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THE RISE AND FALL OF LITTLE VOICE

A Play

by Jim Cartwright

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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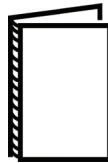


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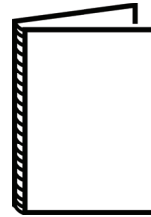
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PRODUCTION NOTES

Music

All songs throughout the play should be suited to the actress playing LV and the production:

The unaccompanied song, page 13.

The unaccompanied songs page 30.

The two performances, page 33 and 46.

The breakdown scene (sung and spoken), page 57*.

The final song, page 68.

although the choice of artist should remain in keeping with the type of diva and singer LV's father would listen to, even a little opera may be appropriate. Bearing the above in mind, any other music used in the play can be a matter of choice.

* If further guidance is needed for the choice of songs in the "breakdown" scene, please contact AJ Associates.

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The first act in the club (page 33) can have simple accompaniment, (i.e. organ and drums) or be sung unaccompanied, or a combination of these, e.g. the first two songs accompanied and the last unaccompanied.

The second club act (page 46) should have an excellent backing, live or recorded, or a combination of both.

The organ and drums, and drums alone, may be used for music between scenes, if required.

Page 11: The film can be any film featuring one of the artists, e.g. Gracie Fields.

Page 13: Mari's record should be someone like Tom Jones or Barry Manilow or Julio Iglesias.

Page 17: The impression performed may be anyone the actress does well, e.g. Cilla Black.

Page 33: When the lights go out, it may be better to avoid total darkness so that the audience can just make LV out and see that she is singing.

Page 35: If the actor playing Billy is small, the following alternative may be used:

Mari Clear off. Go on. Shrimp on heat. Piss it. Go.

Page 59: If the production is using a revolve stage for the burnt-out house, then the last scene in the club may be cut altogether if preferred.

Page 67: final scene: LV can approach the stage through the auditorium if preferred.

Page 68: If the cherry-picker cannot be brought onto the stage for the end, an ordinary, straight up and down genie lighting lift can be used.

Jim Cartwright

THE RISE AND FALL OF LITTLE VOICE

The Rise and Fall of Little Voice, produced by Michael Codron, was premiered in the Cottesloe at the Royal National Theatre on 16 June 1992, with the following cast:

MARI HOFF

Alison Steadman

LITTLE VOICE (LV)

Jane Horrocks

PHONE MAN

George Raistrick

BILLY

Adrian Hood

SADIE

Annette Badland

RAY SAY

Pete Postlethwaite

MR BOO

George Raistrick

Directed by Sam Mendes

Designed by William Dudley

Lighting by Mick Hughes

Music by Terry Davies

This production subsequently transferred to the Aldwych Theatre, London, in October 1992, with the same cast.

CHARACTERS

MARI HOFF

LITTLE VOICE (LV)

RAY SAY

SADIE

BILLY

PHONE MAN

MR BOO

Place: a northern town in England

Time: the present

Set: a living room, kitchen attached, open plan – an absolute mess. Upstage left, stairs to LV's bedroom. At side an alley and lamp post are visible.

ACT I

Darkness.

Darkness.

A long scream from MARI.

MARI There's one. (*She screams again.*) There's another one.
You scream.

LV No.

MARI No, you never scream, you hardly speak but you play
your records, don't you?

LV You're drunk you.

*In the blackness, we hear the sound of MARI smashing
things around.*

MARI And you put out the damn stinking lights, don't you?

*Suddenly the lights come up and LV is at the fuse box
on a chair. The record player in her room suddenly
whirrs back into life, Shirley Bassey record "NEVER,
NEVER", very loud.*

(almost falling over) Shut that up! Stop it! Get it off! Get it!

*LV runs upstairs fast. She gets in her room, takes the
record off. She begins putting another one on.*

Come down.

LV doesn't answer.

OK, stay up. Play your old records. Bore me. Make me want
to be sick all over the house.

Pause.

