

Transcript

"WHO IS MORE PUNK: Sex Pistols or Chumbawamba?"

by Chill Goblin

00:00 Introduction

00:04 Fuck you,
00:05 and welcome to Punk Battles: The only
00:07 show where I decide who is more Punk,
00:10 and I would know. I'm a pretty "punk" guy.
00:14 Now first up today, we've got the Sex Pistols.
00:16 Legendary punk band and the reason I
00:18 learned how to do this face.
00:20 They were together for two and a half
00:21 Years, and in that time put out only one
00:23 album,
00:24 "Never mind the Bollocks." They're facing
00:25 off against Chumbawamba,
00:27 who had hit songs like 'that one your mom
00:29 listens to when she's having a bad day,'
00:31 and nothing else, really. They were
00:33 featured on albums such as
00:34 '90s mix,' '90s sports anthems,' '80s and 90s
00:38 Hits,'

00:39 '90s birthday party,' and '90s nostalgia.'
00:42 So, let's find out who was more punk: the Sex
00:45 Pistols
00:45 or Chumbawamba?

00:47 Round 1: Origin story

00:48 The Sex Pistols were a band
00:49 formed by its manager, Malcolm McLaren,
00:52 who had seen how big punk was about to
00:53 be
00:54 and he wanted in. McLaren owned an
00:56 expensive alternative
00:58 clothing store, called "Sex," so he called
01:00 the band
01:01 "The Sex Pistols," mostly to advertise for his
01:04 store,
01:05 which is kind of like a punk band being
01:06 called the "Calvin Klein Billy Clubs."
01:09 Malcolm McLaren meticulously crafted the
01:11 group's image, he
01:12 gave them clothes to wear and he wanted
01:14 them to be as controversial as possible,
01:16 to generate free publicity.
01:19 Probably the most musically talented
01:21 member of the band, Glen Matlock,

01:23 left after repeated clashes with McLaren.
01:25 Later saying
01:26 "it was just like being in the Monkees."
01:29 Glen was replaced by a friend of singer,
01:31 Johnny Rotten,
01:32 named Sid Vicious. Sid was a heroin
01:35 addicted twink
01:36 who was chosen, by Malcolm, completely for
01:40 his look.
01:41 He could not play bass at all, and
01:43 refused to learn.
01:44 So, when did they sell out? Well, I think
01:46 it's fair to say that the Sex Pistols,
01:48 Somehow,
01:49 sold out before existing. You know, it's
01:51 kind of hard to come at them like
01:52 "What happened to you, Sex Pistols? It used
01:55 to be about selling expensive clothes,"
01:57 you know? But, yeah, at the end of the day
02:00 there are Boy Bands. And I know
02:02 it makes people upset when you call the Sex
02:03 Pistols a 'Boy Band,' but
02:05 first of all: being in a Boy Band doesn't
02:07 mean their music is bad. Who doesn't love

02:09 the bass line to "Backstreet's Back"? Okay
02:12 And, also,
02:13 they were formed as a product of market
02:14 research.
02:15 Named, given clothing to wear, chosen
02:18 more for their looks than their musical
02:20 Ability, by one
02:22 guy, Malcolm McLaren, who had complete
02:25 control over them.
02:26 Even their guitarist, Steve Jones, once
02:28 said "He used to really get the hump,
02:31 McLaren, when we started asking for money,
02:34 so I stopped asking for it. We never had
02:37 our own lawyer, which is insanity.
02:39 That's the closest thing to being in one
02:41 of these boy bands --
02:43 is that they all get reamed, and we were
02:45 getting reamed in that department."
02:47 All right, Chumbawamba time. So, before
02:49 Chumbawamba was a band, there were a
02:51 bunch of anarchists.
02:52 Illegally squatting in a house together,
02:54 spending their days liberating animals
02:56 and organizing community services. One

