Swedish film and filmmaking has long enjoyed international success, famous for auteurs such as Ingmar Bergman. A new generation of directors – such as Ruben Östlund and Lisa Langseth – are now making their mark; winning prizes and charming audiences both locally and internationally, creating everything from small indie films to high-concept Hollywood movies.

**Ruben Östlund** is a writer-director whose early ski movies got him into film school. He made his feature debut in 2004 and has made two prizewinning fictional shorts and three feature films since, among others *Play* (2011) – which won the Nordic Council Film Prize, along with the Best Director Award at the Tokyo Film Festival and Coup de Coeur in Cannes. His most recent production *Force Majeure* (*Turist*, 2014) won the Jury Prize of Un Certain Regard at Cannes 2014 – Hollywood remake rumours abound.

**Lisa Langseth** is a cutting-edge director interested in themes of sex, class and power. Her debut *Pure* (*Till det som är vackert*, 2010), a film about power structures in the world of culture, launched the career of rising star Alicia Vikander. Langseth and Vikander teamed up again for *Hotell* (2013).

**Lukas Moodysson**’s breakthrough came in 1998 with *Show Me Love* (*Fucking Åmål*). He has directed a number of films since, such as *Together* (*Tillsammans*, 2000), *Lilya 4-ever* (2002) and *Mammoth* (2009), starring Gael Garcia Bernal and Michelle Williams. His latest film, *We Are the Best!* (*Vi är bäst!*), won the Tokyo Film Festival Grand Prix in 2013.

**Gabriela Pichler** wrote and directed *Eat Sleep Die* (*Äta sova dö*, 2012), a humorous drama about a woman who loses her job. The film won a series of film awards, including the Venice Film Festival’s 2012 Audience Award. Pichler’s latest work is the play *Red Card* (*Rött kort*, 2014).


**Lisa Aschan** directed a short film and a TV series before making her first feature *She Monkeys* (*Apflickorna*), about two competitive adolescent girls, in 2011. The film won Swedish film prizes as well as Best Narrative Feature at the Tribeca Film Festival and a Crystal Bear in Berlin. Her next film, *White People* (*Det vita folket*) is due for release in 2015.

CONTEMPORARY STARS

Alicia Vikander was born in 1988 and has already managed to captivate audiences in three different languages: Danish (A Royal Affair, 2012), English (Anna Karenina, 2012) and, of course, Swedish (Hotell, 2013). Vikander, who originally trained as a ballet dancer, is set to appear in six films in 2015, including Ex Machina and Guy Ritchie’s The Man from U.N.C.L.E. You might not recognise her name yet, but she looks likely to be inescapable soon.

Johan Renck is a director most known for his commercials and music videos. In addition to his feature debut with Downloading Nancy (2008) he has directed a number of episodes for television shows, most notably for Breaking Bad, The Walking Dead and Vikings. He is most recently credited for the first six episodes of The Last Panthers (2015).

Jonas Åkerlund is another Swedish director who has made a distinct directorial mark through his music videos rather than his feature films. His innovative videos for the likes of Madonna, Lady Gaga and Beyoncé have earned him a number of awards, including Grammy awards, MTV Video Music Awards and Music Video Production Association awards.

Lasse Hallström received two Oscar nominations for My Life as a Dog (Mitt liv som hund, 1985). In 1991 he began his Hollywood career, which has continued unabated with film such as What’s Eating Gilbert Grape (1993), The Ciderhouse Rules (1999), Chocolat (2000) and Safe Haven (2013).

Lena Olin earned international limelight through the film The Unbearable Lightness of Being (1988), in which she shared the lead with Daniel Day-Lewis, and has worked with directors such as Sidney Lumet, Roman Polanski and Sydney Pollack. Her latest projects include the American TV Series Welcome to Sweden (2014–).

SWEDISH STARLETS

Sweden is the birthplace of some of film history’s most iconic actresses. Sadly, Anita Ekberg passed away in January 2015, while the same year would have marked Greta Garbo’s 110th birthday – and Ingrid Bergman’s 100th – had they lived to see the day. The centenary of the latter’s birth was commemorated at the Cannes Film Festival 2015.

