravaged figure in faded finery, fake pearls, enters, and the evening takes an unexpected turn. ‘Madame Bijou’ former Queen of the Belle Epoque, unleashes a string of intimate, colourful memories. Music of Satie, Weill, Hollander, Bruant accompanies her stories and songs, allowing a glimpse into the private, sensual world of a riveting Parisienne.

Bijou is full of delightful surprises.

Chrissie Shaw, award-winning theatre veteran, is joined by leading accompanist Alan Hicks as the long-suffering bar pianist.

**2. BIJOU - A CABARET OF SECRETS AND SEDUCTION**

A café-bar in Paris, 1933. Madame Bijou in faded finery and fake pearls, unleashes a string of intimate memories of her colourful life.

*Bijou*, once queen of the Demi-Monde roves from bar to bar, holding mad court in her tattered finery, draped in fake jewellery. Over many glasses of wine, she reads palms, tells and sells saucy stories, sings snatches of songs, and relives the adventures of her long-lost youth. But tonight she starts to unravel. Past, present, truth and lies collide in a bizarre confusion of tragi-comedy, cabaret and bawdy revelations. The bar pianist plays Satie, Weill, Hollander, Bruant and more, triggering memories of Bijou’s haphazard past.

3. It’s Paris, 1933. Bijou enters the Bar du (change to suit venue) ready to regale the other regulars with her scandalous tales and lurid palm readings. Her glory days are long gone, but she still basks in the glow. This bubble is cruelly burst when she catches sight of an unflattering photo of herself on the wall. Who is this ‘Nightmare from Baudelaire’, in tatty fur and fake pearls? Insulted, she launches into a wild recounting of her life, a tale of seduction, secrets, betrayal and triumph. We are drawn into the story as she transports us to the crazy twenties, an imaginative brothel in WW1, a Prussian palace, a naked tableau on the stage of Les Varietees, and into the dark places of her childhood. All the while the bar pianist is giving us some wonderful French music, backing Bijou as she bursts into song, and humouring her as he takes on the roles of some of the men in her life.

BIJOU – A CABARET OF SECRETS AND SEDUCTION is a musical and theatrical feast, the ingredients being Satie, Weill, Lenoir, Hollaender, Bruant, Saint-Saens, Debussy and more, and a tasty tale of love, lust and loss. Chrissie Shaw, award-winning theatre veteran, is joined by leading accompanist Alan Hicks as the long-suffering bar pianist.

***Bijou – A Cabaret of Secrets & Seduction is ultimately a story of survival that is everything from sordid and sad to funny. In writing and performing it, Shaw has combined myth with history and comes up trumps. Like so many others, you will fall in love with Madame Bijou - Kim Townsend, Sydney Scoop.***

**Short Description:**

**BIJOU - A CABARET OF SECRETS AND SEDUCTION** transports us to a café-bar in 1930s Paris. Enter Madame Bijou, nonchalant in faded finery and fake pearls, and the evening takes an unexpected turn. She sees Brassai’s photograph of herself, and unleashes a string of intimate memories unfolding backwards in time. Her jewels trigger stories, and music evokes the dance and songs of her youth with often hilarious results.Through seductions, wars, betrayal, loss, Bijou survives by constantly reinventing herself.

This sumptuous cabaret gives a rare glimpse into the private, sensual world of an ageing woman in Paris. We see that an older woman can be sexy, beguiling and thoroughly engaging. Accompanied by the music of Satie, Weill, Hollander, Bruant, her stories evoke a myriad of emotions and insights into the sensual life of a wonderfully mischievous woman. A show of delightful surprises.

Chrissie Shaw, award-winning theatre veteran, is joined by leading accompanist Alan Hicks as the long-suffering bar pianist and reciter of Symbolist poetry.

**Long Description:**

**BIJOU - A CABARET OF SECRETS AND SEDUCTION,** a stunning cabaret theatre performance, transports us to a night in a café-bar in 1933 Paris. Richly decorated tables, flickering candlelight and the sound of the piano create a delightfully warm, somewhat seedy bohemian den. Enter Madame Bijou, in faded finery, fake pearls, and an air of studied insouciance. The evening suddenly takes an unexpected turn. BIJOU earns a meagre living in the café-bars by telling stories and reading palms. Catching sight of a photograph of herself on the wall, taken by Brassai, she unleashes a string of intimate memories unfolding backwards in time. Her jewels trigger the stories, and music awakens reveries, evoking the dance and songs of her youth with pathos, and often with hilarity.

