



# *Mother of Mine*

*(Äideistä Parhain)*

A film by Klaus Härö

*"Finnish helmer Klaus Haro comes up with an emotionally involving tale that could also resonate beyond the region in specialty situations. Pic is Finland's official submission for the Oscars' foreign film category." - Variety*



Finland/Sweden/2005 /In Finnish and Swedish/111 min.  
35 mm / 1:2.35 / Color / Dolby Digital

Distributor Contact: Meghan Wurtz  
Film Movement Series

109 W. 27<sup>th</sup> St., Suite 9B, New York, NY 10001

Tel: 212-941-7744 ext. 201 Fax: 212-941-7812 [meghan@filmmovement.com](mailto:meghan@filmmovement.com)

Synopsis

During World War II, more than 70,000 Finnish children were evacuated to neutral Sweden to avoid the conflict. "Mother of Mine," the latest from the award-winning Klaus Haro ("Elina"), tackles that painful patch of history in a tale of 9-year-old Eero, a child who increasingly feels abandoned by his biological Finnish mother and yet not attached to his Swedish surrogate mom. When he is returned to Finland, his confusion intensifies.

## Long Synopsis

This is a story about a small boy who had two mothers and still had none. 1943 in a war-torn Finland 9-year-old Eero's father is killed at the front. Eero's mother makes a painful decision to send her only child to safety in neutral Sweden.

In Sweden, Eero's foster mother, Signe, welcomes him to her home but not to her heart. Eero doesn't speak any Swedish and feels unwelcome in his foster family while missing his mother terribly. All the long-awaited letters from his mother are addressed to Signe, not to him. One day Eero accidentally discovers a letter which he never was supposed to read.

During the Second World War over 70 000 war children were sent from Finland to Sweden, Denmark and Norway in the biggest evacuation of children ever experienced in the world. Mother of Mine, by award-winning director, Klaus Härö, is the first feature-length film ever made of the fate of an individual war child.

## FESTIVALS/AWARDS (EXCERPT)

WINNER - Audience Prize of the "Lübecker Nachrichten" and Baltic Film Prize for a Nordic Feature Film - *Lübeck Nordic Film Days 2005*

WINNER - Golden Pyramid, Best Director, Best Actress - *Cairo International Film Festival 2005*

WINNER - Satellite Award for Best Foreign Language Film - *Satellite Awards 2005*

WINNER - Audience Award - *Palm Springs International Film Festival 2006*

WINNER - Best Actress, Best Set Design and Best Cinematography - *Jussi Awards 2006* (Finland's Oscars)

WINNER - Jury Grand Prix in Free to Fly Series - *Giffoni Film Festival 2006*

WINNER - Crystal Heart - Heartland Film Festival Indianapolis 2006

WINNER - Jury Award for Best Actress - São Paulo Mostra Internacional de Cinema 2006

OFFICIAL SELECTION - NEW NORWEGIAN FILM FESTIVAL HAUGESUND 2005

OFFICIAL SELECTION - TORONTO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL 2005

OFFICIAL SELECTION - HELSINKI INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL LOVE & ANARCHY 2005

OFFICIAL SELECTION - TROMSØ INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL 2006

OFFICIAL SELECTION - FAJR INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL IRAN 2006

OFFICIAL SELECTION - PORTLAND (OR) INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL 2006

OFFICIAL SELECTION - DUBLIN INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL 2006

OFFICIAL SELECTION - EUROPA CINEMA - VIAREGGIO FILM FESTIVAL 2006

OFFICIAL SELECTION - SEATTLE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL 2006

OFFICIAL SELECTION - COPENHAGEN FILM FESTIVAL 2006

OFFICIAL SELECTION - RIO DE JANEIRO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL 2006

OFFICIAL SELECTION - MILWAUKEE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL 2006

OFFICIAL SELECTION - CAMERIMAGE FILM FESTIVAL ŁODZ, POLAND 2006

Nominated for two *Young Artist Awards* (Best International Family Feature Film and Best Performance in an International Feature Film - Leading Young Performer)

