

Press release

Free to release

Generative AI brings the creation stories of Finnish mythology to life in a uniquely whimsical short film



Image produced using: Midjourney

In September 2024, the fully AI-generated 20-minute short film "**The Kalevala – A Few Selected Poems About Creation**" premiered at the Helsinki International Film Festival. It has now been released on [YouTube](#), giving an international audience the opportunity to freely explore this experimental film project that brings the Finnish national epic to life in a completely new way.

Classics Reimagined with Generative AI

Directed by **Umberto Onza** known for [his previous AI short films](#) and written by **Juha Snellman**, the film is a playful tale that recounts the creation of the world and beer according to the Finnish national epic "**Kalevala**". However, this interpretation is a bit different, as **the story, characters, visuals, and music of the short film were developed using a wide range of generative AI tools** — more than 15 in total. The creators were responsible for validating, refining, and integrating the AI-generated content.

This project is not just a showcase of technology but a deeper exploration of storytelling. "*While we've pushed AI's capabilities to the limit in this film, we didn't want to create just another flashy tech demo. We aimed to tell a unique and entertaining story that pays tribute to the surprises and layers of the original story,*" explains Onza. "*I don't think there's another short film right now that demonstrates this much AI capability in just 20 minutes. But of course, technology is advancing so fast that we might see even more ambitious work as early as next week,*" he adds.

AI Enhances Storytelling instead of replacing it

Screenwriter and producer Juha Snellman notes that the short film offers a unique and also internationally appealing perspective to beloved national epic. It gives viewers a chance to see a familiar story from a new perspective and encourages them to think about how storytelling can evolve with technology. "For us Finns, Väinämöinen and Louhi are well-known mythological figures, but with AI, we had the chance to explore their stories from a slightly different angle."

Despite the AI's involvement, Snellman emphasizes that human intuition and perspective remain irreplaceable: "I don't believe that even the best tools can fully replace the human touch. It's crucial that technology supports the

storyteller, not replaces them. It's still up to the human to guide the AI towards a creative vision and correct its biases and mistakes," Snellman concludes.

Despite its potential, AI still has many limitations that affect the final result: "Our little film has quite a few flaws, both in the storytelling and the visuals, but only some of them are due to the technology. At least half of the mistakes are entirely on us. And the same goes for the sparks of insight, of course. The biggest blunders and the best successes are our own human handiwork, while the middle-ground decisions are the AI's," Snellman concludes.

Preview of the Film Industry's Future?

"The Kalevala – A Few Selected Poems About Creation" is more than just a demonstration of AI's potential in creative processes. The non-commercial project was created primarily to inspire and to show what a small but dedicated team can achieve with the right tools. The film was developed over several weeks, with the team working during evenings and weekends alongside their day jobs. "We lost quite a few nights of sleep over this, but we also learned an incredible amount—not only about AI but also about ourselves as individuals. And we had a lot of fun," says Snellman.

The film's premiere at the HIFF festival received an enthusiastic response and sparked a discussion on the integration of technology, storytelling, and culture. It is widely accepted in the industry that AI will inevitably change the film and TV sector in the future. "It is crucial to stay up-to-date and start training oneself with new technology, at the very latest, now," comments Alisha Hasan, Head of Industry at the Helsinki International Film Festival and Finnish Film Affair. "At the same time, there are many issues surrounding copyright and environmental sustainability that require clear guidelines, oversight, and legislation," Hasan adds. However, she believes in the benefits of AI, especially in the development phase, as low-budget productions often have to skip many phases entirely: 'Rarely, if ever, does one get to test shooting locations, lighting, costumes, or set design in advance,' Hasan clarifies.

The creation of this Kalevala short film has already led to other opportunities. Umberto Onza has been conducting training sessions and MasterClasses on using AI, expanding his understanding of both its potential and its risks. *"AI will inevitably influence how films and stories are created in the future. There are ethical and even philosophical dimensions to consider, but ultimately, the responsibility lies with the user: AI can be used for good or bad, rightly or wrongly. Personally, I believe we must experiment and then discuss the results openly. That's the only way to find responsible ways to use AI,"* Onza sums up.

"The Kalevala – A Few Selected Poems About Creation" premiered on September 22, 2024, and is now available for free on YouTube with subtitles in Finnish and English at: <https://youtu.be/KwjvyUX2ikE?feature=shared>. The film is a non-commercial passion project intended to explore, educate, and inspire a broad audience about the possibilities of AI.

The short film was produced in their spare time by director Umberto Onza and screenwriter Juha Snellman, with visual effects by Ville Hackzell. The Helsinki-based trio currently work in different departments at the award-winning creative agency TBWA\Helsinki. Onza serves as Design Director at the NEXT innovation unit focused on generative AI and product design, Snellman works as a senior creative and copywriter in the creative unit, and Hackzell is an editor in the Screen video production team.

Press package:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1n1ofMUgUhoqTHdlt1B2AQhzkmrCfuHEf?usp=sharing>

Further info:

Producer/screenwriter Juha Snellman

hello@juhasnellman.com