Through seductions, wars, betrayal and loss, Madame Bijou survives by constantly reinventing herself. She’s the Madam of a high-class brothel, the wife of a German General, a semi-naked beauty on a Parisian stage, a wealthy courtesan, the young lover of a symbolist poet, a child who witnesses a horrific execution.

This sumptuous, yet poignant cabaret gives a rare glimpse into the private and very sensual world of an ageing woman in Paris. It is truly celebratory as, contrary to popular belief, we see that an older woman can be sexy, sensual and thoroughly engaging.

Accompanied by the music of Satie, Hollander, Weill, Bruant and others, her stories evoke a myriad of emotions and insights into the sensual life of a wonderfully irascible, mischievous, beguiling woman. A show full of delightful surprises…

**BIJOU - A CABARET OF SECRETS AND SEDUCTION**is a performance of memorable intensity embodying the best of the European cabaret tradition. All the elements of Paris’s original Le Chat Noir cabaret are embedded in this remarkable show: the songs, dances, recitations, shadow theatre, and the unravelling of a picaresque tale.

Chrissie Shaw, award-winning theatre and music veteran, is joined by leading accompanist Alan Hicks as the long-suffering bar pianist and occasional reciter of Symbolist poetry.

A ‘gem of a cabaret’, ***BIJOU*** had a sell-out season at The Street Theatre in Canberra in August 2013.

**LATEST RELEASE**

*“BIJOU is a triumph; Chrissie Shaw is phenomenal as she glides around the stage charismatically performing her role to perfection… burlesque inspired striptease, foxtrots, heckling the pianist, Bijou takes you on a private, intimate journey through the triumphs and turmoil of her dramatic life…” Matthew Raven, The Buzz*

**Enjoy a saucy evening in a cosy Parisian bar, as exotic, aging - and irresistible - BIJOU and her wonderful pianist spin a musical tale. Fresh from critical success and popular Canberra, Melbourne (La Mama, June 2016), and Sydney seasons and regional tours, Chrissie Shaw is *Bijou!* Alan Hicks is *Alain* the bar pianist!**

It’s Paris, 1933. Bijou enters the Bar du Papillon ready to regale the other regulars with her scandalous tales and lurid palm readings. Her glory days are long gone, but she still basks in the glow. This bubble is cruelly burst when she catches sight of an unflattering photo of herself on the wall. Who is this ‘Nightmare from Baudelaire’, in tatty fur and fake pearls? Insulted, she launches into a wild recounting of her life, a tale of seduction, secrets, betrayal and triumph. We are drawn into the story as she transports us to the crazy twenties, an imaginative brothel in WW1, a Prussian palace, a naked tableau on the stage of Les Varietees, and into the dark places of her childhood. All the while the bar pianist is giving us some wonderful French music, backing Bijou as she bursts into song, and humouring her as he takes on the roles of some of the men in her life.

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***Bijou – A Cabaret of Secrets & Seduction is ultimately a story of survival that is everything from sordid and sad to funny. In writing and performing it, Shaw has combined myth with history and comes up trumps. Like so many others, you will fall in love with Madame Bijou - Kim Townsend, Sydney Scoop.***

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| **MEDIA RELEASE** |

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **DATE** |  |  | **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE** |
| **BIJOU**  **A CABARET OF SECRETS AND SEDUCTION** | | | |

*Bijou* is a cabaret of ribald tales, French and German songs and the unraveling of a life story starring actor Chrissie Shaw and piano man Alan Hicks. Touring in 2015, Bijou is bringing turn of the century Paris to theatres, cinemas, clubs, and town halls throughout northern N.S.W

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In a Parisian café bar in 1932 we meet *Bijou*. She is one of the night people, captured in Brassai’s revealing photographs of depression-era Paris. Frayed at the edges, they recall the glory days of the Belle Epoque, the mad excitement of the 1920s, as they drink, sing and scratch for survival while the world moves inexorably towards another world war.

