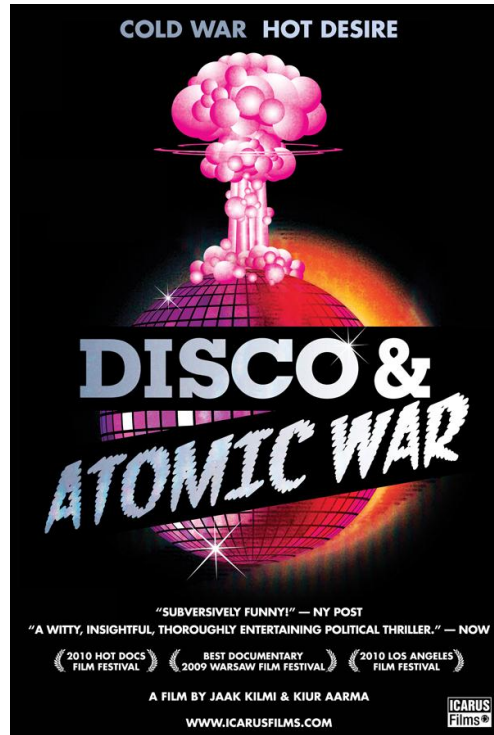


An Icarus Films Release

Disco and Atomic War



80 minutes. Unrated. 2009
In English, Estonian, Finnish, Russian with English Subtitles
Directed by Jaak Kilmi

Opens Nov. 12, 2010 in New York, Nov. 26, 2010 in Los Angeles followed by national release

Winner of Best Documentary Prize, Warsaw Film Festival 2009
Sheffield International Film Festival 2009
Hot Docs 2010
DOXA Film Festival 2010
Seattle International Film Festival 2010
Los Angeles Film Festival 2010

For stills: <http://icarusfilms.com/pressroom.html> Username: Icarus Password: Press

Press contact:

Sylvia Savadjian
Icarus Films
32 Court Street, 21st Floor
Brooklyn, NY 11201
(718) 488-8900
Sylvia@IcarusFilms.com
www.IcarusFilms.com

Synopsis

Winner of the Best Documentary prize at the Warsaw International Film Festival, this witty, charming, and provocative film recounts how in the mid 1980's, the nation of Estonia still lay firmly in the grip of the Soviet Union, and the repressive authorities controlled virtually all aspects of Estonian life. The totalitarian government's power was derived in no small part from their ability to censor cultural life and keep Western culture on the other side of the border. Rock and Roll was but a rumor and the only television shows on the air were dreary propaganda. But one day everything changed. Just a few miles across the border in Finland, a huge new television antenna was built that broadcast western signals in all directions--including directly into the heart of the Talinn, the capital of Estonia.

Filmmakers Jaak Kilmi and Kiur Aarma grew up in Talinn in the 80's, and in DISCO AND ATOMIC WAR they make use of wonderfully playful but credible recreations to set their true personal coming of age story against the backdrop of the rapid collapse of the Soviet government in Estonia. As illicit television antennas sprung up in Northern Estonia, rumors about the attempted murder of J.R. Ewing spread by word of mouth to the rural south, and the nation of Estonia was as gripped by the saga as the USA had ever been.

Teenagers went to their school dances and imitated the disco moves they saw on television, clothing and hairstyles began to change radically, and things would never be the same. The government controlled media scrambled to create western-style soap operas and disco-saturated television programming that vaguely reinforced communist values, but it was far too little, and much too late. The genie was out of the bottle, Estonians were now in the grip of American television, and they began to dream that one day, they too would spend their days working in skyscrapers and their nights drinking fine whiskey by the pool, alongside their robot car.



Filmmaker Bios

Jaak Kilmi- director

(born 1973) graduated from the Department of Culture of Tallinn Pedagogical University, majoring in directing. He has (co-) directed and produced a string of award-winning short films; a number of documentary films and two feature films. His films have received international recognition and have often been broadcasted abroad. Kilmi has acted as a member of the film commission of the Cultural Endowment of Estonia and the Estonian Film Board, and is a member of the Estonian Association of Film Journalists (the Estonian branch of FIPRESCI) since 1995. Since 2001 he's taught film directing at Estonian Art Academy and at the University of Tallinn.

Kiur Aarma- producer

(born 1975) graduated Tartu University, majoring in semiotics and cultural theory). He studied script-writing at BFM (Baltic Film and Media School) master class. Aarma has worked as host for several talk-shows 1997 - 2007. He is one of the founders of production company RUUT (Eetriüksus), in which he has written and produced numerous tv programs and several documentaries.

Credits

Story by.....Jaak Kilmi, Kiur Aarma
Director.....Jaak Kilmi
Camera.....Manfred Vainokivi, Kristjan Svirgsden, Asko Kase
Sound.....Olger Bernadt
Editor.....Lauri Laasik
Editing consultant.....Joonas Louhivuori
Music by.....Ardo Ran Varres
Graphic design.....Janek Murd
Photos by.....Jaak Kilmi, Vello Kilmi, Margus Johanson
Digital effects.....Rait Siska
Sound post.....Horret Kuus
Casting.....Margus Karu, Karin Karu
Set design.....Liisi Eesmaa, Helina Risti, Marju Lepp
Translations.....SDI Eesti
Public Relations.....Merit Kask, Lili Pilt
Consultant in the archives in Finland.....Taina West
Co-producers.....Aleksi Bardy, Annika Sucksdorff
Producer.....Kiur Aarma
Narration.....Kiur Aarma, Jaak Kilmi, Alo Kõrve, Jaan Tootsen, Liina Vahtrik, Eduard Toman