Hey, hey, this better not cock up the putting in of my new phone tomorrow. It won't, will it?

LV No.

MARI Goodoh for that.

LV puts on a different record, Judy Garland, "COME RAIN OR COME SHINE". MARI stands in the living room, tottering. Suddenly, the record from LV's room is really loud. MARI turns, feels sick, suddenly rushes to the kitchen sink. Retching but nothing happening. She slides and knocks all the pans and plates off the side. Collapses on the kitchen floor. LV comes running downstairs. Music still playing loud. LV helps MARI up. They stumble together. LV manages to get her back to the settee. They fall together on that. LV is trapped underneath her but manages to get out. She rolls her over on the settee and tucks MARI's coat around her, takes off MARI's shoes, places them carefully. Covers MARI's ears with pillows. Starts to go upstairs. MARI moans and mumbles. LV stops, turns back, then carries on up. She goes in her room. She turns the record player up even louder. Listens awhile. Bam. Electricity blows again.

Blackout.

LV Not again.

Lights up on the living room. Morning.

A man and a very tall younger man – BILLY – from the phone company are fitting in a phone. They have baggy overalls on.

MARI is in a dressing gown, watching them.

MARI Is it nearly in now?

PHONE MAN Nearly in.

MARI I'll be in touch with the world soon. I can't believe it, I'll be wired up to all parts.

PHONE MAN You will, love.

MARI Goodly. I spend my life and my fortune in them slot boxes, really I do.

The PHONE MAN stands up.

Oh, them uniforms are not very becoming. You look like you've been thrown in a tool bag.

The PHONE MAN laughs.

It's put me right off that. And I always liked a man in uniform too.

PHONE MAN I bet you did.

MARI Eh, watch it Sparks, Sparkeler. Eh, speaking of sparks, you don't know nothing about electricrery do you? The wires of me home is crackling up on me.

PHONE MAN No, I'm just a phone chap.

MARI And a good 'un I hope. How we doing?

PHONE MAN Almost there.

MARI He's quiet in' he? *(She indicates the tall one.)*

PHONE MAN He is.

MARI Is there anybody there? *(She laughs.)* Has he been disconnected? My daughter's like that.

PHONE MAN Speak to her, Bill.

BILLY Hi.

MARI Eh, you're not the famous phone bill, are you?

They laugh.

I'm on form this morning, bloody Nora. I'm excited you see. Hey, don't think I'm tight or anything not offering tea,

but you see how I want the job done as quick as possible don't you. I want voices. And also I'm expecting a call, if you know what I mean.

The PHONE MAN laughs.

You do, don't you? Look at you though in that bag. You ought to complain. I might phone and complain for you. Good looking on the top, then that. Clark Gable in a bag, or should I say Clark Cable.

The PHONE MAN hands BILLY a hammer. BILLY turns to put it in a tool bag. LV enters from the stairs. BILLY drops the hammer. LV jumps.

BILLY (*shy*) Sorry.

LV and BILLY both bend to pick it up. She picks it up first, gives it to him, half smiles.

MARI Oh, look at them two looking now. Hey, he doesn't speak as well. You could go out together and have a silent night, holy night.

LV goes back upstairs.

Eh, what did I say? What did I say? And look at the red of him now, looky. Oh dear.

Suddenly music comes on loud from upstairs.

Hang on. (*She hits the ceiling with something*) Cull it!

The music goes down – almost indistinguishable.

That's all you get when she's upset, crappaty records, full blast.

PHONE MAN Right madam, it's done, I'll just ring through to test the line.

MARI Oh, let me. Let me, go on.

PHONE MAN OK. (*He passes the phone to her.*)

MARI Oh, this virgin blower and coil, this spanking plastic, this phone of mine. Right, what's the number?

PHONE MAN Seven-six-five-four-three.

MARI Seven... Oh, you press, I'll dialogue.

He dials.

Hiyah love, we're on. Yes. Yes. PC Phone said I could ring you. Bye – oh. *(She puts the phone down.)*

The PHONE MAN holds out a sheet and a pen.

