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THE VIRGIN SPRING

(JUNGFRUKALLAN)

Directed by INGMAR BERGMAN

Script by *Ulla Isaksson*

Director of Photography *Sven Nykvist*

Sets designed by *P. A. Lundgren*

Film Editor *Oscar Rosander*

Music composed by *Erik Nordgren*

Distributor — *Janus Films (U.S.A.)*

The Cast:

Herr Töre	<i>Max von Sydow</i>
Fru Märeta, Töre's wife	<i>Birgitta Valberg</i>
Ingeri, Töre's step-daughter	<i>Gunnel Lindblom</i>
Karin, Töre's daughter	<i>Birgitta Pettersson</i>
The slender herdsman	<i>Axel Düberg</i>
The mute herdsman	<i>Tor Isedal</i>
Beggar	<i>Allan Edwall</i>
Boy	<i>Ove Porath</i>
The old man	<i>Axel Slangus</i>
Frida, a serving woman	<i>Gudrun Brost</i>
Simon, a young peasant	<i>Oscar Ljung</i>
First farm-labourer	<i>Tor Borong</i>
Second farm-labourer	<i>Leif Forstenberg</i>

Running time 88 minutes

THE VIRGIN SPRING

Colin Young

The basis of Ulla Isaksson's script is a medieval folk-song titled "The Daughter of Töre Vänge." She has said that the film "as far as possible kept to the original story of the folk-song, which is at the same time both cruel and beautiful in its imagery and has both an uncompromising insight into human behavior and a Christian message." Bergman makes us aware of this dichotomy from the start. His film opens on a long, slowly moving shot of a wild-eyed girl (Ingeri) cooking over an open stove. As the camera pulls back we find that she is large with child. She presses her swollen body against a post and invokes her god Ödin (an ancient Viking deity). Elsewhere on the farm we meet the other members of the family and see the mistrust and contempt with which Ingeri must ride each day. And we meet the farmer's daughter, not any ordinary country girl but a princess of the woods, young and sprawling in her bed, revelling in the memory of her successes on the dance floor the night before. "Who did you dance with last night, Karin?" her mother asks severely. Karin ticks them off on her fingers — "I danced with him and him and him..." — each one a conquest, each one a promise for the future.

Thus the contrast between the two women, Ingeri and Karin, is complete — one used once too often and abandoned, the other fresh and virgin. This contrast is tied together by the girl's parents — praying before a crucifix which hangs in one of their barns. Herr Töre, the father,

prays in a sombre, ritualistic way but his wife's prayer has the aspect of a frightening intense penance. Reminding herself of the early Christian pain, she pours hot wax from the candle on to her wrist and bears the pain gladly, almost hungrily.

In five minutes we know the family in the farm. It is a hard, gaunt existence, emerging from an earlier paganism to a form of Christianity which has not yet moved into people's understanding, but which already involves rituals and submissions which are accepted. It is as a part of this ritual that Karin is sent through the forest to the church with candles for the Holy Virgin. It is here she meets the goatherds who, after sharing her lunch, run after her, throw her to the ground and rape her — each man holding her for the other, and then kill her brutally, senselessly, with a cudgel. Their young brother is a witness and, left alone with her body, tries hopelessly to cover it with earth.

Then with an almost biblical simplicity the story continues. The three goatherds arrive at Töre's house seeking shelter. It is only a matter of time before he discovers their guilt and exacts his revenge. (The scene in which he prepares for his ordeal is beautifully handled. Lighting a fire for a *sauna* he climbs a hill to find birch branches with which he will be whipped, after his bath. He finds a young tree and wrestles with it until it falls to the ground under his weight. This reminds us of the rape in the forest and prepares us for the bloodshed which will follow).

When they find Karin's body in the glade where it lies they fall about it and Töre prays to this strange God who has witnessed both the act and the revenge, and who has permitted them both. Töre cannot understand this, and yet he will build a church on that spot to cleanse his hands. It will be a church of stone and lime, not the rude wooden shrines which are all that is known in these parts. He walks over to the girl, they raise her in an embrace, and water springs up from where her body lay.

Much could be said about how all this works. Bergman treats his subject theatrically and somewhat coldly. Like *The Seventh Seal* the film is packed with important minutae — trivia in anyone else's work become here objects of importance — there for narrative not decorative effect. So we seem to find ourselves firmly rooted in the past, witness to a stark, shocking incident which illustrates an important moment in the development of belief — the kind of belief in the Christian God which is in many ways shocking in itself, but is essential to an orthodox reading of the Gospel. The goatherds' actions are shocking, Töre's revenge is shocking and God's apparent acceptance is shocking. But the three things must somehow be strung together to sustain belief. And this Bergman comes close to demonstrating. Max von Sydow's performance in the last scenes may not convince everyone — emotionally. But on the way to these scenes we shall have been moved many times, as when Bergman takes us completely by surprise. One such scene in-

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volves Karin and Ingeri, who, for a while, accompanies the younger girl on her pilgrimage. They meet a young farmer with whom Karin had danced the night before. He compliments her and ignores Ingeri. Ingeri turns away, loathing on her face, and we realize with a shock that this is perhaps the man who is the father of her child. Later, when Karin tries to apologize for the affection she showed this man and the joy she took in his compliment, Ingeri turns her away – “You cannot apologize to me.” This refusal is at once simple and inevitably final. There is a rift between them – the rift between virgin and bespoiled. The only way for Ingeri to be equal is for Karin to fall. And we now begin to believe that this is inevitable.

The performances are varied, but Birgitta Pettersson is amazingly convincing as the young girl. She is at first pretty and provocative with that kind of youthful promiscuity which seems to make all men her lovers – her father, the men on the adjoining farms...but not in the end the men who use her. But it is in the scene following the rape that she triumphs – showing the endless anguish of a stricken animal, the destruction of a part of beauty, a sadness which, had she lived, would never have left her, a loss which makes the revenge seem not only acceptable but inevitable.

Thus Bergman in the end succeeds where many lesser directors would fail. He has seized a tragic moment in Sweden's past and illustrated with it a beginning of Christian acceptance. It is, properly, the precursor to *The Seventh Seal* and should be considered as a long, often brilliant, preface to it. Perhaps even without such a direct display of violence it would have been a successful film, but, with it, it may shock people into a reaffirmation of their own beliefs or an understanding of someone else's. Thankfully it is not a film for *voyeurs*.

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THE ART FILM



Directed by
INGMAR BERGMAN

