



**STOP MOTION: CELEBRATING HANDMADE ANIMATION ON THE BIG SCREEN**

# Fantastic Mr Fox

## **Fantastic Mr Fox**

*Directed by:* Wes Anderson

*©:* Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation,  
Indian Paintbrush, Monarchy Enterprises S.a.r.l.  
*an American Empirical picture*

*Presented by:*

Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation  
*In association with:* Indian Paintbrush,  
Regency Enterprises

*Executive Producers:* Steven Rales, Arnon Milchan

*Produced by:* Allison Abbate, Scott Rudin,  
Wes Anderson, Jeremy Dawson

*Co-producer:* Molly Cooper

*Line Producer:* Simon Quinn

*Production Manager:* Charlotte Owen

*Production Supervisor:* Fred De Bradeny

*Production Co-ordinator:* Jules Collings

*Accountant:* Jeffrey Broom

*Post-production Supervisor:* Jeannine Berger

*Production Consultant:* Susan Blanchard

*1st Assistant Director:* Kev Harwood

*2nd Assistant Directors:* Ben Barrowman,  
Dan Pascal

*Continuity:* Claire Watson

*Written for the screen by:* Wes Anderson,  
Noah Baumbach

*Based on the book by:* Roald Dahl

*Lead Storyboard Artist Story Department:*  
Christian De Vita

*Story Co-ordinator:* Zoe Radford

*Director of Photography:* Tristan Oliver

*Practical Lighting Specialist:* Gary Welch

*Lighting Camera:* Toby Howell, Graham Pettit,  
James Lewis, Jeremy Hogg

*Gaffer:* Toby Farrar

*Visual Effects Supervisor:* Tim Ledbury

*Compositing Supervisor:* Rupert Davies

*Visual Effects Producer:* Liz Chan

*CG Supervisor:* Nic Birmingham

*Visual Effects Editor:* Daryl Jordan

*Additional Visual Effects by:* LipSync Post

*Animation Director:* Mark Gustafson

*Animation Supervisor:* Mark Waring

*Key Animators:* Jason Stalman, Kim Keukeleire,  
Dan Alderson, Brian Hansen, Brad Schiff,  
Anthony Farquhar-Smith, Andy Biddle, Will Hodge,  
Chuck Duke, Jens Gulliksen, Tobias Fouracre,  
Payton Curtis, Malcolm Lamont, Jeff Riley,  
Pete Dodd, Chris Tichbourne, Trey Thomas

*2D Animator:* Ray Lewis

*Motion Control Supervisor:* Andy Bowman

*Head Motion Control Operator:* Bobby Logan

*Motion Control Operator:* Christophe Leignel

*Supervising Editor:* Andrew Weisblum

*Editors:* Ralph Foster, Stephen Perkins

*Editorial Co-ordinator:* Zoe Radford

*Production Designer:* Nelson Lowry

*Design Consultant:* Alex McDowell

*Art Director:* Francesca Maxwell

*Lead Character Designer:* Felicie Haymoz

*Character Designers:* Victor Georgiev, Huy Vu

*Art Department Supervisor:* Roddy MacDonall

*Art Department Co-ordinator:* Mark Woollard

*Environment Designers:* Chris Appelhans,  
Alan Case, Turlo Griffin, Todd van Hulzen,  
Andy Roper

*Mrs Fox's Paintings by:* Turlo Griffin

*Puppets Fabricated by:* MacKinnon & Saunders

*Puppet Fabrication Supervisor:* Andy Gent

*Puppet/Art Department Co-ordinator:*

Melissa Rogers

*Puppet Wrangler:* Richard Lake

*Titles by:* Look! Effects Inc

The hero of Wes Anderson's animated film *Fantastic Mr Fox* gazes into his wife's eyes. 'I'm just dying to tell you the truth about myself,' he says, apologising for the trouble he's caused. 'I'm a wild animal.' That this 'wild animal' tends to dress in an immaculately tailored double-breasted tan corduroy suit and shares the suave delivery of George Clooney will be no surprise to fans of Anderson's work, in which an immaculately tailored deadpan tone is often used to depict the playfully ludicrous.

