

TRULY, MADLY, DEEPLY

“Rock and roll is a weapon of cultural revolution”
John Sinclair, Ex-MC5 manager and counter cultural flag-bearer

DREAMT up by a small group of commune-dwelling idealistic types from Rochdale, Bury and the Greater Manchester area, the Deeply Vale festival started as very much grass-roots; the first one in 1976 was really just a 300-strong party although those involved saw the possibilities of making something bigger and better almost right away. Chris Hewitt, who owned local music hire company Tractor Music, was one of the leading forces in getting the festival underway. John Peel had signed Hewitt’s band Tractor to his Dandelion label and his patronage was crucial in the festivals early success.

Chris went on to produce many other festivals and concerts and start a record company, Ozit Records. Hewitt’s hire company provided the PA (and often backline) to the legendary Electric Circus, which by this time, was the numero uno punk venue in the North. International Times, Oz and other counter-culture publications of the time had fired the imagination of the people involved and the thought of putting on a truly free festival did not seem in any way an outlandish idea. I guess much of this DIY ethic was born of the punk/hippy idealism and that “let’s-do-the-show-in-the-backyard” mentality was both part of the anarchic chaos and the simplistic beauty of Deeply Vale. They had the location, they had the means (Tractor’s PA hire) and being part of the squat scene, the access to free press printing for publicity material, posters, fliers and such like was easily within reach. Hewitt and friends had previously promoted gigs at student unions and community benefit nights so were not exactly innocents abroad. The bill over the lifetime of the festival was eclectic to say the least; punks, space rockers, acoustic troubadours, funksters, reggae bands, you name it,

there was a place on that hastily constructed stage for all and sundry. The mixture of professionalism and have-a-go weirdness on the stage over the piece was certainly something that many attendees remember.

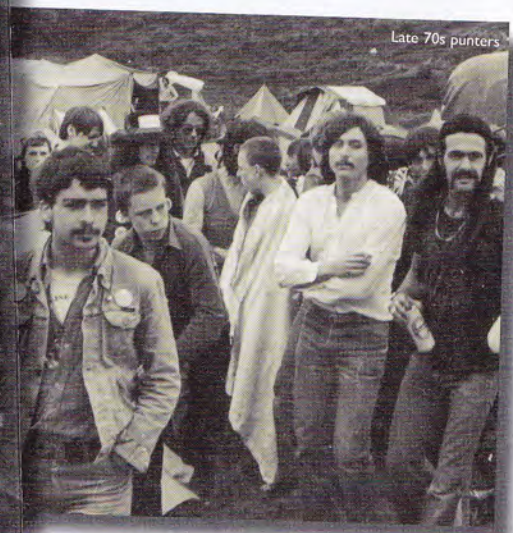
Hewitt recalls: “Within the counter-culture, there is this certain Stonehenge/Glastonbury/Hawkwind almost elitist hierarchy, and I think one of the things we did with the crew at Deeply Vale was perhaps broke the mould with that and we certainly broke the mould in terms of tolerance of punk bands and perhaps tolerance of the fact that you didn’t have to be some sort of person who came from Ladbroke Grove and had some cool album out to actually get on the stage and perform.”

Of course, some of the things that were tolerated at a free festival in the seventies one could never imagine at today’s corporate-sponsored, designer welly boot, re-mortgage -the- house ticket price bun-fights that exist nowadays. Joint rolling competition at stage front, anyone? Danny And The Dressmakers “Johnny Be Really Fucking Good”? I doubt it, somehow. Even the hard to please MES was enamoured; “I don’t like festivals but I loved Deeply Vale.”

That’s not to say it was all happy chaos. Some of the acts were pretty radical even then. The Fall were at their amphetamine-fuelled, cantankerous best; The Ruts were in their imperial phase and had the world at their feet. Incidentally, The Ruts were formed at one of the early festivals when two members of London funkateers Hit And Run had an epiphany-like moment in a tent after seeing Bristol punk band, The Drones. From the existing festival scene came Peter Hamill, Steve Hillage and Nik Turner and also the mighty Here And Now who were a band out of time if ever there was one. The Manchester scene was represented by Vinnie Reilly’s Durruti Column, Crispy Ambulance and the much-underrated Fast Cars. Tony Wilson of Factory Records fame was never far away in



The Ruts



Late 70s punters



Nik Turner of Sphynx



Currently being celebrated with a limited run six album and book box-set, the DEEPLY VALE festival was the melting pot of the UK underground free festival scene and the punk movement (and its aftershocks) which coalesced in the late seventies and around the burgeoning Thatcher era. Joe Whyte investigates.

some guise or other and the legendary Grant Showbiz who would go on to do sound for The Smiths (and produce more Fall albums than anyone else) ran the sound at Deeply Vale and was infamous for berating those onstage with his mixing desk microphone.

It wasn't all spaced-out rock, punk and pre-punk eminence, however. The one thing that united the tribes (apart from their shared love of weed!) was reggae. This was, of course, the days of the National Front gaining ground and the rise of RAR and the ANL. Misty In Roots were regulars over the festival's lifetime and their legacy remains. Hewitt describes how it evolved:

"I think that the one common ground that (we) all had, of course, was reggae because I think all of the hippies and all of the punks liked Bob Marley and they liked Misty In Roots, so I think reggae was a common denominator. I think RAR was also a common denominator and that's where it (Deeply Vale) differed. You'd get more of a crossover at gigs because people in the North tended to be more just music fans, much more so in the north as perhaps there was in the south of the UK."

Deeply Vale spawned so much in the way of cross-cultural pollination; Alternative TV hooked up with Here And Now via the festival. Misty and The Ruts forged a friendship that saw the fledgling punk group release *In A Rut* on their People Unite label. Many people would go on to greater things or first found their musical feet or teenage freedom via attending Deeply Vale. Andy Rourke from The Smiths, Graham Massey of 808 State, Billy Bragg and many others first discovered the joys of the free festival scene via the festivals' many-hued and marijuana-flavoured delights. Andy Kershaw, broad-

caster and World Music champion quipped, "I attended the Deeply Vale festival in 1978 and went on to work with some success in several war zones. Thank you Chris Hewitt..."

Deeply Vale was fortunate that it existed in an era before the major police clampdown on free festivals and gatherings that blighted the rave and crusty scenes of the early nineties. This was an age where hippies were seen as relatively harmless eccentrics by the authorities. Although the drug squad would make customary visits, this was often so ham-fisted as to be ridiculous. Often their arrival would be announced from the stage by whatever scruffy weirdos were doing their thing at that time necessitating much scurrying and weaving from those with, erm, items for sale.

Deeply Vale was really more about the people, the vibe and the ability to do something creative as it ever was about the music. Across the sprawling set of albums (which contain some hilarious interviews as well as crowd interactions) the diversity of what's on offer make it something that's unlikely to interest the casual buyer; some of it is brilliant (and it also contains several unreleased tracks from some big names), much of it is just plain nuts and it is also, occasionally, unlistenable tosh. It reflects perfectly the anarchic, DIY, hazed-out feel of the festival perfectly. If you were there, you probably need this set to remind you of the way it once was. The smell of wet humanity, wood smoke and THC doesn't translate well too often, but it fairly oozes from the grooves and pages here. **VLR**

**"I DON'T LIKE FESTIVALS BUT
I LOVED DEEPLY VALE."
MARK E SMITH**

'The Deeply Vale Box Set' is out now on Ozit Dandelion