

A FILM BY  
SAARA CANTELL

# Stars Above



ELIN PETERSDOTTIR    MERI NENONEN    IRINA BJÖRKLUND

SENJA MÄKIAHO    LAURI TANSKANEN    LEO HONKONEN

DOP MARITA HÄLLFORS F.S.C.    SET DESIGN PIRJO ROSSI    COSTUME DESIGN AULI TURTIAINEN    MAKE UP DESIGN KÄTI KOSKELA

CASTING MINNA SORVOJA    EDITING SÆVAR GUÐMUNDSSON    SOUND DESIGN PIETARI KOSKINEN    MUSIC SID HILLE

CO-PRODUCER SNORRI ÞÓRISSON    PRODUCERS OUTI ROUSU & ELLA PIESALA    SCRIPT & DIRECTION SAARA CANTELL

PRODUCTION PYSTYMETSÄ & PEGASUS PICTURES

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PYSTYMETSÄ OY

## **SUMMARY**

**English title** STARS ABOVE

**Original title** TÄHTITAIVAS TALON YLLÄ

**Genre** a feature drama

**Duration** 105 mins

**Languages** Finnish with the English / Swedish subtitles

**Writer & director** Saara Cantell

**Camera** Marita Hällfors, FSC

**Art design** Pirjo Rossi

**Music** Sid Hille (Germany/Finland)

**Sound design** Pietari Koskinen

**Editor** Saevar Gudmundsson (Iceland)

**Casting** Minna Sorvoja

**Lead cast** Irina Björklund, Meri Nenonen, Elin Petersdottir (Iceland/Finland), Lauri Tanskanen, Leo Honkonen, Senja Mäkiaho

**Producer** Outi Rousu

**Production company** Pystymetsä Oy

**Co-producer** Snorri Þórisson, Pegasus Pictures, Iceland

**Funders** Finnish Film Foundation / Kaisu Isto, Icelandic Film Centre / Laufey Gudjónsdóttir

**Pre sale** YLE Finland / Erkki Astala

**Distributor in Scandinavia** Nordisk Film Distribution, Finland / Katarina Nyman

**World premiere** 2.2.2012, in competition of the Gothenburg FF, Sweden

**Date of cinema release** 2.3.2012 in Finland

### **Festivals**

Finnish Film Foundation, international department

Mrs Jenni Domingo - jenni.domingo@ses.fi / Mrs Jaana Puskala - jaana.puskala@ses.fi

### **INQUIRIES**

producer OUTI ROUSU, Pystymetsä Oy

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### **Reviews: Tähtitaivas talon yllä (Stars Above) / Critics 4 – 5 stars**

*“Actress Elin Petersdottir – a gift from Iceland to the Finnish film.”*

*“Astonishing film!”*

*“Saara Cantell is one of the leading film directors in Finland.”*

*“The camera work of Marita Hällfors is brilliant.”*

*“Meri Nenonen makes a wonderful role as a hippie mother.”*

*“Irina Björklund is better than ever as Saima, a lonely village school teacher who hides her feelings.”*

## SYNOPSIS

The village school teacher **Saima**'s husband is away at the frontline, and she feels like an outsider in the community until she finds company from the young war invalid Toivo who has been sent to help on the farm.

Saima's daughter **Tuulikki** moves from town to the house with her young child, her head full of wild ideas for an ecological lifestyle. When Tuulikki's boyfriend Seppo arrives at the farm with a bunch of noisy friends her plans for the future seem to be going in the same farcical direction as her earlier attempts at sheep farming and organic dye making.

Tuulikki's daughter **Salla** has far more possibilities than any of the earlier generations - but she still finds it difficult to find happiness. Recovering from the aftermath of a long relationship Salla has decided to withdraw to the peace and quiet of the countryside, but her plans go haywire when neighbor Ville enters her life despite her initial resistance.

STARS ABOVE follows the stories of three women from the same family across three different decades. The main characters – SAIMA (Irina Björklund), Tuulikki (Meri Nenonen) and Salla (Elin Petersdottir) – each live in the same country house. Saima's story takes place in the war time 1942, when Finland fought against Soviet Union, Tuulikki's story in colourful year 1978 and Salla's story in the present day. Each woman is between 30 and 40.

This deep and beautiful, yet humorous film pictures the encounters between people and the possibilities for choice. The director Saara Cantell's previous film HEARTBEATS (2010) dealt with fleeting moments in the midst of daily life. This film brings out the idea of the cyclical movement of time and even the possibility of the simultaneous co-existence of all of time.

How much does the time we live in affect us - and our ability to hold on to our dreams? What are those things which we pass on from one generation to the next? What changes, what remains the same? And to what extent do mothers' choices, let alone their unspoken secrets, affect their daughters' lives?



