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A CENTENNIAL RETROSPECTIVE

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*“I never need to concern myself about present opinion or the judgment of posterity.
I am a name that has not been recorded anywhere and that will disappear when I myself disappear;
but a little part of me will live on in the triumphant masterwork of the anonymous craftsmen.
A dragon, a devil, or perhaps a saint—it does not matter which.”*

—Ingmar Bergman



INGMAR BERGMAN'S CINEMA

No name is more synonymous with the postwar explosion of international art-house cinema than Ingmar Bergman, a master storyteller who startled the world with his stark intensity and naked pursuit of the most profound metaphysical and spiritual questions. In a career that spanned six decades, Bergman directed dozens of films in an astonishing array of tones, ranging from comedies whose lightness and complexity belie their brooding hearts to groundbreaking formal experiments and excruciatingly intimate explorations of family relationships.

Text by Peter Cowie

BIOGRAPHY

EARLY LIFE AND PATH TO THE THEATER

Ingmar Bergman was born on July 14, 1918, during the final year of the Great War, which also saw the population of Europe ravaged by the Spanish flu, and Sweden in particular suffering from severe food shortages due to the disastrous harvest of 1917. Frail from the outset, Bergman would for the rest of his life be prone to hypochondria. His father, a Lutheran pastor who rose to become chaplain to the Royal Court and a favorite of the Swedish Queen Victoria, treated his children with sometimes alarming severity. Ingmar, an imaginative boy, sought escape from this harsh regime.

He built a puppet playhouse in the nursery, and acquired a magic lantern from his elder brother, Dag, in exchange for a collection of toy soldiers. He bestowed his inherent affections on his maternal grandmother, who lived in a rambling apartment in Uppsala, some forty miles north of Stockholm. (He would later recreate this mysterious, richly furnished apartment in 1982's *Fanny and Alexander*, one of the many films for which he

drew directly from his own early years.) Ingmar also enjoyed the family's summer holidays in the province of Dalarna, where his father had when young helped to construct the local railway. Here he could indulge his daydreaming, a habit he retained throughout his adult life. Indeed, no greater fantasist has graced the Scandinavian cinema.

While enrolled at university, he finally rebelled against the often crushing discipline meted out by his parents, striking his father during an argument at home and then fleeing to Stockholm's Old Town, where he slept rough and flung himself into stage production. By the age of twenty, he was directing one student production after another. Even well after he started making films, Bergman remained involved in the theater and achieved a mastery of the form. He came to use lighting brilliantly and paid great attention to production design. When he brought Goethe's *Urfaust* to London in 1959, a young Max von Sydow as Faust entered a theater plunged in darkness, apart from a single spotlight on his face. In his 1970 production of Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*, the deep crimson of Bergman's decor and costumes created

what one British drama critic called “a bloodshot, brooding nightmare.”

A CAREER IN THE CINEMA

In 1942, following the premiere of his play *The Death of Punch*, Bergman was contacted by Svensk Filmindustri and offered a position in the studio's script department. By 1944, the veteran Alf Sjöberg had agreed to direct Bergman's screenplay for *Torment*, and the film's eventual success led to SF offering Bergman the chance to make his own first film, *Crisis* (1946). Thus began a career governed by two irrepressible forces. One was a work ethic that insisted that every hour of every day should have its appointed task, which helps explain his remarkable level of productivity. The other was his creative partnerships, including regular collaborations with actors such as Max von Sydow, Gunnar Björnstrand, Erland Josephson, Liv Ullmann, Bibi Andersson, and Harriet Andersson. (Bergman, who would marry five times, also became romantically involved with the latter three.)

Although the films of the 1940s remained largely unseen outside his home country,

the 1950s forged Bergman's reputation, yielding a stream of masterpieces that responded to the zeitgeist. This decade gave us lyrical films like *Summer with Monika* (1953), which became a hit in the United States after it was reedited by its distributor into a shorter and more sensational form, and *Smiles of a Summer Night* (1955), which was Bergman's first film in competition at Cannes. The director finally achieved worldwide fame thanks to the triumph of the more philosophical *The Seventh Seal* and *Wild Strawberries* (both 1957), with the latter's screenplay earning him the first of many Oscar nominations. By March 1960, *Time* magazine featured Bergman on its cover.