PHONE MAN OK, could you sign this please. Er...?

She takes the sheet.

MARI Mrs Hoff. Mari Hoff. *(as she takes the pen)* Crappaty name in' it? My late husband, Frank, left it me. *(as she signs)* You can imagine my feelings on signing the marriage register, Mr and Mrs F Hoff.

PHONE MAN Ay. *(He laughs.)*

She picks up the phone again – messing about with it

MARI See you now.

PHONE MAN See you.

MARI *(practising dialling)* Thank you Clark Cable, bye-oh.

The men are leaving.

BILLY *(quietly)* See you.

She ignores him.

He takes a last glance upstairs, and leaves.

LV enters down the stairs. She picks up the newspapers. Heads for the kitchen.

LV I hope you've paid for that.

MARI Oh shut up, it's me new toy and in fact me lifeline. OK?
Live while you can, that's my motto and your lesson. (*looking at it*) Ring phone, ring.

LV sits at the kitchen table.

Shove us some food on something, LV. Go on, slap some food about for me, love. Come on.

LV There is none.

MARI Please don't tell me that. (*She gets up, goes to the kitchen looking for food. She bangs her hand on the kitchen table.*)
Oh, you're a misery you. Buck up will you.

LV spills her drink. MARI returns to search.

What did you do last night?

LV doesn't answer.

Play your records.

Play your records.

Bloody shit.

She searches for food.

You wanna live a bit.

LV Like you, you mean. The Merry Widow.

MARI Can't hear you. You'll have to speak up, Little Voice. That's all we ever said when you was a kid. (*still looking for food*)
No bacon? I can't start the day without some dribbling fat.
Can you? What you eating, a brown envelope?

LV A Ryvita.

MARI What, are you still a vegetarian?

LV nods.

Oh yes. I forgot. (*still looking for food*) I'll tell you what, if there was a squealer in here, I'd chop it meself. Cut, cut. (*She leaves the kitchen, comes back into the living room.*)
What's on the telly? (*She turns it on, turns it off before it*

even comes on.) Oh sod that. Oh sod this, I'm going down the caf'. But first, ring, phone, ring. Give us paper while I'm waiting.

LV passes it to her.

MARI looks at her.

Why are you so miserable?

LV ignores her.

Hey and listen you. I've been meaning to have a word with you for sometime about something. You never speak, right, you never leave the house. I want to know once and for all, are you agraphobical? Because if you are, you can get out.

LV I'm not.

MARI Eh? Right then. *(She reads on and sits on the sofa.)* Come on love, make us a cuppa.

LV ignores her. MARI throws the newspaper up.

Bloody hell. Bloody hell, eh?

A knock at the door.

Come in, Sadie.

A great big fat woman comes in. The neighbour.

Sit down. Crush a chair anywhere you like.

SADIE OK.

MARI Do you want a cuppa or 'owt?

SADIE OK.

MARI Make us one while you're at it.

SADIE OK.

MARI Where am I this morning, the OK Corral or what? Frig me. Don't put loads of bloody sugar in yours an all. You emptied half the bloody bag yesterday. Do you like me phone?

SADIE (*looking*) OK that.

MARI OK! Wait till it starts trilling. In fact we shouldn't have long to wait as I'm expecting a call this morning.

SADIE (*excited*) A chap?

MARI On the nail, Sade.

LV stands to leave.

Where you going?

LV just makes her way upstairs.

Don't start that bloody music again. I've no head for that. (*to SADIE*) Can you hear it next door?

SADIE At times, when I'm pegging out.

MARI (*to LV*) Did you hear that? (*to SADIE*) Bloody crazed chil' she is. She bugs me at times. Though I'm all she's got and she's all I've got, besides me arse and tits. Where's that brew?

LV puts a record on. It plays. MARI bangs with a broom handle or throws something at the ceiling beneath LV's room.

Cull it!

LV turns it down. She gently puts her head on the player.

