



Rusty Rebel of Rebel Rock Sound System

On inspirations, Birmingham
and unity

“At dances, men often say: ‘What are you doing with those records?’ It feels fabulous to shock them. When I hold a piece of vinyl I think about all the work that has gone into it – especially if it’s an artist that’s no longer here – and I think about how amazing it is that it’s all on this piece of plastic, and the technical process of getting it on there.”

Rusty Rebel, Let’s Play Vinyl touring exhibition, Birmingham (March-April 2018)

My first job was working in a recording studio as trainee Engineer, and then working at the Hummingbird [in Birmingham]. I was given exposure and access to PA equipment and lighting, I controlled the spotlight for artists on stage, and I loved all aspects of it aged 17/18: instruments, mics amps mixing desks, dat machines etc.... I also loved watching the men – I wasn't aware of any women at the time on the scene, in music or sound system. I was only aware of female DJs. I thought, I can do that too! And the seed was sown from then. Musically, as I was also a DJ, my musical tastes were wide and loved all types of music. I started to dig deeper into the roots in music, realising I had missed so much and needed to rectify that. I had to give the roots music the airing it deserved – rightly so – only on a Sound System would the message be heard and felt and shared with others.



Listen to Rusty Rebel's first radio show here



Rusty Rebel with King Earthquake in PST, Digbeth

Having been a radio presenter for many years it was an easy transition to Sound System. At that time the equipment was the same, mic, mixer, amps and speakers albeit larger, now I have a preamp so... in 2014, Rebel Rock was created! Playing sound system was a natural progression of the equipment I used along my musical journey and experimenting with different equipment. This experimentation helped me to find the "sound" that I love. Doing my first radio show with the mighty King Earthquake, I was so nervous. It's still on YouTube! It all escalated from that show - CONFIDENCE.



In terms of inspirations, studio engineers such as King Tubby, Lee Perry and Coxsone Dodd are so creative with technology, and there are so many others who added new sound effects and styles to roots music

What is really uplifting is the support and appreciation of those near and far who like my selections and presentation, which really encourages me and gives me the desire to carry on.

Being a woman in the industry some people are unaware of me being female, maybe due to the name. Even though Rebel Rock has been around for four years, people are still surprised by the music sets that I play. I believe I am one of the first woman to have a sound system in the UK and some people are surprised that I operate, play and select tunes myself. A few ago I played a show and I was the only woman on the line up. Men came up to me and were asking other DJs how I know the tunes that I play. They assumed that I must have been taught by somebody or belong to a certain group, that's the reason why I play the way I do. Well, errrrrrr, it's done naturally!

I wanted to be a sound engineer from the age of fourteen, but the school careers officer was pushing and pointing me towards care and nursing, so-called "female jobs", of which I had no interest. I did accountancy instead, while biding time for any opportunity. Secure units, children's homes mother and baby units: we need to reach those young people that are affected by their circumstances to hear roots and feel the

equipment that sends out the message of positivity, to feel the vibrations and warmth of the community. To pass on this legacy for them to take sound system forward.

Here in Brum, we have maintained the culture of sound system and it seems that Birmingham and the



West Midlands have more sounds active per square mile. Birmingham, along with Leicester, is an essential place for venues and promotions. Reputable speaker box and amp builders are also readily available to a high quality which have international reach. All of this is fabulous for the culture and the scene, and depending on the type of sound system dubplates are out there in abundance, as well as fresh new roots music which is being rapidly introduced.

However, it must be said that Birmingham lacks venues and a level of understanding from. It seems that other genres are music are fully represented and allowed to play/ perform wherever, such as Bhangra and dance music. Sound system and roots music are under appreciation, as is the work involved in creating playing and maintaining the sound – cost of equipment and ongoing expense of buying music, developing specialist knowledge and the moving of it.

WOMEN REINVIGORATING SOUND

V Rocket sound – Valerie
 Mousai Sound – H
 CAYA Feminine Hi Fi in Brazil
 Silmara in Brazil
 Jah 9 Queen Ifrica
 And various female sounds and producers in Europe... an ever-growing list!

Traditionally, sound systems were about much more than just the music; there has always been a cultural and community aspect surrounding the culture. Sound systems have always been about connecting people. It is about getting a message across to the people around you. It's a radio to everybody, spreading the word. That's what sound systems did originally, they allowed people to gather and have a shared experience.

Other countries seem to embrace unity and women as the norm, for the future It would be great to see more women taking control of the equipment and be able to play controlling not just the music but what comes out.

... Rebel Rock to the world ...
 One Love
 Rusty Rebel Representing Rebel
 Rock Sound System

Rusty Rebel from Rebel Rock Sound system is a female selector with her own full sound system. She was the first female operated sound system in Birmingham, and one of the first in the UK. Rebel Rock is her portable radio for her musical voice to be heard clearly. The sound system was launched in Birmingham in April 2014. Prior to that, she has played all types of music on radio: stations such as PCRL and Metro radio back in the 1980s, Kriss FM and Jam Radio to the present day.

Music is an extension of her nature and personality. Her musical experience, taste and genres are vast, and has been playing dance hall and roots reggae as her specialism to large crowds. She has such a strong love for reggae dub culture and roots music that she started sneaking into dance halls at a very early age. There she was bitten by that musical bug and it has been a massive part of her life ever since.



Based out of his photographic studio in Birmingham, **Ian Davies** produces striking imagery for a range of commercial, portrait, marketing and PR and event assignments. Ian is a graduate of Birmingham City University. Clients include; Jaguar Land Rover, Bacardi, Global, Emo Ltd, NHS, Prostate Cancer UK and NHS among many others.

Rusty Rebel and King Earthquake were photographed in Oldbury (Birmingham) and PST.

PST can be found on Lombard Street in Digbeth (Birmingham) and runs regular sound system and reggae events. Follow them on Facebook for listings: <https://www.facebook.com/ClubPST/>

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