Ingrid Bergman would have turned 100 years old in 2015 (she passed in 1982). She is one of the most Oscar-winning actresses of all time and has also won a number of other awards, including two Emmys, four Golden Globes and a Tony. Ingrid was the poster girl for the Cannes Film Festival 2015, during which a new documentary about her premiered – Ingrid Bergman – In Her Own Words (Jag är Ingrid, 2015) – starring Sigourney Weaver, Isabella Rossellini and rising Swedish starlet Alicia Vikander, whom the director Stig Björkman has called “The Ingrid Bergman of today”.

Ingrid is most remembered for her roles opposite Humphrey Bogart in The Maltese Falcon (1941) or Cary Grant in Hitchcock’s Notorious (1946). She made her first major impression in the Swedish-language Intermezzo, 1936, which brought her to Hollywood for a 1939 US remake. Ingrid returned to Sweden for her last major film role; Ingmar Bergman’s (no relation) Autumn Sonata (Höstsonaten, 1978).

Greta Garbo was born ten years before Ingrid and was a major star in silent and early talking films of the 20s and 30s. A role in the 1924 Swedish film The Saga of Gösta Berling (Gösta Berlings saga) piqued the curiosity of Hollywood. After a number of successful silent roles, in which she used intense expressions and groundbreaking performances with restrained realism, she moved on to the talkies in 1930. Garbo was nominated for three Academy Awards during her career, but only won one – the Academy’s Honorary Award long after her career had ended. The mysterious Garbo made her last film in 1941, after which she pretty much disappeared from public view.

Anita Ekberg came to Hollywood by way of winning the Miss Sweden contest in 1951 and participating in the ensuing Miss Universe pageant, earning a contract with Universal Studios. She is perhaps most known for her role, and the famous fountain scene, opposite Marcello Mastroianni in Federico Fellini’s La Dolce Vita (1960). Anita Ekberg passed away in 2015, aged 83.
CONTEMPORARY STARS

Noomi Rapace’s portrayal of Lisbeth Salander in the Millennium trilogy (2009) launched her to international stardom. Among a number of roles in Hollywood films, she has acted in Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows (2011) and most notably held the lead in Ridley Scott’s Prometheus (2012). She’s set to appear in Prometheus 2 (2016) as well, once again sharing the lead with Michael Fassbender.

Peter Stormare got his international breakthrough in the Coen Brother’s film Fargo (1996) and followed up with his part as a nihilist in The Big Lebowski (1998). He has also appeared in Armageddon (1998), Minority Report (2002), and The Last Stand (2013) and is continually cast in an impressive number of TV and movie roles (14 only in 2014).

Malin Åkerman got her big break in the Farrelly brothers’ comedy The Heartbreak Kid (2007) where she held the lead with Ben Stilller. She has since starred in blockbusters such as Watchmen (2009) and The Proposal (2009).

Joel Kinnaman rose to international fame through his role in Easy Money (2010), followed by a lead in TV show The Killing (2011–2014) and feature film RoboCop (2014).

THE SKARSGÅRDS – A FAMILY OF ACTORS

Alexander became widely known for his role as vampire Eric Northman in the HBO series True Blood (2008–2014). He has also starred in lead roles in films such as Straw Dogs (2011), Melancholia (2011) and The East (2013), and is cast as Tarzan in Harry Potter-director David Yates’ upcoming adaptation of the classic story.

While Alexander reached major stardom through a vampire role, brother Gustaf did it as a Viking – playing Floki in the MGM/History Channel television series Vikings (2013–). Prior to that, the younger Skarsgård had already made a name for himself in Sweden through films such as Evil (Ondskan, 2003), Patrik, Age 1.5 (Patrik, 1.5 2008) and Kon-Tiki (2012).

Stellan Skarsgård, father of Alexander and Gustaf, is known for his work on both Hollywood blockbusters such as Good Will Hunting (1997) – and the Pirates of the Caribbean (2006–2007) and Avengers (2012–2015) series of films – as well as art-house movies such as Lars von Trier’s Dogville (2003) and Nymphomaniac (2013). Stellan has two more actor sons, Bill (Simon and the Oaks, 2011) and Valter (URL, 2013) as well as four non-acting children. That might be about to change – as his youngest son was born in 2012.