Finland's selection for Best Foreign Language Oscar

## CREW

Director	<b>Klaus Härö</b>
Screenwriter	<b>Jimmy Karlsson and Kirsi Vikman</b>
Producer	<b>Ilkka Matila</b>
Cinematography	<b>Jarkko T. Laine</b>
Art director	<b>Cian Bornebusch</b>
Editing	<b>Darek Hodor sfk</b>
Sound	<b>Kirka Sainio</b>
Music	<b>Tuomas Kantelinen</b>
Costumes	<b>Anna Svärdendahl</b>

## CAST

Eero	<b>Topi Majaniemi</b>
Kirsti, Eero's mother	<b>Marjaana Maijala</b>
Swedish mother, Signe	<b>Maria Lundqvist</b>
Swedish father, Hjalmar	<b>Michael Nyquist</b>
Eero as a grownup	<b>Esko Salminen</b>
Kirsti, old	<b>Aino-Maija Tikkanen</b>

## FROM THE DIRECTOR

*"For as long as I've lived and worked with films I have wanted to tell the story of war children and the exceptional phenomenon where the totally different histories of the Second World War in Finland and in Sweden converge. Naturally it's impossible to tell seventy thousand unique stories in one film. Through the fictive framework we can however capture something universal in the feelings of exclusion and rootlessness that we associate with the experiences of the war children. The themes are strongly relevant to any child who has been separated from his/her parents, to anyone for whom growing up has generally been hard due to the secrets they carry in their heart.*

*Mother of Mine is pure character drama. The main characters in the story are few, but they are, as such, all the more important for the narration of the film. As the title indicates, the film centers on a young Finnish boy's relationship to his two mothers. One brought him into the world and the other taught him to live in it. The question is: which one of them should be seen as Eero's real mother? Both mothers loved the same child and made some tough choices, with fateful consequences reaching far into his adult life. The story focuses on the principal character's lifelong battle with his suppressed feelings - in order to dispel his parents mistakes from his mind, Eero has to face them, and come to terms with himself and his two mothers.*

*The objective was to make an emotionally strong and visually appealing film on the fate of one individual war child. The contrast between the warring world and the experiences of a little boy is a compelling starting point for telling a touching story. The film, which is targeted to grown-up audiences, gives the viewers a chance to identify with feelings and thoughts through which they can see their own lives in the light of the prospect of conciliation and peace."*

director *Klaus Härö*

## Director Bio

Director Klaus Härö made his claim to fame with his debut film *Elina* (Näkymätön Elina, 2002). The film won over 30 Finnish and international film awards, and was Finland's Oscar nominee for 2003. *Mother of Mine* is Härö's second feature film. Born in 1971, Härö has directed documentary and short films, including the acclaimed documentary *Three Wishes* (Kolme toivetta, 2001), which told the story of three children suffering from cancer

## REVIEWS



Jan. 13, 2006

### **Mother of Mine**

By Sheri Linden

PALM SPRINGS -- Finland's evacuation of more than 70,000 children to Sweden, Denmark and Norway during World War II, the world's largest such undertaking, receives affecting treatment in "Mother of Mine," the official Finnish submission to the Academy Awards. This fictional story of one of the "war children" unfolds with fierce restraint under Klaus Haro's helm, and the film departs from most memory pieces about the war in its emphasis on the complex psychology of its characters, brought to vivid life by the strong cast.

After his father is killed on the Finnish-Russian front in 1943, 9-year-old Eero (newcomer Topi Majaniemi) reluctantly leaves his mother (Marjaana Maijala), joining a large transport of kids promised dolls and bikes in the haven of neutral Sweden. At a remote farm on the coast, he's taken in by a childless couple in their 40s, though Signe (the terrific Maria Lundqvist), still grieving and blaming herself for the drowning death of her daughter, refuses to let him into her heart. Their conflict flares up in angry words and occasional physical tussles but mostly plays out in resentful silence.

Determined not to be touched by the tumult of being uprooted, Eero develops an easy rapport with Signe's good-natured husband, Hjalmar (Michael Nyqvist), a former sailor whose "boots got stuck in this dirt" when he fell in love with her. Signe forces Hjalmar to confront the lingering pain of their loss, but soon she's caught up in a new drama, when Eero's mother asks Signe to keep the boy, even after the war. Offended by this "appeal to her conscience," Signe nonetheless softens toward Eero, and they withstand, just barely, a series of devastating emotional reversals.