*Bijou*, once queen of the Demi-Monde roves from bar to bar, holding mad court in her tattered finery, draped in fake jewellery. Over many glasses of wine, she reads palms, tells and sells saucy stories, sings snatches of songs and relives the adventures of her long-lost youth. But tonight she starts to unravel. Past, present, truth and lies collide in a bizarre confusion of tragi-comedy, cabaret and bawdy revelations. The bar pianist plays Satie, Weill, Hollander, Bruant and more, triggering memories of Bijou’s haphazard past.

This rich cabaret-style entertainment, paints a picture of a colourful life, with music from operetta, romance, political anthems, nursery rhymes, and dance from the waltz and Charleston to exotic Eastern interpretation.

*Bijou* is an original work fromCanberra-based performing artist, writer and producer Chrissie Shaw. Since 1991, Chrissie has produced seven original plays, in collaboration with other producers and artists, all initially funded by artsACT (the ACT Government’s arts funding program). They include ***About Face, Footprints on the Wind, Sweeter Fern – That’s Red!,*** ***Drumming on Water, The Keeper, Gran’s Bag***and ***Flotsam and Jetsam.***

In *Bijou*, Chrissie collaborates with a whole host of local and national talent including Susan Pilbeam in the director's chair, pianist Alan Hicks, designers Gillian Schwab, Imogen Keen and Victoria Worley, with Liz Lea as choreographer. Together they have fashioned a cabaret-style romp through the colourful life and times of *Bijou*.

Alan Hicks is one of Australia's foremost vocal coaches and accompanists. An innovative music educator, he is currently Head of Vocal and Keyboard Performance at the University of Canberra, and Music Director of the UC Chorale. Alan is a graduate of the Newcastle Conservatorium of Music and of the Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester, UK.

Susan Pilbeam has worked extensively in the development of new works, in Australia and overseas. In Melbourne she has premiered works at *La Mama*, *Theatreworks*, *Gasworks*, *The Storeroom* and *Chapel off Chapel*. She has also undertaken post-graduate research in Education and Performing Arts, developing curricula and lecturing at the *Victorian College of the Arts*, *University of Ballarat Arts Academy* and *Victoria University*. Recent touring works include *The Mark Twain You Don’t Know* and *Ada Cambridge.*

*Bijou* was developed through The Street Theatre’s *Hive* and *Made In Canberra* programs. *Bijou*’s premiere season was supported by the *ACT Government’s Arts Funding program*.

**VENUE \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**SEASON** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**TICKETS Standard: $**

**Concession: $**

**Group 4+: $**

**BOOKINGS \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**REVIEW EXTRACTS**

**Review: Bijou, a cabaret of secrets and seduction**

The Bar Du Depot is the setting for Bijou – A Cabaret of Secrets & Seduction. The moment you step through its portal from the friendly bar of the Depot Theatre Marrickville, you are transported to the Paris of the 1930’s, complete with cabaret style, dusky candle lit bistro tables and a piano man playing an ancient Beale upright. It truly feels authentic… As Chrissie Shaw steps into the spotlight at the Bar Du Depot, you get the feeling that she has lived it.   Alan Hicks, who stars alongside Bijou as her pianist, seems right at home….and cleverly conveys the world-weariness of Depression era Paris. It’s a prelude of things to come and it’s evident right from the start that Hicks is a master craftsman of his instrument. You want to hear more and he does not disappoint…the old lady Bijou is a scene stealer. Chrissie Shaw masterfully engages the audience using direct contact that is both enjoyable and skillful enough to avoid embarrassment as she begins to weave her tale. She looks the part, the attention to detail by costume designer Victoria Worley in delivering a living portrait of this character is outstanding, and her unexpected rendition of a Charleston catapults the audience back into the roaring 20’s and is a great example of Shaw’s versatility as a performer…In writing and performing it, Shaw has combined myth with history and comes up trumps. Like so many others, you will fall in love with Madame Bijou.

**SYDNEY SCOOP**

**Chrissie Shaw’s script is charming, with surprising revelations that are guaranteed to delight…** As performer, Shaw’s vocal abilities are her greatest asset. Interpretations of yesteryear songs are consistently enchanting, and the sharp focus she maintains in her one-woman show format is thoroughly impressive. Alan Hicks is on the piano providing accompaniment, with tremendous style and effortless flair. His voice and humour make only brief appearances, but they are very memorable indeed.

