

## Film reviews 13



Mia Wasikowska in Bergman Island

## Rekindled island affair

From the early 1960s, the great Swedish director Ingmar Bergman lived and to a large extent worked on the island of Faro, an isolated spot in the Baltic Sea, accessible via the larger island of Gotland. Since his death in 2007, the island has been turned into a sort of shrine: there is a Bergman museum and a cinema that shows his films to film buff tourists, who can also visit his grave in the local churchyard. It's a magical spot, as I can personally attest.

**Bergman Island** is about a husband and wife who make a pilgrimage to the island. Both are filmmakers themselves, and there's no secret that the characters are based on Danish director Mia Hansen-Love and her partner of 15 years, French director Olivier Assayas. In the film they're named Chris (Vicky Krieps) and Tony (Tim Roth). Tony is to present one of his own films, a thriller, at the local festival while at the same time he is involved in scripting his next

### DAVID STRATTON

#### BERGMAN ISLAND (M)

In cinemas  
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production. Chris is also hard at work on a screenplay of her own.

The first half of the film is almost a documentary, a tourist trip around the island. Absorbing as this is, the meandering screenplay takes its time to get to the point. That point occurs just past the 50-minute mark when Chris

reveals to Tony the content of her screenplay and we see the drama visualised, with Mia Wasikowska – effortlessly stealing the film – appearing as Amy, Chris's fictional protagonist. Amy has come to Bergman's island to attend the wedding of an old friend, and during the course of the celebrations she rekindles an affair with Joseph (Anders Danielsen Lie), a former lover.

This French-German-Swedish-Belgian co-production, which is almost entirely in English, is a rather slight offering. Luckily, writer-director Hansen-Love directs with a light touch and a consistently beguiling, generous tone so that the film is very easy to take. It probably helps if you know something about Bergman and his work going in; suitably primed viewers will appreciate some of the many references, such as Tony's negative attitude towards *The Seventh Seal* or the impact made by *Cries and Whispers*. The film could almost have been titled *Scenes from a Marriage*, in reference to another of the great director's finest achievements.

## Authenticity to behold

#### THE SOUVENIR PART II (MA15+)

In cinemas  
David Stratton  
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British director Joanna Hogg's *The Souvenir* (2019) was a highly regarded autobiography of considerable merit. The leading character, Julie, exquisitely played by Honor Swinton Byrne, the daughter of Tilda Swinton, was a film school student who becomes involved with a charming but unreliable man who claimed to work for the government but who proved to be a heroin addict and who died at the end of the movie, leaving Julie in shock.

**The Souvenir Part II** takes up where this original left off and, frankly, if you haven't seen *The Souvenir* you might not connect with Part II. Julie is recovering at the home of her loving middle-class parents – Tilda Swinton plays her mother; they drink tea, walk the dogs, talk about inconsequential things. But eventually reality kicks in; Julie returns to her London flat and to the film school, where, while directing her graduate film – which looks like a very strange affair – her indecisions and hesitations eventually infuriate her collaborators.

She is also seeing a parapsychologist (Gail Ferguson) who advises her that "you're a human



Honor Swinton Byrne in The Souvenir Part II

being with a life to live – that's your job". But Julie remains traumatised by the loss of her lover; transient sexual encounters offer little in the way of consolation and though her parents are endlessly supportive she clearly feels frustrated in their company.

Swinton Byrne is a most beguiling presence and brings the traumas and misgivings of Julie's character vividly to life. The film school scenes – chaotic yet filled with camaraderie – have an authentic feel to them. "Did you resist the temp-

tation to be obvious?" Patrick (Richard Ayoade), a trendy fellow director asks Julie at one point, and it can be safely claimed that Hogg has achieved this goal, even if her film is somewhat underwhelming in other respects.

Extravagantly praised in the UK (the venerable magazine *Sight & Sound* named it the best film of 2021) *The Souvenir Part II* is undeniably the work of a talented director though this episode of the autobiography is less interesting than its predecessor.

## A courageous escape from violence

#### ESCAPE FROM MOGADISHU (MOGADISHU) (MA15+)

In cinemas from Thursday  
David Stratton  
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A superior production from Korea, **Escape from Mogadishu** is a very well staged and suspenseful account of the plight of Korean diplomats based in Somalia in 1990 during a violent uprising that was part of the civil war in that country. The South Korean diplomats are aware that the rival Embassy of North Korea has been cosying up to the corrupt government of President Barre, while at the same time selling weapons to USC, a rebel group.

Without warning, the rebels attack the presidential palace, clashing with the authorities in a series of extended gun battles, with both sides proving to be equally violent and ruthless. During the ensuing carnage the North Korean Embassy is attacked and looted and the diplomats and their families desperately seek the help of their South Korean counterparts, who reluctantly agree to shelter them.

While the rival Ambassadors Han (Kim Yoon-Seok) representing the South and Rim (Huh Joon-Ho), the North, agonise over the unorthodox situation in which they find themselves, the Koreans are offered a rescue flight by the Italian Embassy but to get to the airport they have to undertake a hair-raising drive across the war-torn city.

In addition to being a vividly handled depiction of the chaotic and dangerous situation – and there are some tremendously impressive action scenes here – the film is making a strong statement in favour of friendship and even reunification between the two Koreas, which lends it a fascinating extra dimension.

Filming took place in Morocco, which makes a startlingly convincing backdrop to an extremely gripping tale of courage and resourcefulness. Ryu Seung-wan's direction is vigorous and impressive.

## Beautiful musical memories

#### WASH MY SOUL IN THE RIVER'S FLOW (PG)

In cinemas  
David Stratton  
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Philippa Bateman's **Wash My Soul in the River's Flow** finally brings to the screen a memorable concert that took place in 2004 at Melbourne's Hamer Hall. On stage were Archie Roach and Ruby Hunter accompanied by the Australian Art Orchestra, conducted by Paul Grabowsky. It's been worth the wait.

Roach and the ebullient Hunter, who sadly died in 2010, are seen in discussions with concert director Patrick Nolan, in rehearsal, and during the concert itself, a concert mainly consisting of Kura tungan (Songs of the River). Spectacular drone footage of the mighty Murray complements the music.

Hunter, who was stolen from her family in 1963, speaks eloquently about her longstanding sense of loss and dislocation, while Roach reminds us that "my songs aren't calling for revolution; they're calling for recognition and truth."

This beautiful film is, in every way, a memorable experience.