

Tallinn University

Research paper

# **Estonian Film 100**

Name Surname

Tallinn 2013

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# 1 Estonian film 100

Estonian film did not appear in an empty place. Figuratively speaking, every Estonian filmmaker has Johannes Pääsuke and his camera standing behind him or her. If it weren't for him, we would have no reason to speak of the 100th anniversary of Estonian film [Figure 1]. He created the path that all future filmmakers took after him.



*Figure 1 Logo of Estonian film 100*

World cinema was born in 1895 with the help of the Lumière brothers in France. Besides those two, Thomas Alva Edison had something to do with it as well. Their work was preceded by many kinds of optical toys and the development of photography. Many were amazed by moving pictures.

The first film screened in Estonia, in Tallinn, in 1896 in the Great Guild building on Pikk Street. The birth of Estonian film has been marked at 1912. The first feature film, “Karujaht Pärnumaal” (“Bear Hunt in Pärnumaa”), was completed in 1914. And thus it began... the birth pains during the independence era, the work of Konstantin Märska and Theodor Luts, and “Kutsu-Juku” (“Juku the Doggy”) marking the birth of Estonian animation.

A long Soviet period followed where numerous films were made, but they all carried the severe seal of ideological repression. Independence came once more and filmmaking found itself with a new economic base, which barely allowed for survival.

We often discuss what Estonian film is like today. We want it to be better, more famous, more powerful. This is natural, but we also shouldn't forget that the issue is much larger than that – if we only support the production of new films without finding the time and money to restore old films, to investigate and maintain our film history, to develop our film and cinema culture as a whole, then our new films will be made on an empty ground. Culture only flourishes when its memory is preserved and its consistent development is assured. (Estonian film 100 2011)