## CAST

### **Actress Elin Petersdóttir (SALLA)**

Icelandic-Finnish Elin studied acting in Helsinki, in Stella Adler Conservatory in New York, in Copenhagen and in European Film Collage, Ebeltoft in Denmark.

Elin stars in films and on stage. Her recent films, made in Iceland, are the tv-series *Réttur* (2010) directed by Sævar Guðmundsson, produced by Saga Film, *I ♥ coffee* (2009) directed by Melkorka Huldudóttir, Mýflugu Productions, and Saara Cantell's feature film *Unna & Nuuk* (2005) and *Den Stora Resan* (2004), which is based on Tove Jansson's novella.



### **Actress Meri Nenonen (TUULIKKI)**

Meri is known for her work in theatre, film and TV. One of her recent films is Saara Cantell's award winning feature drama *Heartbeats* (Kohtaamisia, 2010), which she was a Jussi nominee (Finnish Oscar) of her role as 'Meri'.

Previously, Meri has acted in films including Neil Hardwick's film *Jos rakastat* (2010), Saara Saarela's *Väärät juuret* (2009), Pekka Karjalainen's *Kummeli Jackpot* (2006), Saara Cantell's *Unna & Nuuk* (2006) and Aleksí Salmenperä's *Producing Adults* (*Lapsia ja aikuisia*, 2004). She acted in two seasons of the TV series *Kylmäverisesti sinun*, (Nelonen, 2000 & 2007). In 2005, Nenonen was awarded the best actor award at the Sarajevo International Theatre Festival.



### **Actress Irina Björklund (SAIMA)**

Irina is the best known actress of Finnish films, both in Finland and abroad. Living in Los Angeles 1999-2012 and in Southern France since 2012, she stars alongside of George Clooney in *The American* (2010), with Swedish Jakob Eklund in *Möbelhandlares Dotter* (2006) and *Den Tredje vågan* (2003).

In 1999, Irina awarded the Jussi award (Finnish Oscar) as best leading actress for her role in the movie *Minä ja Morrison* (by Lenka Hellstedt). She made her breakthrough in the movie *Rukajärven tie* (Ambush) by Olli Saarela & produced by Matila & Röhr Productions. Irina awarded the shooting Star prize in the Berlin Film Festival in 2004.



### **KEY CREW**

**Screenwriter and film director Saara Cantell** graduated from the University of Art & Design Helsinki in 1996. Saara is a Doctorate in the Arts (2011). Her thesis is on narrative short films.

Saara's feature films *Stars above* (orig. title *Tähtitaivas talon yllä*, 2012) and *Heartbeats* (*Kohtaamisia*, 2010) awarded the State Quality Price for Films. Both films have travelled well and awarded in international festivals. *Heartbeats* awarded Baltic Prize in Nordic Film Days, Lubeck Germany and Silver Dolphin, Festroia, Portugal. In addition, *Heartbeats* awarded 7 'Jussi' nomination (Finnish 'Oscar' award) in 2010. Saara awarded 'The Best film director' prize in 2010 and the State Film Price in 2010 together with the cinematographer Marita Hällfors.

Saara's debut feature film is a childrens' film *Unna & Nuuk* (2005). Her upcoming feature films is romantic comedy *The Only Ones* (Ainoat oikeat, 2013) and childrens' feature *Onneli & Anneli* (2014). Saara has directed two childrens' tv-series *Vasikantanssi* (2003) and *Rajametsän tarinoita* (2004, 2005). In addition, Saara has written and directed several short films, among them the prize-winning *Sirpalesatu*, (1995), *Peilikirkas päivä* (1996) and *Potretti* (2003) which is a part of the Nordic co-production film series *Moving North*, novella film *Den stora resan* (2005) which is based on a novella by author Tove Jansson, as well as countless radio plays.

**Producer Outi Rousu** has worked in the film industry since 1985. Outi has a degree in producing from the University of Art & Design Helsinki (1996) and an international producer's degree EAVE(1997).



Outi has produced dozens of films and international co-productions, among them the feature films *Heartbeats* (Kohtaamisia, 2010) by Saara Cantell, *Engelen* (2009) by Margreth Olin (Norway), *Non Profit* (2008, directed by skolt-sami Pauliina Feodoroff, Critic's choice award), Swedish drama series *Möbelhandlares Dotter* (2006) by John Olsson & Giraff Film, *Valo* (2005, in association with the Unicef, directed by Kaija Juurikkala), Nordic co-production series *MOVING NORTH* (2003), *Taking Moses for a Ride* (*Kyytiä Moosekselle*, 2001, directed by Kaija Juurikkala), *Slow at Heart* (*Kuningas Hidas*, 2000, directed by Saara Saarela). She also co-produced the children's film *Rollo and the Wood Sprite* (*Röllö ja Metsänhenki*, 2001, directed by Olli Saarela).

