

# Sarah Polley Talks The Complicated Characters Of 'Take This Waltz,' Magical Creatures & Memories Of "Video Killed The Radio Star"



Canadian filmmaker **Sarah Polley's** sophomore directorial effort, **"Take This Waltz"** has captivated the Playlist staff--whether we love it or find it frustrating, it's a unique film that stirs many reactions and it's that quality, in addition to some stunning cinematography and great performances that landed it on our [Best Films of 2012... So Far](#) list. It's a compli-

cated piece that explores the consequences that come from the choices a person makes in life, and it's a film that sticks with you in its humanistic realism and beauty. Polley has become a formidable filmmaker since breaking out as an actress, and her debut feature **"Away From Her"** garnered universal acclaim for its portrayal of losing love in the twilight of life. **"Take This Waltz"** transplants similar issues to the heady, hotheaded world of 20-somethings, and features bravura performances from the always great **Michelle Williams, Seth Rogen** and **Sarah Silverman**.

We recently caught up with Polley on the phone to talk about **"Take This Waltz"** and **"Away From Her."** Here are some highlights from our conversation.



**"Take This Waltz"** and **"Away From Her"** are very much in relationship to each other, despite their aesthetic differences.

Both films feature strong-willed women caught between two men and attempting to find and assert their authentic selves, while their romantic relationships are drastically transitioning. Polley said about the two films that "even though

they are so different in terms of tone, and in terms of the time of life they are dealing with, everything from the look to the season is diametrically opposed, I do feel like they are companion pieces to a certain extent, I do feel like they're both talking about long-term relationships and loyalty and betrayal and what happens to love over time."

**In fact, Polley found working with Julie Christie and Michelle Williams to be eerily similar.**

Polley mentioned that Christie and Williams are both "magical creatures" and "were so similar in their processes, in being willing to go places and sometimes surprising themselves." During the writing process, Polley often relied on understanding her actors to help shape the piece, and said that, "it wasn't until I met Michelle that I really understood and liked the character. I was writing this as more of a morality tale, I was judging her as I was writing it." Truthfully, Williams' character Margot is often vexing in the film, but she brings a warmth and vulnerability to the character that makes her magnetic onscreen.

**Polley welcomes any reaction to the characters and the film, even if audiences do find it frustrating or complicated.**

When asked about the reaction to the film, Polley feels “grateful” and also “understood as a



filmmaker by both the praise and the criticism.” She said the characters in “Take This Waltz” are not heroes or villains, but “just very, very messy human beings kind of muddling their way through the most complicated thing you can muddle through, which is romantic love. I think it’s a bit of a disaster zone for all of us. I think we’re all at our best, and at our worst when we’re dealing with being in love or being in a long term relationship. We’re at our most embarrassing and ugly and interesting and dynamic. So I feel like any response to the film is really legitimate.”

**Polley was working with cinematographer Luc Montpellier on the look of the film and the visual design even while she was still writing the script.**

Polley started working on the cinematography with DP **Luc Montpellier** from the very beginning stages, saying “when I first had the idea for the film, I started to talk to him about it. The visual language was being discussed and created at the

same time I was beginning to put words on the page.” Long-time collaborators Polley and Montpelier took “long walks in Toronto and taking photos and sending images back and forth... I wasn’t even close to being done with the script, so for me, feeling Toronto in the summer and feeling the heat and claustrophobia and that intense vivid color that the world has when you first fall in love, was really integral to the entire film.” Having one feature under her belt, Polley felt more confident in her skills as a visual director and combining the visual process (with the aid of Montpelier, designer **Jessica Reed** and production designer **Matthew Davies**) with the writing process was a big leap for her, as she said “for the first time, I was seeing images at the same time that I was writing the words and sometimes the images were coming before the words. That was my real handicap before with my short films and with ‘Away From Her,’ I was very cautious visually, I was very nervous coming into making films as an actor, moving the camera wasn’t what I felt most comfortable with and so I really wanted to challenge myself with this film and be bold and try and tell a story through images as much as through words.”