

Interview: Peter Farrelly, Pete Jones Issue Comedy ‘Hall Pass’

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CHICAGO – After a brief hiatus, Bobby and Peter Farrelly are back with the comedy “Hall Pass,” starring Owen Wilson, Jason Sudeikis, Jenna Fischer, and Christina Applegate. Wilson and Sudeikis play a pair of married men longing for some time off from their marriages when they’re handed a week without repercussions. What would you do with a week-long hall pass? Co-Director Peter Farrelly (“Dumb & Dumber,” “There’s Something About Mary”) and Co-Writer Pete Jones (“Stolen Summer”) sat down with us last week for a brief conversation about the state of comedy in 2011, working with Owen and Jason, and even a bit about the highly-anticipated “The Three Stooges” movie.

(Note: There are brief spoilers about the final act of “Hall Pass” but character/actor names have been removed. Don’t worry.)

HollywoodChicago.com: What was the most interesting question from last night’s Q&A?

Peter Farrelly: (*Thinks about it for awhile.*) This is the problem. We’ve been junketing since Sunday. Hundreds of interviews. And they all start to blend...I can’t really remember. It would be like asking Kevin Costner who his favorite lay was. It all blurs. You can’t really discern them after awhile.

HollywoodChicago.com: On the way out of the screening, I heard someone say “Did the Farrellys invent the gross-out genre?” How do you feel about that question — both the phrase “gross-out genre” and whether or not you invented it?

Farrelly: That’s a really good question that you’re asking me. I can’t stand it. I don’t like the phrase because it really diminishes what we do. It’s an easy way to sum up what we do but it’s far more complicated. “There’s Something About Mary” — the “hair gel” — to call that “gross-out” is missing the greater work that we did. We took an hour and fifteen minutes to set up this scene where this guy’s been in love with this girl since high school and hasn’t seen her in fifteen years and he FINALLY gets together with her, the love of his life, and he answers the door with a load on his ear. That’s funny. It’s not just gross. “Freddy Got Fingered” is gross. That’s gross-out. That’s gross-out for gross-out’s sake. Nothing against him. He planned it that way. That’s what he did. That’s not what we do. So, yes, it’s disturbing that it stuck.



Hall Pass
Photo credit: Warner Bros.

HollywoodChicago.com: Because you get lumped in with inferior films?

Farrelly: Yeah. For instance, when “Freddy Got Fingered” came out, we were mentioned in nearly every review. “This is the spawn of The Farrelly Brothers.” I don’t like that. I think it’s...on the other hand, it’s not something that I lose a lot of sleep over. We have a good life. You can’t control the way people are going to describe you. We do what we do and have a good time doing it.



Hall Pass
Photo credit: Warner Bros.

Pete Jones: On the positive side, I’ve seen where Judd Apatow’s movies are also called “The spawn of The Farrelly Brothers,” so there’s positives too.

Farrelly: I like that.

HollywoodChicago.com: Everything that’s a hit gets imitated and often in ways that don’t replicate the success of the original.

Farrelly: I don’t believe that Judd Apatow is imitating us. Believe me. I have the highest regard for that guy. I think he’s truly funny. Comparing us to him — I’m very happy.

HollywoodChicago.com: Who else do you guys like?

Jones: Judd Apatow — Outstanding.

Farrelly: Todd Phillips. He’s very good. My favorite guy is Sacha Baron Cohen — anything he does I think is a head above. Even “Bruno” I loved. It was ahead of its time and ballsier than ever.

Jones: What I love about Todd Phillips is he goes for it. In “Due Date,” he has no problem taking a bad character...Pete says what you do is create a likable character and hang jokes on him but it’s fun to see someone do it differently. With Robert Downey Jr., when he punches that kid in the stomach, you’re thinking, “Why am I laughing? That guy’s an a-hole.” He takes chances.

