



RE-RELEASES

Cries and Whispers

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

The first voices to be heard in *Cries and Whispers* are those of an army of clocks, muttering and chiming in a litany of comment at the uncontrollable passage of time. Surmounted by baroque helmets of golden cherubs, their faces stare at us in impassive accusation, as though confirming that to encase life in a mantelpiece ornament is one of mankind's more ludicrous ways of externalising his mortality. There is a close-up of the second-hand, chopping down like a scythe, and then, in an instant of heart failure, a clock has stopped. It is as if a miraculous suspension of nature lets us slip through into an uncertain period beyond, where a woman sleeps, clumsy and inadvertent, in a chair, while another struggles through a crisis of agony on her sickbed, rises feebly, and sets the clock to rights again. She'll last a little longer – long enough for us to explore whether her existence has been worth the struggle. 'It's early Monday morning,' writes Agnes in her diary, a Brontë sister striving to come to terms with the intolerable, 'and I'm in pain.'

It's a superb opening, rich, elaborate, familiar. The images are fresh, yet *Wild Strawberries* (for example), with its eager coffin and uncommunicative timepieces, began in much the same way 15 years ago. Bergman has no right to expect us to join his game again, but one responds gratefully to the pattern as to an immaculate, freshly set-up chessboard, the symbols losing nothing in potency for their reappearance. Time always seems to have been running out for Bergman's characters, deported as they are from a clouded past to a baleful future through the insubstantial landscape of the present. The journey allows them a few questions, some inarticulate gestures of love and hatred, and nothing more. They endure a lifetime of sleepless mornings, and an entire inquisition of doubts and pains.

For Agnes in *Cries and Whispers* the pain is that of terminal cancer; she is dying among the blood-red furnishings of the family home, attended by her two sisters Karin and Maria, and by the devoted, motherly servant Anna. Despite its theatrical resonances, the situation assumes the usual Bergman complexity by the simplest of means – the flashback which we can believe or not as we please. Since the ambiguities of *Persona* and *Hour of the Wolf*, Bergman's sudden interpolations have not been the most precise means of following the narrative, but *Cries and Whispers* appears to provide genuine, if startling, recollections, heralded and concluded by floods of crimson across the screen.

Agnes (Harriet Andersson), who has never married, has passed the years in memory of the mother who largely ignored her except for a single sorrowful gaze. The others have suffered more eventfully. Maria (Liv Ullmann) has had an affair with the local doctor, leading her despairing husband to attempt suicide, while Karin (Ingrid Thulin) is imprisoned in marriage with a man she loathes so much that on one occasion she mutilated herself to avoid his clutches in the bedroom. These two operatic sequences – Maria's husband staggering about with a paper-knife in his chest and Karin hacking between her legs with a piece of glass and smearing the blood across her mouth – are punctuated by the hideous spasms of Agnes as she dies. Take it all seriously?

Well, no. But the melodrama has prepared the way for the film's most extraordinary sequence, in which Anna the maid dreams, imagines, or remembers (it's not too important which) the resurrection of Agnes and the cries of her shrouded body for the embraces of her sisters. Their disgust and terror outweigh their affection for Agnes, and it is left to Anna to provide for any physical comforts that the living corpse may need.

Bergman's final images are tranquil, a symphony of white dresses and late summer colours; it is a day recorded by Agnes' diary as her happiest, spent in the company of her devoted sisters. Like Björnstrand's speech at the end of *Through a Glass Darkly*, it needs to be treated with suspicion, not least for the sentimentality with which Bergman infuses it. The joyful Agnes, whose feet never were too firmly on the ground, depended for her perfect day on the façade presented by the impulsive Maria and the unresponsive Karin, whose incompatibility (however much exaggerated by Anna's fantasy) has been illustrated by their parting conversation. Betrayal is more in their nature than love. So Agnes may be able to conquer pain with love, but it leaves her no better off than the rest of them – even the maid is a mother substitute and treats Agnes as a replacement for the child she lost. Yet Bergman's clocks keep ticking; since the duration of our lives is so brief, he seems to say, why not settle for an illusion or two? It's an unusually mellow conclusion, and he'll need to reach it several times in a row before we can believe he means it.

In all other respects, *Cries and Whispers* is a well-thumbed catalogue of disillusionments. As in *Hour of the Wolf*, Bergman has assembled characters from all stages of his previous work – the scornful lover from *Sawdust and Tinsel*, the tortured cleric from *Winter Light*, the rapacious sensualist and the brooding intellectual from *The Silence*, the below-stairs realist from *Smiles of a Summer Night*. All the old conclusions are there: marriage is a tissue of lies, men are weak, brutal and repulsive, sex is degrading, faith is inaccessible unless you have it already, in which case it's inexplicable. At times, *Cries and Whispers* looks like self-plagiarism, particularly when Anders Ek, voice atremble, tells us straight to camera that Agnes had a stronger faith than his, or when Erland Josephson and Liv Ullmann take each other's wrinkles to task in close-up. Occasionally there's even a narrator, chipping in abruptly to tide us over a bit of explanation the easy way, his contributions too arbitrary to appear much more than second thoughts. 'It's the same old film every time,' Bergman said while shooting it, 'the same actors, the same scenes, the same problems. The only thing that makes it different is that we're older...'

Nevertheless, the other differences are there. For a start, *Cries and Whispers* is a stunning Bergman experiment in the uses of red and white, its rooms upholstered with membranous scarlet, its occupants like brilliantly costumed ghosts. The elemental colours give a magnificent force to the anguish of the characters; if nothing else, they look too good to be disregarded. And striking in on them from the delicious, neglected world outside, like brief illuminations of their dark lives, come geometric slabs of sunlight, warming a face here, a smile there, until the breakthrough comes at last with the final open-air exuberance. Bergman and Nykvist have been achieving miracles with light for years, but *Cries and Whispers* is unquestionably their greatest collaboration.

