

The Darjeeling Ltd: Wes Anderson

Wes Anderson, whose previous films include *Rushmore*, *The Royal Tenenbaums* and *The Life Aquatic*, is one of America's most original and inventive writer-directors. His latest film, the soon-to-be released *The Darjeeling Ltd*, tells the story of three brothers, estranged since the death of their father, who set off on a train journey across India in an attempt to renew their family bonds and maybe find some spiritual enlightenment along the way. Naturally enough, things don't go to plan and the siblings get lost in the desert, buy a snake that promptly goes AWOL, and are involved in a tragic accident as they attempt to get their expensive luggage across a fast-flowing river. The film has more of an emotional pull than Anderson's previous work, but it's funny and quirky as well and blissfully steeped in the light, sounds, gorgeous colors and general hubbub of the Indian sub-continent. *The Darjeeling Ltd* also reunites Anderson with regular collaborators Owen Wilson and Jason Schwartzman (as two of the three brothers), Anjelica Huston (as their long-lost mother-turned-nun) and a briefly glimpsed Bill Murray. Joining Anderson's stock company as the third of the fraternal trio is Adrien Brody, the youngest ever winner of the Academy Award for Best Actor. Anderson talked about the film after its premiere screening at the recent Venice Film Festival.

Q: How did you come to cast your three lead actors as brothers? Did you see a family resemblance?

A: Not really, no. In fact I had some reluctance at the beginning because I was not sure we could sell that, but something that always happens when you try to cast a family is that you pretty quickly decide to just get the best actors that you can get. If you cast it for resemblance then you end up saying, well, I could get one of my favorite actors in the world to play this part or I could get someone who looks a little more like the other guy. I think great actors work out to be a family and they very quickly started acting like brothers. In the end I think Jason and Adrien seem like they could be brothers after all. Owen looks like a whole different kind of animal, but then we have the benefit of the fact that Owen's covered with bandages and stitches all over his face for most of the

movie because his character has been in a motorcycle accident.

Q: Which actor did you cast first?

A: The first brother was Jason because the movie began with me asking Jason and his cousin, Roman [Coppola], who's my friend also, to write a script with me. So I always knew there would be Jason. And Owen is automatic for me. I tend to think of him very early in the process, if not before: Owen is like one of my brothers. And Adrien is somebody who I'd wanted to work with for many years. Owen and I had gone to see King of the Hill, the Steven Soderbergh movie, a long time ago and Adrien was in that – he was maybe 19 or something. We were both been struck by him and always talked about him over the years.

Q: It as if you have your own Wes Anderson acting troupe...

A: I really like the feeling on the first day on set of it being a reunion.

Q: Nearly all your movies seem to be about eccentric and dysfunctional families. Does it all come from personal experience?

A: Well, I come from a family of three brothers and I definitely can sympathize with someone who feels that their family isn't quite there any more. I have definitely experienced that because everyone eventually goes their separate ways. I think with this movie the thing that interested me about these brothers was that we find them at a moment when they are all particularly lost. Their father has died and their mother has disappeared and they can't seem to form their own families.

Q: Was making this film your first time in India?

A: Well, when we were writing we went to India and we tried to imitate the journey, to act it out, which is a bit of a crazy way to go about it. But I wanted to and they wanted to and that experience fuelled the movie and a lot of what we went through found its way into the movie, though I also borrowed stories from other people. [Producer] Dick Zanuck told me about getting a shoeshine in Africa and having the guy run off with one

of his shoes, so I put that in for example.

Q: Did India surprise you at all?

A: My experience of India before I went there was entirely from films. So I had some idea of it and that was accurate, but of course I had been watching it on a box, on a screen, and it's very different when India is all around you and you can hear the sounds and get that distinctive smell that India has.

Q: The colors in the movie are certainly extraordinary...

A: We tried to make the film about what we discovered in India and it's the most vibrant place I have ever been. There is color everywhere and it's just a matter of choosing which direction to point the camera.

Q: Did it ever occur to you or your producers to take the easy way out and shoot the movie on a soundstage in Los Angeles?

A: It would have been possible for all the scenes on the train to be done on a set. My director of photography and I watched lots of train movies. There are a couple of Hitchcock's -- Strangers on a Train, North by Northwest, The Lady Vanishes -- and we also watched Murder On The Orient Express, and they were all done on sets. There's a Merchant-Ivory film, Shakespeare Wallah, which is set in India and that's one of the few movies where the train stuff is on a real moving train and there is something quite different about it. I think you just know you're really there. So this was an adventure. I like to have challenges when we're making a movie and filming on a train requires some big wrangling and going to India meant we were all going to have an adventure together and not to be in our... I think the expression is comfort zone. So every day we'd set out into the desert in Rajasthan on our own train.

Q: Can people go to India now and take a ride on your train?

A: No, because we rented it from the Indian government and had to make it into a movie set. So the exterior of the train is just how trains look in India, but the inside we

created by bringing in local craftsmen to paint signs and patterns and elephants all over the train. I think the train has been taken apart now. I have a few bits of it in New York actually.

Q: Your films are all set in different places and feature different characters yet somehow there's no mistaking a Wes Anderson film for any other. Do you set out with that in mind?

A: No, not at all [laughs]. All my energy goes into what we can do to make this film new and different and how can we tell the story well. Yet somehow I manage to take a movie set in New York or Italy or on a boat or a train in India and people say, it's a lot like your other work. I guess it's just my funny way of seeing things.

[ENDS]

[APPROX. WORD COUNT: 1290]