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CRIES AND WHISPERS

Photo: Bo-Erik Gyberg

CRIES AND WHISPERS

(R)

(NEW WORLD FILMS)

Eastman Color

95 Mins.

Cast: Harriet Andersson, Ingrid Thulin, Kari Sylwan, Liv Ullmann, George Arlin, Henning Moritzen, Erland Josephson.

Credits: Written, Directed and Produced by Ingmar Bergman; Photographed by Sven Nykvist; Music by Kabi Laretei.

An awesome film. Ingmar Bergman's latest work is an overwhelmingly beautiful if somewhat disturbing account of the relationships between a dying young woman, her two sisters and her faithful adoring servant. Highlighted by magnificent ensemble acting and photography. Rave reviews should make this a strong art house item. Ditto its sweep of New York Critics prizes. 2044

Choosing one Ingmar Bergman work over another is obviously a very subjective task since the distinctive moments of greatness found in all of his films will appeal differently to various viewers. To this viewer *Cries and Whispers*, is the best Bergman film since *Persona*. In fact, this work is so outwardly extraordinary it almost overwhelms any hard thinking about what one has really seen. The tone is set from the opening moments with shots of the dawn sending rays of light filtering thru the trees. Following are a series of shots of different clocks, their ticking noises setting an immediate rhythm to the proceedings. Soon we are introduced to Agnes (Harriet Andersson), in her thirties and living out her last days in a country manor (she is painfully dying of cancer) while being watched over by her two sisters, Karin (Ingrid Thulin) and Maria (Liv Ullmann) and her devoted servant Anna (Kari Sylwan). At those rare moments when the plain has not shrouded her every movement or exhaustion not forced her to sleep, she sits writing in her diary and thinking about her childhood. In the meantime, enduring the agonizing experience of watching death slowly take Agnes, her sisters relive their own memories (in the form of flashbacks), all bitter, frustrated and sexual. What *Cries and Whispers* builds to is how the crisis of Agnes' death brings the two remaining sisters, until then cold and distant to each other, back together for a few fragile moments which in turn quickly dissolve with the passage of a little more time. The death also brings Anna's feelings into the open as a dream shows her deep love for Agnes and how frustrated she is because the class structure makes her not nearly as important to Agnes in the world's eyes as the two sisters.

Bergman has constructed a movie so devastatingly beautiful one doesn't really want to worry about meaning or depth very much of the time. To just say that the film captures and reflects emotions that are rarely seen compensates for what possibly is problematic (one or two self-conscious moments). On the pure physical level, the film is so lush in every aspect, it constantly asserts a strength one finds hard not to be overwhelmed by.

Against backgrounds everywhere of red (walls, rugs etc.) the actresses all appear in white, continually providing striking contrasts. (Interestingly, all the flashbacks are proceeded and followed by deep blood red fades: one feels almost the power of feminine discharge to intensely personal memories.) Sven Nykvist's cinematography is easily one of the great instances of classic camera work; the truly striking quality is the intensity of every frame. Add to this Bergman's extraordinary sense of detail and the result has to be considered one of the cinema's great meeting of the minds (or more appropriately of souls).

This leaves the film's women, all of whom have been so amazingly caressed by Bergman's camera, the feelings between director and actresses literally pour off the screen. Of course one never expects to be disappointed by Bergman's actresses in any of his films but *Cries and Whispers* may be a new high even for the team. As a piece of ensemble work the three veterans and newcomer Kari Sylwan have turned out a unit of acting as good as one is ever likely to see. Yet as individuals they each shine through with their own particular strengths combining extraordinary feminine grace and subtle and not so subtle eroticism and most impressive of all, emotions which lurk at all moments just beneath their surfaces and are ready to strike at any moment. Whether talking of Liv Ullmann's seduction of the doctor, Ingrid Thulin's act against her husband or Kari Sylwan's more subtle but everpresent pain at losing a love, the choices are like picking one Michaelangelo over another. The pinnacle though has to be Harriet Andersson's portrait of the dying Agnes, so powerful in every moment she appears on screen one wonders if this isn't one of the greatest performances of all time.

Bergman ends his awesome film with an image of Agnes at an earlier, happier day in her life as she walks in the fields with her two sisters and Anna. The scene is a visual rendering of one of Agnes's diary notations and her thought is "come what may, this is happiness." Bergman seems to find this small moment of joy very sad in the context of her life and his film reflects the poverty of emotional pleasures of his characters' existences. For audiences, it seems the opposite may be true. *Cries and Whispers* will most certainly be cherished and regaled for its emotional dynamism and overwhelming beauty, all of which are so magnificent, the subtleties almost take a back seat.

L.J.

ELVIS ON TOUR

(G)

(METRO GOLDWYN MAYER)

Color

93 Mins.

Credits: Produced and directed by Pierre Adidge and Robert Abel. Associate Producer: Sidney Levin. Director of Photography: Robert E. Thomas. Photographed by David Myers, Erik Daarstad, Michael Livesey, Jim Wilson, Dick Pearce, Fritz Roland, Mike Brown, Steve Lerner, David Stewart and Bert Spielvogel.

Oh Swivelhips on the concert stage again and as much of an enigma as ever. This film doesn't attempt to go beyond Elvis' on-stage performance into his private life, so the film is mainly for Elvis fans. Should do great in those areas where his fans predominate. 2045

It's hard to believe that it's been almost twenty years since Elvis Presley first came among us. Few singers, and none from the rock 'n roll era, have held on to as many of their fans as Elvis has, and remained as essentially private a person as he has. No interviews ever appear, and very seldom does a candid photograph make it to the light of newsprint. So film makers Pierre Adidge and Robert Abel are to be congratulated for getting as close to Elvis as they do in *Elvis on Tour*. Which, it must also be stated, is not very close at all. We see Elvis backstage before several performances where he paces in tried and true fashion, and then afterwards we almost don't see him as he is hustled into a limousine to escape his screaming fans. There is a short sequence in a recording studio which manages to convey almost nothing at all. Indeed what revelations this film has to offer on Elvis himself are rather quicksilverish: a sudden recollection that the stadium he is now riding into was the one he was badly mauled at during a previous concert; an amused reaction when he looks down during a performance and finds a cameraman virtu-