

A FILM BY
BRIAN WELSH

“A HANDS-IN-THE-AIR JOYRIDE”
TIMEOUT

BEATS



PRESS NOTES

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LOGLINE & SYNOPSIS

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Logline:

Scotland, 1994. In this universal story of friendship, rebellion, and the irresistible power of music, two best friends destined for different futures sneak out to an illegal rave in pursuit of one last crazy night together.

Synopsis:

A universal story of friendship, rebellion, and the irresistible power of music set against the backdrop of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act of 1994, which banned unlicensed raves across the UK, *BEATS* follows best friends and polar opposites Johnno and Spanner who, realizing they are destined for different futures, sneak out to an illegal party in pursuit of one last crazy night together.





DIRECTOR'S NOTES

BRIAN WELSH

DIRECTOR/CO-WRITER

A friend said, “You have to see this show playing at the Bush Theatre in London – it’s about you growing up.” When I read the synopsis of *BEATS* – this story about a 15-year-old boy going to a rave at the time the Criminal Justice Act was introduced – I grabbed a ticket and went along. I thought it was the best thing I’d ever seen and genuinely felt like it was talking to me directly, articulating my own experience in a way that I didn’t have the words or self-knowledge to. At the end of the play I realised that everyone else had the same reaction, whether they had grown up in the 90s or the 60s.

I had made various attempts at developing a 90s rave film with people I knew from that era but had never really happened upon the right set of circumstances. I had some great characters, some great scenes, but never had the right balance between a ‘party’ film and a film that actually had something meaningful to say about this shared cultural moment.

What Kieran’s play did brilliantly was weave the personal story of Johnno and Spanner together with the wider socio-political discussion about Scotland in 1994, what the Criminal Justice Act meant, and the ideas it represented. This may make it sound dry, but it’s important to mention that this was all done in a way that was both hilarious and profoundly moving.



Q&A WITH DIRECTOR, BRIAN WELSH

What were the steps that led to the play becoming a screenplay?

The play was a piece of single-voice narration, telling the story of the time, the place and a journey to a rave using the inner voice of multiple characters: Johnno, Spanner, Robert and Alison. It had very few actual scenes. Kieran and I spent many months, years in fact, meeting up trying to add meat to the bones of this one-man poem, giving the story cinematic thrust, action and shape so it could meet the demands of a multi-character movie.

After ‘Glasgow Girls’, this is your second feature set in Scotland – were you able to bring any of your own experiences of going out and clubbing to *BEATS*?

I am Scottish and so, yes, I have a lot of experience of going out raving in Scotland. The film is very personal in that respect. Hopefully this comes through.

What were your impressions of raving as a teenager?

Like Johnno and Spanner, I was very young when I was introduced to this intoxicating world of music and partying. Talking about it now, I still get butterflies and a bit twitchy. I loved the music, I loved the sense of sheer lawlessness, but mostly I loved the people. Many of the friends I made then are still my closest friends now. Music was a massive part of it. Aged 15 I sold my guitar and bought a set of decks, aspiring to DJ at parties. I still do, to be honest.

Why did you ask Keith Mclvor, aka JD Twitch from the DJ duo Optimo, to look after the music?

Keith is an absolute don of the Scottish techno scene. He appeared and reappeared in my consciousness when going out as a teenager, at first with [the club night] Pure and then with Optimo, a night he does with the also legendary Jonnie Wilkes.

(CONT.)

I used to go to a couple of spots in Aberdeen called the Pelican and the Works. Twitch played them regularly. Then when I moved to Glasgow the Sub Club was the spot and Optimo at that time was widely regarded as the best night. Everyone we spoke to when researching the film said, "Keith is your man!" He is so highly respected and rightfully so. He was the first guy to bring many of the Detroit greats over to the UK – I think the first time Jeff Mills played the UK was at Pure.

Music is integral to the film – how closely did you work with Keith on this?

Back in the 90s we used to make endless mixtapes and we wanted the film to feel like a chaotic cassette mash-up, with beat-matching and tracks playing over each other. We wanted the score to feel as if a mixtape had been laid to picture. Keith was the man to make this happen. Keith and I worked closely together, sharing records and working to get the pitch right. Pretty early on we cut together a montage of references and archive footage of various nights in Scotland, clips from feature films that were important and he did a live mix jam to those images. When we heard that mix I knew we could do something really special together.

The film itself goes on a varied musical journey from some of the unsophisticated but banging hardcore tracks that the boys would have listened to in their bedroom to these big, profound, mind-expanding tracks from Detroit in the rave. What I dig is the way a lot of the tracks have this reggae roots vibe. This brings a playful energy and humour to the images and seems to capture the spirit of the boys. When a lot of the raves were kicking off in London in the very early days, Jamaican sound systems would be borrowed and at times the music would borrow this flavour too.

