

IN THIS SHORT LIFE: BRITTA SJÖGREN IN PERSON

The stippled feathers of a dead blackbird nestled in a bed of leaves and the long, white fingers of a piano player in close-up are just two of the many evocative visual details in Britta Sjögren's graceful second feature, *In*

This Short Life. Shot in black-and-white 16 mm, with languid pacing and a lovely score, the film takes its title from an Emily Dickinson poem about what we can and can't control. Like the poem, Sjögren's film grapples with the details of everyday life — like how to pay the rent — but also ponders grander themes of love, independence and sacrifice. Structured around the interweaving lives of four characters all facing difficult personal decisions, the film dances between fact and fiction, with parts of the story deriving from the lives of the performers, who are themselves a mix of professional and non-professional actors. The narrative/documentary hybrid may sound contrived, but Sjögren, whose previous work includes the short film *a small Domain* and her first feature, *Jo-Jo at the Gate of Lions*, has always had a sure hand and a talent for fashioning complete and beguiling celluloid worlds. She achieves that here, too, in part due to the black-and-white film stock, which feels otherworldly, and the soundtrack, which includes a series of songs by Mark Eitzel and American Music Club that align perfectly with the stories. With the close of the 2006 edition of Sundance, and as pundits argue about the state of American independent filmmaking, Sjögren, a key member of the West Coast's emerging generation of filmmakers in 1992 when *Jo-Jo* played at Sundance, reminds us of its possibilities, and what can happen when a filmmaker continues to challenge herself in terms of form and personal revelation. The San Francisco-based Sjögren will attend the screening. (REDCAT, Mon., Feb. 6,

8 p.m.; 213-237-2800 or www.redcat.org)



SHORT RUN

—Holly Willis