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ZOETROPE 5

THE FILMS OF (INGMAR BERGMAN)

SPECIAL PROGRAMS:

THREE RARE EARLY FILMS

1973  
May 7: NIGHT IS MY FUTURE (NUSIK I MÖRKER)  
May 14: THE DEVIL'S WANTON (FANGELSE)  
May 21: TO JOY (TILL GLADJE)

Accustomed as we are to the attitudes and axioms of the politique des auteurs which has permeated critical thinking about films for the past 15 years, it is something of a chock to discover that the director who is generally considered to be one of the two or three greatest auteurs of this period--who has earned a well-deserved reputation for making highly personal films suffused with his own very particular anxieties, instantly recognizable by their notable style--one of the most obviously powerful auteurs of the fifties and sixties, Ingmar Bergman, began his career as a filmmaker nearly thirty years ago with a long succession of films which are remembered now mainly for their failures. In other words, Ingmar Bergman served an extended period of journeymanship during which he slowly and with considerable effort learned his craft. Although it was certainly never the fashion before the politique des auteurs to grant instant recognition to young filmmakers, few directors, indeed, during the short history of the medium progressed as slowly as Bergman. If anything, this is to his credit, and more important, to the credit of the Swedish film industry which supported him during this period. Nevertheless, with the distortive benefit of hindsight, the Bergman films of the forties, since they seem so far away from the films of the fifties or sixties (or seventies), pale utterly by comparison. It was not until the early sixties that Bergman dropped the fiction that as he used to say, "film is my mistress, but the stage is my wife." That comment, often repeated, reveals an interesting awareness on his part that -- despite his fascination with the medium of film he understood that he had not always succeeded as he might have wanted to.

Of the ten films he directed between 1945 and 1950 (see filmography) only the tenth, Summer Interlude, has achieved a lasting reputation: for Bergman and for historians of Bergman's work it marks a new beginning and the films which follow it are clearly demarcated from the films which precede it. There is a common critical tendency (evident among film critics especially) to discover a kind of forced unity in an artist's work which reveals almost miraculously--qualities in earlier films which were mysteriously hidden at the time the films first appeared and which become evident only with the benefit of hindsight. Bergman certainly has been subjected to this kind of critical distortion no less than other filmmakers. Although it is undeniably true that there are bits and pieces of these earlier films which we can now declare confidently foreshadow later, greater achievements, I think it is far more significant to notice how difficult was Bergman's development as a filmmaker: this sets his career apart from most. No one for example, who has ever seen one Fellini film can look at his first film, Variety Lights without being struck by the knowledge that the entire Fellinian universe is available there in embryo. No so with Bergman's early films. It takes a certain will on the part of the observer to link NIGHT IS MY FUTURE, for example, with SHAME.



Vernon Young, who is without peer as an analyst of Bergman's early development, notices that "in the first thirteen film scripts Bergman wrote and/or directed" six suicides were attempted

four girls were seduced by much older men

one wife died from the alleged neglect of her husband

three children perished

three wives and one sexual rival were murdered in fantasy

three abortions occurred (apart from references in Port of Call)

and of the young men who serve as nominal heroes two were crippled,

one a homicidal maniac and a number certainly infirm of character." The frenzied melodramatic character of the early films is certainly clear, then. Young ascribes it in part to a phenomenon he calls "spectator neurosis" which he sees as characteristic of the Swedish ethos of the forties and directly connected with Seden's neutral stance during World War II. In general this makes sense, I suppose, but it seems to me that the character of Bergman's journeymanhood is owed at least as much to his inability to free himself from filmic conventions as it is to his undeniably strong connection with the Swedish ethos. Yet that "spectator neurosis" comes back to haunt again specifically in The Silence and Shame and can do good service in explaining the tone of many of Bergman's other films from The Seventh Seal to The Passion. It is less serviceable I think in untangling the confused, contrived, and strident melodrama of the early films.

NIGHT IS MY FUTURE, despite its mawkish plot offers a few moments, notably with Mai Zetterling, and in it we can see Bergman experimenting with some cinematic tools which he will use later to good effect. THE DEVIL'S WANTON is probably the best respected of this group of early films, many critics having been impressed with its quasi-Pirandellian framework. But that device doesn't seem to be especially helpful here and when we look through that frame we are confronted with that same melodramatic flourish. TO JOY, in addition to sharing with the other films a mawkish mood, simplistic motivations, and a thin tone is further hampered by its dependence on Beethoven's symphony for its main effect. However, what fascinates in all these films is our consciousness of the slow, almost methodical working-out of problems of narration, character, scene, and montage--all those very wooden technical questions which are seldom if ever raised about Bergman's later films, possibly because he had the indulgence to learn his lessons slowly during the forties. Finally, let it be said that the mood for these films, as unintentionally comic as it may seem today, certainly owes at least as much to an international style common in the forties as it does to Bergman's moody artistic adolescence. It is a problem that must be overcome as much with Italian neorealist films of the period as with Bergman.

