

THE GERMAN SOCIETY'S

Friday Film Fest Series



Das Schlangenei

Credits

Produced: 1976
Length: 119 minutes
Cast: Liv Ullmann, David Carradine, Gert Froebe, Heinz Bennent, James Whitmore, Glynn Turman, Georg Hartmann, Edith Heerdegen, Hans Eichler
Director & Writer: Ingmar Bergman
Producer: Dino de Laurentis
Photography: Sven Nykvist

The Director

Birth Name: Ernst Ingmar Bergman

Born: July 14, 1918, Uppsala, Sweden

Education: University of Stockholm (literature, art history)

Awards:

Golden Bear, Berlin Festival, for [Wild Strawberries](#), 1958.

Gold Plaque, Swedish Film Academy, 1958.

Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film, [The Virgin Spring](#), 1961.

Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film, [Through a Glass Darkly](#), 1962.

Erasmus Prize (shared with Charles Chaplin), Netherlands, 1965.

Honorary doctorate of philosophy, Stockholm University, 1975.

Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film, [Fanny and Alexander](#), 1983

Universally regarded as one of the great masters of modern cinema, Bergman has often concerned himself with spiritual and psychological conflicts. His work has evolved in distinct stages over four decades, while his visual style is intense, intimate, complex - has explored the vicissitudes of passion with a mesmerizing cinematic rhetoric. His prolific output tends to return to and elaborate on recurrent images, subjects and techniques. Perhaps his most expressive technique is his use of the facial close-up.

Bergman's background has a profound effect on his work and he has continually drawn from personal experience for inspiration. His mother was intelligent and his father a Lutheran cleric. Bergman was exposed to high society as well as harsh discipline throughout his upbringing. Thus, Bergman's work has forever concerned itself with humanity - both its strengths and weaknesses and its loves and hates. His prolific output has not been dampened by age and his powerful vision has earned him constant praise from his peers, critics and the public alike. We can only expect that he will continue to impact the world of film until his death and will remain an icon forever.

The Synopsis – Brian Conboy

With *The Serpent's Egg*, Ingmar Bergman gives us a film that is dark both literally and figuratively. The setting is 1923 Berlin. It is early November and a narrator informs us of the desperate situation facing its citizens in the coming winter months. Food is scarce. Money is virtually worthless. And the government careens rapidly out of control. The darkness seen and felt in the film mirrors both histories present (at the inception and production of the film) and past. As Ingmar Bergman was working on his screenplay, his battle with the tax laws in his homeland of Sweden had just

begun. It climaxed with his arrest by the Swedish tax police in January of 1976 and led to his self-imposed exile in Germany.

We can now see the direct reflection of Bergman's mental state with that of our anti-hero, Abel Rosenberg. Abel is an out-of-work trapeze artist stuck in Berlin after his partner/brother Max had injured himself. The two were actually a part of a trio: Max' ex-wife Manuela completed the triangle. She is also in Berlin, employed as a cabaret singer.

After Max commits suicide, Abel and Manuela are thrown together. Paralleling their struggle to survive are mysterious murders and an even more mysterious man from Abel's past, Dr. Hans Vergerus. As the film develops, we realize that the depths to which these characters are bound to one another are deep. Not only is Vergerus Manuela's sometime paramour but he later employs, houses and "tries to help" Abel and Manuela. At the film's conclusion, Abel comes face to face with the fact the Hans is responsible not only for the suicide of Max, but the death of Manuela and numerous others under the guise of science. Their deaths are direct results of horrible medical experiments carried out by Hans at the St. Anna Clinic.

Although Bergman himself considers this film to be a failure, there are many themes present in the film worth considering. One is the historical context in which the film is placed. We get a sense of the desperate and hostile climate that led up to the Nazi Era. In Abel we can see themes of entrapment, cowardice, fear, self-loathing and imprisonment not only self-imposed but also what is placed upon him by the foreign and hostile environment in which he finds himself. He is the classic "stranger in a strange land". Manuela's character perhaps offers us a glimpse of faith, forgiveness and resilience in the darkest of hours. Bergman himself does not regret the making of *The Serpent's Egg*. His attitude toward the film is one that we should all remember when confronted with our own doubts and fears: "it was a healthy learning experience."