

Beat-Herder

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'Wouldn't it be funny if...'

These five little words are the reason that Beat-Herder commands the kind of rabid loyalty that made offering tattoos of the festival logo on site a simple matter of supply and demand, rather than a dare.

'Wouldn't it be funny if we had a row of urinals that looked like a pelican crossing and called it Babbey Road? '

'Wouldn't it be funny if we built a tiny church with pews, and altar and stained-glass windows, put a DJ in there instead of a vicar, and then held a Sunday Service with a real choir but got them to sing hits from the 80s instead of hymns?'

'Wouldn't it be funny if we had a tent that looks like a living room, with armchairs, lamps and flock wallpaper, and put the DJ in a mirror over the mantelpiece?'

'Wouldn't it be funny if we had a theatre group running round, pretending to be protesters, pirates, or a bus?'

Describing Beat-Herder to the uninitiated as simply 'a music festival' is like describing Edinburgh Fringe as 'a Jim Davidson gig, but bigger'. Music is both a tiny element of the experience, and a constant rhythm underpinning the exploring of a woodland wonderland. Much like Glastonbury, the collective atmosphere of the festival itself outshines any one of its performers, but because of the well chosen bill you will still find yourself dancing from place to place rather than walking by the end of the weekend.

While other music festivals might have their roots in live gig promotion, Beat-Herder started life as an annual freeparty in these very woods.

Beat-Herder is not a festival, it's the fifth birthday party you always wanted but didn't get because your parents had at least some tiny modicum of responsibility and too small a garden.

A man dressed as a beekeeper chases anyone dressed as a bee (of which there are many) with a giant net; four pirates sail an imaginary ship through the arena and ask for help finding their treasure, marked with a cross on an A-Z ; a couple of Barbies waddle by in their boxes followed by two girls wearing little more than a giant flowerpot each; Minnie Mouse is sitting on a giant chair being sick; and look, someone dressed as Mr Motivator is on the main stage leading a workout. No wait... that's the real Mr Motivator.

If this all sounds a bit 'I'm mad me, check out my silly hat' festival bants, let me clarify. With

over half the people here having put in some serious DIY effort (one guy is even dressed as an entire bar), it's impossible for any one legend to think they're the life and soul just because they had the imagination to pay a tenner for something oversized and made of foam.

Various soundsystems and DJs from the locale make up a sizeable chunk of the music, a nod toward the festival's beginnings as a mildly illegal rave-up in the woods a few years ago. Bands, though, are either danceable, funny or both. Acts as diverse as Dan Le Sac Vs Scroobius Pip, the unhinged country of Son of Dave and reggae brilliance of Easy Star All-Stars are all on the mainstage, along with The Lancashire Hotpots, who are a Beat-Herder staple with their flatcapped Northern odes to chippy tea and emos.

In the Working Men's Club Tent, some proficient wedding covers bands get the opposite reception to the one they'd probably get at Reading or Download. In the Toil Trees the music doesn't stop between about midday and 6am.

Even with an increased capacity this year of a few thousand, it still sold out in no time at all, despite no huge headliner and no band you're likely to have read about in the past couple of weeks. Buying a Beat-Herder ticket is very much an exercise in trust that the curators have got your back for a full weekend of fun and beats, and they've yet to disappoint.

