

State of the Arts

The Contender

Native Nebraskan Marlon Brando a successful actor despite difficulties

BY EMILY PYEATT
Staff writer

Editor's note: In this weekly series, we explore the lives and works of notable Nebraska artists of the 20th century.

One of the great ironies of legendary actor Marlon Brando's life was spoken in his famous slur during the film "On the Waterfront": "I coulda had class. I coulda been a contender. I coulda been somebody."

From looking at Brando's talent and early career, one can see he was a contender.

"Marlon is a god," Brando biographer Peter Manso said in a phone interview Tuesday. "Great actors would pay \$25 to watch him cross the street."

But the tragedy lies in the pain that wore away at one of the most talented actors of all time. It is this pain that kept Brando from feeling like "somebody," Manso said.

In 1994, Manso published an unauthorized biography based on seven years of research and several hundred interviews. The book worried Brando so much, he wrote an autobiography to counter it. "Brando: Songs My Mother Taught Me" was meant to detail the motivations that drove Brando to numerous tragedies.

Born in Omaha in 1924, the Nebraskan legend, nicknamed Bud, had a childhood and family life that would lead to a troubled adulthood.

"Brando was a very screwed-up kid," Manso said.

Brando struggled throughout his education. He failed kindergarten and was known as a fighter who would jump into school-yard brawls on behalf of the underdog.

It wasn't long until Brando was sent to military school to try to reform his deviant behavior. At military school, Brando discovered acting and used performance to escape from his harsh family life.

Brando's family was tainted by his alcoholic par-

ents, a fact that is chronicled in his autobiography. Like many children of alcoholics, Brando suffered from the effects, including the "extremely low self-esteem that plagued his life," Manso said.

Brando's father was a militaristic and demanding salesman who traveled frequently. The travels allowed Brando to spend much of his young adult life with his mother, whom Manso described as "a free-spirited, poetic performer with progressively liberal views."

Brando's mother, Dorothy, was "extremely instrumental to the Omaha Community Playhouse," said Betsy Paragas, the theater's marketing director.

She was involved in the first productions held at the playhouse and directed actors such as Henry Fonda.

"It was tragic that she didn't pursue her own performing career in New York," Manso said.

Dorothy encouraged her son to move to New York in 1943, after he was forced out of military school.

Needing something to hang onto, Brando was "seeking the gratification of performance," Manso said. "He constantly wanted to please his mother with his success."

In New York, Brando studied at the Actor's Studio under Stella Adler, who developed the Method acting. Brando practiced and later made famous.

Method acting "allowed Brando to utilize his explosive emotions, which were finally expressed as art," Manso said.

Please see BRANDO on 14



Sweet little lies theme of UNO play

BY JOSH NICHOLS
Staff writer

Little white lies. Our lives are filled with them.

You tell a friend you have too much homework and can't go out, when really you just feel like staying home.

You tell your professor your printer wouldn't work, when really you forgot about the 400-word paper.

Lies, lies, lies. They rule our lives so much that we don't even think about them. And sometimes, we even believe our own lies.

The romantic comedy "Private Eyes," being put on by the University of Nebraska at Omaha Department of Dramatic Arts, focuses on this character trait of which so many of us are guilty.

"It is a play about self-deception," said Jennifer Stewart, the play's director. "White lies are part of our everyday life. We lie so much we actually believe it."

The play, written by Steven Dietz, is about a married couple whose names are Matthew and Lisa. Both work as actors.

Throughout the play, their little white lies evolve into big ugly lies.

Lisa is having an affair. Maybe. Or it might all be in Matthew's mind.

But the clues are all there that Lisa is having an affair.

But then again, the whole affair might just be part of a play that the couple is in. Who knows?

If this sounds confusing, it is supposed to be.

The audience must play the role of the detective, according to the "Private Eyes" press release.

"The audience gets a clue as the play unfolds to what is actually going on," Stewart said. "By the end of the play, they have enough clues to figure it out."

The fact that Matthew sees indications that his wife is having an affair but doesn't want to believe it goes back to the theme of the play: self-deception.

"Matthew believes his wife is not having an affair, even though he knows she is," Stewart said.

Craig Fitzpatrick, a senior theater major at UNO, plays Matthew.

"Matthew's life is slowly crumbling around him, and he tries to keep a hold on things, while everyone else is changing their lives," Fitzpatrick said.

"He remains in a fantasy world until it is too absurd, then finally realizes he must face the facts that he doesn't have control over everything," he said.

Dietz portrays Matthew's situa-

tion in a unique way. The play is not done in sequence and in a sense is a play inside a play, Fitzpatrick said.

The play's characters are actors, and some of the scenes are of them rehearsing.

"Dietz breaks some conventional rules of the theater," Fitzpatrick said.

It is a mixture of this rule-breaking and the characters' constant lying that forces the audience to play detective.

The audience's role in the production is enhanced by the setup of the theater. Instead of performing on a proscenium stage in front of the audience, the actors perform "in the round," with audience members on all sides. The action takes place on a stage in the center of the audience.

This offered an added challenge for the actors.

"Actor movement is very, very important," Fitzpatrick said. "You have to be constantly moving, so everyone can see you."

With all of the complexities, the play is still a comedy.

"Steven Dietz holds a mirror up to the face of society,

using humor as his primary tool," Stewart said. "He uses comedy because only a comedy can make us realize the truths we are not fond of."

This unique comedy is the first time Dietz's work has been done in Omaha.

"I would wager that people haven't seen anything like this," Fitzpatrick said.

Theater Preview The Facts

What: "Private Eyes"
Where: Del and Low Ann Weber Fine Arts Building on UNO campus.
When: 8 tonight, Nov. 19-20, Dec. 1-4
The Skinny: Non-traditional comedy/mystery comes to UNO theatre dept.