Bergman's Nordic austerity, in the tradition of Søren Kierkegaard, Edvard Munch, and Carl Dreyer, offered a sober alternative to the freewheeling works of the French New Wave and British kitchen-sink realism. He became known for tackling a range of subjects in a wide variety of tones—turning to nineteenth-century mesmerism for the clever *The Magician* (1958), for example, and conjuring up the mood of medieval Sweden in the harrowing *The Virgin Spring*

(1960). The 1960s saw Bergman paring his technique even further to the bone in stark, unadorned chamber dramas like *Winter Light* (1962) and *The Silence* (1963). *Persona* (1966), a psychological duel between two women, struck Bergman's followers like a blow to the solar plexus. Only eighty-three minutes in length, Brechtian in its distancing effects, and perplexing in its intuitive attitude toward human relations, *Persona* showed that the director could experiment with the medium to stunning effect.

TELEVISION WORK AND RETIREMENT FROM FILM

It was at this juncture that Bergman turned to television, creating with *Scenes from a Marriage* (1973) one of the finest and most popular European miniseries of all time, and with *The Magic Flute* (1975) arguably the best screen rendition of Mozart's opera. When he was unjustly accused of evading taxes, he went into self-imposed exile in Munich, producing several plays and directing films that reflected his anxieties and frustration. *The Serpent's Egg* (1977) was set during the catastrophic collapse of German society in

the 1920s and the ominous rise of Nazism, and *From the Life of the Marionettes* (1980) dwelt on the murder of a prostitute by a businessman and has a jagged intensity born of Bergman's unhappy situation outside his home country. With the fiscal charges against him dismissed, Bergman returned to Sweden to make a crowning masterpiece, *Fanny and Alexander*, which won four Academy Awards, including one for Bergman's longtime cinematographer, Sven Nykvist.

"Retiring" officially from the cinema, Bergman then devoted his energies to the theater and television in equal measure, starting with the compelling chamber work *After the Rehearsal* (1984). His swan song came in 2003 with *Saraband*, a sequel to *Scenes from a Marriage* made for Swedish TV but released in cinemas abroad. Bergman's final decades were spent in almost monastic isolation on the island of Fårö, north of Gotland in the Baltic Sea. He had discovered the island while seeking locations for *Through a Glass Darkly* in 1960, and its bleak, rocky shores brought him the peace he needed to write until the very end of his life. He died there on July 30, 2007.



“No form of art goes beyond ordinary consciousness as film does, straight to our emotions, deep into the twilight room of the soul.”



THEMES AND TONES

The struggles of faith and mortality, the nature of dreams, and the agonies and ecstasies of human relationships—these are just a few of the weighty subjects taken up by Bergman time and time again. This centennial retrospective allows viewers to examine the threads that run through the director’s oeuvre. A handful of these are highlighted below.

SUMMER AND STRAWBERRIES

During his twenties and thirties, Bergman often found time to extol the sensual beauty of the Swedish summer, that fleeting six-week period when the sun burns by day and gives way to a milky luminescence by night. Bergman’s young lovers swim around the archipelago outside Stockholm; they gather wild strawberries and make frivolous plans. Their pleasure, however fleeting, may be found in *To Joy*, *Summer Interlude*, *Summer with Monika*, *Smiles of a Summer Night*, and *Wild Strawberries*. Happiness, in Bergman’s world, depends on sexual harmony, and the quest for it dominates many of these early works, all of which were shot by Gunnar Fischer, who could catch the magic of sun-dappled water, trees in blossom, and shadows at dusk.

MASKS AND FACES

The human face is Bergman’s most intriguing landscape. The close-up gradually became his most effective means of exposing human feelings—as in *Summer Interlude*, *Sawdust and Tinsel*, and *The Magician*, films that all employ extended shots that isolate the human face. Bergman used this technique to capture prolonged monologues and soliloquies, such as Ingrid Thulin reading her letter to the screen in *Winter Light*, or Liv Ullmann talking to Max von Sydow outside their cottage in *Shame*. In *Hour of the Wolf*, the aged Naima Wifstrand literally peels off her “face”—i.e., her mask—during the film’s nightmarish climax. In *Cries and Whispers*, the family doctor forces a complacent Ullmann to scrutinize herself

in the mirror, as he recites the flaws in her character. In *From the Life of the Marionettes*, Walter Schmidinger also gazes into the mirror and kneads and squeezes the flesh of his face as though it were a mask that might somehow be detached. *Persona* is the Latin word for mask, and in the peerless *Persona* itself, Bergman reveals the quivering soul that lies beneath the outer features of smugness and hypocrisy.

