

## Morton Marcus: An Ingmar Bergman checklist

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On July 29, the film director Ingmar Bergman died at 89. Many critics have called him a great director, but I will go further and say he was the greatest director in film history. I make this statement because he created more film masterpieces than anyone else, his subject matter relentlessly plumbed the deepest questions of the human condition, and, as his films made clear, he was constantly growing and experimenting as both an artist and a thinker.

The sorrowful news is that he is gone, but the good news is that almost all his films are available in video shops, so you can reacquaint yourself with his work, or, more joyous still, discover it for yourself.

Well, "joyous" may not be the right word, since Bergman's films are, by and large, intense, brooding studies of human anguish and doubt, his characters pursuing knowledge about themselves, God, faith, loneliness, death, art, and the relationship between men and women.

Bergman was as much a stage director as filmmaker. In fact, 1944, the year of his first assignment as theater impresario, coincided with his motion picture directorial debut. Throughout his 60-year career he continued directing and staging dramas while making films, and it was his involvement with live theater that brought him the actors he made into his film repertory group, many of whom became international stars.

Bergman's films fall into three distinct periods. The first lasted from 1944 to 1956. In this phase he was learning, but there several whole films watching, and two unforgettable ones: "To Joy" [1950], and the somber prelude to his second period "Sawdust and Tinsel" [1953].

It was while he was directing at the Malmo Municipal Theater [1953-1958] that he put together the stock company of actors who would grace what many consider his breakthrough to -- and great films of -- his second period. Each actor played the same kind of character in each film. Gunnar Bjornstrand was the cold, cynical, at times flippant rationalist; and Max von Sydow, the heroic figure searching for self-knowledge but tormented by questions of faith, ethics and the meaning of life.

The questions of the second period are clearly metaphysical. The films are mostly costume dramas, but the period began with a comedy, "Smiles of A Summer Night" [1955] that won the Cannes Jury Prize and launched Bergman's international career. The films that followed are a roll call of classics: "The Seventh Seal" [1957], "Wild Strawberries" [1957], "The Magician" [1958], "Virgin Spring" [1960], "Though A Glass Darkly" [1961], "Winter Light" [1963], and "The Silence" [1963].

In his third period, Bergman turned away from the metaphysical questions of faith and mortality and concentrated on the psychological distortions wrought by human obsessions and the relationship between men and women. The later films of this period break traditional dramatic boundaries by having the actors, as if they were in a therapy session, talk directly to the audience. This period also marked the emergence of two new actors as principal characters, first Liv Ullmann and later Erland Josephson. The great films of this period begin with "Persona" [1966], "The Hour of The Wolf" [1968], and "Shame" [1968]. They act as a bridge from the second period to the "marriage" films that followed: "The Passion of Anna" [1969], "Cries And Whispers" [1973], "Scenes From A Marriage" [1973], and "Face To Face" [1976].

There are several great films after that-- "Autumn Sonata" [1978] in which Ingrid Bergman and Liv Ullmann work out mother-daughter problems, and Bergman's crowning masterpiece as well as his retirement film, the autobiographical celebration of life----"Fanny and Alexander" [1982].

Contact Morton Marcus at  
[wbaine@santacruzsentinel.com](mailto:wbaine@santacruzsentinel.com).

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