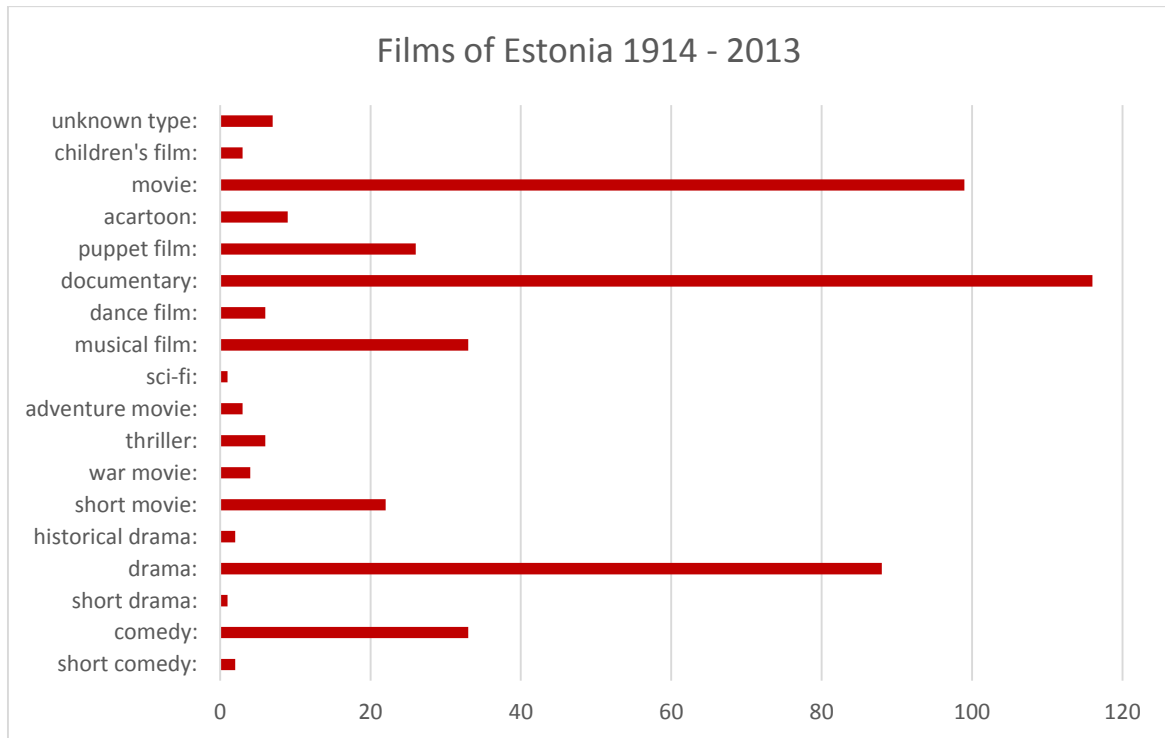


Figure 2 Films produced in Estonia

## 1.1 Important Dates for Estonian Film

- ⌚ October 4, 1896 – films are screened for the first time in the Tallinn Stock Exchange building. Demonstrations of Edison’s Ideal Cinematography for the citizens of Tallinn lasting 12 days.
- ⌚ 1897 The Lumière brothers cinematograph reaches Estonia
- ⌚ April 17, 1908 – The 360-seat cinema Illusion was opened in Tartu. It was Estonia’s first sedentary cinema.
- ⌚ April 27, 1912 – Johannes Pääsuke (1892-1918) shoots his first newsreel in Tartu. “Utotshkin’s Flights Over Tartu” premiered in the Tartu cinema Illusion on April 30, 1912.
- ⌚ February 26, 1914 – The first feature film screens in the Tartu cinema Ideal - the hand-painted political satire “Bear Hunt in Pärnumaa”. The 14-minute short feature was filmed by Johannes Pääsuke, directed by Tõnis Nõmmits, and produced by Aleksander Tippo.
- ⌚ 1924 – the first full-length feature film “Shadows of the Past”
- ⌚ 1930 – the first full-length feature film produced as an international co-production, the German-Estonian film “Waves of Passion”
- ⌚ 1930 – the first ‘song and sound’ film, the short feature “The Golden Spider”
- ⌚ 1931 – creation of the Estonian Cultural Film Foundation

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- ⌚ 1931 – the first drawn animation film “The Adventures of Juku the Puppy”
- ⌚ 1931 - The Estonian Cultural Film Studio is established (active until 1940)
- ⌚ 1932 – the first Estonian-Finnish feature film, the musical melodrama “Children of the Sun”
- ⌚ 1941 – the Estonian Cinema Chronicle Studio was formed, which changed its names many times to finally become Tallinnfilm in 1963
- ⌚ 1947 – the first feature film in Soviet Estonia “Life in the Citadel”
- ⌚ 1958 – the first puppet animation film “Little Peter’s Dream”
- ⌚ 1959- the first wide screen format film (Mischievous Curves)
- ⌚ 1960- Estonian Television`s first feature film is completed (Joller the Actor)
- ⌚ 1962 - The Estonian Filmmakers Union is established
- ⌚ 1963- Kosmos Cinema opens in Tallinn as Estonian largest cinema (1015 seats)
- ⌚ 1965- Estonian Telefilm Studio is established
- ⌚ 1972 - starting a very active period in production of Estonian animated films (beginning with "The Water Bearer"
- ⌚ 1982 - The periodical "Theatre. Music. Cinema" begins publication (it is presently the only periodical which deals with the film)
- ⌚ 1987 – the first international film festival, the 1st Pärnu International Documentary and Anthropology Festival
- ⌚ 1992 - The Tallinn Pedagogical University inaugurates its Departement of Audio Visual Studies (first institution in Estonia to offer education in film)
- ⌚ 1992 - Estonia ratifies a law governing the rights of authors
- ⌚ 1993 - The Estonian Film Journalists Association is established
- ⌚ 1993 - Estonia joins the European Union’s media program (Europa Cinemas)
- ⌚ 1997 – founding of the Estonian Film Foundation
- ⌚ 2001 – opening of a multiplex cinema in Tallinn
- ⌚ 2004 – the cinema Sõprus begins its activities as an arthouse cinema in Tallinn (Estonian film 100 2011)

