

REBELLION.

AN ENTIRE COMMUNITY EMBRACING PUNK ROCK



For well over 20 years, independent UK festival Rebellion has been turning Blackpool into a true punk rock sanctuary. Early August every year, punks from all over the globe travel to the coastal city to see hundreds of bands play. During four fantastic days, entertainment complex The Winter Gardens becomes the centre of the punk rock universe. Remarkably enough, the city has warmly embraced the festival and everywhere you go you'll see punk references. by LOTD

How did the local community get so involved in Rebellion?

'I think it just kind of happened. The cafes started playing punk music. And then a lot of the shops started dressing their windows in a kind of punky theme. I think now even the local convenience stores will stock what people want to drink. Years ago, we did beer mats and a lot of the bars asked if they could use them too. It kind of grows a little bit more every year.

Obviously, we know a lot of people locally now, so through our local connections, we've reached out to people, and they help to promote it and foster that good vibe.'

So, it was much more something that grew organically rather than you trying to get the community on your side?

'I think a bit of both really. We always wanted it to be a whole community thing. I suppose because of the bad press that punk used to get years ago, it was really important for us that that the community wasn't against the festival. That they didn't feel that it was something that was coming into town and causing problems or alienating the local community. Over the years we have forged links through The Winter Gardens and the Council and all kinds



Jennie Russell-Smith

Sex Pistols flags are waving, and restaurants have turned their radios to a punk station. Even at the local post office you'll find employees talking fondly of the festival. Walking around Blackpool, you'll feel nothing but love for a type of music that has a reputation of being aggressive and unsociable. Festival founder and director Jennie Russell-Smith explains how Blackpool has become such a welcoming home to the festival.



Left: Rebellion 2022 (Lien Kroon)
Top: Bob Vylan, Rebellion 2022 (Dod Morrison Photography)

of people. But then I also think that all of the people who go to the festival have forged those links for themselves with hotel owners, shops, and bars. It's all gone hand in hand, and it made this incredible atmosphere, this incredible community.'

You're also bringing a lot to the local community, with all those people visiting Blackpool, staying in hotels... Do you know how much Rebellion brings to Blackpool financially?

'Obviously, the whole town is making huge amounts of money. In the region of £10 million. Absolutely crazy. Blackpool had a huge number of investments recently, but there are still areas which are really very deprived. The money that people who come to Rebellion are bringing into the town, not just at the festival, but when they're staying in hotels, when they're buying food and all of those things, is really vital for the people of Blackpool. But I think, more than just the money there's a desire for people to be involved, to feel like they're somehow part of the community. And I think that music is the thing that really brings people together, that really makes a community.'

It seems even more special, because it's punk, not the easiest style of music.

'No, but I think more and more people are embracing it because obviously punk is so vast, isn't it? There's such a huge difference between the Damned, the Exploited and D.R.I., there's just a huge kind of variation within punk. And more and more I see people that didn't grow up with it, who weren't into it when they were kids, finding something that resonates with them. We have people of all ages, all backgrounds, it really is a big melting pot of people from all over the world.'



Could you say you've kind of managed to change the way the Blackpool community might have felt about punk?

'Yes, well, we were lucky. We had some great photographers that took photographs of loads of punks with little old ladies cuddling them. It happens every year, some local grandmas will come along and sit on the bench and chat to punk rockers, and they go, oh, how did you get your hair like that? It is really all about creating a family.'

Lots of festivals can probably only dream of this kind of involvement, do you have any advice on how to strengthen bonds with your local community?

'I think if I were advising other festival promoters, I'd say, find a local charity that's really close to your heart. Something that you really believe in and support them and get them involved. There's a charity called Street Life that we support. They help people under 25 who are homeless. We support them every year. We tell everybody, this is where your donations have gone, to Street Life, and these are the projects that they've managed to accomplish. It becomes a symbiotic relationship, because through Street Life we've met people who've got great local knowledge as well. If I ever need to find something, no matter how mad it is, I can always ring somebody up and they will know where to get it.'

But more in general, reach out and say, can you help? A lot of the time people want to help. Just ask, would you put some posters up? Would you have some flyers? I think when you're going into a community, it's really important to reach out and tell them this is what we're doing, this is what we're trying to create. Okay, people might look really different, they've got mohawks, but they're actually really nice people.'

Left: Rebellion 2022 (Lien Kroon)
Bottom: Sham 69, Rebellion 2022 (Dod Morrison Photography)

