

Hollywood, Etc.: Male siblings are getting a huge share of the screen action these days

by James Hebert

So you're all set to see that new movie - the one about those brothers and their strained relationship and zany adventures and calamitous romantic lives, all of it culminating in heart-rending attempts at redemption.

BIG BROTHERS - From left, Adrien Brody, Owen Wilson and Jason Schwartzman portray brothers in 'The Darjeeling Limited.' CNS Photo courtesy of James Hamilton. And that movie, of course, would be "The Darjeeling Limited," the account of three feuding brothers on a slow train through India.

Unless, naturally, it's "We Own the Night," a chronicle of two battling brothers on an express train to pain (as well as on opposite sides of the law).

Or maybe it's "Before the Devil Knows You're Dead" (out Nov. 9), about two brothers on the same side of the law - the wrong side, as it happens - one of whom is carrying on with the other's mate.

That's not to be confused with "Dan in Real Life," about two brothers without notable legal issues but, again, with that awkward situation of one sibling coveting the other's soul mate.

Brotherly bonds - or lack thereof - have been a powerful subject for storytelling ever since Cain had those creative differences with Abel.

Lately, though, movies have seemed so fixated on male kin that it's reasonable to ask - paraphrasing the title of a film made (conveniently) by two siblings, Joel and Ethan Coen: "O brother, where aren't thou?"

It's not just the people in the movies, either. It's also those making them. The Coens themselves hit movie screens again Nov. 16 with "No Country for Old Men." Already in theaters is "The Heartbreak Kid," the latest movie from the renegade Farrelly brothers, who themselves made one of the ultimate brother movies a few years ago: "Stuck on You," a comedy about Siamese twins.

And turning a nifty both-sides-of-the-camera trick, Ben Affleck directs his younger brother, Casey, in the crime drama "Gone Baby Gone," which opened the same day as "We Own the Night."

There's a TV angle, too: brothers Joe and Anthony Russo, who jointly won an Emmy in 2004 for the pilot episode of "Arrested Development" (itself a show that dealt with some brotherhood issues), direct the current ABC series "Carpoolers."

Documenting this phenomenon is one thing. Explaining why it's happening now is another. That might require the advice of a psychologist. Say, Dr. Joyce Brothers.

Or maybe just someone who makes movies with his own brother.

Bryan Young is a producer and assistant director of independent documentaries, including "This Divided State" and "The BYU 25," which just finished production.

He has teamed on some movies with his brother, Jason - happily, so far. (Young also co-writes the comic "Pirate Club," which he has showcased in numerous pilgrimages to San Diego's Comic-Con.)

Young speculates that the brother upsurge in movies might stem from the country's red-vs.-blue rift,

something that figures strongly in the documentaries he has worked on.

"I wonder if it has anything to do with the emphasis on family values in the political spectrum," he adds. "Filmmakers and artists go back to their family stories. They think about their own family values and wonder where those values came from."

As for why these thoughts find voice in brother relationships in particular: Brothers have long been an archetype of human bonds - or conflict - of all kinds, from the utopian "brotherhood of man" in John Lennon's "Imagine" to the ominous, omnipresent Big Brother in George Orwell's "1984."

In that sense, a movie like "The Darjeeling Limited" might stand for something larger than the woes of three wayward siblings who can't get along.

"It's about three brothers who are very fractured in both their personal lives and their beliefs," says Young about the movie. "The one brother kind of takes it upon himself to take the other two and force them on a healing journey. To get past all that and act with unity again."

"That could be seen as very much a larger prescription for what we need."

Or at least a peppier prescription than the one offered up by Woody Allen's next movie, "Cassandra's Dream" (coming Nov. 30), in which two brothers played by Colin Farrell and Ewan McGregor get talked into becoming hit men.

As the old saying goes: "Brother, can you share a crime?"

Bro by bro

Brother-minded movies now in theaters, recently released or coming soon:

"Dan in Real Life": Steve Carell is a widower who falls for his brother's girlfriend.

"The Darjeeling Limited": Owen Wilson, Jason Schwartzman and Adrien Brody get lost in India trying to find themselves.

"Before the Devil Knows You're Dead": Philip Seymour Hoffman and Ethan Hawke rob their mom and pop's shop.

"We Own the Night": Joaquin Phoenix and Mark Wahlberg face off as a club owner and cop from the same family.

"American Gangster": As a '70s drug kingpin, Denzel Washington brings his bros into the family biz.

"The Brothers Solomon": This comedy has Will Arnett and Will Forte as brothers who line up a surrogate mom. (Bonus bro points: Arnett starred in TV's "Arrested Development," directed in part by the Russo brothers.)

FAMILY BUSINESS

Movies and shows out now or coming up from brother teams:

"The Heartbreak Kid": The Farrelly brothers remake the '72 marital satire in their (raunchy) image.

"Gone Baby Gone": First-time director Ben Affleck orders kid brother Casey around in this crime tale.

"No Country for Old Men": The Coen brothers return next month in this take on a Cormac McCarthy story.

"Golden Compass": Chris Weitz directs this epic (coming in December), with brother and longtime collaborator Paul executive-producing.

"Carpoolers": Joe and Anthony Russo are behind the new ABC-TV series. (Bonus bro points: They also made last year's "You, Me and Dupree," starring Owen Wilson, who is in the current "Darjeeling Express" - and frequently teams with his own brother, Luke.)

"Speed Racer": Emile Hirsch takes the lead in this projected May 2008 release from the Wachowski brothers of "Matrix" fame.

CAIN'S HIT PARADE

Film classics of the brother kind:

"The Godfather" (1972): The Corleone boys struggle with the demands of a different kind of Family.

"Raging Bull" (1980): Robert De Niro is Jake La Motta, the troubled boxer who has a close bond with brother Joey (Joe Pesci).

"Rain Man" (1988): Charlie Babbitt (Tom Cruise) opens up as he gets to know his autistic brother, Raymond (Dustin Hoffman, who won an Oscar).

"What's Eating Gilbert Grape?" (1993): Leonardo DiCaprio was Oscar-nominated in this story of a developmentally disabled boy and his protective big brother (Johnny Depp).

"On the Waterfront" (1954): This classic gives us the famous "taxicab scene," in which Marlon Brando tells Rod Steiger (who plays Brando's brother): "I coulda been a contender." (The scene is also referenced in

"Raging Bull.")

FAUX BROS

This is a public service announcement. The following outfits? Not actual brothers!

- Super Mario Bros.

- The Chemical Brothers

- The Flying Karamazov Brothers

- The Flying Burrito Brothers

- The Blues Brothers

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