Farrelly: There’s other guys too. The guy that’s had the biggest effect on comedy in the world in the last 25 years would be Larry David. He created maybe the best TV show ever and changed television comedy and comedy in general. And then he continued on with “Curb Your Enthusiasm,” which is hysterical. Another guy that has to be considered one of the top comedy guys has to be Seth MacFarlane. He’s consistently funny. Then, of course, Will Ferrell.

Jones: Adam McKay.

HollywoodChicago.com: So, there’s a vibrant comedy scene?

Farrelly: I think comedy in the last 5-7 years is as good as it’s ever been in this country. I like it when people push it. You go through periods where people did not push the envelope. The more you push it, the funnier you get.



Hall Pass

Photo credit: Warner Bros.

HollywoodChicago.com: From a writing standpoint, how does “Hall Pass” change when Owen Wilson signs on? Do you alter to his strengths and does he offer input being a writer himself?

Jones: When he signed on, that got the movie greenlit.

Farrelly: We did try a few lines for Owen. (*Breaks into an impression of Wilson.*) “Hey, Greased Lightning, take your foot off the gas.” There was a lot of like, “Owen would say that.”

Jones: You would hear his voice. There were a couple time where we specifically wrote a line for Owen and he would read through and go

(*impersonating*) “Jonesy, I don’t like that line.”

Farrelly: He’s an Academy Award-nominated writer.

Jones: Just ask him. (*Laughs.*) He was involved as a writer the whole time.

Farrelly: He could have been a guy who came in and threw his weight around. We have different sensibilities. I love Wes Anderson but that’s not what we do. He could have come in and tried to Wes Anderson-ize it, but he didn’t. He was the most easygoing actor that I’ve ever worked with. Just complete trust. He gives you his opinion and then he trusts you. I’m very grateful for that.



Hall Pass

Photo credit: Warner Bros.

HollywoodChicago.com: What does Jason bring that other actors wouldn’t?

Jones: He’s got a throwback sensibility. He’s unbelievably quick-witted. He reminds me of a character actor from the ’50s. He was able to deliver these lines in a deadpan way that I didn’t anticipate that made it so much better. It’s not exactly how it played out in my head but I enjoyed it so much more.

Farrelly: He turned out to be way funnier than we thought. And such a nice guy. He and Owen hit it off big time.

HollywoodChicago.com: Did you guys ever face any pressure to change the final act?

Farrelly: We did. This is the thing — when you have a concept like this...there’s an old theater saying, “If you bring a gun on stage, it better go off.” If you have a concept like this one and nobody gets laid, I would be angry as a viewer. Something’s gotta give. Then the question is how do you do that? And who is it? And how do you do that and have a satisfying ending? When we approached this movie, we didn’t know for sure that it would have a happy ending. I wanted it to have a ’70s ending - a true, real ending. It doesn’t always have to end up well. Once we punished them for their mistakes, we thought, “You know what, they can get back together and it will be believable.”

Jones: My original concept was soft. Pete said “I don’t like the idea of knowing what’s going to happen at the start of the movie. That can’t happen.” There were battles and discussions about that. I kind of fought it. I think the idea that what happens with [SPOILER REDACTED]’s character kind of opens up the movie.

HollywoodChicago.com: I have to ask even though I’m sure everybody asks — “The Three Stooges”.

Farrelly: We’re starting to shoot on April 18th. You know what’s great? Everyone DOES ask. It makes me so happy. The studio wouldn’t make the thing because they thought nobody cared. I’ve never in my life gotten more questions [about a movie]. We’re casting right now. We haven’t made any decisions. We’ve got some excellent Moes, Larrys and Curlys. It’s not a biopic. It’s three episodes. We wrote. All new episodes but they’re gonna look the same, talk the same, dress the same, same sound effects. I don’t know if it’s gonna be a big hit, but I promise YOU’RE gonna love it.

“Hall Pass” stars Owen Wilson, Jason Sudeikis, Jenna Fischer, Christina Applegate, and Richard Jenkins. It was written by Pete Jones & Peter Farrelly & Kevin Barnett & Bobby Farrelly and directed by the Farrelly Brothers. It will open on February 25th, 2011 and is rated R.



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