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## **BITTERSWEET TWIST: THE FILMS OF AKI KAURISMÄKI**

### **SERIES CELEBRATES THE CAREER OF THE ACCOMPLISHED FINNISH DIRECTOR**

The wonderfully wry and droll films of Finnish director Aki Kaurismäki are being celebrated with a 14-city North American tour that makes its way to Minneapolis when the Walker Art Center presents **Bittersweet Twist: The Films of Aki Kaurismäki** from January 16-30. Organized by BAM cinématek, Brooklyn, complete with new prints struck just for the tour, the series kicks off on Friday, January 16, at 7 pm, with *Drifting Clouds* and *Calamari Union*, and concludes on Friday, January 30, at 7 pm, with *The Match Factory Girl* and *I Hired a Contract Killer*. Prescreening lectures before some of the screenings feature talks by filmmaker/scholar Roger Connah before *Ariel* on Friday, January 23, at 7 pm; and Finnish film critic/writer/scholar Peter von Bagh preceding *Leningrad Cowboys Go America* on Wednesday, January 28, at 7 pm; and before *The Match Factory Girl* on Friday, January 30, at 7 pm.

Kaurismäki transformed his passion for film into a profession, first as a critic and later writing screenplays for his brother Mika. His film *Calamari Union* established his signature style with deadpan humor, irony, and outrageous situations with a twist of frosty existentialism. While the dark irony, simplicity, and amazingly eclectic scores of Kaurismäki's films are reminiscent of work by American Jim Jarmusch, a more apt comparison might be with German director Rainer Werner Fassbinder. Both were inspired by the melodramas of the 1950s and classic gangster films. Both worked with a small troupe of actors and crew and dealt with working-class subjects. Kaurismäki's characters are marked by their humanistic trials. They struggle for survival and love with quiet resignation—and a drink to dull the pain.

(more)

All films directed by Aki Kaurismäki. Screenings are \$7 (\$5 Walker members) and are in the Auditorium. For information, call 612.375.7622.

This program has been made possible by The Finnish Film Foundation with special thanks to Jaana Puskala, Aretta Vähälä, Mari Peltonen, Aki Kaurismäki, Haije Tulokas, Ilkka Mertsola (Sputnik Oy), Thorsten Schaumann (Bavaria Film), Gary Palmucci (Kino International), and BAM cinématek for organizing the traveling retrospective. Peter von Bagh and Roger Connah appear courtesy of the Government of Finland/David and Nancy Speer Professorship in Finnish Studies at the University of Minnesota, with thanks to Pauliina Raento and K. Marianne Wargelin..

## **BITTERSWEET TWIST: THE FILMS OF AKI KAURISMÄKI JANUARY 16-30**

### **FRIDAY, JANUARY 16, 7 PM**

*Drifting Clouds (Kauas Pilvet Karakaavat)*

One of Kaurismäki's masterpieces, this film shows the fight against humiliation in the face of adversity. Kati Outinen, frequent lead in his films, stars as a maître d' who is unceremoniously fired, as is her husband, a bus driver. Their search for survival and struggle for hope becomes a universal quest for dignity. Outinen delivers a stunning performance; she can emote more in one stare than most actresses can in a fit of hysterics. 1996, Finland, color, 35mm, in Finnish with English subtitles, 96 minutes.

with

*Calamari Union*, 8:45 pm

A personal favorite of Kaurismäki's, this film features 18 droll boozehounds, all but one named Frank. Donning sunglasses at night, the group hits the Helsinki subway on a mysterious journey during which some Franks face death, some are forced into drudgery, and others flee to Estonia. "These brave men walk through a wild and merciless city full of angry old women with their sharp tiny elbows, spoons, hammers, typewriters, and dogs the size of cars," says the director. 1984, Finland, color, 35mm, in Finnish with English subtitles, 80 minutes.

### **SATURDAY, JANUARY 17, 7 PM**

*La Vie de Bohème*

Kaurismäki updates this classic tale of mid-19th-century bohemian life with his own take on the soused and hoary group of rakish artists and their sycophants. Filmed in luscious black and white, the film stays faithful to the classic story and features cameos by film legends Louis Malle, Sam Fuller, and Jean-Pierre Léaud. Winner of the Berlin Film Festival International Critics Prize. 1992, Finland/France/Sweden/Germany, BW, 35mm, in Finnish with English subtitles, 100 minutes.

with

*Juha*, 8:45 pm

This homage to Scandinavian silent films tells a tale of love and betrayal. While seemingly happy in their country home, Juha and his wife Marja (Kati Outinen) are pulled into a love triangle. A slick con man, stranded on their farm due to car trouble, hustles the naive Marja to leave her husband for the promise of the big city—with tragic results. “Moving . . . no other film by Kaurismäki has affected me as much as this one,” said Jonathon Rosenbaum, *Chicago Reader*. 1999, Finland, BW, 35mm, English intertitles, 78 minutes.

### **FRIDAY, JANUARY 23, 7 PM**

Prescreening lecture by filmmaker/scholar Roger Connah

Filmmaker/writer/architectural historian Roger Connah is based in Stockholm and Ruthin, North Wales, where he runs The Hotel Architecture Retreat and Resistance Centre. He is the author of a book on Kaurismäki titled *K/K: A Couple of Finns and Some Donald Ducks*. His films include *Take Five*, *27 Minute Lies*, *Drive*, and *Aaltomania*.

