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BRINK OF LIFE

SWEDISH (1958).* *Title Translation: "NARA LIVET."* A NORDISK TONEFILM PRODUCTION. Presented in the U.S. by INTER-AMERICAN FILMS and JEROME BALSAM FILMS. Distributor: AJAY FILM COMPANY Director: INGMAR BERGMAN. Original Screenplay: ULLA ISAKSSON. Photography: MAX WILEN. Sets: BIBI LINDSTROM. Editor: CHARLOLOV SKEPPSTEDT. Sound: LENNART SVENSSON. Technical Consultant: DR. LARS ENGSTROM. Swedish Dialogue, English Subtitles. 82 Mins.

Stina Andersson EVA DAHLBECK
Cecilia Ellius INGRID THULIN
Hjordis BIBI ANDERSSON
Sister Brita ... BARBRO HIORT AF ORNAS
Anders Ellius ERLAND JOSEPHSON
Harry Andersson MAX VON SYDOW
Chief Doctor GUNNAR SJOBERG
Social Worker .. ANN-MARIE GYLLENSPETZ

Synopsis

A young wife named Cecilia Ellius is rushed by her husband to the emergency ward of a Swedish hospital. Only a few months pregnant, she hemorrhages badly and loses her child. When the anesthesia wears off, she finds herself in a semi-private room with two other women. One, Stina Andersson, is a normal, happy woman eagerly awaiting the birth of her first child. The other, Hjordis, is a young, petulant, unmarried girl who, after an unsuccessful abortion attempt, resents the life that still stirs within her. Her boyfriend refuses to consider marriage and wants her to attempt another abortion. For the unhappy Cecilia the loss of her baby is one more indication of her failure as a wife; completely despondent, she rejects her husband and suggests they divorce. Late that night, Stina is wheeled into the delivery room. But her last birth-throes are too hard and her baby dies. Stina's tragic loss deeply affects both of the other women; Cecilia agrees to attempt a reconciliation with her husband, and little Hjordis finds the courage to call her mother and gain permission to return home for the birth of her child.

Critique

THE N.Y. HERALD TRIBUNE. "A remarkable expression of the affirmation of life...A deceptively simple and emotionally hard Ingmar Bergman picture which stays for its entire length in a Swedish maternity ward and never lets up its tension, which being distinctively Bergman is a blend of mysticism, philosophy, and stinging drama. It is in Bergman's naturalistic style, which obscures none of his philosophical or mystic thinking, although the emphasis on the physical, often harsh (probably more so to men, I suspect, than to women) details of life in this exclusive feminine world may at times shove the mind away from deeper, spiritual considerations...The picture opens with a grueling physical and spiritual struggle in the soul of a woman during and after she loses her child by miscarriage...From a technical standpoint one must find it astonishing that Bergman starts off on such a high emotional level, which under ordinary circumstances must lead to an inevitable sag, but he holds the suspense up through brilliant incidents of character-



ANDERSSON, AF ORNAS and DAHLBECK

ization, subtle bits of psychological insight under stress, and at the climax sweeps everything up to an-unendurable pitch in a birth scene in which the earthy and glad-hearted woman loses her child. It is as stark an expression of tragedy as could well be imagined in such a naturalistic style. And then it is hard to believe how satisfying is his quiet, warm denouement in which the girl played by Bibi Andersson learns from these tragedies what to do about her illegitimate child. ...The acting is perfect...Here, too, it is Bergman's imagination and eye and camera that put every facial nuance so inevitably in place that nothing, not one blink of an eye, is meaningless or superfluous...There is the sure sense of contrast, the clear balance of character with character. Miss Thulin's almost morbidly introspective woman is balanced by Miss Dahlbeck's jovous but ultimately frustrated mother, and both by Miss Andersson's elfin, rather spoiled, but irresistibly charming waif...And all three are set against the grave and infinitely patient nurse played by Barbro Hiort af Ornas. It is no surprise that at Cannes last year acting awards went to all four, in addition to the director's award given to Bergman." *Paul V. Beckley (11/9/59).*

SATURDAY REVIEW. "Those who tend to worry about obscurity in the films of Ingmar Bergman may take heart from *Brink of Life*...It bears little or no relation to other movies of his that we have seen, tells a perfectly clear and simple story, and if it deals with any mysteries it delves into none that have not been dealt with before...Bergman's direction is economical and understanding but the peculiar fascination of other of his movies is missing in this one. The reason for this seems fairly obvious. The screenplay was written by Ulla Isaksson, and not by Bergman, and the movies of his that we have most admired were of his own authorship. One can understand why he lent himself to this undertaking. It is a worthwhile story — although it does slightly resemble *The Best of Everything* in a maternity ward — and it even poses a rather unanswerable question: why does life choose some women for child-bearing and leave others barren? No answer, of course. Merely pathos.

* At the 1958 Cannes Film Festival Ingmar Bergman won the Best Director award for *Brink of Life*. And the Best Actress award was shared by the film's leading actresses — Eva Dahlbeck, Ingrid Thulin, Bibi Andersson and Barbro Hiort af Ornas.