Vernon Young describes this period of Bergman's career in language which often has reference to a classic Lutheran obsession with the Devil. If we accept this metaphor of Bergman's consciousness, then his journeymanhood is a period in which he is discovering slowly that his personal struggle with the devil and death must be displayed in a different way. The phenomenological manifestations of the devil--murder, suicide, physical suffering, and blindness--are relatively futile images since they have become so common. Bergman's genius lies in discovering methods to picture **that mortal combat in moods and emotions, atmospheres and characters.** Once the melodrama is excised, once he has the confidence to make films about feelings rather than events, he has found his special province. His eventless, narrowly focussed films of the sixties are infinitely more powerful than these films of the forties with all their calculated effects, dramatic events, and exaggerated characters.



**NIGHT IS MY FUTURE (MUSIK I MÖRKER: Music in Darkness):**

1947. Director: Ingmar Bergman. Script: Dagmar Edqvist from her own novel. Photography: Goran Strindberg. Sets: P.A. Lundgren. Music: Erland von Koch. Editing: Lennart Wallen. Production manager: Allan Ekelund. Producer: Lorens Marmstedt. Production: Terrafilm. Running time: 90 minutes. Swedish premiere: January 17, 1948. Not distributed in the U.S.

CAST: Mai Zetterling (Ingrid Olofsdotter), Birger Malmsten (Bengt Vildeke), Olof Winnerstrand (the pastor), Bengt Eklund (Ebbe), Naima Wifstrand (Mrs. Schroder), Bibi Skoglund (Agneta), Hilda Bergstrom (Lovisa), Douglas Hage (Kruge), Gunnar Bjornstrand (Klasson), Ake Claesson, John Elfstrom, Sven Lindberg, Bengt Logardt, Marianne Gyllenhammar, Barbro Flodquist, Ulle and Rune Andreasson.

**THE DEVIL'S WANTON (FANGELSE: Prison):**

1949. Director: Ingmar Bergman. Script: Bergman. Photography: Goran Strindberg. Sets: P.A. Lundgren. Music: Erland von Koch. Editing: Lennart Wallen. Producer: Lorens Marmstedt. Production: Terra film. Running time: 80 minutes. Swedish premiere: March 19, 1949. Not distributed in the U.S.

CAST: Doris Svedlund (Birgitta-Carolina), Birger Malmsten (Tomas), Eva Henning (Sofi), Hasse Keman (Martin Grande, film director), Stig Olin (Peter), Irma Christenson (Linnea), Anders Henrikson (Paul), Marianne Hofgren (Mrs. Bohlin), Carl-Henrik Fant (Arne), Inger Juel (Greta), Curt Masreliez (Alf), Ake Fridell (Magnus), Bibi Lindquist (Anna), Arne Ragneborn (Her lover).

**TO JOY (TILL GLÄDJE):**

1949. Director: Ingmar Bergman. Script: Bergman. Photography: Gunnar Fischer. Sets: Nils Svenwall. Music: from Mozart, Mendelssohn, Smetana, Beethoven (Egmont overture, 1st and 9th symphonies). Editing: Oscar Rosander. Production manager: Allan Ekelund. Production: Svensk Filmindustri. Swedish premiere: February 20, 1950. Not distributed in the US.

CAST: Mai-Britt Nilsson (Martha), Stig Olin (Stig Eriksson), Victor Sjöström (Sonderby), Birger Malmsten (Marcel), John Ekman (Mikael Bro), Margit Carlquist (Nelly, his wife), Sif Ruud (Stina), Rune Stylander (Persson), Erland Josephson (Bertil), Georg Skarstedt (Anker), Berit Holmström (Lisa), Björn Montin (Lasse), Carin Swenson, Svea Holm (Two women), Svea Holst, Agda Helin (nurses), Maud Hyttenberg (salesgirl).

Special thanks to Adam Reilly for his help in obtaining prints of NIGHT IS MY FUTURE and THE DEVIL'S WANTON and to Telefilm for TO JOY. Thanks as well to Janus films for their permission and aid.

Films Directed by Bergman which have not been included in the Retrospective (none of these films is presently available in the U.S. or U.K. Only one or two of them were ever distributed in English-speaking countries.)

1945: CRISIS

1946: IT RAINS ON OUR LOVE

1947: SHIP TO INDIA

1950: THIS CAN'T HAPPEN HERE.

1967: "Daniel" episode of STIMULANTIA.

Films written by Bergman, directed by others):

1944: TORMETN (Alf Sjöberg). Distributed in the U.S. by Janus Films.

1947: WOMAN WITHOUT A FACE (Gustaf Molander)

1948: EVA (Gustaf Molander)

1950: WHILE THE CITY SLEEPS. (Lars-Eric Kjellgren).

1951: DIVORCED. (Gustaf Molander)

1956: THE LAST COUPLE OUT (Alf Sjöberg)

1961: PLEASURE GARDEN (Alf Kjellin)

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