

club le monde

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edited by Rachel Holdsworth

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Simon Rumley knows better than most about the swings and arrows of the British film industry, as he tells Tom Dawson about his struggle to get anything made at all

“I think *Club Le Monde* reflects clubbing perfectly”, reckons writer-director Simon Rumley. “It’s fun and enjoyable”, he continues, “but it’s not earth-shatteringly challenging.” A former contributor to *What’s On in London*, thirtysomething Rumley wrote the screenplay to the clubland comedy back in 1995, when he felt there was a “lack of films about British youth culture. This was pre-*Trainspotting* and pre-*Human Traffic*, and the likes of *Shopping* and *The Young Americans* weren’t interested in being realistic portraits of young people.” Rumley himself was also inspired by the American film-maker Richard Linklater, whose films *Slacker* and *Dazed and Confused* showed him that “you didn’t have to be constrained by a traditional storyline.”

However the original financing for *Club Le Monde* fell through at the last minute and instead Rumley proceeded to make two ultra low-budget features *Strong Language* and *The Truth Game*: both of these received favourable reviews and extended runs at the NFT, allowing Rumley to return to *Club Le Monde* with the requisite financial backing and to complete his intended youth trilogy. Was he worried though that the material might have become slightly dated? “I’d been rewriting the screenplay over the years”, he admits. “But is clubbing actually that different now from the early 1990s? The music and the fashions are different, yet the essence of clubbing hasn’t changed – people take drugs, dance, and try and get off with other people.”

Indeed the defining quality of *Club Le Monde* is the endearing ordinariness of its setting (a club somewhere near London’s West End) and its 30-plus



● Living it up in a scene from *Club Le Monde* and left: Simon Rumley

characters, who according to the director, “are a bunch of people who are trundling along in their lives and who don’t take their clubbing too seriously, and who aren’t going to spend the rest of their lives looking at white labels in Soho record shops. I just wanted to make them believable and realistic and for them to be a hotchpotch of people I’ve seen over the years. I like to think that they existed before I wrote them. They’re not meant to be original or strange or glamorous or particularly cool – they’re meant for you to look at them and go, ‘I saw that person last week’, or ‘I met that girl in a club three years ago’.

Budgetary restrictions ensured that the 25 day shoot was a gruelling experience. “We were stuck down in this underground venue on Adam Street”, recalls Rumley, “where was little fresh air and no natural light.” Extras had to be recruited for the dancing scenes, not an easy task if you’re only paying them £5 in expenses and asking them to come in on a Sunday morning for an

all-day shift. And to make things even more difficult, the intended distribution company withdrew their share of the money two weeks before filming commenced, resulting in Rumley and his producer and exec-producers all taking a pay cut in order to keep the project afloat.

The fact that *Club Le Monde* is being given significant distribution – UGC are planning to show it on at least 20 screens across the country – gives Rumley hope that he will in future be able to work on a broader canvas and with greater financial resources: he describes his current script *My Mate Charles*, as a “pan-generation ensemble about the highs and lows of cocaine consumption in which the direction will be more conspicuous.” But what keeps driving him on creatively in the face of setbacks and disappointments? “I’ve just got the desire to carry on writing more characters and telling more stories,” he replies. “It’s a form of exorcism, I suppose. Exorcising one’s thoughts and putting them on the screen.”