

The Main Feature



Season 33 - Issue 2 (screening 27.9.12)



UK

released 25 November 2011

Cert 15

99mins

Director: Simon Curtis
Costume designer: Jill Taylor
Cinematography: Ben Smithard

Screenplay: Adrian Hodges
Original Music: Conrad Pope
Editor: Adam Recht

Cast:

Michelle Williams
Kenneth Branagh
Julia Ormond
Dame Judi Dench

Marilyn Monroe
Sir Laurence Olivier
Vivien Leigh
Sybil Thorndike

Eddie Redmayne
Dougray Scott
Karl Moffatt
Emma Watson

Colin Clark
Arthur Miller
Jack Cardiff
Lucy

In the summer of 1956, 23 year old Colin Clark (Eddie Redmayne) just down from Oxford and determined to make his way in the film business, worked as a lowly assistant on the set of "The Prince and the Showgirl". It was the film that famously united Sir Laurence Olivier (Kenneth Branagh) and Marilyn Monroe (Michelle Williams), who was also on honeymoon with her new husband, the playwright Arthur Miller (Dougray Scott).

Nearly 40 years on, Clark's diary account, *The Prince, the Showgirl and Me* was published, but one week was missing. It was published some years later as *My Week with Marilyn*- this is the story of that week.

For the director Simon Curtis, the social and political background to this gently romantic interlude is as interesting as the main story itself. 'At that time Olivier had become emblematic of a fading Britain. Marilyn was emblematic of an exciting, complicated new America. Arguably, 1956 is the year that Britain finally started to shake off the shadow of the Second World War. Rationing had only just ended. So for me, this is about Marilyn and her glamorous, colourful American entourage arriving in black-and-white England.'

"Everybody has their own idea of who Marilyn was and what she means to them," Williams says. "But I think that if you go a little bit deeper, you're going to be surprised by what you find there."

Dougray Scott stars as Monroe's husband, Arthur Miller; Dominic Cooper as her anxious business partner Milton Greene; and Zoë Wanamaker as her Svengali-like acting coach Paula Strasberg; there are stylish cameos by Simon Russell Beale, Sir Derek Jacobi, and, as Dame Sybil Thorndike, Dame Judi Dench.

However what ultimately matters is the performance by Michelle Williams. The primary criticism levelled against her is that she doesn't look "enough" like the iconic Monroe. Admittedly, not a dead ringer for the '50s icon, however the strength of her performance is more than sufficient to wipe away physical dissimilarities. Williams brings Marilyn to life in all her permutations: little-girl-lost Norma Jean; sexy, kittenish Marilyn Monroe; and the confused woman trapped in between. There's a remarkable scene in which Monroe, on a "field trip" with Clark, asks him if she should "turn it on." Moments later, the somewhat timid woman is replaced by a saucy, pouting, entirely confident starlet. *My Week with Marilyn* is filled with moments like this when we get a sense that, for Monroe, although fame was a curse, it was something she could not live without.

Famed cinematographer, Jack Cardiff, whom Monroe personally asked to photograph and light her for the film, wrote in his memoir, "Conversations with Jack Cardiff", by Justin Bowyer, "Marilyn had this ghastly obsession with method acting and was always searching for some inner meaning with everything, but Larry would only explain the simple facts of the scene. I think she resented him".

Cardiff said that Olivier went out of his way to be a "pain in the arse" to Marilyn. "He invited his wife, Vivien Leigh, the star of "Gone With The Wind", who had played the part of the showgirl on stage, to the set - her presence visibly terrified an already nervous Monroe", Cardiff recalled. Olivier's dislike of Monroe "seems to have been based on her refusal to socialise with the cast and crew, and her obsession with method acting, which led her to question decision he made as the film's director. Monroe resented his treatment of her and was particularly hurt by his refusal to acknowledge even her status as a sex symbol".

"From the first, it was evident that Marilyn was going to be a problem for Larry on the film", said Cardiff. "Most actors will come on the set and chat, but she would never come on the set. She went through so many agonized times with Larry because he was, to her, a pain in the arse. She never forgave him for saying to her once, 'Try and be sexy'. Cardiff adds: "I saw Larry years later on *The Last Days of Pompeii*, which was made for television in 1984. We talked a lot on set and I asked him one day what he had thought about Marilyn and he just said, 'She was a bitch.'

The secret diarist

Colin Clark was the younger brother of the well-known diarist and MP Alan Clark, and younger son of art historian Kenneth, Lord Clark of Civilisation fame. His first book, *The Prince, the Showgirl and Me* was published to great acclaim in 1995 and *My Week with Marilyn* followed five years later. After *The Prince and the Showgirl*, Clark became personal assistant to Laurence Olivier and then had a career producing and directing arts documentaries. He was married three times and had one son. He died in 2002.

Iain McGlashan



From left: Laurence Olivier and Marilyn Monroe in *The Prince and the Showgirl*; Marilyn at the film's premiere in London in June 1957



From left: Marilyn and Laurence at a press conference at the Savoy Hotel, 1956; with her husband Arthur Miller in London, October 1956

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Reactions to **The Artist** 13 September 2012

Score	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Votes	~	~	~	~	~	2	4	14	10	3

Total received – Average Score – 8.28

Your Comments

Enjoyed it even more, seeing it for the second time!

Amazing film, esp the dog – exceptional music

Improbable but fantastic – ticked all the right boxes

I have seen it twice and thoroughly enjoyed it – well deserved Oscar

Splendidly done – very atmospheric and Uggie: what a scene stealer!

Second viewing ; still works, a classic – but what do they do next?

A great classic and a superb opportunity to appreciate the influence of the musical sound track

What could be better to start the new season than a new golden oldie

Original and beautifully produced

I loved the dog!

Excellent second time round

Wonderful

Sparkling

The dog was good!

Our next film is a joint presentation with Soroptimist International of Woking & District

8pm on Thursday 11 October 2012

This year's winner of the Oscar for Best foreign language film:

