The WORLD of ESTONIAN FILM

DE CULTU CIVILI ESTONICO
VOL II

Text: Marianne Kõrver

Consultant: Jaak Lõhmus / Estonian Film Foundation

Translation and language editing: Adam Cullen

Captions and notes: Estonian Institute

Graphic design and layout: Siiri Timmerman

Cover photo: Sille Annuk / *Postimees*

Published by the Estonian Institute

ISBN 978-9949-9160-6-1

HOW DO WE LOOK?

Here you are born. On a flat stretch of land.
It is here that your peace and your balance stand.
/Paul-Eerik Rummo, a nonconformist poet (see p 42)/

On April 27, 2012, 100 years passed since the day that one aspiring young man and his two friends headed off to shoot Estonia's first film. Russian aviation pioneer Sergei Utotschkin flew several rings over the town of Tartu in a rickety wood and canvas biplane while the Estonian film pioneer recorded it using a contraption that he himself had constructed. The air show was even repeated on the following day due to great public interest and commercial factors. What is also noteworthy, however, is that the line chosen for an advertisement in the local newspaper – meant to draw a crowd to see the first Estonian-made motion picture – read: "It is possible for the audience present at the flight to see themselves on the floor of the performance."

ENM

Johannes Pääsuke (1892–1918), an enterprising photographer and the *Estonian film pioneer*, whose studio Estonia Film produced newsreels for local cinemas and the big French labels. Shot about 40 film pieces during his short career, nine of which have been preserved. Of greatest interest are his film portrayals of Estonian places, e.g. *Retk läbi Setomaa (A Journey Through Seto Country,* 1913). Drafted into WWI, Pääsuke fell to his death during an accident in a railcar in Orsha, Belarus in 1918.

ENM

The ability to observe oneself from a side-long perspective is a basis for creating a culture with its own mindset and sign system, but this has never come easy for Estonians. The history of this one-million-strong nation, which struggled for ages under the control of alien powers, has given many reasons for national self-doubt. “What do we look like to others?”, “How are we doing compared to the rest of the world?”, “What does everyone else think of us?” are the questions that also emanate from the story of Estonian film.

What is more, there have been no foreign examples that could have been followed by a tiny nation, which acquired its independence only a good number of years after its first film showing. Apart of Iceland and its one-of-a-kind location, the Nordic nations – who in Estonians’ minds are spiritual brothers that feature recognisably unique film languages and a pinnacle of world-famous figures – are all several times more populous, remarkably wealthier, and thus able to sustain much larger film industries.

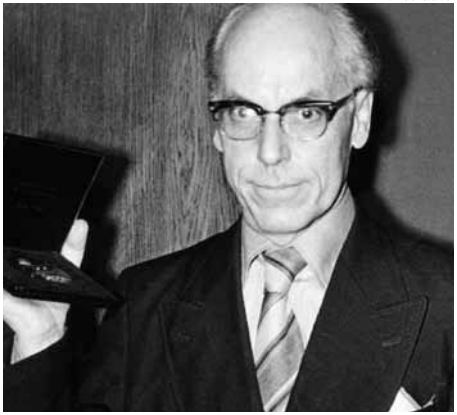
A man from among the one-million-strong nation – Mati, the protagonist of Tühirand (Empty, *2006) by of Veiko Õunpuu (see p 4).*

Empty

Elmar Köster

Laureates of the I Soviet Estonia Film Festival (from the left) – Olev Neuland, Rein Maran (see p 36), Andres Sööt (see p 34) and Priit Pärn.

Mikk Raude



Lennart Meri (see p 37) with a silver medal from the New York Film and TV Festival.

In this disproportionate contest, all Estonians can do is allow their inferiority complex to tickle them under the chin, and boost each and every tiniest achievement up onto the highest pedestal possible. That being the case, let us admit straight away that no Estonian film has yet had the honour of being awarded a single one of the film world's four most coveted recognitions – the Cannes Golden Palm, the Berlin Golden Bear, the Venice Golden Lion or the American Film Academy Oscar.

Yet, Estonian film has enjoyed greater international recognition than ever before over the last few years. A short film about a boy, who worried before his first confession that he didn't have a single sin on his soul and went on to semi-inadvertently murder several people, is the first and so far only Estonian film to achieve an Academy Award nomination for Live Action Short Film. True, the film's production country was the UK, but its writer and director is a promising film artist of pure Estonian descent, who graduated from the London Film School.

pedestal

Matt Petit

Tanel Toom, a promising film artist, with his Student Academy Award.

In the world of *auteur cinema*, however, Estonia's brand has become moderate-tempo productions with eccentric characters. The author of these is a multiple university drop-out, a heavy metal guitarist and an artist, who later took a deep plunge into the world of film. His story about six people with an unhappy fate that reside in a Soviet-era apartment block received the main prize of the *Orizzonti* contest at the Venice Film Festival – a feat that can be regarded as the greatest recognition ever bestowed to an Estonian film.

The third full-length film by the same director – a surreal black-and-white comedy inspired by Hieronymus Bosch's *The Temptation of St. Anthony* – was the first Estonian film to be selected for the Sundance Film Festival. A glossy compendium put out by US publisher Phaidon Press also lists the director among the world's top one hundred most interesting modern filmmakers. Not too bad, as an Estonian would say.

Rivo Sarapik

A heavy metal guitarist and an artist, (left) decorated at the 10th PÖFF, 2006.

Veiko Õunpuu (b 1972), the most celebrated modern filmmaker in Estonia with an upbringing in fine arts and philosophy. Inspired by and compared to, among others, Buñuel and Lynch, Õunpuu keeps digging ever deeper with his productions of dreamlike, surrealistic imagery and multi-layered symbolism.

Veiko Õunpuu's black-and-white comedy Püha Tõnu kiusamine (The Temptation of St. Tony, *2009*).

2 x *The Temptation of St. Tony*

2 x Ruwe Saare

The main local film festival – Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival (shortened to PÖFF in Estonian).

Fiona Shaw, one of the more famous guests at PÖFF.

The fact that a number of Estonian films have earned wide festival acclaim over the last few years has benefited the domestic film industry in more than one way. In the wake of the flagships, the notion of the Estonian film as such has started to take shape in the wider world. At home, the growing international success has given momentum to local film festivals – the more popular the film country, the more famous guests that arrive. As such, Tallinn's Black Nights Film Festival – which was started in 1997 with 4500 visitors and was at first pointedly a casual student-friendly get-together – has now, 15 years later, become a red-carpet gala event with 70 000 guests.

Different specialty festivals have also burst into bloom – events held during all seasons of the year and across the entire country. The tARTuff romance film festival in Tartu, the Haapsalu Horror & Fantasy Film Festival, the Sleepwalkers student- and short-film festival, the Matsalu Nature Film Festival (see p 36) etc. A sundry of parties for a good boy or girl.

CULTURE OF INTERVALS

Estonian filmmaking is like Estonian guerrilla fighting: the worse and colder the weather, the better. When no one can see or hear any longer, then the partisan triumphs with a tin can lid as his weapon.

/Peeter Simm, a master of film direction and aphorisms (see p 46)/

It's difficult to find the right words to describe Estonian film. One thing is certain – continuity and stability will not do.

While rises and falls should be expected in the cultural life of a small nation, a few quite empty gaps also appear in the century of Estonian film. These intervals very accurately reflect the ups and downs of the Estonian people and statehood, with three generations having had to start reorganising their lives from the very beginning again over the course of less than one hundred years – in a new state, with a new ideology and according to new rule.

Having won sovereignty in the War of Independence (1918–1920), Estonians – who until then had lived in the shadow of German culture and Russian authority – began building their own Estonian-language cultural space from nearly scratch; although with that much more fervour. In order to acquaint with the behind-the-scenes of film as quite a novel field of artistic expression, local enthusiasts turned their gaze towards the West. As for themes, filmmakers had to seek inspiration from romantic national literature, from Estonian nature and Hollywood melodramas.

Young Eagles

Noored kotkad (Young Eagles, *1927*)

Theodor Luts (1896–1980), the most versatile filmmaker in pre-WWII Estonia, younger brother of author Oskar Luts (see *Spring*, p 51). Having fought in the War of Independence, Luts capitalised on his experience by making *Noored kotkad* – a spectacular heroic epic about the spectacular Estonian military exploit. Another success of his was the first domestic sound film: the melodramatic love story *Päikese lapsed* (*Children of the Sun*, 1932).

Alas, his move to Finland the following year – where he took part in the production of 29 feature films – unintentionally also contributed to the longest drought in the history of Estonian feature films.

Theodor Luts filming at the set of Päikese lapsed.

