

Bergman film 'lucid and intelligent throughout'

# 'Scenes from a Marriage' avoids stereotypes

Marriage has been the victim of many films, and in most of them the audience is victimized, too. However, Ingmar Bergman's *Scenes From A Marriage* remains lucid and intelligent throughout, keeping an objective viewpoint and avoiding sentimentality. The six scenes in *Scenes* span twelve years in the lives of Johann (Erlend Josephson) and Marianne (Liv Ullmann). After the third episode, the two are already signing the divorce papers. But it is in these final episodes that Bergman gives us the real "marriage" between the two; after the separation they finally learn how to accept each other.

The film begins with Johann and Marianne being interviewed by an effervescent magazine writer who bubbles on and on about how perfect their marriage is. Johann describes himself as middle-aged, intelligent and virile. Wife Marianne, on the other hand, is weak and dependent, relying on Johann for most of the words to describe herself. Later, after witnessing a verbal clash between two married friends and the testimonies of her clients, Marianne demands reassurance

from Johann that their marriage will not fail.

But Johann doesn't allow himself to be so optimistic. Though he tries to be patient with Marianne's weaknesses (she doesn't like sex as much as she used to, which really bothers him), he tires of her optimism and her dottingness, and

the subject by keeping an emotional distance. Finally her pleas sting him and he lashes out, telling her that he has hated her for a long time, and that he needs a change from their boring married routine.

If this all sounds like soap opera, it isn't. Bergman has deleted all the sentiment that turns many films on familiar marriage problems into pure melodrama. There are no stereotypes here: Johann is not the evil, lecherous husband and Marianne is not the wronged wife destined for martyrdom. In fact, one of her first reactions to Johann's leaving is, "What will everyone say?" Johann leaves because he needs excitement, which his relationship with Marianne lacks, and because he is infatuated with another woman. Marianne suffers from insecurity and from her own selfishness. And who can deny them these feelings? They still love each other, but their differences have made them incompatible.

Johann returns after six months and divorce proceedings get underway. Marianne has survived the stress of his absence and the two are quite friendly. But as the signing of the divorce papers approaches, it is increasingly obvious

that Marianne has become the stronger of the two. She has begun to accept the divorce while Johann now wants her back. When Marianne brings him the papers at his office, he hesitates to sign, setting off a violent scene in which he and Marianne physically and verbally attack each other — he out of frustration, and she out of misunderstanding of his hesitation. Ultimately, the divorce goes through. Years later, Johann and Marianne, having each re-married, go off on romantic weekends together to get away from their spouses. Freed from the stress and routine of married life together, they have learned to love and accept each other.

Although Bergman keeps an intellectual distance from his characters, his camera doesn't. Sven Nykvist shoots the film mostly in mid-shots and close-ups to get the audience involved with the characters, but he pulls back just enough during a poignant scene to avoid betraying Bergman's purpose. There are no visual symbols here, and none of Bergman's usual ambiguities and philosophical thematics. In *Scenes From A Marriage* he works on a level more accessible to general audiences, which accounts in part for the film's popularity.

Liv Ullmann and Erlend Josephson play Marianne and Johann impeccably. Both characters go through changes in the learning process. Miss Ullmann's

chameleon-like changes in emotion, particularly in the office scene, are startling at times. Her Marianne can be a doting, happy-go-lucky bride or a bitter, angry, suffering woman. Josephson, who also played the doctor in *Cries And Whispers*, matches her as the pompous, cynical husband, afflicted with indifference and then despair. The two complement each other and their relationship seems real and natural. Bibi Andersson, a brilliant and lately underworked actress, contributes a strong performance as a woman caught up in a loathsome marriage that she can't escape.

Unfortunately, there are problems with the film that have nothing to do with Bergman, but with the distributors. *Scenes* was cut from its total of six one-

hour TV episodes down to 2 hours and 45 minutes. Granted, few people could sit through a six hour film, but there are large gaps in the film in which vital characterization and interesting scenes are lost. Thus, several episodes don't come together into a comfortable, thematic whole and the viewer feels deprived. Some of the time gaps are so large that you think the projectionist has substituted the wrong reel. Someone has bought the six episodes for American TV, so *Scenes* in its entirety will probably be available soon.

Also, the version presently being shown here is dubbed, so wait at all costs; the subtitled version will arrive soon. In dubbing synchronization, not acting, is the major concern, and in this film, that really makes a difference.

## cinema

by Hank Baker

**Scenes from a Marriage, starring Liv Ullmann and Erlend Josephson, was written and directed by Ingmar Bergman.**

their differences begin to grow on him. He suddenly decides to leave her for a young girl named Paula, with whom he has fallen in love. The night before he leaves, Marianne tries to persuade him to help piece their relationship together again because she can't bear the shame of knowing they have failed. She also fears having to face herself on her own terms instead of Johann's. Burning with guilt feelings, Johann stubbornly avoids

# 'Dark of the Moon' premieres Wednesday

The Carolina Playmakers production of 'Dark of the Moon' opens Wednesday, Sept. 24 in Chapel Hill's Forest Theatre on the UNC campus.

Howard Richardson's play, which is based on the ballad 'Barbara Allen,' deals with the legends, superstitions and customs of the Smokies. Its plot centers around two main

characters: John, a witch boy who wants to become human, and Barbara Allen, a lovely but fickle mountain girl. UNC journalism professor Walter Spearman plays Mr. Allen in the production.

Much-produced since its 1951 opening, 'Dark of the Moon' has been subject to almost countless variations. It has been translated into the Cajun dialect, transformed into dance and performed by the London ballet company, and it once starred Cicely Tyson in her acting debut.

Broad in its scope, the biggest problem with the play, according to Playmakers' director Tom Rezzuto, is "to get it combined into one thing."


"It's got a lot of excitement, a lot of drama, pathos, music, comedy and suspense," Rezzuto said.

Audience reactions to 'Dark of the Moon' have been as varied as its artist interpretations, according to playwright Richardson.

"I was asked by a little old lady if I were the one who had written this vile play," Richardson said, recalling a Washington production. "When I replied that I was, she tried to hit me over the head with her umbrella."

'Dark of the Moon' will run for four days, Sept. 24-27. Curtain time is 8 p.m. and tickets are available for \$2.75 at the Carolina Playmakers business office or at Ledbetter Pickard downtown.

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