

## Document Citation

Title	<b>Smiles of a summer night</b>
Author(s)	Pauline Kael
Source	<i>Art Film Publications</i>
Date	1962
Type	program note
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	2
Subjects	Bergman, Ingmar (1918-2007), Uppsala, Uppland, Sweden
Film Subjects	Sommarnattens leende (Smiles of a summer night), Bergman, Ingmar, 1955



worked — but she hasn't really won much. She caught him because he gave up; they both know he's defeated. It's a bitter little victory. *Smiles* is a tragi-comedy; the man who thought he "was great in guilt and in glory" falls — he's "only a bumpkin". This is a defeat we can all share — for have we not all been forced to face ourselves as less than we hoped to be? There is no lesson, no moral — the women's faces do not tighten with virtuous endurance (the setting is too unreal for endurance to be plausible). The glorious old Mrs. Armfeldt (Naima Wifstrand) tells us that she can teach her daughter nothing — or, as she puts it, "We can never save a single person from a single suffering — and that's what makes us despair."

Bergman has worked in two major styles that parallel the two great early traditions of Swedish films: his "black" films — *The Naked Night* (also known as *Sawdust and Tinsel*), *The Seventh Seal*, *Wild Strawberries*, *The Face* (or *The Magician*), *Through A Glass Darkly*, et al. — which suggest derivations from the work of Victor Sjöström, and his "rose" or "pink" films which suggest derivations from the sophisticated erotic comedies of Mauritz Stiller (a style which became known in this country at one remove — through the films of Ernst Lubitsch). *Smiles of a Summer Night* was the culmination of Bergman's "rose" style and he has not returned to it. (*The Seventh Seal*, perhaps his greatest "black" film, was also set in a remote period.) The Swedish critic Rune Waldekranz has written that *Smiles of a Summer Night* "wears the costume of the fin de siècle period for visual emphasis of the erotic comedy's fundamental premise — that the step between the sublime and the ridiculous in love is a short one, but nevertheless one that a lot of people stub their toe on. Although benefiting from several ingenious slapstick situations, *Smiles of a Summer Night* is a comedy in the most important meaning of the word. It is an arabesque on an essentially tragic theme, that of man's insufficiency, at the same time as it wittily illustrates the belief expressed fifty years ago by Hjalmar Söderberg that the only absolutes in life are 'the desire of the flesh and the incurable loneliness of the soul.'"

Copyright 1962,  
ART FILM PUBLICATIONS,  
Box 19652,  
Los Angeles 19, Calif.

## SURF THEATRE

IRVING at 46th -- SAN FRANCISCO

# THE ART FILM

## SMILES OF A SUMMER NIGHT

Directed by  
INGMAR BERGMAN





## SMILES OF A SUMMER NIGHT (*Sommarnattens Leende*)

Written and directed by ..... Ingmar Bergman  
Photography ..... Gunnar Fischer  
Music ..... Erik Nordgren  
Sets ..... P. A. Lundgren

### CAST

Fredrik Egerman, attorney ..... Gunnar Bjornstrand  
Anne Egerman, his young wife ..... Ulla Jacobsson  
Desiree Armfeldt, the actress ..... Eva Dahlbeck  
Count Malcolm ..... Jarl Kulle  
The Countess, Charlotte Malcolm ..... Margit Carlquist  
Petra, the maid ..... Harriet Andersson  
Henrik Egerman, the divinity student ..... Bjorn Bjelvenstam  
Mrs. Armfeldt ..... Naima Wifstrand  
Frid, the groom ..... Ake Fridell  
Desiree's maid ..... Gull Natorp

*Running time: 108 minutes*

Filmed 1955; GRAND PRIX as best comedy, Cannes, 1956; opened in the U.S. in January 1958.

## SMILES OF A SUMMER NIGHT

film notes by *Pauline Kael*

Late in 1955 Ingmar Bergman made a nearly perfect work — the exquisite carnal comedy *Smiles of a Summer Night*. It was the distillation of elements he had worked with for several years in the 1952 *Secrets of Women* (originally called *The Waiting Women*), the 1953 *A Lesson in Love*, and the early 1955 *Dreams*; these episodic comedies of infidelity are like early attempts or drafts. They were all set in the present, and the themes were plainly exposed; the dialogue, full of arch epigrams, was often clumsy, and the ideas, like the settings, were frequently depressingly middle-class and novelettish. Structurally, they were sketchy and full of flashbacks. There were scattered lovely moments, as if Bergman's eye were looking ahead to the visual elegance of *Smiles of a Summer Night*, but the plot threads were still woolly. *Smiles of a Summer Night* was made after Bergman directed a stage production of *The Merry Widow*, and he gave the film a turn-of-the-century setting. Perhaps it was this distance that made it possible for him to create a work of art out of what had previously been mere clever ideas. He not only tied up the themes in the intricate plot structure of a love roundelay, but in using the lush period setting, he created an atmosphere that saturated the themes. The film is bathed in beauty, removed from the banalities of short skirts and modern-day streets and shops, and, removed in time, it draws us *closer*.

Bergman found a high style within a set of boudoir farce conventions: in *Smiles of a Summer Night* boudoir farce becomes lyric poetry. The sexual chases and the round dance are romantic, nostalgic: the coy bits of feminine plotting are gossamer threads of intrigue. The film becomes an elegy to transient love: a gust of wind and the whole vision may drift away.

There are four of the most beautiful and talented women ever to appear in one film: as the actress, the great Eva Dahlbeck, appearing on stage, giving a house party and, in one inspired suspended moment, singing *Freut Euch des Lebens*; the impudent love-loving maid, Harriet Andersson — as a blonde, but as opulent and sensuous as in her other great roles; Margit Carlquist as the proud, unhappy countess; Ulla Jacobsson as the eager virgin.

Even Bergman's epigrams are much improved when set in the quotation marks of a stylized period piece. (Though I must admit I can't find justification for such bright exchanges as the man's question, "What can a woman ever see in a man?" and her response, "Women are seldom interested in aesthetics. Besides, we can always turn out the light." I would have thought you couldn't get a laugh on that one unless you tried it in an old folks' home, but Bergman is a man of the theatre — audiences break up on it.) Bergman's sensual scenes are much more charming, more unexpected in the period setting — when they are deliberately unreal they have grace and wit. How different it is to watch the same actor and actress making love in the stuck elevator of *Secrets of Women* and in the golden pavilion of *Smiles of a Summer Night*. Everything is subtly improved in the soft light and delicate, perfumed atmosphere.

In Bergman's modern comedies, marriages are contracts that bind the sexes in banal boredom forever. The female strength lies in convincing the man that he's big enough to act like a man in the world, although secretly he must acknowledge his dependence on her. (J.M. Barrie used to say the same thing in the cosy, complacent Victorian terms of plays like *What Every Woman Knows*; it's the same concept that Virginia Woolf raged against — rightly, I think — in *Three Guineas*.) The straying male is just a bad child — but it is the essence of maleness to stray. Bergman's typical comedy heroine, Eva Dahlbeck, is the woman as earth-mother who finds fulfillment in accepting the infantilism of the male. In the modern-set comedies she is a strapping goddess with teeth big enough to eat you up and a jaw and neck to swallow you down; Bergman himself is said to refer to her as "The Woman Battleship."

But in *Smiles of a Summer Night*, though the roles of the sexes are basically the same, the perspective is different. In this vanished setting, nothing lasts, there are no winners in the game of love; all victories are ultimately defeats — only the game goes on. When Eva Dahlbeck, as the actress, wins back her old lover (Gunnar Bjornstrand), her plot has