What qualities did you look for in the actors playing Johnno and Spanner?

We were looking for humour, in-the-moment brilliance, authenticity, likeability, warmth, love, friendship, commitment. We saw hundreds of boys. So many were great but striking the right chemistry was hard. Something struck when Lorn [Spanner] and Cristian [Johnno] got together. They really vibed off each other – I think that's because they're good friends already. They both have exciting careers ahead of them.

The rave is a pivotal scene in *BEATS*. Where did you film this and how did you manage to make the event appear so authentic?

We were clear from the outset that in order for the rave to feel real we had to actually have a proper rave, with proper music, in a proper venue. And not only that it had to be THE rave, an absolute mega stomper, with everyone going nuts. Because of the wonderful people of Glasgow working with us we managed to pull off what was essentially a giant recreation of an illegal rave in a secret venue. It was so real the cops showed up at the end of the night to shut us down.

During the film I think you really feel. You come out of the cinema feeling you were actually in the middle of it, in the middle of a big, illegal rave.

(Weirdcore, who does visuals for Aphex Twin and MIA, is also involved in the film – what did he do, and how did you recruit him?)

Weirdcore – Nicky Smith – read the script, we met and instantly got on. I loved his work and was flattered when he agreed to be involved. He used to do the visuals for parties in the 90s and we had a shared love of Stakker Humanoid's 'Humanoid' video and a bunch of 90s scratch 16mm animation. I supplied him with some visuals and content and he blended, effected, coloured and generally 'Weirdcored' them. Through this process we developed a language for the visuals at the party. Lots of people say that this is their favourite moment in the film. It also created a great atmosphere in the warehouse on the big night.

The two leads, Johnno and Spanner, are young and idealistic – are there any parallels in this regard with the brazen rave scene you depict in the film?

I think many of the characters in the film are young and idealistic. The sad thing is that this idealism can be fleeting. I think we all have to fight hard as we get older to try to maintain this idealism. This is one of the ideas of the film.

The best thing you can do as a young person is to disobey because without disobedience how can we carve out a new direction, how can we look to the future with hope? The sad thing about disobedience is that when it catches, when it becomes fashionable or cool, it inevitably becomes the mainstream – it's monetised and sucked into the system.

In the film, it's important to mention that we are coming to this rave at the fag-end of the dance scene. The Criminal Justice Act stamped out the embers of the free-party scene. Since then, dance music culture, along with every other aspect of our lives, has become commercialised.

Why did you decide to show the film in black and white?

We wanted the film for the large part to feel like a memory. Something from a scrapbook of your teenage years, an important moment held sacred, almost mythologised.

In a way *BEATS* is a classic coming of age story – are there any other films you had in mind when you were making this?

There's loads: buddy movies like 'Superbad' and 'Thelma and Louise', teenage rite-of-passage movies like 'Dazed and Confused' and 'The 400 Blows', and music films such as 'Do the Right Thing' and '24 Hour Party People'.

The film takes place during the mid-1990s' free-party era – Castle Morton, Spiral Tribe, the Criminal Justice Act – and there's a strong Us vs Them narrative running through the film. What do you think kids watching the film will think of that era?

I'm not sure – it's 25 years ago. But when I was looking back at the 60s or 70s as a teenager, I thought that era was pretty cool. I enjoyed fantasising at the revolutionary counter-culture power of Woodstock. There was a period when I used to be very angry that I wasn't around when Hendrix was alive, for example. Maybe they will feel the same about the M25 parties or Castle Morton and the sense of anarchy, freedom and togetherness these represented.

NOTES ON THE SOUNDTRACK

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Put together by Keith Mclvor, aka JD Twitch of Glasgow's long-running DJ duo Optimo, and director Brian Welsh, the 30 tracks used in BEATS not only help tell Johnno and Spanner's story but also capture the excitement and adrenaline rush of getting caught up in the thrill of the rave. Drawing on Mclvor's exhaustive musical knowledge and his recollections of parties in early-90s Glasgow, the soundtrack takes in big-hitters at the time such as The Prodigy, Orbital, Leftfield and LFO alongside cult techno tracks by the likes of Plastikman, Joey Beltram, N-Joi and Model 500. There are key releases from the pioneering Belgian dance label R&S – Beltram's 'Energy Flash', Outlander's 'Vamp' – and classic rave anthems from original Dutch heavyweights such as Human Resource, Phantasia and Inner Light, all of which would have been played at the time at clubs and free parties across the UK.

