

## Interview: Christopher Abbott, Todd Louiso, Sarah Koskoff on ‘Hello I Must Be Going’

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CHICAGO – Flawed females are often feared by Hollywood because of their questionable commercial appeal. Yet 2012 has provided moviegoers and TV fans with a rich assortment of characters—led by Lena Dunham’s Hannah Horvath on HBO’s “Girls”—that prove women can be every bit as immature, developmentally arrested and utterly fascinating as the guys.

One of the year’s most engaging heroines is Amy (Melanie Lynskey) in Todd Louiso’s indie romance, “Hello I Must Be Going.” She’s a 35-year-old divorcée who moves back in with her parents (Blythe Danner and John Rubinstein) and is startled to find herself falling for a smitten 19-year-old actor, Jeremy (Christopher Abbott). In this exclusive two-part interview, Hollywood Chicago spoke with Abbott (star of “Girls” and “Martha Marcy May Marlene”) as well as the married filmmaking team of director Louiso and screenwriter Sarah Koskoff.

### PART I: CHRISTOPHER ABBOTT



Christopher Abbott stars in Todd Louiso’s Hello I Must Be Going.

*Photo credit: Justina Mintz/Oscilloscope Laboratories*

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Why has New York been your ideal place to work?

**Christopher Abbott:** When I first started acting, I mostly did a lot of theatre in New York. It’s a concentrated world of people that I’m still friends with now. I have nothing against LA—I actually do like it there a lot—but it’s easier to be in contact with people here. Things kind of happened in a very natural way.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Has it been difficult to shift between doing theatre and TV—sometimes within the same day?

**Abbott:** That was last year—that was during ["Girls"] and the play ["House of Blue Leaves"]. That was kind of fun, actually. I don't know if I would have the energy to do it again, and it was hard at first to split the difference. But because the show and play were so different, it actually got quite a bit easier, not even just in terms of the type of role, but the facets of doing a play and a TV show are so [different]. They're two totally different animals. I found it fun.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** What was it like making your film debut in "Martha Marcy May Marlene"?

**Abbott:** That was one of my favorite projects that I think I've done. What was cool about it was while we were filming it, it didn't really feel like what it became as a movie. Everyone believed in the project and everyone knew that it was really good but the mood of being upstate and being on that farm filming was so insular. Everyone who was working on the movie was staying up there in hotels. We showed up to do the work during the day and we all hung out in the evenings. It was cool to see that movie become what it was.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Did you do any research into cults prior to shooting?

**Abbott:** Individually, people may have looked up some stuff. The one thing we didn't want to do was treat it like a cult. We didn't want to act like we were in a cult because most people that are don't necessarily feel like they're in one. They feel like they're in a community. You want to believe that this is a healthy world to live in. So we didn't use the word cult that much and the weird thing that happened was that it actually felt nice up there. It felt healthy. It would've been bad to play it as if we were these traumatized people because there has to be a reason why people end up in these cults. They end up there for a reason and they chose to be there.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** So as an actor, it was really about grasping onto the therapeutic nature of the setting and getting lost in its appeal.

