

## 'Saraband': The master returns to the big screen

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Article Launched: 08/05/2005 3:00:00 AM PDT

WHAT: 'Saraband.'

RATED: R: Brief nudity, profanity, one violent image.

WHERE: The Nickelodeon, 426-7500.

LENGTH: 1 hour, 51 minutes.

VERDICT: A.

By MORTON MARCUS SENTINEL CORRESPONDENT

Ingmar Bergman is the Swedish film director who produced one masterpiece after another during the 1950s, '60s and '70s. He then called it quits in 1982 with a triumphant final masterpiece, "Fanny and Alexander," which won several Academy Awards, including the year's best foreign film in 1983.

After 23 years of directing stage plays in his native Sweden and writing film and TV scripts, he's back on the large screen with "Saraband." His new film is vintage Bergman, a relentless up-close-and-personal look at four people confronting their relationships with themselves and each other.

It explodes like shrapnel in the viewer's vitals, just like his other films, including "Wild Strawberries," "The Seventh Seal," "Cries and Whispers," "Persona" and "Scenes From A Marriage."



Known for his mostly harrowing, uncompromising pictures of humans torturously looking for the meaning of life and desperately searching for identity as individuals and partners in relationships, this film is no different.

It began as a TV play and, as an added attraction for Bergman fans, is a sequel to "Scenes From a Marriage." (In fact it could be called "Scenes From a Marriage 30 Years Later.")

It unites its stars, Liv Ullman and Erland Josephson, now elderly but attractive seniors, who, like the screenwriter director, are at the top of their forms.

It is 30 years after Marianne (Ullman) has divorced Johan (Josephson). Now a lonely, old woman, she decides, on "an irrational impulse," to visit him in his isolated ramshackle house in the Swedish wilderness. What she finds is a family in turmoil.

Johan has become more remote and selfish than ever, and his tyrannical ways have taken root in his son, Henrik, who lives in a cottage with his 17-year-old daughter, Karin, several miles away.

If Johan had tried to control Marianne 30 years before, Henrik, whose beloved wife, Anna, has recently died, is dominating his daughter's life in the same way, insisting she painstakingly follow his plans for her to become a virtuoso cello player.

The film is composed of 10 short, searing dialogues between the four characters: Marianne and Johan, Marianne and Karin, Marianne and Henrik, Henrik and Karin, Johan and Henrik, and Johan and Karin.

The film's title is trenchantly fitting, since a saraband was a dance for two popular in the 17th and 18th centuries, and there are never more than two people engaged in conversation in any scene.

The four dance around each other verbally, trying not to recognize the truths about their behaviors as they perform dances that mime the fundamental relationships of husbands and wives, fathers and sons, fathers and daughters, and mothers and their children.

The themes of the film will be familiar to Bergman fans, but let me point out one that has gone unnoticed in the corpus of Bergman's work, and that is the essential weakness of men and the inner strength of women.

It is a theme that surfaces in "Saraband" with a clarity that Bergman has revealed in only a few instances before.

Woody Allen has long claimed Bergman as his favorite film director, and on several occasions, particularly in "Interiors," he has tried to emulate Bergman's films. If you want to see the kind of cinema Allen reveres, and if you prize films of honesty and profundity that explore the deepest yearnings of the human soul, accept this invitation to the dance by an old dancing master.

Morton Marcus is co-host of the TV film review program "Cinema Scene" on channel 27 at 8:30 p.m. every Thursday and Sunday. He will lead a discussion on "Saraband" at 1:25 p.m. Saturday at The Nickelodeon Theater.

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