**SUZY GOES SEE**

Chrissie Shaw’s Bijou is a faded character from early twentieth century Paris. She was a sought after beauty, a collector of jewelry, a singer, a dancer, a great hostess and a seedy operator when times were hard….Her dramatic entrance in a glorious costume tells the audience we are in the presence of a great performer… a hilarious striptease routine, her steamy encounters, her performance art and dancing… a lot of her humour comes from the unexpectedness of her behaviour when dancing or being simultaneously coquettish and overtly sexual. Chrissie is accompanied on piano by the versatile Alan Hicks. His singing captures the era … a cabaret-style romp that places us in an old bar in Paris.

**SYDNEY ARTS GUIDE**

Shaw's unbridled emotion and infectious charm shines through, lending life and drama to scenes that in other hands could be quite inconsequential. The intimacy she fosters with lingering touches on forearms and occasionally risque audience participation transforms an overblown account into an invested emotional experience. Throughout, Alan Hicks' beautiful, intricate music as the long-suffering salon pianist carries the audience along inexorably on a journey through time and space that is always entrancing, often funny, and never dull.

**THE MUSIC.COM.AU**

This is a one-woman *tour de force* through time, beginning in the 1930s and weaving back and forth through the decades, through World War One and the Franco-Prussian War, and the days of decadence and hedonism before and after each conflict. Part fact and part imagined history, Bijou’s stories spill forth as she caresses her jewellery, memories unfolding as to how she acquired particular pieces. Songs flow naturally, sometimes unleashing other memories, erotic, tragic or funny.

The audience is drawn further and further into her story, and the clever setting of the theatre encourages that intimacy. Rather than rows of seats, the theatre has become a Parisian café, with tables scattered around the room. This allows Bijou to move about freely, reading palms and begging for coins, all the while exhorting everyone to have another drink.

Music and song are characters in their own right, and Bijou is accompanied by a classical pianist (Alan Hicks) she mocks for being ‘from the Conservatoire’, and taunts him into abandoning his high-brow melodies for flirty tunes she can sing to. The songs reflect the eras of her life, from Charleston and tango numbers in the 20s to dance hall numbers from the 1890s. The most moving piece is Bijou playing the piano herself, as a small child, practising the traditional French melody that we know as *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star*.

This is an extraordinary performance by Chrissie Shaw, a veteran of the stage for more than 30 years. She brings both despair and joy as well as great charm to this bawdy and lusty lady, who is the ultimate in shabby chic. In her 60s herself, Chrissie has learnt to dance for the role, training her muscles to take her through the paces of the Charleston and other period dances.

Alan Hicks is a wonderful accompaniment on the piano, playing softly as the audience takes their seats and welcoming us so completely into this other world that it comes as a surprise when Bijou charges through the front door. He is a gentle presence throughout, in the final moments tenderly wrapping a coat around her shoulders.

[***Heather Wallace***](http://mythsandmisadventures.blogspot.com.au/)***, hercanberra.com.au, September 02, 2013***

***More at:*** [***http://www.hercanberra.com.au/index.php/2013/09/02/review-bijou-a-cabaret-of-secrets-and-seduction/***](http://www.hercanberra.com.au/index.php/2013/09/02/review-bijou-a-cabaret-of-secrets-and-seduction/)

It was quite a privilege to watch someone at Shaw’s age embody past versions of (Bijou’s) character with such authenticity and precision, whether it be enfant, mademoiselle or madame. This was a woman who had lived multiple lives, constantly reinventing herself to survive in a man’s world, with each recreation creating another fascinating layer that is testament to the great depth of Shaw’s writing ability and character development.

With often quite saucy, even erotic themes, Shaw as Bijou also pulled off a level of sensual exploration much more grounded and assured than I have seen in any younger performers.  Stripping down to a lavish corset and pantaloons (by designer Victoria Worley), she seemingly delighted in challenging people on the widely held belief that maturity and sexuality is an oxymoron.

***Deborah Hawke, Barefoot Review, August 2013***

***More at:*** [***http://www.thebarefootreview.com.au/archive/2013-archive/806-vanity-fair.html***](http://www.thebarefootreview.com.au/archive/2013-archive/806-vanity-fair.html)

Alan Hicks is superb as the long-suffering bar-pianist, providing a strong supportive presence, sensitive piano accompaniments and even gentle vocal harmonies. All are essential contributions to a riveting tour de force performance by Chrissie Shaw in this gloriously entertaining, beautifully realised production.

