



## Hello, Norma Jean

Ken Cameron's *My One and Only* and one boy's highly unusual first date

The spark came from *The Hip*, rather than the hips.

Ken Cameron says the inspiration for his play dealing with love, sex, and the greatest sexual icon of modern times came from the unlikely source—*The Tragically Hip*'s hit "Blow at High Dough."

"I was fascinated with the idea in the lyric 'they shot a movie once in my hometown.' It's the quintessential Canadian summer experience: an American movie company comes into town to shoot. It turned into a boy's coming of age story and Marilyn Monroe is involved because it's set in Banff during the summer of 1952 when she was shooting a movie, *River of No Return*, I wanted to explore what happens when your first love is Marilyn Monroe. It's probably not a good idea to have that fantasy..."

Cameron says he's fascinated by the role a first sexual experience plays in the development of a human being "You don't necessarily remember all of them, but you remember the first. That first experience, for better or worse, shapes the way

romance and sexual relationships are viewed. It's an important, tender, moment in the construction of a psyche and if it is skewed the rest of life can become fractured".

That fractured sensation is very present in the play as Scout looks back over his life.

"I had ideas about telling a story in a non-linear way and the idea of someone whose life is changed by an event looking back from that point of view. The 15-year-old Scout meets Marilyn Monroe in 1954 and the play bounces between that meeting and her death in 1963. Scout keeps going back to the relationship and feels swallowed by it. Every boy wants to save a girl, and there's that horrible feeling of 'If I only I could go back and change that one thing, everything would have turned out differently. It's that weird state where an embarrassing high school memory creeps up on you 30 years later while you're doing the dishes and you suddenly realize you're blushing. It's tangible, almost like time travel."

Cameron admits to not being a huge Marilyn Monroe fan. He wrote the first draft before reading an article on Monroe. "I discovered what I had written was accurate. She was so evasive in culture that the little I knew about her was actually tons. I wanted to write a character instead of an icon anyway. At the first public reading, a tremendous Marilyn Monroe fan told me the character captured the spirit but not the facts of her life. I took that as litmus test."

April Banigan who Marilyn Monroe in the Workshop West production of Cameron's *My One and Only*, says she finds half her job to be fairly easy. "Marilyn was a character that she played; it was very calculated and very specific. So, she has a system of poses and a lilt to her voice and it was very calculated so it was easy to imitate. Banigan does admit, however, to being somewhat intimidated by potential audience reaction to her Marilyn-fictionalized or not. "People will come to the show with expectations, people will expect they already know who Marilyn Monroe was-how she should be played, how she walks, how she talks."

The real challenge, however, "was trying to figure out who Norma Jean was," says Banigan, "because we don't get to see that in any documentaries or any of her movies, that was something we had to figure out. Who is she when the mask comes off? Ken Cameron has done a really good job of creating a really honest character. It's really evident to me in the dialogue who she was."

Director Ron Jenkins points out that the relationship between the 26-year-old Monroe and 15-year-old Scout also plays to that dichotomy between Marilyn the sex goddess and Norma Jean. "She's a child herself-they're both orphans and they're trying to heal each other. He comes from a horribly dysfunctional family relationship with his mother and poverty. When they come together it's two people trying to deal with this crazy mixed up world and it makes total sense!"

Banigan adds, "You've got this beautiful love story between these two broken characters with this unfortunate obstacle that she also happens to be Marilyn Monroe because at the heart of the play it's about Norma Jean and Scout and what they find in each other. In a very oblique way, Ken does touch on the double standard. Why in society it's deemed OK when a young man sleeps with an older woman but not the other way around."

The discussion of the double standard and the role of love and sex were things that attracted Jenkins to the script in the first place for a Springboards workshop. He says it was very different to the run of the mill plots pitched to him, and he responded to the honesty in the story. "I think Ken just wants to talk about love and people who get caught and lost in the past of love that's gone wrong. It's the same for her because she does have a string of unsuccessful relationships after Scout. He takes what we know about Marilyn on the periphery of the play and puts this story together. This guy can write, he can really write. The script has come a long way since we first worked on it."

What remains however is the magic of the Rockies and how "they shot a movie once in [Scout's] hometown"; where a beautiful creature was parachuted into a boy's life and helped him become a man. Ken Cameron says therein lies the irony and tragedy of the play "The relationship wouldn't have been possible if Scout were older. She isn't a sexual fetish to him so she can be herself. Scout is just on cusp of adulthood and he grows up through her but she also destroys what made that relationship possible by making him a man"

## **Cameronia**

Who is Ken Cameron? The 35-year-old playwright received his Honours BA in English from McGill University before moving to Calgary where he received an MFA in Directing from the U of C. Although not well known up here in Edmonton, Cameron is a familiar face in Calgary. This week, three of his plays open—*My One and Only* at Workshop West, a workshop of a new play, and his solo piece *My Morocco* at Lunchbox Theatre.

Currently the Executive Director of the Alberta Playwrights' Network, Cameron is the author and developer of works such as *I Think I'm a Wolf* with the Plaid Tongued Devils, and *Doppelganger* a play written by eight writers from across Canada which focuses on the effect of 9/11 on grief and tragedy. Other plays include: *Stop Thinking!*, *The Climate: a Province in deKlein*, *Martian*, *Zertrummerung*, *Office Hours* and *Might As Well Live*, an adaptation of ten short stories by Dorothy Parker.

Also on his resume is five years with Calgary's One Yellow Rabbit. In that time he worked as an assistant director on some of the company's greatest international successes—*Doing Leonard Cohen*, *Thunderstruck*, *Death In New Orleans*, and *The History of Wild Theatre*.

*My One and Only* was shortlisted for the 2005 Gwen Pharis Ringwood Award for Drama at the Alberta Book Awards "I'm nominated right up there beside Stewart Lemoine and Karen Hines (Pochsy), which is pretty incredible if you think about it!"

Once the fluster of awards and openings has settled down, Cameron is set to get married to Rita Bozi—a familiar face to Edmonton Fringe fans for the play she did with TJ Dawe—*52 Pickup*.