

IngmarBergmanTheMagician1958TextTVS

By Tim Van Schmidt

The Magician

Screenplay by Ingmar Bergman

Again, I couldn't see the actual movie, but I was able to read Bergman's screenplay for his 1958 release, "The Magician." The writing is terse and poetic at the same time, careful attention to a wide scope of details mixed with penetrating dialogue that goes directly for the throat at times, confronting death and despair as everyday business.

Everyday business for the ragged troupe of performers Bergman introduced in "The Magician" seems to be in evading the law. It seems their "Magnetic Health Theater" is suspect of conning the public into buying phony potions and believing in supernatural "miracles." The whole thing centers on a "mermerizer" named Vogler, who is accompanied by a crew including an assistant, a driver, a huckster and an old witch.

The troupe has been snared by a group of local authorities near Stockholm and is being challenged to produce irrefutable results in a private show or risk arrest. From there, it gets dark and scary as a few twists and turns in the proceedings keep the troupe, their accusers and the help on the estate where they are being held on their toes.

The final twist is even kind of funny- an irony of a high order. Along the way, though, Bergman still manages to get some serious stuff in there. That includes some exchange of ideas about the "inexplicable." The accusations the troupe absorbs in their journey together also asks a heavy toll on the performers as they play off of the desires and beliefs of the audience, all the while knowing it is all trickery.

Or is it all trickery? Bergman's writing on occasion veers off into a kind of "magical realism" area, a kind of twilight time of reality when it's unsure what the boundaries are between imagination and what is really there, indicating that the writer believes in something. Like in "Wild Strawberries," where the little red berries become a symbol of that tiny faint bit of hope in the darkness of life, in "The Magician," Bergman holds out the tiny hope that Vogler's power is real- by getting them out of jam after jam- and giving them a summons from the King.