



Lincoln Film Society

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Saturday May 19th 2018

The Other Side of Hope (12a)

dir: **Aki Kaurismäki**

Starring: **Sherwen Ali, Sakari Kuosmanen**

Sponsor: **LFS member**

This review contains plot details. It is reproduced with the kind permission of Sight and Sound magazine

Synopsis: Finland, the present. Syrian refugee Khaled Ali arrives as a stowaway and requests asylum at a police station. He meets an Iraqi refugee Mazdak. He reveals he is looking for his sister and is refused asylum. Elsewhere, Wikström, a salesman, decides on a radical change to his life. He quits his job and buys a restaurant. Later, he finds Ali who has been beaten up, and takes him in. Wikström tries to rebrand the restaurant and helps Ali to get new papers. Ali receives news of his sister. Wikström helps her get into Finland and she applies for asylum too. When Ali goes to the police station to support her, he is attacked by Neo-nazis and left seriously injured.

Touchingly dedicated to the late film polymath Peter von Bagh, Aki Kaurismäki's comedy picks up where *Le Havre* (shown by LFS) left off: it uses another of his characteristic fairy tale plots to tackle intractable social-political problems. The focus this time is on a Syrian refugee from the bombing of Aleppo who fetches up in Finland in search of the only other surviving member of his family, his sister. Another of Kaurismäki's seemingly downtrodden but entrepreneurial Finns comes to his aid, helping him evade the polite inhumanity of government bureaucracy and to recover from a racist attack. But, as often in Kaurismäki's films, kindness is not quite enough to Save the Day. Kaurismäki has said that this will be his last film, and he certainly seems to have painted himself into a corner. Short of a wholesale rethink of his belief that life is inherently unjust, there is no obvious way forward. The Best Director prize he won in Berlin in 2017 might well have been a lifetime achievement award, because *The Other Side of Hope* is essentially more of the same.

In truth, Kaurismäki's well tried approach doesn't seem quite adequate to deal with the catastrophic realities of Europe's current problems with refugees and economic migrants. His first protagonist Khaled Ali tells the business-like woman at the Immigration Service Office why and how he came to Finland - after losing most of his family to a bomb, his route took him through Turkey, Greece and Serbia and including a stint in jail in Hungary and a mugging in Gdansk - but his all too plausible history meshes rather awkwardly with what happens to him next. Finland offers him more nightmarish experiences: he's about to be deported back to Turkey when snobbish, leather-jacketed goons from the self-styled "Liberation Army Finland" threatened to burn him alive.

It's at that point that he acquires a fairy godmother in the person of the second protagonist Waldemar Wikström, a middle-aged Finn who has left a loveless marriage, quit working as a travelling salesman, won a small fortune at the card tables and bought a Z-grade diner with the proceeds. Ignoring the law at every turn, Waldemar solves most of Khaled's problems - by giving him a place to sleep and a job, buying him a fake ID, expediting the smuggling of his long-lost sister into the country - which doesn't so much cancel out the cruelties the young man has suffered as risk reducing them to the same level of comic fantasy. The general idea is that one of Kaurismäki's beautiful losers tries to write some real-world wrong; real pain and misfortune come up hard against the absurdism of 'Akiworld', this time without *Le Havre's* wish-fulfillment happy ending.

The tale is told in Kaurismäki's patented deadpan style, with grungy retro settings, incongruous compositions (some involving a Jimi Hendrix poster), a generous sampling of Finnish rockabilly performances and so on. In this world a large, spiky cactus represents the end of a marriage, and the crummy



diner (with a Kaurismäki dog in the kitchen) is rebranded overnight as a sushi bar and a curry house. But the best gag, as Kaurismäki told Michael Brooke five years ago, is the notion that any refugee would choose Finland as his new home.

Credits

Khaled Ali	Sherwan Haji
Waldemar Wikström	Sakari Kuosmanen
Vaimo	Kaija Pakarinen
Miriam	Niroz Haji
Nyrhinen	Janne Hyytiäinen
Calamnius	Ilkku Koivula
Mirja	Nuppu Koivu
Mazdak	Simon Hussein Al-Bazoon
Director	Aki Kaurismäki
Screenplay	Aki Kaurismäki
Director of Photography	Timo Salminen
Editor	Samu Heikkilä
Production Design	Villa Grönroos, Keiki Häkkinen, Markku Pätilä
Sound	Tero Malmberg
Costumes	Tina Kaukanen

Finland/Germany 2017.
100 mins

Another View

This might just be the most drolly poetic response to what has been dubbed the "refugee crisis" by journalists and political wags, and it comes as little surprise that Finland's sardonic sage, Aki Kaurismäki, is the man behind the tiller. *The Other Side of Hope* traces the intersecting lives of two men, one a Syrian migrant named Khalid (Sherwan Haji) seeking temporary asylum in Helsinki, and the other an impassive, older Finnish gentleman named Wikström (Sakari Kuosmanen) who ditches his alcoholic wife to open a low-rent bar-restaurant.

And though it's never articulated with the kind lapel-shaking rage that most filmmakers dealing with this subject might lean on, the film lets out a silent scream during a time of unprecedented geopolitical anxiety, where governments are failing to demonstrate basic empathy towards those most in need. But most of all it's just a beautiful celebration of cultural diversity, from the food we eat to the music we listen to. One of its messages is, never let a Finn try and make you sushi.

From the fat, bright yellow type used in the opening credits, this is unmistakably a film by Kaurismäki. The sad-eyed Khalid emerges from a coal barge, literally having stowed away in the giant coal

stores. It initially appears as an absurd and uncomfortable way to travel, but the more of the hero's sad story that comes to light, the more it becomes shockingly evident that he has probably had to endure much worse. He is on a search for his sister, who was snatched away from him during one of their perilous European border crossings. His life is dedicated to reconnecting with her.

