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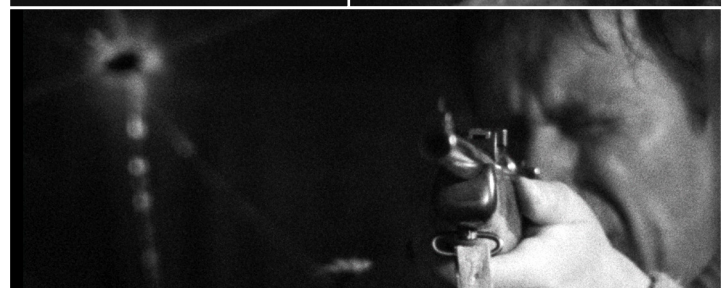


A FILM BY
MIKKO NISKANEN

Eight Deadly Shots

Long an unsung landmark of Finnish cinema, and inspired by actual events, *Eight Deadly Shots* is the magnum opus of writer-producer-director-actor Mikko Niskanen. He delivers a shattering performance as Pasi, a farmer who struggles to support his family through hard labor and who seeks release in alcohol—creating turmoil at home, bringing him into conflict with the law, and leading him on a slow slide toward self-destruction. Presented here in its original four-part format, as made for Finnish television, this monumental vision of everyday human endurance is the rare epic woven from the fabric of ordinary life.

Restored by The Film Foundation's World Cinema Project, Yleisradio Oy, Fiction Finland ry, and Fondazione Cineteca di Bologna at L'Immagine Ritrovata laboratory. Funding provided by the Hobson/Lucas Family Foundation. Additional support provided by the Ministry of Culture and Education in Finland, the Tiina and Antti Herlin Foundation, and the Jane and Aatos Erkko Foundation.



Finland | 1972 | 316 minutes | Black & White | In Finnish with English subtitles | 1.33:1 aspect ratio

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PRODUCTION HISTORY

Mikko Johannes Niskanen began working in the Finnish film industry at the Suomen Filmitoimisto studio as an actor, appearing in minor roles in productions such as *The Unknown Soldier* (*Tuntematon sotilas*, 1955). After studying at the State Institute of Cinematography (VGIK) in Moscow, Niskanen directed his first full-length effort for television in 1962. That same year, he also released his debut theatrical feature, *The Boys* (*Pojat*), an acclaimed tale of a mischievous group of teenagers who come of age during World War II. Several more successes, including *The Partisans* (*Sissit*, 1963) and *Skin, Skin* (*Käpy selän alla*, 1966), followed, but so did *The Song of the Blood-Red Flower* (*Laulu tulipunaisesta kukasta*, 1971), a critical and commercial failure that forced Niskanen to reconsider his creative approach. The result was the grand *Eight Deadly Shots* (*Kahdeksan surmanluotia*, 1972), a five-plus-hour, four-episode miniseries and monument of unflinching realism that Niskanen produced for YLE, Finland’s national broadcasting company.

Though based on a 1969 incident in which Tauno Veikko Pasanen, a man from the small rural village of Sääksmäki, shot and killed four policemen, *Eight Deadly Shots* was an intensely personal project for Niskanen, who not only directed all four episodes but also produced, wrote, and starred in the entire series. Niskanen identified closely with *Eight Deadly Shots*’ protagonist, Pasi, a poor farmer and moonshiner who is driven to madness by poverty and alcoholism. Born in 1929, the director grew up in Äänekoski, a town not dissimilar from Sääksmäki, and he witnessed firsthand the toll of hardship and drinking on working-class lives of mostly quiet yet also intermittently explosive desperation. As Niskanen states in each episode’s opening title sequence, “This film does not claim to reproduce a real event, even though the story is based on one in some important respects. Everyone may have his own truth, but this is the truth I saw and experienced, having been born into these surroundings, having lived this particular life, and having studied these matters.”