***Bill Stephens, City News, August 2013***

***More at:*** ***<http://citynews.com.au/2013/review-shaws-glorious-french-triumph/>***

# Dark tale of high life and tragedy a cabaret gem

**Canberra Times**, Date August 31, 2013

### Reviewer: Alanna Maclean

**BIJOU: A CABARET OF SECRETS AND SEDUCTION**



Performer Chrissie Shaw, who plays an ageing Parisian cabaret performer in *Bijou* at the Street Theatre. Photo: Jay Cronan

The Street Theatre's small Street 2 studio space has always been an intense space for cabaret-style shows and Bijoucontinues that tradition. Chrissie Shaw has developed a sinister and sensual piece from a 1932 postcard of a woman identified only as Bijou in a Paris bar. Out of this, Shaw, along with director Susan Pilbeam, choreographer Liz Lea and pianist and musical adviser Alan Hicks, has devised an emotional history for this still glamorous but somewhat ravaged image.

Shaw glowers among furs and pearls in the first half as she sketches in a story set against the events of Parisian history and accompanied by appropriate songs and music. She makes it pretty clear from the outset that she's not keen on Poulenc, but Satie, Johann Strauss and Kurt Weill seem to pass muster. She moves among the audience's tables reading palms and rattling the tin to take up a collection for the entertainment.

Soon, however, the atmosphere turns more sinister as she starts to reveal her life story: the men, the running of a brothel, her forays into an artistic life, and the terrible sexual exploitation of a child that starts it all. The story seems to stretch from the Franco-Prussian War and the Paris Commune through World War I and the 1920s to the growing threats of the early '30s. There's abuse, an illegitimate child, a marriage to German nobility, a life lived in and out of nightclubs and a succession of lovers. As old age threatens, the pearls and the furs vanish and there is a chilling disintegration.

Shaw maps this with aplomb, switching from song to speech and surrounding the audience with images of Bijou's life. The vulnerability of a woman in times and places where control over one's life is not easy comes across strongly in an encounter with those who have nowhere to go but the streets and, devastatingly, when a child is betrayed by one whom she should be able to trust.

Shaw is backed by Hicks' unobtrusive piano and occasional singing. There's a depth to the musical choices that supports the times and places of the narrative. The gently appropriate design work of Imogen Keen, Gillian Schwab's moody lighting and Victoria Worley's equally moody costumes go well with this.

It's a complex show with some timing that needs a little tightening, but time in front of appreciative audiences should provide that.

**Alanna McClean, The Canberra Times, August 2013**

***More at:*** [***http://www.canberratimes.com.au/entertainment/dark-tale-of-high-life-and-tragedy-a-cabaret-gem-20130830-2swil.html***](http://www.canberratimes.com.au/entertainment/dark-tale-of-high-life-and-tragedy-a-cabaret-gem-20130830-2swil.html)

<http://www.weekendnotes.com/>

**Bijou: A Cabaret of Secrets and Seduction**

**A cabaret of unexpected agelessness**

Bijou tells the story of an enigmatic lady discovered in a single photograph, a life captured in the face of an old lady.

Performer and writer Chrissie Swan was inspired by this photograph, by famed Hungarian photographer Brassai, to delve into the life and history of the mysterious Madame Bijou. We do not know how much is true, but we believe the stories of her loves and pains.

The show is, in essence, the reminiscing of an old woman who wants to remember the days of dancing and beauty. At times she seems completely lost in the memories, believing that she is still the woman who danced for rich men, and was showered with jewels and attention.

Bijou is a reflection on the nature of growing old. The glory of the past and the reality of today is always at odds. The old woman wears her jewels as ever-present memories of who she was. She still dresses like a dancer, or perhaps a French prostitute. Yet the decadence has worn into decay.

The structure of the show reveals her descent into dementia. It wanders back and forth through time as she forgets. We slowly discover her full story, but questions remain. It is fun to piece together the puzzle over a glass of wine, sitting at our table on the stage after the show. The space is set up with a few tables at the front, with normal theatre seating behind. I highly recommend getting there early so you can nab the table seats, to be most immersed in the 1920s cabaret experience.