The soundtrack brings together music from the original Detroit techno trio known as the Belleville Three – Juan Atkins (Model 500), Kevin Saunderson (Inner City) and Derrick May (via Francesco Tristano's version of 'Strings of Life') – as well as Motor City jams from Carl Craig (as 69) and Richie Hawtin (as Plastikman). Hawtin's Plus 8 labelmate Vapourspace appears with his celestial epic 'Gravitational Arch of 10', first released in 1993 and which scores a pivotal scene in the film. The Orbital brothers, Phil and Paul Hartnoll, have recorded a new version of their rave anthem 'Belfast' especially for 'Beats'. Threaded throughout are tracks that could only have come from Mclvor's collection but which fit naturally in the mix: modernist lullabies from Sextant, David Cunningham and John Broadwood, and cavernous dub from NYC's Liquid Liquid. Add the smiley-faced UK hardcore of Kaotic Chemistry and A Homeboy, A Hippie and A Funki Dredd, and you're left with a love letter to the dying days of the second summer of love.



A NOTE ON THE 1994 UK CRIME BILL

BEATS takes place in the wake of the UK's **1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act**, not to be confused with the United State's Crime Bill which was passed that same year.

The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act introduced a number of changes to UK law, most notably in the restriction and reduction of existing rights, clamping down on unlicensed rave parties, and greater penalties for certain "anti-social" behaviours. The Bill was introduced by the Conservative government, and attracted widespread opposition at the time. A primary motivation for the act was to curb illegal raves and free parties, especially the traveller festival circuit, which was steadily growing in the early 1990s, culminating in the 1992 Castlemorton Common Festival.

The whole of Part V of the Act covered collective trespass and nuisance on land and included sections against raves and further sections against disruptive trespass, squatters, and unauthorised campers – most significantly the criminalisation of previously civil offences.

Sections 63–67 in particular defined any gathering of 20 or more people where: 63(1)(b) "music" includes sounds wholly or predominantly characterised **by the emission of a succession of repetitive beats**.

Source: [wikipedia.org/wiki/Criminal_Justice_and_Public_Order_Act_1994](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Criminal_Justice_and_Public_Order_Act_1994)



DIRECTOR/CO-WRITER: BRIAN WELSH

Brian began his film career as an editor in documentaries, before attending the National Film School's editing course. On graduating he was commissioned by Curzon Artificial Eye to make the microbudget feature film, *In Our Name*, which he wrote, directed and edited to widespread acclaim. Brian then directed several high-end TV dramas, winning multiple awards, including an Emmy for *'Black Mirror: An Entire History of You'*. *Beats* is Brian's second feature film.




CO-WRITER: KIERAN HURLEY

Kieran Hurley is an award-winning writer, performer and theatre-maker whose work has been presented throughout the UK and internationally. Recent plays include *Mouthpiece*, *Square Go*, *A Six-Inch Layer of Topsoil and the Fact It Rains*, *Heads Up* and *Rantin*. *Beats* is Kieran's debut screenplay, co-written with director Brian Welsh and adapted from his hit play of the same title.



CREW CREDITS

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Directed by BRIAN WELSH

Written by KEIRAN HURLEY &
BRIAN WELSH

Produced by CAMILLA BRAY

Based on a play by KEIRAN HURLEY

Executive Producers STEVEN SODERBERGH
REBECCA O'BRIEN
SCOTT MEEK

Director of Photography BEN KRACUN

Edited by ROBIN HILL

Music Director KEITH MCIVOR
JD TWITCH (OPTIMA)

Original Music by THE GOLDEN FILTER -
STEPHEN HINDMAN &
PENELOPE TRAPPES

CAST CREDITS

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Johnno

CRISTIAN ORTEGA

Spanner

LORN MACDONALD

D-Man

ROSS MANN

Laura

GEMMA McELHINNEY

Cat

AMY MANSON

Wendy

RACHEL JACKSON

Alison

LAURA FRASER

Robert

BRIAN FERGUSON

ABOUT MUSIC BOX FILMS

Music Box Films is a North American distributor of acclaimed international, independent, and documentary features. Recent releases include Kirill Mikhanovsky's *Give Me Liberty*, Francois Ozon's *By the Grace of God*, and Levan Akin's *And Then We Danced*. Upcoming releases include Werner Herzog's documentary *Nomad: In the Footsteps of Bruce Chatwin*, Haifaa Al-Mansour's *The Perfect Candidate*, Pablo Larrain's *Ema*, Justine Triet's *Sibyl*, and Brian Welsh's *Beats*. Music Box Films is independently owned and operated by the Southport Music Box Corporation, which also owns and operates the Music Box Theatre, Chicago's premier venue for independent and foreign films.

For more information, please visit www.musicboxfilms.com