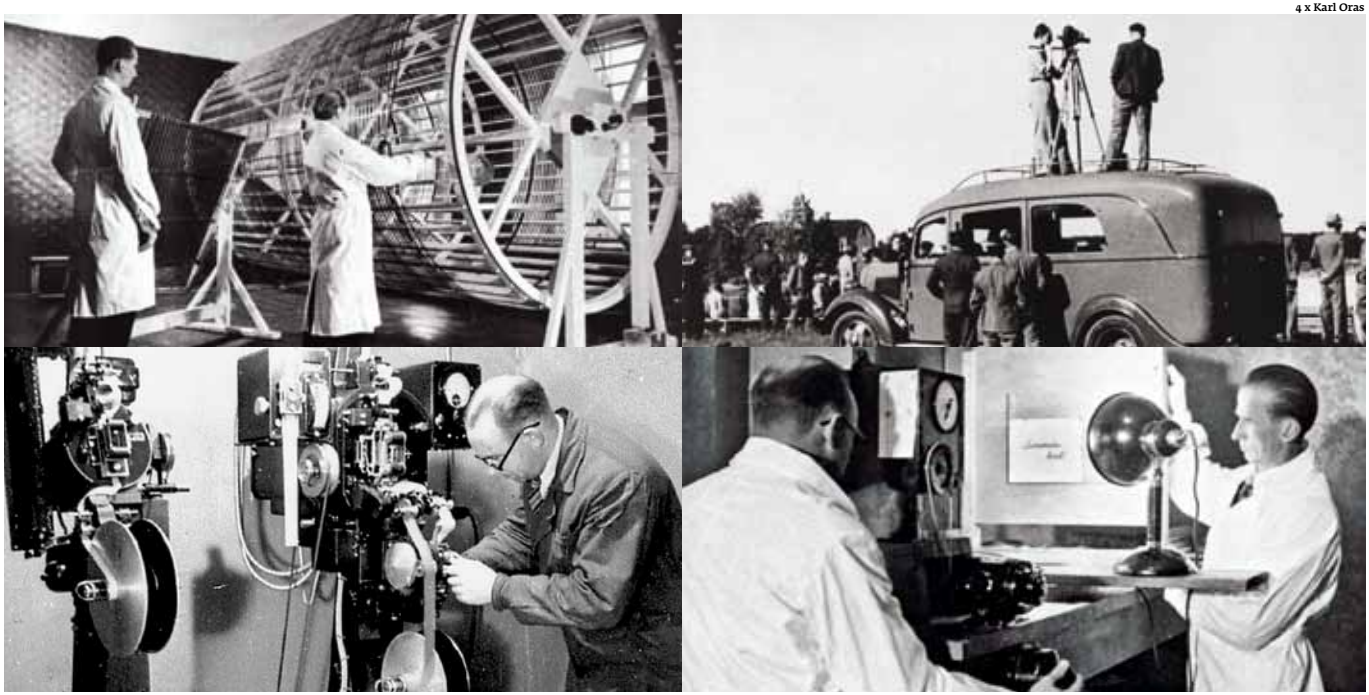
local enthusiast

2 x priv. coll.

The attempts made at producing Estonian-language feature films by enterprising small businessmen and other self-taught cineastes were limited by the narrowness of the market, growing production costs of the up-and-coming sound films, and increased aesthetic demands. In the early 1930's, the situation was further worsened by the Great Depression and Estonia's destabilising political situation. All these factors resulted in not a single feature film being shot in Estonia over the years 1932–1947. The first half of the 15-year interruption coincides with the rise of authoritarianism all across Europe following economic recession. This also featured in the young Republic of Estonia, where newsreels with a friendly propagandist taste that covered topics of the Estonian people, natural resources, industries and national days of importance rose to become more dominant than artistic expression.

Newsreels with a friendly propagandist taste – the staff of Eesti Kultuurfilm (see p 32) at work.

4 x Karl Oras



The second half of the interruption overlaps with the darkest epoch in Estonia's 20th-century history that began with the country's "incorporation" into Soviet sphere of influence by way of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in 1939. Power changed hands in Estonia three times over the course of WWII – firstly with the Red Army marching in in June 1940, followed by the invasion of German forces in summer of 1941, and finally with communists conquering the country anew in the fall of 1944.

As the Bolsheviks' goal was to destroy Estonian civic society down to its very roots, their repressions – from deportation to Gulags through execution – befell many nationally-minded cultural figures. Those that escaped the gauntlet had to adjust to grotesque communist ideology, which extended to the absurd – until Stalin's death in 1953, garish social realism shot by specialists imported from Russia was dominant in Estonian film industry.

Salomon Rosenfeld

Valgus Koordis (Light in Koordi, *1951*) – *garish social realism* par excellence *by the most famous imported specialist Herbert Rappaport (1908–1983).*

priv. coll

August Mõtuste

Estonian-speaking filmmakers ...

For people that grew up in a free society, adapting to a world turned upside-down in an Orwellian manner wasn't easy. However, one can claim that it was in the ESSR, when Estonian film first reached its artistic maturity. The ground for the renaissance was provided by the freer atmosphere that came along with the "Khrushchev Thaw" beginning in 1956. Yet an even more significant factor appeared in the form of the first Estonian-speaking filmmakers with academic education from the Moscow and Leningrad theatre and film schools.

... with academic education

Alla Kerb

priv. coll

Mikk Raude

Kaljo Kiisk (1925–2007), the grandfather of Estonian art-house and the prime mover of the 'new wave' of Estonian film.

Graduating as a theatre actor from GITIS in 1953, and being invited to Tallinnfilm two years later, Kaljo Kiisk continued at the studio in the capacity of a director, screenwriter and actor for over 30 years. He directed 17 feature films, including *Surma hinda küsi surnutelt* (*Ask the Dead About the Price of Death*, 1977) and *Nipernaadi* (1983; see p 44), and "discovered" a number of talented film actors in the process.

"Ansbergs (the ESSR Minister of Culture from 1953–63) come and go; I want to make art!" declared a young, angry man that graduated from Estonian studio at the Moscow State Institute for Theatre Arts (GITIS). Amid the age of pursuits that gripped the entire world fifteen years later, he shot a film that best captured the period's zeitgeist – a distorted image of totalitarianism that pictured all authoritarian regimes of the new age through Nazi symbolism.

The 'modernist loner' of Estonian fiction film – born just a few months after suppression of the Prague Spring – was deemed by Moscow ideologists as inadvisable for screening outside of the Baltic States and Belarus, and the grandfather of Estonian art-house could not use his pass to the Venice Film Festival. It took 40 years for another Estonian feature film to make it into this event (see *Sügisball*, p 48).

Making of a distorted image of totalitarianism – Kaljo Kiisk (with a stool) at the set of Hullumeelsus *(Madness, 1968).*

Tatjana Putnik

Several more unsurpassable films were completed during the peak of Estonian film's golden age in 1968–70: among them was a cloak-and-sword adventure inspired by *Fanfane la Tulipe*, and a heart-warming portrait of childhood school days set during the last decade of the 19th century.

The century of interruptions had one more jolt to offer Estonian film. Although caused by an entirely happier turn of events – the restoration of the Estonian Republic in 1991 – the period of mayhem during the last decade of the century brought Estonian film to a dismal and chaotic state within the new economic reality. The massive Soviet film market vanished together with the disappearance of ideological restrictions, and the well-established financing system, which had brought "pan-Soviet resources" into Estonia via the local production hub, collapsed. As an unpleasant surprise accompanying freedom, Estonian filmmakers discovered that selling their work to the wider public could turn out to be just as difficult as attempts to market an Estonian automobile in the wider world.

EFA

Tallinnfilm, the local production hub.

Grigori Kromanov staging his cloak and sword adventure *(see p 50).*

Villu Reimann

Making of a heart-warming portrait of childhood school days *(see p 51).*

Boris Kustov

"It is an existential battle, in which few have reached the promised land – being able to make a feature film. In addition to creative ambitions, directors are forced to act by an empty stomach and holes in their descendant's booties."

Such is how a master of film direction and aphorisms (see p 46) described the situation, in which national film production dried up and a private-enterprise system based on independent producers had not yet been launched. The young country's priority was understandably to keep bread on its citizens' tables; the circus could wait.

Nonetheless, opportunities for supporting domestic film production also improved as the country's economy began to pick up, and by the end of the first decade of freedom, two foundation piles had been rammed into the ground. These days, barely any Estonian film is completed without their support.

Despite the self-ironic observation that "Estonia is already in such a distant corner on the map of Europe that polar bears will set up shop there soon," there remains reasonable hope that Estonian feature film – which over the course of a century went through hell and high water – will also manage to find its place in the world within the new conditions.

The bestowal of the film award of the Estonian Cultural Endowment: the first foundation pile.

Urmas Luik

Staff of the second foundation pile, the Estonian Film Foundation, at the set of Poll (The Poll Diaries, 2010).

EFF

FROM WEST TO EAST, AND THEN WHERE TO?

Our language and self-consciousness have come from the east, our facial features from the west. This is simple to say and difficult to embrace.

