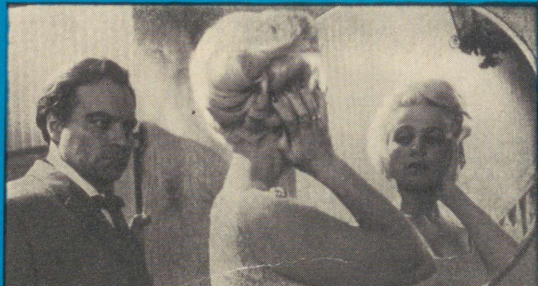


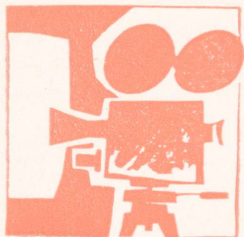
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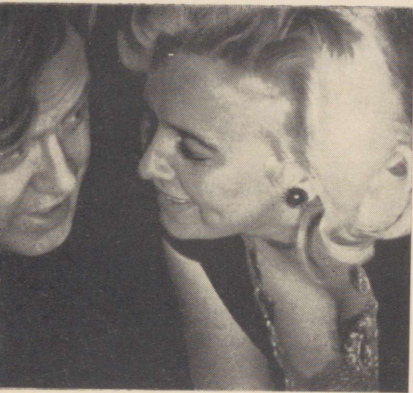
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ASPECTS OF ESTONIAN
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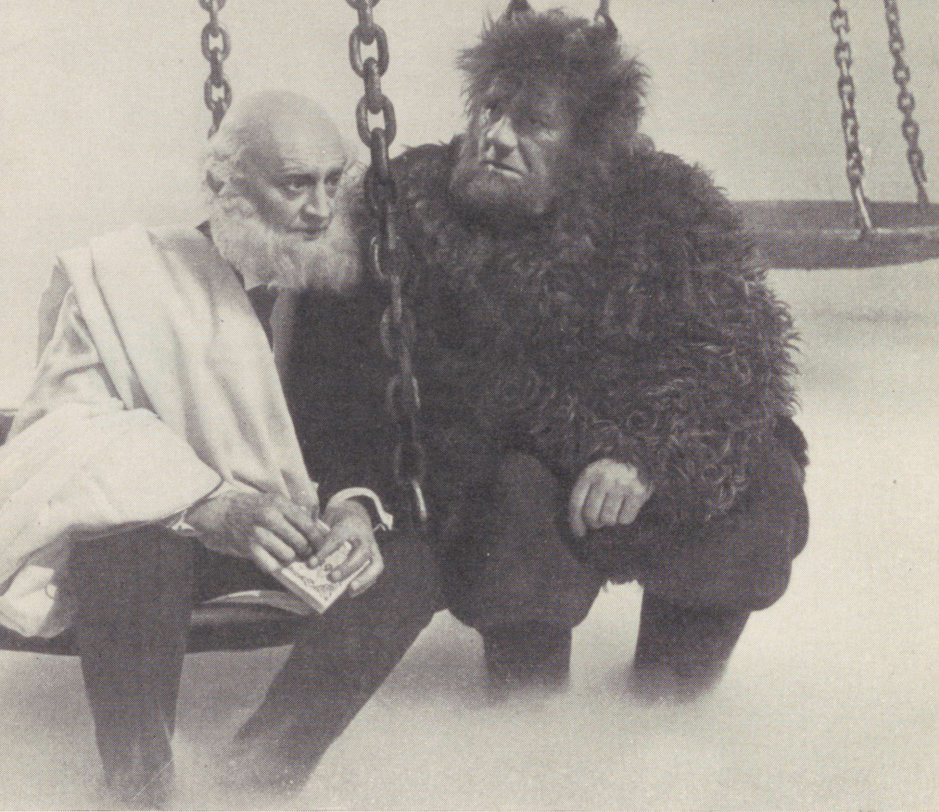




TEN ASPECTS
OF ESTONIAN
LIFE







Prologue to the film "The New Heathen of Põrgupõhja". St. Peter (Jüri Järvet) and the Heathen (Elmar Salulaht) in conversation.

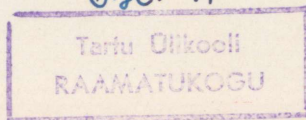
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SOVIET ESTONIAN FILM ART

PUBLISHERS "EESTI RAAMAT" TALLINN 1967

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FACTS AND FIGURES

Soviet Estonian film art is relatively young: as yet it is too early to speak of any old or well-established traditions. Nevertheless, a whole row of statistical items fills up the period between the boundary dates 1940 and 1966: a total of 28 feature films and 15 puppet films, about 200 documentaries and popular-scientific films, as well as over 800 "Soviet Estonia" newsreels. These, in their turn, include tens of individual and collective milestones of creative work at the studio, quests and problems, "growing pains", joys and failures, for in art not all days are red-letter days.

The following lines are devoted to everything that constitutes the notion Soviet Estonian film art. Let us make a fleeting excursion into the past and get a glimpse of the present of the work of our filmstudio. Let us discuss briefly the films shot in the course of the past 26 years, the people who, for a long time, have shared the joys and sorrows of the national film industry, and say a few words about the young people who have supplemented the older generation of creative workers with their fresh energy, knowledge and zeal.

First, a few words must be said about Estonian cinematography before the establishment of Soviet power. Strictly speaking, cinematography as a national art did not exist in Estonia before 1940. Still in order to accentuate the triumphant march of our national film art during the last decade, it seems appropriate to give some comparative data which will characterize the situation in bourgeois Estonia and even earlier, for the history of cinematography already extends over a fairly long period.

FROM THE CUL-DE-SAC OF THE POWER OF MONEY INTO LIFE AMIDST THE PEOPLE

FIRST STEPS

Estonians made their first acquaintance with the moving pictures quite a long time ago: in Tallinn tableaux vivants were screened as early as 1897, i. e. soon after cinematography made its debut in Paris. The first stationary moving picture theatre was set up in Tallinn in 1901. Some casual, fragmentary shots taken in Estonia by French cameramen date back to the same period. Between the years 1912–1914 commenced the filming of current events by local people. The first film-play *A Bear-hunt in Pärnumaa* was shot at that time.

The year 1919 saw the establishment of the first Estonian cinematographic enterprise "Estonia Film". Side by side with this joint-stock company (which, by the way, soon died out), a number of small studios were set up by enterprising business men during the first years of bourgeois power. The majority of these also died out with nothing accomplished. The situation was paradoxical: on the one hand there were, in Estonia, potential possibilities for the development of the film art owing to the relatively high cultural level of the people, the existence of good playwrights and a first-class theatre; on the other hand, however, the period was extremely barren from the artistic point of view. The fact that the films of the period under observation were artistically low and technically weak is largely due to the culture policy of the bourgeoisie, which was aimed at subduing intellectual life, subordinating it to fascist mentality, and cultivating narrow nationalistic feelings. The main obstacle, however, was the absence of funds. Attempts were made to compensate for the absence of means by not paying the actors their salaries, by using private flats as studios, and so on. It goes without saying that such "home-made" pictures were technically weak and did not even repay the minimum production costs. Competition barred the way to the international screen. As there was no development, no permanent staff of workers could be assembled.

LACK OF FUNDS

6

The only virtue of the twenty odd film-plays of the bourgeois period was that they recorded some well-known actors (Ants Lauter in *The Shadows of the Past*, Ants Eskola in



Actor Ants Lauter, one of the pioneers of the Estonian film.



