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Damon Takes a “Journey”

By Kate O'Hare
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LOS ANGELES -- Actor Matt Damon is not an environmental expert, nor does he play one in the movies. But it is because of a movie that he met documentarians Marilyn and Hal Weiner and took the gig of narrator and host of their documentary series “Journey to Planet Earth.”

“It was through Doug Liman, who directed ‘The Bourne Identity,’” Damon says. “The Weiners’ son worked in Doug’s offices. So, in this roundabout way, I heard about them. It was total serendipity. They had sent me some scripts. They were lying around; I hadn’t read them yet.

During editing of the ‘Bourne’ movie, Doug and I were [at my house], looking at it to talk over changes he was going to make. He just looked down, saw the scripts and said, ‘I know them.’ “Then I read the scripts, and they were so well put together, and they were so interesting, that I jumped at the chance to do them.”

Damon narrates the series and also appears on-camera, perhaps hoping that his face will attract fans.

“That’s what Hal and Marilyn want,” he says. “That’s their hope. It’s the only reason they would want me to do it. If not, they’d get an expert or the guy who did ‘Wild Kingdom.’ The idea is to try to get kids a little more interested. Maybe it will get them to hang in and watch the shows.”

“I watch these shows when they’re finally put together,” Damon says, “and it does make the world seem so small. You feel the impact of your behavior on the planet and how fragile it is. You travel around the world and see what’s happening.

“The way I think of it, it’s education in the best way, where you’re not being preached to. You don’t feel like you have to pull out a notebook and take notes. You just feel like you’re getting a lot of information in a very fluid way.”

Asked how much he knows about environmental topics, Damon says, “Educated enough that I’m not a buffoon when I’m being interviewed. There’s a kind of downside protection for one. Then on the other side, you want to learn, especially if it starts to gain importance in your life, which this is starting to for me. At the same time, I’m busy as hell on my day job.

“But ‘[The State of the Planet](#)’ asks totally basic questions, like, are we running out of water? That’s something I’d like to know, as a citizen. So things like that -- are we running out of water, can we feed everybody on the planet? These are really basic questions that are interesting and salient.”

