

# DAVID BARNES

## Uncovering the Hidden Persona of Marlon Brando

by Michelle Kaplan • Photography by Jason Collins

**W**e are a culture fascinated with television and movie personalities. Not long ago, gossip lived only in the tabloid pages that line the checkout counters in supermarkets. Now our homes are invaded during the serious six o'clock news.

We no longer question the credibility of broadcasters who open with the birth of a celebrity baby instead of headlines about our economy, politics or an international tragedy. We'd rather hear about Paris Hilton's mock political rivalry with John McCain.

Before this "stalkerazzi" culture, there lived a celebrity who guarded his privacy like a pit bull. His larger than life image only fueled more curiosity about who he really was, speculation that followed him beyond the grave.

*"A Love Lost Life – The Unauthorized Story of Marlon Brando,"* a play written by a 27-year-old actor and Palm Beach Gardens resident, David Barnes, is a glimpse into the very personal life of the legendary Marlon Brando.

While the play does not attempt to examine Brando's extensive career, or his entire life, it takes us down a narrow path that lies between Brando and his relationship with his children. It looks at the role he most struggled with – fatherhood, and the dichotomy between father and son.

"When I starting writing this I saw generational patterns emerge through father and son... what I saw as Marlon's relationship with his father was identical to the relationship with Christian, his son."

"It was obvious to me. Brando epitomized brut force, masculinity and sex... it was the way Marlon described his father ... it was around the same time that I was coming to terms with my own personal struggles... what male doesn't have identity issues with their father at a time when they're forming their own identity."

The play came into existence when Barnes met director Steve Jacobs who encouraged him to reach beyond acting. Barnes explained that in his circle they talk about the wannabees, people that talk a good game, but do just that – talk. Barnes initially suggested the idea to Jacobs to pass off to a group of writers. Barnes then had another idea – to do it himself.

"I just sat down and did it; he was blown away."

The play has evolved from a short, 40-minute, one-act, three-character play to a deeper well-developed 90-minute endeavor. In it, an older wheelchair-bound Brando is talking about his life. Is he alive and talk-



*David Barnes in front of the Cuillo Centre in downtown WPB where his exciting new play recently debuted.*

ing about his past or is it after death? Either way, Brando is doomed to relive it all. The mirrors on stage reflect this as well as facing your demons, or the ability to look oneself in the mirror.

“It shows the human side of someone who is a legend and an icon.”

The play centers on a time in Brando’s life when he had to come face to face with what his children had become after his son Christian shot and killed his pregnant half-sister Cheyenne’s boyfriend, Dag Drollet, father of the unborn child, in 1990.

Was it life-imitating art?

The true-life murder scene is almost a moment from one of Brando’s greatest artistic triumphs, *The Godfather*. In that epic film, the pregnant sister, Connie, calls her big brother Sonny because her louse of a husband is being abusive. Sonny then swaggers in with all his bravado and nearly beats him to death in front of the entire neighborhood. He leaves him bleeding face down in the gutter.

In like fashion, Cheyenne hinted physical abuse while she was pregnant. Christian then shot Drollet at Marlon’s house on Mulholland Drive, later claiming the gun was only pulled to threaten him and that it accidentally went off during a struggle. Christian plead guilty to voluntary manslaughter, was sentenced to ten years, and eventually released after serving six years in 1996. Compounding the tragedy, Cheyenne committed suicide in 1995. Her son, Tuki, 18, a Versace model, was raised in Tahiti by her mother, Tarita Teriipia, Brando’s third wife.

After writing the play, Barnes contacted Christian, who read the play. Christian called him and was very excited about the way Barnes portrayed him and captured his personality. They talked extensively about the relationship of fathers and sons.

“Christian described the way Marlon saw his father... a World War I veteran, a barroom brawler... a tough son of a bitch.... He respected him to an extent... Marlon said about his father ‘I’m nothing like him.’”

How did Christian view his dad? He adopted the view that Marlon took away from his own father.

“My dad got lucky on Broadway.”

This idea of “getting lucky on Broadway” was how Marlon felt about his acting ability. How he saw being an actor through his father’s eyes as not a “real man’s job.”

Barnes reflected upon an interview Marlon Brando had with Larry King not long before the legendary actor’s death. King asked him about being an actor. Brando answered the question as he always did, by not answering it.

“He said, ‘Larry... everyone’s an actor, you’re an actor,’” recalled Barnes.

So, who was he? Ask an actor.

“He is someone who changed the art form altogether. Before *Streetcar (A Streetcar Named Desire)*, it was all about dramatics, on stage especially. Marlon came along in *Streetcar*. He was real and raw... everyone followed suit.... He WAS method acting.... He was the father of it.”

*A Love Lost Life – The Unauthorized Story of Marlon Brando* was first performed at the Orlando International Fringe Festival in July 2007. A longer version was performed at the Cuillo Centre for the Arts in January 2007.

Barnes asked Christian to attend opening night; however, it was not to be. Six days before the play opened, Christian Brando died in a Los Angeles hospital of pneumonia. He was 49.

“Looking back I want to say there was a sense of urgency in his voice.”

That opening night Barnes’ father was in attendance.

“It was a big emotional moment, hugging, crying. The final line of the play is ‘I did the best I could kid.’ My father once told me your children don’t understand how much you love them until they have kids themselves.”

Barnes doesn’t have kids yet. His baby right now is the play slated for another run at the Cuillo for two nights in August. If all goes well, an extended run will be offered.

“It’s been so well received... it’s dramatic, light-hearted, raw and real. It’s gained this much momentum and notoriety. If we do well, I’d like to put together a tour.”

Good luck, David. **PBG**

*A Love Lost Life – The Unauthorized Story of Marlon Brando* will be performed at the Cuillo Centre for the Arts, 20 Clematis St., West Palm Beach on August 29 & 30 at 8 PM. For tickets or more information call, (561) 835-9226 or visit [www.cuillocentre.com](http://www.cuillocentre.com). For more information about the author, David Nathie Barnes, visit his website, [www.myspace.com/alovelostlife](http://www.myspace.com/alovelostlife).