/Lennart Meri, myth-maker (see p 37)/

Viewed from the direction of the rising sun, Estonia looks like a peninsula jutting out into the sea in the northwest corner of the vast expanses of forested Eastern Europe's flatlands. From the perspective of the evening sunset, the same patch of land appears as a tiny stretch of coastline on the farthest inlet of the Baltic Sea that stretches off into the depths of the continent. Visible at closer inspection are all kinds of borders that criss-cross Estonia – some set by nature, some man-made. Frontiers naturally cause excitement and generate diversity – a property that imparts much more to the land than one would think, given its small area and northern latitude.

The human residents of Estonia also constitute an interesting blend. The first inhabitants – hunters that arrived at end of the last ice age in pursuit of reindeer and perhaps even woolly mammoths – were followed by newcomers in several waves and from many directions, bringing with them formerly unknown tools, livestock, crops and probably also languages. The majority of modern Estonians' linguistic relatives live to the east and the north – the farther away, the swarthier, stockier and Mongol-like they seem to us.

In more recent history, Estonia – located at the crossroads of Baltic Sea trading routes – has been lusted after by many countries and peoples: the Danes, Germans, Russians, Swedes, Poles, and whoever else.

An ancestral Estonian human resident and his modern linguistic relatives.

6 x Rein Maran Enn Putnik Ago Ruus

Johannes Pääsuke

Rein Maran

'Pure-stock' Estonians – a photo of the gategeepers of Koguva village in 1913 by Johannes Pääsuke (see p 31), and two men of the same village from Lennart Meri's The Winds of the Milky Way *(see p 37) in 1977.*

Libahunt (***Werewolf***, 1968), filmed by the most prominent Estonian female director, Leida Laius (1923–1996), tells the tragic story about a pale-featured, dour and tradition-abiding Estonian peasant family's unease over their "dissimilar" – dark-haired and fiery – foster daughter.

Quite obviously an age-old and recurrent theme in Estonians' collective memory, the story was first set into an art form by playwright August Kitzberg in 1911.

2 x Villu Reimann

Most of the new arrivals have successfully hidden themselves among the indigenes by now, resulting in the description of a 'pure-stock' Estonian resembling that of a Viking – tall, blonde and blue-eyed.

The Soviet film industry exploited this fact – it wasn't difficult to find actors from Estonia to play the roles of enemies (mostly Nazis) in the mass-produced war films. A foreign impression conveyed through their cold northern attitude made them perfect cliché German villains – even so convincing as to press a mark of fascism upon all of their compatriots in the perceptions of many an ordinary Belarusian, Armenian or Kazakh.

Eve Kivi (see p 25), an SS officer in the Belarusfilm/ Uzbekfilm *Every Third* (1980), was better known back home as a sparky nun in a domestic cloak-and-sword adventure (see p 50).

Every Third

Arno Saar

The Last Relic

Marianna

Tõnu Aav (b 1939), a villain named Ludwig in *Marianna* (Moldovafilm, 1967) by Vasile Pascaru, is for Estonians mainly associated with his great narration of *Uncle Remus' Stories*.

Villu Reimann

Jüri Järvet (1919–1995), one of the most loved Estonian actors, best known in the West for his role of Dr. Snaut in Andrei Tarkovsky's *Solaris* (1972). He starred in tens of Estonian films, e.g. *Metskapten* (*Forest Captain*, 1971) and *Madness* (see p 10).

Madness

The Baltic German burghers and landed nobility, who held power in Estonia for hundreds of years, viewed the conquered land's indigenous residents as barbarians civilised by sword and fire, while regarding themselves and their acquired homeland as the farthest outpost of civilisation in the east.

As for the Russian Empire (and its offspring, the USSR) – Estonia was considered a part of the West long before the conquest of the Baltic Provinces by the early 18th century, as well as after the departure of the Baltic Germans in the first half of the 20th century. This notion stems from the distinguishably different Protestant ethics, civic culture, fashion sense, orderliness and work habits, the Latin alphabet and general literacy, and many more aspects that the Russians perceive as foreign.

It is no surprise, then, that Estonia became the Soviet Union's little European theme park during the second half of the 20th century. Citizens of more easterly Soviet republics had a rare opportunity to get a whiff of the "West" through the "window" that Peter I once "chopped into Europe" by way of Estonia and Latvia. A better product selection in stores, but foremost European architecture and general living conditions embodied this Westernness. Estonia was also sourced for this quality to be used in films by Soviet "comrade nations" – local castles, manor ensembles and Tallinn's Old Town became the film sets of several famous Soviet films.

Andre Help

A land claim of the Russian Empire from the year 1900 – the onion domes of an Orthodox Cathedral amid Tallinn's medieval Gothic skyline.

The Hound of the Baskervilles

A famous Soviet film – The Hound of the Baskervilles (Lenfilm, 1981), set at Juuliku Manor in Harju County.

4 x Tatjana Putnik

A "touristy feature film" Don Juan Tallinnas (Don Juan in Tallinn, *1972) by Arvo Kruusement (see p 51).*

The USSR's ever-growing foreign debt that spawned a need to stimulate tourism as a source of "hard currency" added another reason for shaping Estonia into an "exemplary Soviet republic". A representative Potemkin village was supposed to convince visitors from the West that lavish and happy living was not only theoretically possible in a communist country, but also real. Several "touristy feature films" made in Estonia helped to serve this goal, blending together Tallinn's Old Town, music and snapshots of "progressive Soviet life".

2 x Peeter Langovits

Aki Kaurismäki at the I Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival (see p 5) in 1997.

Slow-moving odd fellows – an accompanied screening of Kaurismäki's silent film Juha *in Tallinn.*

Film's affect on the masses, which was emphasised by the Bolshevists beginning with Lenin, has of course not decreased since the bankruptcy of their ideology.

One prime example is the story of Finnish 'mentality export', which gives one an idea of what can be brought about by a single filmmaker with an original signature. Or who hasn't met a person, who truly believes Finns really are just like the people pictured in Aki Kaurismäki films? Kind, laconic, poor and slow-moving odd fellows that seem to be living in a world of the 1950's. Although a fair number of people have decided to visit Kaurismäki's homeland precisely because of him, Finland's foreign service ironically has to try with all its might to "restore" the country's image as a modern and investment-worthy destination.

Estonia also experienced something similar at the beginning of the 1990's, when early capitalism began to show its ugly face. After sobering up from the euphoria of restoring independence, the former "Soviet West" suddenly realised that it was the "wild east" for "Real Europe" – an El Dorado of outlaws and corruption. A 1993 spaghetti-eastern portrayed Estonia as just such a backwoods, where indigenous bumpkins – just like the Mexican villagers in Sergio Leone's spaghetti-westerns – were easy prey for the likewise caricatured criminals from the "greater world".

The cooperative Finnish-Estonian film became an international hit – the *New York Daily News* characterised it as the Baltic *Reservoir Dogs*, and Quentin Tarantino in turn selected the film as one of his top-ten favourites of 1993. It took most Estonians years to get used to making fun of themselves and being able to see anything positive in the film.

Over the course of the last twenty years, all kinds of campaigns have been launched to create the image of Estonia as a "normal, boring Nordic country" – a freedom-loving and aspiring e-state, the birthplace of Skype; alas, prejudices fastened once through moving pictures die hard.

international hit

3 x Endel Tarkpea

A spaghetti-eastern Tallinn pimeduses (City Unplugged, *1993).*

THE TRIUMPH OF INGENUITY

If you can do anything | then there's nothing to fear |
I made a washing machine drum | out of a beetroot last Friday.
/Bläck Rokit, a multifaceted personality/

A passion for inventiveness has probably always been typical of Estonians. During Soviet times, this was above all linked to the poor living standard and a deficit of all kinds of products. Getting by in life demanded creative solutions for replacing the missing juice presses and garden machinery, even electric guitars or radio transmitters with self-made alternatives. For example: one could make a heating coil out of a soldering iron, a lawnmower out of a *Riga* laundry machine motor, or a car muffler out of firemen's foam extinguisher.

Do-it-yourself gadgets didn't become common in Estonia only by Soviet times, of course. The majority of household implements used by families in the countryside were self-made until the beginning of the 20th century – the end of the "peasant wooden age". Despite urbanising over the 20th century, Estonians have not lost their technical savvy and habit of crafting something themselves whenever need be.

Rein Maran (see p 36) at work with his self-devised lighting set.

Tõnu Talpsep

priv. coll.

A multifaceted personality – Bläck Rokit a.k.a. Peeter Oja, a comedian with a theatre degree, and one of the best-paid Estonian film actors.

A boy from Tarvastu with a bicycle "of his own design" from the "peasant wooden age".