Cast:

Urve..... Gerda Viira
Jaak..... Oskar Vuks
Toomas..... Toomas Pool
Joosep..... Jaan-Joosep Puusaag
Young Nikolai..... Einar Kotka
Joosep's father..... Aleksandr Aug
Joosep's mother..... Birgit Veemaa
Toomas' mother..... Katrin Roosipuu

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An Interview with Director Jaak Kilmi by indieWIRE

“Disco and Atomic War” reveals the unusual, provocative, and very funny story of how “Dallas” and “Knight Rider” led to the fall of the Iron Curtain. A story of coming of age under Communism, the documentary cleverly and cogently argues that the influence of “soft power” - pop culture via illegally intercepted Finnish TV broadcasts of Western media - weakened the tenuous foundation of the Soviet system in Estonia, hastening the collapse of the Soviet Union.

iW: I'm curious about the Soviet attempts to counter-program Estonia against the “soft power” of the Western media/pop culture. Did they ever try to use humor or some other more subtle, subversive means to fight against the Western media?

JK: In Northern Estonia, the Soviet authorities didn't have a recipe on how to fight against the popularity of Finnish TV. Audiences didn't want to watch hardcore Soviet propaganda. In the mid-1980s, however, the Estonian TV programmers came up with a clever idea: they asked Moscow for millions of rubles to make propaganda in Estonia to fight the Finnish programs' popularity. They got millions from the government, but what they made was not propaganda at all! They simply made good, entertaining programs - no one in Estonia recognized them as propaganda, only Russia thought it was, so they got away with it. Of course, Russia provided their own propaganda programs, but Estonians knew to avoid them.

iW: Your film is often sardonically and even blackly humorous. Can you talk about how you found the right tone for telling this story?

JK: Yes, that tone is intentional. I have so many funny memories from these times. You know, my childhood in the Soviet Union was not terrible, it was very joyful. Life under the Soviet system was often funny, absurd really, especially for children. So in making the film, we felt we couldn't escape the inherent humor, and we didn't want to escape it, because everything was so absurd. The whole idea of this totalitarian system trying to fight against Western influence was so ridiculous. So I think this sardonic humor was present at the time, and it made sense to embrace it in the film.

iW: Speaking of children, can you tell us about your decision to incorporate the re-enacted scenes of childhood memories in the film? Are these re-enactments 100% true or have they been fictionalized to some extent?

JK: My producer/co-writer Kiur Aarma and I knew that we wanted to explore the memories of children who were around our age. We announced in newspapers and on TV our campaign to collect these memories of the Finnish TV broadcasts, and received about 40-50 emails. From these, we saw about 20 stories or motifs that we wanted to use in the film. We realized we could more effectively present them if we constructed characters. So they are constructed, but based on true recollections from these materials we received and our own stories.

For example, the part of the film where I write to my niece regularly about what happened in “Dallas” and “Who shot JR?” In real life, I promised I would write to her, but I never found the time. So I finally corrected that broken promise by writing to her in the film. She saw the premiere and was really happy - she told me, “At last, I get the letters you promised me!” So while I didn't actually write them, I'm sure someone wrote these kinds of letters at the time.

Another funny story from the film - where Estonian boys would talk into their electronic wristwatches as if they were communicating with the car from “Knight Rider?” Kiur and I invented that. But after the premiere, a guy approached us and said he did that as a kid - so it was actually true!

iW: Did you have any trouble getting the participation of the TV executives interviewed in the film?

JK: Nobody had been interested in their work before - we were the first ones to ask them - so they were quite happy to talk. There was one guy who probably could have given us valuable information but he wasn't sure what our intention was. Working under the Soviet system made you very paranoid - people were afraid of everything - and this paranoia is still in people's minds today. But most of the TV people are really nice guys who have a sense of humor about what they did. You needed this in order to survive in the system.

iW: In screening the film, have you noted any generational differences in response from audiences?

JK: The film really resonates with people of any age who grew up in the Soviet Union, but we have shown the film to younger people, and it still works. It's a very human story - basically, people want to see what they want to see, and if someone else tries to prohibit you, you find clever ways to see it anyway. The film is about a very human fight against any kind of totalitarianism.

Press Quotes

"Subversively funny!" —**V.A. Musetto, NY POST**

"A deadpan-comic document of how filmmaker Jaak Kilmi and other grade schoolers in early-80s Estonia had their lives altered by illegally-intercepted Finnish TV broadcasts of Western hallmarks like Dallas, disco dance shows and the original Emmanuelle, Disco's great gift is a total deconstruction of the notion of "soft power" — essentially, a nation's attempt to assert and maintain its dominance through not violent but viral means, including media and public relations."
—**indieWIRE.com**

"Disco is a funny, inventively made work of true-life science fiction about the futility of trying to keep brains safe from outside influence." —**Spout.com**

"A witty, insightful and thoroughly entertaining political thriller about how the Iron Curtain did battle with contraband Western-tinged airwaves from Finland." —**NOW Magazine**

"Adopting a highly idiosyncratic, lighthearted and yet entirely convincing approach to explaining how the communists lost the Cold War, Estonian-Finnish documentary DISCO AND ATOMIC WAR represents the latest sprightly effort from consistently original Estonian helmer Jaak Kilmi (REVOLUTION OF PIGS)." — **Variety**