THE PROBLEM OF FAITH

Kicking against the pricks of a Lutheran upbringing, Bergman yearned to find a solution to the problem of faith. In *The Seventh Seal*, the knight seeks to banish his religious doubts, a quest rendered more urgent for Bergman’s generation by the beginnings of the Cold War in the 1950s and its shadow of apocalypse. In a bow by Bergman to conventional Christian morality, *The Virgin Spring* (also set during the Middle Ages) censures Max von Sydow’s Töre for wreaking revenge on the herdsmen who have raped and murdered his daughter; only by vowing to atone for his sin can Töre achieve catharsis. Pastor Tomas in *Winter Light* has lost both professional and private faith, muttering about “God’s silence, God’s silence” at the church altar, and waiting in vain for that God to reveal Himself. By the time of *Cries and Whispers* in the early 1970s, Bergman had conceived of a priest presiding over an empty sea of faith, with Anders Ek’s Isak uttering chill phrases as he gazes at the body of Agnes (Harriet Andersson): “Pray for us who are left . . . under a cruel and empty sky.” The burden of faith had finally slipped from Bergman’s shoulders.

THE CHALLENGE OF MARRIAGE

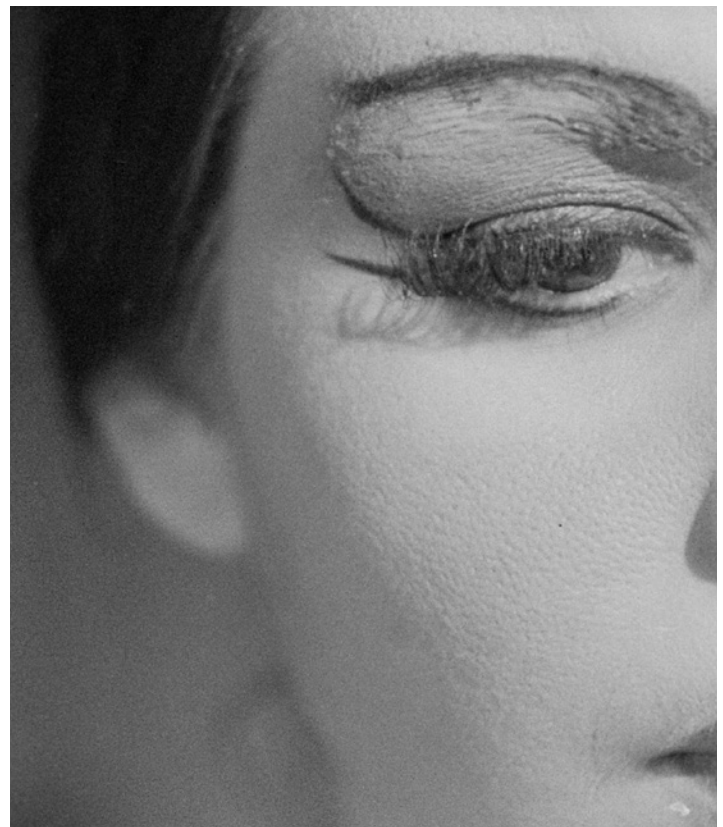
Bergman leapt into the vortex of marriage at the age of twenty-four, and would mourn his fifth and final wife at the age of seventy-six. His early films often dwell on the incessant wrangling between married partners, either with acrimony (*Thirst*, *To Joy*) or Wildean wit (*A Lesson in Love*, *Smiles of a Summer Night*). By the middle of his career, his husbands and wives had settled into a well-worn groove, resigned to being shackled together for better or worse (*Wild Strawberries*), and to facing the world's hostility in unison (*The Magician*, *Hour of the Wolf*, *Shame*). Bergman's couples in such films embody the exclamation of the hardened wife Alice in August Strindberg's *The Dance of Death*: "We're welded together and can't get free!" By his fifties, Bergman felt sufficiently liberated to analyze the everyday pressures of married life at considerable length, which he did in masterful works such as *Scenes from a Marriage* and *Fanny and Alexander*.

