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SEASTROM and ANDERSSON

## WILD STRAWBERRIES

SWEDISH (1958). *Title Translation: "SMULTRON-STALLET."* A SVENSK FILMINDUSTRIE PRODUCTION. AN INGMAR BERGMAN FILM. Released in the U.S. by JANUS FILMS. Producer: ALLAN EKELUND. Directed and Written by INGMAR BERGMAN. Photography: GUNNAR FISCHER. Art Direction: GITTAN GUSTAFSSON. Costumes: MILLIE STROM. Editor: OSCAR ROSANDER. Music: ERIK NORDGREN. Swedish Dialogue, English Titles. 90 Mins.

Isak Borg . . . VICTOR SEASTROM (SJOSTROM)  
The Two Saras . . . . . BIBI ANDERSSON  
Marianne . . . . . INGRID THULIN  
Evald . . . . . GUNNAR BJORNSTRAND  
Agda . . . . . JULLAN KINDAHL  
Anders . . . . . FOLKE SUNDQUIST  
Viktor . . . . . BJORN BJELVENSTAM  
Isak's Mother . . . . . NAIMA WIFSTRAND  
Mrs. Alman . . . . . GUNNEL BROSTROM  
Isak's Wife . . . . . GERTRUD FRIDH  
Her Lover . . . . . AKE FRIDELL

and

Aunt: SIF RUUD. Alman: GUNNAR SJOBERG.  
Akerman: MAX VON SYDOW. Uncle Aron:  
YNGVE NORDWALL. Sigfrid: PER SJOSTRAND.  
Sigbritt: GIO PETRE. Charlotta: GUNNEL  
LINDBLOM. Angelica: MAUD HANSSON. Mrs.  
Akerman: ANNE-MARI WIMAN. Anna: EVA  
NOREE. The Twins: LENA BERGMAN and  
MONICA EHRLING. Hagbart: PER SKOGS-  
BERG. Benjamin: GORAN LUNDQUIST. Pro-  
moter: PROFESSOR HELGE WULFF.

### Synopsis

Early on the day he is to be honored by his university at Lund, the aged and eminent Professor Isak Borg is awakened by a strange and frightening dream in which his own corpse tries to draw him into its coffin. Disturbed by the nightmare, he decides to motor to Lund and revisit the scenes of his youth. He is accompanied by his daughter-in-law Marianne who reveals that she is planning to leave her husband because he refuses to accept her unborn child. She also reveals that she considers her husband's heartlessness the direct result of Dr. Borg's own selfish, ruthless and egotistical nature. Although outwardly unmoved, the doctor begins to examine his past and, when they

stop at the summer house of his youth, he daydreams of the place where he once picked wild strawberries and where he lost the beautiful Sara to his more romantic brother. The doctor's reveries are disrupted by another Sara, a young hitchhiker who bears a striking resemblance to Doctor Borg's first love. The girl and her two male companions join the doctor and Marianne and later, after a near fatal accident, they pick up two more passengers—a neurotic and pretentiously intellectual married couple. But their constant bickering becomes unbearable and Marianne orders them from the car. In the comparative peace that follows, Doctor Borg lapses into nightmarish dreams in which he is castigated by both a medical board of inquiry and his faithless wife. After a brief visit with his 96-year-old mother, Dr. Borg arrives in Lund to receive his citation. But the events and dreams of the day have shattered his peace and he looks upon his laurel wreath as the symbol of his friendless life. That night, after making a tentative effort to establish a friendly relationship with those around him, he once more escapes from his loneliness by dreaming of his childhood.

