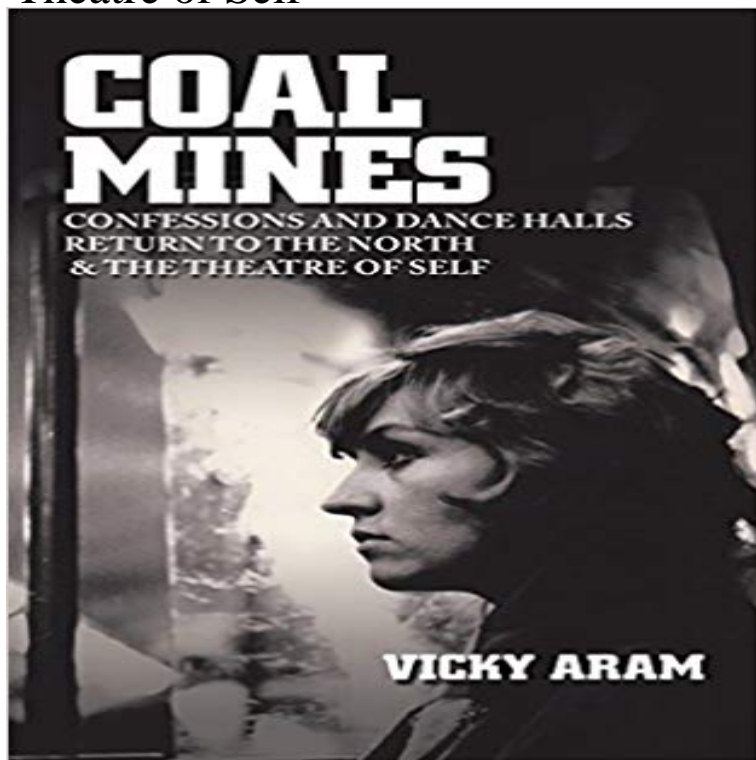


## Coal Mines: Confessions and Dance Halls Return to the North & the Theatre of Self



Coal Mines, Confessions and Dance Halls with Return to the North and The Theatre of Self. This Autobiography is now a trilogy. By Vicky Aram. Vicky Aram was born into the middle of the Great Depression in the 1930s, in a close-knit mining district in England's North East. In her print debut, Vicky escorts us on her journey from an atypically bohemian Northern Catholic environment to the Mayfair clubs of the 1970s, via self-discovery as an illustrator and fashionista. Vicky's father a dancer, theatre manager and sometime optician, and stylish mother clad in veiled hats, feathers and fur nurtured her creativity with piano lessons, which soon led to her recitals on the church organ. As the 1950s dawned, Vicky travelled to Sunderland to attend Art College and, inevitably, to learn to smoke with style. Soon came the inevitable move south, to London, lodging at the YWCA in Bloomsbury with full board for £3 a week. She fell in with the creative set and landed a job as a fashion illustrator, illuminating pieces for magazines and the Daily Telegraph, attending all the couture shows, and becoming a part of the fabric of Soho. Always open to new adventures, Vicky met the extraordinary person who became her husband in the late 1950s. The freedom they afforded each other ensured that they were never thwarted in their ambition, be it his career in architecture or her burgeoning musical gifts. Vicky designed a collection for Harvey Nichols 21 boutique; his various homes featured in colour supplement style spreads. Following a brief interlude in Yorkshire, and the blessing of three children, they returned to London in time for the nascent 1970s and a change of direction. A chance meeting with an Australian musician opened the door to Vicky establishing herself as a singer and pianist. With a tendency towards jazz, blues and Motown, Vicky spent the next two decades serenading London's elite and

sometimes less elite in Mayfair clubs, West End hotels, restaurants and night spots. Vicky truly is the Nightjar described in these pages a bird that sings by night, and sleeps by day although family life and keeping a busy home left little time for rest. The pivotal moment in this book of sketches comes in September 1977. One night, as the summer nears its end, Vicky, the singer at Mortons club in Berkeley Square, finds herself embroiled in one of the 20th Centurys most tragic, shocking motor accidents. In the 1980s, Vicky combines her musical engagements with a little housekeeping and the pleasure of raising her beautiful family. A long residency at The Canteen sees her mixing with the cream of the international jazz and blues scene, including Buddy Tate, Zoot Money, Chet Baker, Carol Grimes, Esther Phillips, Howard McGhee, Eric Burdon, Al & Joe Cohn, and Eddie Cleanhead Vinson. Later still, Vicky travels back to the North East and is re-acquainted with a long-lost love whose story awaits us in the second volume of her memoirs. Vickys style is one of brevity, flavoured with an evocative turn of phrase. Ice skates hang on a hook glittering like weapons; her mother looked like Coco Chanel while Marc Bolan lay serene and silent, his brilliant green satin jacket catching the light from the slow dawn. This slim volume leaves one wanting to know more, to ask a hundred questions; at the same time, it transports you to times of opportunity and notoriety, when creativity abounded and Vicky realised her destiny. She tells us that the journey is the thrill and you must never arrive, yet she allows us to share glimpses of that journey one of definite accomplishment, love and happiness. Martin Barden, 20 February 2011

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