Philip Strick, *Sight & Sound*, Spring 1973

CRIES AND WHISPERS (VISKNINGAR OCH ROP)

Director: Ingmar Bergman
Production Companies: Cinematograph, Svenska Filminstitutet
Producer: Ingmar Bergman
Production Manager: Lars-Owe Carlberg
Runners: Anders Bergkvist, Ragnar Waaranperä
Collaborators: Arne Carlsson, Hans Rehnberg
Script Supervisor: Katherina Faragó
Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman
Director of Photography: Sven Nykvist
Assistant Camera: Lars Karlsson
Electricians: Gerhard Carlsson, Stefan Gustafsson
Stills Photography: Bo-Erik Gyberg
Editor: Siv Lundgren
Art Director: Marik Vos
Assistant Art Director: Ann-Christin Lohrätten
Properties: Gunilla Hagberg
Costumes: Greta Johansson, Karin Johansson
Make-up: Cecilia Drott, Britt Falkemo, Börje Lundh
Musician, Chopin's 'Mazurka': Käbi Laretei
Musician, Bach's 'Saraband': Pierre Fournier
Sound: Owe Svensson
Sound Assistant: Tommy Persson
Mixings: Sven Fahlén, Owe Svensson
English Subtitles: Alan Blair *
Narrator: Ingmar Bergman

Cast

Harriet Andersson (*Agnes*)
Kari Sylwan (*Anna*)
Ingrid Thulin (*Karin*)
Liv Ullmann (*Maria/Maria's mother*)
Anders Ek (*Isak, the priest*)
Inga Gill (*Aunt Olga*)
Erland Josephson (*doctor*)
Henning Moritzen (*Joakim*)
Georg Årlin (*Fredrik*)
Linn Ullmann (*Maria's daughter*) *
Rosanna Mariano (*Agnes as a child*) *
Malin Gjörup (*Anna's daughter*) *
Lena Bergman (*Maria as a child*) *
Monika Priede (*Karin as a child*) *
Greta Johansson *
Karin Johansson *
Ingrid Von Rosen *
Ann-Christin Lohrätten *
Börje Lundh *
Lars-Owe Carlberg *

Sweden 1972

91 mins

* Uncredited

A BFI release

The screening on Sun 3 Apr 15:10 will be introduced by
Christina Newland, Lead Film Critic, *The i* newspaper

NEW & RE-RELEASES

The Worst Person in the World (Verdens verste menneske)

From Mon 28 Mar

Paris, 13th District (Les Olympiades)

From Mon 28 Mar

Hive

From Tue 29 Mar

Cries and Whispers (Viskningar och rop)

From Fri 1 Apr

A Night of Knowing Nothing +

From Fri 1 Apr (+ Q&A with director Payal Kapadia on Sun 3 Apr 17:50)

Playground

From Fri 15 Apr (+ Q&A with director Laura Wandel on Thu 21 Apr 18:10)

IN PERSON & PREVIEWS

Liv Ullmann in Conversation

Fri 8 Apr 18:10

TV Preview: Gerry Anderson: A Life Uncharted + Q&A with producer-director Benjamin Field and producer Jamie Anderson

Sat 9 Apr 15:00

Worzel Gummidge Restoration Screening + discussion

Sun 10 Apr 12:00

Mark Kermode Live in 3D at the BFI

Mon 11 Apr 18:30

Preview: Benedetta

Wed 13 Apr 20:30

Preview: Bubble (Baburu)

Wed 20 Apr 20:30

LIV ULLMANN: FACE TO FACE

Autumn Sonata (Höstsonaten)

Sat 2 Apr 20:45; Sat 9 Apr 12:10 (+ Q&A with Liv Ullmann);

Mon 18 Apr 18:20; Tue 26 Apr 18:10 (+ extended intro by Melanie Iredale, Director, Birds' Eye View)

Shame (Skammen)

Tue 5 Apr 20:45 (+ intro by Catharine Des Forges, Director, Independent Cinema Office); Wed 13 Apr 18:10; Wed 27 Apr 18:00

The Passion of Anna (En passion)

Thu 7 Apr 18:15; Thu 14 Apr 18:10 (+ intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer at Large); Sat 23 Apr 14:20

Persona Fri 8 Apr 20:40 (+ intro by Liv Ullmann); Sun 17 Apr 18:40; Mon 25 Apr 20:50

Faithless (Trolösa) Sat 9 Apr 18:15 (+ extended intro by Liv Ullmann);

Sat 23 Apr 16:40 (+ intro by Nellie Alston, freelance programmer and member of T A P E Collective); Wed 27 Apr 20:00

Scenes from a Marriage (Scener ur ett äktenskap)

Sun 10 Apr 17:40; Sat 30 Apr 17:15

An-Magritt Tue 12 Apr 20:40; Wed 20 Apr 18:20

The Emigrants (Utvandrarna) Sat 16 Apr 14:10 (+ intro by Sarah Lutton, season programmer); Sun 24 Apr 13:45

The New Land (Nybyggarna) Sat 16 Apr 18:50; Sat 30 Apr 12:40

Face to Face (Ansikte mot ansikte) + intro by Sarah Lutton, season programmer Sun 17 Apr 14:15

Saraband Tue 19 Apr 18:20; Sat 30 Apr 20:50

The Wayward Girl (Ung flukt)

Thu 21 Apr 18:20 (+ intro by Anna Smith, film critic and broadcaster)

Miss Julie Sun 24 Apr 17:50; Fri 29 Apr 20:20 (+ intro by Elaine Wong, short film programmer, BFI London Film Festival)

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