The Children of the Sun, Hugo Laur in Waves of Passion, etc.).

The documentary film was in a somewhat better position, although for years in the land of business men this, too, meant only casual filming. Only when the immense propagandistic perspectives of this less expensive category of the film were comprehended in 1935, did "Estonian Cultural Film" begin to function on a state subsidy. Its newsreels were made obligatory for all cinemas. The studio itself was meagre with 16 people on the staff, of whom four were cameramen. The life of higher society, parades, beauty contests, advertising, etc. formed the essence of the newsreels and short films. Hardly ever did they reflect life, the views were patched together on the principle that the cinema is one of the wheels of the machine of propaganda. Nevertheless, mention should be made of the following: W i t h

**A COG ON
THE WHEEL**

**VIEWS,
LANDSCAPES,
PORTRAITS**

a Camera through Estonia presenting the beautiful landscape of our homeland, Views of Osmussaar, and Vilsandi, the Kingdom of Birds (the last of these was shot by the promising young cameraman Vladimir Parvel and it fetched a prize at the Hamburg Festival of Cultural Films in 1937); as well as some irreplaceable film portraits of outstanding workers on the cultural front.

To sum up, neither the feature film nor the documentary inherited anything worth while from the bourgeois period. The twenty so-called "years of independence" confirmed the fact that to a great extent cinematography is a barometer of the development of the cultural life of a country and the whole state, and that the position of cinematography is dependent on the political system. The pre-requisites for the development of cinematography became a reality only when the people took the reins of government into their own hands.

The historic days of June, 1940, marked the rebirth of cinematography. It was the beginning of a stormy stage in the development of modern film art, it was a qualitatively new period in our national cinematography.

Soviet Estonian cinematography, which took its origin in the documentary film, was created in a comparatively short period of time. Cameramen fixed on celluloid many unique scenes of the struggle of the people for freedom and independence. Within one month more events were filmed than in four months previously. What is more, each shot was devoted to social changes, recording the thoughts, emotions, and will of the working people; mass meetings were recorded, rejoicing crowds of people, Estonia's joining the family of the Soviet peoples. On the basis of abundant material the first Soviet Estonian documentary *The People's Will* was assembled. At the beginning of 1941 the narrative film *Estonia* depicting the Republic's yesterday and today was completed and released for picture-goers all over the Soviet Union.

**DECISIVE
TURN**

A decisive turn towards width and depth took place in our cinematography. "Estonian Cultural Film" was reorganized. Favourable technical conditions were created, the staff was expanded, newsreels began to appear regularly, the making of feature films was contemplated. Then the war broke out...

The war-time newsreels *Soviet Estonia*, which were made jointly with the Moscow Studio of Documentary Films, have survived. They were released in the rear, and they showed the struggle of Estonians in the days of the Great Patriotic War. Documentary sequences of retreats were filmed, the life of the evacuated people in the rear, the native country in ruins, towns in flames, the death-camp at Klooga...

WIDE SCOPE OF ESTONIAN DOCUMENTARY FILMS

AFTER THE WAR

The war caused much damage. The studio was destroyed, the staff was dispersed. At the beginning only a correspondence centre for newsreels could be opened in liberated Tallinn. Film production had to start again from the beginning. For this reason a good part of the few years of existence of our film art had to be spent on organizing and regulating the intricate and precise mechanism of the film industry. To replace the ruined studio a new one was built. The Tallinn Studio of Newsreels and Documentary Films was founded. These were hard and yet happy times. The other Soviet republics did not neglect their younger colleague. The whole Soviet Union helped us to assemble and instruct the staff, which forms the material basis. The studios of Moscow and Leningrad were especially helpful.



Semyon Shkolnikov, a keen-eyed
and firm-handed cameraman.

**NEWSREELS
AGAIN
COME FIRST**

At first all efforts were concentrated on making newsreels. Most of the newsreel cameramen of "Tallinnfilm" today, as well as several feature film makers have passed through the school of film journalism. Cameramen and film directors, in close contact with the life and work of the people, and eager to help in the Republic's constructive work, have given in "Soviet Estonia" newsreels an extensive representation of how the wounds of the war were healed in a short period of time, and how the country started on the road to socialism.

"Soviet Estonia" newsreels, which appear once in every ten days now, have a special significance even now. Forty newsreels a year make a comprehensive review of all the Republic's achievements, of topical economic and cultural events. For years "Soviet Estonia" has been the best newsreel in the Baltic states. It also enjoys All-Union fame. The newsreel's variety of genres and topics, the ability to present 7 or 8 independent subjects in 10 minutes, have made it popular. Estonian cameramen are said to excel others in their skilful composition of film material which is of a high quality technically. They do not stick to hackneyed clichés, their films reveal a search for new solutions. The newsreels are pleasant in design; the public likes the established poetical and direct manner of presentation with laconic and striking captions, tasteful choice of the music score, well-timed editing, ingenious transitions, and the topicality of the subject matter.

The same holds good for the documentary films of Tallinn, the releasing of which started in 1947. Up to 1952, however, the results in this field were somewhat involved and contradictory. Attempts to keep up with the topics of the day were interwoven with influences peculiar to that period, which gave rise to simplification, illustrativeness, sketchiness and embellishment.

An outstanding achievement of this period, however, is the documentary colour film *Soviet Estonia* by V. Tomberg, S. Shkolnikov and V. Parvel, which was shot on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Estonian SSR. The authors of the film were awarded a state prize. As the first "Estonian" on an international film festival, it fetched a special prize in Cannes. Parvel and Shkolnikov also screened *Song Festival*, a full-length film, about the first post-war all-republic song festival.

**NO
HACKNEYED
CLICHÉS**

10

A decisive revival in the sphere of documentaries began in 1958 with Shkolnikov's film report *Fishermen of Pärnu*, remarkable for its high-class photography and quest for new forms. From this time on, each producer begins to elaborate his own approach and style. A qualitative change took place: the stress was shifted from a chronicle of occurrences to a deeper interpretation of reality, a representation of the inner life and beauty of people and events. Illustrativeness was ousted by a

A typical pose and an appropriate fore-shortening have been found.



publicistic approach, a passionless recording of events was replaced by documentary portraits of contemporaries, staging was supplanted by reporting. Some 13 to 15 documentary and popular scientific films were then produced every year, and they are strictly documentary and true to life.

The new tendency made itself felt in Parvel's and Gorbunov's film *Birthday*, which was devoted to the Republic's 15th anniversary and the Grand Song Festival, and particularly in the publicistic films *Encounters in the Street* and *Hello, Girls*.

A BRIEF REVIEW

Encounters in the Street (script by V. Pant, directed by V. Anderson, photography by M. Dorovatovsky) is full of passion and problems. It is interesting first and foremost because *Encounters in the Street* really afford ample scope for sketching screen portraits of Paul Kamm, the Estonian Pavel Korchagin, also of a donor, and a sapper settling accounts with an inheritance of the last war, and others. A substantial advance lies in the vital, pithy, concrete and poetical screen novels constituting the short film.

Hello, Girls, another film by Anderson, also goes close to the people. It is the best documentary of the year 1962, with a novel approach to the subject and an original manner of treatment.