## 1.2 Cinema of Estonia

Cinema in Estonia (total population 1.3 million) started in 1896 when the first "moving pictures" were screened in Tallinn. The first movie theater was opened in 1908. First local documentary was made in 1908 with the production of a newsreel about Swedish King Gustav V’s visit to Tallinn. The first Estonian documentary was created by Johannes Pääsuke [Figure 3] in 1912 that was followed by a short film Karujaht Pärnumaal (Bear Hunt in Pärnumaa) [Figure 4] in 1914. (Wikipedia 2013)



Figure 3 Johannes Pääsuke



Figure 4 Scene from film "Karujaht Pärnumaal"

The cinematic content produced in Estonia includes feature, documentary, puppet and cartoon animated films, Estonian-language TV productions, TV advertisements, music videos, multimedia content and to a lesser extent computer games.

Most of Estonian cinemas are municipal cinemas, and their activities are supported by local governments. For years, the Ministry of Culture has supported updating rural cinemas in order to expand film exhibition opportunities all over Estonia.

Estonian film production is provided state financing mainly through the Estonian Film Foundation, the Cultural Endowment of Estonia and the Estonian Ministry of Culture.

Organization of film events has been supported by the Gambling Tax Council and cinema-related activities have also been supported from the funds of the Estonian National Culture Foundation. In addition, film producers have had the opportunity to apply for support from the corresponding European Union programmes.

The Estonian Film Foundation is entrusted with the task of creating the conditions enabling the development of Estonian national film culture and to support the creation, production and distribution of Estonian films. (Estonian Ministry of Culture 2012)

### 1.2.1 1912–1918

The first movie studio in Estonia, Estonia Film Tartus (The Tartu Studio of Estonia Film), was established by Johannes Pääsuke (1892–1918). Pääsuke produced documentaries, short films and pictures of Estonian nature for the Estonian National Museum. *Karujaht Pärnumaal* (Bear-Hunt in Pärnu County, 1914) was the first fictional short film made in Estonia. In total, eight films made by J. Pääsuke have survived and are stored at the Estonian Film Archives. (Wikipedia 2013)

## 1.2.2 1918—1940

The first full-length feature film was made in 1924 *Shadow of the Past* directed by Konstantin Märska [Figure 5] and produced by his Konstantin Märska Filmiproduksioon (Konstantin Märska Film Production). Two feature films by Märska have survived: *Vigased pruudid* (1929) and *Jüri Rumm* (1929). Theodor Lutsu Filmiproduksioon (the Film Production of Theodor Luts Studio) was established by Theodor Luts who produced documentaries and feature films. His *Noored kotkad* (*Young Eagles*) (1927) is generally regarded as the cornerstone of Estonian cinema. Smaller film production studios in Estonia included Siirius Film and K.Kalamees Tartu.



*Figure 5 Konstantin Märska at the Estonian Culture Film in 1936*

The major film production company after the Great Depression hit Estonia during 1930s was state subsidized the Estonian Culture Film (Estonian: Eesti Kultuurfilm) that produced mostly documentaries.

In late 1930s, Academy Award nominated Miliza Korjus best known for a role in *The Great Waltz* (1938), daughter of an Estonian lieutenant colonel in the Imperial Russian Army and later Chief of Staff to the War Minister of Estonia, had a successful career in Hollywood film industry.

The first Estonian animated short film *Kutsu-Juku seiklusi* was made in 1931. (Wikipedia 2013)

## 1.2.3 1940—1953

During the first year of Soviet Occupation (1940–1941) Eesti Kultuurfilm was taken over by the Communist Party and renamed Kinokroonika Eesti Stuudio (the Estonian Newsreel Studio).

During the first decades of Soviet rule as Estonia became a part of USSR in 1944 after the end of World War II, filmmakers in Estonia were mostly coming from inner Soviet Union whose job was to create propaganda films that depicted the victory of socialism in a form of newsreels and documentaries.

