

Rachel Juhasz: My Judy Journals

By [Patricia Maunder](#) ArtsHub | Thursday, February 04, 2010

On the Butterfly Club's tiny stage, there's not a lot of scope for colour and movement. Rachel Juhasz makes a virtue of this fact by focusing the audience's attention on her voice: increasingly raw confessions of a failed love life, told between renditions of Judy Garland songs.

In a simple, elegant black dress, Juhasz sits on a stool for most of the performance. Occasionally she stands, perhaps gesturing a little. She reads from a little book of excerpts from her diary; the few other modest props are only there for show. Apart from that, and Adrian Portell's sensitive piano accompaniment, it's just Rachel and Judy.

At the beginning of *My Judy Journals* Juhasz fesses up that she has been a fan of Judy Garland from a young age, and has throughout her life found songs by the late, great star that exactly reflect her situation. Starting at age 10, when she had a crush on an actor in the TV soap *A Country Practice* – which perfectly sets up that cute early Garland number *Dear Mr Gable*.

Contextually it works a treat, and Juhasz reveals a sweet, confident mezzo soprano voice. The show's 11 songs appear to be presented as direct homage rather than personal interpretation, given the Garland-esque cadences and American twang, and few improvisations to differentiate the performance from familiar recorded versions.

As such they are quite successful, apart from Juhasz's slight lisp. She is particularly Judy-like in soaring passages of melancholia, most notably in *The Man That Got Away*. Melancholy becomes the show's dominant mood, as Juhasz soon takes the audience from the lightweight anxieties of her girlhood to the profound disappointments of womanhood.

The spoken confessions between songs is brave, heart-on-the-sleeve stuff, only slightly marred by a few stumbles in dialogue. It left one hoping for a happy turn of events – a reason to sing that popular Garland number *Get Happy*, perhaps.

But it's not to be: this fast-paced hour ends with the pathos of *Smile*. The best known Garland songs are in fact decidedly absent from *My Judy Journals*, though several will be familiar to those with an interest in her repertoire, or classic songs by the likes of Gershwin and Coward.

Ultimately this makes for a memorable, very personal show, that's much more powerful than channeling the great diva's hits. It's Rachel Juhasz's night, with a loving nod to Judy Garland.

My Judy Journals had a limited season at the Butterfly Club, 204 Bank Street, South Melbourne, Victoria, where it will return 11-14 March 2010 (7pm, Sunday 6pm). Tickets \$22 or \$17 concession/groups of eight or more, bookings at www.butterflyclub.com.au.