

WES ANDERSON

We caught up with the director very early one Sunday morning to talk growing pains, his latest film and long-time collaborators.

WORDS ANNE FULLERTON

Few directors have built a celluloid world as distinct as Wes Anderson's. Whether doing family drama in *The Royal Tenenbaums* or sibling rivalry in *The Darjeeling Limited*, his realm of morose children and elegant matriarchs exists only when viewed through the gaze of his mustard-coloured glasses. Unlike other directors, Anderson looks like he might actually live inside one of his impeccably stylish dioramas, which makes him a particularly intimidating interview subject at 4.30am on a Sunday morning. A technical fail on Skype's behalf means my stretched out tie-dyed pyjama shirt remains a psychedelic secret, but it also robs me of a glimpse of Anderson in his typically Riviera-worthy finery. Despite doing a full day of press interviews at the Beverly Hills Four Seasons for his latest film, *Moonrise Kingdom*, Anderson is upbeat, apologetic about the time difference and answers questions thoughtfully, if a little cautiously.

Children often feature in your films. Why did you decide to make them the main characters in *Moonrise Kingdom*? Well, one of my inspirations for this was a François Truffaut movie, *Small Change*. Do you know that one? It's a really good one and it's a movie that's not really made for children; it's kind of like a grown-ups' art movie, but all the stories are of children and the point of view is [that of] children. It's unusual. For many years I'd been thinking about doing something inspired by that, then I started thinking that maybe it'd be a romance between two 12-year-olds and one where they take it very, very seriously, and we take it seriously too. That was the beginning for me.

They don't seem like the kind of carefree kids usually portrayed in films. What were you like growing up? I think my personality probably changed a lot at that age. Before that I was much more loud and sort of crazy and then I became much more shy and much more quiet, and stayed that way. I don't know why, but I feel like a lot of people change around then. Suddenly things aren't so simple anymore and there are new things that you worry about. That seems like a common pattern.

Is anything in *Moonrise Kingdom* based on your own experience? Usually I think, "No, it's all just made up," and then someone will point something out and I'll say, "Oh yeah, you're right!". There are little things all throughout the movie but it's hard for me to put my finger on 'em. The whole setting of the movie is not really like my own childhood at all. I'm from Texas and I didn't have any experience of going to islands and things like that. But I do think

the way these characters feel kind of isolated and want to break out and start a new life, I remember having feelings like that and being very interested in fantasy and wanting a fantasy to be real. The feelings of these characters, that's what I really relate to my own experience.

You said your own childhood wasn't like that at all. What did you do as a kid? I certainly liked to read. And when I was that age and maybe younger too, I liked to do theatre and to put on plays. That was something I was very fixated on.

So you were in plays like the character Suzy? Yeah, in fact I was in *that* play – Benjamin Britten's, 'Noah's Flood'. This is my thing, I say, "Oh, it's all made up", and then you mention specific things and I'm like, "Oh yeah, that happened". That Benjamin Britten play was produced by my school and church when I was a kid and that music has really stuck with me over the years. It's very beautiful music and very kind of powerful. I was an otter. There were two of them among about 80 other animals, so I don't know if you could really even tell I was an otter, but that's what we were supposed to be.

Was it weird to recreate a play from your childhood? You have the memory that inspired the thing but when you get to the moment of actually doing it, it's not really like it. There are different people, we were in a different church, in a different state and there are so many things that are new. But I will say that when we were in the editing room making these scenes, it was taking me back.

The part where Suzy finds her parents' book about coping with the troubled child was great because most people, at some point growing up, have a moment where they realise that their parents are worried about them. Yeah, that is another point where what's described in the movie was more or less what happened to me. It's not a very good feeling to realise that someone is worried about you. I remember I felt very insulted about it. But I also knew what it was about. If [the book] didn't have my name on it, but I knew that it was me because it made sense. I knew the behaviour that was worrying them.

