

# JERA ON AIR

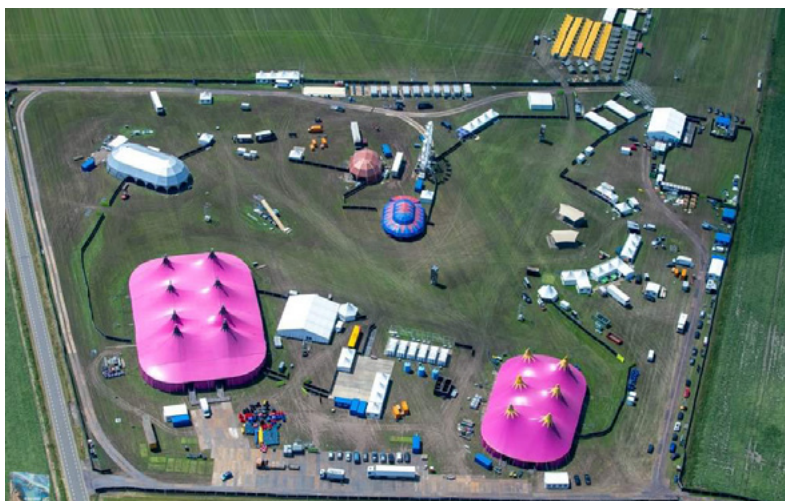
## 4 LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Every year, roughly 12,000 lovers of everything punk, hardcore, and metalcore, hailing from 40 different countries, attend Jera On Air in the southern part of the Netherlands. The festival has been around for 29 years, and it's completely organised by unpaid volunteers. A small core team prepares the whole thing, and when the festival rolls around, another 600 additional volunteers spring into action to make sure everything runs like clockwork. Well, almost; a spanner is bound to be thrown into the works at some point. No huge issues, and each and every one of these hiccups is at some point certainly also experienced by other festival organisers, even if not all would admit to it. A shame really, as it's precisely these experiences that pose valuable lessons for up-and-coming organisations. Luckily, festival promoter Thijs Vogel didn't mind in the slightest to share the following four integral learning experiences.

by LOTD

### Tent placement

'During the last edition, we moved to a new location, which meant having to figure out all over again what works and what doesn't. We created a blueprint and arranged the tents in a way we thought would work well. When the festival kicked off, everything still seemed fine. However, during the first night, it became clear that the sound-check from one of the tents was causing noise bleed into the others. A band showed up a bit late, and their performance went slightly over time, resulting in too much overlap between the tents. In retrospect, the tents simply weren't placed that well, but there was nothing we could do about it at that point. We felt terrible about it, as it was obviously quite frustrating for the bands performing. Fortunately, the audience didn't seem to mind too much, and we received hardly any complaints from them through our WhatsApp group. In the end, there were only a few moments when it was quite annoying. However, this experience taught us to reassess the placement of the tents. It can be easily solved by making a few simple changes in how the stages are set up, so we've got it sorted for the next editions.' →



**Top:** festival site  
**Right:** crowd Jera On Air  
(Natasja Anchorf)



Don't feel bad Jera, the Left of the Dial drips had to close not one, but two venues, due to noise pollution...