The sequences of the life of some young people working at a state farm are disclosed by the chattering of the heroines — four girls, without any interruption on the part of the author. Valeria Anderson, who graduated from the Institute of Cinematography of the Soviet Union in 1961, is one of the most original and talented members of the staff of "Tallinnfilm". Her other films should also be mentioned, as for example the two-part *Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow*, where representatives of the three generations of the "Eduard Vilde" collective farmers talk about themselves and the farm. Also the widescreen film *The Stony Lulla by* deserves mention.

... Mighty cranes, columns of lorries, people hurrying to work, a town where the children are still asleep: the rhythm quickens. At a workshop where large panels are made, a construction unit is being cast with an image of the sun on it. War-time associations arise. The pre-fabricated panel is fitted into the wall of a house. The children wake up, and that is the end. Yet, from what a fresh, original and unexpected angle we get a view of the seemingly ordinary work of a building-materials plant! The philosophically deep thought-provoking script and significant details all help to disclose the idea. The film appeals to the viewer's imagination, there is no announcer's text, not a single word is spoken; the stress is laid on photography, staging, natural

AN ORIGINAL APPROACH

12



Mikhail Dorovatsky, one of the ablest operators of the "Tallinnfilm".



**ISLAND OF
FREEDOM**

"noises" and the expressive music written by the composer Jaan Rääts. The merits of the film lie in its most original dramatic composition and in the perceptible and creative significance of the music score. A wise, thought-provoking film.

The makers of Estonian documentaries do not only work at home. They have shot a number of films in far-away places, having been on the stormy Atlantic together with fishermen and on expeditions together with scientists. Shkolnikov's camera has buzzed in Denmark, Mexico, and on the Island of Cuba, from where he brought back two films: *Under the Stars of Friendship* and *Where Hemingway Lived*. The first consists of film sequences of the life of Cuban sailors and fishermen, the second is a meditative photo-chronical of the places where the great American writer Ernest Hemingway spent

his last years. We see lots of fishing and some prototypes of the renowned "Old Man of the Sea". The announcer's text was written by writer Konstantin Simonov.

Shkolnikov, who has worked with the camera for more than 30 years, is one of the fathers of the studio. He is an Honoured Artist of the Estonian SSR, three times the winner of government prizes, the cameraman of five feature films and a score of documentaries. For the 25th anniversary of the Republic he screened a five-part film, *Stones and Bread*, which is a narrative of the fate of different people, ingeniously interwoven with the historic events of the period. His latest work is a film about the World Figure-Skating Championship held in Switzerland.

HONOURED VETERANS

When speaking of Estonian films, Vladimir Parvel's name occurs fairly often. He has shot three feature films, 36 documentaries and a number of newsreels. Eduard Eljas (died in 1963) should also be mentioned among the veterans, as one of the pioneers of the post-war documentary film and the best cameraman. Several of his over 600 newsreel strips and 27 documentaries have won All-Union appraisal, such as *The Salt of the Earth* on collective farm themes, *Kalevi-Liiva Accuses*, *Hiking*, and others.

Vladimir Maak is known to have the eye and the ear for finding interesting topics and solutions and filming them, e. g. his filming of the Far-East expedition of young scientists under the title *A Lotus Flower, a Speckled Deer and a Crab in the Sea of Japan*. Of Vitali Gorbunov's latest works his popular-scientific *Fruit of Hard Toil* is the most outstanding, as well as his film *A Fragment of The Mother Country*, a heart-felt story about a lighthouse keeper on the island of Vaindloo.

PROMISING BEGINNERS

The temperamental films of Nature by the young woman-director, Reet Kasesalu, deserve mention, such as *Autumn Scenes*, *Winter*, and *A Window to the World*, which is a sketch from the Matsalu Wild-life Preserve, as well as her serial film about the fine and applied arts and artists: *The Beauty around Us* filmed in co-operation with M. Dorovatovsky.

Among our new documentaries mention should be made of a short film about the life of Eduard Vilde, the optimistic film *Yes to Chemistry*, the short widescreen colour film *Songs, Soar High* about a song festival, *A Come-Back* about the Estonian ballet dancer Helmi Puur, and other films featuring

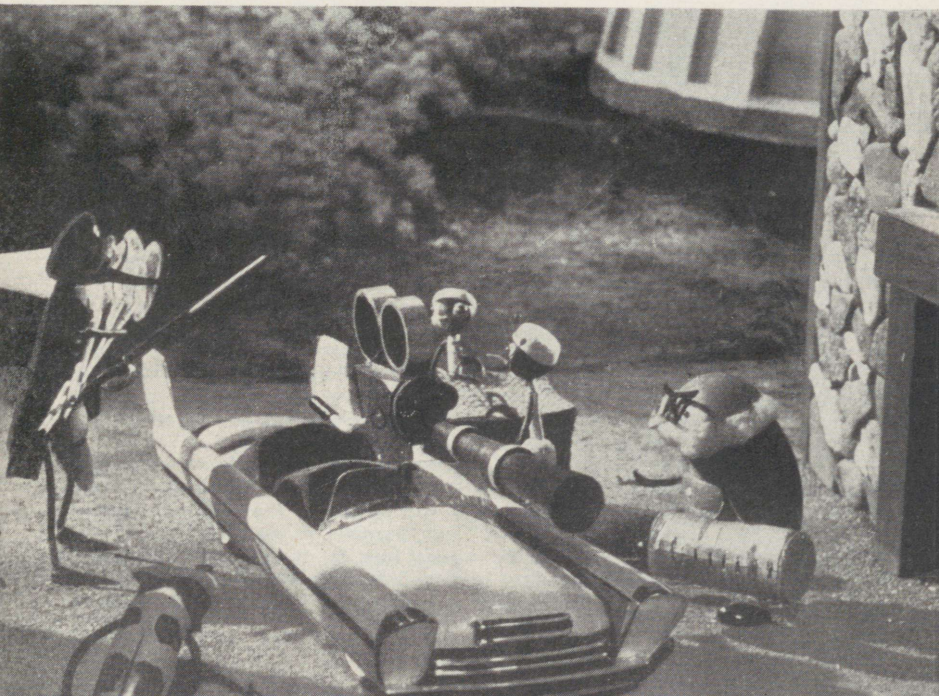
14 Estonia, the museum-town Tallinn and its new profile.

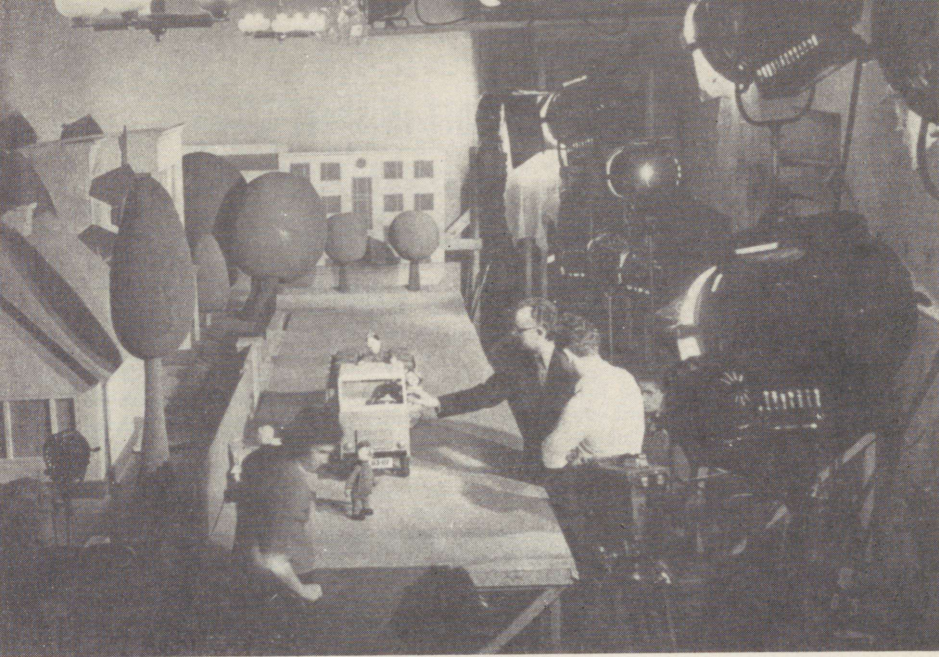
The screen has done much in recording the present day through documentaries which have penetrated every phase of life on a wide front.

