

Filmiryhmä Oy - Finnish film production company, started in 1964.

Main owner Virke Lehtinen.

The short film "Market Place / Tori" in 1962 was the incentive which gave the start for the carriers of director Erkki Kivikoski, 27 and cinematographer Virke Lehtinen, 22, with experienced editor Juho Gartz, 30. Their film won the Silver Bear on the Berlin Film Festival. Next year the trio made the feature "At summer 5 o'clock / Kesällä kello 5", which got an enormous popularity and personal awards for the trio.

Kivikoski and Gartz wanted to start a production company of their own, and they wanted along Virke Lehtinen, who had left for Paris. His aim was to study film making and hopefully enter IDHEC. He could however not find the famous film school, but he was lucky to make acquaintance with some excellent film makers. First and foremost Virke Lehtinen appreciates, that director Jean-Paul Le Chanois gave the young film maker a great opportunity to accompany his working. This strengthened Lehtinen's professional attitude and his ever lasting love for the French art of film making - and above all it made him to understand the warm humanism Le Chanois had.

Lehtinen had to return Helsinki because Kivikoski wanted a third success. The new film was a commercial flop however. The trio started their common production company. They gave it the name "Filmiryhmä Oy" - in English "Film team" - because the name depicts their ideals of working as a team, and the name was modern then. Company didn't get any financing for a new feature, and when the trio tried to get financiers for their short films, it was falling into boycott of the big traditional production companies. After one year Kivikoski and Gartz were bored of being producers, thus Virke Lehtinen was forced to stay alone to end a couple of started productions. He made his first short "Mr. Happy / Onninen" with the skilled and very popular actor Leo Jokela. The script was by Lehtinen and Anssi Mänttari. The film was shown on several festivals.

The production company can't work without productions. Luckily Virke Lehtinen could find as financiers some banks and big industrial companies, and he started some productions and some long time sponsor relations. He asked his old friend Aito Mäkinen, who had started the Finnish Film Archives, to join the company. They produced a big number of shorts, even their first tv-doc; "Berlin Film Festival". In 1968 Mäkinen directed the first feature of the company "Four times only / Vain neljä kertaa", and in 1969 Virke Lehtinen directed in Lapland his first feature "Muurahaispolku / Path of ants". It got the the State Film Award.

Company started to get fame. It produced shorts and films for the education. Their social doc "Bridge / Silta" was awarded as the best European industrial film. They made "The Finnish way" for Finnair, "Marimekko" and in Lapland "Reindeer", which was awarded in Venice.

In 1975 Virke Lehtinen started to prepare a feature to be made in Lapland, "Fires on the Arctic". The project was interrupted, when the company was offered a location for a cinema. It got the name Diana. Even before it's opening Filmiryhmä was again in boycott; big cinema companies didn't accept an art house cinema to the market, not even a small one. Big companies imported traditional films, and they could make agreements with the American distributors, who needed more cinema chains than a single small cinema. Mäkinen proposed that they have to import themselves films for Diana. Then the fact was, that the cinemas around Finland didn't show the films of Diana. Lehtinen and Mäkinen were forced to open several other own cinemas, by the names Diana and Amanda.

During 15 years Diana imported art house films, cinema classics and modern films. It introduced in Finland new film countries and both established and new directors ; there were more than 80 French films, the Japanese film culture was presented with more than 30 films, interesting films from around the world, totally more than 200 films. During years they showed practically every independent Finnish film, even on 16 mm. Diana created a new film culture in Finland. It had a faithful audience which grew bigger. But at what cost!

There were no organization like "European cinemas", not any film foundations to support cinema culture. To be able to import new films for the small cinemas - all between 85 and 180 seats - and to pay the advertising and marketing etc Virke Lehtinen was forced to travel around Finland and beyond; the company made a big number of docs, like "Work / Työ" which won the main award at the Chicago Film Festival. At that time, the second feature of Lehtinen game out; "Three men / Kolme miestä", script by Lehtinen and Solja Kievari, shot in Lapland. The dream of "Fires" was pushed forward, again.

A big pleasure for many, a burden for the owner - Diana cinemas - which started in 1976 by the film of Bertrand Tavernier "Que la fête commence / Fête may start" were closed in 1992 by the remarkable film of Louis Malle, "Au revoir les enfants / Goodbye children". The most beautiful period of the Finnish cinema culture was over. From the golden period of film Mäkinen and Lehtinen made a beautiful documentary "Public Shadows".

In the same year when Dianas were closed, Virke Lehtinen presented at the Amsterdam doc film festival IDFA his project "Fires" now as documentary. The reception was so convincing, that he decided to make "Fires" as feature as he previously planned. Planning and writing take time, collecting financing takes time. His latest documentary "Hazards", 2013, has been shown at many international festivals, starting in Leipzig 2013. "Fires" is coming. It has to come.