



**BIG SCREEN CLASSICS**

# Wild Strawberries (Smultronstället)

**SPOILER WARNING** The following notes give away the film's ending.

An elderly scientist (Sjöström, superb) drives with his daughter-in-law from Stockholm to Lund to receive an honorary award; disturbed by a dream he had before setting out, he looks back over his life, revisiting key moments in an attempt to understand himself – and his family – better. One of Bergman's greatest films, this prototype road movie travels through both space and time.

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One of Ingmar Bergman's warmest films, this boasts a magnificent performance by Victor Sjöström, the actor who was himself an acclaimed Swedish filmmaker in his own right. He plays an ageing, grouchy academic driving to Lund to accept an award; the trip also traverses memories, reveries and illuminating encounters with family members and strangers alike. Famous for its early dream sequence, the film is nevertheless most impressive for its rich, vivid characterisations from a superb cast of Bergman regulars.

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The main character in Ingmar Bergman's *Wild Strawberries* (1957), Professor Isak Borg (Victor Sjöström), an eminent bacteriologist, spends the majority of the film travelling back through his memories and worries. Though in actuality he is travelling by car to Lund to receive an honorary degree, in Bergman's terms the terrain we inhabit is not simply a physical realm but a psychic one too; journeys are both inner and outer experiences. It is not an inanimate collection of roads, hills and houses but a skin that holds time within its scars. Borg is accompanied by his daughter-in-law Marianne (Ingrid Thulin), who has joined him even though she is planning to leave Borg's son, Evald (Gunnar Björnstrand), following a disagreement about the fate of their unborn child. Along the journey, the pair meet various characters, including a trio of youngsters, one of whom, Sara (Bibi Andersson), resembles Borg's lost love. The interactions between these characters and other passengers cause the melancholic doctor to drift off into dreams, reveries and memories.

Looking back is an addictive action whose potency increases as memories accumulate. But Borg has lived a life of avoidance, fearful of the pain in his past. His lost love seems to hold the greatest power in his earlier memories, suggesting this is the source of the pain that haunts him. The unhappiness of his eventual marriage rears its head too, strangely linking potential academic failure with his failure to be a loving husband. Even the recapitulation of the unhappiness between his son and Marianne has been avoided until this trip. It appears he has been resigned to accepting the loneliness of the passing years rather than trying to confront his ghosts. As one character asks him, 'Have you looked in the mirror, Isak?'

The film's final shot links his dream-world of good and bad memories but finds solace rather than torment. Time has been a key worry throughout the film; the handless clock in both his first dream and in his elderly mother's room implies a waste or loss. Is Borg really worried that his life has been meaningless? Bergman could have ended with a continuation of this

pessimistic streak – he did as much the same year in *The Seventh Seal* – but he knows that contentment before death is a more powerful and complex conclusion. The doctor's true love guides his older self gently through a field to a lake to see something. Bergman shows us the man witnessing his past as a gift; the gift of a memory. Light is shining on his face, flickering in his almost tearful eyes. It's an image that embodies totally a moment of happiness.

But what does Borg really see in that final shot? The sight we are presented with is an idyll, his parents enjoying the passing of their own time alone while their large family enjoy themselves on a boat tethered nearer to the house. The father is fishing, the mother watching on. Both are waving back fondly but the sight is not a simple one. Borg's expression shows us he is witnessing something profound, beyond words. For his parents are content, even in just that brief moment away from the confrontations that have characterised the memories in the earlier half of the film. Borg reminisces about such childhood memories, so he says, to calm him before sleep; a soothing proof that his life was not actually hopeless at all.

The screen fades from his memory-scape to the contented man in bed, having faced his demons on the road and now ready for sleep. It's Bergman's most emotional ending; seeing a youthful vision of home through the older eyes of experience. One feeds into the other, a bright and brilliant light shining through the dusty murk of a pessimist's prism. The hollowness and meaninglessness he had perceived in his life was only an illusion caused by the timidity of not looking directly back. Fear over who we once were will always crop up from time to time. Bergman ends on the reaction to this realisation, arguably the whole drive of the film captured in one moment. There is no naivety in regarding such warm memories from the days when wild strawberries grew freely in the garden, just an awareness that the best of days and the worst of days sat side by side and always will: 'Today, tomorrow, forever.'

