

# FAMILIES LIKE OURS

## PRODUCTION NOTES



## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

FAMILIES LIKE OURS is a saga about saying goodbye and about longing, but also about hope and new beginnings. It is a declaration of love to my country – and to the resilience and unity of mankind.

What if our country as we know it was to be evacuated? If, slowly but steadily, the population of our well-functioning civilized society was to be divided in two: those who can finance their own fare and those who depend on welfare. What would happen to ourselves and our families? What would it feel like to be refugees on the outside? How would we cope? If it was our turn to say goodbye to all we know and take for granted? How strong is our love for the homeland once we are forced to leave it? How strong is our solidarity?

This situation - where we are forced to leave our country, our friends, and relatives, and all we hold dear; where our financial and cultural bonds, and all we thought was normal cease to exist - gives rise to an existential examination of human life, which I find compelling. An examination of a people who have not personally experienced being refugees since World War II.

What would happen to people from my own life? Who would fit into my lifeboat? Where would we go? I chose to dwell on this thought experiment and follow it into a desperate situation. I found inspiration in younger generations; in their sense of responsibility for the world we share. In their energy, invincibility, quest, and burgeoning potential. In this way, the story is also a homage to the hope of youth.

FAMILIES LIKE OURS is, in all modesty, meant to be an epic family saga inspired by the great European stories of emigration, with an echo of the melancholy songs and tales from yesteryear when parts of Europe emigrated to America.

The story is set in a reality that much resembles our own. Everything is as we know it, except for the fact that this reality - which we know so well - is slowly brought to a new beginning. In focusing deeply on individual characters, the world feels huge, irrational, and wonderful all at the same time. Families are shattered to pieces and new lives emerge. Love blooms as unexpected reunions and reconciliations take place.

Resonance is important. The close psychological drama is important. It is not a tale of disaster or of nature's revenge on mankind, but an examination of human themes: farewells, separation, and survival. An examination of the anxieties concerning the world shared by myself and my son when he was seven. At worst, a look into the future. At best, an expression of our shared fears and reflections of what we all want to hold on to.

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## OFFICIAL SYNOPSIS

*Countries disappear, love remains.*

Denmark, in a not-too-distant future. The rising water levels can no longer be ignored and the country needs to be evacuated. As people disperse in all directions, they must bid farewell to what they love, what they know, and who they are.

Slowly but steadily, everything changes. All property becomes worthless, all fortunes shift, and luck favours only a few. Those who can afford it travel to affluent countries while the less well-off depend on government-funded relocation to more challenging destinations. Families, friends, and loved ones are separated. Some will be overcome by hatred and division, while others will nurture love and foster new beginnings.

Against this backdrop we meet Laura, a high school student in love for the first time and on the cusp of graduation. When news of the evacuation breaks, the course of Laura and her family's lives are changed forever, and Laura is forced into the impossible dilemma of choosing between the three people she loves the most.

Zentropa Entertainments, TV 2 Denmark and STUDIOCANAL present a CANAL+ Original Series 'Families Like Ours' a series by Thomas Vinterberg with Amaryllis August, Albert Rudbeck Lindhardt, Nikolaj Lie Kaas, Paprika Steen, Helene Reingaard Neumann, Magnus Millang, Esben Smed, Thomas Bo Larsen, David Dencik, Asta Kamma August, Max Kaysen Høyrup.

Script by Thomas Vinterberg & Bo. Hr. Hansen, Director of Photography Sturla Brandth Grøvlen, DFF, Editors Anne Østerud & Janus Billeskov Jansen, Sound designers Hans Møller & Peter Storm Wich, Composer Valentin Hadjadj, Production designer Sabine Hviid, Costume designer Manon Rasmussen, Make-up & hair designer Anne Moralis, Line producer Kristina Kornum, Post producer Line Plougsbæk, Producers Sisse Graum Jørgensen & Kasper Dissing, Director Thomas Vinterberg.

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## WHEN THE IMPOSSIBLE BECOMES REALITY

“They’re going to close the country.”

With that six-word text message the lives of an entire nation change forever. *FAMILIES LIKE OURS*, the first television series from Thomas Vinterberg, director of the Academy Award-winning *ANOTHER ROUND*, imagines what might happen if an entire country had to be evacuated, scattering the population across the globe, turning his home nation of Denmark into just a memory.

That text message is sent, secretly, by Nikolaj (Esben Smed), an employee in the Danish government, to his husband, Henrik. After years of increasing rain and rising water levels, Denmark is experiencing extreme flooding, which will soon make it uninhabitable. With every possible solution exhausted, the government has come to a near unimaginable decision: the entire country will have to be evacuated. Every citizen will be sent to a different country. Denmark as a nation will cease to exist.

In this terrifying, yet all too believable, scenario, *FAMILIES LIKE OURS* follows one family as they have their old lives ripped from them and try to envisage a new future. They’ll be split across Europe, have loyalties tested, and face almost unbearable choices. But even as their worst nightmares become reality, they’ll have each other. *FAMILIES LIKE OURS* is about the unbreakable power of love and the human capacity to endure and adapt.

## STRANGER THAN FICTION

For Thomas Vinterberg, *FAMILIES LIKE OURS* sparked into life just as most of his projects do: when he was alone and letting his mind wander. “It’s called *getting* an idea, not preparing or buying an idea,” says the writer-director. “Ideas are not something you can control really, annoying as it may be. They suddenly just arrive.” In this case, it was late 2018 and Vinterberg was in Paris for work, sitting in a hotel in Montmartre and thinking of home.

“It was a Sunday and I was bored,” he says. “I was missing my family, thinking about my children and their generation and the world they’re growing up in – their perception of it and their sense of responsibility for all of it. Then this thought experiment began.” As he considered the rapidly changing planet, contending with drought, hurricanes, floods, he started to wonder what today’s teenagers might encounter in their lifetimes. Then the premise of the show struck him. “What would happen if we had to evacuate our country?”

