



FILM: **THE FRENCH DISPATCH**

FDG RATING: 2.9 😊😊😊😊😊

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Wes Anderson: *director*
Benicio del Toro: actor, incarcerated artist
Adrien Brody: actor, art dealer
Frances McDormand: actress, journalist
Timothée Chalamet: actor, student revolutionary

DATE: January 23, 2022

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **THE FRENCH DISPATCH**

Wes Anderson's film, *The French Dispatch*, is an affectionate nod to *The New Yorker*, as he rolls three journalistic short films into one story, with some characters and events based on real-life equivalents from the magazine. Bill Murray is outstanding as *The French Dispatch* founder and editor-in-chief Arthur Howitzer Jr., who is based on the true *New Yorker* co-founder and editor-in-chief Harold Ross.

In one of the first scenes we see Howitzer meeting with his staff of the French bureau of the fictional newspaper, *Liberty, Kansas Evening Sun*, to finalize the content of its final issue as the presses are ready to roll. With journalists submitting their stories, the word count is several thousand over the limit but rather than drastically edit or eliminate the stories, Howitzer says to cut some ads (unheard of in a real publication) and shrink the size of the mast head to accommodate the stories as submitted.

And so the stories begin, told in typical Anderson zany style, with over the top stylized sets and vivid eye candy colorization plus a lot of contrasting black and white scenes, although we couldn't figure out why. Whimsical, entertaining, tongue in cheek humor, but most of us thought the stories were too drawn out and contrary to Howitzer, definitely could have been edited shorter.

It's a stellar cast studded with star cameos: Owen Wilson plays Herbsaint Sazerac, a somewhat comical bicycling travel reporter who prefers to interview flops, drunks, con artists, panhandlers, and such, avoiding the usual tycoons, movie stars and captains of industry.

The first of the three main stories "The Concrete Masterpiece" was our favorite. A convicted murderer (Benicio del Toro) is allowed to paint while incarcerated. His female prison guard is his nude model. A wealthy fellow inmate (Adrien Brody), an art dealer imprisoned for tax evasion, makes the artist known to the world, has him paint a masterpiece in hopes of selling it, but the artist paints the masterpiece on the prison walls.

Some of us tuned out during the political second story, "Revisions to a Manifesto", although we liked the characters and performances: A well-reputed reporter (Frances McDormand) has romantic relations with the subject of her story (Timothée Chalamet), a young revolutionary, as well as aiding him in his student-led revolution, helping edit his Manifesto.

The third story, "The Private Dining Room of the Police Commissioner" was a favorite of a few discussion participants. A food writer (mashup of James Baldwin and A. J. Liebling) shares the story of how a chef uses his skills to thwart a kidnapping. One resident reviewer who is also a fan of *The New Yorker* said Baldwin was a frequent contributor to the publication and that classic *New Yorker* stories were so well written and original that the reader was compelled to keep reading no matter the length.

Some of us thought the stories were too involved, complicated, and proceeded at too fast a pace, especially with so much narration. We agreed that this effort by Anderson fell way short of *The Grand Budapest Hotel*. On the flip side, some discussion participants really enjoyed the recurring characters and how they were all brought together. As one discussion participant commented, bits were wonderful but as a whole, the film fell short of our expectations. Another noted that it aspired to be something it wasn't.

Bravo for giving an appreciative nod to journalists and to the *New Yorker*, but all the zaniness, and extreme cleverness was distracting. We edited the cumulative score of *The French Dispatch* to a barely passing 2.9.



See you at the movies!

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