



PREVIEW

Asteroid City

+ Q&A with director Wes Anderson

ASTEROID CITY

Directed by: Wes Anderson

©: Pop. 87 Productions LLC, Focus Features LLC
An American Empirical picture

Spanish executive production services provided
by: S.L. Pop. 87 Films

In association with: Babelsberg Studios

Supported by: Medienboard BerlinBrandenburg,
FFA - Filmförderungsanstalt

Presented by: Focus Features, Indian Paintbrush

Executive Producers: Roman Coppola,

Henning Molfenter, Christoph Fisser,

Charlie Woebecken

Produced by: Wes Anderson, Steven Rales,

Jeremy Dawson

Co-producers: Octavia Peissel, John Peet

Field Producer (2nd Unit): May Ziadé

Regional Line Producer:

Fernando Victoria de Lecea

Line Producer: Frédéric Blum

Associate Producer: Molly Rosenblatt

Production Managers: Nico Santavicca,

Pauline Galtié

Production Co-ordinator: Ira Álvarez

Financial Controller: Beatrice Giraud

Production Accountant: Annie Palazón Huet

Unit Manager: Bertrand Girard

Location Manager: Ricardo Ferrari

Post Producer: Gisela Evert

Post-production Co-ordinator: Lewis Humble

2nd Unit Director: Martin Scali

1st Assistant Director: Atilla Salih Yücer

Script Supervisor: Jennifer Furches

Castings: Douglas Aibel

UK Casting by: Jina Jay

Casting Associate: Matthew Glasner

Screenplay by: Wes Anderson

Story by: Wes Anderson, Roman Coppola

Director of Photography: Robert Yeoman

Additional Director of Photography (Miniatures

Shoot Crew): James Lewis

2nd Unit Director of Photography:

Just-Aurèle Meissonnier

Animation Director of Photography: Tristan Oliver

1st Assistant Camera: Vincent Scotet

Gaffer: Gregory Fromentin

Key Grip: Sanjay Sami

Visual Effects Supervisor: Tim Ledbury

Visual Effects by: Red Visual Effects, Mathematic

Film, VAST, Jellyfish Pictures, Misc Studios, Gorilla

VFX, Goodbye Kansas, VHQ, Alchemy 24, Alkemy X

Special Effects Supervisor: Pau Costa Moeller

Special Effects Designer: Carlos Laguna

Miniatures by: Simon Weisse

Alien Animated by: Kim Keukeleire

TV Lighting Designer: Matt Daw

Motion Control by (Miniatures Shoot Crew):

Portable Motion Control

Film Editor: Barney Pilling

Additional Editor: Andrew Weisblum

Production Designer: Adam Stockhausen

Supervising Art Director: Stéphane Cressend

Art Directors: Antonio Calvo, Gabriel Liste,

Leonardo Grillo, Alejandro Cymerman,

Fernando Contreras

Alien Drawing by: Willa Skye

Asquith Eden Portrait by: Emma Wesley

Billboards and Additional Paintings by:

David Meikle

Cowboy Paintings by: Michael Bergt

Property Buyer: Elia Robles

Prop Master: Sandy Hamilton

Key Construction Manager: José Altit

A one-car pioneer town, somewhere in the parched wilds of the California-Nevada desert, in the fresh-faced post-war years of the expanding American empire, on the third rock from the sun. This remote out-post, and the few days we spend there with a ragtag group of visitors both scheduled and unscheduled, lend Wes Anderson's latest world-rebuilding confection more dramatic unity than perhaps any of his previous ten cavorting cine-capers. It also sees the Houston-born filmmaker who has insistently followed his inclinations eastward – New York, New England, England, France, the Mediterranean, mittel-Europe, India, Japan – finally turning west: the film is festooned with markers of 1950s Americana, from freight trains, singing cowboys and saturated Technicolor to tract-home salesmen, atom-bomb tests and military-scientific sequestration. The name 'Asteroid City' may be a sci-fi come-on for this dreaming toehold in the desert, named after what a billboard promotes as the prize local 'Arid Plains meteorite', but the film precisely evokes that time when America's frontier was moving from the West to the skies above.

All that said, there's more: pressing on with the formal experimentation of Anderson's last, magazine-inspired portmanteau movie, *The French Dispatch* (2021), *Asteroid City* couches its westernisms in the contemporaneous flavours of American east-coast theatre and television. In an occasional (black-and-white, Academy-ratio) framing device, Bryan Cranston plays the stentorian host of a high-culture TV show, bringing us behind-the-scenes glimpses of a new play from the pen of Edward Norton's venerated Conrad Earp, directed by Adrien Brody's suave Schubert Green. (Later there's also some Actors Studio-type experimental group work, for which Anderson loosens his tripod and hits us with Dutch angles.)

