



Stockbridge Community Cinema

Programme Notes 21 August 2026

SENTIMENTAL VALUE

Norway | 2025 | 133 min | Cert 15

Director: Joachim Trier

Screenplay: Eskil Vogt, Joachim Trier

Starring: Renate Reinsve, Stellan Skarsgård, Inga Ibsdotter Lilleaas



This article first appeared in Sight and Sound Magazine in May 2025. It contains several plot details so may be better to read after watching the film

Most cinephiles are prone to the fantasy that if you make – or watch – the right film, life-changing consequences will arise. In Joachim Trier's *Sentimental Value*, his follow-up to the widely beloved *The Worst Person in the World* (2022), the director explores the relationship between a disappointing dad and his two daughters. Gustav Borg (Stellan Skarsgård, giving the performance of his life) is a director clinging to the belief that he does not need to directly confront his eldest daughter's anger and, instead, can move the family unit on by casting her as the lead in his latest film.

An idealism about art is not fully abandoned by Joachim Trier in the course of his gorgeous, generous and gut-wrenching meditation about inherited familial suffering, it is simply grounded within movingly observed and performed family dynamics.

The script co-written by Trier with longtime screenwriting partner, Eskil Vogt drums up characters with such breadth of personality that they can almost mask what's eating them up inside. Nora (Renate Reinsve) is a talented actress who identifies as "80 percent fucked up". Unlike her younger sister, she can't shake

her anger and despair over Gustav leaving Norway for Sweden after her parents' divorce during their childhood.

After her luminous break-out turn in *The Worst Person in the World*, Reinsve proves that she has so much more left to show us. Here she uses her innately joyous screen presence – all lively expressive eyes, often blinking back tears – as the first layer of a character who, when cornered, is prone to withering outbursts and, when in despair, becomes very still.

The best person in her life is stalwart younger sister, Agnes (Inga Ibsdotter Lilleaas – riveting) whose settled domesticity with a husband and child contrasts with Nora's restless loneliness. When the child, Erik, asks if she has a boyfriend, Nora hesitates, unsure over the childsafe definition of her affair with the married Jakob (Anders Danielsen Lie).

Jakob is introduced in the film's second opening sequence, in a scene that builds up an entertaining but still piercing depiction of stage fright. On opening night, leading lady Nora has locked herself in her dressing room. A series of panicked stagehands coax her out, only for her to instantly flee. She runs into techie, Jakob, and without a second thought grabs him for a quickie. When he protests, she relents, telling him a slap in the face will do the trick. She needs something to take out of her head.

This entire scene is directed to bring out the reactions of everyone invested in Nora making it out on stage and sets a tone that is frenetically comic and rich with the emotions of all involved. Such funny flourishes augment rather than undermine the mounting stakes and Trier alternates the handheld backstage footage with stately wide shots of the waiting audience. An even greater visual payoff is waiting once the lights go down and the pyrotechnic stagecraft begins.

Like it or not, a career in the arts gives Nora something in common with Gustav, a European art house auteur. When he returns home to see Nora and Agnes after the death of their mother, he is bearing a script. Borg struggles to find financing these days, but fortunately he has just gained an American movie star amongst his fans in the form of Rachel Kemp (Elle Fanning).

Scene-setting unfolds at an assured and pleasurable pace, offering opportunities for all of the actors to set out the parameters of their performances as Trier delivers riffs on familiar film industry mores. Skarsgård shows us a man who can act the benevolent cinema authority with his ingénue fan, but the moment that she leaves, we see an ageing and lonely man who isn't sure where to put his foot next, other than his mouth.

The path for these characters leads back to the start, which is to say it leads to a home that has borne witness to many generations of Borg. It is in the imagined perspective of this house that *Sentimental Value* opens. Over a montage of scenes that swing from warm family mess to loud parental arguments, Nora wonders (in thoughts shared with us through voice-over) what the house makes of all of this.

Trier plays all machinations with a straight bat until a moment between the sisters in Nora's bedroom recasts everything we have seen so far. Lightly pitched details are revealed as integral to a deeper, darker story. There is a

return to preoccupations from Trier's Oslo Trilogy filtered through the soul-searching of a director who has sincerely given himself over to moviemaking. To me, it feels as though Trier is saying that it's not that cinema isn't magic, it's that this magic will not suffice alone. Creative expression by itself is not enough, there is the equally important matter of returning the gaze of the person looking at you once the movie ends.

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