

SUMMER INTERLUDE 1951

Ingmar Bergman

OVERVIEW

Bergman roars into his theatrical and filmic career, starting early and finding his true voice rapidly. From the earliest work—*Krisis, 1946*—he is onto some of his themes—individual isolation, degradation, unexpected violence, the refusal of easy resolution, in the usually central theme of romance. One can look at a quartet of films—*Music in Darkness 1948; Port of Call, 1948; Prison, 1949; Thirst, 1949*—to see the growing preoccupation with sex, desire, and dreams, as well as with the intensely thwarting factors that like to intervene onto any seemingly smooth sequence of events. The accumulation of insights, which Bergman is diverting into this opus, is under constant co-definition by the cinematographer Gunnar Fischer, who first worked with Bergman in *Port of Call*, and threw his steely palette of blacks, grays, and whites in the faces of tired and anguished Bergmanian characters. It is in *Summer Interlude*, and in *To Joy* (1950) that we see the fruition of a kind of life-awe and transcendency challenge that will mark much of the greatest later work of Bergman—*Wild Strawberries* or *The Seventh Seal*.

To Joy involved the search for the exquisite wonder of life, as embodied in the dreams and disappointments of two ardent (but not 'great') musicians. Bergman's thrilling engagement with music, which regularly pops up his work, becomes the intoxicating life-motif of this entire film, while in *Summer Interlude* it is the world of ballet theater that represents the wonder of music. Arduous on-stage rehearsals for Swan Lake dominate the back themes of this entire movie. The splendor of the created day, and the wonder of simply being here in life, are in this film especially underlined by the beauty of nature, and by the sexual frolics of Henrik and Marie. Nature must contribute robustly, and does, in this film where water, rocks, and sky meet at often jagged edges and set fire to the elation in the humans' hearts.

STORY

Romance In her teens Marie found her way into a thrilling and nature immersed love affair. The thought of it still absorbs her. She was fifteen and going home on the ferry to the Manor, the large estate where she lived on an archipelago off of Stockholm, when she found herself being shyly addressed by a handsome and shy young student, who confessed he had always had a crush on her. She liked his gentle style, they met the next day on the rocky beach of the Archipelago, and from not much later they were lovers, swimming in the bay, boating, making love on the sandy rocks, totally included in one another and in the pristine embrace of nature.

Tragedy By a tragic accident Marie's lover, Henrik, plunged before Marie's eyes to a dreadful death, a dive which goes wrong, bashing his head against the rocks. Marie observed all this in horror. At the time of Henrik's death, by a miscalculated leap, which brought his head squarely down onto the rocks, he and Marie were in the midst of what was becoming an endless idyll, nature and sex and adult play of the most charming kind. Instantly, after the tragedy, Marie's world changed. She could think only of the contrast between her lover's rotting body and the normal lives of living people, on all sides of her. She formed distinct opinions of her own. She discovered both the meaninglessness of life, and the hatred she felt for a God who would allow such torture. Although she returned eventually to the theater, she never forgot the horror which aborted her idyll.

Survival The story places us now in the Stockholm rehearsal studio, which is abuzz with the excitement of an upcoming dress rehearsal for a performance of Swan Lake. Marie—who is now twenty-seven, has sacrificed heavily to her career; her current male interest is like her stuck in the big city ballet world with all its infighting and jealousies.

Diary Suddenly a package, intended for her, is delivered, and sets off a powerful pained emotion in the lady's soul. What she has received is the diary of her first real boyfriend, who though now dead—as we have already learned-- remains in her soul as a high point of understanding life, a set of experiences in which the workaday world of theatrical performance, with its jealousies and anxieties, is replaced by the first joys of sexuality and of the nature that sexuality crowns. The receipt of this diary, and the deep nostalgia Marie feels, abruptly reframe her mind, and in a flashback she skips back away from the rehearsal world, to the flashback world in which she had once in the past discovered the power of life with a shy, handsome student, whom she had met on the ferry and who has always had a crush on her.

The Present Marie has just opened the package with Henrik's diary in it. She is once more immersed by her first love and its awful conclusion. She is also immersed in the preparation of the dress rehearsal for Swan Lake. It has been fifteen years since the ecstasy of that summer on the rocky beaches of the Stockholm Archipelago. The challenge, from within Marie, is to live her current life in meaningful continuity with the love she first knew. Her colleagues know that she is going through a lot. Marie's present boyfriend, the newspaper writer Nystrom, enters the room and the couple start to quarrel. Marie says she wants to break up with him.

