

UK press cuttings

It's a Thon

Directing your first film in cine-illiterate Britain is always going to be a troublesome experience. When you've got to finance the thing as well, you've got a potential nightmare on your hands. VICKY GUERRERO met *RASP!*'s film reviewer Simon Rumley, writer, director and producer of the new movie *THON*, and asked him to lend her a tenner.

"I've got a £65,000 mortgage over 20 years, I've got a four-year lease on my car, I owe Access about £2000 and the bank about £300 but I don't really see it as being in debt, more as just a part of how society works." This is Jo, a music biz PR girl, speaking in a pulsating new film called *THON*.

Ask the immaculately turned-out director of the movie what *THON* stands for, and he stamps out a soundbite as clean as his sparkling white T-shirt: "It's a unique name for a unique film." It's also, apparently, "a ninety-minute vox-pop-art-docu-drama-movie for the MTV generation". Which means it's cool, it's about your life and it's happening in London.

At a nightclub on the Old Kent Road, the cast have assembled, dressed in character, for a photo-shoot. Among the assortment of young Londoners chatting and leaning on the bar are a hippie astrologer in a dress made out of a sleeping bag, a blonde Sloane in strappy high heels, a bouncer with pecs like melons, a biker in studded leathers, and a lift attendant in dance trainers.

In *THON*, these boisterous characters pump out funny, individualistic, stinging, moving stories.

They talk about the subjects that dominate today's society: clubbing, drugs, one-night stands, AIDS, racism, the police, guns. And interspersed between the sharp-edged opinions, a man relates his own tale about one terrible night that changed his life forever. Suddenly it becomes clear that the narrator and the cast are inextricably linked.

At the front of the photo-shoot, a neat, slim man stands with his legs firmly apart. This is a man who sweet-talked Paul Tonkinson (stand-up comic, featured on *Raw Soup* and *GLR*) and Al Nedjari (Samir in *Coronation Street*) into working for him; a man who, against the odds, managed to bring together 17 talented London-based actors, both knowns and newcomers; a man who took a risk to pursue an ambition; a man who quit a full-time job in a corporate production company and cadged money off friends to create his own film. This man is Simon Rumley, 26, writer, director and producer of *THON*.

So how did he drum up the support? "We don't get paid. But we don't mind. He buys us sweeties in the sweet shop," says one actor with a big grin. "He looks like Lee Majors," offers another. "I love his work and his writing,"

bubbles an actress. "I'm doing it as a favour," shrugs a mate. Quietly charismatic and volubly passionate about film, Rumley could charm the pants off your granny.

The photo-shoot over, the director takes a sunny drive around West London to drop off members of the cast. His interest in film didn't kick in until he was studying law at Hull University where he made his first short film, about a young man who falls in love with a hairdryer. "Not one of those hand-held ones," he explains, "but an old-fashioned one on a stand that you'd imagine seeing in your mum's hairdressers."

Hooked, he satisfied his craving for celluloid by making more shorts with fellow students, all the time swotting up on film history. "I was a ski guide and one year there was no snow. I saw 15 films in three days, including a Russian one subtitled in French."

Slamming the books shut, he moved on to work at a corporate film production company as a runner. "I was fortunate to get that job. I wanted to direct, but it was so frustrating as I had no film contacts." He clambered up the ladder, first to production assistant and then



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to a post as an assistant director.

However, the lethargy and arrogance prevalent in the British film industry appalled Rumley.

"The largest cinema-going audience is aged between 16 and 24, yet that seems to be forgotten by the British film industry. As a young director, you send someone a script and they take six months to read it and then they lose it. They tell you they love it, but it's not what they're looking for, or it's not commercial enough, or it's too violent. If Quentin Tarantino was making films in England he'd probably still be waiting for a response."

So Rumley girded his loins, developed a myriad of contacts and decided to strike out on his own. He made a number of short films, including an award-winning black comedy called *Phew!*, before risking money and sanity on his first full-length film. "*THON* is a sign of the times. I really believe there hasn't been such a film — which details what it's like to be young and living in this country — since *Quadrophenia*, and that was in the seventies.

If you've ever lived in England, loved music, loved cinema, worn clothes that aren't from M&S, or gone to a club, then you'll relate to this

film. Our youth culture has been covered in print and in music, but never in a British film before. This film will be historically important — older people will watch it out of curiosity and young people will see it as an affirmation of their lifestyle and say, 'yeah, I know this, I've lived this'. London is so fucking massive, and this is one big microcosm."

But aren't the characters (the clubber, the teacher, the fetish model) youth-movie clichés? "They're only the clichés that exist in real people. We worked a lot with improvisation and the actors had to do their own research from people they knew. They had to fill in questionnaires about themselves, what music they liked, what they liked about London, so I got genuine representations. I'm convinced they're 100 per cent realistic."

Rumley maintains his influences are American rather than English. Against a background of Walt Disney music chirping from the car stereo, he enthusiastically whirls through a catalogue of film heroes: "Michael Mann, Spike Lee, Robert Rodriguez. I remember picking up the newspaper and reading that Krzysztof Kieslowski had died. It was a very moving moment: I was almost

crying. I like the excitement and the slight edginess of Richard Linklater. I like the energy of Kevin Smith's *Clerks*, and Jim Jarmusch is fresh, original and eminently watchable."

He takes his hand off the steering wheel to make a potentially dangerous point. "Good films have been produced on low budgets, so I thought 'fuck it, I'll do it'. Spike Lee did it on friends' credit cards — it's accepted in America. I've done it, but it's more frowned upon here.

Leon The Pig Farmer was one English low-budget film that worked. I don't really know how much *THON* cost. It would be depressing if I sat down and worked it out." He drums his fingers on the steering wheel.

A little irritably, Simon realises he's been driving in a circle. He drops off the final passenger and offers some words of advice to any aspiring film directors out there. "**Make sure it's what you want to do, for you'll spend a few years with no money. And then there's nothing to stop you. If you want to do it, you'll find a way.**"

LOOK OUT FOR *THON*'S NATIONAL THEATRICAL RELEASE NEXT SPRING.