Johannes Pääsuke

EFA

Karl Oras

EFA

Konstantin Märska (1896–1951) – the cornerstone of Estonian cinema, who contributed to virtually every field of domestic filmmaking. Märska started up with a self-made camera and founded a film lab in 1918 together with his brother Theodor. Following a period of practice in Germany, Märska directed four feature films from 1929–30, and joined Eesti Kultuurfilm (see pp 7, 32) in 1931. He kept devising various gadgets, including a sound film camera. After WWII, he worked as a newsreel cameraman and died during filming in 1951. Märska's preserved works amount to 200 film pieces.

Konstantin Märska's cinematography in Mineviku varjud (Shadows of the Past, *1924*).

Shadows of the Past

Evald Vaher

Peeter Langovits

Walter Zapp (1905–2003), one-time photographer's apprentice, inspecting a MINOX camera at the Photo Museum in Tallinn (see p 35).

Russ Yonda

The Giant Spider Invasion *(1975) – the 'Beetle-spider' devised by an American-Estonian filmmaker Ito "Bill" Rebane (b 1937), included a driver and six children to move the creature's legs.*

In the field of visual arts, Estonia can so much as boast multiple examples of innovation that have reached the world stage.

In the 1920's, one photographer's apprentice in Tallinn had a dream, in which his acquaintance from the photography club was holding a small metal box in front of his eyes. Every time that one end of it was pulled – snap!, the device took an exposure. Nearly 15 years later, the world's first subminiature photo camera was born out of this peculiar dream. It became a valued espionage tool used by all sides during WWII, and was epitomised in post-war pop culture as James Bond's and Andy Warhol's favourite.

An American-Estonian filmmaker, the maverick owner of an independent film ranch in the Midwestern US, made waves during the 1970's by constructing and animating impressive monsters for his low-budget horror films. Taking the stage in what is probably the Estonian filmmaker's most widely known work – *The Giant Spider Invasion* (ranked as one of the world's 100 worst films) – is also one of his brightest inventions: an immense arachnid built around a Volkswagen Beetle.

Kaur Kallas

mobile gadget

Tiit Blaat

Kaspar and Kaur Kallas, two tech-geek brothers.

And last, but not least: when James Cameron's epoch-making 3D adventure *Avatar* premiered in 2009, no one in Hollywood knew that far away in Estonia, two tech-geek brothers had finished work on a mobile gadget capable of recording and playing back a moving 3D picture right on set. This was in no way the "old-fashioned" technique used up until then – two parallel cameras – but rather two camera heads combined into a single device. The brothers' invention soon made it into the world cinema industry, when Werner Herzog used it for his 3D documentary *Cave of Forgotten Dreams.*

Cave of Forgotten Dreams *(2011): Werner Herzog and his crew in Chauvet Cave.*

priv. coll.

AMATEURS GOING AT IT

There is no film industry in Estonia.
All we have is a bunch of people with a really expensive hobby.
/Veiko Õunpuu, a heavy metal guitarist and an artist (see p 4)/

The history of Estonian film can already be measured at an entire century, but you can count the professionals that participated in its creation on just a few fingers. Filmmaking has had to settle for the role of little brother to the 'big three' of Estonian culture – literature, music, and theatre. The 'day job' for the majority of individuals listed in the credits of Estonian films lies somewhere else – mostly in theatre and literature, or these days, in television and the advertising industry as well.

Juhan Viiding, the poet of his generation.

3 x Enn Säde

Linnar Priimägi as Baron von Uexküll.
Painter Jüri Arrak as Bernhard Laipmann.

Jõulud Vigalas (***Christmas in Vigala***, 1981) by Mark Soosaar (see p 38) tells the story of a free Estonian peasant man, Bernhard Laipmann, who chose shooting over flogging during the reprisals following Estonians' "second national awakening" – the Revolution of 1905.

The mettlesome director invited many leading Estonian cultural figures to his film, as well as the anchor of the state television newscast *Vremya* to play the Russian general at the head of the punitive squad. Consequently, the film was shelved at the orders of the local Communist Party Committee.

A ballad about the events in 1905.

Margus Oopkaup

At the set of the film.

Enn Säde

Chance Encounter

Mister X

The most famous Estonian opera singer, Georg Ots, in action.

Next to the numerous theatre actors, models, athletes, opera singers, forest rangers, ballet dancers and fishermen, there are but two professional cinema actors to be found among the Estonian performers in domestic film. These two are a glamorous blonde that has mainly acted away from home and in supporting roles (such as the capacity of a Soviet Union cultural ambassador to South America), and the mainstay of the Estonian cinema, who was chosen in 2012 as the Estonian Film Actor of the Century for his memorable roles in films.

Eve Kivi (b 1938), the glamorous blonde *(see p 15).*

priv. coll.

Professional cinema actors in Väike reekviem suupillile (Little Requiem for the Mouth Organ, *1971).*

Villu Reimann

The mainstay of the Estonian film, Lembit Ulfsak (b 1947).

Aldo Luud

4 x *The Last Relic*

The guest stars of The Last Relic *(see p 50):*
Aleksandr Goloborodko (b 1938) from Ukraine, Rolan Bykov (1929–1998) from Russia and Ingrīda Andriņa (b 1944) from Latvia.

During the peak of the local film industry in the 1960's, the opportunity to import actors for Estonian film from the entire broad "Soviet homeland" helped to level out the lack of professionals: guest stars have held a major role in the success of many an esteemed Estonian film.

There are many reasons for the lack of professionalism – from the impossibility of making a living solely from filmmaking on such a small market, through a lack of film education in the Estonian language. The country has strived to patch the latter gap by founding and developing the joint Baltic Media and Film School together with its southern neighbours.

Teet Malsroos

Let's Do It! (see next page).

However, until the graduates of the BMF and the Estonian Art Academy begin making it on their own, one must come to terms with the fact that the majority of people writing on the topic of Estonian film are also self-taught enthusiasts.

Yet there are also many good sides to having an underpinning of enthusiasm. Take for example Estonians' readiness to rise above their everyday social reserve and gather at volunteer bees – joint undertakings, through which projects requiring more hands, feet or heads than a single family or homestead can supply are completed. The ability to "march apart and strike together" (as coined by writer Karl Ristikivi) has found its place in modern Estonia as well – such as at the annual national Let's Do It! cleanup bee, during which tens of thousands of volunteers tidy up Estonia's forests, fields and roadsides of the trash that has "collected" there.

A photo of a bee by Johannes Pääsuke (see p 31) – Mui villagers haymaking (1913).

Johannes Pääsuke

Tiit Koha

Hardi Volmer, a multitalented contributor, at the Tallinnfilm studio.

Toomas Huik

"Estonia's worst and cheapest" film Tappev Tartu (Killing Tartu).

Peeter Langovits

Ilmar Raag, current film critic and director at PÖFF (see p 5).

A number of contemporary films have also emerged from a "will to bee" – mainly through the contribution of volunteers in exchange for food and shelter, but foremost for the chance to join in. Many of these films have provided launching points for the big players of today. As can be expected, university students have always been at the forefront of making "bee-films". For example – The Artel Päratrust for Processing Secondary Cultural Commodity and Waste, which formed in 1979 at the then Estonian Art Institute. Having fostered silent film alongside its musical activities, the group bestowed upon their countrymen a multitalented contributor to Estonian animation, stenography and "big film".

At the end of the last millennium, fresh blood also entered Estonian film from other universities in tandem with the arrival of the digital revolution and "technological democratisation" of filmmaking. In 1998, one young man – a later Estonian Television CEO and current film critic and director, who studied art history in Tartu and Sorbonne – completed "Estonia's worst and cheapest" film, mainly using volunteer work. It must be admitted, though, that the film's budget exceeded its targeted one-thousand-kroon (€64) limit multiple times.

In the final year of the last millennium, a group of political science students from the University of Tartu debuted a horror film about a killer beer yoghurt, continued with an epic parody about Estonians' ancient fight for freedom, and have since created an entire line of TV sketches that feature some of the best special effects on the Estonian visual scene. Most of these were executed as a non-profit contribution from their friends and partner2s.

Malev (Men at Arms, 2005), an epic parody by a group of political science students known as „Õ-fraktsioon".

5 x Anneli Ahven

Crowning the "beeing" mentality was a feature film completed in 2011 and titled *That's it!* The control over the entire film-making process was given to the people – from writing the script through staging and acting, enthusiastic amateurs did all the work. The film, in which 1500 people took part, is most likely one-of-a-kind in the entire world – a true manifestation of Estonians' "let's do it" gene.

That's it! *in the making.*

3 x Mikk Rand

Kinobuss (*lit.* 'cinema bus') – a *perpetuum mobile* of young enthusiasts with a background in film, involved in virtually every volunteer filmmaking project arranged in Estonia over the recent years.

The introduction to filmmaking for children and adults, the screening of Estonian films in all kinds settings at home and abroad, the organising of contests for coining Estonian film terminology – just to name some examples of the "beeing" mentality displayed by the motley crew travelling around in a retro bus (see p 54).