Vinterberg’s home country, Denmark, has been experiencing higher levels of rain in recent years. He pondered what could happen if that rain didn’t stop, if the flooding got so bad that it never went away. How long could people continue to live there? And what might happen when it reached a point of no return? What if Denmark vanished below the water?

As with all Vinterberg’s projects, this premise presented a new way to explore people. He is endlessly interested in the ways extraordinary circumstances affect ordinary humans. This approach has made him one of the most lauded and respected film directors in the world. From his breakthrough movie *FESTEN*, in which a family celebration is exploded by the revelation of a long-hidden secret; to *THE HUNT*, a drama about a teacher falsely accused of a terrible crime; to his Oscar-winning *ANOTHER ROUND*, which sees four men test the effects of alcohol on their lives, with sometimes amusing, sometimes tragic consequences, Vinterberg always begins with characters familiar to all of us. They have jobs like ours, relationships like ours, and go through all the regular daily things we do. They’re not people who are prepared for the shocking things that happen to them. That’s what makes his work so intriguing. He makes us imagine how we’d cope. “I always write, to some extent, about people that I’ve known,” says Vinterberg. “I’ve done that ever since *FESTEN*. It’s not that I have any problem imagining invented people, but in writing about people and a world I know, you create something more truthful and honest.”

As the ideas for *FAMILIES LIKE OURS* percolated, Vinterberg was certain he had something with potential, and possibly the most expansive idea of his career so far, but he also knew it was a more radical concept than anything he’d worked on before. He made some notes about how it all might unfold and did some preliminary writing with Bo Hr. Hansen, with whom he’d collaborated on the 1996 project *THE BIGGEST HEROES*. He discussed his initial thoughts with a few trusted people, just to get others’ input on what he was doing.

“The friends I showed it to said it sounded crazy, too futuristic, and totally implausible!” he says. “Then times changed”.

A little over a year after Vinterberg had the seed of the idea for FAMILIES LIKE OURS, the COVID pandemic struck. In a matter of months, people around the world were being given governmental instructions on where they could and couldn’t go. Families were kept apart for months by unfortunate timing and geography. People whose lives had until very recently felt very comfortable, suddenly found themselves frightened, worried about how to support and protect their loved ones, anxious about what life might look like just a few weeks from now. Much of the world was experiencing, all at the same time, what could happen when your future is no longer in your control.

It was certainly not a situation Vinterberg wanted or took lightly – he was just as unsettled as everybody else – but it made him look at FAMILIES LIKE OURS with a new perspective. The scenarios that only a short time ago were largely theoretical felt newly relatable. The prospect of sudden separation from the people and places you love was something many of us could now understand on a deep level. “It felt very uncomfortable,” says Vinterberg. “We had ideas for the show before COVID that then appeared in front of us during COVID. The idea seemed suddenly even more relevant.” And in a world suddenly overwhelmed by fear and uncertainty, a message of hope, even in the darkest times, was vital.

Vinterberg knew he had to tell this story. As he and Hansen continued their work, he realised it was going to be too big to contain in a single movie. He was going to have to master an entirely new medium.

## **ENTERING UNCHARTED TERRITORY**

The thought of making a TV show is not new to Vinterberg. He’s certainly never been resistant to the possibility. He’s had a number of ideas that could have expanded into the broader canvas that only television offers, but FAMILIES LIKE OURS was the first one that demanded it.

“I’ve definitely considered television before,” Vinterberg says. “When I made my film *FESTEN*, I remember the sort of sad feeling of ending the shoot with all these characters and actors – this family that I’d really enjoyed spending time with. I had a lot more to tell about them. That’s when I first felt a desire to make a TV series. I wanted to further unfold this slice of life we’d made.” He laughs. “Then a lot of years went by and a lot of films happened.” As he began to collate all his characters and plot for *FAMILIES LIKE OURS*, he felt the same feeling he’d had on *FESTEN*. He simply couldn’t bear to lose any of these people or not allow them to tell all the tales they held. “I couldn’t fit it into a feature film. I thought now was the chance to try television.”

To help him bring all his ideas to life, Vinterberg turned to a collaborator from the very beginning of his career. In 1996, Vinterberg and Bo Hr. Hansen co-wrote *THE BIGGEST HEROES*, about a bank robber who discovers he has a child and goes on the run with newly discovered daughter in tow. It was the first filmmaking experience for both men, and Vinterberg’s feature directing debut. Some 25 years later, Vinterberg called his old friend, who in the years since *THE BIGGEST HEROES* has built an illustrious career writing TV and film (*DEPARTMENT Q: JOURNAL 64*, *THE ART OF CRYING*), to suggest getting the team back together.

“I missed Bo’s calm and wise behaviour,” says Vinterberg, fondly. “He’s very skilled, very talented and super humble. That package worked very well for this. He understood from the start that this was a very personal story for me, and he was very respectful of that throughout. He was asking all the right questions and writing brilliant scenes. This collaboration was very smooth and very gentle.”

Vinterberg together with his longtime collaborators at Zentropa took the idea for *FAMILIES LIKE OURS* to *STUDIOCANAL*, with whom they enjoyed a very successful working relationship. “*STUDIOCANAL* distributed *ANOTHER ROUND* in the UK and were absolutely fantastic,” says Vinterberg. *ANOTHER ROUND* became the first Danish film in 32 years to win a BAFTA for Best Film Not In The English Language, and won the Academy Award for Best International Feature Film. “*STUDIOCANAL* has believed in the project from the first time we discussed it and has supported my vision wholeheartedly all the way. *STUDIOCANAL* simply has been a fantastic partner throughout – strengthening the international perspective, backing and contributing to the creative vision without hesitation.”

