

## Michelle Williams is Luminous in ‘My Week With Marilyn’

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Rating: **4.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Bringing the popular culture past back to life in a movie is always a tricky proposition. No matter what, there are always inevitable comparisons to the real thing. They don’t come any more really famous than Marilyn Monroe, and Michelle Williams takes on a portrayal that exemplifies, honors and humanizes the iconic star in “My Week with Marilyn.”

Credit also should be given to director Simon Curtis – working with an adapted screenplay by Adrian Hodges – who establishes an accessible narrative to show all sides of Monroe, at a crucial juncture in her life. Kenneth Branagh also is on his game as Sir Lawrence Olivier, cursed with a crossroads of his own that clashes ironically with the mercurial Marilyn. This is a film that will put a smile on the face of any movie fanatic, but is also fun for the generations not as familiar with the old stars, because it elucidates on a time and place never to come again, with glimpses of the celebrity culture beginnings that now are pervasive in our current society.

The “my” in “My Week with Marilyn” is Colin Clark (Eddie Redmayne), a privileged Brit who is dying to get into the film industry. With barely an introduction, he is made a go-fer on the set of “The Prince and the Showgirl,” the first film to be made the production company of Marilyn Monroe (Michelle Williams). Monroe’s male co-star is Sir Lawrence Olivier (Kenneth Branagh), who also directs the film. Olivier’s wife at the time was Oscar-winning actress Vivien Leigh (Julia Ormond).



Power Couple: Doug Ray Scott as Arthur Miller and Michelle Williams as Marilyn Monroe in ‘My Week with Marilyn’  
*Photo credit: The Weinstein Company*

Marilyn is in a transitional state, having married the playwright Arthur Miller (Dougray Smith). She comes to England with loads of baggage, which includes her acting coach, Paula Strasberg (Zoe Wanamaker). Monroe is constantly late, erratic and insecure on the set, driving Olivier mad. One of her few supporters is Dame Sybil Thorndike (Judi Dench). She begins to cuddle up to Colin, while at the same time her marriage starts to fall apart. The icon and the go-fer begin to spend quality time together during the production, a magical moment with the biggest movie star on earth.

Michelle Williams is the complete actress, because she was unafraid to take the Marilyn Monroe character to wherever it needed to be in the story, and she successfully communicated all those complex sides. She was particular wonderful as the public Monroe, during one scene at a boys school she tells Colin, "should I become her?" and gratefully does. Her sadness, insecurity, sexuality and vulnerability, all the facets of what we know about Monroe, are on display. This is a sure-fire Academy Award level performance, and right now it looks like a winner.

And through all that, Kenneth Branagh as Olivier comes very close to stealing the film. He is at a transitional period himself, having aged past his matinee idol looks and influence. "The Prince and the Showgirl" is a bit of a trifle for him, and his frustration is manifested through the Monroe difficulties. We get a sense that his looks made things easier for him, and now he must rely on his other considerable talents. Branagh is droll, and completely understands the path Sir Larry is on, and brings the famous Brit back to life.

Eddie Redmayne as Colin Clark is a bit of a weak link. It is his story, but the filming of the movie is so interesting that when it turns away to Monroe's interaction with Colin, that becomes the lesser narrative element. But Redmayne also displays a sophistication, coupled with the wide-eyed innocence of youth, that allows him to stand in for all of Monroe's fan base. Julia Ormond and Judi Dench, portraying British stars Vivien Leigh and Dame Sybil Thorndike, encapsulate the position of aging women actors, and are delightful in their small roles.



Kenneth Branagh as Sir Lawrence Olivier in 'My Week with Marilyn'  
Photo credit: The Weinstein Company

The film, essentially, is a movie lover's dream. It is fantastic and fascinating to see all of those amazing "stars" come to life in sumptuous, luxurious color. Recreating such an era is impossible without Cinematography (Ben Smithard), Costume Design (Jill Taylor) and Makeup (Jennie Cooper). Director Simon Curtis makes an auspicious film debut, after years of British television, and he captures the nuance of character that is vital to making this type of film succeed.

Marilyn Monroe famously once said, "they go to bed with her [the image], and they wake up with me." Simon Curtis and Michelle Williams expose both the myth and the humanity with such presence and beauty, that we wake up to both.

*"My Week with Marilyn" opens everywhere on November 23rd. Featuring Michelle Williams, Kenneth Branagh, Eddie Redmayne, Zoe Wanamaker, Dougray Smith, Emma Watson, Julia Ormond and Judi Dench, Screenplay Adaptation by Adrian Hodges, directed by Simon Curtis. Rated "R." For the HollywoodChicago.com interview of director Simon Curtis, [click here](#). [16]*



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