### Critique

SATURDAY REVIEW. "Although *Smiles of a Summer Night* and *The Seventh Seal* [See FF '58, p. 194] have attracted a certain amount of attention from those who regularly patronize their local art cinemas, the name of Ingmar Bergman is not so well known as it ought to be, and probably will be. Bergman is a forty-year old Swedish director who has written most of the twenty movies he has made—a peculiarly fortunate combination of abilities that allows him to express exactly what almost all other movies, with their multiplicity of craftsmen and egos, lack—a sense of personal vision. In Paris and other European centers, Bergman has already been taken up as an important cultural and artistic phenomenon... I hesitate to say that Bergman's films are for the connoisseur, for that implies that their appeal is snobbish and even esoteric... There is no real reason why reasonably large audiences shouldn't find his movies stimulating. They have enormous visual appeal, are excellently acted, and his themes are universal rather than national or regional. They often do have the dark, gloomy preoccupations that Swedish films, not to mention Strindberg's plays, have exhibited in the past, but the modern movie can probably use a good dose of gloom about man's spiritual condition... In *Wild Strawberries* the photography is not only impeccably professional, it is exquisite, worth seeing even if the story failed to interest—something hard to imagine... Sjostrom's performance is remarkably subtle and sensitive...

The most precious commodity in the movie is what Bergman brings; there's no way of pricing it. The framework is deceptively simple... But within the frame are fascinating complexities, minglings of dream and reality, of past and present. The time shifts and backflashes, although on occasion cumbersome, are achieved with lucidity... Bergman's father was a preacher, and because Bergman's work includes the personal element, religious symbols tend to recur in his stories, sometimes adding to their obscurity. His preoccupation with the symbolic detail makes all that he does interesting, even haunting, but probably detracts from the popular appeal of his movies. Nevertheless, he is not so obsessed with his personal message that he fails to communicate, even to entertain. There isn't much doubt that Bergman has, almost single-handed, brought back the Swedish film to its once high eminence. As more of his pictures are shown here, evaluations of his meanings and importance will grow more precise. Meanwhile it is time to know him. *Wild Strawberries* makes a fine acquaintance." *Hollis Alpert* (3/21/59).

THE N.Y. TIMES. "Elusive... If any of you thought you had trouble understanding what Ingmar Bergman was trying to convey in his beautifully poetic and allegorical Swedish film, *The Seventh Seal*, wait until you see his *Wild Strawberries*... This one is so thoroughly mystifying that we wonder whether Mr. Bergman himself knew what he was trying to say. As nearly as we can make out—and, frankly, we found *The Seventh Seal* a tough but comparatively lucid and extraordinarily stimulating film—the purpose of Mr. Bergman in this virtually surrealist exercise is to get at a comprehension of the feelings and the psychology of an aging man... The consensus of those who have known him seems to be that he has been standoffish and emotionally cold... It doesn't carry much conviction in the light of the sweet and charming character of the old man portrayed by Victor Seastrom... He is so real and sensitive and poignant, so winning of sympathy in every way, that Mr. Bergman's apparent explanation doesn't make sense. This is not to say, however, that the film doesn't have its brilliant scenes and its beautifully touching moments, its tatters of sheer nostalgia. These, with Mr. Seastrom, are most rewarding. So are the straight performances of Ingrid Thulin and Bibi Andersson... Mr. Bergman, being a poet with the camera, gets some grand, open, sensitive images, but he has not conveyed full clarity in this film. And the English subtitles are not much help." *Bosley Crowther* (6/23/59).

TIME. "Weirdly beautiful... Ingmar Bergman is one of the most peculiarly gifted and demoniacally creative moviemakers of modern times—'a gothic Dante,' one European critic called him... Like most of Bergman's pictures, *Wild Strawberries* is smashingly beautiful to see. He works in chiaroscuro—the light expresses the innocence of the doctor's youth, the dark describes the moral gloom of his old age. More important, Bergman employs the language of dream and symbol with an eerie, sleep-talking sureness; some of the old man's dreams are as believable and profound as any ever filmed. The trouble, on the whole, is that Bergman has a far stronger affinity for the eternal

symbol than he does for the living moment, more feeling for ideas than for people. He makes his pictures more as a philosopher conducts an argument than as an artist tells a story. And when he cannot make his ideas clear in action or vision, he does not hesitate to interrupt the flow of the film and say what he means in words, words, words. Bergman's problem seems to be the same as his protagonist's: as an artist he lives too much in his mind, too little in his feelings; he has hot ideas and a cold heart. For all its involutions and pedantries, the film has a strong popular appeal, partly because of its theme—the discovery of the heart—but mostly because of Actor Sjoström, who gives a magnificent performance as the doctor. He is Life itself, the unraised Lazarus, the failed Faust." (6/13/59).