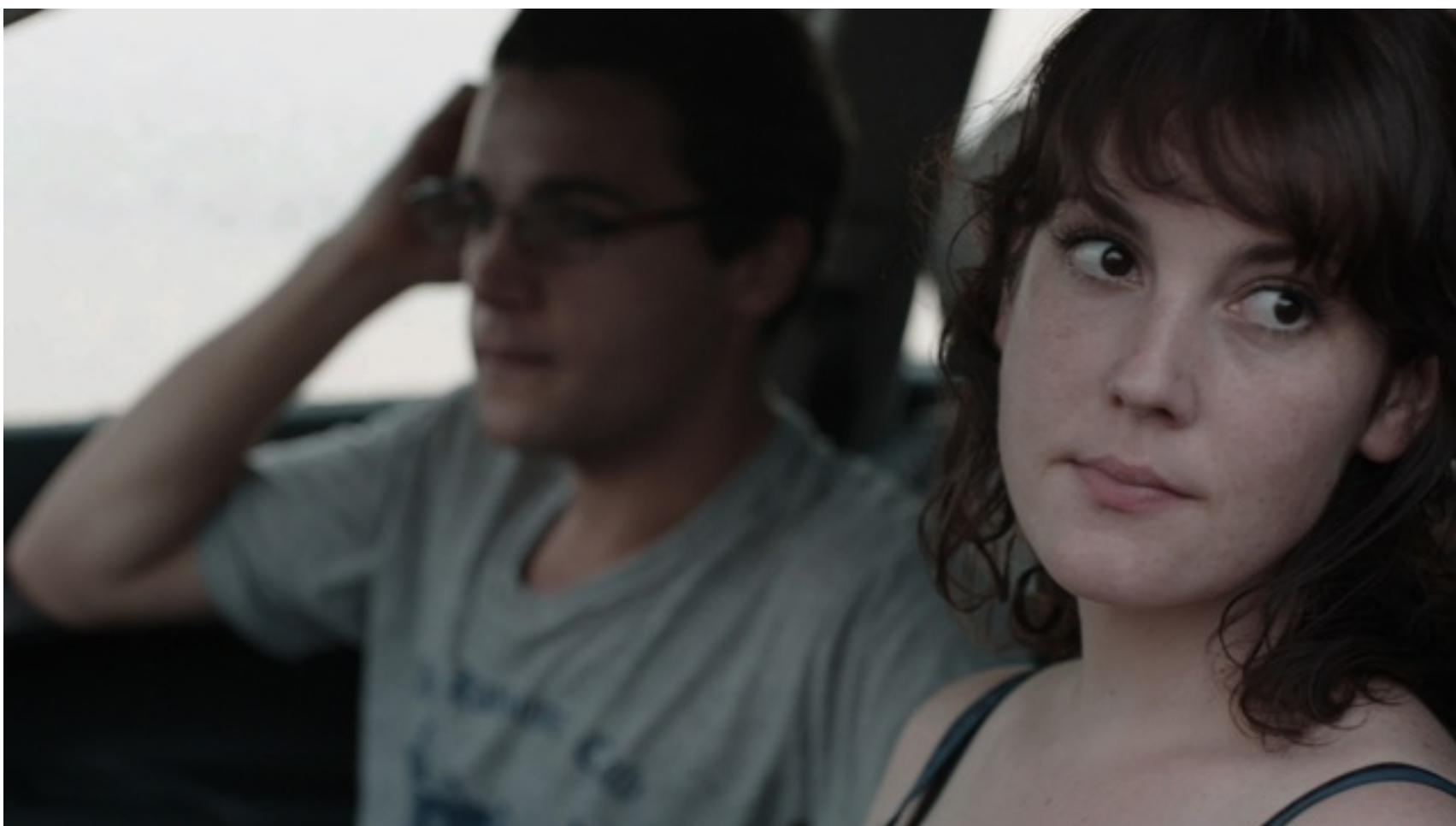
**Abbott:** Yeah, exactly. You're just trying to give yourself over to the world that it is. Aside from the fact that you're making a movie, the fact that you're upstate on this beautiful land—it is a world of its own. It was easy to do if you just give yourself to the surroundings that you're in and the people that you're around. It makes it somewhat understandable.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** On the first season of "Girls," you played Charlie, the boyfriend of Hannah's roommate, Marnie. What aspects of New York life do you feel the show has captured?

**Abbott:** I think it strikes a certain young 20s demographic in New York very well. Lena writes very specifically and takes a lot of stories that she's heard from people or personal experiences and translates them to what she puts on the show. I don't think that it's a generalization or a representation of young people in New York as a whole, but I think that there's a certain sect that find it very relatable. So for people who watch it that don't directly relate, they can be voyeurs into what that group of people is like.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** The critics who've argued that Lena has the responsibility to represent all sects of New York seem to have forgotten that the most relatable material is often the most specific.

