

MY SALINGER YEAR

Directed by Philippe Falardeau



1h41 - Canada / Ireland – 1.85 - 5.1



International Press Contacts

PREMIER

www.premiercomms.com

Simone DEVLIN

tel : +44 7808 640 174

Simone.Devlin@premiercomms.com

Paul OCKELFORD

tel : +44 7904 855 604

paul.ockelford@premiercomms.com

German & International Press:

mm filmpresse

Sylvia Müller, Claudia Hegner

Schliemannstrasse 5, 10437 Berlin

Phone: +49 (0) 30 41 71 57 22/ 23

E-mail: mueller@mm-filmpresse.de

hegner@mm-filmpresse.de

International Sales & Festivals Contact

Memento Films International

sales@memento-films.com

festival@memento-films.com

tel: +33 1 53 34 90 39

[WEBSITE](#) / [FACEBOOK](#) / [INSTAGRAM](#)

US Sales : UTA

SYNOPSIS

New York in the 90s: After leaving graduate school to pursue her dream of becoming a writer, Joanna gets hired as an assistant to Margaret, the stoic and old-fashioned literary agent of J. D. Salinger. Fluctuating between poverty and glamour, she spends her days in a plush, wood-panelled office - where dictaphones and typewriters still reign and agents doze off after three-martini lunches - and her nights in a sink-less Brooklyn apartment with her socialist boyfriend.

Joanna's main task is processing Salinger's voluminous fan mail, but as she reads the heart-wrenching letters from around the world, she becomes reluctant to send the agency's impersonal standard letter and impulsively begins personalizing the responses. The results are both humorous and moving, as Joanna, while using the great writer's voice, begins to discover her own.

DIRECTOR'S INTERVIEW

You have written some of your features as well as adapted screenplays. My Salinger Year, Joanna Rakoff's celebrated memoir, is your first major book adaptation. What initially brought you to this story?

I was browsing in a bookstore, and I picked up Joanna's memoirs drawn by the title and the fact it was written by a woman. Up until then, I had made films with mainly male protagonists; I was on the lookout for an idea with a central female character. Reading the book, I found Joanna's writing both moving and funny in the smallest of details. I could relate to that uncertain time when we have to decide what we want to do with our life, not completely aware of the range of possibilities. A time when anything is possible, but everything seems out of reach.

Novels are one thing to adapt, but memoirs are on another level. What was your approach in respecting the material but also allowing yourself creative freedom as a filmmaker in adapting this well-known and celebrated story?

The book is not story driven, and nor is the film. I like to paraphrase Joanna and describe it as "a visitation with a character." That being said, you have to create a minimum of tension and momentum in a film. I invented moments and events as mutation tools between literature and film. Part of the challenge when you adapt a book is to understand what is organic to each form. The literary world can hold much more content and can sustain multilayered themes without feeling scattered. It also allows direct access to the protagonist's mind. Turning a book into a film usually means making choices, creating composite characters and transforming the inner voice into concrete actions.

At first, I ventured tentatively into inventing scenes; after all, I was dealing with a real person's life, and I wanted to remain true to her experience. Fiction had to be used to convey ideas or feelings found in the book.

Rakoff accompanied the process by reading several of my drafts. I remember sitting down with her in Cambridge after the second or third draft. She liked the fictional stuff and encouraged me to go further. That was music to a writer-director's ear, of course. So this funny thing started to happen: the more fiction I wrote into the story, the closer I was getting to the spirit of her writing. Joanna was also a huge help in guiding me with the dialogues. English is my second language; she helped me make sure the language was period and generation accurate.

Throughout your films we follow characters that are often foreign to the environment they now find themselves in. In *My Salinger Year*, Joanna is thrown into the literary world and has to learn how to navigate it. What did you see as the crux of her personal journey?

My films always involve "a meeting with the other." It's a reflex I developed at age 23 when I participated in the Race Around the World in 1992, a television show on Radio-Canada that involved shooting 18 short films in 17 countries. During that long trip, I was always the outsider who had to reach out. The foreign environments greatly influenced my films back then. Rakoff's book allowed me, once again, to penetrate a world unknown to me. Much like the character who has to navigate new grounds professionally, but also in her personal life.

