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FÖR ATT INTE TALA OM ALLA DESSA KVINNOR (Now About These Women), Sweden, 1964

Cert: X. *dist:* Gala. *p.c.:* Svensk Filmindustri. *p. manager:* Lars-Owe Carlberg. *d:* Ingmar Bergman. *assistant d:* Lenn Hjortzberg, Lars-Erik Liedholm. *sc:* Erland Josephson, Ingmar Bergman. *ph:* Sven Nykvist. *col:* Eastman Colour. *ed:* Ulla Ryghe. *a.d.:* P. A. Lundgren. *sp. effects:* Evald Andersson. *m:* Erik Nordgren. *cost:* Mago. *sd:* P. O. Pettersson, Tage Sjoberg. *l.p.:* Jarl Kulle (*Cornelius*), Georg Funkquist (*Tristan*), Eva Dahlbeck (*Adelaide*), Karen Kavli (*Madame Tussaud*), Harriet Andersson (*Isolde*), Gertrud Fridh (*Traviata*), Bibi Andersson (*Humlan*), Barbro Hjort af Ornäs (*Beatrice*), Mona Malm (*Cecilia*), Allan Edwall (*Jillker*), Gosta Prüzelius (*Swedish Radio Announcer*), Jan-Olof Strandberg (*German Radio Announcer*), Goran Graffman (*French Radio Announcer*), Jan Blomberg (*British Radio Announcer*), Ulf Johanson, Axel Düberg and Lars-Erik Liedholm (*Men in Black Suits*), Lars-Owe Carlberg (*The Driver*), Carl Billquist (*A Young Man*), Doris Funcke and Yvonne Igell (*Housemaids*). 7,200 ft. 80 mins. *Subtitles.*

Cornelius, a well-known critic, arrives at the summer residence of a famous cellist, Felix. He is writing Felix's biography, and has brought his composition, "A Fish's Dream. Abstraction No. 14", which he hopes Felix will play. On arrival, he fawns upon the valet Tristan, until Jillker, Felix's impresario, explains that Felix and Tristan look very much alike. His confusion increases when he discovers women all over the house: Felix's official wife, Adelaide; his official mistress, Humlan; his accompanist. Beatrice; his housemaid, Isolde; his pretty young relative, Cecilia; his pupil, Traviata; and his patroness, Mme. Tussaud. Refused admission to the master's presence, Cornelius wanders about, observing. Humlan coaxes him into her bed, where he is attacked by Traviata brandishing a revolver; looking for Humlan, he is photographed by Jillker in a compromising situation with Beatrice. Fleeing to an attic, he finds bundles of old letters (in one of which Felix urges Adelaide to kill him if he ever betrays his art), and accidentally sets off a riotous blaze of fireworks. He is still no nearer to meeting Felix, so Jillker suggests that he disguise himself as a woman. When this ruse fails, Cornelius angrily intimates that unless Felix plays his composition, he will refuse to immortalise him by writing his biography. Felix makes no reply, but when the time for his radio concert arrives, "A Fish's Dream" is announced to open the programme. As Adelaide waits with a gun in her lap, Felix hesitates: the bow falls from his fingers, and it is discovered that he has died before a note has been played. After the funeral, Cornelius settles down to read his biography to Jillker, Tristan and the ladies—who quarrel with it almost before he begins to read. They are interrupted by the arrival of a young, penniless cellist, who plays for them. All are delighted: the ladies prepare his room, and Cornelius takes out his notebook. . . .

"What is genius?" asks Cornelius in his funeral oration at the beginning of *Now About These Women*, but he does not listen to Jillker's muttered answer, "Genius is making a critic change his mind." Generally dismissed as an elephantine comedy and an almost total disaster, *Now About These Women* will probably survive to see a few opinions reversed. Coming from the hand of Bergman, master of spiritual torment and elegant comedy, it was calculated to disappoint: silent film comedy techniques; stretches of crude, almost custard-pie slapstick; stylishly flimsy settings, shot in delicious pale pastel colours and looking like some exquisite Puritanian brothel; Edwardian costumes for the men, Twenties flapper dresses for the women. Bergman, of course, is having fun in this film, revenging himself with amiable malice on the critics at whose hands he has so often suffered; but he has also made a film which isn't exactly what it seems. If all that one sees is the surface—a glittering, handsomely mounted French farce, intermittently funny but ponderously put together—then one is in exactly the same position as Cornelius, who never gets to see Felix and fixes instead on the trappings which attach themselves to genius.

There is a secret life in Felix's mansion, from which Cornelius is excluded, and which we can glimpse momentarily when the low sound of Felix's cello breaks into the summer afternoon, silencing the row of chattering, quarrelling women sitting on the terrace, and holding them entranced as if under a magic spell. The farcical episodes of Cornelius' humiliations, which form the surface of the film, leave small cracks through which this secret, inner life filters quietly. As in *Smiles of a Summer Night*, Bergman makes use of his ability to suspend a moment of time, so that a sequence of sustained farce suddenly crystallises into a mood of tranquil lyricism. The chaotic bravura of the firework sequence, for instance, in which the entire household goes crazy, suddenly changes gear with a long shot of Felix standing on a balcony, gently waving a handkerchief amid a blaze of coloured light while the women, suddenly stilled, wave quietly back. Moments like this, when Felix, or the sound of his cello, brings order to chaos, reveal Bergman's preoccupation with the nature of art, which exists independently of, and indifferent to, those who nourish it with their love; but it is only on a second viewing that one discovers the vein of deep emotion running through the film, and which is summed up in the beautiful, serene close-up of Adelaide's face after she has realised that Felix is dead and that she will not have to shoot him ("If I fail in my art, you are to kill me"). For Bergman, Art (Felix) is an intangible presence, never seen yet pervading everything, battening like a vampire on those who love it, and yet providing a meaning to life. Behind the goings-on aroused by Cornelius' visit, the house is peopled by quiet, wandering ghosts: sad, self-effacing and resigned like Adelaide, Tristan and Madame Tussaud—those who have sacrificed themselves for Felix; bright, eager and hopeful, like Isolde and Cecilia—those who wait to be used. They are part of the transience of things—a transience which Bergman quietly and sadly acknowledges.

Suitability: A.

T.M.

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