Peeter Helme

Mikk Rand

Karin Kaljuläte

TIME CAUGHT IN FRAME

Every writer becomes a journalist before eternity.
/Juhan Viiding, the poet of his generation (see p 24)/

ENM

Estonian film pioneer Johannes Pääsuke (left) packing for a photo- and film trip in 1913 – also the camera that recorded the first Estonian film.

The further that events slip into the past, the greater value we assign to the frames in which they are captured. But how can time be stored away?

Estonians found footholds from their national heritage while "naturalising" most forms of modern culture, yet there were no underpinnings available in their peasant background for learning to know the film trade born in the metropolises of Western Europe.

Estonian documentary film, started by an Estonian film pioneer in April 1912, was limited mainly to the production of newsreels – the predecessors of TV news – for the first couple of decades. Estonia Film, the first film company established in the Republic of Estonia in 1919, was also focused on creating and distributing newsreels, declaring its goal as: "to boost the cinema business in Estonia and fairly introduce Estonia and events both at home and abroad." The greatest achievement of a joint enterprise of two pairs of brothers – the Märska film enthusiasts (see p 21) and the famed Parikas photography buffs – was the two-and-a-half-hour-long *Filmikaameraga läbi Eesti (Across Estonia with a Film Camera*, 1924).

2 x EFA

Estonia Film newsreel frame of celebrated Finnish runner Paavo Nurmi in Tallinn.

The fifth Great Estonian Motorcycle Race in 1937 – a newsreel of the national foundation Eesti Kultuurifilm.

EFA

A national foundation established in 1931 that was based on the ideas of German *Kulturfilm* made public education its main goal. The studio, which received regular orders from the state, mainly produced what were called compulsory chronicles – ranging from reports about national events, through instructive short films similar to the modern TV-series *How is it made?* – thus offering quite an adequate picture of Estonian life, despite the unusual name.

The Soviet occupation beginning in the summer of 1940 destroyed many of the young republic's achievements in recording on film the worldview characteristic of Estonians. In place of local cineastes scattered during WWII, filming was done by the "guest directors" arriving from the USSR – not too talented, but "steadfast in ideal". This resulted in numerous newsreels titled *Soviet Estonia* that extolled Stalinist progress, as well as full-length propaganda films of same name.

Salomon Rosenfeld

Former Eesti Kultuurfilm employee Vladimir Parvel recording life in Soviet Estonia, "national in form, socialist in content".

Just as with feature films, the rise of Estonian documentaries began after the death of Stalin in 1953 and the subsiding of harsher state terror, combined with the arrival in the late 1950s of young Estonian cineastes with professional instruction. Over the years, filmmakers that graduated from the Moscow State Institute of Cinematography left their mark on the "new wave" of documentary film, introducing to Estonia the innovative film language of the Soviet *avant-garde*.

Although showing the Soviet present was feared even more by the regime than the depiction of Western lifestyle or "bourgeoisie" past, documentaries made at the local production hub (named Tallinnfilm since 1963; see p 11), or under the Eesti Telefilm brand from 1965 onward, came between the censors' scissors less frequently than "large" feature films. With the "help" of on-schedule colleagues meeting propagandist production targets, renewers were able to start making films of a more "vernacular" approach and about more "daring" topics. Several films of the "new wave" testing the limits for "writing between the frames" became expressions of a sort of cultural resistance.

Peeter Tooming

EESTI TELEFILM

Enn Säde (b 1938), a key figure of the "new wave" – the sound engineer for over a hundred films and the tireless caretaker of the Estonian film legacy.

priv. coll.

Andres Sööt, an attentive observer, at the set of his graduate work Kuldsed sarved (Golden Antlers, *1962) in Altai.*

The rise in quality was facilitated by the diversity in approaches to filmmaking among the newcomers – e.g. that of an attentive observer taking meticulous film notes of his surroundings ...

511 paremat fotot Marsist (511 Best Photos of Mars, *1968) – a top "new wave" work about youth of the "golden sixties" and the pre-war generation's fading customs.*

511 Best Photos...

Valentin Moshkovich

Filming Jääriik (The Realm of Ice, *1969) in Antarctica.*

Andres Sööt (b 1934), the Grand Old Man of Estonian *cinéma-vérité*. Deported to Siberia in 1941 as the child of an "anti-Soviet element", he managed to finish studies in cinematography in Moscow against all odds.

A master of the delicately ironic side-view, he has authored over 70 films, including several iconic works – portrayals of outstanding Estonians, views of the Antarctic ice, of Tallinn cafés, or of the restoration of Estonia's independence; and performed superb camerawork for around twenty more.

Peeter Langovits

Peeter Ülevain

... a charismatic modernist striving towards playful richness of expression ...

Peeter Tooming at the making of Õiglane maa (The Fair Land, *1978).*

Valuvesi (Water of Pain, *1990).*

Water of Pain

The Endless Day

The Endless Day, *produced and starred by Jaan Tooming – Peeter's younger brother and no less of a* charismatic modernist.

Peeter Tooming (1939–1997) – a newcomer fresh from photography and journalism studies at the University of Tartu. A charismatic modernist, who made over one hundred films from 1961–1994, including thought-provoking documentaries about the destruction of the environment. He also performed camerawork for many feature films, including the brilliant short film *Lõppematu päev* (*The Endless Day*, 1971/1990) – a manifest of 1960's cultural renaissance that brought together like-minded innovators from many fields of art.

Equally important is Peeter Tooming's role in the renewal of Estonian photography – via writings, exhibitions, founding of the Photo Museum and much more accomplished together with like-minded friends of the 1964-founded photo group STODOM.

Peeter Ülevain

STODOM members (from the left) – Rein Maran (see next page), a documentary director Peep Puks, Peeter Tooming, Kalju Suur, and a direcor and cameraman Andrei Dobrovolski.

..., or a spokesman of lesser brothers and teller of mysterious tales that found the film path leading to a quite extraordinary world.

Ruudi Sülla

Ago Ruus

Two job sites of the spokesman of lesser brothers Rein Maran – in a thicket and at the Matsalu Nature Film Festival.

Castle of Needles

A wood ant and its "herd" of aphids from Castle of Needles.

Rein Maran (b 1931) – a paragon of Estonian nature film. A beginning photographer growing up in a free country, he had to learn the art of survival in Stalin's Gulag. Nevertheless, he overcame four years of prison and other tribulations to graduate from the Moscow School of Cinematography as a cameraman for science films with *Okaslinnus* (*Castle of Needles*, 1971).

The début was followed by over fifty more nature films, including *Tavaline rästik* (*The Common Adder*, 1978), *Nõialoom* (*Toad – The Witches' Beast*, 1981), and *Põdra kuningriik* (*Elk's Kingdom*, 2007). Aditionally, he has initiated many photo- and film events, including the Matsalu Nature Film Festival in 2003, and produced imaginative cinematography for several feature films.

In addition to the journeys of discovery to various creatures' *Umwelt*, Rein Maran has explored the reflection of the experience of nature in traditional folk culture, and striven to make his countrymen and -women appreciate the ecological cognition of their ancestors and the kindred Finno-Ugric nations.

The protagonist of The Common Adder.

The Common Adder

The 1970's also saw the birth of Estonian anthropological popular science film: the beginnings of which reach back to the Baltic German naturalists exploring the frontier of the Far North, and the Finnish and Hungarian ethnographers making scientific expeditions to Siberian peoples in the early 1800's. Based on their findings, the relationship of Finno-Ugric languages to one another and with the Samoyedic languages was determined at the end of the 19th century, and an academically rooted movement of kindred nations was set off.

The great compatriot explorers and related languages, however tiny they might be, are extremely important for a small nation's self-esteem. It also explains the enthusiasm, with which the films of a myth-maker and a later statesman were welcomed – films, which look among kindred peoples for answers to the questions: Who are we, Estonians? Where do we come from? Where are we going?

Enn Putnik

2 x Rein Maran

Aado Lintrop

Enn Putnik

Lennart Meri (1929–2007) – a traveller, writer, myth-maker, director, and the President of the Republic of Estonia. After returning from Siberia as the deportee son of a diplomat and finishing studies in history at the University of Tartu, Meri returned to his former place of exile with expeditions to Estonians' Finno-Ugric and Samoyedic kindred nations. His life-long interest in the roots of his people resulted in *Veelinnurahvas* (*The Waterfowl People*) in 1970, and its sequel, *Linnutee tuuled* (*The Winds of the Milky Way*, 1977), which received a silver medal at the New York Film and TV Festival (see p 3) and a screening ban in the Soviet Union. Unique scenes from the worlds of indigenous cultures – the speech of the last native Kamassian, a Nganasan shamanic ritual, or the Khanty bear wake – add special value to his five films.

Enn Säde

Continuing to hold high the flag of Estonian anthropological film is a poetic and provocative filmmaker and a one-man-powerhouse, who keeps going the Estonia's oldest film festival.