The relationship between the two people on stage is endearing. Bijou (Shaw) is the focus, but pianist Alan Hicks is a vital support. He humours her, like a parent with a child. He plays her favourite songs, and sometimes sings with her. We get the impression he's heard all these stories and songs many times before, but he cares for her, so he is kind. Hicks brings a delightfully dour humour to the character of the pianist.

The thing I most enjoyed about this show was Bijou's her sexuality. I am used to cabaret, used to its style, the coquettishness, the teasing. But when these same moves are enacted by a woman decades older than any other cabaret performer I've seen, it shocks you into questioning. We wonder things like, what is her experience, as an old woman enacting a typically young woman's role? Why is it amusing now, when if she was 40 years younger, it would be arousing?

I wonder these things during the French and German songs, as I get lost in the languages. I can follow the story, but I can't enjoy the jokes in the songs; I wouldn't even know there were jokes, except for the few audience members chuckling. The majority is in English though, so we monoglots can follow along.

Chrissie Shaw is a delightful performer. I so enjoyed this experience – the journey of Bijou's story, and all the humour and interest Shaw brings to the character and shares through her story and performance.

J M Bowen Weekend Notes

**TARGET AUDIENCE DEMOGRAPHICS AND MARKETING SUGGESTIONS**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Audience Type** | **Appeal** | **Promotional suggestions** |
| FOR THE COGNOSCENTI | Those familiar with French culture and history, literature, music etc  The show transports us to an era framed by war – showing how it affects citizens as well as the military.  There are some hilarious incongruities, as Bijou, driven by hubris and survival instinct, does what she needs to get by: eg she dances an ‘exotic’ Egyptian shawl dance a la Isadora Duncan, while the pianist as ‘Claude’ plays Claire de Lune. There are several references to dance styles of the era: a Loie Fuller style interpretive dance with silk veil, accompanying a clumsy Symbolist poem written by a young hopeful poet, her lover. A variety dance of the 1880s to a song by Erik Satie.  There are some delightful references to the literature and to important cultural figures of the time, but the piece does not rely on the audience making these connections, as the story is compelling on its own, and the music is extremely engaging.  The music ranges from ‘serious, classical’ music of the era, used as incidental music, as bar music – to popular songs of the time, musette waltzes, some iconic and loved songs of the era, which will be recognised, but now placed in a context which gives them an extra dimension, a new and fresh perspective. | * Target local language classes (Alliance Francaise have been very supportive in the past) * [Meetup.com](http://www.meetup.com) may list scheduled get togethers for language groups in your area. * The Historical Society may be looking to host a meet and greet to attract new members? Bijou could be pitched to them as a fun night out. |
| FOR MUSIC LOVERS | We get Poulenc, Saint-Saens, Debussy, Erik Satie, Jean Lenoir, Friedrich Hollander, Kurt Weill, Emil Jacques-Dalcroze…a wide variety of musical styles, either as piano music, or as songs and dances.  Alan Hicks has had a significant musical career and an opportunity to see him play live is a coup for music fans.  The pianist is coerced to ‘become’ several of the men in Bijou’s life – her lover the wannabe Symbolist poet; Claude Debussy playing at her salon; as she rockets through the ages, backwards in time, so that near the end, the pianist almost becomes a carer, wrapping her in her cloak, fetching her hat and gently guiding her back to her seat . He is the sounding board, the mood-changer, her rock. Even though she ridicules him at the beginning for playing esoteric classical music, it’s clear that she relies on him, and colludes with him to encourage the audience to fill the tip jar. | * Your local conservatorium of music may be willing to distribute show information in their upcoming newsletter. * Local chorale societies might like to practise a song (Nocturn’ Bar) in advance with the ‘added bonus’ of being invited to sing it at the very END of the show. Company must be contacted to arrange this. |
| FOR THE CABARET FANS | The show is shaped by the genuine cabaret forms of the original Chat Noir and Mirliton (Aristide Bruant’s venue) cabarets of the 18802s and 1890s in Paris. Songs, narrative, dance, shadow play, recitals, direct involvement and interaction with the audience.  Well-known songs are mixed with less known material, all serving to drive the underlying narrative of a life of love, joy, tragedy and survival. | * Local theatre companies/musical societies might distribute show info in their upcoming newsletter/facebook * Does the venue have a patron database that can be accessed? Can a tailored e-blast be distributed to previous Cabaret audiences? |
| FOR OLDER PEOPLE | Here is an older woman performing the story of a woman in her 60s reliving the days of her youth, her sensuality, seductions, as well as betrayal and abuse. Reviews have noted how affirming it is to see an older woman celebrating her sensuality, belying the myth that only the young enjoy this part of life. ‘This sumptuous, yet poignant cabaret gives a rare glimpse into the private and very sensual world of an ageing woman in Paris. It is truly celebratory as, contrary to popular belief, we see that an older woman can be sexy, sensual and thoroughly engaging’. | * Women’s Community Organisations (Probus/CWA etc) might be interested in supporting the work by a) distributing information and/or b) programming the show as an OFFICIAL EVENT and group booking in advance. * Again, [Meetup.com](http://www.meetup.com) may list ‘social singles over sixty’ groups operating in your area. * Community care programs (aged care facilities etc) often look for events to bring their participants to. Contact should be made with the social events co-ordinator. |
| FOR YOUNGER PEOPLE | The show is funny, with a variety of musical choices. It gives a rare glimpse into the private and very sensual world of an ageing woman, showing that contrary to popular belief an older woman can be sensual, as well as thoroughly engaging. The show takes us into an era that is of great interest to many, giving an evocative picture of life between the two world wars, and before as well, back to the Franco-Prussian War. It’s a story about a young woman. Human interest, the human experience…mysteries of the unknown future!  Chrissie delivers a masterful performance which is evident in how clearly she embodies Bijou in all stages/ages. With nothing more than a shift in the tone of her voice she transforms from the elderly Bijou to the child she once was. This show is an opportunity for anyone interested in a future in the arts to observe a stalwart Australian performer at her career best. | * Local universities offering Arts degrees may be interested in attending the show. More interesting (in terms of promo) is the potential that the university magazine/paper may be interested in interviewing Chrissie in advance. You could consider offering a small ticket giveaway to readers answering a simple questions. This must accompany an editorial piece if it is to be of promotional value. * Youth drama groups (associated with amateur companies?) may be interested in reviewing the show on the company blog (if they have one) or in short form on their facebook page. |
| FOR SERIOUS THEATRE-GOERS | Bijou is a play in disguise. It tells the story of a woman whose life is defined by wars. War has strongly affected the track her life takes, from the death of her father through to the cynical advantage taken, Mother Courage like, of war to earn a living. Her survival and the choices she makes (some not altogether wise) to ensure that survival, create a dramatic narrative. The piece follows the shape of the dramatic development inherent in the structure of a play, using music to illustrate, enhance and drive the story. A point of interest is that the story takes us backward in time as her life unravels – from the old tramp-like figure we first meet ; seen in the Brassai photograph, to a little child whose life has been disrupted by terrible tragedy. While the play includes episodes of abuse, betrayal and cynicism, there is also much humour, ecstasy and sensuality, and an affirmation of the joy of living for the moment. The audience leaves on a high note after journeying through a gamut of emotion, some confronting material, and a degree of beauty in sight and sound. | * Workshops CAN be offered when pre-arranged with the company. * Alterantively, a post show Q&A or informal chats over wine can be offered. |

**USEFUL LINKS**

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| --- | --- |
| **Type** | **Link** |
| Approved Show images with Photographer Credits | <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/fyo2lz53w4gswmq/AAB8MI4lbt2xgaJ_eDYgRSCIa?dl=0> |
| YouTube Trailer | [**https://youtu.be/2MmQf2CwlqQ**](https://youtu.be/2MmQf2CwlqQ) |
| YouTube Vox Pops | <http://youtu.be/Pb9rba-MkTQ> |
| BIJOU Website | <http://bijoucabaret.com/> |
| Chrissie Shaw Website | <http://www.chrissieshaw.com/> |
| BIJOU Facebook Page | <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Bijou-A-Cabaret-of-Secrets-and-Seduction/537120199703793> |
| BIJOU Pozible Campaign | <https://pozible.com/project/bijou-to-sydney> |
| Instagram | bijoucabaret |
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**IMAGES**

High res images available through Drop Box Link:

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/lrddyoey3diamyk/AABbVRbNOoKpIEcq-irIHXfza?dl=0