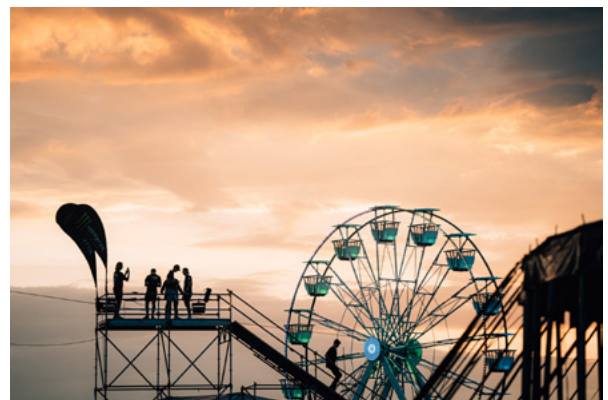


**The running order**

'In 2019, we booked Architects as the headliner for Friday. We announced their performance and placed their name at the top of the poster. Shortly after, we added Parkway Drive to the bill to headline on Saturday. They insisted on having only their name at the top of the poster, without any other acts on the same line. At that time, Parkway Drive was indeed a big act in the Netherlands, so we adjusted the poster accordingly. We had to make changes anyway because we had confirmed many more acts for the bill by that time. The revised artwork was sent to the booking agencies for approval, but only to the booking agencies of the newly added names. Architects had already seen the poster at some point, but they had never commented on it before. Now, they did. We received an angry email from Architects stating that if we didn't change the billing order, they would cancel their performance. I don't know how many drafts we created, but neither band approved a single one. Both Architects and Parkway Drive wanted to be the sole headliner. We continued to search for a solution, but on Valentine's Day, I was at a restaurant with my girlfriend when we received a message that Architects had released a statement saying they were no longer performing at Jera On Air because they were not billed as the headliner. They called it "a matter of principle." At that point, my Valentine's date was pretty much over... That's when we learned that communication truly is key. Now, we contractually confirm the billing order for artwork: Headliners on top, and everything else listed alphabetically below them. We don't release anything anymore until everyone is in agreement. It creates a significant amount of back-and-forth, but it's also the only way to ensure that something like this won't happen again.'



**Top:** Frank Carter & The Rattlesnakes (Kealey Photography)



**Left:** Poster Jera On Air 2019 **Top:** Talent buyer Thijs Vogels. **Bottom:** Jera On Air 2022 (Arne Cardinals)

## 'Trust is good, but control is better'



**Top:** the parking area  
**Bottom:** the thunder storm commences

### Parking issues

'Moving to a new location also meant that we had to find a new parking area for festivalgoers. We found one, and to make our lives easier, we decided to hire a third party specialized in coordinating parking. However, this decision turned out to be a huge mistake. They sent a couple of parking assistants who had no idea what they were doing. They allowed people to park their cars so inefficiently that the parking area became completely full in no time. We had estimated that we could accommodate around 3,000 cars, but fewer than 1,500 cars were actually parked. Furthermore, the coordinators directed some individuals to park their cars in a way that blocked exits, preventing anyone from leaving. It was a complete and utter mess. Fortunately, the festival takes place in a rural area with plenty of open meadows. We quickly found a farmer willing to open up a patch of land. However, at that point, we also had to adjust the travel directions and walking routes to the festival grounds. This required more traffic coordinators. It wasn't the most relaxing way to start the festival. The important lesson to take from this is that while you can outsource some of the work, it's never a guarantee that the job will be done well. If we had been there ourselves for a few hours, it likely wouldn't have spiralled out of control as much as it did. So, from this point forward, we follow the motto: Trust is good, but control is better.'

### Downpour

'Well before the festival takes place, you meet with emergency services to go through all possible scenarios. What are the things that could happen, and how do we deal with them? Obviously, the possibility of a storm was also mentioned, and we prepared for it as instructed. The tents all had lightning rods, and in case a thunderstorm passed over us, people in the tents would be safe.

On Thursday night, the weather in the Netherlands was lovely everywhere, but exactly above the festival grounds, the weather app showed a tiny orange speck: a massive downpour, including heavy thunder. We were prepared for lightning but not for such a ridiculous amount of rain that fell in a short period of time. The festival grounds turned into a swamp within seconds. A local farmer showed up; he had a truck full of wood chips we could use to make the ground a little less soggy. We gladly took him up on his kind offer and went to bed feeling reassured.

The next day, we found out we had a slightly different view of what wood chips look like. These looked closer to logs now spread across the festival terrain. Admittedly, we were no longer standing knee-deep in mud, but walking around was now quite dangerous. You could easily twist your ankle over one of these logs. Fortunately, the days afterward were dry, as were the weeks leading up to the festival, so the water was quickly absorbed into the ground. Ironically enough, only the area where the logs were scattered about was quite problematic. All is well that ends well, and for the upcoming edition, we have very fine wood chips - double-checked by us - ready. So, hopefully, we are now truly prepared for everything.'