At the center of her journey are all those fans who write to Salinger, desperately wanting to connect with him. Her job is to shield Salinger from them, but she finds a very personal way to do her job, and this will help her find who she really is.

The storyline explores several contrasting ideas. How did you use the juxtapositions of these ideas in the screenplay to build up the narrative?

The book is so rich in the way it explores multilayered ideas - literature vs. business, success vs. privacy, the old and the new, boyfriend vs. ambition, etc. It was challenging to get all these ideas in without overcrowding the storyline. The way to do that was to focus on Joanna, stick to her character, and let the themes arise in the background. One of the themes that was very close to me was the perennial debate about "art vs. business."

The film indeed portrays the literary world as multifaceted and depicts the creative and the business process of the arts as both necessary and complimentary.

I think we want to believe literature is at an arms' length of commerce (at least compared to music, visual art or films), but it isn't. The business side is very important which comes as a bit of a shock for Joanna, especially in that sequence when her boss asks her to read Judy Blume's new manuscript. She's a big fan of Judy Blume so she's thrilled to be on the inside. She loves the new book, but her boss wants marketing advice, not a critical appreciation. She realizes that her personal taste and sensibility can be irrelevant in this sort of discussion.

At the other end of the spectrum, Joanna's socialist boyfriend Don is not joking when he says: "Writing makes you a writer. Publishing is commerce." This no-compromise philosophy is naive; after all aren't we glad our favorite authors got their work published? Artists have to make a

living. But there has to be a balancing act between art and commerce. I experience it in all aspects of filmmaking, not without some frustrations. I want to make films without compromises, but I also want them to be financed. And I want them to be seen.

For those who haven't read the book (no spoilers), Salinger himself is omnipresent yet not the focus of the story. How did you approach this concept for the screen?

Salinger is a hovering presence in the book. I had to translate that visually. Throughout the various rewrites, I toyed with many ideas. I even considered not portraying Salinger at all, but it felt like I was avoiding the giant. Salinger was a positive note in Joanna Rakoff's year and I needed to convey that. So I came up with a playful way to portray Salinger through Joanna's point of view. That being said, there was never a scenario where Salinger was a full fledged character; it is not his story, but Joanna's.

You have incorporated extrapolated sequences of Salinger fans expressing their profound experiences to his writing. What prompted you to create and bring these to life?

Salinger's world materializes through the numerous fan letters Joanna reads. This is one example of where I had to transform literature into cinema and invent a parallel world for the fans. This was very exciting to do and Joanna Rakoff encouraged me to go further with each draft. The fan's experience of Salinger's writing became a central narrative argument. It allowed me to bind the film together.

More importantly, I can personally relate to the fan's experiences. In key moments in my life, I wrote to filmmakers or writers whose work had touched me. (No giants in that personal list, but established professionals nevertheless.) They all answered my letters and this had a profound effect on me, not so much because of what they wrote, but because they took the time to acknowledge the conversation that art can trigger.

The cast is marvelous. Sigourney Weaver as Margaret has all the gravitas, glamour and eventual warmth needed to frame the world in which Margaret Qualley's Joanna enters. How did the three of you (and the rest of the cast) flesh out these characters together?

I saw Margaret Qualley in Novitiate. Then I saw the Kenzo ad she did with Spike Jonze and I thought: "wow, is that the same girl? She's got range and such a singular presence". We met in New York very briefly, and I told her I wanted to shape the character and the story with her. I had already written a few versions of the script, but wanted to do the rest with an actress in mind, and there was no doubt anymore who that actress had to be. I gave Margaret Joanna Rakoff's book and told her that she should read it and tell me if I had missed anything that felt important to her. She read it and we spoke at length about what she loved in the book, what felt close to her. Big storylines, but also details about a young women's take on life, love, ambitions. I re-wrote the script with that in mind.

Sigourney was literally a birthday gift. I flew to New York on the day of my anniversary, and we met in a tea room close to where she lives. I was a bit star-struck to be honest, and I think the first thing I said to her when she came in was: "I'm missing my surprise birthday party tonight because of you." (Laugh) We spoke in French and talked about the city, theater, books, this and that. Sigourney knows quite well the literary New York that's described in the book. She even lives in the same neighborhood as the real-life character of the boss. She could play

her, no doubt, but also guide me through the many nuances of that world, me being the outsider, looking in.