The most recent feature film, a bitter sweet comedy *Miss Blue Jeans* (2012), is set on late 70s' when punk rock arrived to remote Northern Finland. The film is based on a famous Finnish novel by Kauko Röyhkä and directed by Matti Kinnunen.



**Co-producer Snorri Þórisson, Pegasus Pictures (Iceland)** is one of the leading producers in Iceland. Pegasus Pictures combines talent and great facilities.

Recent films includes *Rokland* (2011) by Marteinn Thorsson and famous crime series *Hamarinn* by Reynir Lyngland. In addition to development, production and co-production of feature films, TV shows and commercials, Pegasus provides film production services in Iceland and Greenland.



**Cinematographer Marita Hällfors F.S.C.** is acclaimed for her tender film style and for strength of presence in her camera work.

Hällfors has filmed numerous award-winning documentary films, such as *Punksters & Youngsters* (*Punk – tauti joka ei tapa*, 2008, by Jouko Aaltonen) and *Family Meeting* (2007, by Heikki Kossi). She is well known of working with the director Pirjo Honkasalo's

camera assistant in such films as the international award-winning documentary *The 3 Rooms of Melancholia* (*Melankolian 3 huonetta*, 2004) *ITO* (2010) and *Atman* (1996).

Hällfors has shot Saara Cantell's award-winning *Heartbeats* (Kohtaamisia, 2010), Kaija Juurikkala's youth-audience film *Taking Moses for a Ride* (*Kyytiä Moosekselle*, 2001) and English filmmaker Miranda Pennelli's awarded short film *Magnetic North* (2003, for the BBC2).

**Art Designer Pirjo Rossi** graduated from the University of Art & Design in Helsinki as a art designer. Pirjo has received a Jussi nomination for the films *Hellsinki* (*Rööperi*, 2009, directed by Aleksi Mäkelä) and *Little Nurse* (*Pikkusisar*, 2000, directed by Taru Mäkelä). Pirjo's art design can be seen also in Raimo O Niemi's film *Garbage Prince* (2011), Dome Karukoski's awarded feature film *Lapland Odyssey* (2010), *The Home of Dark Butterflies* (2008, Finland's nomination for the Oscars and recipient of Jussi awards) and in Perttu Leppä's films *Pearls and Pigs* (*Helmiä ja sikoja*, 2003) and *Pitkä kuuma kesä* (1999). Rossi was an art designer of the films *V2: Dead Angel* (*V2 - Jäätynyt enkeli*) (2007, directed by Aleksi Mäkelä).

**Sound Designer Pietari Koskinen** is a graduate of the University of Art & Design in Helsinki. His audio work can be heard in such films as in Saara Cantell's award-winning *Heartbeats* (Kohtaamisia, 2010) and children's movie *Unna&Nuuk* (2006), for which he won a Jussi award, and Aku Louhimies' *Tears of April* (2008), Kaisa Rastimo's children's movie *Stormheart* (2008) and *Hayhat and Quiltshoe* (*Heinähattu ja Villtitossu*, 2002) as well as Rastimo's feature films *A Respectable Tragedy* (1998), *Suolaista ja makeaa* (1995), John Webster's award-winning documentaries *Katastrofin aineksia* (2008), *Valon ja Varjon huoneet* (2002) and *Sukkien euroelämä* (2000), and in Hannu Tuomainen's *One-Way Ticket to Mombasa* (*Menolippu Mombasaan*, 2002).



The German-born **composer and musician Sid Hille**, the nominee of the Jussi-award, composes music for films and for his own Platybus orchestra. His music is multidimensional, attractive and very visual. He composed music for Saara Cantell's films *Heartbeats* (Kohtaamisia, 2010), *Mahdollisuus* (2006) and *Ikiomaksi* (2007.) Hille studied piano, composing and especially focused on Jazz music in Holland at the Utrech School of the Arts (1987-1993) with the teachers including Bert van den Brink, Jasper van't Hof, Willy Muller and Wim Witteman. Hille moved to Finland in 1994. He composes and appears in the Platybus Ensemble quartet, which he founded in 1997, and in the Sid Hille Jazz Orchestra. Hille won the international composing competition 'Scrivere in Jazz 2008' in Sardegna, Italia.



**Editor Sævar Guðmundsson** (Iceland) has been freelance editor and director since 2009, after being worked in Icelandic production companies, such as Saga Film, Hugsjon Productions and tv-channel Channel 2 Iceland.

Sævar has directed the kid show "Lazy Town" and for Icelandic TV stations he directed the first season of the comedy cult show "Venni Power" (Venni Páer), the popular series "The Girls" (Stelpurnar) and two season of "Court" (Réttur), Iceland's first lawyers' tv-drama.

As an editor or director, his works has won numerous awards in Iceland, including the Icelandic IMARK awards, EDDAN awards and the EFFIE awards.