As the late Finnish film scholar Peter von Bagh described in a 2012 issue of *Film Comment*, Niskanen filmed *Eight Deadly Shots* in his native region, “surrounded by people he had known all his life, both in front of and behind the camera.” Only three of the series’s actors (Niskanen; Tarja-Tuulikki Tarsala, as Vaimo, Pasi’s wife; and Paavo Pentikäinen, as Reiska, Pasi’s best friend) were professionals—the remainder were all local citizens and amateur performers whom Niskanen believed lent the story an otherwise incommunicable authenticity. Sometimes the

CAST

Pasi	Mikko Niskanen
Vaimo	Tarja-Tuulikki Tarsala
Reiska	Paavo Pentikäinen
Tanu	Tauno Paananen
Ellu	Elina Liimatainen
Ari	Ari Vainiontaus
Manu	Mauno Argillander
Sulo Kokki	Sulo Hokkanen
The gamekeeper	Ilmari Piilonen
The shopkeeper	Yrjö Liehunen
Kalle	Kalle Kellokangas
Taisto Kokki	Olavi Tervahartiala
The preacher	Kaarlo Wilska
The police chief	Harri Väreluoto
Policemen	Sakari Niskanen
	Sulo Olkkonen
	Jorma Lindfors
	Toivo Kähkönen
	Matti Nurminen
	Esko Nikkari
Vaimo’s sister	Helinä Tevi
The speaker from Helsinki	Kari Franck
The doctor	Pertti Weckström
The judge	Riku Rinkama

CREDITS

Director/Writer/	
Producer/Cinematographer	Mikko Niskanen
Cinematographers	Juhani Sarro
	Seppo Immonen
	Kimmo Simula
	Juhani Voutilainen
	Jorma Niskanen
	Sakari Niskanen
Editor	Jyrki Rapp
Art director	Jorma Lindfors
Costume designer	Pirkko Ahvio
Property master	Kaarlo Wilska
Sound designer	Veijo Lehti
Composer	Erkki Ertama
Music recordist	Kari Tamminen
Script supervisor	Helinä Pekkanen
Researcher	Juhani Liedevaara

cinematographic work would be undertaken by anybody available, with Niskanen himself serving as director of photography for one episode. As for taking on the lead role of Pasi and possibly overburdening himself with artistic responsibilities, Niskanen explained to von Bagh: “I have asked myself, ‘Did I have to push things beyond the limits—tearing this person and myself open?’ This is one of the main reasons why I took the leading role in *Eight Deadly Shots*. I knew that if the role were to be played by someone else, I would have to tear him open way too much. And I don’t think I could ever find an actor who would be willing to endure something like that.”

Indeed, Niskanen embodied Pasi physically as well as emotionally—the excruciating stomach cramps that Pasi develops as a symptom of alcoholism affected Niskanen for real and increased in severity during the arduous and stressful production. The scene that most exemplifies the conflation of director, actor, and character occurs immediately before the film’s fatal climax—Niskanen didn’t just pantomime but genuinely whipped himself into Pasi’s sleepless “state of drunken misery” (as Tarsala put it), one that resembled the conditions under which Pasanen committed his horrific act.

Eight Deadly Shots was first broadcast on Finnish television in March 1972 to superlative praise and was subsequently edited down to 145 minutes (by Jörn Donner, Niskanen’s peer and colleague) for theatrical release in September of the same year. Outside of Sweden and Hungary, the rest of the world would have to wait forty years to view Niskanen’s masterpiece, and then only in one-off screenings, such as those for the International Film Festival Rotterdam and the Museum of Modern Art’s International Festival of Film Preservation. Ten years later, the series made the festival-circuit rounds once more, playing at the BFI London, New York, and Doclisboa film festivals, among others. Much of the credit for *Eight Deadly Shots*’ belated recognition belongs to von Bagh, who upheld the series as the crown jewel of a consistently overlooked national cinema.

TRIVIA

In a Finnish poll of film critics conducted in 1992, *Eight Deadly Shots* tied for “best Finnish movie”; twenty years later, in another Finnish poll, critics again voted it one of the country’s best films of all time.

Aki Kaurismäki, arguably Finland’s most internationally recognized filmmaker, has described *Eight Deadly Shots* as “one of the masterpieces of European cinema.”

Tauno Veikko Pasanen, the man whose murders inspired the story of *Eight Deadly Shots*, once viewed the movie in prison. “[The series] is so true that it makes me laugh and cry at times,” he is reported to have stated. “That is how life was back there. My fate in life was so accurately portrayed that it is like [it was] ripped from my soul.”

Mikko Niskanen’s son, Jorma, and brother, Sakari, contributed cinematographic work to *Eight Deadly Shots*.