Adapted from Roald Dahl's classic children's tale, *Fantastic Mr Fox* tells the story of the relentless human persecution Mr Fox brings down upon his family when, bored of his quiet life as a local newspaper columnist, he answers the call of the wild. With the help of his visiting nephew Kristofferson, enigmatic son Ash and sidekick vole Kylie, Mr Fox raids the storehouses of Boggis, Bunce and Bean, three farmers who pride themselves on their superlative chickens, smoked meat, cider – and security systems.

Stop-motion animation first appeared in Anderson's work in 2004's *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou*, for which Henry Selick produced a number of brief, witty touches of underwater life (a sea horse in a champagne glass and various fantastical fish). In conversation, Anderson happily expands on the technical possibilities it creates: 'Animation allows a certain kind of blocking of scenes that I like. You can have someone enter sideways if it's animated. The puppet is on a stand and he's actually entering the shot sideways or upside down directly, or exiting in the foreground and re-entering deep in the background all in one. Things like that appeal to me.'

Equally, the need to create an entire world from scratch, right down to the finest detail, was something that suited Anderson. 'It requires that you manufacture anything you think of, so when you say, "What would be funny is such-and-such a detail," that thing has to be made,' he explains. 'Then you can say: "It can look exactly like this, and it would be nice if printed across it is that and it should have a lightning bolt on it." Someone's going to make everything, so everything's an opportunity to add detail. You get to manufacture your own skies... I've rarely had that opportunity in movies.'

The result is an autumnal world teeming with exquisitely realised details, such as the bristle of genuine hair on each fox model, all captured with Nikon D3 digital cameras, whose resolution exceeds High Definition. Some touches may go unnoticed by the audience: Mr Fox's study, for example, minutely replicates objects and decor from Roald Dahl's own writing den at his home in the Buckinghamshire village of Great Missenden. Anderson and his screenwriting partner Noah Baumbach (better known as writer-director of 2005's *The Squid and the Whale*) even stayed in the Dahl house as they worked on the screenplay, while Dahl's widow pointed out local features that the author was thinking of when he wrote the original.

In his determination to bottle elusive but authentic atmospheres, Anderson even went to the trouble of recording his cast outside or inside, according to the scene's setting. In the end the cast – featuring Meryl Streep, Jason Schwartzman, Bill Murray and Michael Gambon, as well as George Clooney – were recorded 'in every conceivable sort of setting,' says Anderson: 'in an apartment in New York, in a recording studio in France, outdoors next to a lake

*Music Composed/Conducted by:*  
 Alexandre Desplat  
*Music Performed by:* Traffic Quintet  
 (Dominique Lemonnier, Christophe Morin,  
 Philippe Noharet, Anne Vilette, Estelle Vilotte)  
*Mandolin Soloist:* Alison Stephens  
*Celeste Soloist:* Dave Arch  
*Banjo/Ukulele/Guitar/Mandolin Soloist:*  
 John Parricelli  
*Guitar Soloist:* Mitch Dalton  
*Guitars/Banjo/Mandolin Soloist:* Nigel Woodhouse  
*Jew's Harp/Spoons Soloist:* Paul Clarvis  
*Toy Percussions Soloist:* Paul Clarvis  
*Trumpet/Piccolo Trumpet Soloist:* Maurice Murphy  
*Piccolo, Recorder Soloist:* Helen Keen  
*Keyboard Percussions Soloist:* Frank Ricotti  
*Drum Kit Soloist:* Ralph Salmis  
*Timpani Soloist:* Tristan Fry  
*Recorder Soloists:* Piers Adams, Jill Kemp,  
 Annabel Knight  
*Double Bass Soloist:* Chris Laurence  
*Boy's Choir:* The London Oratory School Schola  
*Choirmaster:* Lee Ward  
*Solo Boy Vocalist:* Felix Wareing  
*Location Sound Recordists:* Noah Timan,  
 Stuart Wilson  
*Re-recording Mixers:* Sven Taits, Steve Browell  
*Re-recording Engineers:* Paul Jarvis, Mike King,  
 Jeff Dalmaine, Joe Maher  
*Supervising Sound Editors:* David Evans,  
 Jacob Ribicoff  
*Sound Effects Editors:* Andy Kennedy,  
 Stefan Henrix, Steve Browell, Brian Emrich  
*Voice cast:*  
 George Clooney (*Mr Fox*)  
 Meryl Streep (*Mrs Felicity Fox*)  
 Jason Schwartzman (*Ash*)  
 Bill Murray (*badger*)  
 Wally Wolodarsky (*Kylie*)  
 Eric Anderson (*Kristofferson*)  
 Michael Gambon (*Franklin Bean*)  
 Willem Dafoe (*rat*)  
 Owen Wilson (*Coach Skip*)  
 Jarvis Cocker (*Petey performing 'Petey's Song'*)  
 Wes Anderson (*weasel*)  
 Karen Duffy (*Linda Otter*)  
 Robin Hurlstone (*Walter Boggis*)  
 Hugo Guinness (*Nathan Bunce*)  
 Helen McCrory (*Mrs Bean*)  
 Roman Coppola (*squirrel contractor*)  
 Juman Malouf (*Agnes*)  
 Jeremy Dawson (*beaver's son*)  
 Garth Jennings (*Bean's son*)  
 Brian Cox (*Action 12 reporter*)  
 Tristan Oliver (*explosives man*)  
 James Hamilton (*mole*)  
 Steven Rales (*beaver*)  
 Rob Hersov (*pilot*)  
 Jennifer Furches (*Dr Badger*)  
 Allison Abbate (*rabbit's ex-girlfriend*)  
 Molly Cooper (*rabbit girl*)  
 Adrien Brody (*field mouse*)  
 Mario Batali (*rabbit*)  
 Martin Ballard (*fire chief*)  
 USA 2009  
 86 mins  
 Digital

