

# The Truth Game

UK Press Cuttings

## Mouthing off

Simon Rumley on 'Strong Language'

**R**uns the publicity for 'Strong Language': 'From the coolest city on the planet comes the hippest film of the year.' And the heart, naturally, sinks.

Being self-professedly hip is as challenging as faking spontaneity. Documentarian Robert Flaherty controversially got away with the latter in his fascinating portrait of the Hudson Bay Eskimos, 'Nanook of the North'. No less strange a beast, the contemporary lesser-spotted Londoner gets the searchlight in dynamic young director Simon Rumley's engrossing debut 'Strong Language', an artfully arranged voxpop of 16 Londoners, aged 21 to 31, spouting their mouths off about everything under the sun, from 'Britpop!', the club scene, drugs, AIDS, debt, to the kit and the caboodle. Is it hip? Dunno, but it's

directing and editing (as is the way) the last of his shorts trilogy 'Club LeMonde' that the idea for 'Strong Language' grew.

'Club LeMonde' is "Slacker" meets "Short Cuts" set in a nightclub. I wanted to make a low-budget film on the same subject, set in one location, completely dialogue-based - I always felt I was good at writing dialogue.'

'Ninety-six was the year when Blur, Oasis, John Galliano, Jungle had just exploded. Dance music has been gradually exploding throughout the whole decade. And British youth culture was pretty big abroad. I wanted their voices to add up as a presentation of the whole zeitgeist of that particular Britpop time.'

With a production company on board, Rumley set about finding new young actors (though you may recognise a couple, Al Nejjari from 'Coronation Street', or stand-up Paul Tonkinson, for instance) for his 16 talking heads. 'I interviewed about 200, gave them a questionnaire about their interests and opinions which I tape-recorded them answering. Then I went away, transcribed it and highlighted what I thought were the best answers, and then proceeded to write some of my answers for the characters; others I merged together. So the result, I suppose, is about 65 per cent my original writing, 35 per cent writing from the actors' improvisations.'

Then the company went bust.

'At this stage "Trainspotting" hadn't come out - "youth culture" was still an underground phenomenon in terms of British cinema. And so everyone said, "Wow, that's great! We'd really love to do it!" and, this being independent British cinema, did it for free.

Come to that, the locations, where there are no rooftops, embankments or walkways, came for free too.'

For all the laughter, the film contains a darker side. 'At the time I was writing, there was this woman who had been driving down the Old Kent Road and had just been dragged out of her car and raped by three guys. That's part of the mid-'90s zeitgeist too, and I wanted to reflect that.'

After a long struggle, Rumley has finally secured a release for 'Strong Language'; the video and DVD are released in March and he already has a second feature, 'The Truth Game', under his belt, a trailer for which he's taking to Sundance. So is he happy with his first feature?

'Someone said to me after viewing the film, "If I could get you a million pounds would you like to reshoot it?" I said, "No. It's conceived to be just like it is." It has its own genius? Exactly.'

Wally Hammond  
'Strong Language' plays from Fri at the NFT. See Repertory listings for details.



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damn funny, captivating, and in the end, pretty clever.

Cheap, too, as Rumley explains. 'It was so ludicrously cheap. I decided it was best to tell everyone a different figure, but a reasonable, honest one would be about £30,000 all raised on credit cards and from private investors.' The enthusiasm of this garrulous, slightly nervy ex-law student in his late twenties from Tunbridge Wells - a Londoner and clubber since 1990 - matches his tenacity, but his dismay at the British film establishment dates back to his shorts days.

'I made four shorts on film, including "Laughter", which got short-listed for the Dick Awards, and sent them off to the BBC's Short Film Department. It took them between a year-and-a-half and two years to come back to me and say, "I'm sorry we haven't had time to watch these films yet." And these are people whose job it is to watch short films. Frankly, it's disgraceful.'

It was from writing, producing,

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