

Bergman Lacks Appeal In Search for Truth

BY DAVID GIFFIN

Attempts To Impress, Fails To Entertain In Hyland Films

Seeing a number of Ingmar Bergman's films within a short time convinces me of one thing - he's dreadfully repetitious. Bergman seems to work on the assumption that any given audience is only apt to see one of his pictures; it therefore doesn't matter if he repeats himself, because no one will know the difference. Thus, even in an ostensible comedy (The Devil's Eye) we are left with a moral message; that the struggles between God and Satan are too petty for mortals to be concerned with. Bergman's efforts in the comic genre, if The Devil's Eye and A Lesson in Love are representative examples, are heavy-handed and clumsy, to say the least, and the moral emphasis destroys any spontaneity they may otherwise have had. Bergman, in short, doesn't have much of a sense of humour, and if he is to be judged seriously, as he surely intends to be, then it must be on the basis of his tragic and tragicomic films.

The "seriousness" in Bergman's serious pictures revolves around the age-old effort to justify the ways of God to men. Bergman's position is that of the agnostic; he doesn't know, and his constant questioning soon wears a trifle thin. He suggests that whatever rationality can be perceived in the world is the result of mutual trust among human beings, and the lines of communication between people must be kept open before any attempt to speak with God can succeed. This is the view which emerges in films like Wild Strawberries and Through A Glass Darkly. One story will do, though; it's sheer waste to base a life's work on a single theme.

Bergman likes to emphasize the environment in which his characters live. This is indeed one of the most frequently remarked-upon aspects of Bergman's art; the short sequences that set a mood and make ideal clips to include in trailers. When he doesn't show the environment, he talks about it (as in the instructions to Don Juan in The Devil's Eye). He does, in fact, seem to place some of the blame for the disorder and unhappiness of his characters upon the world which they inhabit - Scandinavia is beautiful, yes, but why didn't God make it a less forbidding land in which to live? This may seem rather childish, but it is what Bergman is doing. The coldness of

the climate is reflected in the loneliness and isolation of the people he shows us. For all his apparent interest in the landscape, however, the typical Bergman film works itself out within-doors. Movie-making is cheaper on the sound stage; so is black-and-white film which Bergman habitually employs.

An article in the December Atlantic Monthly by Pauline Kael points out that many modern films are completely plotless; the story element has been sacrificed in the name of "Art". Her observation is interesting when applied to Bergman. When he has a good story with which to work, as in The Virgin Spring, Bergman really does achieve a mastery. Without a bed-rock of story material on which to build, he produces something as rambling and incoherent as Wild Strawberries, or something as completely devoid of action as Through A Glass Darkly. He seems to have little sense of what does constitute a good story, or, if this seems harsh, he is quite willing to torpedo the story for some other element of design. The flash-back technique is extremely difficult to handle successfully; Bergman cannot handle it at all. A Lesson in Love illustrates how, at his worst, he can become entangled in the time element. Wild Strawberries succeeds rather better in this regard because an effort is made to confine the flash-backs to dreams. In dreams, as Freud realized, anything goes. Bergman achieves true success only when dealing with a sequential plot in a sequential manner, as in The Virgin Spring. There is something to be said for the much-maligned unity of time. He almost succeeds in The Magician, but dissipates an otherwise satisfying picture in the juvenile symbolism with which the film ends. The hero's sudden and unexpected change of fortune is marked by the abrupt shift from a drenching rain to sunny skies. Such an amateurish device is not worthy of Bergman's skill, even if, as I overheard

being remarked, Bergman was attempting to parody himself in the film. Here again, his insistence on a "message", that people can be sold dreams only if convinced that the dream is not illusion but reality, that the entertainer has no business attempting anything other than to entertain, is too prominent to satisfy.

Upon what, then, does Bergman's reputation lie? Two comments by friends may point the way. When I asked one what he thought of Wild Strawberries, the answer was, "It sort of makes me feel sad". Bergman is very successful in eliciting an emotional response from his audience. This explains, I think, much of his appeal. It goes back in a sense to the Aristotelian concept of catharsis, although with Bergman the spectator is not so much purged as made aware of sentiments which he ordinarily does not (or would not) feel. As Lawrence said at the beginning of Lady Chatterley's Lover, ours is essentially a tragic age, and because of this, we tend to ignore the tragedy. We hem ourselves in, as Professor Borg had done, as his son had done, and forget the sense of pity. Suddenly we are brought to an awareness that it is almost too late. What then? Bergman sends his audience home with the happy-sad feeling that escape from isolation is possible. In other words, it is easy to see ourselves in Bergman's characters, to feel their dilemmas as our own. In the 1930's, escapism in the movies meant characters who were as unlike the audience as possible; men who were handsome and rich, strong but cultured; women who were beautiful and beautifully clothed. In the 1960's the case is altered; the hero is frequently neither wealthy nor handsome, and quite often weak both physically and morally, while the heroine is drab and drably dressed. The hungry '30's dreamed of affluence; the affluent '60's hunger for some sign of permanence in the midst of spiritual poverty.