The supporting cast provides such a strong human framework to the two leads.

Overall I was blessed with a strong cast. Douglas Booth and Brian O'Byrne graced the film with their work in supporting roles, not to mention Theodore Pellerin who plays the fan from Winston-Salem; this young man single-handedly encompasses the world of a Salinger's fan with his brilliant performance.

The set and costume design balance the vibrant time in which the story is taking place (1990s), as well as incorporate the mid-century modern aesthetic of the Salinger era. How did you conceive of the eras-specific aesthetics?

The 90s definitely qualify as "period" when it comes to film production design. But it's a tricky time, almost a no man's land not quite far enough in time to give it an aura of nostalgia or a feeling of "grooviness" in terms of colors and texture.

But there are fun details about that time that we tried to exploit narratively: it was a time of changes in the world of communication, press and publishing. In 1996, people were only beginning to get familiar with emails and the Internet, some of us thinking it would just be a trend (like me). Most importantly, almost no one had a cellular phone. Text messages (which can be boring in cinema) did not exist. This was important not only visually, but it had a direct effect on how people communicated.

Shooting in Montreal a story taking place in New York implied a lot of challenges. We had to create three New York: first, the nineties' Brooklyn, the pre-gentrified Williamsburg. Second, on the other side of the East River, a credible midtown Manhattan on street level, and a timeless literary agency. The real agency was on Madison Avenue; it was described in Joanna's book as a place that was stuck in time, a Wonderland of sort. It was one of the oldest literary agencies and apparently it had retained a lot of its old charm. We had our mind set on not using green screens for what would appear outside the agency's windows. It took us close to 5 months to find a location in Montreal with an art deco vibe and with a midtown surrounding outside. Elise de Blois did a stunning job in recreating the agency from scratch based on Joanna's descriptions. Joanna came to visit us on the set and was speechless. As for the costume, I didn't want to overstate the period, especially on Joanna. Patricia McNeil created a wardrobe for Joanna that felt like a combination of clothes that was given to her and neat stuff she would have picked up in thrift stores.

The character of Joanna admits she has actually never read any Salinger, not even *Catcher in the Rye*. Name one classic you have never read but think it's time to?

In Search of Lost Time from Proust. I hadn't read *Catcher* either when I read Joanna's memoirs in 2015. To put myself in Joanna's shoes, I wrote the first draft before reading *Catcher*. I played around with the preconceived ideas that surrounds mythical writers we know but haven't read. Then I did end up reading *Catcher* and, just like Joanna, I was pleasantly swept; I'm not sure I would have appreciated it as much as a teenager.

Interview by Magali Simard

DIRECTOR – PHILIPPE FALARDEAU

2016: CHUCK

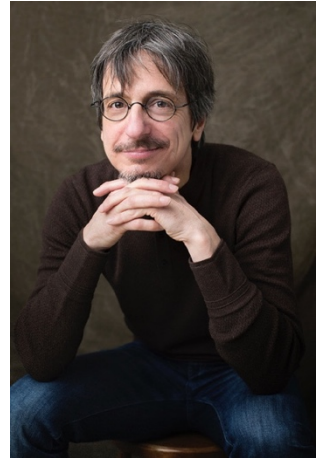
Venice Film Festival, TIFF

2015: MY INTERNSHIP IN CANADA

Locarno Film Festival / Piazza Grande / TIFF: Best Canadian Feature Film / Canada's Top Ten / Festival de cinema de la ville de Québec / Festival de cinema des gens d'ici (Val-d'Or)

2014: THE GOOD LIE

Deauville Film Festival: Jury Special Prize



Credit : Julie Artacho

2011: MONSIEUR LAZHAR

Oscar nomination for Best Foreign Film / Locarno Film Festival / Piazza Grande: Audience Award, Variety Piazza Grande Award / TIFF: Best Canadian Feature Film / Winner of 6 Jutra & 5 Genies (Canadian Screen Awards) including Best Movie, Best Screenplay and Best Director

2008: IT'S NOT ME, I SWEAR!