Former Eesti Kultuurfilm was called Kinokroonika Tallinna Stuudio (The Tallinn Newsreel Studio) in 1942 during the German occupation in World War II and Tallinna Kinostuudio (The Tallinn Film Studio) in 1947 again by the Soviets.

During the era two feature films on Soviet themes were produced in Estonia directed by Gerbert Rappaport, an Austrian émigré in Soviet Union: *Elu tsitadellis* (*Life in the Citadel*) in 1947,

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Valgus Koordis (Light in Koordi) in 1951 that was the first color motion picture film made in Estonia. (Wikipedia 2013)

## 1.2.4 1953—1991

After the death of Stalin in 1953 a more liberal period in Soviet Union's cultural policies followed. Filmmakers started to enjoy greater artistic control at the same time the Soviet State Committee for Cinematography (Goskino) in Moscow provided the money, state censorship body Glavlit and CPSU Department of Culture had the control over releasing the movies. The Tallinn Film Studio was renamed Kunstiliste ja Kroonikafilme Tallinna Kinostuudio (Tallinn Feature- and Newsreel Film Studio) in 1954 and in 1963 was renamed again Tallinnfilm [Figure 6].



Figure 6 The logo of Tallinnfilm

Some of the first films produced during the era that were co directed by an Estonian Kaljo Kiisk were Juunikuu päevad (1957) and Vallatud kurvid also known as Opassniye Povoroty, the first dramatic film shot in Kinopanorama (1959).

In the 1960s a story of Prince Gabriel by Estonian writer Eduard Bornhöhe was turned into a movie script by Arvo Valton. Grigori Kromanov was named to be the director of Viimne reliikvia (The Last Relic), released in 1969 by Tallinnfilm. The movie set the absolute box office record for the entire Soviet Union at the time by selling 44,9 million tickets. It was successfully distributed by the Soviet film export internationally in more than 60 countries. The film also influenced Estonian literature: 2 short stories listed for the Friedebert Tuglas award in 1970-75 included references to the Last Relic.

Another milestone in Estonian Cinema released in 1969 was Arvo Kruusement's Kevade (Spring) based on Oskar Luts popular novel.

Successful films in the 1980s were "Hukkunud Alpinisti" hotell (Dead Mountaineer's Hotel) by Kromanov and movies made by Kaljo Kiisk such as Nipernaadi (1983).

The most prominent female director Leida Laius who emerged during the era is best known for her Kõrboja peremees (1979) and Naerata ometi (1985) receiving at the Berlin International

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Film Festival UNICEF Award in 1985. Peeter Simm's best known Soviet era film is *Ideaalmaastik* (The Ideal Landscape) released in 1980. Peeter Urbla's *Ma pole turist, ma elan siin* (I'm Not a Tourist, I'm Living Here) (1988). Jaan Kolgerg emerged by the end of Soviet era with films *See kadunud tee* (1990) (The Lost Way) and *Võlausaldajad* (Creditors) (1992)

Among the leading Estonian film actors during the Soviet era were Rein Aren with about 30 roles, Jüri Järvet and Leonhard Merzin. (Wikipedia 2013)

### 1.2.5 Since 1991

After the collapse of the Soviet Union Estonia regained its independence, the cost of filmmaking skyrocketed and the 1990s showed decline in filmmaking that reached its bottom in 1996, the year when no fictional films and only 2 documentaries *Lipule... güüsile... valvel!* and *Turvalisuse illusioon* were made in Estonia.

In 1997, the Estonian Film Foundation was founded by the Estonian Ministry of Culture.

Production of *Minu Leninid* (All My Lenins) (1997) a parody of Soviet Revolution by Hardi Volmer marked a turnaround for Estonian feature films. In 1998, there were two feature films produced. *Georgica* directed by Sulev Keedus won the FIPRESCI Prize at the Stockholm Film Festival in 1998 and the Prix Europa Special at Prix Europa in 1999.

