

Loyd gets punk'd

Loyd Grossman as we don't usually see him

Can you picture plummy-voiced former Masterchef presenter Loyd Grossman as a punk rocker? Well, this weekend, his band, yes, his BAND, plays Blackpool's Rebellion punk music festival. Judith Dornan finds out more...

TV presenter Loyd Grossman is many things – chef, journalist, pasta sauce pioneer, history buff, charity worker, the distinctive voice of Through the Keyhole. But a punk rocker?

Yet the former MasterChef host and his recently reformed band, Jet Bronx and the New Forbidden, are on the bill for this weekend's Rebellion Festival, in Blackpool, among the likes of UK Subs, Boomtown Rats and The Specials' Neville Staple.

The original band, Jet Bronx and The Forbidden, was formed by him when he first arrived in this country aged 25 as a postgrad student and even grazed the charts at Number 49 in 1977 with their first single, Ain't Doin' Nothing.

And it was Rebellion organisers who inspired him to revive his punk past – even though Loyd himself is the only original member. On the phone from the BBC studio in London where he is currently filming cookery series Step Up To The Plate, with Anton Du Beke, he explains.

"About a year ago, I got an email from someone at Rebellion saying, 'Would you be interested in putting the band back together again? I said, 'Well, I can't really because the band have just scattered far and wide but I'd be very interested in playing'. And then that night, I was having dinner with a very old friend of mine who I've always wanted to play with, who's been in bands off and on and I said to him, 'Well, look, you know, I've been asked to play at Rebellion, shall we do it?' And he said, 'Yeah, let's do it'. And then we started putting the new band together. He's called Valentine Guinness. I'd known Valentine for 30 years. We then asked our mutual friend James Baring to play bass and then it grew from there, you know, you ask around, friends of friends, and eventually we found the line up that we liked. Yeah, that was the catalyst. I mean, I was kind of waiting for something to inspire me and lo and behold, along came Rebellion."

Loyd has already appeared, sans Forbidden, onstage at Rebellion, guesting with another band, The Pork Dukes, at the Vienna leg of the three-city annual punk festival extravaganza in April – the other is in Amsterdam in May.

How did he fare in front of the punk audiences? "That was great. I just did one number with the Pork Dukes because, not having been on stage for 30 years, I wanted to make sure I could still get away with it.

"So that was just a little warm up and it was great actually, great atmosphere. It's interesting because they call it punk but of course, it's a pretty broad church."

"It's really a lot of all sorts of different alternative music, and a lot of the people who were the original punks 30-something odd years ago, are all mums and dads now so it's kind of a family thing now. And I think a lot of younger people who missed it the first time around are very much discovering and enjoying all this alternative music because it's just much more authentic and raw and approachable. Most of the gigs we've played so far, it has been a very very very mixed audience and as I say with a lot of young people who are just discovering this kind of music for the first time."

To Loyd himself, the idea of him fronting a punk band seems perfectly logical. He says: "I was a very keen musician from the time I was a young teenager - and I first started writing because I was writing about music.

"Yeah, yeah, I used to write for Rolling Stone and for all the big underground music papers in the States when I was a student. I was always very into rhythm and blues and rock and roll and, you know, I mean, really most music, I mean, I love country and western, for example. I just like music. I was very lucky, my parents were musical. I've always pursued music one way or another, either playing or listening. When did I learn to play guitar? I was probably like 11 or 12, I guess. My earliest musical memory is watching Elvis on the Ed Sullivan show."

Did he ever dream of a career in music?

"No! But I liked playing and the thing is, if you play electric guitar, you've got to play in a band because there's only so much you can do sitting around your kitchen, playing solo."

He is keen to get Jet Bronx and The New Forbidden into the studio too. He says: *"Yeah, not quite sure (when] but definitely before the end of the year. We've been playing quite a lot around London and have got quite a lot more gigs on the way but I hope sometime before the end of the year, we'll be able to record."*

Will they make a single or an album?

"I don't know because these days I don't even know whether people distinguish between singles, EPs, albums, who knows? I think we're just going to look at which of our material is worth recording and then take it from there."

Which musical heroes inspire him these days? He replies thoughtfully: *"What I am listening to at the moment is a fairly rich melange. I've just recently discovered a wonderful blues musician called Guitar Shorty who I think is just fantastic and I like North African music, I listen to a lot of that, and I've been rediscovering Dean Martin so it's a fairly eclectic mix."*

Loyd has a close connection with the North West. A combined passion for charity work and history has seen him take up a range of roles including English Heritage commissioner with responsibility for the North West, chairman of Culture North West, chairman of National Museums Liverpool and deputy chair of Capital of Culture. *"It's a fascinating region."*

His fascination with history comes from his family of artdealers back in his home town of Boston. But it's understandably hard to picture the English Heritage commissioner for the North West pogoing around the Rebellion stage.

Yet it's typical of Loyd. Chef, presenter, academic, historian, journalist, the face of quality pasta and curry sauces – and now punk rocker.

With so many varied strings to his bow, does he ever slow down?

He grins: *"I only like doing things that I'm interested in and I like learning new things and trying new things and that's that."*

"I don't really have a career at all, it's just that there's a lot of stuff I like doing. It's much more interesting."