

Documentary makers to reveal stories of infamous Sunderland nightclubs



They were the go-to nightclubs for a generation of young people from across the North East - and beyond.

But Sunderland's Blue Monkey and New Monkey venues were as controversial as they were popular.

Now, years on from their closure, two University of Sunderland students are making a documentary on the impact of the clubs, their music, and their reputation on cultural life in the city.

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Rob Kilburn and Lewis Dodds, third year [Digital Film Production](#) students, are interviewing key figures involved with the clubs, from door staff to DJs, as well as trying to trace those who regularly danced the night away at the venues.

While Rob, now 25, was much younger at the peak of the clubs' popularity, he still remembers the impact and reputation they had on young people growing up in Sunderland.

Rob, from Seaburn, said: "They were the most talked about places; they reached beyond being just nightclubs. The music they were playing was quite wide-reaching."

The venues highlighted music genres including Makina, a form of hardcore techno which originated in Spain with a keen following in the North East, and Monta, the events held to dance and listen to it.



Rob added: "Even though the New Monkey has been closed for more than a decade, the impact [of the clubs] is still there and I thought it would make an interesting subject as a documentary for part of my dissertation."

Sunderland's Blue Monkey was located in an old bingo hall on Bedford Street in the city centre, the site has now been demolished to make way for the new Empire cinema. But during the 90s, it was a haven for ravers before it burned to the ground.

In 1999, efforts began to turn the former Plaza Bingo Hall in Pallion into a new nightclub, this time called the New Monkey. However, residents living near the venue objected to the plans, claiming their lives would be disrupted by late night comings and goings, loud music and antisocial behaviour.

But bosses behind the club resubmitted plans, this time saying they aimed to open a private members' only dance club, serving only soft drinks - thereby removing liquor licence control by the local authority.

So began the era of the New Monkey which finally ended in March 2006 when more than 100 police officers raided the venue, seizing drugs and making 14 arrests. Search warrants were also simultaneously executed at the homes of senior management and staff from the trouble-hit venue.

Rob and Lewis hope their 25-minute documentary will encapsulate the impact of the clubs during the height of the UK's rave scene.

This is not the first short-film Rob has made. In 2012 he made a documentary about the often-forgotten Seaburn Zoo.

He said: "I was blown away by the fact that a zoo which had tigers had just been around the corner from where I now live."

As well as a short film about Parkour, Rob and Lewis are currently finishing off a film about the history of graffiti in the North East - called Broken Window - which they hope to have completed by the beginning of next month, just in time for the Sunderland Short Film Festival.

Rob believes that thanks to streaming services like Netflix, documentaries are now becoming much more mainstream and hopes to continue perfecting his craft ahead of graduating from the University this summer.

The 25-year-old also started popular Facebook page [Tyne and Weird](#) which looks back at North East folklore, urban legends and street history.

Speaking about his time at the University of Sunderland, Rob said: "It's been a great three years and I have learnt a lot.

"After graduating, I'm looking forward to building on documentary making as well as my work on Tyne and Weird."

Anyone who would like to get in touch with Rob and can help provide archive footage or stories of the Blue and New Monkey clubs can send a message via the page or email Tyneandweird@outlook.com



Rob Kilburn and Lewis Dodds