His vivid and unconventional works, which observe more- and less-well-known persons and tend to include an abundance of stage direction, are the best example of Estonian docu-fiction.

The Pärnu International Documentary and Anthropology Film Festival – Estonia's oldest – has been a colourful addition to the domestic film scene since 1987.

Mark Soosaar (b 1946) – a poetic and provocative filmmaker, trailblazer of Estonian auteur documentary film, who "arrived from Moscow" some ten years after the "initial wave" of cameramen; he is the author of more than 40 documentaries and one feature film (see *Christmas in Vigala*, p 24).

While having also observed statesmen and dormitory suburbs, Soosaar is interested above all in the small and endangered, and returns time and time again to the film site of his most impressive works – Kihnu Island.

Scene from Mark Soosaar's breakthrough film Kihnu naine (Kihnu Woman, *1973).*

Peeter Kümmel

Urmas Luik

Kihnu Woman

Henn Soodla

Estonian documentary film of the new millennium is deeply pained by the problems of a transitional state, the difficulties of those raised in a different society adapting to the new, or ordeals of a small people caught in the gears of modern life. Alas, many of the stories that filmmakers of the post-digital-revolution Everyman video era want to tell are more painful than what the majority can bear to hear.

As usual in these cases, comic relief comes to the rescue: Estonia's own Michael Moores, who as the orderlies of society are able to drag onto the white screen the comical aspects of modern person's tragedy – pictures of home-knit spin doctors, housewives absorbed by network marketing, filmmakers worn down by churning out advertisements...

Yet the yearning for a boreal experience of expanse also persists among Estonians: quite a number of anthropology- and adventure enthusiasts walk in the footsteps of their great predecessors in the Siberian snow.

Itelmeeni lood (Itelmen Stories, *2010) by Liivo Niglas (b 1970).*

Itelmen Stories

A SINGING PEOPLE

In 1170, when heathen Estonians clashed with the royal Danish forces off the Öland Island, the chronicler Saxo Grammaticus described the pagans on the eve of the battle as such: "So that it might not seem as if they had lost courage, they gave the appearance of being cheerful and made merry, sang and danced in a lighthearted mood; while the Danes spent the night in abject silence."

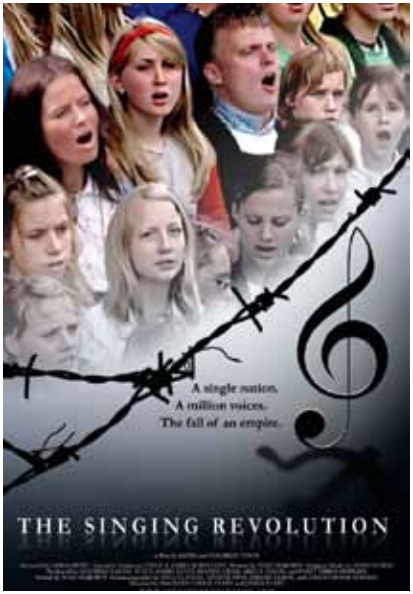
Wherever its origins lie, the image of Estonians as a singing people has lasted to this very day. Several turning points in the nation's history have involved singing – in 1869, the "national awakening" took off at the first general song festival in Tartu; in the early 1990's, Estonia's independence was restored with the Singing Revolution. Yet, while capable of organising singing events with several hundred thousand participants, Estonians must admit that friends from beyond the Big Puddle are the most competent at making a moving picture about the heights of those national sentiments.

2 x The Singing Revolution

Men at Arms

An Estonian elder about to sing – a parody from Men at Arms *(see p 29).*

The Singing Revolution *by friends from beyond the Big Puddle, Maureen and James Tusty*



Almost all renowned Estonian composers have written music for Estonian films. One of the most acclaimed among them, the tintinnabuli master of the classical world, composed music for more than thirty films during his earlier creative period. Many of his melodies have worked their way into Estonians' memory banks, such as the accordion waltz from an epic film *Ukuaru*.

Estonia's iconic choral composer has also written entrancing soundtracks. His music, derived from folk melodies and brimming with magical power and a biting yearning, vivify both an evergreen portrait of childhood school days, and the film journeys of a myth-maker telling of ancient rituals.

Oti Vasemaa

Estonian actress and actor of the century, Elle Kull and Lembit Ulfsak, in Ukuaru *(1973) by Leida Laius.*

Mait Jüriado

Arvo Pärt (b 1935), the tintinnabuli-master.

Peeter Langovits

Veljo Tormis (b 1930), an iconic choral composer, at the premier of the remastered portrait of childhood school days *(see* Spring, *p 51).*

Raivo Tiikmaa

Estonian conductor Tõnu Kaljuste performing Tormis's The Curse Upon Iron *for* The Winds of the Milky Way *(see p 37).*

For Estonians, who hold belief in the power of words, songs also hit the right chord the most in film music. This includes songs with lyrics written by a nonconformist poet in a summer cottage near Tallinn in August 1968, when Soviet tanks were firing upon Czechs and Slovaks fighting for civic freedoms on the streets of Prague. The texts with meaningful titles – *One Man Dreamed of Heavenly Justice*, or *Flee, Free Child!* – went straight from a cloak-and-sword adventure into popular use, and remain there to this very day.

Salomon Rosenfeld

Paul-Eerik Rummo, the nonconformist poet, with a retinue in 1972.

Tujurikkuja

A 'film cover' by the authors of Men at Arms *(see p 29) of* The Song of Rebels *from a famous cloak-and-sword adventure (see p 50).*

The Last Relic

The Song of a Prostitute *from the original film.*

Yet there are also songs that need no words. When an emigrating tintinnabuli master (see p 41) asked his analogue-synthesiser-inspired colleague to write music for a film based on a novel by the popular Russian sci-fi authors Arkady and Boris Strugatsky, it was soon apparent to the young man that for any film to reach the screens of the pan-Soviet cinema network, its soundtrack has to dubbed over in Russian.

In order to preserve his creation, the by now most productive Estonian film composer replaced the lyrics of songs with strings of phonemes – there was seemingly a text, but no meaning to translate. Years later, the film's Pink-Floyd-like song *Ball* in an alien tongue became the uncrowned hymn of alternative Estonian music.

priv. coll.

2 x *The Dead Mountaineer's Hotel*

Sven Grünberg (b 1956), the most productive Estonian film composer, has created recognisably individual music for more than 100 titles made within and beyond the borders of Estonia.

Yet, he is still best known for his music for ***"Hukkunud Alpinisti" hotell*** (***The Dead Mountaineer's Hotel***, 1979), which has become a cult film greatly thanks to its electronic sci-fi soundtrack.

Hypnotic atmosphere from The Dead Mountaineer's Hotel *by Grigori Kromanov (see p 50).*

Nipernaadi

Endless roads and a yearning for freedom bring Kaljo Kiisk's Nipernaadi *(1983) close to many an Estonian heart.*

As to the power of song, there seems to be one in Estonia that has evoked a film for itself. *Rändaja õhtulaul* (*Evening Song of a Wayfarer*), a haunting melody set to no less haunting lyrics, was first heard in an existential play staged in the course of Estonian theatre innovation in 1976. Story has it that Juhan Viiding, the poet of his generation (see p 24), convinced that the song deserved a place in a more permeable form of art, persuaded his father-in-law (see Kaljo Kiisk, p 10) to take up directing a "vessel" for it: the film adaption of August Gailit's popular road novel from 1928. Regardless of whether or not the story is true, the song is there: in a poetic and picturesque travel through Estonian rural landscapes by one of the most memorable characters in the Estonian film, the vagabond and fabulator Toomas Nipernaadi.

FROM THE COUNTRY TO THE CITY – WITH ROOTS AND ALL

From the times beyond written history up until the late 19th century, Estonians were known to themselves as *maarahvas* (*lit.* 'people of the land'). The belief that the land takes care of its inhabitants retains a strong footing in the Estonian mindset. The woods and bogs have been always perceived as a refuge during troubled times, such as the years of the Forests Brothers' guerrilla war against the Soviets after WWII. The towns, built and inhabited by conquerors (hence their 'European' look) and German-speaking until the early 1900's, have felt foreign.

All this is reflected in Estonian film, with came around simultaneously with the rise of self-consciousness of the Estonians that had moved to urban centres during the wave of industrialisation at the turn of the 19th century. The ensuing conflicts with the Baltic Germans became a theme in its own, as exemplified by the first domestic feature film shot in 1914.

Yet, as the fledgling Republic decided in 1919 to allot manor lands to the volunteer fighters in the War of Independence (see *Young Eagles*, p 6) – resulting in 140 000 farms in 1939 (compared to less than 20 000 of today) – the Estonian identity's centre of gravity remained firmly in the country.

Bear Hunt in Pärnumaa

The preparations for a bear hunt – an episode from the first domestic feature film by Johannes Pääsuke.

