

BFI RIP IT UP PROGRAMME NOTES

HUMAN TRAFFIC + W. A RETURN TO OZ

Q&A with Director Daniel Howard Baker



1. The Warehouse is presented as a hugely important part of the South West's rave history. What was it about Plymouth, and the wider South West, that allowed a club and a scene like this to emerge — and do you think there was something distinctive about the region's club culture compared with what was happening in London, Manchester or Cardiff?

Plymouth, and the South West region, seemed, as far as I was aware, unrepresented in the big magazines, films, articles and publications regarding the rave / nightclub scene. Despite the Warehouse Club bringing in up to 3,000 people every weekend, meaning its popularity as a club was more or less a silent one at the time. Not even counting the Warehouse, Union Street had hundreds of clubs all lined up, offering something for everyone on a night out. By making the



documentary, it was my way of exploring a relatively unknown but thriving and vibrant (and sometimes infamously violent and dangerous) point in history for Plymouth that perhaps can apply itself to other cities in the UK. By all accounts, Plymouth through the decades was used as a testbed for new music styles, acts, artists and bands to test material onto the Plymothian populace before it is taken national or global. This implies we were not only ahead of the curve with new countercultures and movements but also an essential part of their innovation. In the words of one of our DJ interviewees, Andy Howard, "If it works in Plymouth, it'll nail it everywhere."

2. The film is partly an act of remembering a place that no longer exists in the same form. What surprised you most when you began digging into people's memories, stories and archive material — and did making the film change your own understanding of what The Warehouse meant to people?

"I was surprised most by the fact that I grew up mostly in Plymouth and had no knowledge at all of its former thriving club culture, let alone the rave/acid house movement. But going into it, I had no idea what Pandora's Box I was opening. I also felt in the interviews I did with ravers, promoters, MCs and DJs the sense of relief from them – 'finally someone is telling our story!' Some interviewees even broke into tears during the recording as they reminisced and realised it was all gone! In terms of archive, I was planning to do a comparison edit or crossfades between the archive footage inside the club and what the club looks like now. But to my shock, when I first entered the building a few years ago for filming, there was absolutely nothing similar or feature I could spot to reference to the archive, showing how much it has changed and been destroyed over the decades. That being said, the one thing I could recognise from both the archive and now is the iconic star dome on top, which I'm told would rain down sweat that had evaporated from the thousands below!"

3. The present-day derelict building is such a striking presence in the film. What drew you to filming the physical remains of The Warehouse, and what did you want the contrast between the silent building today and the energy of the rave era to communicate?

"I think it was important to divulge the truth behind the building's current state, as well as equally reminisce in the archive. I was inspired by the contrast they did in the film Titanic with the ship in its maiden voyage in contrast to the remains of it at the bottom of the Atlantic. By contrasting them, I wanted to nail down the fragility of time but nonetheless celebrate the time that has gone before. In my mind, the cameraman (i.e., me) was a character that was 'late to the party' of Plymouth's rave scene (albeit 30 years too late!), and so by the end of the film, when the revival rave occurs, it's a catharsis; he has arrived at the right time, and the party shall continue."

4. As we are, with our BFI UK-wide Rip it Up season, you're looking back at a youth culture that is now several decades in the past. What do you think today's



audiences — particularly people who weren't there — can recognise in the story of *The Warehouse*? Are there parallels between the need for spaces like this then and the need for places where young people can find community now?

"I think the conditions currently with the nightclub scene are strikingly similar to the early 80s, when rave culture was just around the corner. Most club nights out now are chart-pop, cheesy, overly loud and expensive. Perhaps this is similar to the disco- and rock-dominated clubs in the 80s, and so for the disenfranchised youth, they had to band together to form their own parties of acid house and rave for it to become the norm, commercialised and eventually plateau. It's a cycle in some ways. I hope that the current mundane conditions of Clubland will mean that perhaps a new club youth movement is just around the corner, most likely DIY in nature."

5. We're screening the film immediately before *Human Traffic*, another film that looks at rave culture as a form of escape, friendship and belonging. What do you think the two films have in common — and what does a story rooted specifically in Plymouth and the South West add to the wider story of British rave culture?

"Both *Human Traffic* and *W* are bound together by a shared heartbeat: the preservation of 90s British youth counterculture and the raw, collective pursuit of escapism. Putting on screenings of the film with raves, you see more or less meet the same people—a wider family of ravers that *Human Traffic* presents and celebrates. At their core, both narratives focus on the community built on the dance floor. They celebrate the democratic, equalizer effect of rave culture, where social status dissolves under a strobe light. It proves that rave culture wasn't just a metropolitan phenomenon. The Southwest—often stereotyped as rural, sleepy, or coastal ("pasties and clotted cream")—had an incredibly fierce, isolated, and self-contained counterculture. Venues like *The Warehouse* were vital regional hubs that rivalled major city clubs in intensity and loyalty, such as through *Cultural Vibes*. As mentioned in the film, because the South West was geographically distant from London or Manchester, its scenes had to be fiercely independent. This isolation bred a distinct DIY ethic and family unit within it. In addition, Plymouth is a historic naval port city with its own distinct working-class, post-war identity, as well as *Human Traffic*, which highlights how rave culture acted as a vital pressure valve for youth living in regions that felt economically or socially overlooked by the capital."

ABOUT RIP IT UP

The 2026 BFI FAN UK-wide season, *Rip It Up*, explores and celebrates the changing face of youth rebellion, culture and expression – from joy to heartbreak – on screen in the UK.

As part of the UK-wide season Exeter Phoenix will be screening:

HUMAN TRAFFIC

TRAINSPOTTING

YOUNG SOUL REBELS

