

THE INGMAR BERGMAN ARCHIVES

Edited by Paul Duncan and Bengt Wanselius

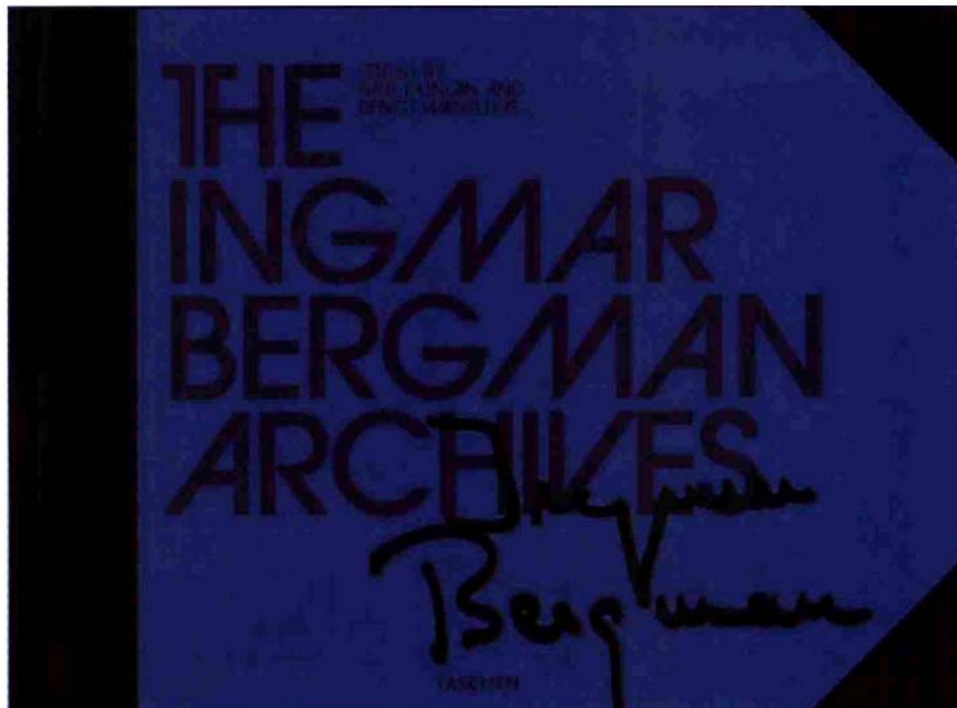
2008, Taschen, www.taschen.com, Hardcover, 592 pp., \$200

Reviewed by Sam Umland

A *weighty tome* measuring 16.2 x 11.8 inches, consisting of almost 600 pages, sumptuously illustrated with many rare and unpublished images, accompanied by a DVD of rare archival footage and an original 35mm film strip from **FANNY AND ALEXANDER**, Benedikt Taschen's **THE INGMAR BERGMAN ARCHIVES** is a survey of the noted *auteur's* entire *oeuvre*: a chronologically organized, oral narrative examining the entire

corpus of Bergman's work in film, television, theater and radio, as well as his books and other published writings.

Similar in format and organization to Taschen's previously published, equally expensive and image-laden **THE STANLEY KUBRICK ARCHIVES** (2005), this ambitious project was conceived prior to Bergman's death in July 2007 and began with his cooperation, as he gave the



researchers full access to his archives at The Bergman Foundation, as well as permission to reprint his writings and interviews, many of which have never been previously reprinted outside of Sweden. Although much more than a mere compendium, those individuals seeking extended critical analyses of Bergman's individual films and theatrical productions will need to refer to the vast number of scholarly books and articles already available. Still, those wishing to learn more about the wide range of artistic works created by the great *auteur*, as well as his characteristic themes and obsessions, will find themselves adequately rewarded despite the book's hefty \$200 list price (available at a reduced price at several online retailers).

The book's two editors were responsible for different aspects of the project. Paul Duncan, the text editor, assembled a group of respected Bergman experts as contributing editors to research and write a narrative that combined all of Bergman's working life in film, theater, and television. Ulla Åberg and Birgitta Steene covered the theater work, noted Bergman scholar Peter Cowie was responsible for the film work, and Bengt Forslund covered the (later) film work as well as the television and radio productions. The book's picture researcher, Bengt Wanselius (Bergman's photographer for 20 years), researched photo archives around Sweden, uncovering previously unseen images from Bergman's films, and selecting unpublished snaps from the personal archives of several photographers. While the exposition relies heavily on Bergman's own writings and memoirs to explain each project, there is also ample use of material provided by his artistic collaborators, including actors, writers, and cinematographers—interviews, excerpts from interviews, and other, previously published sources.

