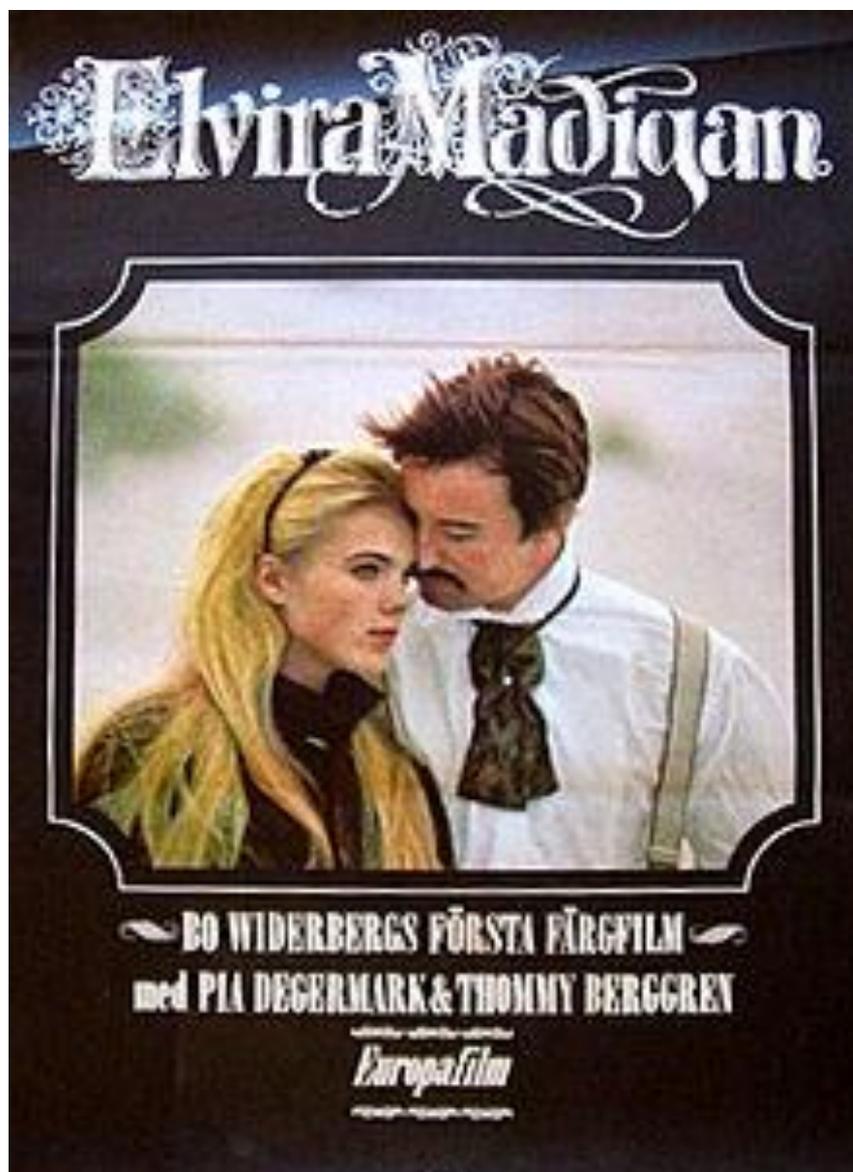


## *Elvira Madigan*



*Reviewed by Garry Victor Hill*

Directed, edited and written by Bo Widerberg. Produced by Waldemar Bergendahl. Cinematography by Jorgen Persson. Original Music by Mozart and Vivaldi. Cinematic length: 90 minutes. Distributed by. Production Company Europa Films. Cinematic release: April 1967. DVD release 2004. Rating 90%.

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Written Without Prejudice

## Cast

Pia Degermark - Hedvig Jensen, known as Elvira Madigan.

Thommy Berggren - Lieutenant Sixten Sparre. A Swedish Count

Lennart Malmer – Lieutenant Kristoffer

Cleo Jensen - Cleo

## Review

Upon its release in April 1967 many critics commented that *Elvira Madigan* must be either the most beautiful film ever made or a strong contender for that title. There can be no quarrelling with those opinions. Four out of five settings were in rural Sweden, the other was in Denmark and all are filmed in bright summer weather. Lush green forests lit by dappled sunlight, fields of yellow grain, castles and concert halls, crystal clear brooks, pale blue ponds, immaculate villas and farmhouses... The music matches. The exquisitely beautiful music of Mozart and Vivaldi seems just right. It seems a point that director Bo Widerberg makes is that tragedy can unfold against an idyllic background. It can also unfold on young, good looking, well intentioned and optimistic people.

This is not to give away the ending, because at the beginning we are told that the young couple Hedvig Jensen (Pia Degermark) a famed circus performer known as Elvira Madigan and Sixten Sparre (Thommy Berggren) a Swedish Count and lieutenant of cavalry, committed suicide in 1889. Widerberg bases his story on their last months. In the first scenes they seem as far away as possible from being suicides. On an idyllic summer day they lie under a tree, exuberant in their love and carefree. In the next scenes we see roll call in Sixten's cavalry unit and the circus ring master asking for Elvira Madigan. These very brief scenes are all that is depicted of their life before the elopement, They have just run off together after finding true love: we are in the world of the united couple, the world of happily ever after. We do not see how they met, how or they decided to run off together. We are in a land where dreams come true – for a time.



*The film made Mozart's Piano Concerto no 21 its own. It is frequently referred to as 'The Elvira Madigan Concerto.'*





*These pictures show that Elvira Madigan should be considered one of the most beautifully filmed pictures ever made*



Even in this idyll food has to be paid for and as their money runs out they begin to become desperate and after one narrow escape they sense that they will never be able to settle down. Sixten will be pursued and jailed for military desertion. When Sixten's friend and fellow officer, Lieutenant Kristoffer (Lennart Malmer) tries to warn Elvira of the cost and the consequences she replies "There are times when you don't question the cost." Indeed she does not. In this idyllic world the reality remains that their dwindling money decides their

lives. The world exploits them when it can. Elvira sells a portrait of herself cheaply, believing the artist to be an unknown French cripple. We see the signature of Toulouse Lautrec. When she applies to entertain as a tightrope walker at a village fair, it turns out that she is wanted for erotic dancing, followed by prostitution. Sixten's bashing of one of the creeps saves her, but ensures that she remains unpaid, while they are permanently starving.

The forest can be beautiful, but its beauty can be unsustainable as Elvira finds out when she tries to scavenge nuts, berries, and mushrooms there. She ends up on her hands and knees vomiting. She is the first to realise that they have no choice but suicide and she tells Sixten "You know what we must do" the film's last words. She is shown catching a butterfly in freeze frame and two shots ring out.

In the spring of 1967 when this film was released the hippie dream of dropping out and living in sensuality was taking hold and the Beatles were singing 'All You Need is Love.' Clearly although his film has 1889 characters permeated with the idealism of the middle 1960s Widerberg ultimately had a different viewpoint.



*The Graves of the Lovers*



*Bo Widerberg 1930-1997*