Epiphany The ballet master, Nystrom, sits down to talk life with her. He tries to convince her that only art, not life, has meaning. After Nystrom goes out in a huff, she continues washing off her make-up. Then, however, she catches sight of herself in her mirror, discovers, out of the blue, that she is smiling impishly back at herself, as though to say that she has come through hard days and is somehow on the far side of them. During the ballet performance itself, and after all the theatrical struggles to get the team act in order, Nystrom appears back stage, watching Marie as she performs. Between the ballet sets Marie goes up to Nystrom and plants a genuine and heartfelt kiss on him, and the film watcher knows that the personal journey Marie has been taking, into a past that helped to form her, has brought her home into full life again.

THEMES

Nostalgia Marie carries inside her the memory of her first love affair, with Henrik, when they were both discovering their lives. That memory is deep, and is triggered on a day when she is scheduled for a dress rehearsal of her upcoming ballet. The nostalgia is so powerful that she takes off the afternoon to visit the Archipelago where she and Henrik fell in love. The atmosphere of flash back nostalgia permeates the entire film.

Tragedy Just as Marie lives out the film as a manifestation of her nostalgia, so the frightful tragedy—Henrik's death on the rocks—haunts Marie until the present moment when the film begins, and she is struggling with her ability to take life as it comes, to live life in the present. As often, in Bergman's films, a suicide, a psychotic episode, or an abortion will provide a nub of intense feeling around which the work as a whole revolves

Art. The ballet master at Marie's theater tells her, toward film's end, that she should view life as meaningless, and only art as meaningful. At the film's end, after her epiphany, Marie seems to have matured sufficiently to reject this view of life, but the artifices of the theater and of memory as imagination will already have strongly inflected the entire film, by that time.

Corruption. A single corrupt figure—Marie's uncle—suffices to spread the stain of corruption across this entire film. He has had his seductive eyes on Marie since she was young, as he had had his eyes on Marie's mother, earlier. After the death of Henrik he moves in, pretends to take Marie on a 'recovery trip,' but actually takes control of her as his mistress, a violation she will never forgive.

CHARACTERS

Marie is a twenty-seven-year old career ballet dancer with a good position in a Stockholm theater company. Her first love affair was thirteen years ago with a handsome young student, who lived on the

same Archipelago with her, and the memory of whom—he died in a tragic accident—haunts her to the present.

Henrik is the good looking young University student who falls in love with Marie when they are both in their mid-teens, and who spends a summer of love in nature with her, a summer which ends in tragedy for him, and remains of lasting importance to her.

Uncle Erland is Marie's uncle, who was once the lover of her mother, and who subsequently, after the death of Marie's lover, Henrik, induces Marie (now his mistress) to travel with him, to forget her loss. He earns Marie's lasting hatred, for the advantage he took of her at a vulnerable time.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

MARIE

Character. Marie is an attractive young ballerina in her late twenties, performing with a prominent Stockholm ballet theater. When we first meet her she is on the brink of an important dress rehearsal. At that very moment she receives a package—the diary of her first, teen-age lover—which takes her mind and soul back to the moment of her lover's death, over ten years earlier. This memory sets the stage for almost the entire film, which is Marie's replaying to herself of the events of that amorous summer on the Archipelago, when nature and eros combined to make Henrik and her belong to one another. A tragic accident took Henrik from her early in their love, and she remained haunted by the memory of that loss for the next ten years. By the time the ballet presentation of Swan Lake takes place, at the start of the film—the point from which we look back onto her tragic loss of Henrik—Marie is on the cusp of having worked through the memory of her loss, and of having positioned herself to adopt a new realism and generous good sense about living life in the present.

Illustrative moments

Romantic As Marie recreates her past, in memory, her first awareness is of a handsome and shy student, who is a fellow passenger with her, on a ferry boat trip back to the Archipelago where they both live. Their attraction to each other is instantaneous, and she soon converts it into an occasion for them to meet on the coast of the Archipelago.

Eros. Not long after Marie and Henrik have found each other, by the bay near their houses, they start love play, and for all the time they are together, during the summer, they cannot keep their hands off one another.

Growth to Maturity. Where the film begins, with the arrival of a memory-generating package, Marie is just trying to work out a meaningful relation with her boyfriend, Nystrom, a newspaper writer. After a quarrel with him, she makes up, building effectively, at last, on the cumulative experience of life and suffering.