**"OTT IN SPACE"
A LAUREATE OF
INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVALS,
AND OTHERS...**

A slide from the puppet film "Cameraman Kõps in the World of Mushrooms".

THE PUPPET STAGE Of course it is the screen representatives of the Estonian puppet world that are meant. They form quite an independent chapter in the production history of "Tallinnfilm". True enough, the history of films for our youngest citizens is still short: puppets have been





**YOUNGEST
ATTAINS
WORLD FAME**

among the filmstars of the Estonian screen for only eight years, yet they have already attained world fame and perhaps they have popularized the strongest side of our film art.

It all began in 1957. With his film *Peter's Dream* the enthusiast, Elbert Tuganov, opened the "screen" door to puppets, as well as to international recognition. The first-born had a successful run in Rumania and Pakistan. The second, *Ott in Space*, attracted attention in Oberhausen, fetched a special prize at a festival of aviation and space films in France in 1963, and came first at an All-Union festival in 1964.

16 The highly imaginative Tuganov is not the only representative and specialist in the field of puppet films. There are several other puppet film specialists who belong to the smallest group of film-makers (only 25 "toy" with puppets in their studio near Tallinn), who are united by a great love for their work and sincerely believe in the great art of their little puppets. They have already passed their graduation examinations and now threaten to

overtake their master. The most prominent among them is Heino Pars, who has worked a long time as cameraman and has already produced four films.

Two or three new films are added every year to the first Estonian puppet film screened by the enthusiast Tuganov. The first was a purely enthusiastic undertaking, and so far "Tallinnfilm" is the only republican studio that has ventured to shoot puppet films. Rapid development has resulted from continuous and indefatigable research work in finding suitable plots and inventing technical devices, with the aim of making the films more vivid, modern and acceptable to children. On the whole the makers of puppet films have already created their own style of treatment and approach: it is characterized by a rather complicated and witty plot, and an ingenious solution of comical situations.

**GROWN-UPS
ENJOY
THEM TOO**

Not all the puppet films of "Tallinnfilm" are meant only for children, e. g. the film *Just So* is full of spicy satire directed against the stupidity displayed by certain officials when choosing personnel, while the witty *Talent* laughs at those parents who firmly

A scene from the puppet-film pavilion. The puppets are "directed" by producer Elbert Tuganov.



One of the main characters in the puppet film "Me and Murri".

believe that their child is an infant prodigy like Robertino Loretto. Nor do our puppet films deal only with the world of play and fairy-tales. While enjoying the fun, children also learn something of the wisdom of life. Take for example *Me and Murri*, an educational film about a boy and his four-footed friend who wanted fish, or *Cameraman Kōps in the World of Mushrooms*, a truly edifying piece in which the plot can interest people of all ages. Aside from their educational value, these films are, moreover, pioneers from a technical point of view. For the first time in the history of the puppet film, living nature appears on the scene: the puppets walk in a real forest. The same technique is used in a new instalment of the *Kōps-serial* – *Cameraman Kōps in the World of Berries*. Heino Pars is planning a third instalment, where *Kōps* will talk about plants and wild flowers.

**BOTH JOLLY
AND EDU-
CATIONAL**

The level that has been reached in these productions is high and fairly uniform. To complete the list of good works, the following puppet films should be added to the above-mentioned: *A Forest Tale*, *Two Stories*, *An Almost Unbelievable Story*, *The Little Motor-Scooter*, *Jaak and the Robot*, *Brave Animals*, *The Last Chimney-Sweep*, *Children and the Tree*, *A Mouse-hunt*. However, *Ott in Space* excels all the others. At times jolly, at times didactic (in the best sense of the word), at times satirical, it is an emotional and ingenious story of the boy *Ott*, who, in the course of events, finds himself at a cosmodrome. And having accidentally started a rocket plane, he flies into space. People on the Earth try to instruct the incompetent space-man by radio, but that is of no avail. At school *Ott* had done everything but learn his lessons; his text-book of astronomy was all scribbled. At long last *Ott* gets back home, but not until he had had dealings with the raving god of war, and was suspended in weightlessness, which is so real that it even gives the audience a feeling of outer space.

Needless to say, the role of a puppet film artist is most important. The highly original, ingenious and generalizing nature of the puppets and the scenery of "Tallinnfilm" are designed by three artists: Rein Raamat executed the puppets and sets for *Peter's Dream*, Halja Klaar was the artist for *Ott in Space* and Georg Shchukin drew the *Kōps-serial*.

Puppet films bearing the mark "TF" have already found their way to more than 30 foreign countries, from Finland to the far-away

18 Pakistan. It is to be hoped that even bigger triumphs are still to come for the puppet film makers. They are bound to win ever growing popularity, which a good solid foundation guarantees, and for which a staff of eager and enthusiastic artists stands security.

Actor Kaarel Karm – one of the main props of the Estonian feature film.



HEROES OF ESTONIAN FEATURE FILMS

As the production of feature films determines to a great extent the status of a film studio or of film art in general, so the birth of artistic cinematography should be considered the most important event of the Republic's post-war cultural life.

Between 1947 and 1955 films were made in collaboration with "Lenfilm". Cinematography on a large scale is not born overnight or without the necessary prerequisites. Studios, specialists and equipment were lacking, also experience.

FRUITFUL CO- OPERATION

The first steps were taken under the direction of Herbert Rappoport. The screening of *Life in a Citadel* was an event of great significance. Even today this exciting film has not lost its significance due to the artistic force of the screenplay. The film

is a screen adaption of a drama, full of high civic pathos, by A. Jakobson, one of the founders of Soviet Estonian literature. It was masterfully screened by specialists from "Lenfilm". The screenplay was composed by L. Trauberg, the photographer was S. Ivanov. A number of Estonian actors participated: H. Laur, A. Särev, A. Talvi, et al. As an uncompromising analysis of life, the film was a timely reaction to the current events of the period. Autumn, 1944. Soviet power has been restored in Estonia, but the rapid succession of events, often contradictory, has confronted people with a number of problems, the most important of which is "Who is with whom?" So as to escape making a decision, Professor Miilas tries to isolate his house from the outer world with a high wall, both literally and figuratively. The logic of life and class struggle, however, are stronger than the subjective wish. Reality breaks into the citadel and it becomes the field of battle between two camps. The illusory "ivory tower" crashes and in the end Miilas stands on the ruins of his collapsed castle. The

**FALL OF
CITADEL**



"Dangerous Curves" rivalry on the racetrack and discord between the contestants.