DREAMS AND MEMORIES

Some of Bergman's greatest works, *Persona* among them, stem from dreams he noted down and then developed into screenplays. *Cries and Whispers* began as a vision of "a large red room, with three women in white whispering together," and much of the film, photographed by Sven Nykvist in crimson interiors and on twilight parkland, retains the texture of a dream. The brilliant prologue to *Sawdust and Tinsel* is shot without dialogue in glaring, overexposed tones ("My nightmares are always saturated in sunshine," said Bergman). The most compelling scenes in *Wild Strawberries* are hallucinatory or nightmarish, as the old professor strives to come to terms with his past—and his fears. Fantasies of this kind course through *Hour of the Wolf*, with Max von Sydow's Johan at one juncture attacked by a vampiric young boy on the seashore, and at another confronted by a "corpse" that suddenly awakens. *Fanny and Alexander*, the crowning work of Bergman's later years, thrives on moments of fantasy and illusion, with the young Alexander clearly endowed with visionary powers.

THE COMEDY STREAK

If much of the mordant, bittersweet humor in Bergman suggests Hamlet playing the clown, the director's flair for outright comedy has enriched several of his films. He could write with the coruscating wit of Molière or Oscar Wilde. His repartee sparkles in sequences from *The Magician* and *Fanny and Alexander*, and in the best passages of *The Devil's Eye* and *All These Women*. Bergman's favorite satirical target is the upper middle class, past and present, with its pompous rituals and inhibitions regarding sex. During the 1950s, his pairing of Eva Dahlbeck and Gunnar Björnstrand in *A Lesson in Love*, *Secrets of Women*, and *Smiles of a Summer Night* resulted in sardonic, piquant exchanges to rival those of Tracy and Hepburn.



*“I want audiences to feel, to sense my films.
This to me is much more important than their understanding them.”*

FILM SYNOPSES

All These Women (*För att inte tala om alla dessa kvinnor*)

1964 • 77 minutes

Conceived as an amusing diversion in the wake of the despairing *The Silence*, this comedy is Bergman's first film in color, and it looks like a glorious chocolate box. Working from a bawdy screenplay he cowrote with actor Erland Josephson, about a supercilious critic drawn into the dizzying orbit of a famous cellist, Bergman brings together buoyant comic turns by a number of his frequent collaborators, including Jarl Kulle, Eva Dahlbeck, Harriet Andersson, and Bibi Andersson. *All These Women*, in which Bergman pokes fun at the pretensions of drawing-room art, possesses a distinctly playful atmosphere and a carefree rhythm.

Autumn Sonata (*Höstsonaten*)

1978 • 93 minutes

Autumn Sonata was the only collaboration between cinema's two great Bergmans: Ingmar and Ingrid, the monumental star of *Casablanca*. The grande dame, playing an icy concert pianist, is matched beat for beat in ferocity by the filmmaker's recurring lead Liv Ullmann, as her eldest daughter. Over the course of a day and a long, painful night that the two spend together after an extended separation, they finally confront the bitter discord of their relationship. This cathartic pas de deux, evocatively shot in burnished harvest colors, ranks among the director's major dramatic works.

Cries and Whispers (*Viskningar och rop*)

1972 • 91 minutes

This existential wail of a drama concerns two sisters, Karin (Ingrid Thulin) and Maria (Liv Ullmann), keeping vigil for a third, Agnes (Harriet Andersson), who is dying of cancer and can find solace only in the arms of a beatific servant (Kari Sylwan). An intensely felt film that is one of Bergman's most striking formal experiments, *Cries and Whispers* (which won an Oscar for the extraordinary color photography by Sven Nykvist) is a powerful depiction of human behavior in the face of death, positioned on the borders between reality and nightmare, tranquility and terror.

Crisis (*Kris*)

1946 • 93 minutes

With his very first film as a director, made with the blessing of silent-film maestro Victor Sjöström, Bergman began exploring some of the essential themes of his early period: youth pitted against a crass society, and the tensions between men and women. Nelly, who lives with her foster-mother in a quiet provincial town, is shaken by the sudden arrival of her birth mother, who eventually brings her to Stockholm—where Nelly receives a crash course in corruption and wrenching heartbreak. *Crisis* proved that Bergman had an incipient gift for developing characters and evoking atmosphere on-screen.

The Devil's Eye (*Djävulens öga*)

1960 • 84 minutes

This sophisticated fantasy—the last Bergman film to be shot by the great Gunnar Fischer—is an engaging satire on petit-bourgeois morals. The Devil suffers from an inflamed eye, which he informs Don Juan (Jarl Kulle) can only be cured if a young woman's chastity is breached. So the legendary lover ascends from Hell and sets about seducing the innocent pastor's daughter Britt-Marie (Bibi Andersson). Bergman's dialogue bubbles with an irony reminiscent of his beloved Molière, and the music of Domenico Scarlatti (played by Bergman's fourth wife, Käbi Laretei) underscores the joy that invests much of the film.

