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Aili Kari

by Hannu Salmi

Aili Kari made a career for herself in the early Finnish film industry, but her name is very seldom remembered or mentioned. During the silent era, she worked as a production secretary and as an actress at the major film company Suomi-Filmi, which had been founded in 1919 under the name of Suomen Filmikuvaamo and regularly produced fiction films. Later, Kari was involved in the founding of another major studio, Suomen Filmitöollisuus, and worked there as an office manager and chief accountant.

During her childhood, Kari was surrounded by creative people. Her father was Kaarlo Kari (1872-1941), an artist and a cartoonist, as well as an actor, a stage designer, and a leader of a theater company. Her mother was Naimi/Naëmi Kari (née Kylmänen, 1878-1968), an actress who worked in her husband's theatrical company and toured around the country. She also appeared in three silent feature films in the 1920s. Kari's older brother was the cinematographer and editor Eino Kari (1897-1954), who worked in the film business from 1920 to 1952. Her younger brother, Kullervo (1903-1981), was also employed by Suomi-Filmi as a camera assistant. Additionally, Elli Kylmänen, her mother's sister, was married to Erkki Karu, who became the most productive film director of the silent era. Both Karu and Kylmänen had previously worked in Kaarlo Kari's ensemble (Uusitalo 1988, 21).

By the time she reached her twenties, Kari was known for her singing and recitation performances. She was used to being on stage having performed with her father's ensemble during her childhood. In the early 1920s, her parents were most likely very enthusiastic about the possibilities of filmmaking and film acting. Their oldest son Eino was hired as a cinematographer in 1920, and soon after, in November 1921, Aili was recruited by Erkki Karu to be "an officer and an accountant" for Suomi-Filmi (Uusitalo 1988, 90). Soon, other members of the family joined the industry. When Erkki directed his short comedy *Kun isällä on hammassärky/When Father Has a Toothache* in 1922, he cast Kari's mother in a small role. The next year, he made the first cinematic adaptation of Aleksis Kivi's famous play "Nummisuutarit"/"The Village Shoemakers," a Finnish silent classic, and Kari's father got the role of Sakeri. In this film, Aili was credited as a production secretary for the first time. From that year on, she worked regularly as a production secretary for Suomi-Filmi. While it is difficult to determine the exact dimensions of the position, as production secretary Kari was most likely an overall secretary at the director's disposal. The production secretary was probably never on location or in the studio, but was based in the office and helped the director keep the project moving. At that time, Suomi-Filmi produced only one film at a time and there were no parallel productions (Uusitalo 2018). The Finnish National Archive credits Kari with seven feature-length films as production secretary ("Aili Kari" n.p.). Otherwise, as a full-time employee of the company, she was taking care of the financial accounts of the studio.

Soon, Kari also got roles in front of the camera. She appeared in the historical drama *Rautakylän vanha paroni/The Old Baron of Rautakylä* (1923), directed by Carl Fager. Her mother was given the role of the housekeeper, Lisette Hallström, but since the story spanned a long period of time, someone else had to play young Lisette. This part was given to Aili. In 1931, she also appeared in *Rovastin häämatkat/The Dean's Honeymoon Travels*, where she was seen as Anni, the daughter of the main character, the Dean. Furthermore, Kari made one uncredited appearance in *Meidän poikamme/Our Boys* (1929).

It seems that Kari was an all-around worker for Suomi-Filmi throughout the 1920s, and she became a close confidante of her uncle Erkki. When he decided to leave Suomi-Filmi in the fall of 1933 and establish a new company, Suomen Filmiteollisuus (SF), Kari decided to follow. In fact, she became the first employee of the new company, an office manager, and most likely faced a great deal of work in organizing everyday practices and taking care of financial matters (Uusitalo 1975, 72; Uusitalo 1988, 170; "Pikku paloja elokuvamaailmasta" 14). Kari remained a loyal employee of SF until the company went bankrupt in 1965. She saw the rise of SF into a dominant company in the 1940s and 1950s ("10 vuotta SF:ssä!" 14), but also its downfall in the early 1960s. She was the closest partner of T. J. Särkkä, the producer who led SF after Karu passed away in 1935. After the mid-1930s, Kari's work was restricted to economic matters, which were crucial to the ever-growing business. In a 1943

interview in the company newsletter *SF Uutiset*, she concluded: “I couldn’t have imagined a more exciting career than the one that [was] finally realized for me. Film business is really a ‘fairytale land’ where something new and unexpected always happens” (“10 vuotta SF:ssä” 14).

Selected Bibliography

“10 vuotta SF:ssä!” *SF-Uutiset* 7 (1943): 14.

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Uusitalo, Kari. *Lavean tien sankarit: Suomalainen elokuva 1931-1939*. Helsinki: Otava, 1975.