**Abbott:** Yes. When you read the script, what's happening isn't world-changing or mind-blowing. [laughs] Lena's just so good at taking these minute, microscopic situations and blowing them up. They have these moments in the show that, in real life, would be fleeting and sometimes people forget or don't realize how important they are—these little interactions with people that you love or that you're friends with. Sometimes you take them for granted but they can be very telling about who they make you as a person. Lena is very good at highlighting them.



Christopher Abbott and Melanie Lynskey star in Todd Louiso's *Hello I Must Be Going*.

*Photo credit: Oscilloscope Laboratories*

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Was there a lot of discussion onset about Marnie and Charlie's history prior to the show's events, or was it more about being in the moment of each scene?

**Abbott:** I think it was a mix of both. Lena was good about giving us the backstory of their relationship. In everything I do, I always try and ask, “Why am I doing this, why am I acting this way?” Often enough, I don’t personally relate. I personally wouldn’t react in this situation that way, so I have to figure out why Charlie would. Lena was always good about giving us an idea of who these people are, and who they are to each other. In the case of Marnie and Charlie, they’re so young but they’ve been together for quite a long time since college. What that can do to you when you’re in that kind of relationship is you can get tunnel vision. You don’t broaden out to the outside world. It’s made you kind of naive and you don’t even know it.

During that first season, Charlie is opening his eyes more and more as it goes along, but I think there’s still some denial there. I wanted to [capture] the way people act sometimes when they feel safe with somebody and they just don’t want to lose that. You’ll still try and fight for it even though you know in the back of your head that you probably don’t want it and it’s unhealthy.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Will Charlie return for Season 2?

**Abbott:** I haven’t done as much as on the first season. I’ve gone in a few times here and there. I haven’t read the future scripts yet, but in the coming weeks, I’ll be going in to do the last couple ones.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** What appealed to you about the character of Jeremy in “Hello I Must Be Going”?

**Abbott:** The reason why I liked the script so much was because the relationship between Jeremy and Amy was unique and really specific. I hadn’t seen anything like that in a while. Some of Jeremy’s ideals in terms of how he looks at his life were interesting. He’s acting and he doesn’t really like it. I related to how he always questioned what he was doing and wasn’t always dead set on everything. The other thing is that I’m going to be 27 and he’s 19 and I didn’t necessarily want to play him young. In the script, I found him to be wise enough. He can seem older, and I thought that should be part of the reason why she is attracted to him. Even though he’s of a certain age, he has a certain gravitas that would make her want to be with him. Being a woman who’s been through a marriage, there has to be something about Jeremy that feels older, whether it’s his soul or just his demeanor.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** In some ways, Amy seems younger than her age, which makes her appear to be on the same level as Jeremy.

**Abbott:** Yeah, I think that’s the idea. Halfway through the movie, hopefully people start to forget that age difference and those lines should start to blur a little bit. I think it does.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** How did you go about developing chemistry with Melanie Lynskey during production?

**Abbott:** We didn’t have much time when we were there. Pretty much from day one, Melanie and I would have frank conversations about the scenes that were coming up. Some of the scenes were sexual and are always weird to do with someone that you don’t know that well. We had a very frank conversation about making each person comfortable and then our rapport just started to happen very naturally. Whether or not it was forced because we were on a time limit, it didn’t feel forced. Maybe somewhere in the back of your head, you’re going, “You have to establish a rapport with the other person outside of making the movie so what comes across onscreen is energetic, heartfelt and true.” We hung out a lot and we talked about stuff, so it didn’t feel forced. That’s the main thing we did.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** While watching peers like Lena work behind the camera, have you developed aspirations to direct?

**Abbott:** I do but I know that it’s not right now. I actually find cinematography more interesting, but that’s going to take some research and some schooling before that comes around. The next project I’m doing is going to be a friend’s project. My friend Mona is doing her first feature film that she co-wrote with Brady Corbet, who was in “Martha.” We’re going to be in it together and we’re going to shoot it in October.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Has Jody Lee Lipes—your cinematographer on “Martha Marcy May Marlene” and frequent director on “Girls”—served as an influence?

