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BERLIN FEST

LA CASA DEL SORRISO (HOUSE OF SMILES) (ITALIAN)

A Titanus Distribuzione release of a Titanus Distribuzione-Scena Intl. production. Produced by Giovanna Romagnoli, Augusto Caminito. Executive producer, Pino Auriemma. Directed by Marco Ferreri. Screenplay, Ferreri, Liliana Betti, Antonino Marino; camera (Kodak color), Franco Di Giacomo; editor, Dominique B. Martin; music, Bruno Guarnera, Henri Aguel; art direction, Ferreri. Reviewed at Titanus screening room, Feb. 13, 1991. (Competing in Berlin Film Festival.) Running time: 100 MIN.

Adelina Ingrid Thulin
Andrea Dado Ruspoli
Lawyer Vincenzo Cannavale
Rosy Francesca Antonelli
Dr. Peri Caterina Casini
Esmeralda Elisabeth Kaza
Elvira Maria Mercader

Also with: Nuccia Fumo, Nunzia Fumo, Lucia Vasini, Rosalina Neri, Mohamed Kamara, Mimi Felixine.

More restrained than many of Marco Ferreri's films, "House Of Smiles" has just enough transgression to alienate family audiences, while it lacks the blistering irony and bitterness of the director's best arthouse work. Theme of the 41st Berlin Film Festival Golden Bear winner probably will keep it from scoring at the domestic boxoffice.

A hot love affair between 70-year-olds in a rest home turns into an offbeat, well-intentioned, occasionally banal comedy, the kind of film in which everybody over 60 is cheerful and generous, and everybody under 40 grumpy and grasping.

Adelina, courageously portrayed with indomitable good humour by Swedish actress and director Ingrid Thulin, is an independent oldster. Her son (born out of wedlock) is dead, and her daughter-in-law has just got her

hands on his inheritance, leaving Adelina a pauper.

Still an attractive woman, she cedes to the genteel courtship of another resident, Andrea (played with irresistible charm by playboy-prince Dado Ruspoli).

Lack of privacy in the home leads Adelina and Andrea to hold their (tastefully suggested) trysts in a brightly painted camper, the property of a community of black immigrant workers who live nearby. The blacks are portrayed as generous, amorously inclined and quick to dance.

Both Ruspoli and Thulin are very human presences and reasonably attractive, a fact that considerably mutes the shock value of sex over 60. Much more scandalous — but far too predictable — is the indifference and cruelty of the bored doctors and attendants, who gang up on the happy couple. To "calm them down," they steal Adelina's dentures. It doesn't matter to Andrea, but it's a tragedy for the vain lady.

She finally gets hold of a pair of vampire-fang teeth that bring her smile back, and the afternoons in the camper begin again. But the lovers soon decide to go separate ways with the same strained optimism they've always shown. Adelina drives off with her black friends for some unknown destination, and film ends on a note of puzzling fantasy.

Pic's best qualities are the details Ferreri spotlights, such as Andrea's dandyism or his skill at playing the "Arab guitar." Elizabeth Kaza has a splendid cameo as his chronically ill wife, a feisty old Hungarian countess.

A few characters even manage to burst through the pic's heavy-handed thesis that old age is dignified and lovable, and they

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become believable people. Technical credits are adequate.

— Yung.