

The Museum of Modern Art

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MAJOR SWEDISH RETROSPECTIVE OF CLASSIC EARLY FILMS

See enclosed screening schedule

Two giants of the Swedish cinema, Victor Sjöström and Mauritz Stiller, will be honored in a major historical retrospective to be introduced by the Department of Film of The Museum of Modern Art from February 3 through April 8, 1977. The new film exhibition, "Sjöström, Stiller and Contemporaries," will present all the extant early works of these two master directors, with the exception of one unavailable print, "The Story of Gösta Berling." This will be the first time that these great silent Swedish films will be seen in the U.S. as a collection. Many other virtually unknown films dating from 1911 through 1929, which is called "The Golden Age of Swedish Cinema," will also be shown. The program is a unique opportunity to re-examine an important chapter in film history.

Many of the films of Sjöström and Stiller seem to have left a deep, strong impression even when they were first released, especially in America, Germany and Russia, according to Adrienne Mancina. The Museum Curator initiated this comprehensive retrospective, with the cooperation of Anna-Lena Wibom and her staff at the Swedish Film Institute, which is dedicated to the preservation of early Swedish film classics. Both Harry Schein, Chairman of the Board of the Institute, and Ms. Wibom, Director of the Institute's Cinemateque, will come to New York from Stockholm for the inauguration of this event.

It is well known that the early Swedish films had a profound influence on Ingmar Bergman whose father used to show them in his church after communion.

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Bergman was particularly affected by Sjöström's "The Phantom Carriage," with its supernatural quality. The film deals with a wealthy man who is carried off after death by a coach man. Called the pinnacle of the Swedish silent cinema, it contrasts phantom-like sequences with realistic and brutal intervals, callous tavern ribaldry and harsh quarrels, all of which set an example followed by Bergman in "The Seventh Seal."

Considered the greatest Swedish director of all time, Victor Sjöström has been called "one of that small band of directors, in company with Griffith, Eisenstein, Antonioni and Resnais, who have led the cinema into altogether fresh channels." Having come out of the theatre, he was also a consummate actor, and present-day movie-goers know him for one of his greatest screen roles as Isak Borg in Bergman's "Wild Strawberries."

"No film-maker before Sjöström," writes Peter Cowie, "integrated landscape so fundamentally into his work or conceived of nature as a mystical as well as a physical force in terms of film language." The tumult that threatens his heroes' psyche corresponds, says Cowie, to the majestic power of nature, and while Sjöström's themes are elemental, there is a tragic and noble serenity in them. Moreover, "he had an advantage over Stiller in that he was keenly Swedish, imbued with a desire to set the mark of his nationality on his work, and to penetrate the basic psychology of Swedes in their natural environment."

Mauritz Stiller, whose protege was Greta Garbo, was born in Helsinki of Russian parentage, and like Sjöström, came out of the theatre. Though said to be second only to Sjöström, he was his equal in creating epic national sagas, mostly from the literary works of Selma Lagerlöf and others, but as George Sadoul says, his adaptations with their subtly individualized heroes, "were visually imaginative," and placed him in the front ranks of the world's directors.

George Sadoul believes Stiller's work was as delicate as Sjöström's was massive. Stiller, who like Sjöström, wrote his own screen plays and

adaptations "wanted to create a poetic visual art with the rhythms, proportions, contrasts and harmonies with which painters and architects were concerned." In the opinion of one Italian critic, Mario Verdone, he and not Eisenstein was the father of modern montage. There is something extremely musical in the flow and rhythm of his films, according to Anna-Lena Wibom, who points out he was a violinist known for his meticulous editing, which was inspired by D.W. Griffith's early films which reached Sweden before World War I.

Unlike Sjöström, whose oeuvre was dominated by a vein of fatalism that precluded levity, Stiller who cast Sjöström in his films before Sjöström was himself a director, felt free to engage in satiric, social subjects such as "Erotikon" which derives its humor from the characters' mutual distrust of one another. But Stiller the dramatist, says Cowie, began to overtake Stiller the wit who made "Love and Journalism." His work began to resemble Sjöström's, though Stiller's films in the field of brittle and piquant comedy were to influence American cinema and Lubitsch in particular.

The famous trio, Stiller, Greta Garbo and Sjöström, left Sweden and were in Hollywood by 1925; each was then to meet a different destiny: Stiller an early death, after two Pola Negri pictures, "Hotel Imperial" and "The Woman on Trial"; Garbo attained unexcelled screen stardom; and Sjöström enlarged a brilliant career that included "The Scarlet Letter" and "The Wind," though he chose eventually to return to his native land, there to direct one more film, another made in England, and finally to devote himself to acting.

The "contemporaries" of Sjöström and Stiller included in this show are Georg Af Klercker, whose work is reminiscent of the thrillers of the French Louis Feuillade; Victor Bergdahl, known for his animation series, Captain Grogg; Carl Barcklind; John W. Brunius; and Carl Dreyer, whose picture "The Parson's Widow" is on the program. Benjamin Cristensen, the Danish director, will also be represented by "Witchcraft Through the Ages," which he made in

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Sweden. Others in the series are Per Lindberg; Gus Molander, in whose picture "Sin" Elissa Landi stars; and Alf Sjöberg, known here for "Miss Julie;" and Eric A. Petschler, director of "Peter the Tramp" starring Greta Gustafsson, later known as Greta Garbo. A fragment of this film is included in the program.

Many of the films have English intertitles, and simultaneous English translations will accompany the first screenings of those that do not. The intertitles will be translated by Eva Johansson, and William Perry will provide the piano accompaniment for the films with English intertitles. All the films will be supplied by the Swedish Film Institute of Stockholm, which has made new 35 mm prints for all the Sjöström and Stiller films. The films will be circulated to other American institutions: the Pacific Film Archives in Berkeley, The American Film Institute in Washington, and elsewhere, including Montreal.

A complete program will be available at the screenings, or upon request.

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Stills and additional information are available from Michael Boodro, Assistant, or Lillian Gerard, Special Projects Coordinator, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53 St., New York, N.Y. 10019 Tel. 956-7504;7296