Berlin Film Festival: Christal Bear and Deutsche Kinderhilfswerk and Prize / TIFF / Vienne / Palm Springs / Göteborg / Vancouver
Titre en anglais. A gagné generation

2006: CONGORAMA

Cannes Film Festival (Directors' Fortnight, closing film) / TIFF / Munich / Pusan / New Directors / New films in New York / Seattle / Vancouver / Winner of 3 Jutra for Best Movie, Best Screenplay and Best Director / Best Screenplay at the Genies (Canadian Screen Awards)

2000: THE LEFT-HAND SIDE OF THE FRIDGE

TIFF: Best Canadian First Feature Film / Best Screenplay Radio-Canada Award ACCQ Award / Rotterdam / Dublin / Vienne / London / Vancouver / Toronto / Seattle / Prague / Ghent / Dakar

CAST

MARGARET QUALLEY as Joanna

Margaret Qualley has become one of the most sought-after actors of her generation.

This past summer, Qualley appeared in Quentin Tarantino's ninth film, *ONCE UPON A TIME IN HOLLYWOOD* as *Pussy Cat*, alongside Brad Pitt, Leonardo DiCaprio, Lena Dunham and Margot Robbie. The film premiered in Cannes to rave reviews and Sony released it on July 26th.

Qualley received an Emmy nomination for her portrayal of *Ann Reinking* on the eight-episode limited FX series, *FOSSE/VERDON*, alongside Sam Rockwell and Michelle Williams. The series, directed by Thomas Kail and executive produced by Lin Manuel Miranda, is based on the biography by Sam Wasson, *Fosse*, which tells the story of a romantic and creative partnership between two of Broadway's greatest talents, Bob Fosse and Gwen Verdon. The show received 17 Emmy nominations.

Also in 2019, Qualley appeared in Rashid Johnson and A24's *NATIVE SON* alongside Ashton Sanders, Nick Robinson and KiKi Layne. The film premiered at Sundance in January and HBO acquired and released it later in the year. In February, she starred in IFC and Tim Sutton's gritty indie thriller *DONNYBROOK* alongside Jamie Bell, Frank Grillo, and James Badge Dale.

Qualley also appeared in Benedict Andrews' *SEBERG* alongside Kristen Stewart, which had its world premiere at the Venice Film Festival on August 30th. The political thriller tells the true story of the FBI's cointelpro investigation of actress Jean Seberg (Stewart). Qualley portrays the wife of one of the FBI agents assigned to surveil the actress. Amazon Studios released the film on December 13th.

Other projects that year included Rhys Ernst's and Wolfe Releasing's *ADAM*, which chronicles the story of a teen spending his last high school summer with his big sister (Qualley) among the LGBTQ community in a 2006 New York City; and Lionsgate's Fred Berger produced and Rowan Athale directed psychological thriller, *STRANGE BUT TRUE*, alongside Nick Robinson and Amy Ryan.

Upcoming, Qualley is attached to star in Tim Sutton's drama, *THE CHAIN*, alongside Sebastian Stan, Jamie Bell and Denise Gough. The film will tell the story of a man's daughter who is viciously attacked by a dog, setting off a chain of events that ends in unspeakable tragedy. She also stars in Philippe Falardeau's *MY SALLINGER YEAR*, the big-screen adaptation of Joanna Rakoff's international bestseller which will open the 70th Berlin Film Festival.

In 2017, Qualley starred in Margaret Betts's *NOVITIATE*, opposite Melissa Leo and Julianne Nicholson. The film premiered at the 2017 Sundance Film Festival and was released by

Sony Pictures Classics that fall. Qualley received rave reviews for her performance and was featured on multiple "Best Performances" lists from the festival.

Qualley's break out role was starring opposite Ryan Gosling and Russell Crowe in THE NICE GUYS for Warner Bros, producer Joel Silver, and director Shane Black, playing a misunderstood and mysterious young woman who becomes the center of investigations by two private detectives. Her first remarkable turn came when she played as 'Jill Garvey' on the critically acclaimed HBO series THE LEFTOVERS. She made her feature film debut in Gia Coppola's independent drama, PALO ALTO, starring Emma Roberts and James Franco.

