



RE-RELEASES

Fanny and Alexander

(Fanny och Alexander)

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot.

Partly autobiographical, partly a summation of his abiding themes, *Fanny and Alexander* is one of Ingmar Bergman's most celebrated achievements. Set in the early 1900s, it focuses on the Ekdahls, an extended, well-off family running an Uppsala theatre; their ups and downs are seen primarily through the imaginative eyes of young Alexander – a Bergman surrogate – and his sister Fanny. Though it deals, characteristically, with fraught relationships, fear and mortality, puritanical religion and moral dilemma, the film is generally lighter in tone than most of his work, succeeding as a warmly nostalgic tale of cruelty overcome by supportive love. At the same time, playfully and wittily alluding to earlier Bergman films, it revels in the illusionism of art and life alike. Magic!

Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-large

A contemporary review

Ingmar Bergman has declared that *Fanny and Alexander* is to be his last film. There have, it should be noted, been previous last performances, and we shall have to wait and see whether this is absolutely and positively the not-so-old Magician's last trick. If, however, it is, he could hardly have executed a more smiling, confident and sweeping valedictory bow. The proceedings open on Christmas Eve 1907 in an unnamed Swedish provincial town (there is, it transpires, a theatre, a cathedral, a university, a dark rushing river). Our hero, ten-year-old Alexander Ekdahl, is gazing dreamily through the proscenium of a toy theatre. We are then introduced to the sumptuous apartment of Alexander's grandmother: the imagined, enclosed, ideal home of childhood. It is unmistakably framed as another theatre. The empty stage is soon awash with revelry: for sustained exuberance, as well as for a fluid grace suggesting space and liberating movement, Bergman has never done better. After the years of exile, one can hear the exhalation. The filmmaker is back home among his own people, happy in his own petit theatre.

Fanny and Alexander, like *Scenes from a Marriage*, comes in two versions. The one under review, for theatrical release, is divided in two and runs some three hours. Bergman published a *Fanny and Alexander* script in Sweden in 1979, and Alan Blair's translation (Pantheon Books, New York) is a useful adjunct to the film since a prologue supplies some essential background detail to this many-charactered family story. It also reveals that one seemingly important scene has been dropped (if it was ever shot) from the theatrical version. (*Scenes from a Marriage* lent itself reasonably well to television, but it is hard to imagine that Sven Nykvist's rich, crowded images for *Fanny and Alexander* will transfer as happily.) One finds in the script's stage directions confirmation of two of the film's striking aspects: Bergman's desire to speak plainly and his taste – some may have forgotten it – for sly humour. We are allowed at one point to hear the voice of God: Alexander hears it too and

speaks up for himself-this God, it turns out however, is only a large misshapen puppet.

In the first part, Bergman is concerned with establishing the feeling of a child, Alexander (Fanny hardly gets a look in), cocooned in the middle of a sprawling, prosperous, close and on the whole greatly good-humoured Swedish family. Helena (Gunn Wallgren), is the family matriarch; she is flanked by Isak Jacobi (Erland Josephson), her confidant and discreet lover, and her three sons, the wan Oscar, the actor-manager of her late husband's theatre, Carl, an embittered second-rate academic, and Gustav Adolf (Jarl Kulle), an ebullient businessman and restaurant-proprietor. Swimming around this centre is a host of wives, children, theatre people and servants, the latter both young and old being treated by Bergman with particular fondness. By the time Christmas is over they have firmly established themselves: one wants to know about them.

Oscar – and the script but not the film makes clear that his children Fanny and Alexander are not his own – subsequently dies. He collapses during a rehearsal of *Hamlet* and is to return from time to time in the guise of the Ghost of Hamlet's Father until Alexander, in exasperation, finally sees him off. Oscar's beautiful widow, Emilie (Ewa Fröling), remarries the town's dour Bishop Edvard Vergérus (Jan Malmsjö). At this point, the action shifts into a more starkly melodramatic key. Life in the Bishop's palace is unadulterated misery and it is time for the sorcerer, here Isak, a kindly old party with a mysterious antique shop, to come into his own. In a wonderful piece of sleight-of-hand, playing the Old Jew to the hilt and infuriating the anti-semitic Vergérus, he spirits the children from the palace in a chest which he has agreed to purchase from the out-of-pocket Bishop.

Vergérus is as nasty and hypocritical a piece of work as any Bergman has put before us. (And in the one major scene missing from the film he is, it is implied, also a devil in his own right. Emilie's brothers-in-law come to the palace, after the abduction of the children, and play a game of verbal chess with the Bishop for Emilie's release. He checkmates them, however, by conjuring a false image of his supposedly smiling and contented wife.) Nevertheless, the Bishop is something of a straw man and lacks the power to conquer the wilful Alexander, who is a conjurer and storyteller in his own right. Furthermore his household is peopled with such a gallery of grotesque women that it is hard not to feel a small measure of sympathy for this weak and fastidious man. Harriet Andersson has a marvellous light-hearted cameo as the most duplicitous of ratlike servants. The old duel is refought with vigour but also with a certain amount of good-humour – as though it was at long last no longer the be all and end all of life as well as filmmaking.