Another comment made to me was that Bergman is unbearably boring; nothing happens in his pictures, there is no action, no colour, no "life". Life is there, all right, only so vividly we sometimes cannot recognize it. When Bergman holds the mirror up to Nature, we see ourselves. This is small comfort to those who plunk down their dollar bills and expect two hours' blissful cessation of thought. Bergman not only expects but demands something of his audience; they must put into viewing his pictures some fraction of the effort he had to put into making them. If the spectator doesn't co-operate, he might just as well be looking at the words on the pages of a book without attempting to comprehend them. He won't understand what he's looking at in the least. Bergman's pictures as a rule (The Virgin Spring is evidently an atypical Bergman effort) are more "talkie" than "movie". This is an unfortunate tendency, because it leads eventually, as Pauline Kael points out, to a separation of "films for the academics" and "movies for the mob", both branches then rapidly evolving themselves into oblivion. The decline of the Elizabethan stage in the first quarter of the seventeenth century, for example, can be seen as a result of its becoming more and more a coterie art. I feel fairly strongly, with Miss Kael, that motion pictures must maintain a popular appeal if they are to flourish in the future as they have in the past.

Is Bergman justified, then, in boring part of his audience in the effort to get his vision across? He is, after all, a commercial movie-maker (just as Shakespeare was a commercial playwright). His primary purpose is to make a profit for Swedish Film Industries. Should he, then, stop trying to impress and get around to the business of entertaining? Aside from the report that any film company would be happy to employ Bergman merely as a prestige figure and permit him to do anything he wished, which doesn't answer the question but skirts it, we are forced to say that yes, if Bergman wishes to be taken seriously, he must move on to new things. He can, of course, repeat himself as often as he wishes, his reputation, those who say with the appearance of each new film, "Ah, a classic!" (this after the first screening of the picture - what meaning does the word "classic" have any more?) are behaving very like the people who praised the emperor's new clothes, when the emperor was, in fact, parading his nudity.

GAZETTE REVIEWS

Margaret Ann Ireland at Neptune

BY BRYCE MORRISON
Gazette Music Editor

Miss Margaret Ann Ireland gave a piano recital, entitled "Germanic Masters" at the Neptune Theatre, recently. She was eloquently introduced to us by a representative of CBC, under whose auspices the recital was given. Miss Ireland's press releases quoted a highly impressive list of international tours, press acclaim, and the pronouncement that she is "an outstanding musician", by the formidable Russian virtuoso, Emil Gilels. But press handouts can be notoriously misleading, the comments of those who hold high positions in the musical profession, frequently extravagant, and it can be reliably reported that on this occasion, Miss Ireland gave no evidence whatsoever, of being either "outstanding", or "brilliant." Indeed, so undistinguished were her readings in

general, as to make the epithet "musician" a questionable one. Her choice of so-called "Germanic Masters" also proved questionable.

A couple of faded period pieces in the form of two "songs without words" by Mendelssohn could hardly be considered as the work of a "Germanic Master." Similarly, two "piano pieces" from opus 47 by Hans Pfitzner, though they would undoubtedly be worth an occasional hearing, if played by the late Walter Gieseking (to whom they are dedicated) proved pitifully dull in Miss Ireland's hands - a sort of un-comfortable compendium of pseudo-Brahms and Schumann. Mendelssohn's variations series, opus 54, is a work of far greater substance, but both technically and musically, the pianist had nothing to offer. She

cautiously felt her way through its considerable difficulties, without a spark of imagination or flair. Rhythms were consistently flaccid and ill-defined, and inaccuracies abounded at every turn. The two "songs without words" already mentioned, moved along similar lines, the second (the famous "Bee's Wedding") demonstrating the most lamentable inadequacy in terms of dexterity. Pfitzner's "two pieces" totally failed to come to life, and a group of Intermezzi, by Brahms, from opus 117, 118, and 119, were deplorably done. The savage passions and gestures of the A minor, opus 118, and the sparkling wit of the C major, opus 119, were completely unrealized, while the B flat minor, opus 117, reached a new low water mark in its total lack of interpretive insight.