Ants Eskola's masterful acting is an integral part of nearly all our feature films.



screen version of the exciting life drama of the apolitical professor (H. Laur as Miilas created an unforgettable image) aroused a wide social resonance, for at that time many were faced by the same problems. The film *Life in a Citadel* refuted the intelligentsia's misapprehension that science can be apolitical. What was true in life became true art. The film is a masterpiece.

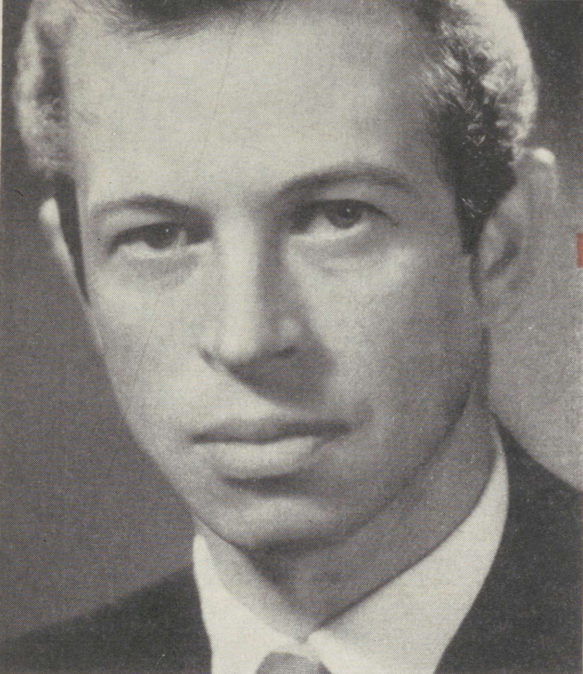
The next two films *Light at Koordi* (1951) and *Andrus Finds Happiness* (1954) made from scenarios based on novels by the Estonian writer H. Leberecht, were also produced by "Lenfilm", under the direction of Rappoport with the co-operation of Estonian actors. The first-mentioned motion picture brought to the screen (with a strong inclination to sketchiness, unfortunately) the conflict between the old and the new that made itself felt in the countryside; the other film was devoted to the Estonian working class. Here, too, the actors H. Laur, A. Lauter et al. played their parts admirably.



The striving to produce feature films spoke of strength, the three film productions proved the existence of talented actors. The technical basis and the staff of specialists grew from year to year. In 1954 the studio was renamed "Tallinn Studio of Documentary and Feature Films".

**MORE
DIFFICULTIES
TO OVERCOME**

It must be confessed, however, that the start was not very promising. Notwithstanding certain achievements in the cameramen's skill and in the acting, which was highly commended, the spark had not yet burst into flame. Everything in the films inclined to be too straightforward and outspoken, threatening to become merely illustrative. The use of outward effects was often overdone, of which the excessive use of folk costumes and dances is an example. The shortage of energetic and experienced film directors was felt. The film-production methods were on a rather low level and did not attract "big literature". That, again, made itself felt in the film plays and themes, which were apt to become stereotyped. The dominating theory of "conflictlessness" also had some influence, which resulted in simple topical incursions into



It is not the familiar flash of the lighthouse that has caught the eye of the "Men of the Same Village".

Kaljo Kiisk is a film actor, producer, and also Chairman of the Union of Estonian Film Workers.



A PERIOD OF SEEKING AND SEARCHING

life instead of an all-round representation of reality. A film about fishermen was produced at that time, another film about builders, about collective farmers, and so on. These tendencies were noticeable, to a greater or lesser extent, in such films as the first independent musical colour film *When Night Falls* (author of screenplay and director A. Mandrykin), a sports adventure film *Yachts at Sea*, also the film *In the Back Yard* (1965) made from a scenario based on a story by the popular writer O. Luts. The same can be said about *The Turning Point* (1957), which was an attempt to reflect the fundamental changes that had taken place in the village, and also *June Days*, a screenplay unfolding the events of 1940 on the background of the fate of a family, and several short films.

23 The total sum of cinematic experience and training was growing but it was still insufficient and no radical change was felt: success alternated with setbacks. Thanks to new equipment ("Tallinn-film" was the second studio in the Soviet Union to make wide-screen films) a more or less successful screen version was made

of *The Captain* (1958), directed by A. Mandrykin. In the following years cinema-goers gave a warm reception to *Uninvited Guests*, an ingenious adventure film produced by a group of young film artists, and also H. Rappoport's *In Rain and Sunshine* (1960), a film featuring the builders of a power station and their new life. At the same time there were several films which were less successful, as *Underwater Reefs* (1959) depicting the life of fishermen, *The Männards* (1960) about the revolutionary past, *Song-lovers* (1961) about the traditional Estonian song festivals – all these had little to convey. The film *A Chance Encounter* (starring Georg Ots) was a failure, its undoing was the obstinate desire to be entertaining, which resulted in over-emphasizing the singer's part and showing off Tallinn, whereas the theme itself – fight against indifference – was left in the shadow.

**IF YOU FAIL –
GO ON**

At the initial stage of its existence the feature film lagged behind the stormy progress of life. This was a period full of complications and worry, caused by "growing-pains".

A real flash of light was *The Wanton Curves* (J. Kun and K. Kiisk, 1959), an ingenious, buoyant and captivating comedy, well directed and admirably played by talented actors. It was filmed for a widescreen. It does not boast of a pretentious plot (script by D. Normet and S. Stern); the stress is on humour, beautiful landscapes, motor races. Quite unexpectedly the film was a great success at home and abroad.

The world's first coloured feature film for the panoramic cinema, *Dangerous Curves*, was screened in 1961 on the basis of *The Wanton Curves*. This was a most significant event: up to that time, panorama films had been only documentaries and newsreels. The technically and artistically good film *Dangerous Curves* attracted considerable attention, thanks to a new system of producing visual effects in scenes of everyday life and to the stereophonic sound that created an illusion of reality. On March 8, 1962, the French film critic Marcel Martin wrote in the magazine of literature and art "Les Lettres Françaises": "Dangerous Curves is a splendid comedy where sequences, emphasized by the advantages of the treble screen, are skilfully linked with fascinating love affairs." The film brought recognition to Estonian film art as well as to the actors T. Luik (in the part of the twin sisters), R. Aren, E. Kivi, A. Eskola and others.

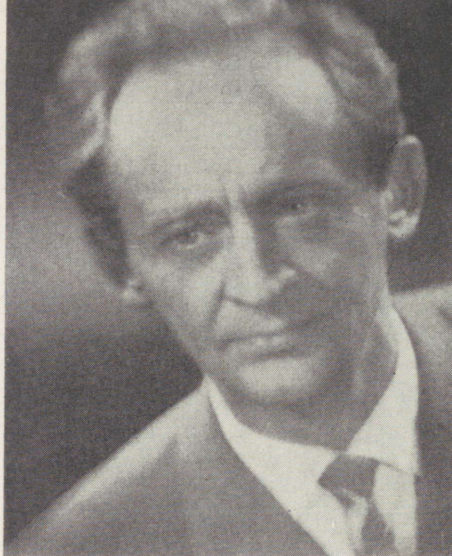
**IF YOU
SUCCEED –
GO ON**

24

The year 1961 was a year of joyous events: the period of testing the preparedness of Estonian artistic cinematography was over, it was time to reap the harvest. In spite of many shortcomings the previous years had, nevertheless, laid the foundation for future success and forged experience. Inconsistency was replaced

Scenes from "Ice-Drift". In the photo below Hugo Laur, one of the oldest and most merited film actors of Estonia.