Vinterberg says the process of making a seven-episode series wasn't actually a huge departure from the way he makes his films, because he always constructs a lot more than viewers see on screen. "When I make a feature film, I make just as much work for myself as I did making this series," he says. "I always create the history of the characters before the film and the story I imagine happening after the film." This isn't because he plans on revealing any of that information to the audience, but because it helps him create more rounded, complex characters and gives his actors a deep well of information to draw from. "On every project, I like to begin with a resume of what happened before the story begins," says Vinterberg. "All actors enjoy having a past to bring to each scene. In this case, I had the opportunity to dig into even more of that history."

The process for structuring the narrative into chapters also had much in common with the way he makes his films. "I always work in sequences," he says. "I think in terms of what unfolds in each place, so that worked in much the same way here. In fact, I translated my whole way of making movies into this project." His entire approach was not to see this as an altogether new way of storytelling, but simply an expansion on the way he's always worked. "We treated it just as we would a feature film."

In a way, it became like combining multiple feature films, with a wide cast of characters getting the depth of exploration Vinterberg brings to his movies. "This is a multi-plot story," says Vinterberg. "We have several families and many family members that have their own narratives. There are many stories to tell."

## **FAMILY MATTERS**

The series follows a regular upper middle-class family as their world turns upside down. At the heart of the show is 19-year-old Laura (Amaryllis August). In her final year of school, Laura is excited about everything the future has to offer: travel to other countries, myriad choices of career, burgeoning first love with her classmate Elias (Albert Rudbeck Lindhardt). Laura's father, Jacob (Nikolaj Lie Kaas), is a successful architect with lucrative government



contracts. He leads a happy life with his second wife, Amalie (Helene Reingaard Neumann), with whom he has a young son.

Fanny (Paprika Steen), Laura's mother, and Jacob's ex-wife, is a science journalist living alone in the centre of town. Signed off work due to stress, she has little contact with anyone but her daughter. Amalie's brother, Nikolaj (Esben Smed), is a government employee with insider knowledge of the impending flooding and the plans for evacuation. Along with his husband, Henrik (Magnus Millang), Nikolaj is attempting to sell off as many assets as possible and make it out of the country without his actions – which would lead to almost certain imprisonment – being detected.

Other characters include Holger (Thomas Bo Larsen), Fanny's brother who refuses to accept his country's closure; Christel (Asta Kamma August) a young mother facing a terrible decision about whether to send her young son, Lucas (Max Kaysen Høyrup), alone to the UK or keep him with her; and Peter (David Dencik), Henrik's scheming older brother who suddenly finds himself in need of help from the sibling he's bullied all his life.

In writing these characters, Vinterberg, as he always does, drew on elements of people he has encountered throughout his own life. "It's a story that takes place in an environment that I know," he says. "That's how I always write. Everything comes out of observing real people." He chose to depict a comfortable upper middle-class family because "they are like the people I spend my days with – people like myself – and they are very privileged people. I thought it was interesting to see how these people would survive? What would this take from them, this great fall?"

The wide cast allowed Vinterberg to explore many answers to this question. Jacob, a proud man who is used to being able to provide for his family and who enjoys the status his job brings, has to confront the loss of that status and the possibility that in another country he may be no more important than anyone else. In turn, Amalie learns to take charge and claim independence as her family – and extended family – crumbles around her.

For Nikolaj and Henrik, survival means wrestling with what matters to them. Does happiness lie in maintaining the wealth and luxury they currently enjoy, even if that means breaking the law? And what future dreams can they hold onto, even as the world they know is fading from existence? For Fanny, the end of Denmark is the end of a dark chapter in her life, when

ambitions were thwarted by mental health challenges. With only her daughter tying her to Denmark, what might she find in a new land?

All of them are facing a terrifying, unexpected present, but also learning what their future might look like with a clean slate. Many will find unexpected opportunity when forced to start again, forge new relationships, and learn just what they're capable of when fighting for survival.

When casting, Vinterberg drew in regular collaborators alongside exciting newcomers. *FAMILIES LIKE OURS* reunites Vinterberg with a number of actors he's worked with before, some of them multiple times, including Helene Reingaard Neumann, Paprika Steen, Magnus Millang, Thomas Bo Larsen, and Albert Rudbeck Lindhardt. Working with actors he understands, and who understand him, helps in creating the specificity that is central to Vinterberg's work.

"In filmmaking, there has to be a sense of everyone relying on each other," he says. "This is a very naked, vulnerable process and I need to work with people with whom I can be very honest. I need them to feel free to make mistakes and to understand that if they do something that doesn't work, it's ok, because we're all on the same team. We're in it together and we're going to make it work together. I want an environment where everything is completely transparent and we're all unafraid to be ambitious. That is hugely helped by working with people you know and with whom you have mutual respect."

"Thomas is a very good listener," says Nikolaj Lie Kaas, who plays Jacob. "He's very interested in what you have to say, but also very clear in what he wants. He's really open-minded when you come to him with suggestions and always happy to listen to a different approach. That's what I love about him. This was the first time I've worked with him and it was a very, very happy experience."

There are many in the cast who, like Kaas, are very experienced actors but new to working with Vinterberg, but there is also one actor new not just to Vinterberg but to the entire acting industry. Laura is the first professional role for Amaryllis August. It's an extraordinary debut. Laura's life begins as many teenage lives do, with thoughts of friends, an exciting future, and the thrill of first love. But through the series everything Laura knows falls apart. Her family

is split. She has to choose between her parents. She finds herself in unknown places, all alone, uncertain of whether she'll ever again see the people she loves or even live to see another day. The role asks enormous amounts of any actor, let alone one making her screen debut. August more than rises to the challenge.

