



***The Worst Person In The World***

**128 min**

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A good movie is easy to talk about, easy to explain, but when we're discussing something truly great, we're left with language usually associated with magic. It's as if something *extra* happens to a movie, something conjured that arrives independently, like a gift to the filmmaker, and to the audience. Such is the case of *The Worst Person in the World*, directed by Joachim Trier, a Norwegian filmmaker who hinted at greatness with *Oslo, August 31st* and *Thelma*, and now he has stopped hinting. Co-written by Trier, it's the story of a young woman, as seen from her mid-20s through her early 30s, told in a dozen episodes. Trier wrote the film specifically for Renate Reinsve, and it has the feeling of one of those classic collaborations — like Marlene Dietrich and Josef von Sternberg, where a director is besotted with a woman's image and personality and wants to bring every aspect of her to the screen. He has to make her interesting to the entire world. And Trier does. Reinsve, who won the acting prize at last year's Cannes Film Festival, has a quality of being down-to-earth and yet mysterious, perfectly normal and yet distinctive, with a reflexive honesty that suggests an inner core of integrity. She also has charm — and a smile that makes viewers feel like she has just let them in on a conspiracy. The role she plays, Julie, is not the worst person in the world. She's an unusually restless person, who starts off in medical school and decides she doesn't like it. She goes into photography, and then starts working in a bookstore, all in the movie's first five minutes. In this, we recognize someone with courage: She is willing to admit what she doesn't want, even when she's not sure what she *does* want. The rest of this long film is about her journey, which is all about discovering who she wants to be. Inevitably, the journey involves romance — because love is often how people get an education in themselves — and so we see her get into a relationship with a successful cartoonist, Aksel (Anders Danielsen Lie). He is lovely in this and makes almost as strong an impression here as Reinsve. Though at times preoccupied with his work and career, his 40-something Aksel leaves us in no doubt that he really sees her and that he knows her better than anyone, including the audience, and so we must pay attention. Lie lends the character interesting notes of watchfulness, tact and regret. We also understand why Julie might want to get away from him. There's a fascinating sequence at a wedding, in which she meets a man (Herbert Nordrum) and they share an attraction but decide not to cheat on their partners. Instead, they share a series of intimacies — that are straight out of childhood. The sequence combines adult longing with a sense of characters wanting to flee adulthood. *The Worst Person in the World* is a Norwegian film, not a Fellini movie. Even when angry, the characters barely raise their voices. The film has the measured and expansive quality of real life, which could have been dull. It's anything but that. Instead, by making Julie so real and vivid, Reinsve and Trier accomplish something rare. They make everything that happens to her feel as interesting as if it were happening to you.

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