Beethoven's "Appassionata" sonata, concluded the proceedings, and while this was rather better, surprisingly enough, it failed utterly to suggest the range of Beethoven's power. Schubert's G flat impromptu, added as an encore, whilst at least competent as to the matter of notes, disclosed not a wit of any temperamental affinity or warmth. Non-entities of Miss Ireland's sort abound on concert platforms throughout the world, and since fine pianists are also two to the penny, one can see little point in the continuation of such manifest inadequacy. Her mouse-like tinklings, in Mendelssohn, for example, would doubtless make an attractive background noise, to say, after tea, but as serious interpreter of great music, she can hardly be said to exist at all.

Behan's "The Hostage," Admirable

BY DOUGLAS BARBOUR
Gazette Reviewer

DGDS has every right to be proud of its production of "The Hostage" this fall. Brendan Behan's "entertainment" (I can find no more suitable word for it) lends itself to the boisterous talents of a young amateur company, as many "safer" or less extravagant plays do not. This production was, for the most part, admirably served by the students. Evelyn Garbary's direction was very solid, and the only real criticism one can make is that she allowed the pace to drag somewhat. Otherwise, she played for the laughs (there were many of them), and gave the actors plenty of room to do their stuff. In one or two spots she directed for spectacle, allowing the lines to be lost in the general confusion, but this was usually in places where it did not matter too much.

It was a refreshing experience to watch some really talented young amateurs moving about on a good stage. The choice of the Neptune Theatre was a good one. The choices of Gwyn Phillips for ones. Credit where credit is due:

Gwyn Phillips very nearly stole the whole show with his performance as Pat. He never faltered

ed once, and the old gimpy leg was well in evidence, throughout. Mr. Phillips had a convincing accent, too.

The parts of Leslie and Teresa hold a number of pitfalls for young amateurs: Behan has written a few nicely sentimental love scenes for the young couple. They carried them off with great aplomb, and, indeed, John Yoe was creditable throughout his performance. Linda Dudley was just innocent enough, yet open and friendly enough, to be convincing as a naive young maiden. Karen Quigley started slowly, but soon grew into her role, and when the lines called for it she was an commanding a "madame" as anyone could wish. She played tough all the way, and I think this was a wise decision, especially as it used the cliché of the "whore with the heart of gold" in just the play, Behan's little sacred - cow - destroyer, where real mileage could still be found for it.

Among the smaller parts, James Craig as Princess Grace, and Eleanor Pushie as Miss Gilchrist stood out. Princess Grace is a part for stereotyped gesture, but Craig did more than just go through the motions, and his little "bird" was really laugh-provoking. Perhaps all the part required was sufficient gall; if so, Craig Pat, the boozy old proprietor of the Dublin brothel where all the action takes place, of John Yoe as Leslie, the hostage, of Karen Quigley as Meg Dillon, retired whore, of Linda Dudley as Teresa, the young convent girl who falls in love with Leslie; of James Craig as Princess Grace, everybody's favourite fairy; and of Eleanor Pushie as Miss Gilchrist, a funny sort of "social" worker, were all happy

had it, and used it. Miss Pushie used her height well, and her studied awkwardness was just right, matching the awkwardness of much of her speech.

The rest of the cast performed with verve, if not always with aplomb. They were obviously enjoying themselves, as Behan seems to have intended. This infectious feeling of enjoyment spread to include the whole audience, which was the main intent of the play, I think. Peter Ray's piano stylings helped to achieve this effect.

The Neptune stage is extremely well designed. The set took advantage of the stage to give the actors plenty of room, and yet suggest a rather full and scruffy building. It was just seedy enough to be convincing. Lighting was good, except when the technicians slipped up in their timing once or twice. The sound effects, from the first bar of the opening anthem, were clear and well

timed. Mrs. Garbary proved sly in the use she made of the audio effects at her disposal. In fact all the backstage work was well handled, and the results were evident and enjoyable onstage.

A great deal of the credit for a successful evening of theatre should probably go to George Munroe, whose energy and dedication behind the scenes was manifest in the finished product.

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Beat The Devil: "A Shinplaster"

BY DAVID GIFFIN
Gazette Reviewer

Beat The Devil is an excellent example of the "topical" movie (and this criticism is not limited only to comedies) that begins to show its age almost before it's in the can. A decade ago, uranium was the magic metal, possessed of all the glamour associated in the nineteenth century with gold. A decade ago, the Adam Smith idea of colonialism was still very much in the news. Today, with the bottom knocked out of the uranium market and the former leader of the Mau Mau a Commonwealth Prime Minister, the plot of Beat The Devil, which concerns the efforts of a rather bumbling quartet of villains to exploit uranium holdings in British East Africa (sic), appears as odd as a 25-cent shinplaster.