"We looked at a lot of young actresses for this role," says Vinterberg. "Amaryllis had this beautiful balance of being delicate and truthful, yet with the ability to fully inhabit the character's more dramatic moments." The tenets of transparency and mutual respect could not have been more important in this working relationship. "In the beginning, she was understandably quite shy," says Vinterberg, "but she had a natural talent and a natural ability to convey her thoughts through just her eyes." The pair worked together over weeks, ahead of shooting, to immerse August in Laura's life and help her to understand on an instinctive level how this initially innocent and comfortable girl would behave when faced with life-threatening situations and heart-rending choices.

"I have no experience to talk from, so I don't know what other directors might be like," laughs Amaryllis August, "but Thomas gave me lots of room to do my own thing, while also keeping a watchful eye on me and telling me what did and didn't work. It was really lovely."

"We had a very long rehearsal period," says Vinterberg. "I worked a lot with Amaryllis and Albert Rudbeck Lindhardt, who plays her boyfriend Elias, who has a lot more acting experience (Lindhardt previously worked with Vinterberg on *ANOTHER ROUND*). I wanted to sort of coddle them and make them inseparable, to form a bond before we started shooting. I think that was so important for both of them."

"Thomas is an incredible perfectionist," adds August. "He would spend a lot of time to get the scene exactly as he wanted it. I love that about him. It's incredible to work with him."

Laura's journey takes her through such physically taxing ordeals, trudging through freezing remote areas of Romania, and battling with people-smugglers, that the shoot was also an endurance test of sorts for August. "She had to go to the gym and do boxing training to be fit and ready for this very long shoot," says Vinterberg. By the time shooting began, August was so thoroughly prepared that she embraced everything Vinterberg asked of her. "Her character is crying, being thrown in the mud – going through very difficult things. Amaryllis never

complained once. She is such a trooper. She worked and worked and worked. She loved it. She was truly incredible.”

“Working with Amaryllis, it’s almost like you’re not acting, because what she does is so real,” says Kaas. “It’s fascinating to watch. And it’s very easy to act opposite someone like that. It makes you better as an actor.”

Perhaps the most extraordinary part of Laura’s journey is that it turns her from a child, moving very comfortably through life, to a young woman who almost has to become the glue keeping her family together.

“In the beginning, she’s very insecure and hasn’t really developed into adulthood yet,” says August. “Through the series, she’s sort of rushed into adulthood, because of the extraordinary circumstances.” Her very different relationships with her parents show opposing sides of Laura. “With her mother, Laura is almost the parental figure, instead of the other way around, because she wants to protect and be kind to her mother. With her father, their relationship is much more traditional, so they get into conflict more – partly because they’re very alike. Then of course she meets Elias and falls madly in love with him, which makes things even more complicated – because love is always complicated.”

## **A STORY ACROSS MANY BORDERS**

Amaryllis August was not the only one throwing herself into unfamiliar territory. The international nature of FAMILIES LIKE OURS’ saga took Vinterberg and his cast and crew to five different countries, for a shoot that lasted almost a year.

When the people of Denmark are told they’re going to be evacuated, there are too many of them to go to one place. While those with money and connections are able to pick and choose where they go, many are sent to Romania to live with strangers in crowded rooms. As the show’s characters are split, trying to find new homes as comfortable as those they left behind (and rarely succeeding), the action travels across Europe. Shooting took place in Denmark, Romania, France, Sweden and the Czech Republic (the UK and Poland are also depicted but

were not shooting locations). While Vinterberg has shot outside Denmark for previous films, including *FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD* (shot in the United Kingdom) and *KURSK* (shot in France and Belgium), *FAMILIES LIKE OURS* required him to shoot in more countries than ever before, and to quickly establish a sense of realism in each of them.

“It was a constant learning process and a very humbling one,” laughs Vinterberg. “You have to come from a very curious place and do lots of research. You don’t want to do an outsider’s version of showing these places.” Events take characters to Paris, where they experience both the most luxurious side of the city and the polar opposite; and sequences in Poland where deserted towns and stern military are encountered. “How do you properly dig into Parisian life? What does a shabby Parisian hotel look like? And when you meet Polish soldiers, what would they be like? How would they behave with a young refugee? There was so much research.”

Vinterberg, Hansen and the creative team worked with consultants from each country depicted and welcomed all their guidance. Vinterberg has no embarrassment in saying his show wouldn’t be the same without it. “The first scenes we wrote for Paris, they felt a bit touristy,” he says. “We were more than happy to be given guidance on how to make it more authentic.”

When it came to selecting the right cinematographer to help bring the story to life, Vinterberg felt encouraged by his previous fruitful collaboration with Sturla Brandth Grøvlen: “There was no doubt in my mind that I wanted to make the series together with my Director of Photography from *ANOTHER ROUND*, Sturla,” he says. The pair had developed a strong working relationship on *ANOTHER ROUND* and Vinterberg knew Grøvlen could bring to life everything he imagined for *FAMILIES LIKE OURS*. They worked together on a visual language that would fluently tell a story that is both epic in its scale and extremely vulnerable and detailed in its attention to character.

“We wanted to tell this story with a sense of authority and precision in the visual language, while also fostering a feeling of intimacy and care for the characters,” says Vinterberg. With so many different aspects of storytelling to balance, they broke that visual language down, so between them they had a simple shorthand for how each scene would look.

“We worked with four different types of visual expression linked to the different layers of the story. We termed the different modes the ‘Authoritarian Camera’, the ‘Subjective Camera’, the ‘Dreaming Camera’, and the ‘Searching Camera’.”

