



BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

Wild Strawberries

(Smultronstället)

On the 20th of February, Ingmar Bergman delivered an address at the Swedish Film Academy. The following tribute to Victor Sjöström is a slightly abridged translation of that address.

No. I can't compose a speech in memory of Victor Sjöström. I suspect he would smile with the utmost irony if he could see me making such a speech.

Instead, I shall simply pass on a few brief impressions – jottings set down in my notebook while we were actually filming *Wild Strawberries*. They are very personal lines my pencil has drawn. But for me they are like engravings, and very much alive.

What I and the rest of us in the team who were filming at that time witnessed was the struggle of a tremendous will against the forces of annihilation. From moment to moment this struggle raged on, with victories and defeats equal on either side.

But when the film was finished and the artist no longer had a strict working routine, like a bulwark, to protect him, the enemy took a merciless revenge and plunged him into nameless suffering. His soul tried in vain to ward off the threat of refrigeration, extinction. The prison walls of his chosen isolation became thicker and thicker all around him ... It was a cruelly tortured prisoner who was finally given his freedom.

I read a few lines from my diary: 'I can't rid myself of the notion that this old man is a child who has aged in some extraordinary way, having at birth been deprived of both parents and brothers or sisters; a child who is endlessly searching for a security that is just as endlessly denied him.

'It's for this reason he almost brutally rejects all affection that isn't sincere. He loathes it when people stretch out their soft, sticky fingers to catch him, and he spits on all half-hearted or self-seeking sympathy. Even so ...

'In his mind's despairing duality he does not succeed in hiding or keeping secret his pain. In front of everyone who stands near him he shows his always infected, always open bleeding sore.

'The death of his wife ...

'Ceaselessly he repeats his accusations against an unjust god who obliterated the only comforting reality he had and who cast him out into the waste land.

'His glance is for ever trying to pierce through the darkness. He is for ever trying to catch the sound of a reply to his terrified questions and despairing prayers. But the silence is complete.'

Another page from my diary:

'I never stop pryingly, shamelessly studying this powerful face. Sometimes it is like a dumb cry of pain, sometimes it is distorted by mistrustful cruelty and senile querulousness, sometimes it dissolves into self-pity and astoundingly sentimental effusions.

'But there are also other moments which I shall never forget.

‘Suddenly he can turn toward us with a smile, a gesture of spontaneous tenderness, his tone of voice expressing a subtle wisdom. At such times it becomes no effort at all for us to love him and we can meet him simply and in the sunniest concord.’

A third jotting from my diary:

‘We have shot our final supplementary scenes of *Wild Strawberries* – the final close-ups of Isak Borg as he is brought to clarity and reconciliation. His face shone with secretive light, as if reflected from another reality. His features became suddenly mild, almost effete. His look was open, smiling, tender.

‘It was like a miracle.

‘Then complete stillness – peace and clarity of soul. Never before or since have I experienced a face so noble and liberated.

‘Yet it was all nothing more than a piece of acting in a dirty studio. And acting it had to be. This exceedingly shy human being would never have shown us lookers-on this deeply buried treasure of sensitive purity, if it had not been in a piece of acting; in simulation ...

‘In the presence of this face I recalled the final words of Strindberg’s last drama *The Great Highway*: the prayer to a god somewhere in the darkness.

‘Bless me, Thy humanity

That suffers, suffers from Thy gift of life!

Me first, who most have suffered

Suffered most the pain of not being what I most would be.’

***Sight and Sound*, Spring 1960**

Bergman, the son of a pastor, admits that one of the most powerful influences on him has been the cruelly obsessive atmosphere of religion in which he was brought up. *The Seventh Seal* is probably the most extreme expression yet of that influence on his thinking; but in *Wild Strawberries* the influence, if submerged, is no less strong. Like the trail of a treasure hunt, clues are scattered throughout the film: the names of the characters – Abraham, Isak, Sara; the couple with whom the Professor nearly crashes – a resigned Catholic woman and her bitter, snarling non-Catholic husband; the extraordinary moment when the Professor, in one of his dreams, puts his hand against a window frame, tears it on a nail, and looks at his palm to see the stigmata at its centre – all these titillate the imagination, until one becomes nervously on the watch for the next clue, terrified of missing some vital detail which may lead to the centre of the mystery.

The mind that Bergman reveals in this film is one corrupted by despair, tormented by human cruelty, seeking salvation in a kind of simple good-heartedness that would be despised for sentimentality in a lesser artist. Perhaps these very features make him a man of his time; perhaps the very confusion of symbols is a relief, being such a rich source of theorising for anyone who likes to construct theories. Whether any of the solutions offered represents Bergman’s own intention or not, or whether that intention is communicable at all, is another matter. He is a supremely skilful setter of crossword puzzles. If only we could be sure they had an answer.

