

MEET MARILYN MONROE: THE LEGEND LIVES ON

BONNIE GOLDBERG 203-397-5433 6/4/09

The iconic and legendary Marilyn Monroe began life as Norma Jeane Mortenson or Norma Jeane Baker, she was never quite sure which. As a little girl, she never knew her father, her mother was institutionalized and she was teased for being an orphan. Her childhood was spent in a series of foster homes and she found herself married to a neighbor's son at sixteen because she wanted to love someone and be loved in return. It was a theme that marked her short and tumultuous life.

This blonde bombshell, Hollywood glamour girl, sex goddess queen, was a fascinating blend of voluptuousness and vulnerability, as sensual as she was innocent. All of her three dozen years on this earth, she was a nobody who desperately wanted to be a somebody.

The Ivoryton Playhouse is offering you an intimate and revealing opportunity to meet Marilyn, beautiful beauty marks and warts and all, until Sunday, June 21 in Greg Thompson's fabulous portrait "Marilyn Forever Blonde: The Marilyn Monroe story in her own words and music."

Her story is set in 1962 at what was to be her last photo shoot and she is fashionably and characteristically late. As the camera clicks, the audience is privy to her reminisces, as she determines that she'd like to do her life all over again, this time differently.

Sunny Thompson is luminous as the pouty starlet with the luscious shiny red lips and the sexy breathy voice. Sunny oozes with charm as she captures the essence of the woman who wanted to be taken seriously, to play Shakespeare, to be more than a pin-up beauty, a cheesecake model, a girl who wanted to own that fickle lover known as fame.

Norma Jeane became Marilyn, taking her grandmother's name Monroe, early on in her career, when she was earning \$5 an hour modeling and discovered that posing nude would pay her \$50 an hour. When she didn't have the money to pay the rent, she took the expedient way. As a child growing up in Los Angeles, she had spent hours in movie theaters, which her foster family used as a baby sitter, and she dreamed of one day becoming a star.

Her less than storybook life included making thirty movies, like "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes," where Jane Russell took home \$2000 and Marilyn \$500, "Some Like It Hot," "Bus Stop" and her last film "The Misfits." Her ill-fated marriages to the baseball legend Joe DiMaggio and

the literary giant Arthur Miller, as well as her time as a producer's and president's plaything are honestly and candidly revealed. Even her dalliances with Ol' Blue Eyes, Frank Sinatra, are delightfully dished out, in a breezy, unself-conscious way. But Cinderella's glass slipper always slip off her foot.

The play itself is the brainchild of Greg Thompson, who in the early 1980's went to a show on Broadway about comedian Groucho Marx. Expecting a comedy, he was astonished by the level of sadness onstage and determined he would like to write his own play about a star who had a fascinating but tragic life.

He focused on Marilyn Monroe and spent years researching her words and her actions for accuracy. Once the script was finished, he auditioned dozens of actresses but could not find the perfect fit. "A few men," he joked, "came close," but the ideal woman to play Marilyn never materialized. His play ended up in a desk drawer.

Fast forward a dozen and a half years. Thompson has gone on to many other successful ventures, in many new directions. He is working with a talented actress named Sunny and creating a theatrical routine in Branson, Missouri where she portrays a series of musical stars, Mae West, Dolly Parton, Madonna, Joan Rivers and, you guessed it, Marilyn Monroe. Struck by how much Sunny resembled his vision of Marilyn, he told her about his one-woman show but Sunny wasn't interested, despite the fact that audiences reacted to her Marilyn becoming "wet noodles- all softened." Sunny was too busy with too many other projects to even consider it.

Fast forward once again. A persistent Greg Thompson marries Sunny and starts actively "nagging" in earnest. Reluctantly Sunny agrees to "try on" the part and the result, as they say in show business parlance, is history.

For Sunny Thompson, being Marilyn is "in a lot of ways guilty pleasures, being overtly sexual and coming onto men as Marilyn, gives me a lot of freedom to perform." When she finally agreed to try out the role as an "acting exercise," her husband announced, "You're brilliant. I'm going to find you a director." He interviewed many and narrowed the field to four, allowing Sunny to make the final decision. Stephanie Shine, who is the Artistic Director of the Seattle Shakespeare Company, is now also a best friend, which is a bonus. In a roundabout and ironic way, Marilyn Monroe has finally achieved her goal of being "Shakespearian."

After working on the role for fourteen months, Sunny, with the help of

Greg and Stephanie, has brought all the possibilities to life, sinking her teeth into the project, growing with it. She considers it “a gift,” culling facts and personality from the two hundred and fifty books on Marilyn she owns and has read.

Sunny considers Marilyn “a genius at marketing, who created her own image, who used her photographer friends as paparazzi to orchestrate moments in her life.” She has also been amazed at the reception the show has received in its two hundred performances around the world.

For example, in New Zealand, people flocked to the show and they had to extend the run. “It was mind boggling how much they knew about her

Marilyn has no demographics. Everyone has a fascination. You can’t go any place where she is unknown. Monday, June 1 would have been her 83rd birthday.”

For tickets (\$35, seniors \$30, students \$20, children \$15), call Ivoryton Playhouse, 103 Main Street, Ivoryton (exit 3 off route 9), at 860-767-7318 or online at www.ivorytonplayhouse.org. Performances are Wednesday and Thursday at 7:30 p.m., Friday and Saturday at 8 p.m., with matinees Wednesday and Sunday at 2 p.m. LET Marilyn Monroe, who was once Miss California Artichoke Queen, for whom Elton John wrote “Candles in the Wind” as a musical tribute, who was named “Sexiest Female Star of All Time,” whose name is synonymous with beauty, whose face became a commemorative postage stamp, overcame great obstacles in her roller coaster ride to greatness. As she admits, “Hollywood is a place where they’ll pay you a thousand dollars for a kiss and fifty cents for your soul. I know, because I turned down the first offer often enough, and held out for the fifty cents.”

Sunny Thompson gets under the skin and into the soul of Marilyn Monroe. She makes this “uniquely beautiful and tragically vulnerable” woman real. Thanks to Greg and Sunny Thompson and artistic director Stephanie Shine, we have an outstanding opportunity to meet and fall in love with her, to hear her hopeful voice defend her actions and her life, and find out the hard way that fame is fickle and temporary and an unstable lover. For a child/woman who admits “all I ever wanted was to be wonderful,” with the help of Greg and Sunny Thompson, she achieves her goal and then some. WONDERFUL!