



Finlandia Foundation[®] National

Inspiring, celebrating and connecting the Finnish-American community since 1953

CENTENARY LECTURERS

Börje Vähämäki:
“Film, Literature and
Finnish Identities”



(Clockwise) Thomas A. DuBois: “Finland and the *Kalevala*”

Sharon Franklin-Rahkonen: “The History of Finnish Independence”

K. Marianne Wargelin: “Beyond the Atlantic: Finland’s Independence
Viewed from Across the Sea”

Peter MacKeith: “A House of Finland”

A once-in-a-lifetime event like 100 years of Finnish independence deserves to be celebrated, but it should also spur reflection on a remarkable story. In recognition of the centennial of Finland’s declaration of independence, Finlandia Foundation National is pleased to present an expanded Lecturer of the Year program featuring scholars who are experts on topics related to Finland’s national independence and identity.

The Centenary Lecturers are available for FFN chapter programs between June 2016 and May 2018.

Film, Literature and Finnish Identities

Finnish identities have been formed by historical events and trends and by Finland's geographical and political realities. Those identities have been examined and exposed in Finland's literature and film over time. It is also true that Finnishness has in turn been shaped and (re)defined by momentous films and great literary works. Identifying Finnish identities has progressed from rather unified descriptions in masterpieces by J.L. Runeberg, Aleksis Kivi, Minna Canth, Juhani Aho and Väinö Linna to expositions of great diversity in Finland's linguistic and social realities, and in international ideological orientation. In the 21st century, both Finnish film and literature have begun to display almost non-existent unity in the mosaic of Finnish identities.

In my lecture I attempt to capture pivotal moments in the history of Finland's film and literature through clips and quotes that I find to be interconnected and relevant for aspects of Finnish identity. The films I touch on include *The Village Shoemakers* (1923) based on Aleksis Kivi's

comedy, and Tapiovaara's *Juha* (1937) based on Juhani Aho's novel. Linna's monumental trilogy *Under the North Star 1-3* (1958-62) is a major milestone.

Others include *The Diary of a Worker* (1967) and *The Year of the Hare* (1977), both directed by Risto Jarva, the latter based on Arto Paasilinna's novel of the same name. The Kaurismäki brothers represent the transnational stage in Finnish cinema as shown in clips from their films. And finally, Sofi Oksanen's celebrated novel *Purge* and its film version will bring the discussion to the present.

Finland has experienced four wars in its century of independence: The Civil War 1918, The Winter War 1939-40, The Continuation War 1941-44, and the Lapland War 1944-45. They have left indelible traces in Finnish identities. F.E. Sillanpää's novel *Meek Heritage* (1919) and Antti Tuuri's novel *Winter War* and its film version addressed those two wars. The greatest impact on the Finnish identities was imparted by Linna's *The Unknown Soldier* (1954) and Edvin Laine's film rendition of it (1955). The Lapland War still awaits its literary and cinematic chronicler.

About Börje Vähämäki

Börn and educated in Finland, Börje Vähämäki received all of his academic degrees from Åbo Academy University in Turku, Finland. In 1975, he accepted a position as professor of Finnish Studies at the University of Minnesota at Minneapolis, where he taught until 1989, after which he moved to initiate and head a Finnish Studies Program at the University of Toronto. He retired in 2014.

Early in his career Börje specialized in Finnish linguistics and wrote his magnum opus, *Existence and Identity* (Åbo Academy University Press) as well as several articles. However, at both Minnesota and Toronto his teaching dealt mostly with Finnish literature, including the *Kalevala*, and Finnish cinema, and so he changed his research focus accordingly. Over the last four decades he has written books on the Finnish language, including the language learning package *Mastering Finnish* textbook and CD set. He has published numerous articles on Finnish literature and the *Kalevala*.

In 1997, Börje founded the *Journal of Finnish Studies*, which he edited for 12 years. In 1999, he established a small publishing



company, Aspasia Books, Inc., which has published over 30 English titles of relevance to Finnish studies, including Kivi's *Seven Brothers* and the trilogy *Under the North Star 1-3* by Väinö Linna. His translations include *A Treasury of Finnish Love Poems*, *Finnish Short Stories* (with Ingrid Jensen), *Red Moon over White Sea* by Laila Hietamies and *Fragments of Lappish Mythology* by L.L. Laestadius. He published two audio books of *Kalevala* poems in 2009.

He has been awarded the insignia of Knight of the Order of the White Rose of Finland, First Class. He was inducted as the 137th foreign member in the Kalevala Society of Finland, founded in 1919.

PAST LECTURERS OF THE YEAR:

2015 Taina Elg with Heli Sirviö

2014 Suzanne Jurva and Erin Smith, filmmakers of the documentary *Yoopera!*

2013 Yvonne Lockwood, “Traditional Material Culture in Modern Finnish America”

2012 Glenda Dawn Goss, “Sibelius: A Composer’s Life and the Awakening of Finland”

2011 Carl Rahkonen, “The Finnish-American Musical Journey”

2010 Arnold Alanen, “From Finland to North America: Buildings, Landscapes and Cultural Change”

2007-09 Mark Coir and Susan Saarinen, “The Saarinen Architectural Legacy”

2006 Ben Stout and *Fire and Ice*, a documentary about The Winter War between Finland and Russia

Find more information on their programs at FinlandiaFoundation.org

Finlandia Foundation National is the premier network of Finnish-American organizations in the United States.

Founded in Pasadena, California in 1953, FFN administers grants, scholarships and programs supporting and celebrating Finnish heritage and Finnish-American culture and traditions, and contemporary Finnish America.

FFN is a 501(c)(3) organization. For more information: FinlandiaFoundation.org



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