



***Sommarlek (Summer Interlude)* is an early summer 2026 LVCA dvd donation to the Ligonier Valley Library of Ligonier, Pennsylvania. Below is Kino Ken's review of that Criterion Collection dvd release.**

16 of a possible 20 points = ** = a minor classic**

**Sweden 1951 black-and-white 96 minutes subtitled live action feature drama Svensk Filmindustri Producer: Allan Eklund
a Criterion Collection dvd release**

Key: *indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance

Points:

- 2 Direction: Ingmar Bergman***
- 1 Editing: Oscar Rosander**
- 2 Cinematography: Gunnar Fischer***
Still photography: Louis Huch*
- 2 Lighting**

- 0 Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman and Herbert Grevenius based on an original story titled "Mari" by Ingmar Bergman
Script Supervision: Ingegerd Ericsson and Sol-Britt Norlander
- 2 Music: Erik Nordgren, Bengt Wallerström and Piotr Tchaikovsky
- 2 Production Design: Nils Svenwall*
Animation: Rune Andréasson
Makeup: Carl Lundh
- 2 Sound: Sven Hansen* and Aaby Wedin*
Sound Mixing: Sven Rudestedt*
- 2 Acting
- 1 Creativity
- 16 total points

Cast: Maj-Britt Nilsson* (Marie), Birger Malmsten (Henrik), Alf Kjellin (David Nyström), Annalisa Ericson (Kaj), Georg Funkquist (Uncle Erland), Stig Olin* (ballet master), Mimi Pollak* (Henrik's aunt), René'e Björling (Aunt Elisabeth), Gunnar Olsson* (Pastor), Gerd Andersson, Monique Roeger, Marianne Schöler, Göte Stergel (ballet dancers), thirteen others

A rather early transitional film in director Ingmar Bergman's career, *Sommarlek* offers a number of sneak peeks at themes and stagings which will recur in his later productions. The basic story is a survival tale, mourning loss of naïveté as it gets gradually replaced by cynicism and detachment from emotional commitment. Through flashback and voiceover narration, viewers follow the progress of adolescent romance between a teenage ballerina and her equally young student wooer. In addition to university introvert Henrik, Marie is also an object of attraction to dour sophisticate Uncle Erland and, at a later stage, tabloid reporter David Nyström. She progresses through extramarital relationships with each of them. Never finding satisfaction. Ultimately, only the perfection and discipline of dance keep her alive. She resigns herself to a perfunctory carnal relationship with a younger man, shedding illusions about marriage, eternal vitality, and faithful devotion to a single lover.

Maj-Britt Nilsson gives her role of Marie considerably more nuanced passion than it merits, transforming credibly from flibbertigibbet adolescent to icy veteran of three successive dead-end sexual attachments. Tragedy may provide

her with deeper immersion in Swan Lake's plot, furthering her career at the same time it blights her joie de vivre.

Since screenwriter Bergman references Stravinsky's *Petroushka*, there's an intended bond between its titular character and feckless Henrik. Both characters are destroyed through romantic entanglement with a ballerina. Each attempts to accomplish a feat outside his ability. And perishes as a result. Both then reappear to haunt someone. *Petroushka*, in phantom form, seeks revenge on the magician who created him. Henrik shows up again in nostalgic recollections of Marie, chaining her to the past and suffocating her emotionally.

Here the director explores what he perceived as the fickleness of God, a creator who visits doom on lovers he made just as they are experiencing rapturous joy in mortal existence. Marie sees no plan in what transpired. Just a random administration of shock and pain.

Uncle Erland, taking advantage of her vulnerability following Henrik's accident, serves as world-weary, nihilistic demon. One who ensnares rather than entices his victim. However, he cannot maintain a stranglehold on the young woman's life. For age and pessimism are no magnets for youth. Ultimately Marie drifts instead to importunate David, though neither understands the other. She seeks confirmation of attractiveness despite encroaching age. He hungers for experience and perhaps maternal pampering.

The best performances turned in are by Nilsson as three-time loser Marie, and by Mimi Pollak as Henrik's domineering, cancer-ridden grand dame with prophetic inclinations and plenty of cash in the bank. Gunnar Olsson proves quite effective as a chess-playing pastor whose presence never fails to suggest mortality to Marie.

Stig Olin's ballet master is, unfortunately, utterly stagebound. He's completely artificial in appearance, speech, and movements, more simply a character. Hardly a credible human being. Neither Birger Malmsten's alternately shy and possessive Henrik nor Alf Kjellin's truculent David Nyström rise above the level of merely adequate performances.

Editing is quite satisfactory, with optimal durations for scenes and dialogues. Much of the drama moves at a judiciously slow pace, allowing for numerous memorable closeups buttressed by Bergman's trademark absences of speech.

As is generally true throughout Bergman's oeuvre, his screenplay lacks depth and poetry, substituting underdeveloped theology for profound insights into characters or events. Here he seems to be recycling a philosophy of fatalism more potently communicated in French crime dramas of the late 1930s and American film noirs.

What actually embellishes the film are its cinematography, soundtrack, music, and production design.

Gunnar Fischer's scenic photography capitalizes on pervasive radiance of Sweden's extended summer daylight. Tracking shots of characters frolicking aimlessly over rocky shores of Stockholm's archipelago may have been suggested by Otello Martelli's work for Rossellini's *Stromboli*. Similar shots can be found in island episodes of Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'avventura*. Probably a case of subsequent master appropriating inspiration from a predecessor.

There's superlative employment of natural lighting in exterior shots of halcyon skies and stormy cloud clusters. However, film restorers were unable to eliminate moderately annoying flickers in some interior scenes.

From the cry of a cuckoo in its opening sequence to horrific screams of Marie as disaster strikes, impeccable sound recording adds convincing realism.

Music of Erik Nordgren inserts appropriately low-key tension in counterpoint to penetrating romantic expressionism of Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*. Only once, at a melodramatic crisis, does the Swedish composer falter and resort to Mickey Mouse double-layering of histrionic effects. No such misstep mars Tchaikovsky's melodies, which are given plentiful accommodation in *Sommarlek*. For Bergman cherished classical music and generously wove it into most of his films. In fact, he claimed a career as composer once tantalized him as a possibility.

Kudos to production designer Nils Svenwall for splendidly antiquated interior furnishings. He must have raided Stockholm's curio shops to locate the odd, though appropriately incongruous, classical era objets d'art for Uncle Erland's architecturally linear manor house.

Bergman's tenth feature film displays fully mature expertise in casting and instructing of performers while sensitively connecting choreography and music to create a parallel story to his main narrative. A scene in which the ballet master asserts, while costumed as Dr. Coppelius in *Coppelia*, his commanding role as creator of ballerina personalities, is a striking forerunner to *Ansiktet's* mirror scene. It suggests females age and wrinkle, being products of artificial

cosmetics. While men themselves remain attractive far longer, possibly a fantasy of the director himself. Bergman is also claiming suffering births art. Creativity stems from tragedy; maturity from smiling through tears.

As a bonus feature, Criterion offers an essay by film scholar Peter Cowie, stressing the drama's key role as a pivot point for Bergman as he started shifting focus from male protagonists to females.

While not an essential film of Sweden's greatest film director, *Sommarlek* is an engaging one with superior sound, lighting, cinematography, art direction, and acting from distaff members of the cast. Recommended, but only for adults because of sex talk, sensuality, and a couple profanities.