

Monroe's Spirit, Flirty Yet Cynical, Comes Alive on Tiny Stage

By Michael Janofsky

March 6 (Bloomberg) -- The lights come up on Marilyn Monroe, posing for pictures on a silk-sheeted bed. Wearing only the sheets, she squirms this way and that, teasing a photographer with her smiles and sexuality.

“All I ever wanted to be was wonderful,” she says as flashbulbs pop.

Marilyn talks to the unseen photographer for two hours, during which her remarkable life unfolds in words, songs she made her own in movies and clothes that convey everything about her personality. There are times you cannot believe this is an actress (Sunny Thompson) playing Marilyn, and not Marilyn herself.

That would be impossible, of course; Monroe died in 1962 at age 36 and is buried not too far from the 99-seat Stella Adler Theater in Los Angeles, where Thompson is returning her to life four times a week in her irresistible one-woman show, “Marilyn: Forever Blonde.”

Every word spoken by Thompson in Monroe's soft, breathy voice was spoken by Monroe, as researched by Thompson's husband, Greg Thompson, the show's writer and producer.

The result is a compelling and nuanced performance that spares no detail of a life that always seemed thwarted by powerful, manipulative men who mistook Monroe's earnestness and beauty for weakness.

Source of Pain

As her foils, men are the constant source of pain that broke her confidence but not, at least in this telling, her spirit. Moving about a white set that includes a living room, bedroom studio and boudoir with makeup table and bath, Monroe recounts her trysts with studio executives, actors and two Kennedys, as well as intimate details of her failed marriages to James Dougherty, Joe DiMaggio and Arthur Miller.

Despite the stardom that made her one of the most famous celebrities of her time, Monroe never believed that the men she chose as partners or the directors who cast her took her seriously.

For all the films and television shows about America's most iconic sex symbol, it is hard to imagine any of them truer to Monroe than this two-act monologue, tightly directed by Stephanie Shine of the Seattle Shakespeare Company.

``Being a movie star was never as much fun as dreaming of being one," she says sadly. Dressed only in a white robe, Marilyn sits weeping at her vanity, peeling off makeup to reveal a woman the public might never have recognized. Then she moves back to the bed, lying down and closing her eyes as the lights dim.

``Marilyn: Forever Blonde" runs through April 1 at the Stella Adler Theater, 6772 Hollywood Blvd., Los Angeles. Information: +1-800-595-4849; <http://www.tix.com> .

(Michael Janofsky is a reporter for Bloomberg News. The opinions expressed are his own.)

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