

Document Citation

Title	A lesson in love
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Source	<i>Filmfacts</i>
Date	1960 Apr 01
Type	article
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	2
Subjects	
Film Subjects	En lektion i kärlek (A lesson in love), Bergman, Ingmar, 1954

A LESSON IN LOVE

SWEDISH (1953). Title Translation: "EN LEKTION I KARLEK." AN INGMAR BERGMAN FILM for SVENSK FILM-INDUSTRI. Released in the U.S. by JANUS FILMS. Directed and Written by INGMAR BERGMAN. Photography: MARTIN BODIN. Art Direction: P.A. LUNDGREN. Music: DAG WIREN. Editor: OSCAR ROSANDER. 95 Mins.

Marianne Erneman EVA DAHLBECK
 David Erneman GUNNAR BJORNSTRAND
 Suzanne YVONNE LOMBARD
 Nix Erneman HARRIET ANDERSSON
 Carl-Adam AKE GRONBERG
 Grandfather OLOF WINNERSTRAND
 Lise BIRGITTE REIMER
 Sam JOHN ELFSTROM
 Grandmother RENEE BJORLING
 Sister Lisa DAGMAR EBBESEN
 Traveling Salesman HELGE HAGERMAN
 Conductor GOSTA PRUZELIUS
 Clergyman SIGGE FURST
 Uncle Axel CARL STROM
 Hotel Manager ARNE LINDBLAD
 Porter TORSTEN LILLIECRONA
 Dancer YVONNE BROSSET



BJORNSTRAND and DAHLBECK

Synopsis

After fifteen years of marriage, a philandering Swedish gynecologist named David Erneman learns his wife Marianne is leaving him because of an affair he has been having with one of his patients. Furthermore, he learns she is leaving for Copenhagen to renew a pre-marital love affair with his best friend, a sculptor named Carl-Adam. Determined to win her back, David boards the same train she is taking and proceeds to rewoo his neglected wife. Nostalgically, he recalls the day

of her proposed marriage to Carl-Adam which had ended in a free-for-all when she had declared her love for David. Before he has finished his reminiscences, David has made his wife relive almost their entire life, including the problem of their awkward teenage daughter, Nix, who hates being a girl and would like to be surgically transformed into a boy. But Marianne remains resolute; and once in Copenhagen she greets Carl-Adam with open arms. However, when the three former friends visit a local night spot, Marianne shows her true feelings by wildly attacking a young girl who has made an obvious play for David. Once more the victorious husband, David leads his wife off for a second honeymoon.

Critique

TIME. "The most natural, robust and heartily funny of Ingmar Bergman's comedies... A riskily sophisticated satire on the tiny, interminable adventures of any Dagwood and every Blondie. Made in 1953, two years before Bergman's *Smiles of a Summer Night* summed up his ironic discussion of the domestic predicament, *A Lesson in Love* lacks the assurance and allegoric precision of that picture. Instead it is warm, accidental, lifelike, full of lucky hits, preposterous misses, and all sorts of surprises. A comedy of morals as well as manners, the film seems, like the Rorschach test, no more than an amusing game, but it soon develops some remarkable insights into the character and predicament of human beings.... Bergman displays a wide range of comedic accomplishments. He is a master of bedroom farce - not to mention bathroom humor, most of which is not translated in the subtitles. In a flashback to the couple's courtship, he pulls a hilariously rowdy switch on the old Tristan-Isolde routine, and follows it with an uproarious crescendo of crockery-busting buffoonery. Moreover, Bergman flashes a redoubtable power of cynical epigram ("Only impotent men are faithful, and they have unfaithful wives"). - And almost every character and scene is shaped by the cutting edge of his irony... All the effects and episodes are brilliant things, considered singly - and they must be considered singly because Bergman tells his story in such a manner that the moviegoer cannot guess, until the last moment, what each part of the jigsaw puzzle will signify in the completed picture. And when the picture is finished, it is still not complete. Several pieces seem to be missing, and several do not seem to fit in. The moviegoer is left with a nagging sense that the picture he has seen is really part of a larger picture. That, of course, is part of what Bergman means to say: one *Lesson* does not make a sentimental education." (3/28/60).

FILMS IN REVIEW. "Bergman wrote and directed this persiflage about marriage four or five years ago. But for the current Bergman vogue, it would never have been thought worth importing. It would have been better for Bergman if it hadn't been imported... [It contains] some adolescent dialogue about the perils of matrimony that is

relieved only by flashbacks revealing the no-sense-making past of husband and wife. One of these flashbacks is of a wedding party that becomes a brawl (a favorite, and infantile, symbol of Bergman's). What could be drearier? Eva Dahlbeck and Gunnar Bjornstrand are none too attractive. Nor is Yvonne Lombard as the tramp. In a pretentious little program note Bergman says this film 'is a comedy that might have become a tragedy, but everything turned out well and therefore it is a comedy.' It didn't turn out well for the audience, and if more films like this are imported into the US it won't turn out well for Bergman." *Louis Corbin (Feb. '60).*

