

Joan
FONTAINE

Louis
JOURDAN



Efter Roman af:
STEFAN ZWEIG



by

Scenesat af: **MAX OPULS**



BYTA & OPTISKE BILDBOKSE ARTISTIKKOLLEKTIONEN



**MAX
OPHÜLS
SEASON**

Eden Court Cinema
Tuesday, 15 March
2016 at 7.15pm

Letter from an Unknown Woman

Romantic melodrama, 1948, USA, B&W, 83 mins

Cast: Joan Fontaine, Louis Jourdan, Mady Christians, Marcel Journet, Art Smith, Howard Freeman, John Good

Director: Max Ophüls

Screenplay: Howard Koch, from the novel "Brief Einer Unbekannten" by Stefan Zweig

Perhaps the finest American film from the famed European director Max Ophüls, the film stars Joan Fontaine as a young woman who falls in love with a concert pianist. Set in Vienna in 1900, the story is told in a complex flashback structure as the pianist, Stefan Brand (Louis Jourdan), comes upon a letter written to him by Lisa Berndt (Fontaine), a girl who has been in love with him for years. Stefan is in the process of fleeing Vienna on the eve of fighting a duel. As he prepares himself for the nocturnal journey, the letter arrives. It begins, "By the time you read this letter, I may be dead."

Review material sourced by
Mike Noble

Paul Brenner, Rovi

There has been much written about "Letter from an Unknown Woman" by many of our finest writers on film, from Robin Wood to Molly Haskell. This is a movie I have watched over and over again throughout my life, and my view of it has changed dramatically over time. As a lovelorn teenager, I thrilled to its portrait of unrequited love, as Fontaine's Lisa Berndle spends her life overwhelmed by Stefan (Louis Jordan), a hedonistic pianist. She runs away from home, she runs away from respectable suitors and a respectable husband, she runs away from everything just to be near Stefan. She waits for him to recognize her devotion. As I got older, I began to understand the biting irony of this movie as well as its wholehearted romanticism.

There's something about the rueful, chilly, candid way that Fontaine says this line that just kills me, maybe because it's so far from her usual out-of-breath, self-deprecatory way of talking. The second moment is a physical thing: the way Fontaine's Lisa buys flowers for Stefan in the street before going up to meet him in his apartment one final time. There is something so strange, so gallant, about the way that Fontaine buys those flowers. What woman buys flowers for a man in the street? A woman who has taken control of her own destiny. Just thinking about the image of Fontaine holding those flowers she has bought and hopefully going up to see Stefan one more time makes me cry. And they aren't adolescent tears anymore, but adult tears that



Lisa falls in love with Stefan when she is fourteen years old. Something happens to her that is akin to a religious conversion as she watches him move into her apartment house and listens to him play his music. Lisa might be seen as a fool on some level, or even deranged, but Ophüls's camera and Fontaine's glowing devotion to the role make her into a holy fool, a warrior for love, a heroine who follows her heart and pays the full price for it.

When I heard that Fontaine had died, two moments from "Letter from an Unknown Woman" immediately came to my mind. The first is the way she says, "What are you waiting for?" to Stefan when they meet again after a number of years and he cannot seem to remember her.

understand the full complexity of Lisa's situation and this last gender-reversed, heroic gesture she is making toward her dream of life.

The film does not flinch from Lisa's passive aggressive anger when Stefan doesn't recognize her, or her need for vengeance when she writes her letter to him and tells him about all he has missed. "Letter from an Unknown Woman" is a tragic film, circular and inevitable, the confrontation between an atheist and a true believer, between a woman who feels too much and a man who feels too little who belong together because they both like winter better than spring. Why? Because in spring you can't imagine spring.

Roger Ebert

Director Max Ophüls's considered love as much a curse as a blessing, and this heart-rending drama is one the finest expressions of his delicate aesthetic balance.

Stefan (Louis Jourdan) is a self-serving and pleasure-seeking concert pianist in late 19th-century Vienna. Returning home the night before he's due to fight yet another duel he discovers a letter that opens, "By the time you read this, I may be dead."

So begins the story of Lisa (Fontaine), the woman with whom he enjoyed a fleeting relationship ten years earlier and then abandoned, unaware she was pregnant.

Told largely in flashback, Lisa's subsequent life turns out to have been a catalogue of disappointments, but throughout that time she clung to the memory of Stefan. Horribly, she even spent a second night with him, during which he failed to recognise her.

Ophüls's gliding camerawork is fantastically agile, swooping in on his characters and then suddenly retreating, but this is really Fontaine's show - her Lisa is hopelessly romantic but there's also an impressive resilience at her core. A tragic tale in every way but beautiful to behold.

film4.com



DIRECTOR – MAX OPHÜLS

1902 - 1957



Eden Court Cinema
Tuesday 29 March 2016
at 7.15pm

Retired criminal investigator Benjamin Espósito (Ricardo Darín) is writing a novel in an attempt to put an unsolved case to rest. He enlists the help of a former colleague, Irene (Soledad Villamil) who is now a judge and the case is reopened, leading to stunning revelations of love, justice and evil.

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Our next screening...
The Secret in Their Eyes

The opening film in our
Spanish Language Season



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