

The Darjeeling Ltd: Jason Schwartzman Q & A

Actor Jason Schwartzman, whose credits include *I Heart Huckabees* and *Marie Antoinette*, made his film debut playing the precocious high school misfit Max Fischer in the 1998 film *Rushmore*, and he reunites with *Rushmore* director Wes Anderson for his latest film, *The Darjeeling Ltd*. The quirky movie tells the story of three estranged brothers – Schwartzman, Adrien Brody and Owen Wilson -- who take a train journey across India (aboard a train called *The Darjeeling Ltd*.) in hopes of bonding with each other and finding both themselves and their long lost mother-turned-nun (Anjelica Huston). Along the way, the fractious siblings encounter escaped snakes and amorous train attendants and find themselves lost in the desert with eleven suitcases and a laminating machine. This much is comic business as usual for Wes Anderson, whose previous films *The Life Aquatic* and *The Royal Tenenbaums* also told tall tales of riotously dysfunctional families, but *The Darjeeling Ltd* heads in an unexpectedly emotional direction when the brothers are involved in a tragic accident as they attempt to get their expensive luggage across a fast-flowing river. Schwartzman talked to us during the recent Venice Film Festival, where the new film had its premiere.

Q: You are credited as one of the writers of the film with Wes Anderson and Roman Coppola. How did the idea come about and how did the collaboration work?

A: Wes had the initial idea, which was to do a movie about three brothers on a train in India and when he first brought it up to me, I didn't think it was an invitation to co-write the movie. I was in Paris at the time and was just finishing up on *Marie Antoinette* and I had a spare room, so Wes was staying with me for a while. We would go for these late night walks and tell stories about the girls that we knew, things they had said, things we'd said back, and go on off on all kinds of tangents from there. Wes would always be writing stuff down and after about three weeks he suddenly said, "You know this movie we're writing, we should bring Roman in on this." I hadn't realized we were writing a movie together till then.

Q: How long did it take to come up with the finished script?

A: We wrote it over the course of two years. Once Marie Antoinette was over I went home, but Wes stayed on so Roman and I would fly to Paris for three weeks at a time and basically we would sit in a room all day from ten in the morning until two or three the next night. When I write I tend to do things in short little chunks, like three hours and then a break, three hours and then a break. But that's not their style. They just keep going and don't really eat or anything like that.

Q: Your character in the film is a rather cheerless womanizer. Did you base him on yourself?

A: [Laughs] In a weird way I would say my character is equally Wes, Roman and I, and the same for Owen and Adrien's characters. I think each character is a fragment and a blend of the three of us. Okay, maybe I'm two-thirds of my character....

Q: You, Owen Wilson and Adrien Brody seem like a visual mismatch as brothers yet you pull it off. Did you have any initial doubts about the casting?

A: When we all stood next to each other for the first time I really wondered if it would work. But I think that it does and I think it comes across that they love each other, or at least that they have the potential to love each other, and to me that seems like family or brothers.

Q: Did the three of you like each other in real life?

A: Yes, we were fortunate that the three of us got all along because if we hadn't, it could have gone horribly and it would have been miserable being in India for three months, away from home and in such an unfamiliar environment. As it was, all the actors had to look out for each other. There was nowhere to hide either. We had a communal green room on the train and not our own dressing rooms, except maybe just this little sliver of space where you could decompress or blow your nose or something. And I think that proximity helped us create this feeling of us being brothers. You give an actor a trailer, they are going to go to a trailer. We had to sit in a room together and get

to know each other.

Q: You shot on a real train?

A: I don't know why, but for a while I was lying and telling people the whole movie was shot on location in Los Angeles, but the truth is that we found an old broken down train in Rajasthan and rented it and the production designer completely rebuilt and remade it to become the one you see in the film. We also got permission to use the tracks. So every morning at seven a.m. we would all get on the train and ride to different locations and shoot while we rode, which was insane in a great way. We had to yield to more official trains, to commuter trains, to cows or any other sort of animal that might decide to cross the tracks, so at any moment the train could suddenly grind to a halt and the scene would be ruined. It created this odd tension.

Q: Wes Anderson seems to be such a precise director and his films are built around seemingly very carefully composed images and scenes. How did he deal with the unpredictability of a cow on the tracks?

A: He just basically said, India is unpredictable and we can't control it, so if we ask for a red car and they bring us a blue truck, let's just go with it and start shooting.

Q: Was this your first time in India? What impression did it make on you?

A: We all went to India while we were writing the script. About halfway through we thought, maybe we should actually go there and make sure that we know what we're writing about [laughs] and we aren't way off the mark. Oddly enough, when we got there I think it was what we had imagined to a large extent, especially the kinetic energy of the place. I suppose we've seen it our whole lives on TV and in movies and stuff. Many things were surprising too.

Q: Such as?

A: Many of the things you see are normal for India I suppose but they were totally bizarre to me. One day I was in the car on the way to work and I looked out the window

and there was a baby elephant in a pickup truck in front of us.

Q: The three brothers in the film are on a supposed spiritual journey that seems pretty misguided, yet their trip ends up being enlightening in all sorts of ways. Did that match your experience in India?

A: Well, people keep saying to me, do you feel like you went on a spiritual journey? I'd feel like a bit of a jerk if I said yes. Spiritual is so hard to define. But I know that I was initially really nervous to go to such a faraway place and it still feels very distant to me, very exotic. At the same time, there is something magical about the place, which was overwhelming and impossible to escape. While I there I just kept thinking, I want to come back here, I want my mom to be here, I want my brothers to experience this place. And seeing the film for the first time, I got very sentimental.

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