The ‘Authoritarian Camera’ is characterised by an observant, insistent gaze, taking in details that reinforce characters’ emotions. The ‘Subjective Camera’ moves in a freer manner, following the characters more closely and intimately, presenting room for poetic details that delve into the characters’ psychology. The ‘Dreaming Camera’ is a mode relating to the characters’ dreams and subconsciousness, allowing for a more poetically experimental visual language. The ‘Searching Camera’ favours authenticity, with the ambition to capture the ‘gifts’ that occur in some of the more unpredictable settings the series was shot in – inviting improvisation and playfulness.

None of these terms were rigid – a scene might involve both the Dreaming Camera and Authoritarian Camera – but they were key to creating a clear look that could encompass many different moods and methods of storytelling while always feeling unified. “Visual expression and methodology are deeply interlinked in our work, Sturla's and mine,” says Vinterberg. “Our starting point was always the situation and the psychology of the characters, which in turn made the imagery seem consistent.”

Vinterberg reunited with another member of his ANOTHER ROUND crew, bringing in production designer Sabine Hviid to take on the immense task of creating an entire world for the show. The huge challenge of the project was to depict a world that is in many ways just like our own, but also appears authentically changed by the central ecological disaster and the sudden reshaping of countries and their populations.

“Sabine had to be part of the journey,” says Vinterberg. “Although our story is based on a hypothetical scenario, it takes place in a close-to-present day, much like our own, and is characterized by realism rather than dystopian drama. We decided to have the aesthetics of ANOTHER ROUND carry over in terms of describing the specifics of the city and home environments. Filtered through a lyrical, human, and authentic lens, our hope is that audiences across the world will be able to recognize themselves.”

Vinterberg and Hviid discussed ways to subtly visually delineate the different parts of the narrative, giving some lightness and softness to the environments in the families' comfortable Denmark existence; a harder, less comfortable texture to scenes of their travel to new countries; and a quiet sense of renewal and even optimism as we see their new lives.

"Visually, we wanted our tale to consist of three 'poems', each with their own stylistic expression," says Vinterberg. "They were: Home, The Journey and A New Beginning. All of them brimming with life in their own unique way."

FAMILIES LIKE OURS includes some of the largest scale sequences Vinterberg has ever directed. One breathtaking scene has Laura desperately racing through the streets of Copenhagen to get to her mother. The city is overwhelmed by thousands of citizens trying to escape, and people protesting against the evacuation. Another takes place on the dock next to a huge refugee ship transporting countless refugees to a new life overseas. The scale didn't faze Vinterberg.

"I have to say, it's a lot harder making a small movie," he says. "On a huge production day, with lots of extras and all sorts of stuff going on, there are a lot of people there to help you do your job. On a small film you basically have to do everything yourself, so in some ways working on a large scale is easier." The challenge was in maintaining the intimacy of his narrative on a bigger canvas. "The thing I'm always focused on is how the story comes through. Even when there is a lot going on around the character, it has to still be all about the character and what they're experiencing."

Part of the reason none of the scale, or globe-hopping, intimidated Vinterberg is because this is the part of filmmaking he loves: the leap into the unknown and figuring out things that initially seem impossible. "Even after all these years, every film shoot is nerve-wracking," he says. "There's always fear. Will I achieve my ambitions? Will I get everything we need on the day? There are always obstacles and always worries, but you surround yourself with great people, you shoot, and you get creative. There are times when you think your head is going to explode from all the decisions, but you find ways over every obstacle, you make decisions in the moment that suddenly make everything better. You find new moments you could never have planned for. And I think having so many things to think about stops you focusing too much on yourself. I've been told that's what keeps you happy." Vinterberg laughs.

## IN DEEP WATER

Vinterberg's focus in this series is on the people and the way their lives change. While he had no ambitions to make his version of a traditional disaster movie, he thought long and hard about how to depict the world-changing floods. He wanted to present the rising waters seriously, not sensationally, and to have this key element feel like a constant presence without taking focus from the human narrative. "I see this as a catastrophe in slow-motion," he says. "I think that's much closer to reality than a normal catastrophe movie. Countries like ours would be prepared".

Vinterberg and Bo Hr. Hansen did thorough research into what could happen if flooding progressed to such a disastrous level. "I have to be clear that this is a thought experiment," he says. "The water level will probably not rise as much as in the show in the foreseeable future, but it was important to research what is happening and what might happen. And we did a lot of research into how foreign ministries would react. What would they do to try and 'win' in this situation? What would be the process to try to relocate this many people?"

Although this is something of a 'what if?' scenario, Vinterberg also notes that forecasts of the future altered drastically in the years from the show's inception to now. Parts of Europe have seen record-breaking rain and flooding. Others have seen temperatures exceed anything scientists thought possible. "Nature doesn't move in a straight line," says Vinterberg. "It's not always predictable. The experts we spoke to at the time were saying, 'Well, it would take a very long time for this to happen', but I wonder what they might say today."

How much of the flooding to show was a subject of great debate between Vinterberg and Hansen. They decided they wanted to convey its constant threat without showing too much, giving only stark, brief looks at the sunken streets of Denmark. "There's something about the invisible, the inevitable, being out there, getting ever closer, that makes it very scary," says Vinterberg. "That was the sense of danger we were trying to build."

While this is a series focused on an imagined future for Denmark, it's a scenario that will speak to audiences all over the world. Vinterberg knows from experience that core human emotions will always translate. "Throughout my career, every time I've been very specific about something and made it very much about Denmark, the themes become universal," says Vinterberg. "I think, actually, by being extremely specific you avoid being generic. Being



specific to what I know makes it real, but the themes are ones we all recognise. We all know what it's like to feel despair, longing, survival, resilience.”

## **HOPE, ALWAYS**

As much as this is a story of incredible drama and people living through unthinkable horrors, it is also about hope and compassion. Vinterberg seeks to ask questions about different relationships. How do we behave as communities and nations when other people are facing disaster, and how far can our family bonds stretch?