*Ariel*, 7:45 pm

Voted Best Foreign Film of the Year by the National Society of Film Critics, *Ariel* is the most successful of Kaurismäki's films dealing with social realism and stylistic abstraction. When the Lapland mine that he worked for shuts down, Taisto takes to the highway in an enormous Cadillac. On his existential road trip he becomes entangled in a web of crime and a marriage to a dreary meter maid with a young son. 1988, Finland, color, 35mm, in Finnish with English subtitles, 74 minutes.

with

*Hamlet Goes on Business (Hamlet liikemaailmassa)*, 9:15 pm

Kaurismäki's update of Shakespeare's tragedy is set in the corrupt business world of the 1980s. The scheming prince plots to sell his father's shipbuilding empire in order to corner the market on rubber ducks. This cynical film noir features a portly Hamlet with a “heart as warm as a ‘frigerator” and the marvelously cast Outinen as the suicidal Ophelia. 1987, Finland, BW, 35mm, in Finnish with English subtitles, 86 minutes.

### **SATURDAY, JANUARY 24, 7 PM**

*Shadows of Paradise (Varjoja paratiisissa)*

In this bleakest of black comedies, Kaurismäki brings together two desperate souls seeking a way out of their dismal existence. Nikander, an ex-butcher and garbage man, finds a way out of his day-to-day routine through his relationship with Ilona, a supermarket cashier. Things aren't much more exciting on their dates in bingo halls, but when they decide to escape their gloomy lives, ironic twists ensue. 1986, Finland, color, 35mm, in Finnish with English subtitles, 76 minutes.

with

*Take Care of Your Scarf, Tatjana (Pidä huivista kiinni, Tatjana)*, 8:30 pm

Kaurismäki's rarely screened road film is filled with the pleasures and pain of communication. Coffee fanatic Valto hits the highway with his rocker friend Reino with no agenda. Along the way they pick up two immigrants, the wide-eyed Estonian Tatjana and the curvaceous Russian Klaudia. As no one speaks the other's language, they bond through their shared appreciation of alcohol, coffee, and cigarettes. 1994, Finland/Germany, BW, 35mm, in Finnish with English subtitles, 62 minutes.

**WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 28, 7 PM**

Prescreening lecture by Finnish film critic/writer/scholar Peter von Bagh

Prominent Finnish film critic/scholar Peter von Bagh began his career in 1961 writing for the Finnish publication *Ylioppilaslehti*. He is currently Professor of Cinema History at the University of Art and Design Helsinki, Artistic Director of the Midnight Sun Film Festival, and editor of *Filmihullu* magazine. He has written numerous publications, including *Drifting Shadows: A Guide to the Finnish Cinema*, and is co-author of *Guide to Cinema of Sweden and Finland*. He is presently working on a book about Kaurismäki.

*Leningrad Cowboys Go America*, 7:45 pm

This cult hit is fueled by stretch Cadillacs, rock and roll, lofty pompadours, spiky shoes, and alcohol. With seemingly impossible dreams of making it big in the U.S., the Finnish rock group Leningrad Cowboys takes its unlikely mix of Finnish folk tunes and rockabilly on the road. 1989, Finland/Sweden, color, 35mm, in Finnish with English subtitles, 78 minutes.

Preceded by

*Rocky VI*

A Siberian boxer takes on his American opponent. 1986, Finland, color, 35mm, in Finnish with English subtitles, 9 minutes.

*Thru the Wire*

A man escapes from Alabama to Utah accompanied by the music of the Leningrad Cowboys. 1987, Finland, color, 35mm, in Finnish with English subtitles, 6 minutes.

*These Boots*

The Leningrad Cowboys' view of Finnish history from 1952 through 1969. 1992, Finland, color, 35mm, in Finnish with English subtitles, 5 minutes.

*Those Were the Days*

A lonely cowboy wanders with his donkey along the sidewalks of a postcard-perfect Paris, searching for a corner to set up his camping kitchen and ease his tortured heart. 1992, Finland, color, 35mm in Finnish with English subtitles, 6 minutes.

**FRIDAY, JANUARY 30, 7 PM**

Prescreening lecture by Finnish film critic/writer/scholar Peter von Bagh, 7 pm

*The Match Factory Girl (Tulitikkutehtaan Tyttö)*, 7:45 pm

This final film in his "Proletarian Trilogy" (the others being *Shadows of Paradise* and *Ariel*) is one of the funniest and most tragic of his career. Outinen stars as the factory worker trapped in a repetitive, mind-numbing job, browbeaten by her family, and exploited by her boyfriends. When she comes to terms with her tragic situation, she plots revenge with disturbing conviction. "Magnificent! . . . Heartbreaking until it turns outrageously funny" (*The New York Times*). 1989, Finland/Sweden, color, 35mm, in Finnish with English subtitles, 70 minutes.

with

*I Hired a Contract Killer*, 9:15 pm

On his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, Henri Boulanger is fired from his company after 30 years and decides he has nothing to live for. Lacking the nerve to do the deed himself, he hires a contract killer. While waiting for the inevitable, he takes his first drink of whiskey and falls in love with a woman for the

first time. Just as everything in his life begins to look better, he finds that the contract cannot be canceled. 1990, Finland/Sweden, color, 35mm, in English, 80 minutes.

**The Walker Art Center is located at 725 Vineland Place,  
at Lyndale Avenue South, Minneapolis, one block off Highway I-94.  
For public information, call 612.375.7622.  
Gallery hours: Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday, 10 am–5 pm;  
Thursday, 10 am–9 pm; Sunday, 11 am–5 pm; closed Monday.  
<http://www.walkerart.org>**