Apparently the situational drama in the desert is the resulting televised play – although it looks more than anything like a Wes Anderson film, down to the lovingly demarcated act and scene intertitles – and in it Scarlett Johansson's Mercedes Ford plays another actor, Midge Campbell, who herself is learning her lines opposite Jason Schwartzman's Jones Hall as Augie Steenbeck, a newly widowed war photographer. What with Anderson's chatter-box dialogue and the most aggressively dynamic camerawork yet by his perennial director of photography Robert Yeoman – daisy-chaining Anderson's trademark flat, symmetrical set-ups with responsive tracking shots and whip pans – it's a lot to take in on first viewing. But as ever, Anderson's overarching scenario is secondary to the scene-by-scene pleasures of his comic-sketch style and variety-revue treatment of his starry ensemble cast.

Breaking down in Asteroid City with a station wagon full of children and his late wife's ashes in a tupperware pot bound for his father-in-law (Tom Hanks dressed in teal and tan golf-wear by Anderson's regular costume designer Milena Canonero is something to see), Schwartzman's Augie rents a roadside cabin from Steve Carrell's chirpy realtor/proprietor. In the neighbouring cabin he and his bashful teen son Woodrow (Jake Ryan) take shines to Johansson's Midge and her teen daughter Dinah (Grace Edwards), one of a quintet of brainiac outcasts in town to be awarded for their outlandish inventions at a

Costume Designer: Milena Canonero
 Wardrobe Supervisor: Patricia Colin
 Make-up and Hair Designer: Julie Dartnell
 Hair & Make-up Supervisor: Claire Burgess
 Roadrunner and Alien Puppets by: Andy Gent
 Title Design: Erica Dorn
 Animatic/Title Sequence Editor: Edward Bursch
 End Credit by: Jeff Kryvicky
 Colourist: Gareth Spensley
 Music by: Alexandre Desplat
 'Dear Alien (Who Art in Heaven)': Written by:
 Wes Anderson, Jarvis Cocker; Vocals:
 Preston George Mota; Lap-steel Guitar: Rupert
 Friend; Washboard: Jarvis Cocker
 Original Music Orchestrated and Conducted by:
 Conrad Pope
 [Production] Sound Mixer: Valentino Gianni
 Sound Mixer (2nd Unit): Armando Ciudad
 Re-recording Mixers: Wayne Lemmer,
 Chris Scarabosio
 Supervising Sound Editors: Wayne Lemmer,
 Chris Scarabosio
 Dialogue Editor: Russell Farmarco
 Sound Effects Editor: Luis Galdames, Taylor Flinn
 Stunt Co-ordinator: Dominique Fouassier
 Yodelling Consultant: Jennie Knaggs
 Lasso Consultant: Felipe Lleras Garcia
 Lead Armourer: Juan Ramón Molina
 Special Thanks: Juman Malouf, Noah Baumbach,
 Brian De Palma, Jake Paltrow, Martin Scorsese,
 Steven Spielberg
 Cast:

Jason Schwartzman (*Augie Steenbeck*)
 Scarlett Johansson (*Midge Campbell*)
 Tom Hanks (*Stanley Zak*)
 Jeffrey Wright (*General Gibson*)
 Tilda Swinton (*Doctor Hickenlooper*)
 Bryan Cranston (*the host*)
 Edward Norton (*Conrad Earp*)
 Adrien Brody (*Schubert Green*)
 Liev Schreiber (*J.J. Kellogg*)
 Hope Davis (*Sandy Borden*)
 Stephen Park (*Roger Zak*)
 Rupert Friend (*Montana*)
 Maya Hawke (*June Douglas*)
 Steve Carell (*the motel manager*)
 Matt Dillon (*the mechanic*)
 Hong Chau (*Polly*)
 Willem Dafoe (*Saltzburg Keitel*)
 Margot Robbie (*the actress/wife*)
 Tony Revolori (*the aide-de-camp*)
 Jake Ryan (*Woodrow*)
 Grace Edwards (*Dinah*)
 Aristou Meehan (*Clifford*)
 Sophia Lillis (*Shelly*)
 Ethan Josh Lee (*Ricky*)
 Jeff Goldblum (*the alien*)
 Ella Faris (*Andromeda*)
 Gracie Faris (*Pandora*)
 Willan Faris (*Cassiopeia*)
 Deanna Dunagan (*waitress*)
 Vandi Clark (*cashier*)
 Pedro Placer (*cook*)
 Iván Lopez (*Romulus*)
 Aaron Ziobrowski (*bus driver*)
 Celia Bermejo (*chaperone*)
 Zoe Bernard (*Bernice*)
 Brayden Frasure (*Billy*)
 Preston George Mota (*Dwight*)
 Kaleigh Fuller, Henry Sebastian Rhoades,
 Jack Eyman, Sebastian Stephens, Willa Skye,
 Annalise Mackulin, Calhoun Metcalf (*other pupils*)
 Seu Jorge, Jarvis Cocker, Pere Mallén,
 Jean-Yves Lozac'h (*other cowboys*)
 Damien Bonnard (*bodyguard/driver*)
 Ramón Ródenas (*motel handyman*)