VISUAL SPECIAL EFFECTS

Special effects might not be the first thing that comes to mind regarding Swedish film. But ambitious efforts by post-production and production companies during the last decade have undoubtedly left a Swedish influence on international visual effects.

Filmgate started as a postproduction company in Sweden in 2006 and has worked on over 85 feature films in eleven different countries. So far. Credits include visual effects for Swedish films such as Mammoth and a five minute long avalanche shot in Force Majeure. Filmgate has also worked on international films such as Cloud Atlas (2012), Lars von Trier’s Antichrist (2009) and upcoming British werewolf film Howl! (2015).

Fido film is one of Scandinavia’s largest special effects companies, specialising in the animation of characters and creatures.

ACADEMY AWARD-WINNING SWEDES

Sweden’s most prominent Oscar winner is Ingrid Bergman, who took home three Oscars in the course of her career, two for Best Actress (Gaslight, 1944 and Anastasia, 1956) and one for Best Supporting Actress (Murder on the Orient Express, 1974).

Three of Ingmar Bergman’s films won Best Foreign Language Film (The Virgin Spring, 1960, Through a Glass Darkly, 1961 and Fanny and Alexander, 1983) awards. In 1970, Bergman also received The Irving G. Thalberg Memorial Award.

Other Swedes who have received Oscars include Arne Sucksdorff (Best Short Film for Symphony of a City, 1949), Olle Nordemar (Best Documentary Feature for Kon-Tiki, 1951), Greta Garbo (The Academy’s Honorary Award, 1955), Sven Nykvist (Best Cinematography for Cries and Whispers, 1974 and Fanny and Alexander, 1983) and Anna Asp and Susanne Lingheim (Best Production Design for Fanny and Alexander, 1983).

At the 2013 Oscars, Paul Ottosson (Zero Dark Thirty, 2012) and Per Hallberg (Skyfall, 2012) shared the prize for Best Sound Editing. Both had been awarded previously, Ottosson for Best Sound Mixing and Best Sound Editing (The Hurt Locker, 2008), and Hallberg for Best Sound Editing (Braveheart, 1995 and The Bourne Ultimatum, 2007).

The most recent Swedish Oscar winner is Malik Bendjelloul, who won the 2013 Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature with Searching for Sugar Man (2012).
FACTS AND FIGURES

In 2014, Swedish cinemas sold 16.3 million tickets, grossing around SEK 1.652 billion. Most Swedes (58.2 per cent) prefer to watch US films, while 25.1 per cent favour Swedish movies. The most popular film in 2014 in Sweden was a domestic production, The Hundred-Year-Old Man Who Climbed Out the Window and Disappeared (Hundra åringen som klev ut genom fönstret och försvann), with 1.57 million viewers. The film has also won several international awards.

FUNDING EQUALITY

Swedish film policy supports the production, promotion and distribution of Swedish films through a collaborative process between the state, film industry, cinema owners and television companies. The latest Swedish Film Agreement, which came into force in 2013 and runs through 2016, provides filmmakers with greater freedom of distribution and also stipulates that ‘the funding shall be divided equally between women and men’ in the key positions of director, screenwriter and producer. The Film Agreement will be terminated as a model in 2017 and the state’s new focus will be on quality, innovation and accessibility – aiming for a better balance between artistic and commercial interests.

Funds and other means of film support are allocated and administered by the Swedish Film Institute. In 2013, their contributions totalled about SEK 332 million. There are alternative means of distribution, however, as exemplified by 27-year-old Swedish rookie director David Sandberg’s success in online crowdfunding, setting a Kickstarter record with his martial arts comedy spoof Kung Fury. The film premiered in the Directors’ Fortnight section at the 2015 Cannes Film Festival, before being released on SVT (the Swedish Public Service Broadcaster), YouTube and other streaming media.

USEFUL LINKS

www.sf.se SF cinemas
www.sfi.se Swedish Film Institute
www.statensmedierad.se Swedish Media Council
www.swedenfilmcommission.com Sweden Film Commission

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Further information about Sweden: sweden.se, the Swedish embassy or consulate in your country, or the Swedish Institute, Box 7434, SE-103 91 Stockholm, Sweden. Phone: +46 8 453 78 00; e-mail: si@si.se
www.si.se www.swedenbookshop.com www.swedenabroad.com