----- . *Meidän poikamme: Suomalaisen elokuvan perustanlaskija Erkki Karu ja hänen aikakautensa*. Helsinki: Valtion painatuskeskus, 1988.

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[Complete Project Bibliographies](#)

Filmography

A. Archival Filmography: Extant Film Titles:

1. Aili Kari as Production Secretary

Nummisuutarit/The Village Shoemakers. Dir.: Erkki Karu, sc.: Artturi Järviluoma (Suomi-Filmi Oy Finland 1923) cas.: Axel Slangus, Adolf Lindfors, Alarik Korhonen, Kirsti Suonio, Antero Suonio, Juho Puls, Heidi Korhonen, Aku Käyhkö, Jaakko Korhonen, Konrad Tallroth, Kaarlo Kari, Martti Tuukka, si, b&w. Archive: [FIH](#).

Myrskyluodon kalastaja/The Fisherman of Storm Skerry/The Price They Pay. Dir.: Erkki Karu, sc.: Erkki Karu (Suomi-Filmi Oy Finland 1924) cas.: Wilho Ilmari, Wilhelmiina Tuukkanen, Emil Lindh, Agnes Lindh, Irja Lindström, Alarik Korhonen, Axel Slangus, Uuno Aarto, Sven Relander, si, b&w. Archive: [FIH](#).

Murtovarkaus/The Burglary. Dir.: Harry Roeck Hansen & Erkki Kivijärvi, sc.: Erkki Kivijärvi (Suomi-Filmi Oy Finland 1926) cas.: Emil Lindh, Joel Rinne, Kaarlo Saarnio, Agnes Lindh, Ester Roeck Hansen, Waldemar Wohlström, Mimmi Lähteenoja, si, b&w. Archive: [FIH](#).

Muurmanin pakolaiset/Fugitives From Murmansk. Dir.: Erkki Karu, sc.: Erkki Karu & Lauri Vesala (Suomi-Filmi Oy Finland 1927) cas.: Gunnar Brygge, Berndt Lindahl, Sulo Räikkönen, Heikki Välisalmi, Leo Franck, Kullervo Kari, Paavo Costiander, Jalmari Sauli, Naemi Kari, si, b&w. Archive: [FIH](#).

Nuori luotsi/The Young Pilot. Dir.: Erkki Karu, sc.: Erkki Karu (Suomi-Filmi Oy Finland 1928) cas.: Lillan Järnefelt, Joel Rinne, Sven Hildén, Paavo Costiander, Toivo Suonpää, Ellen Sylvén, Lilli Sairio, Martta Hannula, si, b&w. Archive: [FIH](#).

Aatamin puvussa ja vähän Eevankin/Dressed Like Adam and a Bit Like Eve Too. Dir.: Jaakko Korhonen, sc.: Jaakko Korhonen (Suomi-Filmi Oy Finland 1931) cas.: Joel Rinne, Elsa Segerberg, Yrjö Tuominen, Kaarlo Saarnio, Uuno Montonen, Heikki Välisalmi, si, b&w. Archive: [FIH](#).

Tukkipojan morsian/The Lumberjack's Bride. Dir.: Erkki Karu, sc.: Erkki Karu (Suomi-Filmi Oy Finland 1931) cas.: Urho Somersalmi, Helena Koskinen, Hemmo Kallio, Aku Käyhkö, Uuno Montonen, si, b&w. Archive: [FIH](#).

2. Aili Kari as Actress

Rautakylän vanha parooni/The Old Baron of Rautakylä. Dir.: Carl Fager, sc.: Carl Fager (Suomi-Filmi Oy Finland 1923) cas.: Adolf Lindfors, Felix Borg, Einar Rinne, Naimi Kari, Aili Kari, Axel Slangus, si, b&w. Archive: [FIH](#).

Meidän poikamme/Our Boys. Dir.: Erkki Karu, sc.: Erkki Karu (Suomi-Filmi Oy, Finland 1929) cas.: Axel Slangus, Waldemar Wohlström, Olga Leino, Birgit Sergelius, Helge Ranin, Uuno Montonen, Margit Tirkkonen, Reino Wolanen, Otto Kotilainen, Kaarlo Saarnio, Uuno Laakso, Ossi Korhonen, Aili Kari [**Note:** uncredited], si, b&w, Archive: [FIH](#).

Rovastin häämatkat/The Dean's Honeymoon Travels. Dir.: Jaakko Korhonen, sc.: Jaakko Korhonen (Suomi-Filmi Oy Finland 1931) cas.: Katri Rautio, Iris Knape, Glory Leppänen, Mia Backman, Birgit Nuotio, Hemmo Kallio, Joel Rinne, Waldemar Wohlström, Yrjö Tuominen, Juhani Turunen, Aili Kari, si, b&w. Archive: [FIH](#).



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