



'24 Hour Party People' film poster by [theartofthetitle](#)

## 24 Hour Party People Review by Megan Spencer, 2003

*Trailblazer...*

It feels as if we've waited an eternity for *24 Hour Party People*, the much-anticipated 'mocku-feature' about Manchester and its "mad music" sound of the 1980s.

Released in the UK in April 2002, *24 Hour Party People* is British director Michael Winterbottom's 'Almost Famous', the "love letter to rock" he and producer Andrew Eaton brainstormed while avoiding the cold climes of Canada during filming of *The Claim* (2000).

Suffice to say, it's worth the wait.

*24 Hour Party People* is irreverent to say the least. A biopic of sorts, the film's creators (including scriptwriter Frank Cottrell Boyce) do all they can to tear down the oft-inflated genre.

Operating almost as two films in one, *24 Hour Party People* is based around the life and times of Granada TV reporter Tony Wilson, one of the shambolic architects

behind the famed Hacienda Night Club and influential music label Factory Records. Mancunian TV comic sensation Steve Coogan (*I'm Alan Partridge*) goes on a veritable irony frenzy as Wilson, frolicking with all manner of actors and real-life musicians from the era.

The parallel film is of course about the music itself. The bands and individuals depicted in *24 Hour Party People* (sometimes whether they were there or not!) range from major players Joy Division and their later incarnation New Order, to the Happy Mondays, the Duritti Column, The Fall, The Buzzcocks, music manager Rob Gretton, musicians Howard Devoto, Bernard Sumner and producer Martin Hannett. The latter is played as a grotesque, made eccentric and troll-like by actor Andy Serkis, known for his portrayal of another well-loved movie troll, 'Gollum' (*Lord Of The Rings: the Fellowship Of The Ring*).

After Mr. Wilson (aka Coogan) kicks off the proceedings with a madly funny recreation of a hang-gliding story for local Manchester TV, we veer straight into the Sex Pistols' first gig in Manchester, in 1976. Again straight-to-camera, Coogan's Wilson informs us that this is "where it all began" for the Manchester sound. "Forty-seven people" attended the gig (including "Tony the Postman" he reports, tongue firmly in cheek), though its musical ripple effect proved infinite for the area.

The film doesn't end as much as it implodes, around 1992, the year that Wilson and his cohorts ran out of money and closed the Hacienda, one of the acknowledged foundations of England's rave culture.

In *24 Hour Party People* Winterbottom uses the messy handheld camera style he employed in *Wonderland* (1999), here swapping film grain for pixels (it was shot on digital video).

*24HPP* thrashes about like a great beast trapped in a spotlight, illuminating a dazzling array of characters, taking generous liberties with the truth (and history), and making out like it's a fully conscious being. (Richard Linklater's *Waking Life* (2001) does same - another glorious film that simultaneously comments on our experience of watching it).

In true Brit style, *24 Hour Party People* lampoons itself mercilessly while affectionately validating the music culture and history it is at great pains to preserve. Coogan is astonishing to watch, relishing the chance to do what he does best, that is "become" someone else in all their sordid and flawed human glory.

It isn't perfect but what a sheer joy *24 Hour Party People* is, a beautiful, frazzled and alive music culture film, that, like the real-life people on which it is based, kind of burns itself out as it goes.

Man it's funny, and exciting, and a great reminder of how we loved the music.

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