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Author, Conversations With Scorsese

Marlon Brando

A Life In Film



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MARLON BRANDO, A LIFE IN FILM

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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MARLON BRANDO, A LIFE IN FILM

We began worrying about **Marlon Brando** almost immediately - not a half dozen years after he went to Hollywood and made his first movie. His great run of films - great at least in the sense that they permitted him to impress himself indelibly on a generation's consciousness - was perhaps the most exciting thing about the movies in the first years of the fifties. From *The Men* in 1950 through the film version of his stage masterpiece, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, to his one public brush with Shakespeare in *Julius Caesar*, to his disparate rebels in *Viva Zapata!* and *The Wild One* (one with a cause, the other without), and on to the Oscar-winning culmination of this first phase, *On the Waterfront*, he had laid out his credentials, and by 1954 they had finally been accepted by nearly everyone (witness the Academy Award) as genuine. Moreover, he had done it his way. He had worn his blue jeans in Bel Air (long before it became fashionable; indeed, he probably established the fashion); he had insulted **Louella Parsons**; he had picked his nose in public and said terrible things about mighty people. He was, the star as anti-star. But now, as the Chianti went 'round in the lofts and railroad flats of lower Manhattan, the discussions of "Marlon" - emotionally everyone was on a first-name basis with him - grew hot with anxiety, cool with gloom. Why was he staying so long on the Far Coast? When would he return home to his

roots, enter again upon that temple of truth the theater? Was it possible - darkest of all possibilities - that he, of all people, was now in danger of “selling out”? Was it possible, perhaps, that the deal had already been struck?

Something quite astonishing, quite without historical antecedents in our culture, was going on here. Some three decades earlier **D.W. Griffith**, the man who had pioneered (with limited success) the radical notion that a moviemaker might be taken seriously as an artist, cast his eye wistfully over the history of American heroism, noting that in his time the military leader had been replaced as the repository of our highest admiration by the inventor and the entrepreneur. Now, in the 1920s, he wondered if sometime in the not too distant future the artist might, in his turn, replace these figures as “the one who expresses in the highest degree the achievement the people of the nation would like to achieve individually.” At last, in postwar America, the moment he, among others, had dreamed of was at hand. For the first time the mass media, the mass public indeed began to see certain figures in all the arts in a heroic light. We had now the time, the money, and the communications technology to attend, on a more intimate basis than ever before, the great drama of creation; we could now share immediately in the thrill of the artist’s victories over his own demons and the indifference of the crass world, to suffer with him the agonies of his defeats. It was Brando’s fortune (and misfortune) to be the new young actor, representing what seemed to be a radically new approach to his art, on which this unprecedented attention was focused.

He thus became the first actor to be burdened not just with the weight of conducting a significant and interesting career but with what seemed to be an obligation to transcending our customary expectations of the performer.