Dreams (*Kvinmodröm*)

1955 • 88 minutes

Grave and witty by turns, this drama develops into a probing study of the psychology of desire. Susanne (Eva Dahlbeck), head of a modeling agency, takes her protégée Doris (Harriet Andersson) to a fashion show in Gothenburg, where Susanne makes contact with a former lover, and Doris finds herself pursued by a married dignitary (Gunnar Björnstrand). With its parallel narratives and subtle compositions, *Dreams* marked a transition between Bergman's early explorations of affairs of the heart and the more somber and virtuosic masterpieces to come later in the fifties.

Fanny and Alexander (*Fanny och Alexander*)

1982 • 312 minutes

Through the eyes of ten-year-old Alexander, we witness the delights and conflicts of the Ekdahl family, a sprawling bourgeois clan in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Sweden. Bergman intended *Fanny and Alexander* as his swan song, and it is the director's warmest and most autobiographical film, an Academy Award-winning triumph that combines his trademark melancholy and emotional intensity with immense joy and sensuality. Bergman described *Fanny and Alexander* as “the sum total of my life as a filmmaker.” And in this, the full-length version of his triumphant valediction, his vision is expressed at its fullest.

Fårö Document (*Fårö-dokument*)

1970 • 88 minutes

Bergman had discovered the bleak, windswept island of Fårö while scouting locations for *Through a Glass Darkly* in 1960. Nearly a decade later, and after shooting a number of arresting dramas there, the director set out to pay tribute to the inhabitants of Fårö. In *Fårö Document*, shot on handheld 16 mm by the peerless Sven Nykvist, Bergman interviews a variety of locals, in the process laying bare the generational divide between young residents eager to leave the island and older folk more deeply rooted in bucolic tradition. The film revealed Bergman to be a sensitive and masterly documentarian.

***Fårö Document 1979* (Fårö-dokument 1979)**

1979 • 105 minutes

Returning to Fårö after living in Germany for three years, Bergman undertook his second documentary tribute to the remote Swedish island he loved. Longer, more optimistic, and less ascetic than its predecessor, this film charts a calendar year in the life of the island's 673 inhabitants, many of whom he observes working tirelessly shearing sheep, thatching roofs, and slaughtering livestock, as well as going about various communal rituals. Distilled from twenty-eight hours of material, *Fårö Document 1979* is a lyrical depiction of life's cyclical nature.

***From the Life of the Marionettes* (Aus dem Leben der Marionetten)**

1980 • 104 minutes

Made during his self-imposed exile in Germany, Bergman's *From the Life of the Marionettes* offers a lacerating portrait of a troubled marriage, and a complex psychological analysis of a murder. Unhappily married businessman Peter nurses fantasies of murdering his wife, Katarina, until a prostitute becomes his surrogate prey. In the aftermath of the crime, Peter and Katarina's psychiatrist and others attempt to explain its roots. This compelling film moves seamlessly between dream and everyday reality, between lurid color and austere black and white, and the acting by the German cast is superb.

***Hour of the Wolf* (Vargtimmen)**

1968 • 88 minutes

The strangest and most disturbing of the films Bergman shot on the island of Fårö, *Hour of the Wolf* stars Max von Sydow as a haunted painter living in voluntary exile with his wife (Liv Ullmann). When the couple are invited to a nearby castle for dinner, things start to go wrong with a vengeance, as a coven of sinister aristocrats hastens the artist's psychological deterioration. This gripping film is charged with a nightmarish power rare in the Bergman canon, and contains dreamlike effects that brilliantly underscore the tale's horrific elements.

***A Lesson in Love* (En lektion i kärlek)**

1954 • 95 minutes

One of Bergman's most satisfying marital comedies, *A Lesson in Love* stars the droll and sparkling duo of Eva Dahlbeck and Gunnar Björnstrand as a couple deep into their married years and seeking fresh pastures. A gynecologist (Björnstrand) falls for one of his patients (Yvonne Lombard), while his wife (Dahlbeck) flounces off to Copenhagen to renew her fling with a sculptor (Åke Grönberg). Deftly interspersing scenes of farce with interludes of tranquil reflection, *A Lesson in Love* serves as a cocktail before the full-blown comic brilliance of *Smiles of a Summer Night* the following year.