The film was directed by John Huston and starred Humphrey Bogart, a pretty powerful cinematic pair not very long ago.

The Treasure of Sierra Madre and The African Queen were both Academy Award-winning pictures. Bogart's acting style was all his own: it could be parodied but never matched. What- ever merit Beat The Devil retains, after its topicality has passed and rendered it simply a cinematic curiosity, resides pretty largely in Bogart's screen personality. The film can always serve as second feature during Bogart film festivals (an article in Time last year was devoted to the annual one at Harvard.) The dialogue is still quite funny, even if the topical jokes are more than a little embarrassing, reflecting credit on Huston and Truman Capote (Breakfast at Tiffany's), who jointly prepared the script.

The two feminine roles in the picture are taken by Gina Lollobrigida and Jennifer Jones. The contrast in sheer acting talent is

startling. Ten years ago, at least, Miss Lollobrigida's career was beginning largely on the strength of her fore and aft superstructure: Miss Jones was suffering through the final stages of what must surely prove to be one of the most mis-managed careers of any Hollywood actress. In Beat The Devil, flushed, sweaty, and obviously thirsty, she conveys perfectly the misty-eyed myopia of the incurable romantic. Of course, Bogart manages to fend her off, in the best traditions of the Producers' Code, but what a pity! She really deserves better.

The movie was filmed in Italy, which gave Huston the opportunity for several pleasingly pastoral settings, and one very effective visual sequence in the Senett mode. Bogart and the leading heavy (played by Robert Morley) are trying to get to the airport to catch a plane to "British

East". The dilapidated taxi in which they are travelling keeps stalling on the road which twists perilously down a cliff-face beside the sea. At last, exhausted with pushing the car to get it started again, they are unable to catch up with it, and after following the turns in the road for a considerable stretch (without a driver), the vehicle plunges over the railing and keeps falling for a seemingly interminable time before finally hitting the water. The visual effect is impressive.

A John Huston production is certainly never (consciously, at least) a second-rate one: Beat The Devil is unfortunate in that the course of world events makes it appear less than it was. The question arises whether topical humour can ever be the basis of lasting value. If so, the urbane and intellectualized approach of Beat The Devil is not the way.

ing on the part of student actors assured the play's failure.

BUTTERS AND BACH
The costuming was delightful. An extraneous element was introduced in the form of music by Joseph MacDonald, organist, and the Dalhousie Chorale. Mr.

MacDonald gave the audience a large, healthful, wonderful dose of Bach. He and Mrs. Butters - and the Dalhousie Chorale - provided the main means of preventing complete rebellion in at least one member of the audience that night.

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Campus Workshop's Nativity, "Depressing"

BY JOHN CHATTERTON

I found the Basileia Nativity of December 6 depressing. The avoidable faults of the production were faults of acting; the actors were at fault in that they could not project their characterizations or their voices.

In criticism of the Dalhousie Drama Workshop production, one should not be too hasty in condemning the obvious inexperience of most of the cast. The important thing about the play - a medieval mystery play - is that it be approached in the spirit in which it was written, a spirit of reverence, sincerity and fun.

ACTORS GOOFED
Unfortunately, those whose lack of skill precluded their approaching the play in any but the amateurish manner in which it was first produced, were too inhibited and noiseless to do so. They showed large - albeit varying - degrees of shyness, lack of contact with the play, or both. There was much more projection on the part of the non-student actors, but here, except in the case of Herod, there was little of the amateurish vigour and sincerity needed. Isaiah, played by Alan Cannon, was notable for his almost ludicrous interpretation of the part, making a prophet into a dear old uncle. It is difficult to err by too little sophistication in such a play, provided one is equipped with a vivid sense of drama; but there is great danger of losing sight of

the basic aim of the play, for the sake of lofty, and irrelevant technical ends. The non-student actors, other than Herod, showed the results of too much artiness.

John Ripley's Herod was a better job than any other in the play, but still it was only fair. He showed little variety of movement or expression, and so lost any chance of using simple "ham" to make the part a success. Herod's is by far the best part in the play, but he did not show it to its best advantage.

Acoustically, the hall was wretched. This fact helped to destroy a potentially interesting production, but the actors should have overcome the acoustics, as they did once or twice; there were four or five microphones scattered about. One means of overcoming the acoustics problem of a hall is to restrict one's pitch range to that which allows maximum audibility. Every hall has such a range, but not one of the actors in The Nativity showed any knowledge of the fact; bad speaking here. The costume department, headed by Doris Butters, deserves the only credit to be given for the production proper; it would be good indeed to see Mrs. Butters' work again in a Dalhousie production. All the rich, bright, enthusiastic feeling of the play bore fruit