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Barnens Ö

("Children's Island")

Sweden : 1980 : dir. Kay Pollack :

: 108 min

prod: : scr: : dir.ph.:

[Tomas Fryk](#)

Anita Ekström; Ingvay Hirdwakk; Lars-Erik Berenett; Hjördis Pettersson; Sif Ruud; Lena Granhagen; Malin Ek; Majlis Granlund; Helene Svedberg; Börje Ahlstedt

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω	□	€	Z	⚡	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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Source: *The Moving Picture Boy*

Speelfilm Encyclopedie review:

"The story of a small boy, on the one hand searching for true friendship and on the other afraid to lose his childlike innocence [sic], who is sent to a summer camp by his mother. He doesn't go there, just as his mother doesn't go away on holiday but moves in with a boyfriend. After many wanderings he learns that it's not so simple to keep an honest and upright

friendship going. From the book by P.C. Jerslid. *** "

International Film Guide 1982 review:

"...In 1980/81 Sweden did produce one film ("CHILDREN'S ISLAND") of which any flag might be proud..."

"CHILDREN'S ISLAND" reveals Kay Pollack as a director in the Jan Troell class, and the lukewarm response to the film at the Berlin Festival in 1981 is hard to understand. You feel that film as a medium comes as naturally to Pollack as tennis does to Björn Borg. His visuals, his control of sound, his direction of players, all have a supple, visceral quality that involves the audience.



Source: International Film Guide 1982

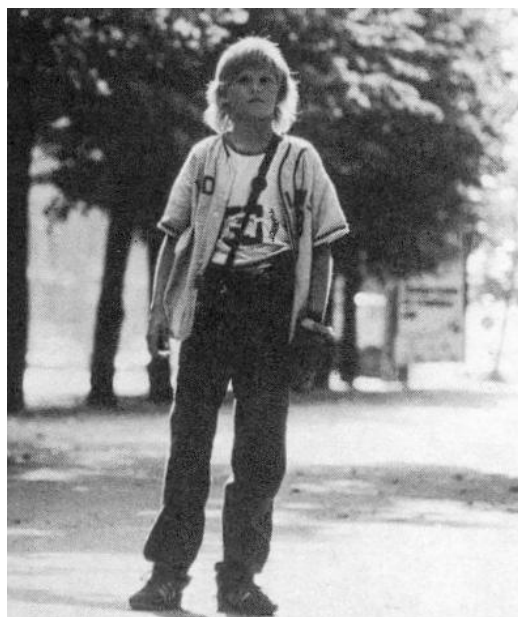
When Reine, the eleven-year old boy who takes off on his own in Stockholm during the summer holidays, tries to stay underwater as long as he can, you suffer with him, feel the thumping of the blood in your ears and the chilliness of the water about you. P.C. Jervil's novel is of course a marvellous springboard for the film; it externalises the desires and fantasies, the fears and aspirations, of pubescent boyhood, and through Reine's eyes the city acquires a mysterious glow and poetry. "CHILDREN'S ISLAND" (which is not about an island at all, unless it be that metaphorical island of which John Donne spoke) is a film about discovery, discovery of profanation, sex, jealousy and all those other illusions and disillusionments that constitute the process of growing up."

The Moving Picture Boy entry on Fryk:

"In "BARNENS Ö" the divorced mother of eleven-year old Reine Larssen goes off on a trip with her new lover, despatching Reine (as she believes) to a summer camp known as Children's Island. Reine, however, who has no intention of wasting his time in organised games, climbs back into his empty home and his own private world. His main preoccupations are the existence of god and his own genital development, together with hatred of his mother's boyfriend and the possibility of holding his breath for a record three minutes.

In excursions into the outside world he has interesting, sometimes exciting but finally unsatisfying meetings with girls and women: he is repeatedly brushed aside as superfluous, and furious to find himself crying for his mother. But not a single man he knows offers an adequate role-model, only "mythical" figures like Chaplin or Björn Borg. Children, he sees, really are stranded on an island of their own.