The wide range of characters personified by Jüri Järvet is enviable.

The pastor (Heino Mandri) can give no consolation to the Heathen (Elmar Salulaht), either in the matters of salvation or justice on earth ("The New Heathen of Põrgupõhja").

BEGINNING A NEW CHAPTER

26

by a steady rising curve of progress; the new films were up-to-date and teeming with problems. Young people occupied the key positions, and the creative pulse of "Tallinnfilm" quickened. The majority are talented, promising young directors and cameramen with a sound cinematic training, graduates from the Cinematography Institute of the Soviet Union. Characteristic of these workers is a definitely modern approach to life and its problems and a feeling of responsibility to themselves and the cinema-goer. Thanks to them the problem of screenplays is nearing solution — a firm co-operation with writers has been established. However, the success of "Tallinnfilm" is mainly due to the new quality of directing. The key-stones of the foundation were laid by the young K. Kiisk, J. Müür, V. Käsper, who focussed their attention on the interpretation of social problems through a search for new means of artistic expression and by expanding the inner world. The process of maturing was heralded by the film *Men from the Same Village*, and confirmed by the film *Ice-Drift*.

Men from the Same Village (script by A. and V. Beekman, staged by J. Müür, directed by G. Kromanov, photographed by H. Rehe and J. Garshnek) brought two new names

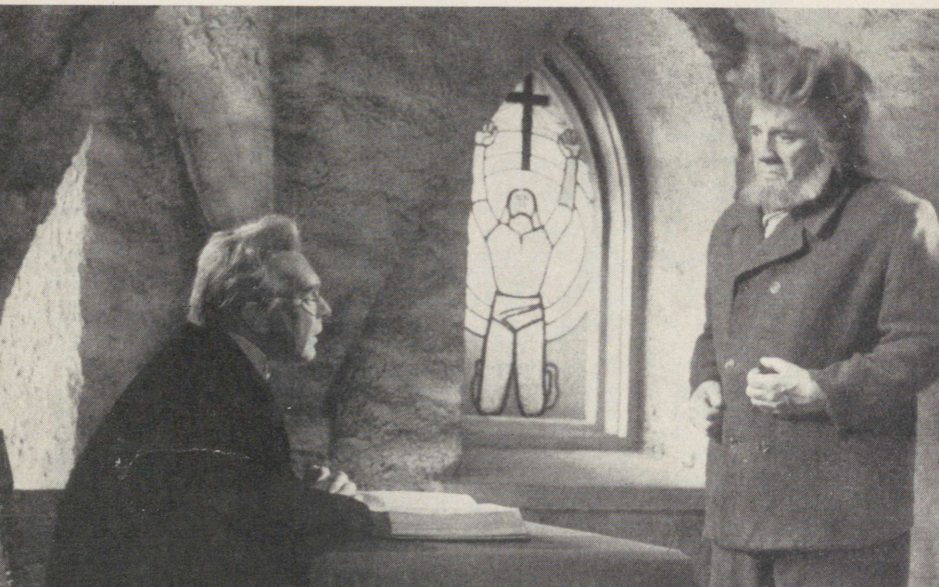
into Estonian cinematography: Müür and Garshnek. The hero of the film is a life-true figure.

Five Estonian fishermen are driven to the Finnish coast by a storm. Here they are given shelter, but a chance to betray their native country is also offered them by a "man from the same village" – an emigrant. It is a film about the working people's solidarity and high morale, depicting the fate and characters of these men from the same village.

Jüri Müür's work is emotional, laconical but expressive, psychological and true to life, as well as intense, highly figurative and yet not long-winded. Although the film is not quite free from illustrativeness, it is a step forward along the new road taken by the Estonian feature film.

**NEW
TRENDS**

Ice-Drift (script by A. Hint and A. Borshchakovski, directed by K. Kiisk, photography by A. Mockus) won high appraisal. Figuratively speaking, it broke the ice in our film world. It proceeds from the conviction that the greatness and significance of an event is not always determined by its dimensions in space, but by its profoundness and idea content. Ice-Drift is a film



**TYPICALLY
ESTONIAN**

about the Great Patriotic War, but without battles or guns. It is the story of what took place on the borderland of the war, life on a Nazi-occupied island, a stony crumb of land in the sea, where only two families live. Even here a war is waged, a war in the minds and concepts of the people. Two essential ideas resound in the film: first that war means misery for the people, and secondly that passiveness must be condemned.

Kaljo Kiisk initiated the trend to express historical events wholly through emotional experiences, through the changes that take place in people's minds, caused by the course of events. Especially interesting in this respect is the evolution that one of the main characters in *Ice-Drift* undergoes: from a by-stander he becomes a man of action (Laas – H. Laur). *Ice-Drift* is a popular drama, simple in texture. It is very interesting and typically Estonian, which can be observed in the characters and psychology of the people, in their way of life, especially in K. Karm's representation of Jögel. The fact that the film ranks high among the best works of Estonian film art is in part due to the skill of the guest-cameraman, the Lithuanian Algimantas Mockus: his portraits and his shots of the sea are exceptionally good.

The trend to present a war theme through psychology is continued in the most original and ingenious short film *From Night till Morning*. The chief character is faced with the problem, whether to stand aloof or whether to hide a runaway prisoner of war. In the short period between night and morning the people are put to a test. They experience a whole scale of emotions, ranging from fear to new moral convictions. The film was demonstrated all over the Soviet Union and warmly welcomed everywhere, in spite of the fact that it was made by debutants: for it was cameraman Mikhail Dorovatovsky's first attempt at shooting a feature film, and Viiu Härm, in the leading role, was filmed for the first time, and it happened to be the diploma work of Leida Laius, the director.

One more film was released in 1962 – *Under the Same Roof* (skilfully photographed by M. Dorovatovsky) adapted for the screen from H. Leberecht's short story of the same name. It is an interesting and well-made psychological film. Through the medium of a clash of characters, the problems of a collective farm are analysed. One merit of the film is the superb acting. Thanks to M. Dorovatovsky's masterly camera work, the picture is rich in detail, it is matter-of-fact and true to life.

**MATTER-
OF-FACT,
TRUE TO
LIFE**

28

The year 1963 began with the film *Footprints* made by the team A. Saar, K. Kiisk, M. Dorovatovsky. *Footprints* is a screen meditation on the vicissitudes of life in the post-war years, on "the footprints a man should leave on the sands



Another dreary day is dawning at the poverty-stricken home of the Prillups (from the film "The Milkman of Mäeküla", with Elle Eha and Jüri Järvet in the leading roles).

of time", on the necessity of always taking one's stand in the front ranks of life, and searching for the truth unswervingly. For its wealth of problems *Footprints* has no par on the Estonian screen. It is a film about communists who try to help the people to establish new relationships with the land and with each other, a film about the struggle between two philosophies of life. The leading character of *Footprints* is a young Party man, Heino Raagen, whose development, activities and attitude to life are analysed. In contravention of his father's indefinite and toothless humanism about loving one's fellow-men, he goes to the other extreme — he falls into the error of distrusting people.

**LEADING
ACTORS
BECOME
FILM STARS**

In the team of excellent actors, such as H. Laur, J. Järvet, M. Klooren and R. Aren, K. Karm stands out as a most memorable character of Estonian cinematography. The actor represents Jaak

Tambu as a rather narrow-minded, yet honest middle peasant, deeply concerned about land, who finally breaks down the barriers in his soul.