The lifelong wounds from this tug of war become clear in the film's present-day black-and-white sequences, in which the middle-aged Eero (Esko Salminen) visits his mother (Aino-Maija Tikkanen), eager to talk about the war. The screenplay by Jimmy Karlsson and Kirsi Vikman, based on the novel by Heikki Hietamies, delivers sharp insights into the ways people use children to fill their needs.

The contrast between Finland's frigid birch forests and the open expanse of the Swedish coast, captured in Jarkko T. Laine's striking camerawork, is a key element of the film's quiet power, but composer Tuomas Kantelinen tugs too hard at heartstrings.



## Mother Of Mine

### *Aideista Parhain*

(Finland ) A Nordisk Film release of an MRP Matila Rohr Prods. production, in association with OmegaFilm, Film i Skane, with participation of YLE Coprods., YLE Fiction, SvT, Cinestar Prod., Digital Film Finland. (International sales: Nordisk Film Intl. Sales, Copenhagen.) Produced by Ilkka Matila. Co-producers, Lennart Duner, Peter Kroppenin, Ralf Ivarsson.

Directed by Klaus Haro. Screenplay, Jimmy Karlsson, Kirsi Vikman, from the novel by Heikki Hietamies.

By **GUNNAR REHLIN**

**The true story of how Finnish kids during WWII were transported to neutral Sweden to be safe from the conflict, "Mother of Mine" has all the right ingredients to become a big hit across Scandinavia. Finnish helmer Klaus Haro comes up with an emotionally involving tale that could also resonate beyond the region in specialty situations. Pic is Finland's official submission for the Oscars' foreign film category.**

More than 70,000 Finnish children were uprooted from their homes and sent to Sweden. For many, it was an adventure; for others, especially the very young, it was a tragedy. The latter returned to Finland after the war, not knowing their parents and speaking only Swedish.

Film starts in the present, as Eero (Esko Salminen), a Finn in his 60s, visits his aged mother, Kirsti (Aino-Maija Tikkanen). He tells her he's just been to Sweden for the funeral of a woman called Signe, and it's now time to have a proper talk about the war and what happened during and after Eero's stay in Sweden. The mother grudgingly agrees, and in long flashbacks Eero's story unspools.

After his father (Kari-Pekka Toivonen) was killed during the war, young Eero (Topi Majaniemi) was sent by his mother (Marjaana Maijala) to Sweden. The boy protests, but is transported along with hundreds of other children, ending up at a farm belonging to married couple Signe (Maria Lundqvist) and Hjalmar (Michael Nyqvist). Signe, who was expecting a girl, is initially hostile towards him, but Hjalmar is more welcoming.

Eero starts going to school, but is ridiculed by the other kids and desperately wants to return to Finland. Overhearing a conversation between Hjalmar and Signe, he realizes they once had a child who died.

Eero occasionally receives letters from his mother, and at Christmas she also calls him from Helsinki. When he hears the Finnish capital has been bombed by the Russians, he tries to sail home on a raft and almost drowns.

Soon after, Eero's mom writes that she's met a German officer and wants to go to live with him in Germany. Could Eero stay with Hjalmar and Signe forever? But as the audience knows from the beginning, it's not meant to be.

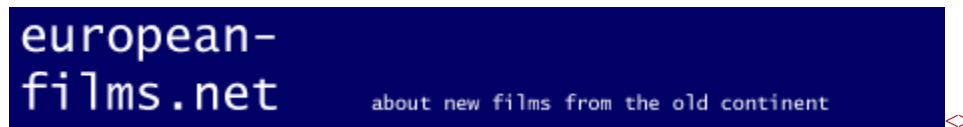
Pic has many similar themes to helmer Haro's first movie, "Elina," about a fatherless little Finnish girl whose teacher tried to force her to speak Swedish. But where "Elina" was an optimistic story about a feisty girl who fought back, "Mother of

Mine" is a tragedy. Eero is a victim, bereft of parental love -- most strikingly captured in the B&W modern-day scenes where he confronts his aged mother. Though sentimental, pic never feels manipulative.

