



# What if You Never Come Down?

Rise: The Story of Rave  
Outlaw Disco Donnie DVD  
(Music Video Distributors)  
Directed by Julie Drazen

I REMEMBER RAVING. I remember Ecstasy. I remember chewing on a piece of gum until it broke—until it turned into something else, something weak and viscid, its gummy properties of twang and bounce quite exhausted. Symbolic? I thought so. I remember the mad foam of chemical brotherhood. I remember insisting, deep in some woofing, thumping London club, that two people I had just met stand next to me with their heads touching mine so that I could enjoy the warmth of their nude ears (we all had very short hair). And I did it in San Francisco too, where the loonies are—a man at a 'smart drinks' bar, wearing an Anarchic Adjustment T-shirt, told me that in the course of his psychedelic researches he had become invisible for nearly three weeks.

I know a little bit about it, is what I'm saying, but Julie Drazen's *Rise*—a movie about New Orleans rave promoter Disco Donnie—still surprised me, because guess what the kids have done now? They've taken raving—the most goddess, pharmaceutically programmed, pseudo-spectacular trip there is—and gone and made a religion out of it. And because their minds have been weakened by drugs and flashing lights, they have christened this religion with the anaemic acronym PLUR. PLUR, for Peace Love Unity Respect, which they pronounce as a single syllable to rhyme with "purr." Oh dear. "Jesus preached PLUR!" declares a girl with awful Ecstatic earnestness, filmed against a colorless background. The bass frequencies of an offscreen rave shimmer around her, and her jaw is lunging about like something trapped. "And he probably smoked bud too!" Her boyfriend is even worse, a drug-electrified fanatic, unable to do anything more than twitch his head in agreement. Rave as spent cultural force? Just say that word PLUR and hear the energy leaking out of you, away from that promising plosive beginning—the pop! of newness—into entropy, wasted breath, the heat-death of the universe etc.

Not to bash the kids: They have an absolute right to their foolishness. And if they make it through, if they don't entirely ransack their life's ration of serotonin and good luck, who knows, they could end up as wearily wise as me. But there does seem to be some synchrony going on here between the powers of Ecstasy and the credulousness and positivity of the American national character. British ravers, though drugged like shamans, were by and large a pasty-faced, sardonic crew. They kept it—I won't say real, but *realistic*. UK rave had its cranks and ideologues of course: one thinks for example of the magnificent shaven-headed Spiral Tribe, illegal party planners and white label artists, speculating on mystical vortices, intoxicated with the number 23, bouncing grimly in churned fields and in the corners of squats. But an essential British narrowness was always part of it. This was part the distinct pleasure of the whole trip:



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(Top) Disco Donnie; (bottom) Peace Love Unity Respect, man.

beneath the skin of the most blazingly loved-up raver, his open arms extended zombie-like towards you, you could always discern the sunken shrewd skull-face of the morning after, the colour of an empty milk bottle. The spidery ironist Jarvis Cocker made fun of us all: *and you want to call your mother and say 'Mother, I can never come home again/cos I seem to have left an important part of my brain/ somewhere, somewhere/*

*in a field, in Hampshire* ("Sorted For E's and Wizz"). In America there was Timothy Leary in his robes. There was twinkling Terence McKenna, that one-man rocket-ship leaving the Ego behind. It was in America that someone actually said to me, muffled deep in an embrace. "I don't know who you are, but I fucking love you."

But back to *Rise*. Purporting to be "the story of rave outlaw Disco Donnie," it actually doesn't have

much to do with Donnie himself. Which is fine—he seems to be a fairly unblinking hedonist, brightly-dressed, not especially verbal, with an enormous ever-ready grin that he flashes at the least excuse. He sort of shimmies in and out of the frame, as befits an impresario: he has his business to take care of, after all. We concentrate instead on a few of what might be termed Donnie's clients—the kids who go to

his parties. There's pale little Colin—"I get to the parties by bus. It takes like fifteen minutes"—and his friend pale little Jenny, who sit hunched and glumly teenaged in a bedroom full of rave posters. Colin carefully plans his wardrobe for the night: "I've decided to wear some shorts and a T-shirt." Jenny talks about drugs, or the practice of "rolling," in a softly-spoken, Southern-tinted monologue that would have worked beautifully on one of the latter Swans albums: "Ah tried it one time and then ah liked it... a LOT." From these two we learn about "candy ravers"—"they got the fairy wings, the furry back packs, the pacifiers"—and also the substance known as "rave funk," which is what collects on the hems of your extra-large jeans after a night of swishing them across sweaty floors. At a party we catch Colin and Jenny doing that twisty flame-like rave dancing, like people trapped in a *Star Trek* transporter beam, unable to fully materialise.

It is the faith of these kids that bankrolls Donnie's extravaganzas, that produces rave's characteristically nutty cashflow: one of Donnie's colleagues talks about selling party tickets from a booth and being literally overwhelmed by money, having to throw it over her shoulder, stuff it down her dungarees. The whole rave thing is so cleanly riven with paradox anyway. You have the weightless rapture of the dancefloor experience, its intimations of universal love and so on, and then you have the mechanized, almost totalitarian interface between the drugs and the music. You have the fiery naivete of the raver, wallowing in his bliss, not of this world, and then you have the whole shady and sharp-eyed apparatus of dealers, landlords, muscle, etc. that has put him where he is, the black economy of which he is the prime mover.

Much of *Rise* is hallucinatory party footage—banging techno and drastic disco editing, skillfully done I'm sure, but not my cup of tea. Stars of the scene roll across—Oberb, Josh Wink—and DJ Tommie Sunshine (is he a star? I'm out of the loop) stands there in a dress and terrible wavy blonde hair, telling us to have a good time, for Christ's sake. There are jittery moments, hugs in stairwells, drug-dirty illuminations. A character called Goddess, a damaged androgynous twinkling and licking his lips, says (as if polishing an egg in the back of his throat) "I didn't know what to be, so I decided to be... this." A wolfish soundman, a more rock'n'roll character than the rest of them, says that he enjoys "pushing pockets of air in people's faces... I think it's important for the kids that things be loud. Your hearing is part of your reptile brain." Outside Donnie's party is the shabby magic of Mardi Gras—looming headresses, fat women throwing Tarot, homophobes with placards. Dawn comes up, trash in the streets, and dear shafts of daylight smite the drugged brain. We come down, we come down. And have we actually been anywhere at all?

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