The closing episodes of the film are somewhat melodramatic, which seems to be one of the current "sins" of Estonian films – the inability to wind up effectively at the right moment.

The same year witnessed the completion of an anti-war film letter – *The Pink Hat*, by the young director V. Käsper; and the comedy *Bicycle Tamers*, casting several famous film stars of Moscow, Riga and Leningrad, side by side with H. Laur, R. Aren and others. The action of the film unrolls on the background of a big cycle race event.

In 1964 the crowning achievement was *The New Heathen of Põrgupõhja*, which may be considered as a graduation test piece. This big event cast into the shade the film "0-3", which was basically a love story involving the work and professional ethics of some doctors at a first aid station.

The producer of *The New Heathen of Põrgupõhja* is J. Müür (J. Müür and G. Kaleda collaborated in writing the screenplay). The filming was directed by G. Kromanov, photographer J. Garshnek. The film has a strong dramatical foundation: it is based on a deep allegorical novel which stands astride in reality and unreality, a classic of Estonian literature, written by A. H. Tammsaare. Though it is built up on the theme of the well-known folktale about Old Heathen and Cunning

**FROM
LITERARY
CLASSICS
TO FEATURE
FILMS**

Rein Raamat has designed the stage sets of a number of Estonian films.

The beginning of the intrigue in "What Happened to Andres Lapeteus?" – the hero's wife (Ada Lundver) appeals strongly to her husband's best friend, Haavik (Rein Aren).





Ants, the New Heathen turns out to be a brilliant satire on bourgeois society. It is a superb social generalization: Is it possible for a mortal to find his way to bliss? The New Heathen decides to try it out himself by way of experiment and settles down to live on the Earth for a time. In spite of endless toil he does not find bliss: the reasons are Cunning Ants and the existing social system. J. Müür has penetrated to the very core of the literary work: we see unfolding on the screen the realistic life story of a poor peasant in bourgeois Estonia. (The allegory is only in the prologue, customary for Estonian films, with J. Järvet's wonderful representation of St. Peter.) The film has a primeval, many-featured, popular and calm manner in the true Tammsaare spirit. The characters reveal features common to all mankind. Interesting details have been used to convey the writer's way of thinking, his manner of saying and seeing things, his seemingly un-filmlike, philosophical style of narration.

Two actors stand out in the film: E. Salulaht in the role of Jürka, the New Heathen, is a most original actor. He is at his best in the dramatic scenes. A. Eskola in the role of Cunning Ants is splendid throughout, his superb gestures and mimicry draw special attention. H. Mandri played the role of the Pastor, one of the best supporting roles created in Estonian films.

**ACTORS
AND ART
DIRECTORS
AT THEIR
BEST**

When speaking of such films as *The New Heathen of Põrgupõhja* the art director's contribution should not be underestimated. Rein Raamat has designed many Estonian films. Besides puppet films, he was the artist of *In Rain and Sunshine, Under the Same Roof, From Night till Morning*, and later *The Milkman of Mäeküla*. He is both imaginative and original as an artist. The ethnographical and architectural side of the film *The New Heathen* is resolved in a pure style, revealing the artist's profound knowledge of the epoch.

The New Heathen of Põrgupõhja is essentially a national film, a remarkable screen version of a great literary classic.

**A LANDLORD
AND A
LANDLESS
PEASANT**

The same can be said about *The Milkman of Mäeküla* (authors of the screenplay – V. Panso, L. Laius and M. Dorovatovsky), which was released in 1965 to mark the centenary of Eduard Vilde's birth. On the screen we can see the real Vilde and his epoch, with a captivating plot and a tragic ending.

The film analyses social relations and conflicts through a psychological prism. The theme is an economic-ethical problem related to the onset of capitalism in the Estonian village, when money became the unit of measure for all values. The landlord (played by A. Lauter) offers the hopelessly poor peasant Prillup (whose mental perplexities from exultation to despair get a masterly rendering in J. Järvet's acting) the only chance of his life to get rich. All he has to do is to "sell" his wife. The third point of the triangle, Mari, is played by E. Eha, who made her debut in this film. With fresh youthful impulsiveness and a most sincere manner of acting, she creates the contradictory character of Prillup's young wife Mari.

In a film like *The Milkman of Mäeküla* the spirit of the age must be felt, and M. Dorovatovsky has succeeded in fixing subtly and with good taste the historical background of the plot and life-true portraits of the characters.

**FIRST
ESTONIAN
WOMAN TO
DIRECT
FEATURE
FILMS**

Leida Laius is the first Estonian woman director of feature films. Her films are remarkable for the skill she has achieved in sketching the characters, and a rather documentary style of treatment. Besides, she has acquired an astonishing ability to produce acute dramatic moments, while on the whole a lyrical-poetical atmosphere is created.

The above-mentioned two films prove that the highlights of the Estonian cinematography grew out of the ageless classics of our literary heritage. Nor has the present been neglected. *We Were Eighteen Years Old* (1965, by A. Saar, K. Kiisk, J. Garshnek), depicts contemporary life. It is an artistic picture of the events of 1940, and the growing from youth to manhood.

A seemingly peaceful atmosphere at the school of a small town, the gang spirit of youth, the romantic vows "till death do us part". And then a crossroads is reached, and a parting of ways on ideological grounds. On whose side am I? Everybody seeks the truth, each in his own way. Deskmates join opposite camps; a schoolmate becomes the murderer of a schoolmate. "Class struggle" is no longer a mere word on the page of a book: it is life itself. The standpoints of the working-class become manifest. The film is the story of the development of two young people and their love, on a background of the class struggle on a wide front. Although one of the young people – cheerful Virve (played by M. Hellaste) perishes just when she has come to understand

A scene from the film "What Happened to Andres Lapeteus?". Another gay party, arranged by the hero's wife, has begun.





It is getting clearer and clearer to Andres Lapeteus (Einari Koppel) that both a modern home and a fashionable wife (Ada Lundver) are alien to his heart, but . . .

SCHOOL- MATES AND CLASS STRUGGLE

a new truth, still the film has an optimistic undercurrent. The other roles in the film are played by E. Hermaküla, H. Laur, K. Karm, A. Eskola and some others. There are some excellent shots of a town at night in the film and skilful use is made of documentary sequences.

This film was another of Kaljo Kiisk's successes. He is, by the way, the Chairman of the Union of Film Workers of the Estonian SSR and for over ten years has worked as a film director of "Tallinnfilm". During this period he was the second cameraman for *Yachts at Sea* and *The Turning Point*, had a hand in the making of *The Wanton Curves* and *The Dangerous Curves*. Besides, he has directed three films independently. The films he made in collaboration with other producers helped him "to find himself" in art and to accumulate

34 experience. The results are evident now. Kaljo Kiisk is a past-master of his art, level-headed and logical. He makes comparatively little use of cutting, preferring long shots and a calm rhythm. K. Kiisk knows how to work with actors and he relies on

**THE REALM
OF THE
HEAVENLY
BODIES**

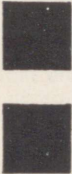
their skill. His films are characterized by a philosophical atmosphere, with the idea well expressed, and strong civic pathos. Now a few words about "Tallinnfilm's" brand new films. At the time of writing these lines, three feature films are in the making. *Supernova* was directed by V. Käsper, the cameraman was H. Rehe. The film is about astronomers (featuring A. Eskola, E. Kerge and others). The central theme is the development of a young scientist, his straining towards his own "star".