Bergman's close friend, actor and collaborator Erland Josephson, provides the book's foreword, contributing an engaging essay that anticipates the book's ultimate aim, to understand the daunting complexity of Bergman the human being: sometimes warm and garrulous, at others tyrannical and abusive, he was a world-famous figure who, by dint of personality, was a misanthrope and an extraordinarily creative artist burdened by excessive insecurity and self-contempt. Gunnar Fischer, who as cinematographer made twelve films with Bergman—including **THE SEVENTH SEAL** (1957), the film that cemented the director's international reputation—is quoted as saying: "Verbal eruptions were common and quite humiliating at times. It was tough, for he demanded very, very

much. You couldn't let up for a moment when you worked for him—you worked under constant tension. In a way, that was perhaps very good, but in another it wasn't, for this entire group of people who worked with Ingmar, they were really a trembling crowd...." The two parted ways after **THE DEVIL'S EYE** (1960), after Fischer felt that he had been the "scapegoat" for the film's troubled production. Nonetheless, while no book can be a perfect simulacrum of an individual's life, the portrait that emerges from the pages is a reasonably candid one, depicting Bergman as neither saint nor scoundrel, but an actual person, if a prodigiously gifted one.

The special virtue of the book is that its contributing authors have precisely the sort of expertise a project of this scope demands. Peter Cowie, for instance, has published many important pieces on Bergman including a critical biography, while Birgitta Steene is the author of the 1,150-page **INGMAR BERGMAN: A REFERENCE GUIDE** (2005). Ulla Åberg has worked at the Royal Dramatic Theater in Stockholm, where many of Bergman's plays were produced, since 1966. And Bengt Forslund was executive producer at Svensk Filindustri (where Bergman began his film career, in the script department, in 1943) from 1965-72 and at the Swedish Film Institute from 1972-89. The considerable first-hand knowledge of the contributors thus makes **THE INGMAR BERGMAN ARCHIVES** a definitive resource in terms of biographical and production-oriented details, with the added virtue of having Bergman's statements in regard to each project all conveniently located in one place—a life of artistic creation, remember, stretching over a period of 60 years. Moreover, as stated previously, the book is embarrassingly rich in illustrations—well over a thousand of them—with many dozens of these illustrations consisting of rare and unpublished images. There are both color and B&W behind-the-scenes photographs and production stills, promotional portraits, personal family and production photographs from Bergman's own archives, reproductions of the original Swedish theatrical posters, as well as scads of images from his stage productions. Additionally, sprinkled throughout the book are reproductions of theatrical film posters from around the world. Especially interesting are those particular movie posters that exploited the more sensational aspects of certain of the director's films. For instance, there is a reproduction of the sexploitation poster for **Sommaren med Monika** (**SUMMER WITH MONIKA**, 1953), released in the United States in 1956 through Hallmark Productions as **MONIKA**:

THE STORY OF A BAD GIRL, with blazing text averring that the film's titular character is "Naughty and Nineteen" and that it was "filmed in the beautiful lake country of Sweden," additionally proclaiming a title song and musical score by Les Baxter!

A handsome volume, the book opens to a page that holds, on the left, a plastic sleeve containing the DVD full of rare and previously unseen material, and, on the right, a filmstrip, also tucked within a plastic sleeve, consisting of 12 frames from **FANNY AND ALEXANDER**, allegedly taken from a 35mm print of the film once played on Ingmar Bergman's own projector. (The first printing of Taschen's earlier **THE STANLEY KUBRICK ARCHIVES** also contained a filmstrip as an add-on bonus, a 12-frame clip from a 70mm print of **2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY**.) The attached DVD, titled "The Ingmar Bergman Archives" (112m 43s, DVD-0), contains material perhaps most intriguing to those, like myself, who are more than slightly interested in Bergman's films, although the fourth segment, "A Video Diary of **SARABAND**" (43m 51s) by Torbjörn Ehrnvall, has some intrinsic interest because it contains extremely rare and interesting footage from the TV commercials for **Bris [Breeze] Soap** Bergman directed beginning in 1951 as a consequence of the Swedish film industry going on strike. Another segment of the disc includes behind-the-scenes silent home movie footage ranging from the period 1953-1961, shot during the production of three films (**SAWDUST AND TINSEL**, **THE SEVENTH SEAL**, and **THROUGH A GLASS DARKLY**) that includes a narration by Marie Nyrröd (17m 15s). Despite the often dark, somber nature of Bergman's films, the footage is revealing in that it shows that there was plenty of levity on the set. Another segment consists of behind-the-scenes footage for **AUTUMN SONATA** (19m 52s), while the fourth segment is titled "An Image Maker" and is a documentary, by Bengt Wanselius, of Bergman working late in his career (31m 36s). Consisting of both B&W and color footage, the image quality of the disc is actually quite good, and with a total time near two hours, it represents a happy addition to an already valuable book. The daunting list price of this book may turn off some potential buyers, but to reiterate, it is available at a reduced price through several online vendors, so some searching is recommended for those interested.

In any case, **THE INGMAR BERGMAN ARCHIVES** is a valuable contribution to our continuing (re)assessment of the great Swedish director's artistic career, most certainly one of the more fascinating of the cinema's first century.