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FILM REVIEW: Hour of the Wolf (Ingmar Bergman, 1968): Sweden

Description

Reviewed by Larry Gleeson. Viewed at Grauman Chinese Theater, AFI film festival in Hollywood, CA.

With a very surreal mise-en-scene, *The Hour of the Wolf,* a horror/drama Swedish film produced by Svensk Film Industries, was directed by Ingmar Bergman. Other notable films by Bergman include *The Seventh Seal* (1957), *Wild Strawberries* (1957) and *Fanny and Alexander* (1982). The film follows a young couple who live on a desolate island. Johan Borg, an artistic painter, played by Max von Sydow of *Minority Report* (2002) *The Exorcist* (1973) and recently, *Shutter Island* (2010) fame, goes mad. Liv Ullman, most known for roles in *Persona* (1966) , *Shame* (1968), and *Scenes from a Marriage* (1973), plays Alma Borg, a very loving, doting wife.Yet, Johan is haunted by nightmares from his past.

The storyline has the artist communicating to his wife his most painful memories during â??the hour of the wolfâ?• â?? between midnight and dawn. In a brief note, Bergman explains: â??It is the hour when most people die, when sleep is deepest, when nightmares are more real. It is the hour when the sleepless are haunted by their deepest fear, when ghosts and demons are most powerful. The Hour of the Wolf is also the hour when most children are born.â?•

Johan stays up night after night speaking to Alma of his horrors as he stares into a candle. He retells an account when he was a young boy and of how his parents locked him in a closet and informed him that there was a man in the closet who was going to eat his toes off. On another night Johan tells the story of a fishing trip where he murders a young boy. Are these imaginations or are they realities? Most likely a little of both. Nevertheless, Bergman marches on toward a rather macabre grotesque dinner party where more bizarre behavior ensues. All bizarreness aside, the editing, done by Ulla Ryghe, known for *Through a Glass Darkly* (1961), *Persona* (1966), and *The Silence* (1963) makes this film work with the use of stark black and white images coupled with quick cuts, extreme closeups, goth-like makeup, howling wind effects and deafening cries. I asked again and again â?? Is this real or imagined? I sat riveted. Back and forth. In and out. I let go and just thoroughly enjoyed the film and all its imagery. The cinematography was done by Sven Nykvist known for popular films like *Sleepless in Seattle* (1993) , *Chaplain* (1992), and *Whatâ??s Eating Gilbert Grape* (1993). Oddly, the theater contained only a splatter of an audience. What a treat to see Ingmar Bergmanâ??s only horror film in a dark sparsely filled theater on a Sunday night near the bewitching hour! Highly recommended.

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