Supernova was Veljo Käsper's debut in feature films after his graduation from the Institute of Cinematography of the Soviet Union (his earlier works include *Let Our Songs Soar*, *The Pink Hat* and *Ice-Drift*, where he was second cameraman). The film is his first major work, but it lacks something in psychological profundity.

The screening of *The Case of Andres Lapeteus* (P. Kuusberg, G. Kromanov, M. Dorovatovsky) is going on at the time of writing these lines. It is bound to be a big event in our film world. The film is based on one of the best dramatic works of modern literature. The plot revolves around a car crash and the breaking up of a marriage. As a matter of fact, the motor accident reflects a life drama, a clash of ideas and attitudes towards life. The unravelling of a tangle of human relations turns into a veritable judgement on vices and virtues. One excursion into the past follows another, each scene confirms or overthrows the former idea, until the chain of events closes in a circuit. The characters and their fates are disclosed in detail, heated controversies arise. The chief defendant is Andres Lapeteus, a man of strong character, who has run on the rocks of self-seeking. The film cast includes E. Koppel, A. Eskola, R. Aren, K. Kiisk and a number of other good actors. The strong points of the film are the concentration of everything around the main problem and a wealth of philosophically and publicistically devised details.

Letters from the Village of the Benighted, by Lenin Prize Laureate Juhan Smuul, will be screened by J. Müür, who has already made a name in the film world. The film is made up of short screen stories about everyday life at a seaside-collective farm, meaningful and emotional pictures, full of movement, feelings and thoughts. There are serious, troubled reflections and memories, dramatic situations and the struggle against survivals of the past. And there is humour too – fun spiced with pepper is a part of Smuul's nature.

35 Mention should be made of such brand-new masterpieces of the studio as R. Kasesalu's popular science film *Black and White* devoted to Estonian graphic art and artists; E. Tuganov's puppet film *The Pig-headed Plants* for 1966 envisage the release of such films as *The Girl in Black*, *The*



So far Mare Hellaste has acted in one role only, but she was a great success.



Burning Ferryboat, Men in Soldiers' Uniforms, and V. Anderson's two film reportings devoted to high school graduates. It is understood that A. H. Tammsaare's monumental novel Truth and Right will also be screened in the near future.

* * *

**FILMO-
GRAPHIES
MAKE POOR
SUBSTITUTES**

We have made a short excursion into the past of Estonian cinematography. Naturally, a better idea of what it is like would be obtained by seeing the films themselves: a filmography merely conveys the general lines and tendencies of development and briefly outlines the contents and the artistic-ideological side of a film.

The Soviet period of Estonian cinematography is remarkable for the quantity of films that have been made, and also for their idea-content. It gave rise to a truly national film art in the Republic. The victory of socialist ideas gave the film makers new conditions of work and new possibilities, a new content and new subjects for their films. Estonian cinematography became many-sided and vital, thanks to the Republic's joining the family of the Soviet peoples. And speaking of "Tallinnfilm" today, we must consider it an integral part of the general development of Soviet film art.

36

Socialism extricated the Estonian film from its narrow national limitations and self-centeredness. Practically the whole popula-

tion of Estonia are cinema-goers. By the way, Estonian film-viewers exceed the population of the Republic twenty times. That recognition has been accorded to our films was mentioned above. Numerous prizes and diplomas have been received from the yearly joint film festivals, where the Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, and latterly also the Byelorussian and Moldavian Republics participate. All genres have fetched prizes for "Tallinnfilm" on the review-competitions: newsreels, documentaries and popular science films are continually among the first. *Ice-Drift* and *The New Heathen of Põrgupõhja* were the first feature films to bring fame.

**NO LESS
THAN 18
SHOWS
A YEAR**

That "Tallinnfilm" and the cinema-goer have found each other is reflected in film statistics. Estonia today is a real film republic. As compared to the bourgeois period, when a person went to



Elle Eha is one of the most gifted cinema and theatre actresses of the younger generation.

the cinema 4–5 times a year on the average, we can now say that one of the stimulators of film art – the activity of the cinemagoer – has risen abruptly. In Soviet Estonia every inhabitant goes to a film show 18 times a year. Such a figure is unknown in any capitalist country; it is also the highest in the Soviet Union. The source of this "cinema fever" is the high standard of living and cultural level of the population, also the national character of our film art, the improvement in quality, and a dense network of cinemas. Bourgeois Estonia could boast of no more than 72 stationary cinema theatres and one itinerant cinema in the country; now there are 518 cinema instalments, plus 873 sets belonging to various institutions and schools. The network of cinemas in the countryside comprises a total of 314 itinerant and stationary cinemas. In every settlement 2–4 shows are given a week. More and more cinemas are being built (wide-screen cinemas alone number 66 now). The biggest of them is the panoramic cinema "Kosmos" in Tallinn, which can seat 1015 people.

FUTURE PROSPECTS

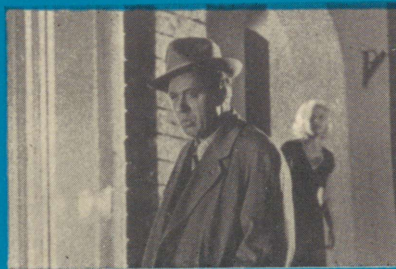
"Tallinnfilm", too, has undergone a considerable quantitative development. Now it is a kind of a combine with over 300 workers (among whom 11 are film directors and 17 cameramen). The Republic's film industry stands on a firm foundation. A solid material basis, up-to-date equipment and good specialists guarantee future development (4–5 feature films a year will be screened soon, instead of the present 2–3). The qualitative side of Estonian film art is characterized by a steady rise of the ideological and artistic level, a striving to widen the range of genres and subjects, and an intensive seeking for new means of expression.

A FAIR BEGINNING

It is hard to say which is the best Estonian film. But one thing is certain: "Tallinnfilm" can already boast of achievements that rank as passable works of art. Of course, it would be excessive optimism and provincial patriotism to say that Estonian cinematography has produced unexcelled masterpieces. That would be asking too much, as "Tallinnfilm" is one of the youngest studios in the Soviet Union. As regards the content of Estonian films, no serious claims can be made; however, there are still shortcomings in the cutting and editing and in the unity of the various components, while in some cases the planes and possibilities of the conflict are not all presented. There is a shortage of film actors, as no actors have specialized in film acting. Nevertheless, most important is the fact that Estonian film art has found its feet and is advancing steadily with a firm stride. "Growing pains" and other similar difficulties have been overcome and left behind. It must be remembered that Estonian cinematography is only starting on its way, but it already has individuality. Also, diversified styles of directing and treatment have been developed.

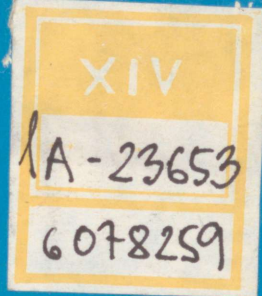
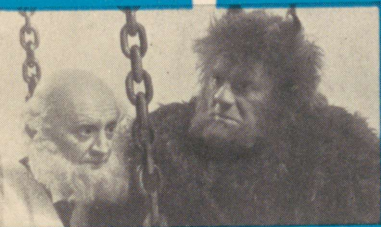


TEN ASPECTS
OF ESTONIAN
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ASPECTS OF ESTONIAN LIFE

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