**Adam Scovell, *Sight & Sound*, February 2018**

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#### **WILD STRAWBERRIES (SMULTRONSTÄLLET)**

*Director:* Ingmar Bergman

*Production Company:* Svensk Filmindustri

*Producer:* Carl Anders Dymling \*

*Production Manager:* Allan Ekelund \*

*Unit Manager:* Sven Sjönell

*Assistant Director:* Gösta Ekman

*Script Supervisor:* Katherina Faragó

*Screenplay:* Ingmar Bergman

*Director of Photography:* Gunnar Fischer

*Assistant Cameraman:* Björn Thermenius \*

*Editor:* Oscar Rosander

*Art Director:* Gittan Gustafsson

*Property Master:* Karl-Arne Bergman

*Costumes:* Millie Ström

*Wigs:* Nils Nittel, Firma Carl M. Lundh

*Music:* Erik Nordgren

*Musical Direction:* E. Eckert-Lundin \*

*Sound:* Aaby Wedin

*Assistant Sound:* Lennart Wallin \*

#### **Cast**

Victor Sjöström (*Professor Isak Borg*)

Bibi Andersson (*Sara, hitchhiker/Sara, Isak's cousin*)

Ingrid Thulin (*Marianne Borg, Evald's wife*)

Gunnar Björnstrand (*Dr Evald Borg*)

Jullan Kindahl (*Miss Agda, Isak's housekeeper*)

Folke Sundquist (*Anders, hitchhiking theology student*)

Björn Bjelvenstam (*Viktor, hitchhiking medical student*)

Naima Wifstrand (*Borg's mother*)

Gunnel Broström (*Berit Alman*)

Gertrud Fridh (*Karin, Isak's wife*)

Sif Ruud (*Aunt Olga*)

Gunnar Sjöberg (*Sten Alman, an engineer*)

Max von Sydow (*Henrik Åkerman, petrol station owner*)

Åke Fridell (*Karin's lover*)

Yngve Nordwall (*Uncle Aron*)

Per Sjöstrand (*Sigfrid, Isak's elder brother*)

Gio Petré (*Sigbritt, Isak's married sister*)

Gunnel Lindblom (*Charlotta, Isak's elder sister*)

Maud Hansson (*Angelica, Isak's younger sister*)

Ann-Mari Wiman (*Eva Åkerman, Henrik's wife*)

Eva Norée (*Anna, Isak's sister*)

Lena Bergman, Monica Ehrling (*Kristina/Brigitta, Isak's twin sisters*)

Per Skogsberg (*Hagbart, the eldest Borg brother*) \*

Göran Lundquist (*Benjamin, Isak's younger brother*) \*

Profesor Helge Wulff (*public orator in Lund Cathedral*) \*

Else Fisher (*Isak's mother as a young woman*) \*

Sweden 1957

91 mins

\* Uncredited

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## BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

### Touch of Evil

Mon 27 Mar 20:45; Tue 4 Apr 14:30; Sun 9 Apr 18:30; Fri 28 Apr 20:45

### Wild Strawberries (Smultronstället)

Tue 28 Mar 20:50; Wed 12 Apr 18:10 (+ intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-Large); Fri 14 Apr 20:50; Mon 24 Apr 14:30

### To Sleep with Anger + Borom Sarret (The Wagoner)

Wed 29 Mar 18:10 (+ intro); Mon 10 Apr 12:45; Wed 12 Apr 18:00

### Rio Bravo

Thu 30 Mar 20:20; Sun 9 Apr 12:50; Fri 21 Apr 20:20

### Aguirre, Wrath of God (Aguirre, der Zorn Gottes)

Fri 31 Mar 21:00; Thu 13 Apr 21:00; Thu 20 Apr 18:15

### Last year in Marienbad (L'Année dernière à Marienbad)

Sat 1 Apr 12:50; Mon 3 Apr 20:30; Sat 8 Apr 18:20; Tue 18 Apr 20:45

### La Grande Illusion

Sat 1 Apr 13:00; Wed 12 Apr 20:40; Sat 15 Apr 18:00; Fri 21 Apr 18:15

### The Godfather Part II

Sat 1 Apr 16:00; Sat 22 Apr 18:40; Sun 30 Apr 16:30

### Nashville

Sun 2 Apr 17:50; Sat 8 Apr 20:00; Sat 29 Apr 16:30

### The Passenger (Professione: reporter)

Wed 5 Apr 18:00 (+ intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-Large); Fri 7 Apr 20:20; Sun 16 Apr 18:15; Thu 27 Apr 18:10

### Pickpocket

Thu 6 Apr 20:45; Tue 11 Apr 14:30; Mon 17 Apr 20:50; Mon 24 Apr 20:50

### The Portrait of a Lady

Fri 7 Apr 14:30; Wed 19 Apr 17:50 (+ intro); Sat 29 Apr 20:15

### Code Unknown (Code inconnu)

Sun 9 Apr 15:45; Wed 26 Apr 18:15

### The Lady Eve

Mon 10 Apr 18:15; Sat 15 Apr 12:40; Sun 30 Apr 14:15

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