

Times BFI Film Festival 2007

By Lana Gorlitz

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DARJEELING LIMITED at the TIMES BFI FILM FESTIVAL

The Times BFI London Film Festival (17 October-1 November 2007) celebrated its 51st anniversary last year, hosting 185 feature films and 133 short films from 43 countries. The LFF thrives as a "festival of festivals," choosing the best films available on the circuit. This creates an atmosphere which focuses primarily on audience participation and enjoyment rather than the typical emphasis on the industry and the acquisition of distribution rights. The principal concern for Sandra Hebron, Artistic Director of the LFF, was "to select films which showed another way of looking at the world." By all accounts, that was a mission accomplished. From the pursuit of a spiritual self in *The Darjeeling Limited*, and a lonely voyage to Alaska in *Into The Wild*, to a glimpse into the world of Bob Dylan in *I'm Not There*, and a young girl's experience of Iran's Islamic Revolution in *Persepolis*, the festival achieved a level of diversity only matched by the bustling city that was its host. This year, the festival opened with the UK premiere of David Cronenberg's *Eastern Promises* and closed with Wes Anderson's highly anticipated film, *The Darjeeling Limited*.

As a long-standing enthusiast of Anderson's films, the highlight of the festival for me personally was the presentation of *The Darjeeling Limited*. Anderson's eagerly awaited follow up to *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou* was not only selected as the choice for the Closing Gala screening, but was also accompanied at the festival with one of several on-stage interviews sponsored by TCM (Turner Classic Movies) featuring a discussion between writer-director Anderson and Sandra Hebron. Since his first feature, *Bottle Rocket*, Anderson has developed a body of work involving a stylistically unique cinematic vision, featuring eccentric characters, scrupulously detailed shots and an idiosyncratic - and always delightful - soundtrack. His films are not associated with any particular time period, and in his Screen Talk, Anderson quipped that if a film is not dated, then it can never be out-dated. His career has ultimately produced a distinctive blend of contemporary cinema - his films are never straightforward dramas, romances, comedies or adventure films, but are the hybridized concoction of the director's imagination.

The Darjeeling Limited was derived conceptually from three of his special interests: trains, India and brothers. Anderson remarked about the beginnings of the film: "I'd always wanted to make a movie on a train because I like the idea of a moving location. It goes forward as the story goes forward. I already set a movie on a boat. I decided I would like to make a movie in India, I decided I would like to make a movie on a train and I thought I'd like to make a movie about three brothers." The forward progression of the narrative is paralleled by the device of the train itself which propels these three estranged brothers on a spiritual, physical, and emotional journey through the impressive landscapes of India.

As in previous films such as *The Royal Tenenbaums* and *Rushmore*, Anderson presents astute observations on the chaotic and humorous interactions of love and familial relations. In *The Darjeeling Limited* the decision to set the film in India added a new layer to his filmmaking style. Reminiscent of Jean Renoir's *The River*, Anderson approaches India not as a tourist attraction, but as a landscape that serves to magnify the alienation of the three brothers. Anderson said of India that "it's a place where so many aspects of daily life are so radically different from our own, and that really affected the screenplay." The chaotic spirit of India heightens the tone and energy of the narrative created by the filmmakers.

The oldest sibling, Francis Whitman, played by Owen Wilson, has reunited his brothers, Peter and Jack, played by Adrien Brody and Jason Schwartzman respectively, on an adventure with the intent of finding their mother, reconciling their brotherly differences, and discovering the true meaning of life. However, not long after their joyous reunion the brothers return to the bickering and animosity which originally characterized their estranged relationship.

Anderson creates a convincing and organic family dynamic by casting regular collaborators Schwartzman and Wilson, as well as the talented and versatile Adrien Brody, working with Anderson for the first time on this film. It was important to Anderson to choose actors who could establish a unique bond, having great

affinity for each other while playing against each other's unstable temperaments. Wilson takes on a new role in his career, appearing vulnerable with most of his face bandaged and limping with a cane as a visual depiction of his fragile state. The sad knowledge of Wilson's recent suicide attempt created a definite and yet unintentional discomfort in watching his deadpan performance.

The theatrical release of the film was preceded by a 13-minute prologue, *Hotel Chevalier*, in which Jack Whitman is visited by his ex-girlfriend in a Paris hotel. In his Screen Talk, Anderson discussed his view that, while unconventional, it was beneficial to link *Hotel Chevalier* with *The Darjeeling Limited* as seeing both lends an added dimension to the character development and narrative of each separate film.

References

Awards

The Sutherland Trophy Winner: *Persepolis* (Marjane Satrapi)

10th FIPRESCI (International Critics) Award Winner: *Unrelated* (Joanna Hogg)

The Alfred Dunhill UK Film Talent Award Winner: Sarah Gavron (*Brick Lane*)

The Times BFI London Film Festival Grierson Award: *The Mosquito Problem and Other Stories* (Andrey Paounoy)

The 12th Annual Satyajit Ray Award Winner: *California Dreamin' (Endless)* (Christian Nemescu)

TCM Short Film Award Winner: *A Bout de Truffe* (Tom Tagholm)

Author Information

Lana GORLITZ is a graduate of the Honours Film studies at the University of Western Ontario. Her academic interest centres on auteur theory, gender studies, classical Hollywood cinema and global popular culture.