

DORCHESTER FILM SOCIETY
2023/24 SEASON



BERGMAN ISLAND
(Language: English)

Director: Mia Hansen-Løve, 2021. Running time: 112 minutes.
Presented by Dorchester Film Society, 10 January 2024.

“It’s worth sticking with Mia Hansen-Love’s *Bergman Island*, although there’s a lot to stick through too. Two film-makers, a woman named Chris (Vicky Krieps) and an older man named Tony (Tim Roth), make the trip to the Swedish island of Faro, where Ingmar Bergman lived and worked, to soak up the great man’s ambience while working on their own projects.

There’s an inevitable gaucheness about any film filled with hat-doffs to another film-maker — every five minutes a Swedish tourist guide pops up to impart some gobbet of information about Bergman’s work — and you can sometimes feel as if you’re trapped on the “Bergman safari” Tony goes on one afternoon. But the subtleties of the interaction between Roth and Krieps, both world-class naturalists, are fascinating. It’s like a competition to see who can most successfully underplay each scene: Roth sauntering around, scratching and sniffing like he has been caught on candid camera; Krieps lolling around, wind-tousled, or succumbing to a fit of bedtime giggles. Krieps is the winner, by a nose.

Then, at the halfway mark, Hansen-Love switches things up. Chris tells Tony the story she’s writing and we get to see it as a film-within-a-film, starring Mia Wasikowska as a woman who rekindles an affair with a former boyfriend (Anders Danielsen Lie) while attending a wedding. Is Chris confessing to infidelity under the guise of fiction? For once the film-within-a-film is more interesting than the film that frames it. It’s like a puzzle box showing you the characters’ inner lives. Suddenly, the uninflected, slightly boring naturalism of *Bergman Island* yields a small gem of romantic anguish and longing.”

Tom Shone, *The Times*, 5 June 2022.

“A female director (Vicky Krieps), in a relationship with an older film-maker (Tim Roth), spends time at a creative retreat on the island of Faro in the Baltic Sea, famously the home and workplace of Ingmar Bergman. There she develops an idea about a young woman (played by Mia Wasikowska, in a beguiling film within the film), also a film-maker, visiting Faro for a wedding and reconnecting with her former lover (Anders Danielsen Lie).

Factor in the autobiographical element – *Bergman Island*'s writer-director, Mia Hansen-Løve, was herself in a relationship with an older film-maker, Olivier Assayas – and the story starts to feel like a refracting prism in its overlap of characters and creator. In the hands of Hansen-Løve, it's a delicate millefeuille, layering story upon story, character upon character, until it's hard to peel them apart.

Krieps's character, Chris, approaches storytelling in a manner that is inquisitive and engaged; she questions and explores. It seems likely that Hansen-Løve takes the same route: *Bergman Island* has a languid, meandering pace and a plot that is governed by chance encounters and discoveries.

The score, a delicate motif crafted from the unlikely combination of harp, recorders and bagpipes, captures the slightly unconventional beauty of the island. But it's a location Chris chafes against: "All this calm and perfection, I find it oppressive." Likewise, she is disappointed by what she learns of Bergman himself. With the "Bergman safari" and its competitive cineastes staking personal claims to the great man's work, Hansen-Løve gently pokes fun at the reverence for an overbearing auteur, and instead allows her women to drive the story."

Wendy Ide, *The Observer*, 5 June 2022.

"Here is an elegant and ruminative dual narrative from Mia Hansen-Løve, a parallel romance concerning monogamy and its discontents... It's intriguingly autobiographical and the Bergman-adjacent discussion and ambience creates something instantly serious, although the effect is also sometimes self-conscious and desiccated. Perhaps in order to pre-empt charges of swoony Bergman-worship, the film has one character boorishly attack Bergman's reputation but the effect is unsatisfying in another way.

Tim Roth and Vicky Krieps play Tony and Chris, a renowned film director and his screenwriter spouse who have come here for a creative retreat. Chris wants to tell Tony about the script she's having trouble with: he is unhelpful and distracted, but nonetheless we see Chris's movie idea dramatised on screen. The film-within-the-film stars Mia Wasikowska and Anders Danielsen Lie as Amy and Joseph, a couple who were lovers as teens but broke up, and now find the spark re-igniting, in a difficult and upsetting way, when they meet later in life as guests at the wedding of a mutual friend.

Amy's tristesse amplifies and makes explicit Chris's own anxieties about her relationship and this juxtaposition of the real and imagined versions of marital woe is effective: although it is arguably a little predictable when fact and fiction

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duly leak into each other. The movie ends with a flourish of the sort Almodóvar could have created, although this has less primary-colour exuberance. A valuable if slightly passionless and reticent movie.”

Peter Bradshaw, *The Guardian*, Tuesday 31 May 2022.

“Earlier this week, Mia Hansen-Løve’s *One Fine Morning* was named best European film at Cannes’ Directors’ Fortnight. A quiet character study pivoting around mum sex and elder care, it’s not the director’s best work but it’s streets ahead of this recent misfire.

Bergman Island takes place on Fårö, the Swedish island where Ingmar Bergman lived and shot such classics as *Through a Glass Darkly*, *Persona* and *Hour of the Wolf*.

Thus, Chris and Tony Sanders, married film directors played respectively by Vicky Krieps and Tim Roth, travel to Fårö to complete an artist’s residency. The set-up and the use of the bed from *Scenes of a Marriage* promises a Bergmanesque relationship implosion that never comes. Instead, we get mere hints that there is tension generated by his greater success as a filmmaker. Even these potentially corrosive aspects fizzle.

Mostly, we get sunny views of the island as Chris strolls around with Swedish film student Hampus (writer Hampus Nordenson playing a version of himself) while Tony opts for the tourist bus tour.

Nothing much else happens in the film, which never really justifies its setting, save as a postcard-pretty destination. Whither the rending of garments? Did anyone actually see a Bergman film?

Bergman’s films are named, watched and referenced, yet are not meaningfully engaged with. Tony describes one of his films as “about how invisible things circulate within a couple”, part of a dull pattern of superficial intertextuality that sees Joachim Trier regular Anders Danielsen Lie play both a character named Joseph and himself.

There is more possible commentary provided by Chris’s film-within-the-film, a shaggy dog drama about a young woman, Amy (Wasikowska), who travels to Fårö to hook up with former lover Joseph (see above) at a friend’s wedding.

Chris complains that she doesn't know how to end her script: truth be told, the beginning and the middle aren't great either.

Despite solid performances and Denis Lenoir's bright cinematography, this is disappointing from the director of *Eden* and *Goodbye First Love*."

Tara Brady, *Irish Times*, 16 July 2022