

# What happens if your first love is Marilyn Monroe?

Liz Nicholls



J.Lo, fresh from a shoot in Kamloops, flies into the 'Peg by private jet, nodding regally to paparazzi as she gets into her limo to be whisked to the set of *Shall We Dance?* A prairie town stops and stares.

We know what it's like to be invaded by Hollywood, but nothing can compare with the summer of 1953, when a bona fide screen goddess came to the Canadian Rockies. Marilyn Monroe, post-*Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and pre-*Seven Year Itch*, was in Banff and Jasper shooting Otto Preminger's entertainingly awful melodrama *The River Of No Return* with co-stars Robert Mitchum and Rory Calhoun.

The locals and passing vacationers still remember seeing her there, against the backdrop of photogenic mountains, or in the lobby of the Banff Springs Hotel. My friend Liane's mom Betty took her picture (tight jeans, white shirt, rolled-up sleeves) and got her autograph. Lots of people did.

Those kinds of souvenirs are more resonant than the movie which, says Workshop West's Ron Jenkins, is an artifact only for connoisseurs of hilarious badness or early Cinemascope. "Just terrible. *Weird*. A faux epic romance that never earns any of its big moments, like the one where Mitchum gets rough with Marilyn for no reason ... a knife fight happens in total silence, then the guy runs away ... Indians get treated like 'Indians.'"

## THEATRE PREVIEW

### My One And Only

Theatre: Workshop West

Written by: Ken Cameron

Starring: Chris Fassbender, April Banigan, Annette Loisele, Glenn Nelson  
Where: Westbury Theatre, TransAlta Arts Barns

Running: Tonight through May 8

Tickets and info: 477-5955 or Tix on the Square (420-1757)

No, it's in the ethereal moment where a romantic icon, with an indelible aura of innocence and ageless knowledge, dropped in from another galaxy for a time, Calgary playwright Ken Cameron got his idea for a play. *My One And Only* opens tonight in a Jenkins production, and closes the Workshop West season.

Pictures in a *Saturday Night* magazine piece had caught Cameron's eye. Marilyn was "looking natural," he says, "damn good in a little sweater, sitting on a wooden fencepost with the Columbia Icefields mountains in the background." The accompanying article included an anecdote from a man who conjured his childhood self, riding his bike on a mountain road. There was Marilyn, walking alone. "Hey, aren't you Marilyn Monroe?" the boy asked. "Hey, can I ride your bike?" she asked. She did.

"I wove a fantasy around that," says Cameron, whose day job is executive director of the Alberta Playwrights Network. He extrapolated from a bike to a love affair between a lonely 15-year-old named Scout and a lonely 27-year-old star named Marilyn. He did most of the first-draft writing in hotel rooms, while stage-managing a tour of Doug Curtis's Mesa, without doing a lick of research. "I'm not a Marilyn Monroe fanatic or any-

thing. But a lot of things I'd woven in turned out to be actually true.

"We think of Marilyn Monroe as MARILYN MONROE, rarely as a person. ... The idea of Marilyn Monroe is so all-pervasive in the Jungian super-consciousness. I don't know anything about the Bible, but if the name Moses comes up. ... You just know the stories inherently."

Cameron has worked a lot with Calgary's experimental troupe One Yellow Rabbit, mostly as a director, and it shows. Recently, his Art Ranch company produced *Doppelganger* by assembling eight playwrights on the Internet, giving them the same premise — "a man has seen his doppelganger falling from a window" — and forbidding them from communicating with each other. An actors' collective put the eight playlets together.

It isn't surprising, then, that with *My One And Only*, which premiered in Calgary at the 2004 PlayRites Festival, he opted to "bounce around in time." We meet Scott at eight, at 15, then in 1963, just a year after Marilyn's death in L.A. We see how the love affair has affected him in the intervening decade, the what-ifs of "every boy's fantasy."

"What happens to you if your first love is Marilyn Monroe? What can be next?" asks Cameron.

In a way, therefore, the play belongs to Scout, not Marilyn. Jenkins concurs. "It's a loss of innocence story, a wild and weird coming-of-age story with a twist that finds something beautiful about her and her relationship with this boy. They're both orphans, trying to heal themselves, in a way. He's the town bastard. She's the product of 10 foster homes. ... The characters travel through time. OK, *My One And Only* is a time-travelling coming-of-age pseudo-campy dark comedy."

Ah, one of those.

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The object of his affections: April Banigan is screen goddess Marilyn Monroe. Fassbender is the hormonal Scout in Workshop West's *My One And Only*.