***The Magic Flute* (Trollflöjten)**

1975 • 135 minutes

This scintillating screen version of Mozart's beloved opera showed Bergman's deep knowledge of music and his gift for expressing it in filmic terms. Casting some of Europe's finest soloists—among them Josef Köstlinger, Ulrik Cold, and Håkan

Hagegård—the director lovingly recreated the baroque theater of the Drottningholm Palace in Stockholm to stage the story of the prince Tamino (Köstlinger) and his zestful sidekick Papageno (Hagegård), who seek to save a princess (Irma Urrila) from the clutches of evil. A celebration of love, forgiveness, and the brotherhood of man, *Flute* is considered by many to be the most exquisite opera film ever made.

***The Magician* (Ansiktet)**

1958 • 101 minutes

With *The Magician*, an engaging, brilliantly conceived tale of deceit that doubles as a symbolic self-portrait, Bergman proved himself to be one of cinema's premier illusionists. Max von Sydow stars as Dr. Vogler, a nineteenth-century traveling mesmerist and peddler of potions whose magic is put to the test in Stockholm by the cruel, eminently rational royal medical adviser Dr. Vergérus. The result is a diabolically clever battle of wits that's both frightening and funny, shot in rich, gorgeously gothic black and white.

***The Passion of Anna* (En passion)**

1969 • 101 minutes

The fifth drama that Bergman shot on his beloved Fårö describes a mood of fear and spiritual guilt. Not long after the dissolution of his marriage, and a fleeting liaison with a neighbor (Bibi Andersson), the reclusive Andreas (Max von Sydow) begins an ultimately disastrous affair with the mysterious, beguiling Anna (Liv Ullmann), who has recently lost her own husband and son. The film, which incorporates documentary-style interviews with the actors, blurs the boundaries between fiction and nonfiction, dream and reality, identity and anonymity.

Persona

1966 • 83 minutes

By the midsixties, Bergman had already conjured many of the cinema's most unforgettable images. But with the radical *Persona*, he attained new levels of visual poetry. In the first of a series of legendary performances for Bergman, Liv Ullmann plays a stage actor who has inexplicably gone mute; an equally mesmerizing Bibi Andersson is the garrulous young nurse caring for her in a remote island cottage. While isolated together there, the women perform a mysterious spiritual and emotional transference. Acted with astonishing nuance and shot in stark contrast and soft light by Sven Nykvist, the influential *Persona* is a penetrating, dreamlike work of profound psychological depth.

***Port of Call* (Hamnstad)**

1948 • 97 minutes

Strongly influenced by the neorealist films of Roberto Rossellini, *Port of Call* is Bergman's most naturalistic work. Shot on location in the port of Gothenburg, the film focuses on the relationship between Gösta, a sincere, easygoing seaman, and Berit, a suicidal young woman from a broken home. As Berit reveals more about her troubled past, and the couple confront many harsh realities in the present, the bonds between them are put to the test. With this confident and disciplined feature, his fifth, Bergman tackled moral and social issues head-on.

The Rite (Riten)

1969 • 73 minutes

During the filming of *Shame* in 1967, Bergman conceived this experimental work inspired by his controversial tenure at the Royal Dramatic Academy. Focusing on four characters—a trio of actors charged with obscenity, and the judge assigned to try them—*The Rite* alternates between criminal interrogations and interpersonal confrontations, leading up to a final “performance” that stands as one of the most bizarre moments in Bergman’s filmography. Staged on bare sets and shot almost entirely in close-up, *The Rite* condenses a decade’s worth of cinematic exploration into seventy-three tense, claustrophobic minutes.

Sawdust and Tinsel (Gycklarnas afton)

1953 • 92 minutes

Bergman presents the battle of the sexes as a ramshackle, grotesque carnival in *Sawdust and Tinsel*, one of the master’s most vivid early works, and a decisive step in his development as a filmmaker. The story of the charged relationship between a turn-of-the-century circus owner (Åke Grönberg) and his younger mistress (Harriet Andersson), a horseback rider in the traveling show, the film features dreamlike detours and twisted psychosexual power plays, making for an accomplished study of physical and spiritual degradation.

Scenes from a Marriage (Scener ur ett äktenskap)

1973 • 283 minutes

Scenes from a Marriage chronicles the many years of love and turmoil that bind Marianne (Liv Ullmann) and Johan (Erland Josephson), tracking their relationship as it progresses through a number of successive stages: matrimony, infidelity, divorce, and subsequent partnerships. Shot in intense, intimate close-ups by cinematographer Sven Nykvist and featuring flawless performances by Ullmann and Josephson, Bergman’s emotional X-ray reveals the intense joys and pains of a complex bond. *Scenes from a Marriage* is presented in its original five-hour, six-part television version.