star-gazer/space cadet presentation. (Jeffrey Wright's clip-tongued General Gibson and Tilda Swinton's lab-coated Dr Hick-enlooper preside over the ceremonies.) Then, during a viewing of 'astronomical ellipses', they're briefly joined by another, stop-motion interloper, presenting as something like one of Louis Feuillade's silent bandits in a frog suit.

While the teenagers' onsite escapades and brain games recall the intrigue of *Moonrise Kingdom* (2012), Augie and Midge, two adults passing time as they pass through, bring a countervailing deadpan melancholia, deflecting feelings of grief, abandonment and hapless parenting behind their professionalism. (Midge identifies them as 'two catastrophically wounded people who don't express the depths of our pain because... we don't want to'; Augie, teeth clamped as ever on his pipe as if it will save him, responds: 'Let's change the subject.')

So the film, wrapping modernist questions of existentialism and artifice, alienation and isolation in Anderson's arch, whimsical post-modernism, presses onwards, spinning out its formalist frolics for dear life. It closes with Jarvis Cocker and Richard Hawley singing the refrain earlier pitched as a mantra by the acting students: 'You can't wake up if you don't fall asleep.'

Nick Bradshaw, *Sight and Sound*, bfi.org.uk, 25 May 2023

Wendy Nottingham (*Conrad Earp's secretary*)
 Bob Balaban (*Larkings executive*)
 Fisher Stevens (*detective 1*)
 Mike Maggart (*detective 2*)
 Tilda Swinton (*Doctor Hickenlooper*)
 Elvira Arce (*Mary*)
 Nicolas Avinée (*military-science ensign*)
 Mohamed Belhadjine (*military-science ensign*)
 Katy Heffernan-Smith (*stunt double*)
 Paul Kynman (*Lunky*)
 Sam Marra (*telephone booth guard*)
 Rita Wilson (*Mrs Weatherford*)
 Ara Hollyday (*Skip Weatherford*)
 Kenneth Bate, Christian Bate (*newsboys*)
 Sandy Hamilton (*backstage sound man*)
 Roberto Moreno de Matías (*engineer*)
 Francisco Serrano (*pilotman*)
 Francisco Javier Gómez Piero (*brakeman*)
 Jacinto Domingo Torija (*hobo*)
 Alvaro Olives Marqués (*caddy*)
 Dominique Fouassier, Pablo Amoros
 (*outlaws on the run*)
 Yann Tremblay, Sébastien Fouassier,
 Carlos Arimón (*state troopers*)
 Antonio Graziano (*cameraman*)
 Nuria Gígorro (*motel guest (at shower)*)
 Raquel Jiménez Martínez (*motel guest (at shower)*)
 Jorge Francisco Mena García (*motel gardener*)
 Ana Isabel Comendador Martínez (*motel maid*)
 Carlos Saez (*T-shirt vendor*)
 Karine Niederman (*bookseller*)
 Jesús Olivas Santos (*man with soda*)
 Jose Luis Figueroa (*hot dog stand*)
 Pascale Coppola (*girl on blanket*)
 Matilda Clarke (*girl on blanket*)
 Milagros Ahijón (*souvenir booth*)
 Paula Domingo (*souvenir booth*)
 Cristian García Jiménez (*boy in spacesuit*)
 Junior Harris, Robert Tattam,
 Eusebio Mateo Díaz (*ferris wheel crew*)
 USA/Spain/Germany 2023
 105 mins

Courtesy of Universal Pictures

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