What was it? I don't know if I can really conjure that up. I just knew that I wasn't really fitting into our household at that age. The details have sort of gone out of my mind.

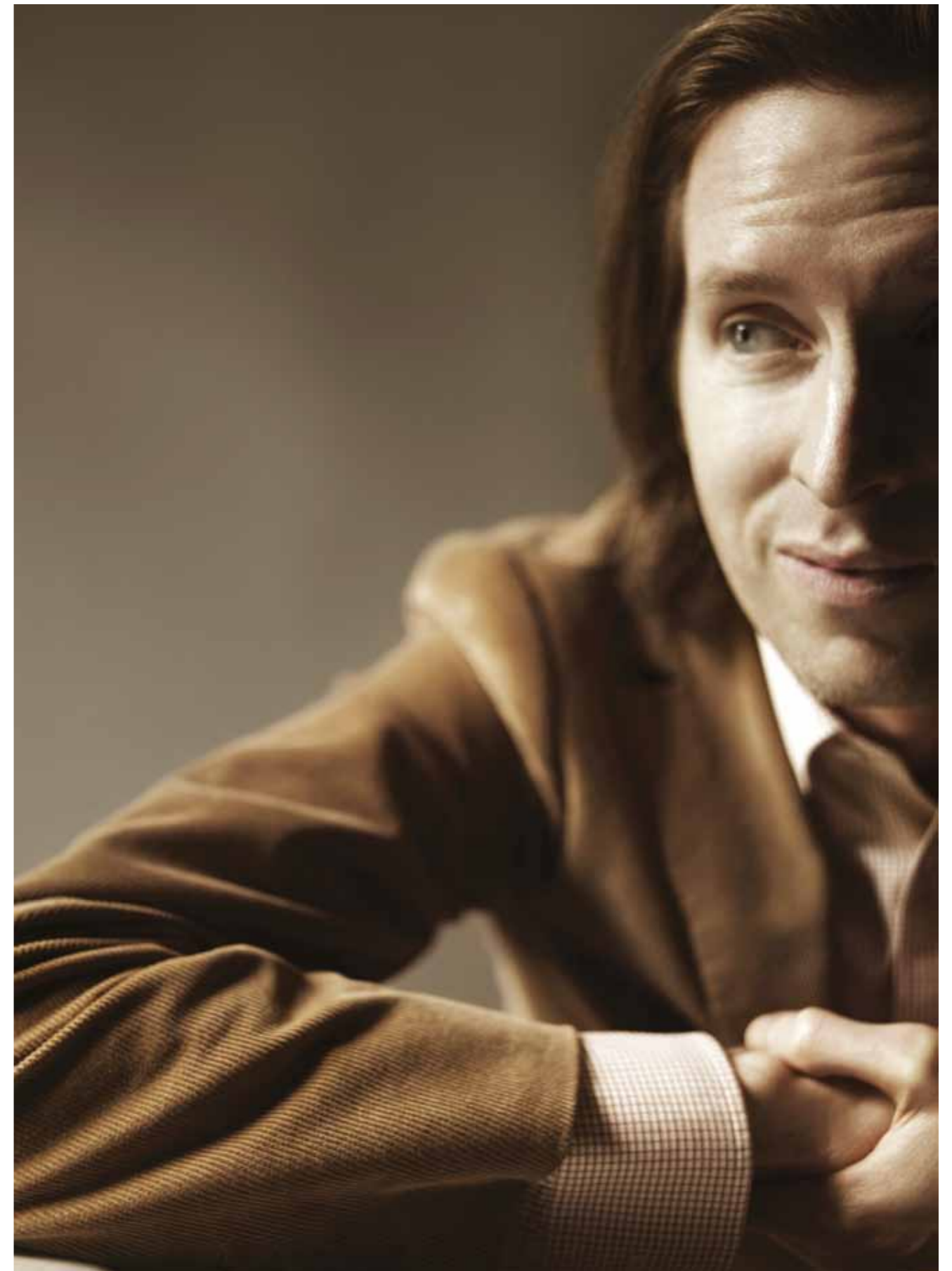


IMAGE: SOLVE SUNSDØ / ART + COMMERCE / SNAPPER MEDIA.



