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EXCLUSIVE: Natalie Zea Talks *Sweet Talk*

The *Justified* star plays a phone sex operator who gets caught up in an intricate fantasy world. This indie drama debuts in limited release December 13th.



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Dec 11, 2013 by Brian Gallagher

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[Natalie Zea](#) is having one hell of a 2013, shining in hit TV shows such as [Justified](#), [The Following](#), [Under the Dome](#) and even shooting a new Amazon Studios pilot entitled [The Rebels](#). If that wasn't enough for one year, the talented actress also stars in the unique and compelling indie drama [Sweet Talk](#), which debuts in limited release December 13 before arriving on VOD formats December 15. The actress delivers another terrific performance as Delilah, a phone sex operator who takes an unlikely journey through an intricate fantasy world with a struggling writer ([Jeffrey Vincent Parise](#)) looking for inspiration. I recently had the chance to speak with [Natalie Zea](#) over the phone about her experiences on the set, being glued to the phone all day, and much more.

I recently had the chance to see this, and I really loved it.

Natalie Zea: Oh, good! Thanks.

Before you even read the script, though, did they tell you that that there was a phone sex element, and was there any trepidation in taking on a movie with that kind of stigma attached to it?

Natalie Zea: God, it was such a long time ago. I think it was pitched to me by my agent. He said, there's this little movie, it's teeny tiny, but I think it's kind of cool, because it was based on a play. I don't know if you're interested, but read it and see what you think.' I don't think he mentioned it, but the script is so PG-13, compared to even some of the stuff I've done on TV. There's something really sweet about it, obviously, but it really doesn't feel sexually explicit. It feels more like a love story than a sex story, I guess.

I'm curious how these phone scenes actually played out. You're with him ([Jeffrey Vincent Parise](#))

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in the fantasy scenes, but a majority of the movie is you and him on the phone. Were you actually on the line with one another?

Natalie Zea: Yeah, he went first, which was great and it was awful. It was great, because it gave me a chance to learn my lines, because after you do three or four takes, you kind of have it down. I got to do that before I even went on camera. It was awful, because they put me in this box. I actually have a picture of it. They put me in this makeshift sound-proof area that they put me in, and I was on an actual land-line phone. It was covered in blankets and it was just me and the phone, which was hooked up to a mic, and I had my iPad in there, so I could read and stuff, but it was really lonely. A lot of times, people didn't even know I was on set, until I would pop out and go to craft services (Laughs). I actually read an article about the [Spike Jonze](#) movie [Her](#), where [Scarlett Johansson](#), the whole movie is voice-over for her. I know that they had to do the same thing, and it was a similar experience. There's something very isolating and lonely about it.

That must help you get into a character like this, though. She's just sitting there by herself, trying to enact all these fantasies all day.

Natalie Zea: Yeah, I think it added another layer, and I think I had an advantage over [Jeffrey](#), even though he was brilliant, as you can tell, but I was able to do it first and get my feet wet a little bit, before I had to actually do it on camera.

The more we get to know Delilah, it becomes clear how sharp and educated she is. It made me wonder why she's a phone sex operator when she doesn't seem to enjoy it that much. Was there a back story that you created with (director) [Terri \(Hanauer\)](#)?

Natalie Zea: Yeah, [Terri](#) is very much an actor's director, very much, because she's rooted in theater and, for her, it's about the performance and the actor's. That's really rare for somebody who comes from television, because my education is in theater but I haven't done as much theater as I would like to, or as I have TV. You sort of forget that, in TV, it's all about the camera angles, the lights, making sure the story works, and the actors are kind of on our own. With her, we spent a week, separately, just working on on back story. We would go to rehearsal, but it wasn't really rehearsing. It was just talking and it was so refreshing and so weird, to get back into that whole theatrical way about approaching a character.

We don't get too concrete of an explanation regarding the Silent Man. I was wondering if that played into all those preparations?

Natalie Zea: Yeah, it did. Again, it's been so long. I have an idea of what he means for her, but I don't think we got very concrete with it, and [Terri](#) certainly didn't want to know too much, so she sort of guided me through it. It all remains very vague, intentionally, because it is a weird, vague kind of thing. It's everybody's version of what that is to them, that creepy, unnamed entity in the back of one's subconscious. That's who that is.

With so many other films, you would get this, 'Oh, this is who he was,' her abusive father or something like that. For a second, I was a tad disappointed, but the more I thought about it, the more I enjoyed it. He could be whoever you want him to be.

Natalie Zea: Yeah, this isn't anything concrete, but it's as simple as the worst version of herself, the voice in the back of her head that says she's not good enough, very Freudian and pop psychology 101. It's significant nonetheless, because we all have that, somewhere.

This is [Terri](#)'s feature directorial debut. Can you talk a bit about how her style stands out, as opposed to others you may have worked with?

