

(continued)

top Indian actors living outside India — **Roshan Seth** and **Saeed Jaffrey** — for his debut film. Seth has starred in *Gandhi*, *A Passage to India*, *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* and *Stalin*. Saeed Jaffrey has acted in a vast variety of films from Satyajit Ray's *The Chessplayers* to *The Man Who Would be King* to *The Deceivers* and *Gandhi*. Both actors have had distinguished careers in British theater and television, and Jaffrey was awarded the O.B.E. on the Queen's Birthday Honors list for his services to drama, the first Asian to be given this award.

Seth and Jaffrey acted together in the epic *Gandhi* as Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Patel respectively, and ten years later they worked together again in *My Beautiful Launderette*.

How did he pull off this coup? Saluja chuckles: "Yes, it was difficult. They are big stars and very busy, and I'm a first time director. After all, who wants to take the risk of coming all the way from London or Delhi, go to a small place like Pittsburgh where some bald little Punjabi is going to make a movie?"

He maintains that the script of *The Journey* which he has penned, won the stars over. The story is a comedy/drama where not only cultural but generational clashes take place when Kishan Singh, a retired school headmaster, comes to live in America with his son Raj, an Indian physician who is married to an American woman, Laura. There is humor and angst as two lifestyles clash and yet find common ground.

Roshan Seth stars as Kishan Singh. Saeed Jaffrey plays Ashok, his friend from college, who has lived in America for many years and provides a cynical counterfoil to his innocent enthusiasm. The role of Kishan's son Raj, the physician, is acted by **Antony Zaki**, a young South Asian actor from Britain who has extensive film, television and theater credits. Laura, Raj's American wife, is played by **Carrie Preston** who just finished shooting *My Best Friend's Wedding* with Julia Roberts.

"The moment the heroine wears a white saree in a Hindi film, you know it's going to rain. There are no Bollywood-type fat women in wet sarees singing and dancing around trees in my film," says Saluja ruefully. The message of this thoughtful, cross-cultural film, is that "We shouldn't get bogged down with superficial exteriors in life but look into a person's heart and judge them that way."

He has made the film for under \$3 million, and raised part of the funds from the Indian community in Pittsburgh. Most of the would-be investors, however, preferred to give him free advice on how to make the movie rather than money. He says, "First they tell you they are not going to give you the money — then they tell you how to shoot the movie. I don't know about the rest of the country but in Punjab at least, I think most of the medical schools teach film direction on the side!"

He shot the film in three weeks. "The production was on budget and on time. Even the weather gods smiled. Every outdoor location was sunny."

*The Journey* will be entered in various film festivals, and Saluja is confident that this emotional



Carrie Preston with Antony Zaki.



Left to right: Roshan Seth, Director Harish Saluja and Saeed Jaffrey rehearsing.

film will find a market in many countries including Europe and will be of special interest in countries with large Indian populations.

Saluja has 25 years of immigrant tales within him. He believes that Indian Americans have many stories to tell and they cannot afford to wait for the mainstream film-makers to do it for them. "Nobody is lying awake at night, worrying about telling stories of our people. This is our job — we are the generation who have been here 15-20 years. We have beautiful stories unique to our culture. It is up to us not to propagate the clichés of Indians either as rich, accented doctors in the suburbs with the Mercedes, or as the millions lying in the streets in India. There is a huge spectrum of beautiful reality in-between."

Saluja hopes to attract a group of like-minded Indian Americans who are successful and are willing to invest in producing these movies.

*As Saluja likes to say, "Life gets in the way of art." Saluja may be an engineer by day but there's the artist, the director and the dreamer all struggling to get out.*