

## ‘Away We Go’ From Sam Mendes a Slightly Bumpy Trip Worth Taking

Submitted by [Ebeth](#) [1] on June 12, 2009 - 1:41pm

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Rating: **3.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Has life always been this difficult? *Doesn't anybody ever stay together anymore?* Have the pressures of modern times turned the majority of us into screw-ups?

“Away We Go” is a chronicle of couple – Burt and Verona (John Krasinski of NBC’s “The Office” and Maya Rudolph of “Saturday Night Live”) – attempting to resolve just that.



Maya Rudolph (left) stars as Verona and John Krasinski (right) stars as Burt in Sam Mendes' “Away We Go”.

Image credit: François Duhamel

A narrative map of stops along the road to self-discovery, the film is an exploration of the complications and confusions in modern relationships.

Thirty-somethings Burt and Verona – a pair stunted in their college days (living with borrowed furniture and a cardboard window) – are expecting. What they're not expecting is to be left completely alone in the venture as Burt's parents (played by Catherine O'Hara and Jeff Daniels) announce their planned move to Belgium one month before the baby's due date.

Unsettled by this lack of support with no family or friends left in the area, the couple sets off on a city-by-city tour with the goal of finding their niche: a new job, new community and new home all their own.



John Krasinski stars in Sam Mendes' "Away We Go".

*Image credit: François Duhamel*

Each stop on their itinerary is an intended visit to a mosaic of colorful “characters”. A credit to writers Dave Eggers and Vendela Vida, the film excels in finding humor in the quirky: those crazed to the point of awkwardness but sane just enough to function in society.

From the appearance of Burt’s egocentric and insensitive parents to the couple’s brief encounter with a sociopath-in-the-making youth, the oddities sprinkled into several of the characters make for some great “it’s funny ‘cause it’s true” moments.

Among the drop-ins we find Allison Janney as Lily (from the acclaimed “Juno”). In a complete 180 from her conservative “West Wing” role, she plays a loud and social bubble-invading blast from Verona’s professional past. Though a few notes of overacting, Janney hits the mark more often than not.





Allison Janney stars as Lily in Sam Mendes' "Away We Go".

*Image credit: François Duhamel*

Playing opposite Janney as Lowell (Lily's husband), stand-up comedian Jim Gaffigan stumbles through a half-enthused performance. Be it the writing or Gaffigan's interpretation of the character, the humor in his scenes feels forced within a film that's clearly trying to not.

A couple with much the same dynamic, Maggie Gyllenhaal (of "The Dark Knight" and "Stranger Than Fiction") energizes as pop-spiritual, in-a-realm-of-her-own LN (formerly known as Ellen) whereas Josh Hamilton's flat appearance as LN's husband Roderick can't be deemed yang to her yin.

Remarkable are Chris Messina and Melanie Lynskey's performances as Tom and Munch as longtime college friends of Burt and Verona. Both of these actors – as adoptive parents experiencing the agony of multiple miscarriages – create two heartbreaking personas and leave an empathic physical ache within the audience.

Perfectly attuned to the subtleties of "Away We Go," the soundtrack by new artist Alexi Murdoch *is* the movie. It would be a challenge to find music that's a better addition to this script.



John Krasinski (left) stars as Burt and Maya Rudolph (right) stars as Verona in Sam Mendes' "Away We Go".

*Image credit: François Duhamel*

Despite the multiple take-offs, the number of descents within "Away We Go" do leave it slightly south of its destination. Some of its character quirks (such as LN and Roderick's "spirituality") are too emphasized and leave the moviegoer wishing the writers had hit the breaks just a bit sooner.

Attempts to capture a natural, chit-chat flow within the characters (something Maya Rudolph does excel in) succeed at times, but leaves a few scenes between the couple feeling dull and contrived.

Often quite endearing and dead on as sentimental, goofy-nerd Burt, John Krasinski has a few moments of wide-eyed and aimless line sputtering that seem out of place. Equally out of place is the final line of the movie, which – spoken by Verona – seems out of character. It's a clunk at the end of a pretty piano piece.

In creating Verona, the writers and director Sam Mendes (who directed "American Beauty," "Jarhead," "Revolutionary Road" and "Road to Perdition") are graced by Maya Rudolph's touching portrayal. A role seemingly destined for Rudolph, she floats through a performance that's memorable and complete.





Director Sam Mendes on the set of his new film “Away We Go”.

Image credit: François Duhamel

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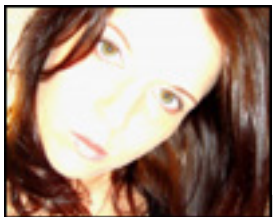


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All in all, “Away We Go” proves a satisfying, rare look at the intricate dynamics between people – all types of people – as they struggle for balance in this “crazy world”. Driving straight into the difficult themes of separation, divorce, childbirth, death and infertility, this is a film with a little something for everyone who has *lived*.

It’s especially for those currently experiencing these trials of life. Though not without its valleys, “Away We Go” delivers just enough to be a worthy trip to the theatre.

*“Away We Go” from director Sam Mendes stars John Krasinski, Maya Rudolph, Maggie Gyllenhaal, Allison Janney, Jeff Daniels, Jim Gaffigan, Catherine O’Hara and Chris Messina. “Away We Go,” which opened in Chicago on June 12, 2009 and opens in other limited cities on June 5, 2009, is rated “R” for language and some sexual content.*



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