Since then, the trend has also been towards joint film productions such as Peeter Simm's *Head käed* (Good Hands) (2001) a joint Estonian-Latvian coproduction that in 20025 won the Manfred Salzgeber Award at the Berlin International Film Festival and the Golden Olive Tree Lecce Festival of European Cinema in Italy. *Kõrini* (Fed Up) (2005) an Estonian-German coproduction. Arvo Iho' s *Karu süda* (Hart of the Bear) (2001) nominated for Golden St. George at the Moscow International Film Festival and for the European Film Award at European Film Awards, was a coproduction between Estonia, Germany, Russia and the Czech Republic.

The most commercially successful Estonian film in 2002 was *Nimed marmortahvlil* (2002) (Names in Marble) by Elmo Nüganen and in 2003 a comedy by Rando Pettai *Vanad ja kobedad saavad jalad alla* (Made in Estonia) that in Estonia topped the international blockbuster *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* with its box office results.

In 2004, two young directors emerged Jaak Kilmi and René Reinumägi with their *Sigade revolutsioon* (Revolution of Pigs) that won the Special Jury Prize and was nominated for Golden St. George at the Moscow International Film Festival, and for Grand Prix Asturias at the Gijón International Film Festival.

In 2007, about 10 feature films were made in Estonia. Most notable perhaps *Sügisball* (2007) by Veiko Õunpuu receiving among other awards Best Director at the Thessaloniki Film Festival, International Film Festival Bratislava and Venice Horizons Award at the 64th Venice

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International Film Festival. Georg (2007) by Peeter Simm is a movie about the life of legendary Estonian singer Georg Ots.

Most recent awarded film is Veiko Õunpuu's The Temptation of St. Tony (2009). In 2011, Estonia made eight full-length films, which included one animated film. (Wikipedia 2013)

## 1.3 TOP 10

The Estonian feature films Top Ten Poll in 2002 by Estonian film critics and journalists.

Kevade (1969) directed by Arvo Kruusement

Hullumeelsus (1968) directed by Kaljo Kiisk

Ideaalmaastik (1980) directed by Peeter Simm

Viimne reliikvia (1969) directed by Grigori Kromanov

Georgica (1998) directed by Sulev Keedus

Nipernaadi (1993) directed by Kaljo Kiisk

"Hukkunud Alpinisti" hotell (1979) directed by Grigori Kromanov

Naerata ometi (1985) directed by Leida Laius, Arvo Iho

Põrgupõhja uus Vanapagan (1964) directed by Grigori Kromanov, Jüri Müür

Tuulte pesa (1979) directed by Olav Neuland

## 1.4 List of Estonian submissions for the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film

Estonia has submitted films for the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film since 1992. The award is handed out annually by the United States Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences to a feature-length motion picture produced outside the United States that contains primarily non-English dialogue. It was not created until the 1956 Academy Awards, in which a competitive Academy Award of Merit, known as the Best Foreign Language Film Award, was created for non-English speaking films, and has been given annually since. Seven Estonian films have been submitted for the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film, but none of them have been nominated for an Oscar.

Submissions

The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences has invited the film industries of various countries to submit their best film for the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film since 1956. The Foreign Language Film Award Committee oversees the process and reviews all the submitted films. Following this, they vote via secret ballot to determine the five nominees for the award. Below is a list of the films that have been submitted by Estonia for review by the Academy for the award by year and the respective Academy Awards ceremony.

All submissions were in Estonian.

