

'Scenes from a Marriage': The homage to a great screen work has little new to offer



CHENNAI: Swedish legend Ingmar Bergman's 1973 "Scenes from a Marriage" caused a storm not merely in his native country, but also elsewhere in Europe. It is said that it led to a rise in divorce among married couples. His work, first as a television miniseries and later condensed into a feature film, traces a 10-year journey of a couple as they move toward a separation, and it is fraught with agony and uncertainty. Bergman inspired Noah Baumbach's "Marriage Story" and earlier Richard Linklater's trilogy "Before..." Currently streaming on HBO, and OSN in the region, a new miniseries, also called "Scenes from a Marriage" was helmed by Hagai Levi, a Golden Globe winner for co-creating and co-producing the television drama, "The Affair."



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Levi's "Scenes from a Marriage" begins with Jessica Chastain's Mira getting ready for a television commercial shoot, and the camera intercuts to her apartment that she shares with her husband, Jonathan (Isaac Oscar), and their four-year-old daughter. While the couple in Bergman's outing are interviewed by a magazine journalist, we have a university graduate (played by Sunita Mani) doing this in Levi's series. She is researching what makes two people stay together in a marriage for a long time, given that many go their separate ways in an average of about eight years.



Both Oscar and Chastain are undoubtedly great actors. (Supplied)

But Levi is on the same page with Bergman in the scene where Mira and Jonathan meet their friends, a couple played by Nicole Beharie and Corey Stoll. The dinner conversation veers towards unease when an argument breaks out between the visiting couple, which causes a strange reaction from our star couple. The pair soon face marital issues when news of an unplanned pregnancy comes to the fore.

Levi's "Scenes from a Marriage," which premiered recently at the Venice Film Festival, although a tribute to Bergman, could have been more effective had it not been so faithful to the original series. The kind of dilemma in a marriage that may have been

common nearly 50 years ago in Bergman's era is quite different today. It comes with its own set of challenges, pushed and provoked by the daily grind of modern living where two people have little time to work on their relationship.

The HBO series is efficiently done, but is not remarkable as Bergman's. Both Oscar and Chastain are undoubtedly great actors. Chastain's face is wonderfully expressive as it travels from misery, to anger to resignation. She is quiet one moment, mercurial the other. Oscar's character is calm most of the time, but the flicker of doubt about Mira surfaces now and then. He is not into quick fixes like divorce. Their performances make the series worth a watch. Otherwise, the five-hour long work can get painfully boring — Levi does not give us anything new to savor.