I don't know what to do with her. She's morbidity itself, just plays them damn records her dad left her, over and a over. Just them, nothing else, on and on. That's not health is it, Sade? But what can I do? You can only do so much, can't you Sade?

SADIE brings really steaming tea over.

SADIE You can. You said chap?

MARI Oh yes...yes. (*She takes the tea.*) Ta. Let me see yours.

SADIE *shows her.*

I can see the sugar! Will you stop that.

SADIE OK.

MARI Go on, drink it now.

They both sip.

Well, Sadie, what a night! What-a-night! What a championship neet! I picked up that Ray again. I did it again! He had no choice, Sadie. He motored me home about a million miles an hour, then screeching to a halt outside, did you not hear us? I saw every other curtain in the bitching road twitch. Then he comes at me with this pronto snog, lip-lapping like hell. That's men for you in' it Sade, if you can remember. At least he's a lot better than most, at least there's always the thick wad of his wallet up against your tit for comfort.

SADIE Ay.

MARI And he's got a finger in so many pies, Sadie. Some too hot for his own good if you get my meaning. In fact, he's moving into artists' management at the moment, you know. Yes. He's got a crooner, a dog act and two strippers at the moment. But he'll make it, he'll make it in anything, Ray Say. See, that's why I got the (*She indicates the phone.*) ragbone in. I've got to be on call. It's got to be smooth for him going out with me. I must win him. I've got to keep him. He's got a lot of young bitches into him a quart my age. I know they haven't got my wizzle and mince but I'm taking no chances Sade, how can I at my time of strife?

Music comes on loud again, another record.

Oh trash that calypso!

It goes down again.

I've got to eat though or I won't be able to hold my own with him down the blower.

SADIE *gets up to leave.*

While you're at the door get me me coat.

SADIE *does and holds it for her, MARI slips it on.*

SADIE *goes out.*

(She shouts upstairs.) I'm going down the Caf-Caf. If anyone phones before I return, this is more important than your life girl, tell them I'll be back in five minutes. Tell them that and that's all, all right? ALL RIGHT? Are you receiving me?

LV *(from the bedroom)* Yes.

MARI Toodle pip.

MARI *leaves.*

The music is turned up full, Shirley Bassey, "I (WHO HAVE NOTHING)". LV emerges from the bedroom, comes downstairs. Music is playing loud. She goes in the kitchen. She opens the fridge door, looks in.

LV Oh God.

She closes it. Fills and plugs kettle in. Goes and picks pieces of newspaper up, tidies a little.

The phone rings. She looks at it, scared. Looks at it. Lowers her hand over it. Retreats. Runs upstairs, turns off the record player. Peeps down, it's still ringing. Comes down, frightened. Suddenly, a knock at the door. She looks at the door. Knock again. She opens it.

It is the shy phone boy, BILLY.

BILLY *(shyly)* Hello, I put your phone in.

She nods.

I think we left our hammer.

She looks, sees it, nods. Steps back to let him in.

Oh.

He goes to get it. It's by the phone. He gets it.

Your phone's ringing.

She nods. Looks at it. He can see she's uncomfortable.

Do you want me to get it for you?

She nods. He picks it up.

Er... Mari... Er...

LV She's gone Caf-Caf.

BILLY What?

LV Back soon.

BILLY She will be back soon. Right. Right.

He puts the phone down.

Ray, he'll ring back.

LV Thanks.

BILLY *(clutching the hammer)* Yes. *(not knowing what to say)*

I don't like talking on phones an' all. An' I work with 'em.

She nods. They look at each other. He wants to say more, but can't.

See you then.

He goes to leave. Stops.

See you.

LV *nods.*

BILLY *leaves.*

She closes the door. The kettle explodes.

Blackout.

Lights up on the living room. Night.

LV is sitting in the dark. TV on, the light flickering up her face, an old Judy Garland film.

The door suddenly bursts open. MARI there. Switches the light on.

MARI Right you. You've got a fucking second to get in shape.

She runs from the back, leaps over the settee. Turns TV off. Goes back round towards the door.