“I didn’t start this as an environmental shout-out,” says Vinterberg. “This is about asking existential questions. What happens if only a finite number of people can fit in the lifeboat? Who will you allow in? And what happens to those of us from privileged Western societies when we become the refugees? This isn’t about being political. It’s about what’s happening to all of us.”

Some of the show's key themes only started to emerge for Vinterberg as work on the show progressed. When he had that initial idea back in 2018, the world was a very different place. All of us have gone through extraordinary changes and, in all our different ways, looked at the relationships in our lives.

“This story is a lot about love,” says Vinterberg. “It’s about that young love between Laura and Elias, and how that can grow into something much stronger. And it’s also about how love can prevail, even as your circumstances fall apart. You can see that in Nikolaj and Henrik, or in Jacob and Amalie.” He pauses. “But I think the main theme of it, which only came through while I was working on it, is that this is about resilience. Human beings have an incredible ability to adapt, even in the worst circumstances. I think there’s such dignity in that. And hope. In resilience there is hope.”

## **BIOGRAPHIES**

### **THOMAS VINTERBERG - WRITER, DIRECTOR**

Thomas Vinterberg is an Academy Award-winning filmmaker based in Copenhagen, Denmark.

Vinterberg was the first Danish filmmaker to ever receive an OSCAR® nomination for Best Director for his 2020 film *ANOTHER ROUND*. He went on to win an OSCAR®, a BAFTA, a CÉSAR and 4 European Film Awards for the blockbuster drama, which premiered in Cannes and later screened at Toronto International Film Festival and San Sebastian Film Festival.

Vinterberg graduated from the National Film School of Denmark in 1993 with his graduation project *LAST ROUND*, which won him a string of awards and a nomination for a student OSCAR®. Vinterberg then directed the award-winning short film *THE BOY WHO WALKED BACKWARDS* (1995), which went on to win multiple audience awards at film festivals, among others the Audience Award at Clermont-Ferrand. Following this, Vinterberg made his debut feature *THE BIGGEST HEROES* in 1996.

In 1995, Vinterberg and Lars von Trier wrote the manifesto for Dogme 95. Vinterberg directed the first film of the Dogme 95 movement in 1998, *THE CELEBRATION*, which was awarded the Special Jury Prize in Cannes, the Fassbinder Award at the European Film Awards, and Best Foreign Language Film at both the Los Angeles and New York Film Critics Circle, among numerous other prizes worldwide. In 2008, Vinterberg and von Trier, along with their 'Dogme brothers' Kristian Levring and Søren Kragh-Jacobsen, received the Award for Outstanding European Achievement in World Cinema at the European Film Awards.

Vinterberg directed two critically acclaimed English language films, *IT'S ALL ABOUT LOVE* (2003), starring Joaquin Phoenix, Claire Danes, and Sean Penn, and *DEAR WENDY* (2005), written by Lars von Trier and starring Jamie Bell. In 2007 Vinterberg returned to the Danish language with *WHEN A MAN COMES HOME*, followed by *SUBMARINO* (2010). The latter premiered in the Berlinale and was awarded the Nordic Council's Film Award.

In 2012, Vinterberg directed *THE HUNT*, starring Mads Mikkelsen, which was nominated for an Academy Award and a Golden Globe for Best Foreign Language Film and went on to win a British Independent Film Award for Best International Independent Film. Mads Mikkelsen won the Best Actor Award in Cannes.

In 2015, Vinterberg directed *FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD*, starring Carey Mulligan, Matthias Schoenaerts, and Michael Sheen. In 2016 he wrote and directed *THE COMMUNE*, which won a European Film Award, and a Vilnius International Film Award, and won Trine Dyrholm a Silver Bear for Best Actress.

Thomas Vinterberg has also written and directed critically acclaimed plays for the national stage at Austria's Burgtheater Wien, which play to sold-out audiences around Europe. He has also directed music videos for bands such as Blur and Metallica.

## FILMOGRAPHY

### Director:

- Sidste omgang (1993) // Last Round
- Slaget på tasken (1993)
- Drengen der gik baglæns (1994) // The Boy Who Walked Backwards
- De største helte (1996) // The Biggest Heroes
- Festen (1998) // The Celebration
- The Third Lie (2000)
- D-Dag – Niels-Henning (2000) (TV) // D-Day
- D-Dag (2000) (TV) // D-Day
- The Best of Blur (2000) (V) (video “No Distance Left To Run”)
- D-Dag – Den færdige film (2001) (TV) // D-Day – Editor’s cut
- It’s All About Love (2003)
- Dear Wendy (2005)
- En mand kommer hjem (2007) // A Man Comes Home
- Submarino (2010)
- Jagten (2012) // The Hunt
- Far from the Madding Crowd (2015)
- Kollektivet (2016) // The Commune
- Kursk (2018) // The Command
- Druk (2020) // Another Round
- Familier som vores (2024) // Families Like Ours

### Writer:

- Slaget på tasken (1993)
- Drengen der gik baglæns (1994) // The Boy Who Walked Backwards
- De største helte (1996) // The Biggest Heroes
- Festen (1998) // The Celebration
- The Third Lie (2000)
- It’s All About Love (2003)
- En mand kommer hjem (2007) // A Man Comes Home
- Submarino (2010)
- Jagten (2012) // The Hunt
- Kollektivet (2016) // The Commune
- Druk (2020) // Another Round
- Familier som vores (2024) // Families Like Ours

## MAIN CAST

### **Amaryllis August - “Laura”**

Born in 2003, Amaryllis August had recently graduated high school when taking on the leading role of ‘Laura’ in FAMILIES LIKE OURS. While she has 6 years of experience working as a professional model, the leading role of ‘Laura’ is her acting debut. As the daughter of OSCAR®-winning writer/director Bille August and actress Sara-Marie Maltha, Amaryllis August has been brought up in the film industry and gained insight and knowledge of film production through her parent’s work. Several of her seven siblings - including Asta Kamma August who also stars as ‘Christel’ in FAMILIES LIKE OURS - are actors or work behind the camera.

