

Film Notes

By Ric Rawlins

Wild Swimmers

2025 | 78mins

Director: Ric Rawlins

Starring: Valerie Kwok

Somewhere between the thriller, the arthouse flick, and the creature feature that *Wild Swimmers* is tonally navigating, is a simple line split down the middle: the wild path of the River Avon. It's this river that journalism trainee Deji (Valerie Kwok) is studying as part of her research into a potential serial killer, when she begins looking through a copy of *The Wind in the Willows*. She pauses on the infamous chapter 'The Piper at the Gates of Dawn'.

A controversial chapter that seemingly exists outside of the wider book's narrative, it concerns a baby otter called Portly who has gone missing. Ratty and Mole form a search party and go out onto the water to look for him. Before long, they hear the distant call of a strange hypnotic flute, luring them to an island on the river – and it's here that they have a spiritual encounter with the Greek God Pan.

'If we think about a river, it's really a kind of liminal space,' says Paul Robichaud, author of *Pan: the Great God's Modern Return*. 'The word "liminal" comes from the Latin word for threshold, it describes a place that is between spaces. And a river is very literally between places: we have the bank on one side, the bank on the other – and this encounter with the Piper takes place not just on the river but on an island in the middle of the river. So it's kind of extra-liminal!'

      @FilmBathUK



Nobody knows what inspired author Kenneth Grahame to include this esoteric chapter in the book: theories range from him being a secret occultist, to the chapter being a satire of (at the time) popular pagan fantasy books, to the possibility that the chapter is a covert expression of Grahame's sexuality (Pan is described as having curvaceous, rippling muscles).

It's clearer why the chapter is alluded to in *Wild Swimmers*, however. Anyone sailing through the wilder parts of the Avon as spring breaks into summer will be aware that they are in a magical, ancient environment. A place where the glimmer of sunlight, the islands of reeds and the dragonflies in the haze might just be luring you towards a meeting with the Piper.

'The premise is original, the direction is tight and the cinematography is gorgeous

– A Year in Horror

Excellent

Fair

Poor



What did you think of the film? Please mark or tear the number.

Please add any further comments here

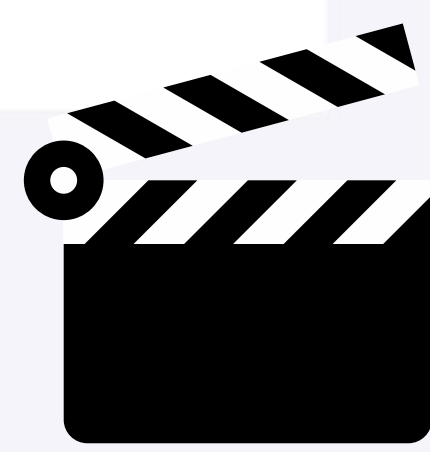
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Did You Know?

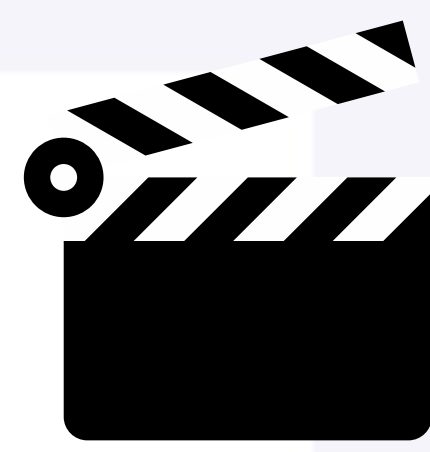
- Bath Women’s Rugby Team have an action-packed cameo
- The film also features numerous actors plucked from Bath’s indie theatres the Rondo and the Mission
- Filming was paused for three weeks when the cinema camera fell in the river

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Zodiac (2007)
Details the man-hunt for the Zodiac Killer, a serial killer who terroirised the San Francisco Bay area of America.



Decision to Leave (2022)
Follows a married detective whose investigation of a murder leads him to the man’s wife, who he begins to develop romantic feelings for.



Rave on for the Avon (2025)
A documentary-film following local Bristolians as they fight to save their outdoor swimming and bathing spot on the River Avon.

SCAN ME



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