Secrets of Women (Kvinnors väntan)

1952 • 108 minutes

While at a summerhouse, awaiting their husbands’ return, three sisters-in-law recount stories from their respective marriages. Raket (Anita Björk) tells of receiving a visit from a former lover (Jarl Kulle); Marta (Maj-Britt Nilsson) of agreeing to marry a painter (Birger Malmsten) only after having his child; and Karin (Eva Dahlbeck) of being stuck with her husband (Gunnar Björnstrand) in an elevator, where they talk intimately for the first time in years. Driven by dexterous flashbacks, the engaging *Secrets of Women* is a veritable seedbed of perennial Bergman themes, ranging from aspiring young love to the fear of loneliness, with the finale a masterpiece of chamber comedy.

The Seventh Seal (Det sjunde inseglet)

1957 • 96 minutes

Returning exhausted from the Crusades to find medieval Sweden gripped by the Plague, a knight (Max von Sydow) suddenly finds himself face-to-face with the hooded figure of Death, and

challenges him to a game of chess. As the fateful game progresses, and the knight and his squire encounter a gallery of outcasts from a society in despair, Bergman mounts a profound inquiry into the nature of faith and the torment of mortality. One of the most influential films of its time, *The Seventh Seal* is a stunning allegory of man’s search for meaning and a work of stark visual poetry.

Shame (Skammen)

1968 • 103 minutes

Shame was Bergman’s scathing response to the escalation of the conflict in Vietnam. Max von Sydow and Liv Ullmann star as musicians living in quiet retreat on a remote island farm, where the civil war that drove them from the city soon catches up with them. Amid the chaos and confusion of the military struggle, vividly evoked by Sven Nykvist’s handheld camera work, the two are faced with uncomfortable moral choices. This film, which contains some of the greatest scenes in Bergman’s oeuvre, shows the devastating impact of war on defenseless individuals.

The Silence (Tystnaden)

1963 • 95 minutes

Two sisters—the sickly, intellectual Ester (Ingrid Thulin) and the sensual, pragmatic Anna (Gunnel Lindblom)—travel by train with Anna’s young son Johan (Jörgen Lindström) to a foreign country seemingly on the brink of war. Attempting to cope with their alien surroundings, the sisters resort to their personal vices while vying for Johan’s affection, and in so doing sabotage any hope for a future together. Regarded as one of the most sexually provocative films of its day, Bergman’s *The Silence* offers a disturbing vision of emotional isolation in a suffocating spiritual void.

Smiles of a Summer Night (Sommarnattens leende)

1955 • 108 minutes

After fifteen films that received mostly local acclaim, the 1955 comedy *Smiles of a Summer Night* at last ushered in an international audience for Bergman. In turn-of-the-century Sweden, four men and four women attempt to navigate the laws of attraction. During a weekend in the country, the women collude to force the men’s hands in matters of the heart, exposing their pretensions and insecurities along the way. Chock-full of flirtatious propositions and sharp witticisms delivered by such Swedish screen legends as Gunnar Björnstrand and Harriet Andersson, *Smiles of a Summer Night* is one of the cinema’s great erotic comedies.

Summer Interlude (Sommarlek)

1951 • 96 minutes

Touching on many of the themes that would define the rest of his career—isolation, performance, the inescapability of the past—Bergman’s tenth film was a gentle drift toward true mastery. Maj-Britt Nilsson beguiles as an accomplished ballet dancer haunted by her tragic youthful affair with a shy, handsome student (Birger Malmsten). Her memories of the sunny, rocky shores of Stockholm’s outer archipelago mingle with scenes from her gloomy present at the theater where she works. A film that the director considered a creative turning point, *Summer Interlude* is a reverie about life and death that unites Bergman’s love of theater and cinema.

***Summer with Monika* (*Sommaren med Monika*)**

1953 • 97 minutes

Inspired by the earthy eroticism of Harriet Andersson, in the first of her many roles for him, Bergman turned in a work of stunning maturity with this sensual and ultimately ravaging tale of young love. A girl (Andersson) and boy (Lars Ekborg) from working-class families in Stockholm run away from home to spend a secluded, romantic summer at the beach. Inevitably, it is not long before the pair are forced to return to reality. The version initially released in the U.S. was reedited by its distributor into something more salacious, but this original version of *Summer with Monika* stands as one of Bergman's most important films.