SATURDAY REVIEW. "One of the more gratifying aspects of the movie world is the opportunity it often affords us to catch up on the work of an artist we particularly admire. This is especially true of the foreign film makers... Just a few months ago, New York was a Bergman festival, with no less than seven films by the redoubtable Swede playing simultaneously — films early and late, all contributing additional insights into the variety of his special but intriguing genius... *A Lesson in Love* is, for the most part, a gay romp, often hilariously funny, invariably witty, and serious only when reflecting upon the effect of marital infidelity on the young... Not much of a story perhaps; but Bergman, once again his own script writer, has threaded it with deliciously naughty dialogue, some wonderful farce comedy, and a good many telling jabs at the battle of the sexes. Although this is not yet the lyric Bergman of today, there is at least one sequence — a marvelous, silent scene in which an awkwardly adolescent girl attempts to choose between mother and father — that can stand with anything he has done in the full maturity of his powers. To alter a slogan that Paramount once made popular, 'If it's a Bergman picture, it's the best show in town.'" *Arthur Knight (1/23/60).*

THE N.Y. TIMES. "Any new film from Ingmar Bergman is a cinema event these days, in view of the interest stimulated by his *Wild Strawberries*, *The Magician* and *The Seventh Seal*. And more of the same should be excited by his latest to be shown here, *A Lesson in Love*. Even though it came early in the snowballing Bergman career, it reveals certain sparkling characteristics that have been striking in Mr. Bergman's themes and style. And, of course, it is on a subject of lively interest at which he excels. That subject, in broadest outline, is the complexity of love, the illusory quality of it and the paradoxes it often entails. It is a subject that Mr. Bergman expanded in his subsequent *Smiles of a Summer Night*, with more wit and satiric implication. But, for a warm-up, he got off nicely here... In the hands of a mundane scenarist and director, this could be — indeed, it has been — trivial material, suited to gags and leers. But Mr. Bergman plays around with it in such a clever and thought-provoking way that the emotional dilemma implicit in it has humor, wisdom and charm... Concern for a tomboyish daughter, the felicities of a dull domestic life, the vagrant conceits of masculine vanity —

all are deftly slipped into the film. And, as in all of his pictures, Mr. Bergman has used a cast that seems to act with inspired understanding — which means, of course, sympathy with him. Gunnar Bjornstrand and Eva Dahlbeck are the nimble, elliptical man and wife, playing around each other with delightfully meaningful intimacy. Harriet Andersson is their callow daughter — an amusingly agonized kid; Ake Gronberg is a gross and oafish artist, and Yvonne Lombard makes a cool, seductive miss. While the English subtitles may not do justice to the Swedish dialogue, they are apt. What is the moral? As with all pictures from Mr. Bergman, it is that love is — well, what do you think it is?" *Bosley Crowther (3/15/60).*

THE N.Y. HERALD TRIBUNE. "Delightful... Bergman's comedy is not of high manners nor of character, but rather a humor of philosophy like Schopenhauer giggling... It would dull some of Bergman's surprises to follow each twist and turn in the development of the deceptively simple situation. As always, he skips about in time, unfolding in flashbacks the viewpoints of his people and the origins of their present situation — he makes his camera do what too often is ploddingly told in explanatory dialogue. It is not the ultimate end that strikes Bergman as ironic or surprising, but rather the unpredictable means by which obvious ends are reached... It is not the technical devices such as his frequent flashbacks that make his skill so impressive, but the way he can flit from high comedy to near slapstick to wry disillusionment to scenes of gentle pathos. His step is not only nimble, but sure. This is what gives *Lesson* its peculiar airiness while keeping it solid. The most acid exchanges between husband and wife have an affectionate and tolerant undertone. Such a ridiculous set-to as the wedding party that turns into an engagement party is a gem in which he changes emotional key with dazzling speed. The fracas in the Copenhagen jazz joint is a high point of comedy, as hysterical as the wedding party but subtler in its progressions... His dialogue is witty even in English subtitles, which may or may not be passing along to us the savor of Bergman's original Swedish. It's enough to make one want to learn the language. And the acting is on the same luminous level one expects in Bergman's pictures... No one interested in fine films should miss even a minor Bergman, for if it did nothing else it would give bright insights into the man's major works." *Paul V. Beckley (3/15/60).*

VARIETY. "Light comedy... Bergman again shows he can make ideas quite entertaining filmically... He keeps this moving with shrewd insight glances into character. However, there is a tendency to go in for too much talk and epigrams on the frailties of love and marriage. But cohesive acting, knowing direction and the right balance between character and complications make this an above-average situation comedy. It could have arty theatre chances abroad on the Bergman name and the film's sparkle. It has too much talk for more general spotting. Technical credits are fine." *'Mosk' (Paris - 11/4/59).*