Kay Pollack's film is a truthful study of early adolescence, and the proud, sceptical gaze of Tomas Fryk probes his dilemma deeply, with interludes of wild resentment or lust. In his late teens he made a comeback on TV in "Femte Generationen" (86)."



Source: *International Film Guide 1982*

[no listing in "Halliwell's Film Guide", "Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2001", "The Critics' Film Guide", "The Good Film and Video Guide", "Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89", "Rating

the Movies (1990)", "The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television", "The Time Out Film Guide", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995", "Variety Movie Guide 1993", "Video Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

No further information currently available. In the pick'n'mix genre of boyhood films, many who have seen it count "**BARNENS Ö**" among the very best. It has all the hallmark qualities of the Scandinavian cinema of childhood, a refreshing sexual frankness which would be socially – not to say legally – impermissible in the UK or US, and a protagonist who for once is not pining for the greener grass of adulthood, but lamenting the imminent loss of his own untarnished state, as the spectre of pubertal change looms ever closer.

In most, nearly all, so-called "rite of passage" films about boys, the central characters undergo some testing emotional event before they can be "elevated" to the status of pre-manhood. Or, like Kevin in TV's "**The Wonder Years**", they are in a state of perpetual angst whether they will pass muster in the (supposedly more complex) adult world. This of course is the *adult* view of puberty and its meaning. How refreshing then, in Kay Pollack's admittedly difficult film, to meet a hero of eleven who is in no hurry at all to cross that threshold, thank you very much. Indeed, he monitors his own genitals with obsessive dismay for signs of the first betraying hair. Because Reine finds nothing enviable or admirable in the messy, deceitful world of adult life. As the film begins we meet him arse-upwards in the bath, testing his lung-power to the limit underwater. It is a metaphor for that other alien environment into which he will soon be plunged, like it or no. By the end of the film he announces to his portable memo recorder that the inevitable has happened – the first hair has sprouted, and it is with resignation more than triumph that he embarks on the world of adolescence.

It is more than ten years since I last watched "**BARNENS Ö**", so a detailed plot description is not possible. Reine is very aware of his mother's intent to park him quietly out of the way while she gets on with her private life, and it's in the spirit of rebellion that he thwarts her. At one point he even pays a visit to her boyfriend's flat to catch them out, but they have gone away. Meanwhile, he drifts aimlessly through the childless streets, recording his observations as he goes. He finds himself modelling for a photographer as the boyhood Björn Borg, falls in with a troupe of circus performers, tags along with a teenage biker gang. And inevitably enough, he finds sex entering his mind with ever greater urgency.

I was living in Holland when this film was broadcast in the excellent VPRO children's film season. The following week, as a friend told me, a customer walked into a photocopying shop where the film was being watched in an adjacent room. The sequence she saw sent her straight to the police, and next day the shop was raided for "distributing child porn". There were red faces in uniform when they learned the film had been shown on children's television the week before. But the anecdote gives some indication why hell will freeze over before it is shown in the English-speaking world. There is no room in our increasingly paranoid culture for a film as frank about puberty as this.

It would be a mistake to suggest that “**BARNENS Ö**” is in any sense a pleasurable viewing experience. For adults it is intense enough, quite what American children would make of it, raised as they have been on a diet of Disney sop and teen romance television, is difficult to guess. The film addresses intelligent, articulate, self-aware children with a healthy scepticism of adult values. It is, in a modest way, and hence the title, a declaration of independence. The “children’s rights” it concerns itself with are the right to be taken seriously, the right to be counted as of equal worth – pubic hair or not – and the right to learn by doing, not just by listening. *Recommended*

See subject index under **RECOMMENDED TITLES, RUNAWAYS / STOWAWAYS, SCANDINAVIA** and **SEX & SEXUALITY**.