Karujaht Pärnumaal (***Bear Hunt in Pärnumaa***, 1914), the first Estonian feature film – a 14-minute allegorical satire about the political battle between the German mayor of Pärnu, Oskar Brackmann, and an activist of the Estonian Popular Progress Party, Jaan Karu (*lit.* 'bear') – premiered in Tartu on February 26, 1914.

One more contribution to the domestic cinema of Johannes Pääsuke, it was a box office success. However, it also became the first Estonian film to be "shelved", as its screening was prohibited in Pärnu by order of the local Chief of Police.

Peeter Simm (b 1953) – a graduate of the Moscow Film Institute in 1976, master of directing and aphorisms and author of several conspicuous Estonian films. His full-length debut, a portrayal of the Sovietisation of rural life titled *Ideaalmaastik* (*The Ideal Landscape*, 1981), is regarded by many as the best Estonian film.

Another remarkable work of Peeter Simm is the adaptation of a *roman-fleuve* about life in an Estonian village throughout the 20th century, *Tants aurukatla ümber* (*Dance Around the Steam Boiler*, 1987).

Ain Protsin

The appeal of the pre-WWII rural idyll was only strengthened by the brutality of the Soviets in their attempt to wipe out the armed resistance and make the individualist Estonians join collective farms. Terror campaigns such as the March deportation in 1949 coincided with crude propaganda, including the first Soviet Estonian feature films that dealt with subduing and "re-educating" the "class enemy" (see p 8). However, these tough times also provided great material for new Estonian filmmakers that burst onto the scene in the 1970's, among them an amiable master of directing and aphorisms of modern-day Estonian cinema.

The Ideal Landscape: Arvo Kukumägi (b 1958), an acting talent of more than 40 film roles "found" by Peeter Simm.

The Ideal Landscape

"First Harvest to the State!" – a slogan in a collective farm from Dance Around the Steam Boiler.

Dance Around...

While Estonia is about to enter among the five most urbanised nations in Europe, the experience of modern city life is actually rather brief and sparse among its inhabitants. No surprise there, as "brief" is also the history of modern dormitory districts in Estonian towns. The first large-scale projects for the construction of precast panel apartment buildings were launched only in the early 1960's in Tallinn, with the first such suburb – the 80 000-inhabitant Mustamäe – completed by the beginning of the 1970's.

Conducted under the slogan "Out with the rotten wooden slums!", the erecting of concrete blocks that were quite similar all across the Soviet Union was also motivated by the need to provide housing for the ever increasing influx of immigrants into Estonia from the "brotherly Soviet republics" – mainly Russia and Ukraine.

Consequently, while a new apartment with central heating and hot water was no doubt a dream come true for many Estonians, it came with the price of impersonal, standardised environs, and the need to get used to the unfamiliar customs of new neighbours.

Peeter Ülevain

Peeter Tooming (see p 35) documenting the life in and around the concrete tower blocks in Mustamäe, 1976.

An aerial shot of Tallinn's Õismäe suburb.

Herkki-Erich Merila

The threat posed to the "Estonian way of life" by Soviet housing policies triggered protests, such as the chorus from a popular song during the Singing Revolution: *Peatage Lasnamäe!* (*Stop Lasnamäe!*; the largest concrete suburb in Tallinn). In general, however, it took quite a while for the "universal" modern urban themes to enter Estonian cultural expression. It can be claimed, with a little exaggeration, that neither the image of dormitory suburbs, nor that of modern city life existed as such before the publication in 1977 of the novel *Sügisball* (*Autumn Ball*) by an inspiring author, dramatist and theatre director – Mati Unt. Before Unt, the concrete suburbia was an empty space devoid of depth and memories. Since Unt, the imagery of desolate spinsters, cheated family men, misunderstood teens – of all the loners looking from their uniform flats for the light in the windows of others – has established itself firmly in the Estonian cultural perception, culminating thirty years later in a film of the same name by a heavy metal guitarist and an artist (see p 4).

Scenes from lives of the loners from the dormitory suburbs in Veiko Õunpuu's Sügisball (Autumn Ball, 2007).

2 x Gabriela Liivamägi

PUBLIC FUNDING, CONNOISSEUR FILM

The first century of Estonian filmmaking resulted in about a quarter of a thousand full-length feature films. This roughly equals France's annual film production, or one-fourth of feature films shot yearly in India. At these numbers, filmmaking in Estonia has been never viable commercially, but has, as an expression of national culture, relied mainly on public funding. However, the three or four domestic features so generously subsidised each year are usually also derided as too arty and too "Estonian" – slow, melancholy and obscure – by the main funders, the Estonian people.

One reason for it is the peculiar position of film among other forms of art. Thus, while an Estonian theatre-goer can draw comparisons between the productions of local theatres, the cinema-goer compares domestic films to foreign sales hits screened in the same cinema – pretty unfair of a contest, as out of the over 800 movies produced yearly in the US, only a selection of 80 are shown in Estonia.

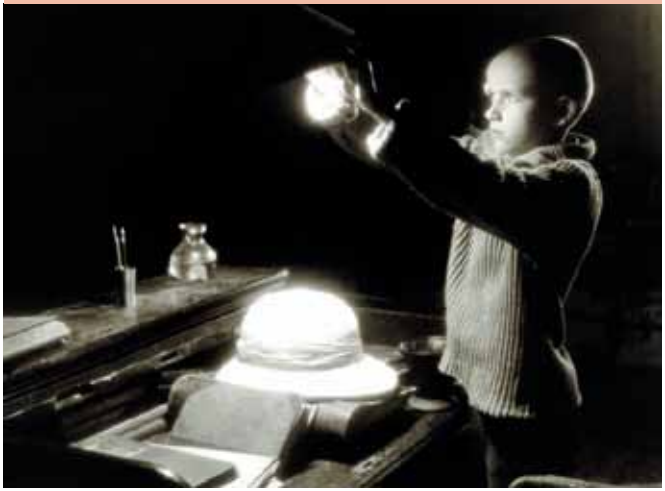
Yet, another reason for the discontent is the "refined taste" that tends to permeate the allocation of public funding – experts instinctively prefer "festival-material" projects to "people's films". As this in turn draws massive flak from the "regular taxpayer", filmmakers caught in the crossfire have to display genuine civic courage to stay true to the *cinéma d'auteur*.

Peeter Laurits

Sulev Keedus (b 1957), one of the last Moscow-educated Estonian directors, was considered the "Last of the Mohicans" of Estonian *cinéma d'auteur* for a long time. He has directed some of the most decorated Estonian feature films, such as *Georgica* (*Georgics*, 1998) and *Somnambuul* (*Somnambulism*, 2003; see p 53), and more than a dozen documentaries.

Georgics, *a poetic auteur film at its best by Sulev Keedus.*

Georgics



Nevertheless, Estonian cinema also has its high-grossing genre films, such as the legendary cloak-and-sword adventure by one of the leading Estonian filmmakers of the 1960's. This domestic version of *Fanfane la Tulipe*, released at the peak of the "golden era" of Soviet Estonian cinema and set during the years of the Livonian War in the 16th century, remains unsurpassed for its influence on popular culture – e.g. numerous catchphrases from its dialogues, and the song lyrics by a nonconformist poet (see p 42).

3 x *The Last Relic*

Grigori Kromanov (1926–1984), a graduate from the Moscow Theatre Institute (1953), worked in Tallinn as a theatre and television director, and became one of the leading Estonian filmmakers of the 1960's.

The author of many conspicuous works, Grigori Kromanov is best loved for the documentary film *Meie Artur* (*Our Artur*, 1968), the sci-fi masterpiece *The Dead Mountaineer's Hotel* (see p 43), and, of course, the cloak-and-sword adventure ***Viimne reliikvia*** (***The Last Relic***, 1969). With its superb soundtrack by Uno and Tõnu Naissoo dubbed over in Russian (see p 43) by the most famous Estonian opera singer, Georg Ots (see p 26), the latter film set box office records across the entire Soviet Union. A whopping 44.9 million tickets were sold in its premier year of 1970, and it was distributed by the Soviet film export in more than 60 countries.

Remarkably, the Estonian film of the century originates from the very same year, 1969. The story behind Tallinnfilm's black-and-white "B-production" from the *annus mirabilis* of the Estonian film began with the selling of 200 copies of the novel *Kevade* (*Spring*) by an author Oskar Luts (helped with sales by his younger brother Theodor; see p 6) on Christmas Day in 1912. The cinema adaptation of Luts's portrait of childhood school days, which soon became a best-seller, was planned already in the 1920's, but materialised as the début of a director of decorum and note of the Estonian film in more that forty years later.