***Thirst* (*Törst*)**

1949 • 84 minutes

Made right after the dissolution of Bergman's own second marriage, *Thirst* is an often dazzling tirade against the institution of matrimony. The principal couple, Bertil (Birger Malmsten) and Ruth (Eva Henning), travel home by train to Sweden from Switzerland, at each other's throats the whole way. Meanwhile, in Stockholm, Bertil's former lover, Viola (Birgit Tengroth, who also wrote the stories on which the film is based), tries to evade the predatory advances of her psychiatrist, and then of a ballet dancer who was once a friend of Ruth's. This dark and multilayered drama, sustained by biting dialogue, reveals Bergman's profound understanding of the female psyche.

***Through a Glass Darkly* (*Såsom i en spegel*)**

1961 • 91 minutes

While vacationing on a remote island retreat, a family's fragile ties are tested when daughter Karin (an astonishing Harriet Andersson) discovers her father has been using her schizophrenia for his own literary means. As she drifts in and out of lucidity, the father (Gunnar Björnstrand), Karin's husband (Max von Sydow), and her younger brother (Lars Passgård) are all unable to prevent Karin's descent into the abyss of mental illness. Winner of the Academy Award for best foreign-language film, *Through a Glass Darkly* presents an unflinching vision of a family's near disintegration and a tortured psyche further taunted by God's intangible presence.

***To Joy* (*Till glädje*)**

1949 • 99 minutes

Taking its title from Friedrich Schiller's "Ode to Joy," adapted by Beethoven for his Ninth Symphony, this tragic romance opens with a talented violinist, Stig (Stig Olin), learning of the death of his wife, Marta, in a fire. During a prolonged flashback, Stig remembers the delights and tribulations of his marriage with Marta during their student days, when he was riddled with self-doubt; back in the present, the orchestra conductor Söderby (Victor Sjöström) reminds him of the consolations afforded by music.

An undeniably personal work for Bergman, *To Joy* is a compelling tale of a young man's struggle with the demons standing in the way of his happiness.

***The Touch* (*Beröringen*)**

1971 • 115 minutes

With his underappreciated first English-language film, a relationship drama shot near his island retreat of Fårö, Bergman delivered a compelling portrait of conflicting desires. A chance encounter between seemingly contented housewife Karin (Bibi Andersson) and intense American archaeologist David (Elliott Gould) leads to the initiation of a torrid and tempestuous affair, one that eventually threatens the stability of her life with a respected local surgeon (Max von Sydow). Upon its release, Bergman declared this emotionally complex and sensitively performed film to be his first real love story.

***The Virgin Spring* (*Jungfrukällan*)**

1960 • 89 minutes

Winner of the Academy Award for best foreign-language film, Bergman's *The Virgin Spring* is a harrowing tale of faith, revenge, and savagery in medieval Sweden. With grim austerity, the director tells the story of the rape and murder of the virgin Karin, and her father Töre's ruthless pursuit of vengeance, set in motion after the killers visit the family's farmhouse. Starring Max von Sydow, the film is both beautiful and cruel in its depiction of a world teetering between paganism and Christianity.

***Wild Strawberries* (*Smultronstället*)**

1957 • 92 minutes

Traveling to accept an honorary degree, Professor Isak Borg—masterfully played by director Victor Sjöström—is forced to face his past, come to terms with his faults, and make peace with the inevitability of his approaching death. Through flashbacks and fantasies, dreams and nightmares, *Wild Strawberries* dramatizes one man's remarkable voyage of self-discovery. This richly humane masterpiece, full of iconic imagery, is a treasure from the golden age of art-house cinema and one of Bergman's most widely acclaimed and influential films.

***Winter Light* (*Nattvardsgästerna*)**

1962 • 80 minutes

"God, why did you desert me?" With *Winter Light*, Bergman explores the search for redemption in a meaningless existence. Small-town pastor Tomas Ericsson (Gunnar Björnstrand) performs his duties mechanically before a dwindling congregation. When he is asked to assist with a troubled parishioner's (Max von Sydow) debilitating fear of nuclear annihilation, Tomas is terrified to find that he can provide nothing but his own uncertainty. The beautifully photographed *Winter Light* is an unsettling look at the human craving for personal validation in a world seemingly abandoned by God.

Peter Cowie's critical biography of Ingmar Bergman appeared in 1983. He has written and lectured about the director since 1962, and has provided the audio commentary for numerous Bergman classics released by the Criterion Collection.