**Abbott:** He’s one of my favorites. He’s so talented and I really like the way that he works. He’s really slow in a good way—he checks everything and is very meticulous about stuff—but he’s extremely calm when he’s working. He has the experience level of someone much, much older and a confidence too.

## **PART II: TODD LOUIISO and SARAH KOSKOFF**





Melanie Lynskey and Christopher Abbott star in Todd Louiso's *Hello I Must Be Going*.

*Photo credit: Justina Mintz/Oscilloscope Laboratories*

**HollywoodChicago.com:** What are the benefits to working together?

**Todd Louiso:** It can be both amazing and really hard too. What we care most about in terms of work is the work itself. We know what we like and what each other's tastes are, so we have sort of a—

**Sarah Koskoff:** We keep each other on track. [laughs]

**Louiso:** Just like that.

**Koskoff:** Not selling out the intention in the work. Just being a check and balance for each other. It's very helpful because it can be so overwhelming with so many different people involved in making a film. If you're someone who gets thrown by other people's opinions—

**Louiso:** Which I am...

**Koskoff:** [laughs] Which we both are, it helps to be able to check in and know that the other person is on your side and more importantly on the side of the project.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** I noted a certain correlation between your protagonists in “Love Liza” and “Hello I Must Be Going.” Both are attempting to overcome a personal tragedy, and both are living somewhat of a lie. What attracts you to exploring these broken yet sympathetic adult characters?

**Louiso:** I just find them interesting to watch and I love them as characters. I was just thinking the other night about Mike Leigh and how much I love his films. I love watching his characters and I think that's what attracts me to certain pieces. The script that Sarah wrote had a lot in it that I connected with and tonally that I loved. I love when there's a little bit of tragedy and sadness mixed with a certain amount of humor. That's really hard to write and it's also hard to film. That's what I love to see when I go to the movies.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Was Sarah hands-off during the shoot or was it a closer collaboration than would normally occur between the writer and director?

**Koskoff:** It was both of those things because we have two young children. They were going to camp that summer, and I was really with them the whole time. I was very available by text message—it was very strange but it actually worked well. There would be times where it would be kind of an emergency situation—like, “Can you get here? Is there a way you could get here?”—and I would either bring the kids or I would see if there was someone who could hang out with them. It was very fluid, flexible and moment-to-moment during the whole shoot.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Has both of your experiences in front of the camera enhanced your approach to working with actors?

**Louiso:** Yeah, definitely. It's everything to me. I understand how difficult it can be for an actor. I don't know how other actors like to be directed but I know how I like to be directed and I try to do that on the set with actors by giving them a lot of say in their choices.

**Koskoff:** From a writing point of view, it's really helpful as well. If I can't say it, if I can't act it myself, I can't expect an actor to be able to do

it. So there’s quite a lot of acting that I do of the scenes that I thank god no one will ever see. [laughs] I’ll say the dialogue out loud and if it sounds ridiculous, if it doesn’t feel like a person talking, then I go back to it.

**Louiso:** We read them together as well.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** How did Melanie become involved in the project?

**Koskoff:** She did the very first public reading of the script. I didn’t really have an actress in mind, so her take on it was the first that I saw. It was so grounded and it worked on so many levels that we were sold on her from then on.

**Louiso:** She was so in love with the part herself and so committed to it. It was great for both sides because of what she brought to the table and how incredible she is. Her enthusiasm and support of the film also helped us get off on a really strong foot.



Blythe Danner stars in Todd Louiso’s *Hello I Must Be Going*.

*Photo credit: Justina Mintz/Oscilloscope Laboratories*

**HollywoodChicago.com:** We’ve seen many recent films about the “man-child” archetype, but not many about women struggling with arrested development.