## BECOME A BFI MEMBER

Enjoy a great package of film benefits including  
 priority booking at BFI Southbank and BFI  
 Festivals. Join today at [bfi.org.uk/join](http://bfi.org.uk/join)

in Italy and all over the world.' It's the kind of quixotic effort that feels entirely appropriate to the painstaking process of stop-motion animation, a technique which might yield a mere three seconds of footage on a productive day.

While Anderson went to extraordinary lengths to reproduce the rural idyll in which Dahl set the book, accents were one significant, if inevitable, change. 'I think Noah and I are funnier if we're just trying to keep it American,' he argues. 'For us it's a bit of a stunt to try to write for British voices, so we decided that the animals can have American accents – I don't feel that's a violation of any particular reality, since animals don't have accents of any kind. We just give the humans British accents.'

But Anderson and Baumbach were also intrigued by adapting the author as much as the text. 'The character of Mr Fox is inspired by the book, but it's equally based on Dahl himself,' he explains. 'When Noah and I were writing, we were considering him to be Roald Dahl as a fox.' Anderson's previous films *Rushmore*, *The Royal Tenenbaums* and *The Life Aquatic* all feature seriously flawed father figures, and here Mr Fox's casual negligence of his son Ash becomes an important plot point. Does this create a certain continuity? 'Sometimes I think, This is too similar to something I've already done,' Anderson admits. 'But sometimes I just want to do it anyway. I think, I don't care, it's the best thing for the movie.'

Anderson insists he put all thoughts of audience from his mind while making *Mr Fox*. 'But I certainly thought of it in the context of children's movies that I still like to watch,' he says. 'The two that I particularly love are *Watership Down* [1978] and *The Plague Dogs* [1982]. *Plague Dogs* is more disturbing, and I think was less seen, but it's very good. It has the most awful ending.' Both films were animations directed by Martin Rosen and adapted from Richard Adams novels. *Fantastic Mr Fox* ends on a vision that is as happy as *Plague Dogs* is hopeless.

Returning to these films fostered a determination to be true to a certain kind of wildness. 'One of the farmers, a villain, smokes cigarettes,' Anderson explains. 'The amount of static you get about having a puppet smoking a cigarette which is in fact not even a real cigarette – people don't want smoking in a kids' film. Any kind of violence is highly dubious... It's a bit of a struggle. I did want to make a movie where we wouldn't ask parents what we ought to do differently and change it for them – that is how I think it's done these days.'

For all its poise and finish, from Mr Fox's sartorial choices to the Rothko-referencing skies and clouds, Anderson's film remains true to its hero's inextinguishable hankering to be wild. In its final moments it even pulls off an enigmatic encounter with a wolf – something many directors might have excised as a non sequitur. But Anderson is clear about the moment's importance. 'It became the whole theme of the movie,' he says. 'It wasn't that we planned that it should be. As we wrote it, we thought, "This is what the movie's about!" The movie should be allowed to be a bit of a wild animal and not be too... domesticated.'

Sam Davies, *Sight and Sound*, November 2009