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Drifting Clouds

Kauas pilvet karkaavat

FINLAND 1996, 96 min.

DIR/PROD/SCR/ED Aki Kaurismäki

CAM Timo Salminen **CAST** Kati Outinen, Kari Väänänen, Elina Salo, Sakari Kuosmanen, Markku Peltola, Matti Onnismaa **PRINT SOURCE** Finnish Film Foundation

Bleakness may define the overriding atmosphere of **Drifting Clouds**, but like all the films of Aki Kaurismäki, quirky humor and frequent plot twists and surprises (will we laugh? will we pity? will we run from the theater in tears?) are essential elements of this Finnish master's approach as well. Kati Outinen, who starred in *The Match Factory Girl*, plays a *maitre d'* in an outdated restaurant in downtown Helsinki. Both she and her husband (a dour tram driver) lose their jobs thanks to corporate transactions and the downsizing that inevitably follows—and this after they just bought a new TV and bookshelf on installment plans (though they can't afford any books yet). The outside world feels as cold, blue and closed up as the lead characters' emotions (at least what they show each other)—their expressions, like the conversations, are minimal, to say the least. But what saves the film from pushing us too far over the edge is Kaurismäki's genuine sense of (and love for) the absurd—seemingly everyone drives huge American cars, for instance—and honest glimmers of hope on the horizon. In fact, the balance of tragedy, comedy and unadorned human beauty is exactly what makes **Drifting Clouds** Kaurismäki's most complex and engaging film in years.

Kurt Wolff

Selected Filmography: Aki Kaurismäki (b. Orimattila, Finland, 1957) *Total Balalaika Show* (SFIFF 1994), *La Vie de Bohème* (SFIFF 1993), *The Match Factory Girl* (SFIFF 1991), *I Hired a Contract Killer* (SFIFF 1991), *Ariel* (SFIFF 1990)