"MY PERSONALITY CHANGED A LOT AROUND THAT AGE. I WAS MUCH MORE LOUD AND CRAZY, THEN I BECAME SHY AND QUIET AND STAYED THAT WAY. THINGS AREN'T SO SIMPLE ANYMORE"

Did your parents see the film? They have, yes. They came to the editing room and saw it but we're doing a screening in Houston where they live in a couple of days.

So they recognised that moment too? Well I don't know, they didn't mention it but it's kind of out there now.

Did you have a childhood sweetheart? Not really, but you know the characters, the names of these characters, are real people. I don't even know if that's legal. But the character is called Suzy Bishop and there was a Suzy Bishop who was my friend when I was even younger [than the characters in the film], like second grade. Somehow I became very close to this girl Suzy and I remember the teacher made a point of saying in front of the class that we had our first romance in the school and that it was me and her. I think I kind of stopped talking to her after that. I felt so humiliated that I distanced myself from her, which in retrospect is a terrible thing. But I will say if the teacher had kept her mouth shut it probably wouldn't have happened. But anyway, the name comes from her.

You've worked with Bill Murray a lot and he's notorious for being difficult to contact. How did you first get in touch? The first movie we did together was *Rushmore* and that's probably 15 years ago or so. In those days he had an agent. We sent the script to his agent and I think she encouraged him to read it. That was really luck I think. And since then, I know I can just get in touch with him directly so it's a simple matter, but it was just a stroke of luck in those days.

IMAGE: SOLVE SUNSDØ / ART + COMMERCE / SNAPPER MEDIA.

What's the best thing you've kept from a film? I have a submarine from *The Life Aquatic*, a miniature submarine. I have archives so it's not in my house but it's in my storage. I keep the props and costumes from all my films, so I have a huge inventory of objects. Clothes, racks of costumes.

You feature a lot of old technology in your films. Are you a collector of old things or is it an aesthetic choice? I think it looks good on the screen. A record spinning is a nicer visual than an iPod doing nothing. I think it's partly that. In this one there's a reason at least, but in my life I'm as digital as anyone else. I don't have a record player but I do think they look nicer and they have a more poetic image.

You do have a very distinct style. Floating around the internet there's a Wes Anderson colour palette, a Wes Anderson bingo sheet. How do you feel about those kinds of things? I think really it's nice just to know somebody is interested. Whether it's meant as a compliment or neutral or even negative, there's something that's a positive about just engaging with an audience that feel something about it.

You work with the same cast of actors quite often. Tell us one thing we might not know about the following people...

Bill Murray

One thing you can always count on with Bill is that he's going to surprise you with what he's wearing. He is interested in clothes and enjoys clothes. Clothes are part of entertainment for him, not just for himself but entertainment towards the world. The way that manifests itself can sometimes be unthinkably strange, and great! His character in this film wears madras trousers and Bill in Cannes was wearing madras everything, he had seven different plaids at once. He has a great kind of style.

Anjelica Huston

I'm trying to think of things that aren't too personal but that also aren't known. Anjelica is someone who I became friends with after *The Royal Tenenbaums* who I just really love beyond description and also her husband Bob Graham, who died now I guess two years ago very suddenly. He was a wonderful sculptor. I have to say the two of them together as a couple, they're two people who I adored together. I adore Anjelica and I miss Bob.

Jason Schwartzman

Jason is somebody who has an enormous knowledge and inventory of music. He's a musician as well as an actor, but his knowledge of music is so broad and continuous. He's always finding new music and always sharing his discoveries.

Owen Wilson

Owen is a very good reader, so Owen is someone you can look to to suggest a new book. ☺

Moonrise Kingdom is out 30 August.