Kenneth Cavander, *Sight and Sound*, Winter 1958-59

WILD STRAWBERRIES (SMULTRONSTÄLLET)

Director: Ingmar Bergman
Production Company: Svensk Filmindustri
Producer: Carl Anders Dymling *
Production Manager: Allan Ekelund *
Unit Manager: Sven Sjönell
Assistant Director: Gösta Ekman
Script Supervisor: Katherina Faragó
Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman
Director of Photography: Gunnar Fischer
Assistant Cameraman: Björn Thermenius *
Editor: Oscar Rosander
Art Director: Gittan Gustafsson
Property Master: Karl-Arne Bergman
Costumes: Millie Ström
Wigs: Nils Nittel, Firma Carl M. Lundh
Music: Erik Nordgren
Musical Direction: E. Eckert-Lundin *
Sound: Aaby Wedin
Assistant Sound: Lennart Wallin *

The screening on Wed 21 Jul will feature a pre-recorded intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-Large

Cast
Victor Sjöström (Professor Isak Borg)
Bibi Andersson (Sara, hitchhiker/Sara, Isak’s cousin)
Ingrid Thulin (Marianne Borg, Evald’s wife)
Gunnar Björnstrand (Dr Evald Borg)
Jullan Kindahl (Miss Agda, Isak’s housekeeper)
Folke Sundquist (Anders, hitchhiking theology student)
Björn Bjelvenstam (Viktor, hitchhiking medical student)
Naima Wifstrand (Borg’s mother)
Gunnel Broström (Berit Alman)
Gertrud Fridh (Karin, Isak’s wife)
Sif Ruud (Aunt Olga)
Gunnar Sjöberg (Sten Alman, an engineer)
Max von Sydow (Henrik Åkerman, petrol station owner)
Åke Fridell (Karin’s lover)
Yngve Nordwall (Uncle Aron)
Per Sjöstrand (Sigfrid, Isak’s elder brother)
Gio Petré (Sigbritt, Isak’s married sister)
Gunnel Lindblom (Charlotta, Isak’s elder sister)
Maud Hansson (Angelica, Isak’s younger sister)
Ann-Mari Wiman (Eva Åkerman, Henrik’s wife)
Eva Norée (Anna, Isak’s sister)
Lena Bergman, Monica Ehrling (Kristina/Brigitta, Isak’s twin sisters)
Per Skogsberg (Hagbart, the eldest Borg brother) *
Göran Lundquist (Benjamin, Isak’s younger brother) *
Profesor Helge Wulff (public orator in Lund Cathedral) *
Else Fisher (Isak’s mother as a young woman) *

Sweden 1957
91 mins

* Uncredited

BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

All the President’s Men
Sun 4 Jul 11:50; Tue 20 Jul 14:15; Sat 31 Jul 20:20
Rear Window
Sun 4 Jul 15:40; Fri 9 Jul 14:30; Tue 20 Jul 17:50; Mon 26 Jul 18:00; Sat 31 Jul 11:10
Hope and Glory
Mon 5 Jul 14:30; Fri 23 Jul 18:00
The Magnificent Ambersons
Mon 5 Jul 20:50; Wed 14 Jul 18:00 (+ pre-recorded intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-Large); Sun 25 Jul 15:00
All about My Mother (Todo sobre mi madre)
Tue 6 Jul 20:45; Sat 10 Jul 21:00; Thu 22 Jul 14:30
Distant Voices, Still Lives
Wed 7 Jul 18:00 (+ pre-recorded intro by film critic Thirza Wakefield); Sun 18 Jul 12:45; Mon 19 Jul 20:50; Fri 30 Jul 14:30

How Green Was My Valley
Thu 8 Jul 14:15; Fri 16 Jul 17:50
Wild Strawberries (Smultronstället)
Sun 11 Jul 12:50; Wed 21 Jul 18:00 (+ pre-recorded intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-Large); Tue 27 Jul 14:30
35 Shots of Rum (35 Rhums)
Mon 12 Jul 20:45; Wed 28 Jul 17:40 (+ pre-recorded intro by Be Manzini, poet and director of Caramel Film Club)
Man About Town (Le Silence est d’or)
Tue 13 Jul 14:15; Sun 18 Jul 12:30; Mon 26 Jul 14:20
Battleship Potemkin (Bronenosets Potemkin)
Thu 15 Jul 18:00; Sat 24 Jul 11:50
Casablanca
Sat 17 Jul 13:00; Sat 24 Jul 14:40; Thu 29 Jul 18:00

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