While Khalid represents the displaced migrant humbly searching for safety in foreign climes, Wikström is the well-heeled dreamer who thinks nothing of taking direct action (and a fair amount of risk) when it comes to getting a job done. It would be hard to describe him as a kind person, as his various acts of altruism come as almost logical reactions to each new situation. He extends no charity to anyone, but he works to improve the lives of those around him, knowing that it will stoke his own sense of self worth.

In the way the actors intone lines with a stone face, or seldom display their feelings through body language, Kaurismäki assures that the human body is so expressive (and the camera so sensitive) that empathy will invisibly radiate from the faces of the good eggs. The film is a hymn to this unseen, common sense goodness which everyone has deep inside themselves.

Formally, the film is trimmed of all unnecessary flab, and Kaurismäki, with his long-time partner in cinematographic crime, Timo Salminen, uses every shot to capture a process. Characters are locked tightly within the frame, especially for the super-snug two shots. On the rare occasion that the camera moves a little further away from the subject, the effect is one of subtle transcendence, such as when Wikström sits alone in his restaurant, drinking whiskey as a giant shaft of dusty light scythes through the image.

Aside from its trenchant political underpinnings, this is also a gorgeous ode to the power of cinema itself, with various pronounced nods to Jacques Tati, Yasujiro Ozu, Robert Bresson, silent comedy, 1940s noir and all manner of cinephile flotsam and jetsam. Old bushy geezers pile on the soundtrack with soulful rockabilly toe-tappers, and there's an aside in which Wikström decides to embrace modern trends and open a sushi restaurant that might be the director's single funniest sequence ever. In fact, the whole thing is a whimsical joy from start to finish, and Kaurismäki now proves to be an old hand when it comes to shifting on a dime between scenes of madness and melancholia.

David Jenkins; Little White Lies

Programme News

The provisional list of films for our 2018-19 is below

A Fantastic Woman (Chile 2017)	On Body and Soul (Hungary 2017)
Beast (UK, 2017)	Redoutable (France 2017)
Custody (France 2017)	Summer 1993 (Spain 2017)
Faces, Places (France 2017)	The Breadwinner (Ireland 2017)
Goodbye Berlin (Germany 2016)	The Florida Project (USA 2017)
Good Time (USA 2017)	The Rider (USA 2017)
Happy End (France 2017)	The Wages of Fear (France 1953 - classic film)
In the Fade (Germany 2017)	The Wound (S.Africa 2017)
Jeune Femme (France 2017)	Thelma (Norway 2017)
Kedi (Turkey 2016)	Under the Tree (Iceland 2017)
Last Flag Flying (USA 2017)	The Draughtsman's Contract (UK 1982) - Archive classic
L'Amant Double (France 2017)	
Mountains May Depart (China 2015)	

3 new films, released over the coming months, will be added to the programme in November, February and April. Next season will have 27 films in total. We aim to launch the programme in July (it will be available from The Venue, Central Library and many other city-centre locations) and begin the season on September 7th.

To help with commemorations of the RAF centenary this year, we are joining with The Venue to present 2 films on June 8 & 9. Details are below

Dark Blue World (Czech Republic 2001. Cert 12. 110 mins. Showing Friday, June 8th, 7.30pm)

2 Czech pilots escape from their homeland after the Nazis invade and

occupy it and make it to Britain, where they join the RAF to fight in the Battle of Britain. They face the dangers of combat, and the no less demanding challenge of how to fit into British society. With some fine action sequences, moments of humour and even a touch of romance, the film pays tribute to the many pilots from overseas who served with distinction during World War 2

A Matter of Life and Death (UK 1946. 100 mins. Cert U. Showing Saturday June 9th, 2.30pm)

David Niven stars as a bomber pilot returning from a raid in a badly damaged Lancaster. About to crash, he contacts radio operator June (Kim Hunter), before bailing out without a parachute. He should by rights be killed - but he survives, and the film then explores whether he has the right to live or die. Made in 1946 by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, (arguably British cinema's finest directors), this is not just an engrossing drama but is recognised as one of the most innovative British films of all time.

Entry is free but a collection will be taken at each film on behalf of the International Bomber Command Centre)

We're joining with The Venue too for a short film festival from July 6-9. The focus is on children as makers of, performers in and the audience for cinema. Planned screenings include

- **The Silent Child** (Oscar-winning live-action short film this year)
- **A Story of Children and Film** (Mark Cousins' documentary about the role children play in cinema)
- **The Eagle Huntress** (a spectacular documentary from Mongolia as a 14-year old girl tries to enter the traditionally all-male preserve of eagle hunting)
- **My Life as a Courgette** (acclaimed animation telling a story of disadvantaged children finding hope, strength and love when they meet in a foster home.)
- **The Breadwinner** (beautifully-made story about a young girl which fuses traditional and modern tales from Afghanistan)
- **The Kid**: Charlie Chaplin's classic silent)
- **E.T.** - Steven Spielberg's classic

The event also showcases the work of Lincolnshire school-children and young people who are working with the BFI Cinemathèque and Academy programmes.

Full details are expected to be available next month.

Postscript

This has been another highly successful season for the Society. We expect to reach over 4,000 attendances to all films, for the second year running. The most popular screenings were

<u>Attendances</u>	<u>Audience Reaction Scores</u>
A Man Called Ove (2016)	A Man Called Ove (93%)
Frantz (196)	Land of Mine (90%)
A Date for Mad Mary (192)	The Olive Tree (88%)

The Committee would like to thank everyone in our audience - members and guests - who have supported us during the season. We hope you enjoyed the films we presented, that you have a great summer and we see you at the 2 events planned before we return in September.