Natalie Zea: I've never had a better sense of communication with a director, than I had with [Terri](#). At one point, she came up to me, and she didn't say words, and in my head, I was like, 'I got it,' and I did. I knew exactly what she wanted, and she knew that I knew what she wanted. It became this weird twin language (Laughs) that crept everybody out. That's what you get when you spend so much time with the performers beforehand, and you let the actors know how important they are. So often, and I think people who aren't in the industry don't understand this, we as actors are kind of low on the totem pole, in terms of how much attention we get on set. The lighting is very important, sound, where the camera is, and then we're just trusted to give a brilliant performance. For her, it was such a priority, that we were our best selves, throughout the whole process.

That sounds like the ultimate shorthand.

Natalie Zea: Yeah, it was. People were creeped out about it (Laughs).

I'm also a huge, huge [Justified](#) fan. I saw that you joked on [Twitter](#) that you knew the name of Raylan and Winona's baby. Do you actually know the name of the baby?

Natalie Zea: I do.

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I assume it's not 'Winona's Fault'?

Natalie Zea: No, but it's close (Laughs). It makes sense. It's funny, and we don't even say it, yet. Nobody says the name on screen yet, but for me, I was like, 'Of course, that's the name.' That's perfect.

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Can you talk about how many episodes you're on this year? Do you have a set number yet?

Natalie Zea: No, I never have a set number. The way we worked it out is, I got off contract after year three. It was originally supposed to be year two, and they asked for me to stay on so I could wrap it up, and I was more than happy to oblige. After that, they said, 'You know, we understand you need to go and do other things. Would it be possible for you to come back for a handful of episodes every year?' The way it works on TV is, if you're contracted on a different show, you're allotted three episodes of another show. That's actually up to the discretion of whatever network, and so far, every network has been happy to oblige. I can only do as many as three. I've done one, and if they want me to do a couple more, I'm happy to.

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I was also reading about [The Rebels](#) pilot on Amazon, which sounds awesome. Since your character essentially inherits a pro football team from her late husband, did you go through a football crash course, or, because she's so new to the world, did you need to do that?

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Natalie Zea: Oh, no, I didn't need to. Yeah, she's very new. It's such a refreshing character for me, and I was telling ([Justified](#) star) [Tim Olyphant](#) this the other day, that I don't play anyone's girlfriend, I don't play anyone's wife, I don't play anyone's ex-wife. This is very new territory for me, where it's this fully-realized character that has nothing to do with her sex or dating life. It's about just who she is. She's naive about this, but at the same time it was her husband's life, her husband's world. She knows enough, and she's a really smart woman, she's just not smart about football. I can certainly identify on those terms. I know a little bit. I know enough to host a Super Bowl party, but aside from that, I'm not going to own a team. I'd be a mess. There was very little acting that had to go into that (Laughs).

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Is there anything else you might be adding to the slate anytime soon?

Natalie Zea: Yeah, there's a movie that I had written, and I recently made a very big step. I put my fiancee's name on the script, because he's been such an integral part of the writing process over the past few years. It's time for us to share this credit. We will hopefully be going into production on that in 2014. I wrote it almost 10 years ago, so it's been a really long labor of love, and we're getting to the point where money seems like it's possible. I think the biggest challenge for me, is I'm going to have to book out. I'm going to have to tell everybody I'm not available. For a couple of months, I'm going to be MIA, which will be hard, because I like to work (Laughs). It's called [Imaginary Places Ease](#). It's a working title, but I'm happy with it, so as long as nobody has any objections to it, that's what it will be.

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You've become so well known for so many different kinds of shows, but a project like this might be under some people's radar. What would you like to say to fans of yours about why they should give [Sweet Talk](#) a shot?

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Natalie Zea: I spent a lot of my career playing the sort of reactive sidekick, or the reactive significant other, and with this, it's so, so different in that she's fully realized already. From the moment you see her, you want to know more, because she's just this whole person, not dependent on any other character to be, she just is. From there, the character unfolds and you get to discover this really strange, beautiful, sweet world... of phone sex (Laughs).

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That's great. That's about all I have. Thanks so much, [Natalie](#). It was a real pleasure.

Natalie Zea: OK, great. Thank you!

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You can watch [Natalie Zea](#) take us through the intimate world of phone sex in [Sweet Talk](#), debuting in limited release December 13 and on VOD formats December 15.

[Sweet Talk](#) was released [December 13th, 2013](#) and stars [Karen Austin](#), [Devion Andrez Coleman](#), [John Glover](#), [Lindsay Hollister](#), [Anzu Lawson](#), [Andre Myers](#), [Jeffrey Vincent Parise](#), [Time Winters](#). The film is directed by [Terri Hanauer](#).

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