### **Albert Rudbeck Lindhardt - “Elias”**

Born in 2001, Albert Rudbeck Lindhardt is one of Denmark’s most in-demand young actors. Despite his young age, he has already appeared and starred in more than 20 productions since his debut in 2011. Among his most recent credits are OSCAR®-winner ANOTHER ROUND (2020) by Thomas Vinterberg, box office hit RIDERS OF JUSTICE (2020), the Netflix series CHOSEN (2022), AS IN HEAVEN (2022), and PRETTY YOUNG THING (2022). Notable credits include a feature role in COLLISION (2019), where he played opposite Nikolaj Lie Kaas, and leading roles in the feature THE DAY WILL COME (2016) and the TV 2 series FINDING HOME (2018). In 2024, he will appear in WAY HOME, once again alongside co-star Nikolaj Lie Kaas.

### **Nikolaj Lie Kaas - “Jacob”**

One of Denmark’s most beloved, versatile and multi award-winning actors, Nikolaj Lie Kaas debuted in a leading role at age 18 in THE BOYS FROM ST. PETRI (1991), which earned him the most prominent Danish film awards. He has since starred in more than 70 film and TV series working with top Danish directors and internationally. Titles include: THE KINGDOM: EXODUS (2022), RIDERS OF JUSTICE (2020), BRITANNIA (2017-2021), four “DEPARTMENT Q” films (2013, 2014, 2016, 2018), THE KILLING (2012), THE WHISTLEBLOWER (2010), BROTHERS (2004), FLICKERING LIGHTS (2000), and THE IDIOTS (1998). In 2024 he will appear in WAY HOME, and in 2025 he will be featuring in Guillermo Del Toro’s FRANKENSTEIN. He also directed and wrote the TV series AGENT

(2023) with FAMILIES LIKE OURS co-star Esben Smed in the lead. FAMILIES LIKE OURS (2024) marks his first collaboration with Thomas Vinterberg.

### **Paprika Steen - “Fanny”**

Paprika Steen is a household name in film and on stage in Denmark. Initially, she conquered the Danish audiences in Thomas Vinterberg’s THE CELEBRATION (1998) - their third collaboration after THE BIGGEST HEROES (1996) and the award-winning short film LAST ROUND (1993). Besides with Vinterberg, she has also had a long-standing collaboration with Susanne Bier in titles such as: THE FIRST LADY (2022), LOVE IS ALL YOU NEED (2012), OPEN HEARTS (2002) and THE ONE AND ONLY (1999). Among her many significant performances are also leading roles in SILENT HEART (2014), which won her a Silver Seashell for Best Actress at the San Sebastian Film Festival, APPLAUSE (2009), and OKAY (2002). She also writes and directs feature films of her own, such as THAT TIME OF YEAR (2018), which she also starred in. Recently she played the lead in TOVE’S ROOM (2023) and appeared in NIGHTWATCH: DEMONS ARE FOREVER (2023), the follow up to the Danish hit from 1994.

### **Helene Reingaard Neumann - “Amalie”**

Helene Reingaard Neumann made her screen debut in Thomas Vinterberg's WHEN A MAN COMES HOME (2007). Her collaboration with Vinterberg has continued ever since, most recently on the OSCAR®-winning ANOTHER ROUND (2020) and the international drama THE COMMAND (2018). Helene Reingaard Neumann played the leading role in THE COMMUNE (2016) opposite Ulrich Thomsen and was featured in SUBMARINO (2010), both films by Vinterberg. Other work by her includes WORLDS APART (2008), the TV-series 2900 HAPPINESS (2007-2009) and a smaller part in the DR smash-hit series BORGEN (2010). Besides acting, her main occupation is being a pastor in the cathedral church in Elsinore. She also does guest sermons in The Marple Church of Copenhagen, which is also prominently featured in FAMILIES LIKE OURS.

### **Magnus Millang - “Henrik”**

Magnus Millang first worked with Thomas Vinterberg on THE COMMUNE (2016), a collaboration which carried on to THE COMMAND (2018) and the OSCAR®-winning ANOTHER ROUND (2020). Magnus Millang had his film debut in the “DEPARTMENT Q” film THE KEEPER OF LOST CAUSES (2013). Later, he appeared in DAN DREAM (2017),

and debuted as a feature film writer/director – alongside his brother, Emil Millang – with the comedy HEAVY LOAD (2019), in which he also starred. Magnus Millang is a man of many talents, being a well renowned comedian in Denmark as well, most notably as co-creator and co-star of the series DANISH DYNAMITE (2012-2014). Millang also starred in co-star Nikolaj Lie Kaas' TV series AGENT (2023) and the Danish hit series BORGEN (2022).

### **Esben Smed - “Nikolaj”**

Esben Smed is one of Denmark's fastest rising stars. He debuted in KICK N' RUSH (2003) whilst he was still in high school. His national breakthrough came when he played the lead in all three seasons of DR's FOLLOW THE MONEY (2016-2019). Esben Smed is also highly praised for his leading roles in the high-profile features HELD FOR RANSOM (2019) and Bille August's A FORTUNATE MAN (2018). In 2022 he completed yet another leading role in Bille August's film THE KISS. Additional credits include THE JOY OF SERENDIPITY (2022), Lone Scherfig's THE KINDNESS OF STRANGERS (2019), Danish hit comedy SUMMER OF '92 (2015) and SORROW AND JOY (2013). In 2023 he played the leading role in co-star Nikolaj Lie Kaas' comedy TV series AGENT.