Emilie is finally restored to the bosom of the Ekdahls and her return is crowned with the christening of her own daughter by Vergérus and that of Gustav Adolf by the lame nursemaid Maj. Throughout the film Bergman celebrates the Ekdahls' capacity for tolerance, and the fact that both these babies are wholeheartedly welcomed puts the seal on this celebration. Overcome with happiness at the birth of his new daughter, Gustav Adolf declares with tipsy sentimentality his faith in the happiness of the day whatever awfulness the future may hold. He echoes the feelings of his creator. One small question, however, intrudes: what is it that these strong, good-natured, understanding women, Gustav Adolrs wife and his mistress, see in this noisy old goat? Bergman's women have for years, one feels, been too good for their men.

Fanny and Alexander is not a perfect film. The character of the disappointed Carl is rather peremptorily written out of the plot. The film lacks the concentrated rigour of *From the Life of the Marionettes*. The exposition is occasionally confusing. Nevertheless, taken as a whole, it is a sustained triumph: the Ekdahls are a great pulsing family unit; one believes in the reality of Oscar’s theatre company (and believes in it the more for the virtually silent presence of Gunnar Björnstrand as the stately *père noble*). For those who have kept faith with Bergman it is an inexpressible relief to find that despair has not gained the upper hand.

Bergman’s ability to fix spots of time has not deserted him. Fanny and Alexander are waiting in the kitchen. Their father is dying. The old cook is writing a letter to a faithful correspondent at a mission station in China. Another old retainer talks about dogs. The children are playing a game. A treacle sandwich is produced. The cook, consolingly, offers Alexander the stamp to lick. He politely declines. The scene, the everyday persisting when death is at the door, is knitted together with calm assurance. Death in the end has no dominion.

John Pym, *Sight and Sound*, Spring 1983

FANNY AND ALEXANDER (FANNY OCH ALEXANDER)
Director: Ingmar Bergman; *Copyright/©:* Svenska Filminstitutet;
Production Companies: Cinematograph, Gaumont, Personafilm, Sveriges Television Kanal 1, Tobis-Filmkunst; *Producer:* Jörn Donner; *Production Accountant:* Hellen Iglér; *Production Manager:* Katinka Faragó; *Unit managers:* Eva Ivarsson, Brita Werkmäster; *Administrators:* Lars-Owe Carlberg, Ingrid Bergman, Fredrik von Rosen; *Production Secretary:* Benita Lundqvist; *Assistant Director:* Peter Schildt; *Continuity:* Kerstin Eriksdotter; *Screenplay:* Ingmar Bergman; *Director of Photography:* Sven Nykvist; *Assistant Photographers:* Lars Karlsson, Dan Myhrman; *2nd Unit Photographer:* Tony Forsberg; *Grips:* Daniel Bergman, Ulf Pramfors; *Gaffers:* Ulf Björck, Torbjörn Andersson, Ragnar Hansson, Kent Hogberg, Ted Lindahl; *Stills Photography:* Arne Carlsson; *Laterna Magica:* Christian Wirsén; *Special Effects:* Bengt Lundgren; *Puppets:* Arne Högsander; *Editor:* Sylvia Ingermarsson; *Art Director:* Anna Asp; *Set Decorator:* Susanne Lingheim; *Technical Supervisor:* Kaj Larsen; *Assistant Technical Supervisors:* Ulrika Rindegard, Annmargret Fyregård; *Props:* Jan Andersson, Gunilla Allard, Christer Ekelund, Johan Husberg; *Construction Foreman:* Jakob Tigerskiöld; *Construction Grip:* Percy Nilsson; *Carpenters:* Olle Berg, Kenneth Blomqvist, Jan Eriksson, Nisse Johansson, Bert Martinsson, Bertil Sjölund, Björn Sinclair, Hans Strandberg, Anders Söderlund; *Supervising Painter:* Rolf Persson; *Painters:* Annne Marie Davidsson, Tua Ekholm, Kent Eriksson, Ylva Hammar, Teddy Holm, Cecilia Iversen, Dick Jacobsson, Lisbeth Jansson, Andrew Jones, Donald Karlsson, Lena Karlsson, Bengt Landegren, Anna Skagerfors, Tom Stocklassa, Bengt Svedberg, Sigrid William-Olsson; *Costume Designer:* Marik Vos; *Costumers:* Kristina Makroff, Elsie-Britt Lindström, Robert Nordlund, Kjell Sundquist; *Assistant Costumers:* Lenamarié Wallström, Ingabritt Adriansson, Anne Marie Broms, Maria Lindmark, Annchristin Lohrâten-Hjelm, Gorel Engstrand; *Seamstresses:* Wiveka Dahlström, Ann Katrin Edmark, Solveig Eriksson, Rosemarie Karlsson, Lena Persson, Caroline von Rosen, Niclas Svartengren; *Make-up Artists:* Barbro H. Haugen, Anna-Lena Melin, Leif Qviström; *Hairstyles:* Cecilia Drott, Kjell Gustavsson, Mariann Virdestam; *Laboratory:* Film Teknik, Nils Melander; *Music:* Daniel Bell; *Military Band Conductor:* Per Lyng, *Choreography:* Mercedes Björlin; *Sound/Mix:* Owe Svensson, Bo Persson, Björn Gunnarsson, Lars Liljeholm; *Teacher:* Marie Rechlin; *Driver:* åke Dahlbom; *Stunts:* Johan Torén; *Press Representative:* Berit Gullberg