Perk girl perk. *(at the door)* Ay come in Ray. Come in. Here he is. *(She holds her hand towards the door.)* Mr Ray Say.

RAY SAY *comes in – a man in his forties, in a suit, hair quiffed slightly.*

Here it is, my home. My phone. My kitchen. My wall. My telly. My daughter.

RAY How do.

MARI Ray. Sun Ray. Sting Ray. Ray Gun. My Ray of hope. I'm a-frigging just into him so. *(She kisses him. To LV)* Well, say hello at least. You miserable spot. I've warned you.

LV *(awkward, almost inaudible)* Hello.

MARI Oh, she's a miserable misery. What you having Raymondo and don't say nowt rude, ha!

RAY What's in?

MARI Everything your throat could desire. *(She suddenly speeds round to one place and gathers up an armful of bottles, too many to hold properly, and places them down on the table. Backs off)* There.

RAY I'll have a cup of tea, ta.

MARI You'll what? He'll have a cup o' tea. Har. Ha ha he. (*She looks at LV.*) Look, look, she nearly laughed then, din't you eh? Nearly.

LV stands up and heads for her bedroom.

Hey, don't just go like that, you rude slit. Hey!

RAY Leave her, she's all right.

MARI No. It's not right, she spoils everything, her. I'm trying to make an impression and she can't even be swivel to a friend. The little tiny slit! (*She kicks a chair over, boots the bottles*) Oh what am I doing and in front of you! Oh well, that's it, I give up. This is my crappaty home, and this is how I am Ray, no gracey airs, and if you don't like it piss off out of it.

RAY Hey, hey, calm down. Don't get mad at me. I didn't say anything about anything.

MARI Oh OK, come on, let's roll about.

She pulls him on the settee. His drink goes flying. They snog and roll about. Suddenly, from above, the sound of Judy Garland loud, "THE MAN WHO GOT AWAY".

RAY What's up?

MARI I'll shut her up.

RAY Leave it.

MARI hits the ceiling. The music doesn't go down. Angry. She starts to go upstairs

MARI Right!

RAY Hey, hey never mind. Come on. Come here.

MARI (*stopping*) Ha. You're right. Sod the bitch. We'll have our own on.

She goes to the radiogram, puts her own record on. Turns it up. She goes back to RAY.

They roll about, snogging. Suddenly the lights go. The electricians have gone again. RAY stops. The two record players grind to a halt.

You've blown me fuse.

They laugh and carry on. LV begins singing "THE MAN WHO GOT AWAY". It sounds just like the record. She sings for quite a while. RAY and MARI snogging. Then suddenly RAY stops.

RAY How can that be, has she a radio?

MARI That's not "her", that's her.

RAY What?

LV takes her singing down to a low hum.

MARI I mean, that's not the record, that's LV.

RAY No.

MARI Yeah.

RAY No.

MARI Yeah.

RAY No.

MARI Fucking hell.

RAY That's her singing, but that's amazing.

MARI Amazin' Ray sin. Come on, let's roll about.

RAY Hold on. How can she do that?

MARI I don't know, throat twisting, I presume. Roll.

RAY I still don't believe it.

MARI Look, Ray, she plays 'em all the time, every God sented sec'. They're stuck in her head. She can sing them. It gets on my wick. End of story. Come on. I'm ready.

RAY Where did she get them?

MARI When he died, he left them her.

RAY Your husband?

MARI Yeah, Frank.

RAY What was he like then?

MARI Put it this way, he listened to women's records.

RAY So.

MARI Put it this way. He was thin and tall and hardly spoke. When I was a teenager, I thought I'd found Gary Cooper but ended up I'd found Olive Oyl. He was a length of dry stick that bored me bra-less. He sat folded up in that chair there resembling misery in its many fucking forms and he tried to make me the same. He could not succeed.

LV's singing returns now, building in volume.

Come on lover boy.

RAY *(still towards the singing)* Hang on, I'm listening.

MARI Come on, lover boy, I'm contorted here.