BERGMAN

THE N.Y. HERALD TRIBUNE. "If one hankers for a change from the customary story-telling movie and does not bridle at the inscrutable, finding comfort rather in the fact others are sometimes as mystified as he—in other words, if one can accept the unknown as an influence in man's life, taking no umbrage at the fact no big questions are answered—I can recommend without reservations Ingmar Bergman's *Wild Strawberries*... While it is one thing in its total effect on the imagination, it is made up of many things. Its content is unusually diverse. As a matter of fact, on re-running it in one's mind, one observes that it contains many situations which sum up in a few brief sequences the whole content of some films... Thus, one could say that Bergman's film is most striking because of the richness of its content, but on the other hand, how avoid at the same time commenting on the marvelous economy of his means of expressing it?... What is most important is the incredible artistry of Bergman's effects, which are never mere exhibitionism... His use of lighting to separate the sun-bright images of the old man's youth in the summer house are like overexposed snapshots of a gay, crackling, petticoat-whispering past, while the old man is always underexposed, darkly in the shadows. Bergman's use of sound and silence is so strong it can shock visual im-

ages. He has obviously made use of the fact that sound goes more swiftly to the nerve centers than things seen. This man has made a movie out of such a wealth of photographic images of unusual power that if such were cut into more conventional films, a few of them would be enough to haunt a whole movie. His *Wild Strawberries*, if nothing else, is a visual adventure, and bits of it will cling in the memory a long time." *Paul V. Beckley (6/23/59)*.

VARIETY. "Personal and profound... Sometimes talks too much in philosophical asides, but it remains a searching pictorial analysis of a man's life... Nightmares, dreams and reminiscences are expertly blended as space and time are broken to work on the various levels of the man's thoughts... Expert directorial touches and notations of director Bergman, and the dignified miming of oldtime director Seastrom plus other fine thespic additions, make this an offbeater with good U.S. arty chances." *'Mosk' (Venice Film Festival-9/24/58)*.

FILMS IN REVIEW. "A confused and unsatisfactory film... From the chatter of Bergman apologists here and abroad I gather the one-day events in the scenario are intended to be symbolical representations of Borg's entire life. If so they represent it inadequately and incomprehensibly. And the overt symbolisms in *Wild Strawberries* are no better. The coffin that spills out in the first dream is merely one of the more hackneyed of poor old surrealism's few devices. As for the Sign of the Stigmata which the Bergman faithful descry in Professor Borg's hand, it is *post hoc* babbling... Let us leave Bergman's confusions and go to Seastrom's art\*... Seastrom gives a performance that is acting art at its maximum. All students of acting should see it... There is evidence in *Wild Strawberries* that Seastrom, realizing Bergman's script was a lost cause, devoted himself to making one last gift to life—i.e., to utilizing a poorly conceived role to give audiences an insight into the mental world of the very old: their detachment from all passion—even from the desire to live and the fear of death; their pain as well as pleasure from memory; their unjudging clear vision of the impassioned young; their illusion-free awareness and whole-hearted acceptance of their *actual* self; their complete resignation to the imminence of death. Such eschatological things are rarely on motion picture screens—or on the stage, or even in books. Bergman may have wanted *Wild Strawberries* to be a fitting crown to Seastrom's career, but it was Seastrom himself who made it so." *Henry Hart (April '59)*.

\* 79-year-old Victor Seastrom (Sjostrom) is one of the leading figures of the Swedish cinema, having been active as producer, director and actor for over 50 years. From 1910 to the early 1920's he directed over 40 Swedish films, including the classic *Korkarlen* (known in the U.S. as both *The Phantom Horse* and *Thy Soul Shall Bear Witness*). In 1925 he came to Hollywood and in eight years directed, among others, Lon Chaney's *He Who Gets Slapped*, *The Tower of Lies* with Norma Shearer, *The Divine Woman* with Greta Garbo, and two films with Lillian Gish—*The Scarlett Letter* and *The Wind*. Difficulties with American producers led to his return to Sweden in 1931. Since 1945 he has served as Creative Adviser to Svensk Filmindustrin and has been one of the forces behind Ingmar Bergman's rise to fame.