SIGOURNEY WEAVER as MARGARET

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

2016 : A MONSTER CALLS – J.A. BAYONA

2016 : FINDING DORY – Andrew STANTON and Angus MACLANE

2009 : AVATAR - James CAMERON

Nominated for 9 Oscars and won 3 (Best Cinematography, Best Visual Effects, Best Art Direction), won 2 Golden Globes (Best Director and Best Motion Picture – Drama)

2008: WALL-E – Andrew STANTON

Won 1 Oscar (Best Animated Feature) and nominated for 5 Oscars

1999 : GALAXY QUEST – Dean PARISOT

1997 : THE ICE STORM – Ang LEE

Nominated for 1 Golden Globe (Best Performance by an Actress in a Supporting Role in a Motion Picture) and Winner of the Best Screenplay at the Cannes Film Festival

1988 : GORILLAS IN THE MIST: THE STORY OF DIAN FOSSEY – Michael APTED

Nominated for 5 Oscars ((Best Actress in a Leading Role, Best Adapted Screenplay, Best Sound, Best Film Editing, Best Original Score) / Winner of 2 Golden Globes (Best Performance by an Actress in a Drama, Best Original Score)

1988 : WORKING GIRL – Mike NICHOLS

Nominated for 6 Oscars (Best Picture, Best Actress in a Leading Role, two times Best Actress in a Supporting Role, Best Director) / Winner of 1 Oscar (Best Original Song) / Winner of 4 Golden Globes (Best Comedy, Best Performance by an Actress, Best

Performance by an Actress in a Supporting Role for Sigourney Weaver, Best Original Song)

1986 : ALIENS - James CAMERON

1984 : GHOSTBUSTERS – Ivan REITMAN

DOUGLAS BOOTH as DON

Douglas most recently starred as Mötley Crüe's bassist Nikki Sixx in the hit Netflix film, THE DIRT, a filter-free chronicle of the band's debauchorous 1980s and their rise to become one of the world's most famous heavy metal bands. Douglas is also well known for his additional film credits including; Carlo Carlei's ROMEO AND JULIET where he played Romeo opposite Hailee Steinfeld's Juliet, Darren Aronofsky's NOAH, Lone Scherfig's THE RIOT CLUB, the Wachowskis' JUPITER ASCENDING, PRIDE AND PREJUDICE AND ZOMBIES, THE LIMEHOUSE GOLEM, Haifaa Al-Mansour's MARY SHELLEY as the poet Percy Shelley opposite Elle Fanning and Bel Powley and the Academy Award, Golden Globe, Critics' Choice and BAFTA-nominated LOVING VINCENT, a world first for animation, the fully painted film told the story of the final months and mysterious death of Vincent Van Gogh. Coming up, Douglas will be seen in a key supporting role in Terrence Malick's upcoming THE LAST PLANET.

SEÁNA KERSLAKE as JENNY

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

2019 : THE HOLE IN THE GROUND - Lee CRONIN

2018 : DUBLIN OLDSCHOOL - Dave TYNAN

2016 : A DATE FOR MAD MARY – Darren THORNTON

BRIAN F. O'BYRNE as HUGH

Brían F. O'Byrne is a BAFTA and Tony Award winning and Emmy nominated actor, critically acclaimed for his work in film, television and on stage. He has five Tony nominations, five Drama Desk nominations, and has been awarded Obie, Lucille Lortel, and Outer Critics Circle awards, among others.

O'Byrne can currently be seen in the acclaimed NBC series LINCOLN RHYME: HUNT FOR THE BONE COLLECTOR, which he stars in the role of The Bone Collector. Based on The Bone Collector series of novels, the series will debut in January 2020.

This past year, O'Byrne wrapped production on the independent film MY SALINGER YEAR, based on Joanna Smith Rakoff's best-selling novel. The feature was directed by Philippe Falardeau and O'Byrne co-starred opposite Margaret Qualley and Sigourney Weaver. Also in 2019, he starred in the Netflix independent film, SERGIO, directed by Greg Barker, opposite Wagner Moura and Ana de Armas, which will make its premiere at this year's Sundance Film Festival.

In 2018, O'Byrne won the BAFTA award for "Best Supporting Actor" for his work in the 2017 ITV mini-series, LITTLE BOY BLUE. He was also nominated for an Emmy Award in 2011 for his role in MILDRED PIERCE, opposite Kate Winslet. Additional television credits include: SYFY / Netflix's NIGHTFLYERS, AQUARIUS, MERCY STREET, THE MAGICIANS, MANHUNT: THE UNABOMBER, SAINTS & STRANGERS, PRIME SUSPECT, FLASHFORWARD, BROTHERHOOD and the acclaimed Irish series LOVE/HATE.

