

## 'The Mystery of Marilyn Monroe: The Unheard Tapes' doesn't provide a convincing argument

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun  
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Rating: ««

out of «««««

Running Time: 101 minutes

***This feature film begins streaming this week on Netflix.***

Model and actress Marilyn Monroe became a national icon in a short period of time. After appearing on the big screen, the performer not only became an instant sex symbol, but also managed to build up a number of memorable performances in classics like “Niagara,” “Gentlemen Prefer Blondes,” “How to Marry a Millionaire,” “The Seven Year Itch,” and “Some Like It Hot.”

Sadly, Monroe passed away unexpectedly on August 4, 1962 at the age of 36. Initially, her death was reported as an overdose and probable suicide, but as the years have passed various other theories have arisen. The new documentary “The Mystery of Marilyn Monroe: The Unheard Tapes” attempts to shed some light on what may have happened 60 years ago.

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The movie begins by reminding viewers of an official investigation into Monroe's death that occurred in 1982. Irish investigative journalist Anthony Summers was assigned to report on the story. He found himself interviewing and recording hundreds of people about her life and final night. He ultimately spent years following tangents and threads that resulted in his 1985 biography, "Goddess," and provided some of the material for this film.

For the first time ever, pieces of the audio he captured in 1982 are presented. The material doesn't paint a very flattering picture of Hollywood during the 40s and 50s, revealing the exploits of some predatory men in power preying on young actresses. Their behavior is horrendous and would have been an ordeal for any young and aspiring actress to have to deal with (although very little of it has anything to do with the subject herself). There is also a lot of archival material, like early photos and pieces from interviews regarding her personal philosophy of living a truthful life.

These bits are interesting, but are not particularly unique. However, Summer's interviews with stars like Jane Russell, director Billy Wilder, crew members, as well as her psychiatrist are more revealing. Particularly intriguing are comments made about Monroe's troubled childhood, which involved living with a mother who caused her severe psychological trauma.

There are some quick details about her experiences in various orphanages, as well as claims of molestation. The movie attempts to tie Monroe's unhappy early life to romantic relationships with famous figures (who were often older men, almost like father figures). They also make direct assertions that the star was involved with more than one member of the Kennedy family.

Still, for all the film's attempts to create connections, a lot of the threads tying them to her death are very loose. There are a lot of inconsistencies and surely some aspects of her death might have been altered, but the interviews are contradictory and far-fetched. It's also odd that early on, the filmmakers don't paint the people involved in an honorable light, yet ask us to take what they say later at face value later in the film.

There are also reenactments of the phone interviews themselves, including performers mouthing the audio on cassette tapes. It all looks strange and feels like an unnecessary technique. Even a shot of an empty psychiatrist's office would have worked better than an actor in costume mouthing his side of a recorded conversation on camera.

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For all its bluster, the movie doesn’t make a wholly convincing final argument. It spends much of the time glossing over the life of a tragic star and addressing conspiracies about her end, rather than present a detailed and deeper portrait of the figure and her final days. “The Mystery of Marilyn Monroe: The Unheard Tapes” offers a few insights into its subject’s life, but ultimately comes across as a pulpy exercise rather than an illuminating examination.

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