**Koskoff:** I’ve seen that character a lot—that developmentally arrested male living at home and still acting like a child. I knew so many women who were that way and I myself still felt that way [laughs], so I wanted to take it on from the female perspective, but also adding to it the fact that she’s sort of doing a lot of this stuff for the first time. She’s been a bit of an outcast growing up—awkward and uncool. She’s been a really good girl even though she’s an underachiever. She’s basically done what her parents have told her to do and what her environment expects from her in her own lame way. So this rebellion is new for her even though she’s 35.

**Louiso:** The rebellion has also been brought on by that fact that, as Sarah said, she’s the good girl and has always done what she’s been told to do, which includes marrying her husband, David. In the film, she says to him, “Thank you for ending our marriage because I never would’ve done it on my own,” and I always find that so amazing because I think it’s true. She never would’ve done it on her own, she would’ve stayed in that marriage and thank god she was able to challenge herself in a way that she hadn’t known how to do when they were still together. She was able to break the pattern within her family structure by not repeating the same mistakes that her mom had made.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** That restaurant confrontation is so well-acted because we get a sense of Amy’s relationship with David purely in how they silently relate to one another before she verbally stands up to him.

**Koskoff:** We had to edit very quickly because we were trying to submit the film to festivals, and at some point there was some talk of cutting



down that speech. It is long for film, but one of the things we talked about was that she’s so quiet at the beginning—it’s so hard for her to speak about herself, and so it is important that she has an outpouring of connected dialogue there. That felt like a real growth—she’s going to take that time and she’s even going to leave and come back and say, “You know what? I want—” [laughs]

**Louiso:** That scene encapsulates her whole arc because when she goes back to see David, she meets him and he immediately tussles her hair like a little kid. She’s very quiet at the table and listens to his stories because she is a listener. She’s not the center of attention—she’s always in the background, and that scene is where she goes from what she used to be to realizing she isn’t that person anymore.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Was it difficult to humanize Jeremy so he wouldn’t resemble a “Fifty Shades of Grey”-style, idealized fantasy of a young man?

**Koskoff:** Yeah, that was definitely the very last part that had to be worked on for exactly the reasons that you’ve said. He couldn’t be a regular kid, and I think it was when he became an actor that it started to make more sense. Those kids never got to be kids. They work from a very young age, they take care of their families and they’re in an adult work environment. They’re extremely mature and very savvy, at least in my experience of working with them.

**Louiso:** It was really tough casting Jeremy because tonally we didn’t want it to seem like she was taking advantage of him or that he was taking advantage of her. It had to walk a fine line and it helped having Melanie and Christopher, who are both incredible. If the Jeremy character is too knowing, then it could seem kind of yucky that he’s taking advantage of this vulnerable woman, and we also didn’t want her to seem like a cougar.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** What inspired you to use the music of singer-songwriter Laura Veirs throughout the film?

**Koskoff:** For us, which is true of a lot of the process of making this film, things would feel right and we would figure out why later on. We were looking for a sound that felt right, and every time a couple songs of Laura’s would come on, we would be overwhelmed by it and would be like, “Oh my god, this is so beautiful. This is it.” But it didn’t cross my mind that we could ask her to do that for us. It came late in the game when we were putting in music and every time that we put in one of her songs, it would work. Finally, we just said, “Let’s get in touch with her,” and we did. It was in October or something ridiculous. She was thrilled to do it and so amazing and helpful. She has a young child and lives in Portland and she’s such a serious artist.

**Louiso:** She fit in so well and she feels a lot like Amy to me.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Do you see your film as particularly relevant to the general economic turmoils of modern America?

**Koskoff:** I think it’s relevant in terms of confusion about things that are supposed to make us happy and depending on things that don’t turn out to be true—a certain delusional behavior. People were effected by the financial crisis on all different levels. They believed in something that didn’t turn out to be solid because nothing is, really. I think that’s terrifying to people, and trying to find meaning after that is a challenge.

*‘Hello I Must Be Going’ stars Melanie Lynskey, Christopher Abbott, Blythe Danner, John Rubinstein, Julie White and Dan Futterman. It was written by Sarah Koskoff and directed by Todd Louiso. It will be released September 14th at Landmark Century Centre and Landmark Renaissance Place. It is rated R.*



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