



Jenny Strömberg

Also Known As:

Johanna Strömberg, Johanna Charlotta Erling

Lived:

June 12, 1858 - Unknown

Worked as:

society matron

Worked In:

Finland

by Outi Hupaniittu

Jenny Strömberg was the first woman credited in filmmaking in Finland for her appearance in the film *Släpjak/ Drag Hunt* (1908). She arranged the filmed event and appeared in the film as herself, and was the only one mentioned by name in the adverts and reviews of the film. Her drag hunts initiated the making of the film, and she led the hunt on horseback, but most likely she had nothing to do with the actual filmmaking. There are also no hints about her participation in financing the filmmaking or other tasks associated with the traditional role of producer. Nevertheless, she was promoting the hunt dogs that appeared in the film and her husband was among the wealthiest businessmen in Finland, which means that she could have financed the film, if it was needed.

At the time, Jenny Strömberg was a prominent figure in the Helsinki upper-class, spending her time promoting tennis competitions and breeding hunting dogs. She had gained this status via the success of her husband's company. Twenty years before, Jenny had been a primary school teacher from a relevantly poor family of upper middle class civil servants. She had married Gottfried Strömberg, five years her junior, and given up her occupation. The young engineer had just set up his own company, which soon became the leading electrical engineering company in Finland (Hoffman 2008, n.p.).

The couple had no children. Together, they played tennis and rode daily, and seem to have been very active in different kinds of sports (Hoffman n.p.). The wealth and status gave Jenny Strömberg the freedom to follow her sporting pursuits, which then led to the filmmaking project. In 1907, she acquired new English foxhounds from a Swedish kennel, and soon started to arrange

events to promote and showcase them. In January 1908, the newspaper *Hufvudstadsbladet* reported:

New Sport in Helsinki. Yesterday, at 10 AM, a drag hunt with English foxhounds was organized. The scent had been dragged from Sörnäinen for about 3,000 metres over the frozen sea to the shore by the fields of Viikki, where the end signal was blown. The hunt was led by Mrs. Jenny Strömberg, who owns the hounds. Some of them are imported from England by the Stockholm Eventing Club, others were raised in the club's kennel. The hounds were followed smoothly and without disturbance by some riders, both male and female. The drag hunt is going to be ridden regularly 2-3 times a week at least as long as the large bays are covered with ice and snow (6).

The new sport Strömberg had introduced drew the attention of one of the leading Finnish cinema companies, Nordiska Biograf Kompaniet, and soon after, it was arranged that the hunt would be filmed. It is not known when the filming commenced, but *Drag Hunt* premiered in late April 1908. The review in *Hufvudstadsbladet* described it as follows (my translation):

A film that drew special attention was *Drag Hunt*, filmed by Nordiska Biograf Kompaniet and arranged by Mrs. Jenny Strömberg with Mrs. Strömberg's English foxhounds on a snow-covered ice near Helsinki. With the unfavourable weather and wind considered, the filming was done bearably, and despite some parts are not fully sharp, it is still worth seeing (6).

At the time, Finnish film production focused on actualities. The first fiction film had premiered the previous spring and the second was in post-production, but the third would not be released until 1912. Most of the actualities were travel films, but the second most common topic was sporting events, which is why it was not that surprising that Jenny Strömberg's hunt was filmed (Hupaniittu 2013, 95-97).

In 1907-1908, there were five companies producing films in Finland and Nordiska Biograf Kompaniet was the third largest. Along with the two larger companies, Apollo and Maat ja Kansat, these three dominated the Finnish cinema business. These three companies had film theaters spanning across the large cities of southern Finland, as well as their own import branches and distribution functions. The big business was in film exhibition, but filmmaking was an important feature for the leading companies in their mutual rivalry. Most of this production consisted of filming day-to-day happenings, but every now and then a special topic was chosen and special attention was paid to the publicity (Hupaniittu 89-90, 99-112).

Drag Hunt was one of these special films. Strömberg was a well-known figure and her new hounds had gained recognition by winning at the dog shows. As the hunts were organized regularly, they drew attention that the film utilized. It is not known if the initiative came from Nordiska Biograf Kompaniet or from Strömberg, or if there were financial arrangements between the wealthy society matron and the film company. However, it is evident that the film was to

advance them both: Strömberg got publicity for the new sport and her dogs, and Nordiska Biograf Kompaniet got interesting material for the screens.

When it came to the publicity, the film was all about Jenny Strömberg and her dogs, as for example the cinematographer was not mentioned. In the adverts, she was presented as “Mrs. Jenny Strömberg (Master),” which emphasized her significance to the project (“Biograf Teatern” 2). Nevertheless, one must bear in mind that “master” did not refer to filmmaking, but to the English traditions of fox hunts. She was not the director of the film, and probably had nothing to do with the practicalities of filmmaking – at the time the Finnish cinematographers worked quite independently from planning to execution and post production (Hupaniittu 107-111). Instead, she led the hunt from horseback, thus appearing in the film as herself. Still, this does not decrease her status. Her name was presented in the adverts and reviews, which proves that she was the most important factor in the marketing of the film.

The review reveals that due to the poor weather the film was not technically as good as could have been expected, but these kinds of problems were not exceptional (Hupaniittu 104, 108-111). The film got regular distribution, which means that it travelled from one Finnish city to another in one of the film programs provided by Nordiska Biograf Kompaniet. Like most of the films made in these years, however, *Drag Hunt* is considered lost.

Jenny Strömberg did not appear in other films, but her husband commissioned a commercial film of his electric factory some five years later. After the First World War broke, Jenny Strömberg moved to Sweden and in 1916 the estranged couple received a divorce (Hoffman n.p.). What happened to her afterwards and even her date of death are unknown.

Bibliography

“Biograf Teatern.” Advert. *Nya Pressen* (22 April 1908): 2.

“Biografteatern N. Esplanadsgatan 21.” Rev. *Hufvudstadsbladet* (24 April 1908): 6.

Hoffman, Kai. *Gottfried Strömberg (1863-1938)*. National Biography of Finland. Helsinki: Suomalaisen kirjallisuuden seura, 2008. <http://www.kansallisbiografia.fi/kb/artikkeli/4351/>

Hupaniittu, Outi. *Biografiliiketoiminnan valtakausi: toimijuus ja kilpailu suomalaisella elokuva-alalla 1900–1920 -luvuilla*. Turku: Turun yliopisto, 2013.

“Ny sport i Helsingfors.” *Hufvudstadsbladet* (15 January 1908): 6.

Filmography

B. Filmography: Non-Extant Film Titles:

1. Jenny Strömberg as Herself

Släpjak/*Drag Hunt*/*Ajometsästys*/*Släpjak efter fru Jenny Strömbergs (Master) engelska räfhundar på snöbetäckta isfält invid Helsingfors, 1908.*

Citation

Hupaniittu, Outi. "Jenny Strömberg." In Jane Gaines, Radha Vatsal, and Monica Dall'Asta, eds. *Women Film Pioneers Project*. New York, NY: Columbia University Libraries, 2015. <<https://wfpp-test.cul.columbia.edu/pioneer/jenny-stromberg/>>