

# *'Stop and Go' with Co-Director Stephen Meek*



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The upcoming COVID-inspired comedy *Stop and Go* (2021), f/k/a *Recovery*, explores the journey of two directionless sisters who brave a cross-country road trip with a single mission in mind; to reach their grandmother at her nursing home before COVID does.

The film, which proudly premiered at SXSW '21, effortlessly navigates the many comedic and human moments of the early pandemic days. While the film certainly touches on the numerous experiences we all shared in common in 2020, it is also filled with plenty of laughs as it ventures out into bold-comedic territory.

Directing a film like *Stop and Go* can be a unique challenge for many reasons. How does one achieve the right tone while mixing comedy with heavy subject matter? How does a director overcome the many challenges that they surely faced while filming in 2020?

Today, we sit down with Stephen Meek, co-director on *Stop and Go*, to discuss such matters and more as he shares his take on the good, the bad, and the ugly that he encountered while making a COVID-comedy in the midst of all the struggles that 2020 brought.



**Both yourself and the entire *Stop and Go* team took on a challenge that few filmmakers dared to try; make a feature film during 2020. What were some of the unique challenges you faced while directing during this time and were there hurdles you thought would be big that ended up being barely an inconvenience — and vice-versa?**

I honestly think there were enough other variables involved — being a first-time feature, having a tiny crew, starting production self-funded — that proved stressful enough that the pandemic almost faded into the background. Wearing masks, taking temperatures, and relying on our crew to stay safe felt highly manageable compared to filming at a breakneck pace or having locations fall through the day before. When Sorø came in on day five of our eleven-day schedule and alleviated funding concerns, we could all breathe much easier, but by then we had also found a rhythm that made the project feel fully achievable. It kept our few hands very full, but was an entirely exhilarating process.

**Speaking of exhilarating, this was your directorial debut for feature films, was it an experience that turned out to be what you expected — and is directing what you'd like to take on more of moving forward?**

I've heard repeatedly that filmmakers should love the process over the product, so that's definitely how all of us approached *Stop and Go*. If we were having fun,

enjoying the moment, problem-solving as much as possible, we felt like we were fulfilling the purpose – maybe of film generally, but certainly of *Stop and Go* — specifically. I’m definitely looking forward to more films, regardless of the role I might play in making them, because they’re a joy to work on and a joy to help bring to life.

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**— and with “loving that process,” Mallory Everton and Whitney Call, the two stars of the film, have such an extensive personal history together — can you describe your process when it came to directing them?**

I genuinely tried to stay out of the way where I could and step in only when the laughter or the energy took any dives. *Stop and Go* definitely has a heavy dose of “Whit & Mal autobiography,” and they were also able to memorize such large portions of the script in such a short amount of time, that directing them honestly came down to interpretation of performance. Trying new options, helping bridge the energy between entirely separate scenes or days, and just giving them as many opportunities as possible to deliver the lines the way they hoped to deliver them became the natural recourse.

**Mallory Everton, besides starring in the film, also stepped in as co-director on *Stop and Go*. How does co-directing compare to directing a project solely by yourself — and how was your experience co-directing with Mallory?**

I can’t draw from a deep well of experience, but co-directing felt like the perfect approach for *Stop and Go* given the heavy involvement Mallory and Whitney had in the entire creation. We were wearing a wide array of hats, so scouting locations and crafting shot lists with Mallory the night before we needed them felt more like lifting where we could rather than any strict divvying up of



responsibilities. We all had an aim – get this movie made – so they would shine in front of camera, I'd make sure we had all the coverage and energy we needed behind camera, and we were gonna see *Stop and Go* finished in 2020 or die trying. Maybe not die trying. I have 3 kids.

**Did the genre and theme of *Stop and Go* influence your directing style or approach at all?**

I'm not sure the genre specifically informed any approach. To me, comedy feels like comedy if that joy lights up in my chest when a genuine moment comes off the page. Lines that play well in a cold read can fall flat on the day because of any number of variables, so if the camera is catching lightning in a bottle, you have to trust that feeling more than anything – and if it's not, you need to fix it STAT.

**What sources of inspiration did you look to while directing the film?**

The writing phase borrowed heavily from Knight's Locke and Winterbottom's *The Trip*, so both of those were definitely studied for style, but I found the energy of Wilde's *Booksmart* and Scott's *Thelma & Louise* the more true tonal inspirations – and I'd say relying on Whitney and Mallory's classic chemistry guided the film more than anything.

**I'm sure there were many challenging shoot days on *Stop and Go*, what are some that come to mind?**

Our first day was, hands down, the most emotionally crushing film day I've ever experienced. All first days have their issues, but we were rained out of our luau scene, wore Mallory's feet down to blisters while rollerblading, and lost a major location for our following day, all while filming about a page of the entire script. For a ninety-page script, eleven days of production, and our own money on the line, we felt like the project was going nowhere incredibly fast.

**Luckily, it did go somewhere; all the way to SXSW '21. Throughout that journey, how much of the film changed between the script and the final cut?**

When it comes down to it, there was very little left on the cutting room floor. Some of the scripted plot-driving conversations were longer, many of the <sup>=</sup> improvised conversations were much longer, but our first cut felt bloated at about 97 minutes and we ultimately trimmed it down to 80. There aren't any "deleted scenes" that came out of that 17-minute difference, but a good amount felt like jokes running too long or general pacing problems. Cuts were pretty straightforward – and, even still, we wish we could cut some moments tighter.

**The film has been very well-received thus far — from premiering at SXSW '21 to many glowing and positive reviews since, do you have any thoughts or reactions?**

Oh my goodness, the reception has felt so much more positive than I ever thought possible. I felt incredibly proud that we finished the film in the first place, but to have it accepted to SXSW and praised for what we very specifically aimed to accomplish has left an afterglow that is hard to describe. Whitney often talks about the "delayed gratification" that filmmakers receive in their work (i.e. in comparison to the instant form that a crowd delivers to a stage performance or scored touchdown) and that it can disconnect you from the accomplishment of a task well done. But the positive reception has most certainly fueled a desire to keep making the next project and the next project and the next.

**What do you hope audiences take away most from *Stop and Go*?**

Connection. From this film, and from (God-willing) any future films I have a hand in, I hope people walk out with a sense of closeness with others or the world around them. Everyone – EVERYONE – has a hard journey and I think quality work can lighten many burdens.

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*Stop and Go* hits theaters October 1st, 2021. For more information, [click here](#).

LISTEN TO STEPHEN MEEK ON THE SORØ FILMS PODCAST

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