



ABHAY DEOL

TRIUMPHS BY BEING DIFFERENT

By: Preeti Thandi

He lives up to his first name and has fearlessly followed instincts instead of following trends. Abhay Deol has broken the mould of a typical Bollywood lead man by shattering conventions. Much like every character he plays, he has triumphed. Yet he affirms that he does what he is passionate about and doesn't necessarily want to be a trendsetter. Being heralded as the trailblazer of new age Indian cinema, Deol has made his mark with films like *Oye Lucky! Lucky Oye!* and *DevD*. Most recently he has appeared in Dev Benegal's *Road, Movie* which premiered at the 2009 Toronto International Film Festival and is yet to release internationally. In the film he plays Vishnu, a self centred young man who takes off on a truck journey to escape his father's faltering hair oil business. Deol who divides time between Mumbai and New York, has also set up a production company of his own. Seemingly shy yet approachable, he laughs easily as he enjoys a five egg white omelette, also glancing intently at my notebook as I begin.

CM: You go with your instincts while choosing a role, how is it that your instincts work so wonderfully well everytime?

AD: Instinct is instinct, there's no logical explanation for that. When I read a script, I do look for honesty. Is it playing to the galleries or is it just a script by itself? Is it meant to be true to itself, without any gimmicks. Then I look at the graph, where it starts, where it ends and what is it trying to say? I look for the basic elements.

CM: Do you think there is a common thread in most of the characters that you've played - you start as a loser and emerge as a winner?

AD: Yes, in some of them it has happened. It was there in *Manorama Six Feet Under*, *Socha Na Tha*, my first film has that and so does *Ahista Ahista*. In every film you have to find that heroism in some way. You find a character attractive only because either they triumph in some way or they are different from what they were when they started. Our movies tend to focus more on triumphing, on overcoming conflict which is actually a very basic film rule around the world and maybe because in Bollywood it usually translates into beating up the bad guys, getting the girl in the end and I suppose I haven't followed that path so these similarities are more glaring in my films. *DevD* is very arrogant throughout; it is only at the ending that he comes to a realization. In *Oye! Lucky* there's no attempt to portray him as anything other than what he really is, so there are those differences and it is really the director's vision, and like I said I am attracted to a character who is different from what he is when he starts off.

CM: What attracted you to Vishnu in *Road, Movie*?

AD: This was overall a film with a very attractive script and a dry sense of humor. It was surreal and adventurous. The character was very simple and quite straightforward. He grows up towards the end, it is more of a coming of age story. I wouldn't say he is a hero or anything.

CM: Was there anything you learned from that experience? Were there life lessons learned on that road journey?

AD: (*Laughs*) There are lessons learned all the time. Every film is a journey and you are constantly learning something every day. It is not like any particular film teaches you more than the other, every film teaches you a different lesson essentially.

CM: You seem like a nice guy, was the selfishness in the *Road, Movie* difficult to portray?

AD: It is not necessarily difficult. Portraying an emotion is not hard, finding the right one is. But then the script does that, the director does that and then it is really the performance. You can have a hard day at work and then any emotion can be hard, even happiness can be hard. We have everything inside of us, you just have to bring it out.

CM: How was it like working with cast and director?

AD: Tannishtha is really easy going, she's very talented. It's a lethal combination. You just get absorbed into the work and it is kind of inspirational and it was the same with Satish and Faizal. All of us got along and had the same agenda. With Dev, the funny thing was that when he said excellent shot it meant

the opposite. He has a great sense of vision. He is always lost in his imagination but always has a clear vision, he experiments.

CM: How have you been able to move away from this general Bollywood song and dance routine?

AD: I did a little of that in the beginning. I stayed away with a lot of patience and a little bit of fighting (laughs). You have to stand up for what you believe in otherwise people just take over. You have to be very patient.

CM: What did you learn from the other Deol actors?

AD: I've learned to have your own personal space and not get taken by your work or industry. I've learned to be honest with people and at the end of the day, nobody can do for you what you can do for yourself. Don't expect it from others, you have to stand up on your own.

CM: You have a close bond with your Uncle (Dharmendra)? Is he happy with where you are today?

AD: He's really happy. He is very encouraging and he tells me to continue doing what I do.

CM: How was it like growing up in such an illustrious family?

AD: Like every normal family. It's a big family so quite haphazard, lots of kids, lots of activity, lots of noise, you know like any normal big family would be like.

CM: Are you going to produce unconventional films with the production company that you've set up?

AD: The idea is to produce good films, entertaining films. I think breaking convention is fun in a way especially at this time in the Hindi film industry where so much is open, the market has opened up, the public mindset has opened up



so why not? It's an exciting time to experiment right now, there's a lot of talent out there and not be bogged down by any particular formulas or ideas, just make good entertaining films, stuff that I'd be proud of.

CM: What do you think is the reason for your success?

AD: I think it is just standing up for your individuality which very few people do. A lot of people just feed off each other. I think nobody stands up and says lets try something different, let's not follow trends.

CM: Do you want to be the trendsetter?

AD: I don't want to be a trendsetter or anything. I just want to do what I am passionate about and be allowed to do that.

Now whether it sets a trend is a side effect, so if I am going to go in with the thought that I am going to set a trend, that's like saying that I want to work for awards. You know what I mean, it has to be a result of what you do. Fame and fortune should just be the result of what you do. Your driving force should be how passionate you are about your work and that's what people catch on to. That's what starts to define you as a person and I am hoping that's the reason for my success because then I have achieved a little something in my life.



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