Sille Annuk

Boris Kustov

Arvo Kruusement (b 1928), a director of decorum and note, one more Moscow-schooled theatre actor in the Estonian film, a director in Tallinnfilm for 25 years. Author of several features (e.g. *Don Juan in Tallinn*; see p 17), he is best known and loved for films based on the novels of Oskar Luts – the portrait of childhood school days, ***Kevade*** (***Spring***, 1969), and its sequels *Suvi* (*Summer*, 1976) and *Sügis* (*Autumn*, 1990). *Spring*, a captivating black-and-white masterpiece with great acting by a classful of schoolchildren and a splendid score by Veljo Tormis (see p 41), was chosen the Estonian film of the century in a public vote in 2012.

Finding the balancing point between courting the public and pursuing artistic goals remains a major challenge for Estonian filmmakers. How to ensure viewers' interest without becoming puerile or frivolous? How to warrant enough allusions and symbols to attract the interest of major festivals? The depth of the dilemma has caused creative cramps for many Estonian cineastes, and has prompted some banterers to come up with a cheat-sheet for a beginning director applying for funding from the Estonian Film Foundation. According to this list, both audience- and festival fame can be achieved by including the following elements:

Heart of the Bear

12 points – retro sex, agro sex, arctic sex;

A sample of arctic romance on the set of Karu süda (Heart of the Bear, *2001) – a film by charismatic cinematographer, director and film educator Arvo Iho (b 1949) about a young Estonian trapper that looks for his true self in the Siberian taiga, and encounters a shapeshifting bear woman along his way.*

11 points – actions occurring in the main character's head;

2 x Men Don't Cry

10 points – lone island (where nothing is what it first seems);

Mehed ei nuta (Men Don't Cry, *1968) – a comedy about the endeavours of a group men, supposedly suffering from insomnia, in a fictional curative resort on a lone island that turns out to be a peninsula. This paragon of Estonian people's film is the source of many catchphrases, such as the favourite of domestic film critics: "An axe! Give me an axe!"*

9 points – leaning lighthouse;

An archetypal leaning lighthouse of the domestic cinema – an episode from Somnambulism, *a hauntingly scenic, strangely symbolic and scathingly poignant drama about the arrival of the Soviet occupation to a remote Estonian coastal village, made by the man that walks by himself in Estonian film, Sulev Keedus (see p 49).*

Somnambulance

8 points – fumbling around in reeds;

A director of decorum and note (see p 51), Arvo Kruusement (in the middle, wearing a cap and tie), inspecting preparations for the scene of fumbling around in reeds in his film, Spring *(see p 51). The filming of the initial part of the episode – falling through the thin ice at the edge of the reeds of the two protagonists – took place in quite a different setting (see p 11).*

Boris Kustov

The Last Relic

7 points – a waterfall, a fire, a kerosene lamp in mid-frame, a bare tree;

A fiery scene from The Last Relic *(see p 50). Relates the guest star Aleksandr Goloborodko (see p 26): "I ran with Agnes on a roof. Boring, complained the cinematographer Jüri Garšnek. With a suggestion that her dress ought to catch fire, I was given a bottle – sprinkle some. I sniffed it... petrol! Sprinkled some, maybe too much. Agnes ignited, the wig scorching and all. I performed a feat and ripped off her dress, leaving her standing in her underware."*

Lauri Nagel

6.5 points – a railroad and unexplained business in a railway station;

The insatiable need to guide people into the wonderful world of filmmaking, leads the crew of Kinobuss (see p 30) to many a business in and out of railway stations.

5.75 points – woman in a bathtub, woman on a boat;

/---/

2 points – a woman knitting and singing;

An image of an Estonian grandmother knitting and singing from the Kihnu Woman *by Mark Soosaar (see p 38). It's pretty amazing how the women of this small island in Southwest Estonia, who still make and wear their traditional apparel, have such an spell over many filmmakers, as well as over the viewers of their films.*

Kihnu Woman

1 point – an object otherwise incapable of speech starts talking in the film (a dog, horse, garbage bag, etc.);

0.5 bonus points – a crane's whooping call in the soundtrack.

A rare footage of a crane with its chick from the film Sookured (The Cranes, *1982) by Rein Maran. The whooping call of this bird, Estonians' spirit animal and the star of the country's most secluded wilderness recordings in large mires, are indeed associated with the harrowing mood of an archetypical Estonian art house film.*

The Cranes

Every song- or dance number gives 1 bonus point. If there are at least 5 Bollywood-level song- or dance numbers in the film, the Estonian Film Foundation guarantees a plane ticket to an Indian film festival.

On the first centennial anniversary of Estonian film, it is not clear whether the saying inscribed by Aristotle – *Μία χελιδὼν ἔαρ οὐ ποιεῖ* ("One swallow does not make a spring") – holds also in the case of one aspiring and appropriately named young man (by the way, 'pääsuke' translates to 'swallow'), who started it all in April 1912. There have no doubt been icy spells during the first century, but there have been also spells of summery warmth, and there are good reasons to believe that more swallows and a full-blown spring are poised to arrive for Estonian film.

Prizes for the best of Estonian film at the centenary celebrations – statuettes of Johannes Pääsuke (see pp 25, 51, and p 1).

Sille Annuk

Photo credits:
Anneli Ahven, Sille Annuk / *Postimees*, Tiit Blaat / *Eesti Ekspress*, Peeter Helme, Andre Help, Toomas Huik / *Postimees*, Mait Jüriado, Kaur Kallas, Alla Kerb, Tiit Koha, Boris Kustov, Elmar Köster, Peeter Kümmel / *Sakala*, Peeter Langovits / *Postimees*, Peeter Laurits, Gabriela Liivamägi, Aado Lintrop, Urmas Luik / *Pärnu Postimees*, Aldo Luud / *Õhtuleht*, Teet Malsroos / *Õhtuleht*, Rein Maran, Herkki-Erich Merila, Valentin Moshkovich, August Mõtuste, Lauri Nagel, Liivo Niglas, Margus Oopkaup, Karl Oras, Matt Petit, Ain Protsin / *Postimees*, Enn Putnik, Tatjana Putnik, Johannes Pääsuke, Mikk Rand, Mikk Raude, Villu Reimann, Salomon Rosenfeld, Ago Ruus, Arno Saar / *Õhtuleht*, Ruwe Saare, Rivo Sarapik, Henn Soodla / *Pärnu Postimees*, Enn Säde, Ruudi Sülla, Tõnu Talpsep / ERR, Endel Tarkpea, Raivo Tiikmaa / ERR, Peeter Tooming, Evald Vaher, Oti Vasemaa, Peeter Ülevain, Russ Yonda.

Film frame credits:
Estonian Film Archives: *Bear Hunt in Pärnumaa, Shadows of the Past*, *Young Eagles*;
Tallinnfilm (EFF): *511 Best Photos of Mars*, *Castle of Needles*, *Chance Encounter*, *The Dead Mountaineer's Hotel*, *Forest Captain*, *The Ideal Landscape*, *The Last Relic*, *Little Requiem for the Mouth Organ*, *Madness*, *Nipernaadi*, *Spring*;
Eesti Telefilm (ERR): *The Common Adder*, *The Cranes*, *Dance Around the Steam Boiler*, *The Endless Day*, *Kihnu Woman*, *Men Don't Cry*;
Exit Film: *Men at Arms*; F-Seitse: *Georgics*, *Somnambulance*; Homeless Bob Production: *The Temptation of St. Tony*; Kuukulgur Film: *Autumn Ball*, *Empty*; Lenfilm: *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson: The Hound of the Baskervilles*, *Mister X*; Moldovafilm: *Marianna*; Liivo Niglas: *Itelmen Stories; Maureen Castle Tusty and James Tusty: The Singing Revolution;* Uzbekfilm / Belorusfilm: *Every Third*.

Acknowledgements:
Anneli Ahven / Exitfilm, Sille Annuk, Mait Jüriado, Kaur Kallas / Digital Sputnik, Katrin Kissa, Eve Kivi, Artur Kuus, Aado Lintrop, Rein Maran, Herkki-Erich Merila, Liivo Niglas, Tristan Priimägi, Tatjana Putnik, Mikk Rand / Kinobuss, Ito Rebane, Ago Ruus, Kai-Ene Rääk / F-Seitse, Reet Sokmann / Estonian Film Database, Enn Säde, Andres Sööt, Tanel Toom, Maureen Castle Tusty and James Tusty, Margus Õunapuu / Film Tower³, Peeter Ülevain;
Estonian Cultural Endowment, Estonian Film Archives (EFA), Estonian Film Foundation (EFF), Estonian Ministry of Culture, Estonian National Museum (ENM), Estonian Public Broadcasting (ERR), Kinobuss, Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival (PÖFF).

100 EESTI FILM 1912-2012

Eesti Filmi Sihtasutus
Estonian Film Foundation

ERR

Eesti Instituut

Estonian Institute
Suur-Karja 14
10140 Tallinn
Estonia

Tel: +372 6314 355
e-mail: estinst@estinst.ee
http://www.estinst.ee