

Marilyn Monroe Hits a New High

By ROBERT CAHN



TO MARILYN MONROE, currently the nation's favorite daydream, a trophy won is only a prelude to shinier trophies to come. She learned to act and she learned to dance. Now she's learning to sing.

Marilyn hummed her first few bars for a national audience in last year's film *Niagara*. She was called upon to deliver a solid song or two in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and in her current release, *River of No Return*. Cynical moviegoers assumed, as they do with most stars whose appeal is essentially visual, that the voice had been dubbed. They didn't sit up and listen, though they kept on looking. But the Monroe voice is a good one. And it's all her own.

Marilyn takes her new career as a vocalist seriously. She doesn't want to be known as just Monroe, the pinup, singing a song. Apparently she's off to a running start. RCA Victor has given her a contract. Her first record for that label, a bawdy barroom ballad from the sound track of *River of No Return* called *I'm Gonna File My Claim*, sold 75,000 copies its first three weeks out. And in her singiest movie to date—20th Century-Fox's *There's No Business Like Show Business*—she bucks the high melodic wind always created by top-billed Ethel Merman. Marilyn, playing a hat-check-girl-turned-musical-comedy-star, sings four songs, new and old, by Irving Berlin. Studio bigwigs, recording experts and professional skeptics who have heard the results react with fervor. Victor executive Joe Carlton says, "Her voice has a hushed, velvety tone, sort of like a female Nat King Cole."

As a test of quality, disc jockeys received early pressings of Marilyn's new record with a nameless label bearing a large, red question mark. They didn't recognize the singer. But they liked the sound. It's obvious that the midnight music men will be grinning into their microphones, and jukebox nickels will jingle for Monroe, if what West Coast platter pundit Peter Potter says is true: "Marilyn sings like she walks."



Marilyn, who wants to be heard (left) as well as seen (right), digs into practice session with voice coach Hal Schaefer (above). She's on Victor label, sings in 20th-Fox's *No Business Like Show Business*



After a high note: "Air in my ears"

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Under her placid, peppermint-candy exterior, Marilyn is a worker and a worrier. And when she settled down to polish up her octaves she worked hard. Voice coach and arranger Hal Schaefer, who had just helped guide Judy Garland back into harness for Warners' *A Star Is Born*, was hired to work with her. And the one-room cottage-studio where they rehearsed for three weeks was barred to all but a select few. Collier's photographer, John Florea, on the preferred list, made the candid record of the sessions appearing here.

Every morning at nine or so, Marilyn slid up to the bungalow in her big new convertible. Hal concentrated first on getting her to relax. "She's tense when she starts," says Schaefer, "because she's determined to become a really good singer." The sessions went like this: "Think of your stomach," Hal advised her. "Breathe from there, not from your chest." As she practiced, Marilyn roamed from piano to sofa to overstuffed chair and back to the piano again. Then, singing into an amplifier, Hal took her to the top of her range—B-flat—coaxed her even higher till she hit a very small D-flat, then down past her normal limit of a low F until she just barely touched a bottom D-flat in a husky whisper. When she'd run through a number a few times, Schaefer turned up the sound-equipment volume high enough for Marilyn to hear herself over her own voice. Then he switched off the amplifier, turned on a recording machine, saying, "Let's go for the tape" (which would serve as a test for the final recording that's synchronized with the action of the film). Marilyn closed her eyes, moved her hands to the mike, tried the song once more. When she finished, she pounced on the arm of the chair to listen to the playback, singing quietly along with it.

Schaefer is pleased with the result. Marilyn herself says, "I won't be satisfied until people want to hear me sing without looking at me. Of course," she adds, candidly, "that doesn't mean I want them to stop looking."



Eyes closed, she emits throaty whisper which makes critics liken her voice to her looks. "You could drive a truck through here when I sing," she says, "I wouldn't notice." Right, she sings along with playback of a recording



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