### **Thomas Bo Larsen - “Holger”**

Thomas Bo Larsen broke through in Thomas Vinterberg's short film LAST ROUND (1993). Since then, the two have worked together on several films including THE CELEBRATION (1998), THE BIGGEST HEROES (1996), WHEN A MAN COMES HOME (2007) where Thomas Bo Larsen plays the lead, the Academy Award-nominee THE HUNT (2012) and the OSCAR®-winning ANOTHER ROUND (2020). Among a multitude of performances, he has starred in the series THE LAWYER (2018-2020), the Danish hit family franchise FATHER OF FOUR (2017, 2018, 2020), the acclaimed DR series FOLLOW THE MONEY (2016), and the features THE IDEALIST (2015), and A SECOND CHANCE (2014) by Susanne Bier.

### **David Dencik - “Peter”**

David Dencik is among the most diverse and prolific actors in Scandinavia. He first commanded the audience's attention in A SOAP (2006) for which he garnered the most prestigious national awards. With more than 100 performances in both Scandinavian and international films and TV series he hardly needs an introduction. Credits include DR's PRISONER (2023), THE KINGDOM: EXODUS (2022), NO TIME TO DIE (2021),

Netflix's THE CHESTNUT MAN (2021), CHERNOBYL (2019), THE KINDNESS OF STRANGERS (2019), TOP OF THE LAKE (2017), DR's FOLLOW THE MONEY (2016), "DEPARTMENT Q" – THE ABSENT ONE (2014), THE HOMESMAN (2014), A ROYAL AFFAIR (2012), TINKER TAILOR SOLDIER SPY (2011), THE GIRL WITH THE DRAGON TATTOO (2011) - both versions but in different roles.

### **Asta Kamma August - "Christel"**

Asta Kamma August has already impressed Scandinavian audiences in numerous performances, despite her relatively young age. She received her feature film debut at the age of nine in the feature film ANNA (2000). The following year, she appeared her father Bille August's A SONG FOR MARTIN (2001). Asta Kamma August has starred in various hit TV series such as DR's THE LEGACY (2014), FOLLOW THE MONEY (2018) and Lars von Trier's THE KINGDOM: EXODUS (2022). She also starred in TV 2's THE NEW NURSES (2018) and SEX (2020) where she played the leading role, same as with SVT's BLACKWATER (2023). Asta Kamma August recently starred in Bille August's feature film about Karen Blixen, THE PACT (2021), which earned her nominations for the most prestigious Danish film awards, BURN ALL MY LETTERS (2022) alongside Bill Skarsgaard and Gustav Lindh, THE HYPNOSIS (2023) and KALAK (2023).

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### **SISSE GRAUM JØRGENSEN, PRODUCER**

*Another Round, Riders of Justice, The Hunt, In a Better World*

Producer Sisse Graum Jørgensen is a permanent fixture at Zentropa. She is also a part of the company's senior management and a member of the board. Additionally, Graum Jørgensen is a member of The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences® and the European Film Academy.

FAMILIES LIKE OURS (2024) marks Graum Jørgensen's fifth collaboration with Thomas Vinterberg. A partnership that started out with the critically acclaimed DEAR WENDY (2005) written by Lars von Trier. Later came THE HUNT (2012), which was selected for the main competition in Cannes and won the award for 'Best Actor'. The film also received an OSCAR®- and a GOLDEN GLOBE® nomination. In 2016 THE COMMUNE followed, which also garnered numerous awards. Most recently, Graum Jørgensen produced Vinterberg's ANOTHER ROUND (2020) which was once again selected for the Official

Programme of the Cannes Film Festival, along with Toronto International Film Festival and San Sebastian International Film Festival. ANOTHER ROUND (2020) has earned a string of prestigious awards and recognitions including: an OSCAR®, two OSCAR® nominations, a BAFTA, a CÉSAR and four European Film Awards.

Sisse Graum Jørgensen is also well known for her many years of successful collaboration with other major directors such as Susanne Bier, Anders Thomas Jensen, Kristian Levring, and screenwriters Tobias Lindholm and Kim Fupz Aakeson.

Sisse Graum Jørgensen's productions have garnered both national and international acclaim including: Two OSCAR®, five OSCAR® nominations, one GOLDEN GLOBE®, three GOLDEN GLOBE® nominations, four Cannes entries, a Palm for 'Best Actor', the Cannes Jury Special Prize, a Berlinale Bear and eight European Film Awards.

### **KASPER DISSING, PRODUCER**

*The Quiet Ones, Another Round, The Journey*

Kasper Dissing has been a producer at Zentropa since 2014, where he produced Thomas Vinterberg's Cannes-selected, OSCAR®, BAFTA- and CÉSAR-winning feature film ANOTHER ROUND (2020) together with Sisse Graum Jørgensen. Kasper Dissing has previously worked with Danish talent such as Christoffer Boe (THE JOURNEY (2017)), Thomas Vinterberg (THE COMMUNE (2016), THE HUNT (2012)), Kristian Levring (THE SALVATION (2014)) and has worked closely with producers such as Sisse Graum Jørgensen and Peter Aalbæk Jensen.

In 2017, Dissing was Associate Producer on the drama series FINDING HOME (2018) directed by Christian E. Christiansen. He also produced Christoffer Boe's 'The Journey; A cinematic exhibition' at Moesgaard Museum that formed part of 'AARHUS - 2017: European Capital of Culture'. The focal point of the exhibition was THE JOURNEY (2017) which was filmed on location on all seven continents.

Most recently, Kasper Dissing produced the action feature THE QUIET ONES (2024) with the director Frederik Hviid, which was selected for the Toronto International Film Festival.