

# Take This Waltz, Sarah Polley, 116 mins (15)



The romantic deck is somewhat stacked in Canadian drama *Take This Waltz*. On one hand, Margot (Michelle Williams) is married to a charming guy, Lou (Seth Rogen); he's cuddly, they love each other, they wake up entwined every morning to share baby talk and bizarrely violent endearments: "I want to put your spleen through a meat grinder." Problem is, Lou spends all his time cooking chickens (he's writing a chicken cookbook; it's what he does).

On the other hand, there's Daniel (Luke Kirby). He's sexy, but sensitive too; an artist shy of revealing his talent to the world, he makes his living wheeling a rickshaw round

Toronto. An affair seems written in the stars: Margot bumps into him by chance in Nova Scotia, and wouldn't you know it, he turns out to live right opposite her.

A powerful, and knowing, streak of fantasy emerges in hot-house visuals: the film is phenomenally atmospheric, cameraman Luc Montpellier pumping up the reds to evoke the erotic hum of a steamy summer. One highlight is a funfair ride sequence that's not only poetically euphoric but also makes brilliant use (no kidding) of the Buggles's "Video Killed the Radio Star".

Yet there's a hard core of realism in Sarah Polley's script and direction. The lure of infidelity, a friend tells Margot, is about the thrill of the new; Polley then cuts from three youngish women naked in a shower to three much older women, to show that flesh, and dreams, lose their sheen.

Actor turned director Polley based her acclaimed debut *Away From Her* on a story by Alice Munro. This follow-up also shows the influence of the Canadian school of finely crafted emotional narrative, embodied by Munro and Carol Shields. If *Take This Waltz* strikes us as uncomfortably literary, it's partly because we're unused to seeing films that address the private life in a thoughtful, complex manner.

Still, there's something uncomfortable about the dialogue in what's very much a thinking-aloud, these-are-my-feelings film. Margot cuddles up to Lou in the kitchen, but it's not the best moment for him, as he's slaving over a hot fricassee; she pulls back, aggrieved: "Do you know how much courage it takes to seduce you?" *Take This Waltz* is the sort of film that elicits the complaint, "But no one talks like that in real life." But really, it's a question of whether the film can persuasively make these people talk like that in this fiction – and for my money, Polley doesn't succeed.

In *Blue Valentine*, Michelle Williams superbly conveyed the everyday stresses and yearnings within a relationship, and she's just as fine here. Her oddly babyish features quiver mesmerisingly in a scene where Daniel tells Margot at length exactly what he'd like to do with her, and the tension between her gaucheness and her full-on adult desire is nicely modulated. Luke Kirby is good too, in a rather one-dimensional role. As for Rogen, he comes into his own in a cleverly conceived scene where Lou and Margot finally talk things through: except that we see and hear only what he says, his dialogue edited in jump cuts.

Despite the terrific acting, I wanted to slap all these smug, self-absorbed people. The only person whose spleen I didn't want to grind, is Sarah Silverman, mercifully gritty as Lou's

recovering alcoholic sister.

*Take This Waltz* is, I'll admit, fundamentally not my kind of film, but I suspect it'll be many people's kind of film, in a big way – and I can't help admiring it. At the very least, it proves two things – that Sarah Polley is no mean director, and that rickshaw guys have all the pulling power.

### **Critic's choice**

Get up close and personal (and political) with an artist, dissident and international hero in the documentary *Ai Weiwei: Never Sorry*. Meanwhile at the BFI Southbank in London, *The Lodger: A Story of the London Fog* is just one of the delights in the Alfred Hitchcock season which continues until 19 October.