

Marilyn spills the beans

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In a small auditorium, the stage is set as a plain, all-white bedroom. It emits a blue light.

It is Jan. 16, and *Marilyn: Forever Blonde* is about to make its Canadian debut at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia (AGNS). This is its only Canadian stop. The show will remain in Halifax until Feb. 17.

A flash of light momentarily illuminates the stage, accompanied by the mechanical sound of a camera taking a picture. The scene is a recreation of a photo shoot by Douglas Kirkland entitled *An Evening with Marilyn Monroe*. And there she is, in one of her classic poses, blowing you a kiss. Then darkness, another flash of light, and another pose.

Wrapped in silk sheets, lying on the bed, is actress Sunny Thompson. But if you didn't know better you would swear it was Marilyn herself.

She looks out at the audience as if each member were that lonely photographer.

"When you're playing someone else, especially someone like Marilyn Monroe, you really want to get it right," says Thompson. And does she ever get it right. The soft-spoken tone, the subtle humour and the sexual power are all spot-on.

As the play begins, Marilyn recounts her childhood – growing up in orphanages and marrying her next-door neighbour at age 15. She speaks of her active sex life with her first husband, saying, "Nobody ever got cancer from sex."

She tells tales of how she moved up in the Hollywood circle. One of the beautiful things about Monroe, which is communicated majestically in this play, was her ability to be incredibly witty and comical without missing a beat.

While you're watching Thompson navigate the stage, you realize how talented she is. She executes the blocking perfectly, all the while focusing on the audience and engaging them in amusing tales of Hollywood life.

In a red dress that leaves just



PRESS PHOTO

Marilyn: Forever Blonde is an emotional ride, playing at AGNS Jan. 16 – Feb. 17

enough to the imagination, Thompson as Monroe recounts how she gained fame through sexual exploitation. She tells of performing oral sex on a geriatric movie producer who liked to play with her breasts.

In between anecdotes, the character serenades her audience, performing perfect renditions of songs from Monroe's films. Thompson sings tunes such as "Ev'ry Body Needs A Da-Da-Daddy" and "Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend" gracefully, pairing them with Monroe's gentle mannerisms.

It's almost hard to concentrate on the lines when Thompson's movements, diction, gestures and image are so hypnotizing.

After another costume change out of a diamond-studded outfit and into a pink dress, the character is on her fifth glass of champagne (having already accredited Joe DiMaggio for her affinity for the bubbly). She is

drowning her emotional instability with the drink.

Thompson's lines include some quotes from Monroe. "I'm one of the world's most self-conscious people," she says, then speaks of her two miscarriages with Arthur Miller. As she quotes a poem on love by Yeats, the mood of the play changes.

Marilyn is half in the bag and the audience is frozen. One girl wipes her tears away. This isn't the story of a woman's rise to Hollywood success, but rather the confessions of a vastly intelligent woman who was only seen as an object, an arousing image.

Marilyn: Forever Blonde is an emotional ride. Provoking laughter, thought and sadness, this play is executed perfectly by a wonderfully talented actress. For an hour and a half, you are the photographer, sitting in a room and listening to one of the most beautiful yet tragic stories ever told in pop culture.