RAY Ssssh. Hold on.

MARI Oh, I'm off then.

She closes her eyes and immediately falls asleep.

RAY *listens intently till the song ends. Then he starts clapping. LV, upstairs, afraid.*

Blackout.

Lights up on the living room/kitchen. Morning.

LV *comes downstairs, goes in the kitchen. Opens the bread bin. Takes out a curled crust of white bread from the bottom of it. She is heading for the toaster with it.*

RAY *appears from the stairs, pulling on MARI's dressing gown over bare chest and trousers.*

RAY Hi.

She drops the precious piece of bread.

Don't get a shock, it's only me, Ray Say, remember.

*She doesn't speak, goes to plug in the kettle. It flashes.
She jumps again.*

You wanna watch that. Could fetch the house down. And so could you with what you did last night.

LV retreats further into the kitchen. Gets a glass of water.

Bloody marvellous that. Who else do you do, eh?

She starts to go.

Don't go. I'm interested 'cause I'm show business meself you see. R Say very personal management. Your mam must have told you. No? Well never mind. *(He indicates the bread)* Shame about the crust cocker, here let me rustle you up one of Ray Say's famous breakfassays. I do'em all the time for my artistes, when we's on a foreign engagement. Not all glamour our game you know. *(He opens the fridge.)* Oh God. *(He closes it quick.)* You ever bin to Spain?

LV No.

RAY Last weekend I flew a couple of the girls and myself out to do a show. I know an old jockey runs a bartello there, The Princess Di, good gig, good gig. Bloody mad out there though. Raging, love, wild. Not like the postcards. I've got two scars somewhere I brought back for souvenirs. One on me chest, see. And one on me lip, look. *(He gets close.)*

She looks.

Can I just say again while you're this close. Bloody marvellous what you did last night. Marvellous in the dark there, something I'll never forget. Do you mind if I ask you something love?

LV *shakes her head.*

How the hell on earth do you do it?

LV Uh, I...

RAY No, no, don't try. Don't. You wouldn't know. The true performer never does, take it from me. I understand the artiste, you see. *(He casually pulls a packet of cornflakes down, looks in.)* What's this, a box of privet leaves, urgh they's all green. *(He puts them back.)* I'll tell you what, what say you and me continue our conversation down the Caf-Caf.

LV No thanks.

RAY *(surprised)* No... I'll pay and everything. *(He gets his fat wallet out.)*

LV No.

RAY OK, suit yourself.

LV But.

RAY Yeah.

LV Er...?

RAY Hey fire away love.

LV In show business, did you ever meet Shirley Bassey?

RAY Now then, Shirley, to be honest no love, our paths have never crossed. I've met Monkhouse though. *(He sees she's not impressed.)* And of course, Lulu.

LV Lulu?

RAY Yeah.

LV No.

RAY Sure.

LV *(eager)* What's she like?

RAY Alreet.

LV I've got one of hers upstairs.

RAY You can't do her an' all can you?

He starts putting his wallet away – or any action here that will serve as a distraction for him.

While he's distracted and not looking, she sings, at full blast, in Lulu's voice, the opening wail from "SHOUT".

RAY turns. **LV** is expressionless, almost unaware that she has done anything.

(seriously shocked) Christ, I can't believe that. Take it from me. Hey... Hey. Honest love. Take it from me... Does no one know about this?

LV No. *(She shakes her head.)*

RAY I can't believe it. What does your mam say?

LV Nowt.

RAY Nowt?

LV No.

RAY Listen seriously LV. Listen, you are my discovery. I've found you right, me, always remember that. In fact here, have one o' me new cards. *(He gets one out.)* Gold, look.

She is fascinated by the glint of it, but won't take it.

No, here you are, you're the first to have one a these.

She almost takes it, but doesn't.

No, there love. I wouldn't give one a these to everyone.

She takes it.

Now listen LV. I know you're quiet, your mam's told me that, but together you and me we could set the place on fire.

LV You're a nutter you.

She goes.

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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