Film credits include: MILLION DOLLAR BABY, MEDEAS, BEFORE THE DEVIL KNOWS YOU'RE DEAD, BROOKLYN'S FINEST and THE INTERNATIONAL, JIMMY'S HALL and QUEEN AND COUNTRY.

COLM FEORE as DANIEL

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

2018 : GRETA – Neil JORDAN

2014 : ELEPHANT SONG – Charles BINAMÉ

2011 : THOR – Kenneth BRANAGH

2008 : CHANGELING – Clint EASTWOOD

Nominated for 3 Oscars (including Best Actress in a Leading Role)

2005 : THE EXORCISM OF EMILY ROSE – Scott DERRICKSON

2002 : CHICAGO – Rob MARSHALL

Won 6 Oscars (including Best Picture, Best Actress in a Supporting Role)

1999 : THE INSIDER – Michael MANN

Nominated for 7 Oscars (including Best Picture, Best Director) and 5 Golden Globes (including Best Drama, Best Director)

1998 : CITY OF ANGELS – Brad SILBERLING
Nominated for 1 Golden Globe (Best Original Song)

1997 : FACE/OFF – John WOO
Nominated for 1 Oscar (Best Sound Effects Editing)

PRODUCERS – MICRO_SCOPE

Luc DÉRY & Kim McCRAW

micro_scope is one of the most important film production companies in Canada.

Founded in 2002, the company mainly focuses on the development and production of innovative, relevant and accessible feature films. Led by producers **Luc Déry** and **Kim McCraw**, micro_scope strives to make sure each of the company's films reaches its full potential.

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

2015 : MY INTERNSHIP IN CANADA – Philippe FALARDEAU
TIFF: Best Canadian Feature Film

2013 : GABRIELLE – Louise ARCHAMBAULT
Locarno International Film Festival : Audience Award

2013 : ENEMY – Denis VILLENEUVE

2011 : MONSIEUR LAZHAR – Philippe FALARDEAU
Nominated for the Oscar of the Best Foreign Language Film
Locarno International Film Festival : Audience Award / Variety Piazza Grande Award

2010 : INCENDIES – Denis VILLENEUVE
Nominated for the Oscar of the Best Foreign Language Film / TIFF (Best Canadian Feature Film)

CAST

Joanna	Margaret QUALLEY
Margaret	Sigourney WEAVER
Don	Douglas BOOTH
Jenny	Seána KERSLAKE
Hugh	Brian F.O'BYRNE
Daniel	Colm FEORE
Boy from Winston-Salem	Théodore PELLERIN
Max	Yanic TRUESDALE
Karl	Hamza HAQ
Pam	Leni PARKER
Placement Agent	Ellen DAVID
Girl who wants an A	Romane DENIS
J.D. Salinger	Tim POST
Mark	Gavin DREA
Clifford Bradbury	Matt HOLLAND

CREW

Director	Philippe Falardeau
Screenwriter	Philippe Falardeau (adapted from My Salinger Year by Joanna Rakoff)
Producers	Luc Déry Kim McCraw
Co-producers	Ruth Coady Susan Mullen
Executive producers	Philippe Falardeau Joanna Rakoff Mary Jane Skalski

	Hussain Amarshi
	Celine Haddad
	Emilie Georges
	Naima Abed
Cinematographer	Sara Mishara
Editor	Mary Finlay
Production designer	Elise de Blois
Art director	Claude Tremblay
Costume designer	Patricia McNeil
Original score	Martin Léon
Sound	Claude La Haye
Sound designer	Fionan Higgins
Re-recording mixer	Bernard Gariépy Strobl
Casting	Billy Hopkins
	Ashley Ingram
Casting directors	Rosina Bucci
	Nadia Rona
Line producer	Claude Paiement
Production manager	Michelle Quinn
Post-production supervisor	Erik Daniel
Music supervisor	Sébastien Lépine
	Opale Lavigne
Music consultant	Mary Ramos