

The Magic Flute [U] 2017|USA/Canada/UK|107 min

UK release date	8th September 2017
Director	Ingmar Bergman
Screenplay	Emanuel Schikaneder (libretto); Ingmar Bergman (screenplay)
Cinematographer	Sven Nykvist
Composer	W A Mozart
Conductor	Eric Ericson, with the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra
Cast	Josef Köstlinger (Tamino); Irma Urrila (Pamina); Håkan Hagegård (Papageno); Elisabeth Erikson (Papagena); Birgit Nordin (Queen of the Night); Ulrik Cold (Sarastro)

Music has always been close to Ingmar Bergman's heart. *To Joy* (1949) took its title from Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and featured Victor Sjöström as a distinguished conductor – a calling, incidentally, that attracted Bergman himself. Then there have been significant snatches of Bach in movies like *Through a Glass Darkly*, *The Silence* and *Cries and Whispers*. So his production of *The Magic Flute*, made for Swedish TV, is perhaps not so startling a departure as one might assume. The fact that it was made for TV suggests not merely the straitened circumstances of the commercial cinema in Sweden, but primarily Bergman's conviction that only through TV can he now reach a wide audience at a single stroke.

Bergman spent a year on the production, selecting a predominantly Scandinavian cast of singers from over a hundred candidates. "The most important factor for me," he claimed, "was that the singers should have natural voices. You can find artificially cultivated voices that sound marvellous, but you can never really believe that a human personality is doing the singing. Records have accustomed us to a kind of absolute perfection – but beauty cannot be perfect without also being vibrant and alive."

Far from attempting to open out the opera, Bergman has been at pains to recreate the atmosphere of the 1791 production at the Theater auf der Weiden in Vienna (even the dragon that pursues Tamino upstage is a delightful creature of felt and bunting). The Drottningholm Palace Theatre proved too fragile to accommodate a

TV crew, so the stage was carefully reconstructed in the studios of the Swedish Film Institute, under the direction of Henny Noremark.

When does an opera become a film? Certainly in Act Two, when the Queen of the Night, her face transformed into a mask of fury by waxen make-up and a livid green filter, harangues Pamina in Der Holle Rache. And certainly in the climactic sequence when Monostatos and his minions advance threateningly towards the camera. In spite of such frissons, and for all the inevitable skulls that mock the hapless Papageno in the House of Trials, this is a witty, rumbustious Flute, played and sung at fast tempo throughout.

During the film, Bergman cuts back occasionally to the seraphic features of a small girl in his 'audience', dwelling on her pleasure as if nudging us into recognition of the opera's 'childish magic and exalted mystery'. It's somehow a superfluous, sentimental gesture, uncharacteristic of Bergman. As Papageno and Papagena frolic with their children in the final shot, one is left in no doubt as to the meaning of the opera in Bergman's eyes.

Like his own best films, it embodies a quest, and Sarastro, so often a grave and sombre figure, is seen by Bergman as the paternal source of that exalted love sought in their different ways by Tamino and Papageno. It is as though Bergman's own predilection for chilly metaphysics had been tempered by Mozart's sense of wonder.

From the review in **Sight and Sound**, 1975, from the Archive

Coming Soon....

A Taste of Honey (12) – Monday 14th May (Trinity Church Hall)

Sanctuary (15) – Monday 21st May

For more information about all our films and more, go to our website

www.buxtonfilm.org.uk

Buxton Film is a Registered Charity no. 1165040



admin@buxtonfilm.org.uk



@buxtonfilm



BuxtonFilm