Cast

Ekdahl Residence
Kristina Adolphson (*Siri, housemaid*); Börje Ahlstedt (*Carl Ekdahl*); Pemilla Allwin (*Fanny Ekdahl*); Kristian Almgren (*Putte*); Carl Billquist (*police superintendent*); Axel Düberg (*witness*); Allan Edwall (*Oscar Ekdahl*); Siv Ericks (*Alida, Emilie’s cook*); Ewa Fröling (*Emilie Ekdahl*); Patricia Gelin (*statue*); Majlis Granlund (*Vega, Helena’s cook*); Maria Granlund (*Petra Ekdahl*); Bertil Guve (*Alexander Ekdahl*); Eva von Hanno (*Berta, Helena’s housemaid*); Sonya Hedenbratt (*Aunt Emma*); Olle Hilding (*old clergyman*); Svea Holst (*Ester, Helena’s parlourmaid*); Jarl Kulle (*Gustav Adolf Ekdahl*); Käbi Laretei (*Aunt Anna*); Mona Malm (*Alma Ekdahl*); Lena Olin (*Rosa, new nursemaid*); Gösta Prüzelius (*Dr Fürstenberg*); Christina Schollin (*Lydia Ekdahl*); Hans Strååt (*clergyman at wedding*); Pernilla Wallgren (*Maj Kling, Emilie’s nursemaid*); Inga Ålenius (*Lisen, Emilie’s housemaid*); Georg Årlin (*the colonel*)

Bishop’s Palace
Marianne Aminoff (*Blenda Vergéus, bishop’s mother*); Harriet Andersson (*Justina, kitchen maid*); Mona Andersson (*Karna, housemaid*); Linda Kruger (*Pauline*); Hans Henrik Lerfeldt (*Elsa Bergius, bishop’s aunt*); Jan Malmjö (*Bishop Edvard Vergéus*); Marianne Nielsen (*Selma, housemaid*); Marrit Olsson (*Malla Tander, cook*); Kerstin Tideliu (*Henrietta Vergéus, bishop’s sister*); Pernilla Wahlgren (*Esmeralda*)

Theatre
Anna Bergman (*Miss Hanna Schwartz*); Gunnar Björnstrand (*Filip Landahl*); Mattias Bollinger; Nils Brandt (*Mr Morsing*); Lars-Owe Carlberg (*glee singer*); Gus Dahlström (*props man*); Ernst Günther (*dean of the university*); Hugo Hasslo (*glee singer*); Heinz Hopf (*Tomas Graal*); Maud Hytenberg-Bartoletti (*Miss Sinclair*); Sven Erik Jakobsen (*glee singer*); Marianne Karlbeck (*Miss Palmgren*); Kerstin Karte (*prompter*); Tore Karte (*office manager*); Åke Lagergren (*Johan Armfeldt*); Sune Mangs (*Mr Salenius*); Per Mattson (*Mikael Bergman*); Marie Louise Sidh; Licka Sjöman (*Grete Holm*); Runo Wallin; Georg Årlin (*the colonel*); Daniel Bell, Gunnar Djerf, Folke Eng, Ebbe Eng, Evert Hallmarken, Nils Kyndel, Ulf Lagerwall, Börje Mårelius, Karl Nilheim (*orchestra*)

Jacobi’s House
Erland Josephson (*Isak Jacobi*); Stina Ekblad (*Ismael*); Mats Bergman (*Aron*); Viola Aberlé, Gerd Andersson, Ann-Louise Bergström (*Japanese ladies*); Marie-Hélène Breillat

Sweden/France/Germany 1982
189 mins

A BFI release

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Fri 23 Dec 18:10

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Scrooged

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