As in "Elina," Haro's direction is slow and somewhat old-fashioned, with Jarkko T. Laine's widescreen lensing often contrasting the wide open landscapes of southern Sweden with the murky interiors of the farmhouse, where time seems to stand still. In some sequences, all natural sound is removed, with a melancholy piano tune used instead, to striking effect.

Majaniemi is a find as the young Eero, often letting just his eyes and face do the talking. As Hjalmar, Nyqvist (last seen in "As It Is in Heaven") is fine, as always. However, both are almost acted off the screen by Lundqvist, in the pivotal role of Signe. Mostly known for TV comedy, thesp proves herself here as a dramatic actress to be reckoned with.

Camera (B&W/color, widescreen), Jarkko T. Laine; editor, Darek Hodor; music, Tuomas Kantelinen; art director, Cian Bornebusch; costume designer, Anna Svardendahl; sound (Dolby Digital), Kirka Sainio. Reviewed at Haugesund Film Festival, Norway, Aug. 20, 2005. (Also in Toronto Film Festival -- Contemporary World Cinema.) Running time: 105 MIN.



**review: *Äideistä parhain* (Mother of Mine)**

Written by Boyd van Hoeij

Friday, 13 January 2006

Finland's entry in the foreign language Oscar race is *Äideistä parhain* (*Mother of Mine*), a film that reunites two genres dearly loved by the Oscar voters: films set during a World War (be it one or two; in this case the latter) and films with a child as the main protagonist. The fictional story of just one of the 70,000 Finnish war children who were placed with foster parents in neutral Sweden while the Finns fought the Russians, *Äideistä parhain* is unnecessarily bookended by contemporary scenes that diminish the power of its central section. The story's quiet force stems mainly from the unaffected performances of young Topi Majaniemi as the young protagonist Eero and Swedish veteran actress Maria Lundqvist, who plays Eero's unaccepting foster mother.

Aesthetically misty – the film looks like it has been shot with a permanently hazed over lens – the film's central theme is less nebulous; even the title explicitly refers to the mother-child relationship that is the crux of the story. The film's screenplay, written by Jimmy Karlsson and Kirsi Vikman and based on the Heikki Hietamies novel, offers a stripped down, almost emotionally detached central story set during the war which becomes heartfelt through the extraordinary work of the actors as directed by Klaus Härö. Lundqvist and newcomer Majaniemi both disappear in their characters the way Heath Ledger did earlier this year to staggering effect in *Brokeback Mountain*, another Oscar contender. Together with Michael Nyqvist, who plays Lundqvist's practical farmer husband, the actors deliver three reigned in yet emotionally raw performances that definitely strike a chord.

Where the screenplay falters is in its present tense, where an aged Eero is invited to Sweden for the funeral of his foster mother and he decides to ask his own mother about her motives for sending him off during the war. These scenes feel contrived and do not feel part of the narrative in the way for example *De Tweeling* (*Twin sisters*) blended past and present versions of the same characters and themes into a coherent whole. These scenes should have either been cut or expanded because what little is there fails to connect to the film's central theme of mother-son relationships in a meaningful way. *Äideistä parhain* thus has it in itself to score an Oscar nomination (and perhaps even a win) because it so clearly appeals to what the Academy likes. Its resemblance to best picture frontrunner *Brokeback Mountain* in terms of its powerful acting and its landscapes filmed in muted colours could only help it achieve this goal. With or without an Oscar however, Härö's film contains enough raw emotional truth in its middle section to sit through the bookends to get there.

## ABOUT FILM MOVEMENT

Film Movement is an innovative new film distribution company, created as a solution for millions of consumers across the nation whose access to outstanding film is limited by geography, lifestyle or lack of information. Film Movement has members in over 50 states and 1200 cities. Film Movement acquires award winning independent films from the world's top festivals, which they then release each month of the year to members on DVD through a subscription service, and theatrically through The Film Movement Series. Participating filmmakers are able to reach under-served film fans everywhere through Film Movement.

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- Scott Hamilton Kennedy's *OT: our town*
- Donovan Leitch & Rebecca Chaiklin's *The Party's Over*, starring Philip Seymour Hoffman
- Mina Shum's *Long Life, Happiness and Prosperity*, starring Sandra Oh
- Eric Khoo's *Be With Me*
- Ismael Ferroukhi's *Le Grand Voyage*
- Joseph Cedar's *Campfire*