

Movie Review: 'The Darjeeling Limited'

by David_Elliott

When you hear music from Satyajit Ray's arcane classic "The Music Room" at the start of Wes Anderson's "The Darjeeling Limited," you realize that Anderson is one hip guy. Savvy thief, too.

'THE DARJEELING LIMITED' - Traveling on 'The Darjeeling Limited,' the brothers (from left, Adrien Brody, Owen Wilson and Jason Schwartzman) ponder a boxed snake during their Indian rail quest. CNS Photo courtesy of Fox Searchlight Pictures. RATINGS

4 STARS - Excellent.

3 STARS - Worthy.

2 STARS - Mixed.

1 STAR - Poor.

0 - Forget It (a dog.) "Limited," a comedy of "spiritual" seekers, has about as much to do with Ray's work as it does with the Gandhi family. Best known for "Rushmore" and "The Royal Tenenbaums," Anderson is a sly, pitter-pat jester, and the new comedy is a genially flowing spoof of India as holy land for those who settle for mantra-mumble tourism.

Owen Wilson is wealthy Francis Whitman, recently banged up in a car but ready to tap the Indian soul with

brothers Peter (Adrien Brody) and Jack (Jason Schwartzman). Both are laid-back guys with other concerns, but fussy Francis has everything planned, including "the temple of a thousand bulls, probably one of the most spiritual places in the entire world!"

The three bros have lavish, matching, monogrammed luggage for the train trip into deep India. Soon, they head for the class-A club car, and old tensions bubble up. Control freak Francis (when we later meet his mother, we see the source of that) takes their passports, orders their meals, and before long they're falling in a boyish spat on the sleeper car floor.

The amazing colors and faces of India flood in as the Whitmans zip through various shrines, even an "airport temple." The train, a cross-section of Indian social strata, provides a click-along rhythm like deadpan comedy. And we realize that getting fraternal again is all the spiritual traction these guys will get.

It is charmingly done, with Wilson a bit in the comic lead, but not by much. Brody is good at being peeved, and Schwartzman's moves on a saucy train stewardess, Amara Karan, are fine. Anderson is a bit cruel to tease us with just two glimpses of Bill Murray, but up in the Himalayan foothills compensation arrives as Anjelica Huston, a nun of the flinty sort.

"Limited" nearly derails when the silly, air-blown plot includes a village crisis and a death. This sobers even the scatty, self-absorbed Whitmans. The film wobbles, then recovers its blithe pulse (on the other hand, the flashback about a German auto mechanic played by Barbet Schroeder adds nothing).

Maybe village grief is Anderson's adult pass at the Real India, but if you want that, look at Ray's films. Anderson is an enjoyable, slipstreaming entertainer, and in this film he has a great country to back up his often amusing cast. It's like being hugged, not mugged, by a deft prankster.

Consult the movie's Web site for a teasing companion short, "Hotel Chevalier," with Schwartzman's Jack meeting lover Natalie Portman in Paris. She does occupy the eyes, and will also grace the DVD.

A Fox Searchlight Pictures release. Director: Wes Anderson. Writers: Wes Anderson, Roman Coppola, Jason Schwartzman. Cast: Owen Wilson, Adrien Brody, Jason Schwartzman, Anjelica Huston, Amara Karan. Running time: 1 hour, 42 minutes. Rated R. 3 stars.

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