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MASTERS

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Mies vailla menneisyyttä

The Man Without a Past

Aki Kaurismäki

FINLAND/GERMANY/France, 2002

97 minutes ■ Colour/35mm

Production Company: **Sputnik Oy/
Pandora Film/Pyramide Productions**

Producer: **Aki Kaurismäki**

Screenplay: **Aki Kaurismäki**

Cinematographer: **Timo Salminen**

Editor: **Timo Linnasalo**

Production Designer: **Markku Pätälä,
Jukka Salmi**

Sound: **Jouko Lumme, Tero Malmberg**

Principal Cast: **Markku Peltola, Kati
Outinen, Annikki Tähti, Juhani Niemelä,
Kaija Pakarinen**

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Aki Kaurismäki has long been one of the great champions of the working class. His illustrious filmography is peopled with the ordinary and downtrodden, those left behind by modern life. But Kaurismäki never despairs for his protagonists and their indomitable spirit is a tonic for his own ironic, deadpan world view. He finds both humour and absurdity in their predicaments and has an endless regard for their ability to survive.

The Man Without a Past is unquestionably one of Kaurismäki's greatest films. Finely balanced between the earnest and playful, ironic and subversive, it is respectful and occasionally reverential. It details the misadventures of tired-faced, middle-aged M (Markku Peltola), who, upon arriving in Helsinki, is brutally mugged, taken to hospital and proclaimed dead – but who just as suddenly sits up, strips off his bandages and walks away to start a new life. Jobless, penniless and amnesic, he is taken in by a kind-hearted family living in a container by the docks. From this modest beginning, he slowly starts to reconstruct his life, getting assorted menial jobs and even earning enough to rent his own tiny container, which he cleans and fills with odds and ends. Life takes an upward turn when he meets Irma (long-time Kaurismäki collaborator Kati Outinen), a Salvation Army worker, and the two begin one of those odd and compelling relationships that is a trademark of Kaurismäki's films.

As they grow closer to each other, Kaurismäki skillfully surrounds them with

sharply observed characters and situations. He mines the conventions, mores and even the iconography of the Depression – with a nod to John Steinbeck's "The Grapes of Wrath" and John Ford's film adaptation – to show that little has changed in the intervening decades. History moves in cycles. But Kaurismäki does not succumb to nostalgia or sentimentality. His is a downbeat yet totally loving and scathingly humorous portrait of people who live in dignity with their fellow travellers. After the extraordinary beauty of *Drifting Clouds*, Kaurismäki shows that he is truly the Poet Laureate of the working class. The film also features one of the great performances by a dog on screen (one of Aki's own!).

■ Piers Handling



Aki Kaurismäki was born in Orimattila, Finland in 1957. His work was featured in the Festival's 1988 Spotlight programme. Selected filmography: *The Saimaa Gesture* (co-director, 81), *Crime and Punishment* (83), *Calamari Union* (85), *Shadows in Paradise* (86), *Hamlet Goes Business* (87), *Ariel* (88), *Leningrad Cowboys Go America* (89), *The Match Factory Girl* (90), *I Hired a Contract Killer* (90), *La Vie de Bohème* (92), *Total Balalaika Show* (94), *Take Care of Your Scarf, Tatjana* (94), *Drifting Clouds* (96), *Juha* (99) and *The Man Without a Past* (02).

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