

Filmmaking friends board the ‘Darjeeling Limited’

By Dino-Ray Ramos

STAFF WRITER

AN ACADEMY AWARD-nominated director, an acclaimed actor and an heir to Hollywood royalty sit in a suite wallpapered in Victorian flair at San Francisco’s Ritz Carlton Hotel. The three people in question are Wes Anderson, Jason Schwartzman and Roman Coppola respectively, and they’re on a press tour for their collaborative writing venture, “The Darjeeling Limited” (in theaters now).

Loosely connected to Anderson’s short film “Hotel Chevalier,” the movie involves a train voyage through India during which three brothers hope to bond. The brothers — Francis (Owen Wilson), Peter (Adrien Brody) and Jack (Schwartzman) — have reunited a year after their father’s death.

As writers of the “bro-centric” film, Anderson, Schwartzman and Coppola’s energy in the room is not unlike that of real-life siblings.

“You got a little chunk of something on your eyelash,” Anderson says nonchalantly to Schwartzman.

Schwartzman picks at his lash and says, “It’s tiredness and exhaustion.”

His fatigue is understandable considering the trio has been promoting the new film non-stop. The men’s candidness, on the other hand, shows that they have a working relationship with each other that makes them one of the film industry’s most viable writing teams.

“We were all friends for years, but the reason I became friends with Jason was because I wanted to cast him in a movie,” says Anderson, who also directed the film. “The reason why I wanted Roman to write with us is because I admired his work for so many years. What ties that all together is ingenuity. For me, it was a chance to work with my close friends.”

“I think that there is a sense of trust, love and respect amongst us,” adds Schwartzman. “That’s the kind of dynamic and chemistry to write a movie like this. The intent was to write something very personal. You’re going to have to say something that is embarrassing, personal and not be afraid of saying whatever is on your mind. You can only do that with your closest comrades.”

In addition to being a writer for the film, Schwartzman plays Jack, the youngest brother in the movie. But his bloodline goes beyond his role in the movie. Roman Coppola, brother of director Sofia Coppola and son of director Francis Ford Coppola, is also Schwartzman’s cousin.

“It’s hard to divorce that connection as a relative or friend, but I admire his performances,” says Coppola. “Same with Wes — I admire his movies. We are interested in one another, so the things that they work on are interesting.”

The trio’s body of work



ALL ABOARD: Wes Anderson (above left) directs Adrien Brody, Jason Schwartzman and Owen Wilson in ‘The Darjeeling Limited.’ Estranged and spoiled, brothers (from left) Schwartzman, Brody and Owen Wilson hope to reconcile during a trip on an Indian train.

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reads like a collaborative tangle. Anderson has worked with Schwartzman on “Rushmore.” Schwartzman has worked with Coppola on “CQ.” And Coppola assisted in directing Schwartzman in “Marie Antoinette.” It’s no wonder that their camaraderie is so vibrantly reflected in “The Darjeeling Limited.”

Even though Anderson is known for tackling family dynamics in films such as “The Royal Tenenbaums” and “The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou,” he doesn’t approach his projects with this sole intent.

“I think to some degree, you don’t choose the material, it

chooses you,” says Anderson. “This sounds phony, but as you are writing, you are just searching for a story that already exists.”

To create the three brothers, Coppola says they had to contribute ideas that were personal to them. As a result, there are tidbits of each of the writers’ experiences that shape the on-screen siblings. They even went so far as to put themselves in the characters’ shoes.

“Sometimes we would do im-

provisations and I would be Peter, Jason would be Jack and Wes would be Francis,” says Coppola.

As for which personal experiences are fact and which are not, that remains unanswered — to a point. The eldest

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brother, Francis, who is covered in scars and bandages throughout the movie, is based on a guy with vacant eyes, also padded with bandages, whom Anderson saw in Rome.

The youngest brother, Jack, doesn’t wear shoes or socks throughout the movie. This is one of many whimsical details stitched into the film. But to Anderson, these quirks aren’t that weird.

“Why are those bare feet whimsical?” asks a curious Anderson. “People use that word ‘whimsy’ a lot and I’m sure that is what’s there. In the short (film), Jason was barefoot because he was in a hotel room. We kept it as a link. We liked that for his character.”

Schwartzman has his own view on Jack’s bare feet.

“I had dinner at someone’s house in India,” he says. “One

of the members of the family had become a Jain priestess. They walk around everywhere without shoes because they don’t want to step on any bugs or hurt anything. Another part that is built into it is that they consider each step they are taking. I thought that was nice.”

“The Darjeeling Limited” also carries Anderson’s directorial wit, which some perceive as off-beat. He sees things from a different perspective.

“Oftentimes people will refer to something as out of left field,” he says. “But everything is inspired by something in real life. I guess there’s something about how we combine everything that makes it feel heightened.”

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