Name Surname

Year (Ceremony)	Film title used in nomination	Original title	Director	Result
<a href="#">1992</a> <a href="#">(65th)</a>	<a href="#">Those Old Love Letters</a>	Need vanad armastuskirjad	<a href="#">Mati Põldre</a>	Not Nominated
<a href="#">2001</a> <a href="#">(74th)</a>	<a href="#">The Heart of the Bear</a>	Karu süda	<a href="#">Arvo Iho</a>	Not Nominated
<a href="#">2004</a> <a href="#">(77th)</a>	<a href="#">Revolution of Pigs</a>	Sigade revolutsioon	<a href="#">Jaak Kilmi, René Reinumägi</a>	Not Nominated
<a href="#">2005</a> <a href="#">(78th)</a>	<a href="#">Shop of Dreams</a>	Stiilipidu	<a href="#">Peeter Urbla</a>	Not Nominated
<a href="#">2007</a> <a href="#">(80th)</a>	<a href="#">The Class</a>	Klass	<a href="#">Ilmar Raag</a>	Not Nominated
<a href="#">2008</a> <a href="#">(81st)</a>	<a href="#">I Was Here</a>	Mina olin siin	<a href="#">René Vilbre</a>	Not Nominated
<a href="#">2009</a> <a href="#">(82nd)</a>	<a href="#">December Heat</a>	Detsembrikuumus	<a href="#">Asko Kase</a>	Not Nominated
<a href="#">2010</a> <a href="#">(83rd)</a>	<a href="#">The Temptation of St. Tony</a>	Püha Tõnu kiusamine	<a href="#">Veiko Õunpuu</a>	Not Nominated
<a href="#">2011</a> <a href="#">(84th)</a>	<a href="#">Letters to Angel</a>	Kirjad Inglile	<a href="#">Sulev Keedus</a>	Not Nominated
<a href="#">2012</a> <a href="#">(85th)</a>	<a href="#">Mushrooming</a>	Seenelkäik	<a href="#">Toomas Hussar</a>	Not Nominated

Three of Estonia's submissions (2004, 2007 and 2008) were about the lives of very different kinds disaffected youth:

Revolution of Pigs is a teen comedy with serious undertones, taking place at a summer camp in 1986 Soviet Estonia where the kids begin a rebellion against Communist rule.

The Class is a fast-paced and violent drama about two bullied teens who take drastic action against their tormenters.

I Was Here is a crime drama about an upper-middle-class teen who becomes involved in drug dealing.

Estonia's earliest and latest submissions (1992 and 2009) were period films taking place in the mid-twentieth century:

Those Old Love Letters was a biographical film about Estonian composer Raimond Valgre before and after the Soviet takeover.

December Heat is a drama drenched in period music about an attempted Communist coup, set in 1924 during the Estonia's first period of independence.

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Estonia's other submissions (2001 and 2005) included:

The Heart of the Bear, a drama steeped in mythology about an Estonian man who moves from the city to become a hunter on the Siberian taiga.

Shop of Dreams, a comedy-drama about three unemployed female friends who decide to go into business together. (Wikipedia 2012)

## 2 Estonian Animation

Estonian animation tradition dates back to the 1930s when the first experimental films were made. The only surviving short film from the era is Kutsu-Juku seiklusi (Adventures of Juku the dog) (1931). After the Great Depression, WW II and Soviet Occupation interrupted the development, Estonian animation was reborn in 1958. Elbert Tuganov founded a puppet film division Nukufilm in Tallinnfilm Studio. The first film was titled Peetrikese unenägu based on a Danish writer Jens Sigsgaard's children story *Palle alene i verden*. Joonisfilm a traditional cell animation division of Tallinnfilm was founded by Rein Raamat in 1971. Films like *Põld* (1978) nominee for Golden Palm at the Cannes Film Festival in 1979; *Lend* (1973) the winner of Special Jury Award at the Zagreb World Festival of Animated Films; the *Suur Tõll* (1980) 2nd place at Ottawa International Animation Festival in 1982 and *Põrgu (Hell)* (1983) the winner of FIPRESCI Prize and Special Jury Award at the Annecy International Animated Film Festival made Raamat the first internationally recognized Estonian animation director.

Since Estonia regained independence in 1991 Nukufilm and Joonisfilm continued to operate as private companies owned by the filmmakers. During the era internationally most successful Estonian animation director has been Priit Pärn, the winner of Grand Prize at the Ottawa International Animation Festival in 1998 for *Porgandite öö (Night of the Carrots)*. *Crocodile* by Kaspar Jancis was selected to be the Best European Anima film at Cartoon d'or 2010. The other film of Jancis "*Villa Antropoff*" was awarded with the Special Mention on Scancroma Festival. (Wikipedia 2013)

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