

REGALLY BLONDE

By PAUL MATWYCHUK

My Only and Only could use more focus, but April Banigan is an uncanny Marilyn Monroe

Like Billy Pilgrim in Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Scout (Chris Fassbender), the hero of Ken Cameron's play ***My One and Only***, has come "unstuck in time," hopscotching unpredictably back and forth among the key events in his life, including an idyll with an impossibly sexy, gloriously yielding movie star.

Except whereas Billy's idyll with porn actress Montana Wildhack on the planet Tralfamadore is a sort of whimsical cosmic reward at the end of a confusing, violent life, Scout's love affair occurs when he's still a teenager and is so tinged with sadness and pain that it winds up throwing the rest of his life completely off its axis.

Scout's lover, improbably enough, is Marilyn Monroe (April Banigan), who has come to Banff, where Scout lives with his lonely, alcoholic mother (Annette Loïselle), to shoot that turgid Otto Preminger potboiler *River of No Return*. The two of them meet by chance one afternoon on a deserted mountain road ("Ssshhh—I'm incognito!" whispers Marilyn from behind her attention-getting sunglasses) and they strike up an odd friendship when Scout allows Marilyn to take a ride on his bicycle. Scout soon becomes Marilyn's pet companion on the set, helping her run her lines and smuggling bottles of whiskey to her, which he steals from his mother every night after she passes out.

The whole situation is so sexually charged that it's a wonder the virginal 15-year-old Scout doesn't die from some kind of hormone overdose—Marilyn even winds up giving Scout his first sexual experience as they bathe together, naked, in a secret pool Scout knows about deep inside a mountain cave.

Scout keeps getting pulled out of these blissful events, however, and into an incident 10 years later, in 1963, shortly after Marilyn's death. It's night, and Scout's car has been pulled over by a California highway patrolman (Glenn Nelson); Scout has been speeding, but when the cop discovers a map to Marilyn's home in his glove compartment, it soon becomes apparent that he's committed a crime a lot more serious than going 100 in a school zone. Gradually we realize the full extent to

which Scout was never able to move on from his affair with Marilyn; he can't stop reliving his time with her over and over again, and yet at the same time, Scout desperately wishes he could have done everything differently so that their affair could have had a happier outcome.

The scenes between Scout and Marilyn are very well-done—they're shown from Scout's point of view, but Cameron lets you see enough of Marilyn's vulnerability and her paradoxical mixture of guileless and manipulateness to keep them from being nothing more than a working-out of a juvenile male fantasy. (I wouldn't have minded, though, if the parallels between Marilyn and Scout's mother had been drawn a little less heavy-handedly.)

And April Banigan does a wonderful job of capturing Marilyn's spirit, especially her very peculiar way of talking—she seems at once completely astonished by everything she says, and yet also incredibly careful to pronounce every single syllable of every single word as clearly and articulately as possible. I love the way Banigan's Marilyn is always rubbing her hands against her own body, stroking her ankles or caressing her shoulder blade, as if she too needs to constantly reassure herself that she's really there and not just a daydream.

Director Ron Jenkins's inventive staging effectively creates the feeling of a dream—the play takes place in a long "alley" that runs the length of the theatre between the two halves of the audience. Designer Narda McCarroll has placed a couple of conventional sets on either side of the alleyway, but most of the action takes place in the long no-man's-land between them, a space that transforms from Banff to the California highway with nothing more than a lighting shift.

That said, it's a little disappointing when Cameron's script shifts focus from Scout's fascinatingly complex relationship with Marilyn to the grown-up Scout's efforts to re-edit his life, as if it were a movie, and give it a happier ending. Cameron takes this idea very literally, to the point where Scout actually holds up a magical watch and commands time to start flowing backwards. Now, it's pretty impressive watching Glenn Nelson redo his entire performance as the highway cop in fast motion and in reverse when Scout magically "rewinds the film" on him, but the scene is so disruptive to the play's tone and has so little to do with Scout and Marilyn that it ultimately feels like an empty, showstopping stunt. An extended surreal dream sequence near the end of the play also fails to come off—you can feel the playwright and the director pushing a little too hard to make it all seem spooky and

"nightmarish." And somewhere amidst all these flashy fireworks, I think *My One and Only* loses track of its characters—Scout and Marilyn, these two well-meaning innocents who nevertheless wind up causing irreparable damage to each other's lives. But if the play is ultimately a little too fancy for its own good, the performances by Banigan and Fassbender never lose their bearings—if only Monroe and Robert Mitchum had this much chemistry when they made *River of No Return*, that film would be remembered a lot more fondly than it is today.