



LIV ULLMANN: FACE TO FACE

Scenes from a Marriage

(Scener ur ett äktenskap)

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

Originally a six-part TV miniseries, *Scenes from a Marriage* was subsequently edited into this feature-length cinema version. Created in the era of second-wave feminism, amidst rising divorce rates, this piercing portrait of a disintegrating marriage struck a chord with many audiences. As Marianne and Johan, Liv Ullmann and Erland Josephson have never been more tender, which makes the way they hurt one another all the more heart breaking.

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A contemporary review

For six Wednesday evenings this spring [1973] Swedish television has been showing Ingmar Bergman's *Scenes from a Marriage*, a series of 50-minute programmes made directly for TV. On these evenings, half of Sweden has taken the phone off the hook, and in thousands of homes people have used the Bergman series as a basis for discussion on the problems of living together. The destiny of the couple, Johan and Marianne, has been followed with the kind of interest that surrounded the richer and more gaudy gallery of characters in *The Forsyte Saga*.

In his first TV series (he previously made for television a documentary about his home island Fårö and the film *The Rite*), Bergman holds to his classical *kammerspiel* tradition. Johan and Marianne (Erland Josephson and Liv Ullmann) completely dominate the drama. In two episodes they are the only characters; in others Bergman has introduced a couple of accessories to comment on or mirror their drama. Johan is a doctor, Marianne is a lawyer. They have been married some ten years, and have two daughters. They have what people would call 'an ideal marriage'.

Bergman introduces us to this seeming idyll via an ironic stratagem. In the first scenes of the first episode Johan and Marianne are visited by a journalist from a woman's weekly, who is inspecting the home and the relationship, asking treacherous questions and giving indiscreet sidelong looks. It is a malicious introduction, where nothing is allowed to break through the illusion. The journalist – and the audience – is presented with a solid facade: well-brushed children, a tidy home and a couple of well-expressed definitions on the notorious questions about love and happiness. But the cracks are there, and they widen as the series proceeds. Johan and Marianne's existence is by no means free from problems. They talk with insight and awareness about their situation, but when a conversation risks becoming inflammable, they retreat via some suitable excuse. They try to come closer to each other, but they seem afraid of the touch, a touch which is real and serious and which might threaten their habits of life.

Scenes from a Marriage is to a large extent a counterpoint to *The Touch*; and as in *The Touch*, Bergman seems to mean that you have to go through a passion to be able to find your real self, your own face. You have to break loose from the comfortable prisons offered by the bourgeoisie and search for overwhelming experiences. Here, the husband one day, without warning, announces that he wants to leave his wife. For some time he has been seeing

another woman, Paula. They are now planning to go to Paris for six months. Johan has got a scholarship and wants to leave immediately. The confession is brutal, and Marianne's world falls apart. What will the children, their parents, their friends say? Her shock is no less when she discovers that their friends have long known about Johan's affair.

This break-up takes place in the third episode, and the rest of the series shows how husband and wife, separately and together, arrive at a kind of private insight into themselves. In the fourth episode Johan looks Marianne up after his return from Paris. He regards the affair with Paula as important but a failure, and shows an unexpressed longing to come back to his wife. She confesses that she is still in love with Johan, but she doesn't dare to get involved with him again.

In the fifth episode Marianne visits Johan at his office. She brings the forms for their divorce, but she also tries to seduce him. They quarrel and start to fight. In the final episode some ten years have passed. Both Johan and Marianne have remarried, and they have both reached a new kind of independence and understanding.

Bergman can be described as a conservative anarchist. He describes the moral life of his main characters exactly as they live themselves: quietly, without hurry, without stressing the development of their feelings, their thoughts or conversations. His language is listening, quiet, vigilant and understated. The style is even more close-up than in his recent films. The faces of the actors are Bergman's dramatic landscape.

The world Bergman reveals is the protected rooms of the bourgeoisie; and this has been the main reason for some strong criticism of both his films and his TV series. Bergman does not make any kind of links with the society surrounding the figures in his films, and the problems he dwells on are therefore considered too private and exclusive. Only the bourgeoisie can afford time and money for these problems. This is true, but it doesn't mean that the problems are irrelevant.

In one of his novels Dostoevsky lets one of his characters say (thus portraying Tolstoy): 'If I were a Russian novelist and if I had talent, I would always choose my characters from the Russian nobility, because only in this background do you find the outer appearance of fine discipline and noble motives...' Bergman locks his problems up in the same kind of 'noble milieu' where pure and clear truths can be formed. But if *The Touch* or *Scenes from a Marriage* is Bergman's *Anna Karenina*, one misses here the network of contacts to a world outside which was always held open in Tolstoy's novel. In *Scenes from a Marriage*, for instance, Johan and Marianne's children are practically forgotten after the first episode. And when Bergman introduces other people around Johan and Marianne (the series is spiced with excellent bit performances from players like Bibi Andersson and Gunnel Lindblom), one would want to see either more of them or less because they demand a place in the lives of the husband and wife.

Paradoxically enough, the episodes where Johan and Marianne are completely alone emerge as the most engaging and emotionally true. Here the issues are clean and clear. Johan and Marianne are no ideal characters. They talk to us, shamelessly direct, vulnerable and unprotected. And we are allowed to share an experience.

Stig Björkman, *Sight and Sound*, Summer 1973

SCENES FROM A MARRIAGE (SCENER UR ETT ÄKTENSKAP)

Director: Ingmar Bergman
Production Company: Cinematograph
Producer: Ingmar Bergman
Production Manager: Lars-Owe Carlberg
Collaborators: Anders Bergkvist, Stefan Gustafsson, Lars Hagberg, Adolf Karlström, Kent Nyström, Bo-Erik Ohlsson, Siri Werkelin
Script Supervisor: Ulla Stattin
Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman
Director of Photography: Sven Nykvist
Colour Controller: Nils Melander
B-Camera: Lasse Karlsson
Stills: Lars Karlsson *
Editor: Siv Lundgren
Art Director: Björn Thulin *
Properties: Gunilla Hagberg
Costumes: Inger Pehrsson
Make-up: Cecilia Drott
Sound: Owe Svensson
B-Sound: Arne Carlsson
Mixing: Owe Svensson

Cast:
Liv Ullmann (Marianne)
Erland Josephson (Johan)
Bibi Andersson (Katarina)
Jan Malmström (Peter, Katarina’s husband)
Gunnel Lindblom (Eva, Johan’s colleague)
Barbro Hiort af Ornäs (Mrs Jacobi)
Anita Wall (Mrs Palm, the interviewer)
Ingmar Bergman (voice of the photographer)

Sweden 1973
162 mins

* Uncredited

LIV ULLMANN: FACE TO FACE

The Wayward Girl (Ung flukt)

Mon 28 Mar 18:10 (+ pre-recorded intro by Invisible Women, Archive Activists); Thu 21 Apr 18:20 (+ intro by Anna Smith, film critic and broadcaster)

Persona

Tue 29 Mar 14:30; Wed 30 Mar 20:50 (+ intro by Tricia Tuttle, BFI Festivals Director); Fri 8 Apr 20:40 (+ intro by Liv Ullmann); Sun 17 Apr 18:40; Mon 25 Apr 20:50

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

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

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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