

Blu-Ray Review: 'The Seventh Seal' Still Dazzles From Criterion

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on June 23, 2009 - 7:00am

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CHICAGO – What more is there to write about “The Seventh Seal”? Dozens of scholars more renowned than myself have already examined virtually every shot of the film. It has been dissected and discussed in dozens of languages and continues to be one of the most influential pieces of work in the history of its medium. The new Criterion Blu-Ray edition makes it clear why.



Blu-Ray Rating: **4.5/5.0**

Since it won the Special Jury Prize at the 1957 Cannes Film Festival, “The Seventh Seal” has become a world-renowned masterpiece of cinematography and symbolism. Writing again about its significance in the history of film would be merely repetitive. Instead, let’s look at the remarkable edition that Criterion has released for it.

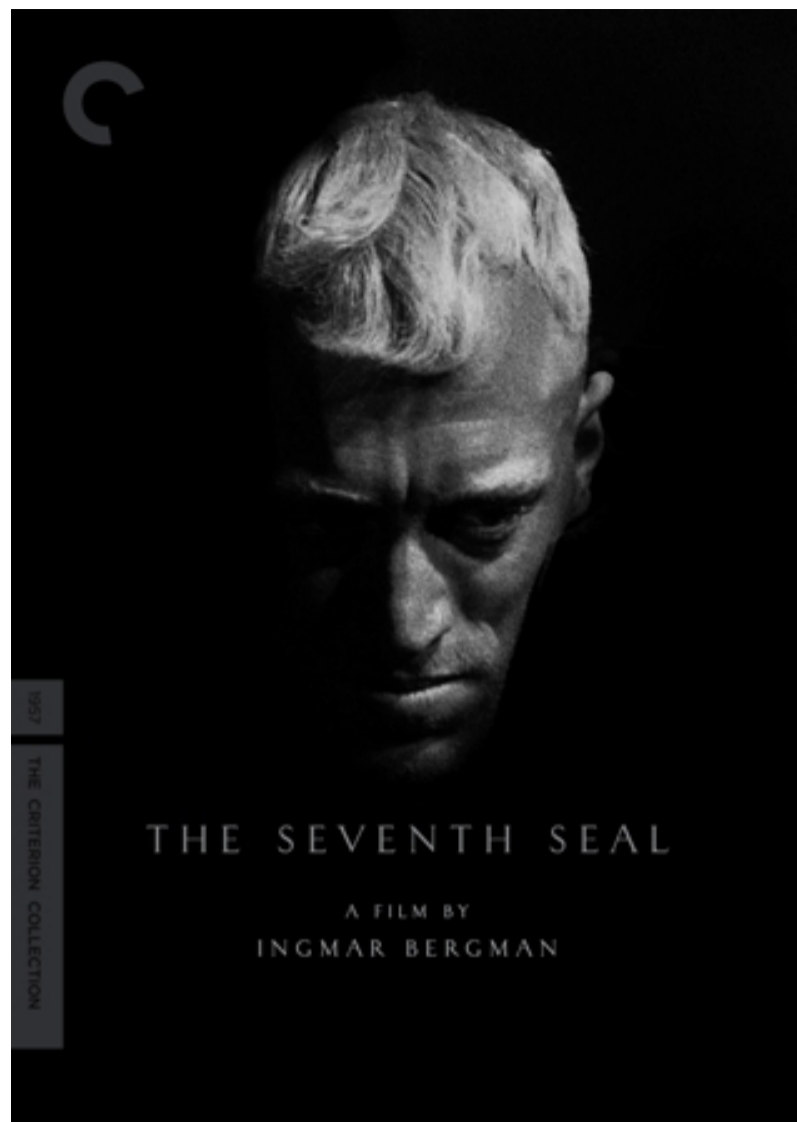


Death played by Bengt Ekerot and Antonius Block, the knight played by Max von Sydow

Photo credit: Courtesy of the Criterion Collection

In case there are some of you out there completely unfamiliar with “The Seventh Seal,” a brief plot recap, one that doesn’t do the film justice, is in order. A knight (Max Von Sydow), disillusioned and exhausted after a decade of fighting in the Crusades, finds himself on a beach, playing chess with Death. The film has been widely parodied. And even if you haven’t seen it, you’ve probably seen a movie influenced by it.





The International was released on Blu-Ray on June 9th, 2009.

Photo credit: Courtesy of the Criterion Collection

Criterion's Blu-Ray edition features a new, restored high-definition digital transfer with uncompressed monaural soundtrack. Both are impressive if not overwhelming. There's something a bit off about watching "The Seventh Seal" in high definition. The picture is beautiful, but Criterion has correctly kept a lot of film grain on the image, which will throw many Blu-Ray viewers off. I think it's merely a byproduct of having seen the film on VHS and original DVD, where grain and loss of detail is expected, but the HD grain of the Criterion transfer took some getting used to. The mono track is crystal clear.

The real draw of the new Criterion release is "Bergman Island," a feature-length documentary about Ingmar Bergman from journalist Marie Nyrerod. She was allowed complete access to the man and his home on Faro Island and the doc is basically an 83-minute interview that fans of the legendary director will adore. It's the first time that's been available and has also been released as a stand-alone title. How often do you see special features so complete that they are also available as their own release?

Criterion's main expertise, in this writer's opinion, has always been in selection and production of special features. Nothing feels like filler. The extras are always designed to enhance the real draw - the film itself.

In the case of "The Seventh Seal," viewers will find an introduction to the film by Bergman himself (which is another mini-interview with Nyrerod), an audio commentary by Bergman expert Peter Cowie (with a new afterword for this edition), an archival audio interview with Max von Sydow, a 1989 tribute to Bergman by Woody Allen, "Bergman 101" - a selected video filmography tracing Bergman's career, the theatrical trailer, an optional English-dubbed soundtrack, a new and improved English subtitle translation, and a booklet with an essay by critic Gary Giddins.

"The Seventh Seal" is a must-own and Criterion has given the film the treatment that it deserves in every way. The studio continues to set the pace for Blu-Ray in much the way they did for DVD. This is one of the most impressive and complete releases of the year to date.

'The Seventh Seal' is released by The Criterion Collection and stars Max Von Sydow. It was written and directed by Ingmar Bergman. The Blu-Ray was released on June 16th, 2009. It is not rated.



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