02:59 day, they happened to be at a musician's
03:01 collective hanging out, when
03:02 someone asked how many people there were
03:04 in bands.
03:06 “For a laugh we sort of went ‘Oh we're a
03:08 Band,’ which
03:09 we weren't, we were just... a bunch of punks...
03:12 he passed this paper around... so we wrote
03:14 ‘Chimp Eats Banana’ and we put our names
03:16 down.
03:17 About a week later, he rang us up, said
03:19 ‘I’ve got a gig for you man, it's in two
03:21 weeks.’
03:22 And obviously none of us, we couldn't
03:24 play any instruments.
03:26 So we thought ‘Right... you be the singer,
03:28 I'll play the drums, you play [the] guitar.’
03:31 ...we borrowed some stuff, and that's how it
03:33 Started.”
03:34 Chimp Eats Banana became Chumbawamba. They
03:36 were together for about 30 years,
03:38 and in all that time they put out a ton
03:40 of albums--
03:41 many of which never ended up on Spotify.

03:43 And while their musical style evolved,
03:46 from Anarcho-Punk
03:47 to Techno Dance Folk and Pop Music,
03:51 they never really lost sight of their
03:52 anarchist roots, putting radical messages
03:55 on
03:55 all of their many albums. So when did
03:57 Chumbawamba sell out? Well, they had
03:59 already been
04:00 a band for about 20 years when they
04:02 signed with EMI.
04:03 After years of criticizing the label, uh,
04:06 being on a
04:07 compilation album called *Fuck EMI*, and,
04:10 one time,
04:11 smearing an EMI office with blood,
04:14 a lot of people criticize them for being
04:16 anti-capitalists signing with a
04:17 capitalist
04:18 record label. And their response to that
04:20 was essentially that
04:21 all of the indie labels they'd been on
04:23 before were just as capitalist,
04:26 only they weren't as good at it. So, if

04:29 they really wanted a shot at spreading
04:31 their anarchist message as far as
04:32 possible,
04:33 they needed to sign with a major label.
04:35 To be fair to them this choice
04:37 fairly quickly paid off with the release
04:39 of "Tubthumping,"
04:41 the one song of theirs you've probably
04:43 Heard-- that one about getting knocked
04:44 down
04:45 and getting back up again. I dare you:
04:47 just
04:48 try and listen to that song all the way
04:50 through
04:51 without being converted into a full-on
04:53 anarcho-communist.
04:55 It can't be done.
04:56 [Music;
Punk Battles Score: Sex Pistols (0), Chumbawumba (1)]

05:00 Round 2: The big red "A"

05:01 Punk is associated with left-wing
05:02 politics, particularly
05:05 anarchy. (Or actually this, this "A" stands
05:07 for "Ashlee Simpson" but)

05:08 let's see how these two bands stack up:
05:10 Now, you've probably heard the song
05:12 "Anarchy in the UK" before, if you've ever
05:14 been to karaoke night with me.
05:16 It's a great song. Very catchy and it has
05:19 the word 'anarchy' in the title,
05:21 but is it really an anarchist song?
05:24 Johnny Rotten has said, at various times,
05:26 "I've always been an
05:27 Anarchist," "I am a natural-born anarchist,"
05:30 "I have never been an anarchist, what gave
05:33 you that idea?"
05:34 Seems the only reason this song is about
05:36 anarchy at all is because Johnny
05:38 Rotten was looking for a word that
05:39 rhymed with "antichrist,"
05:41 and in the end he never did find that
05:43 Word, But he decided to shoehorn
05:45 "anarchist" into the line instead. At the
05:47 Time, he did know at least
05:49 one real life anarchist. The artist Jamie
05:52 Reed, who created the band's
05:54 iconic ransom notes aesthetic you find
05:57 on their posters and their album cover.

05:59 And apparently Johnny Rotten had Jamie
06:01 Reed in mind as he wrote this song.
06:03 Anarchy is a widely misunderstood
06:05 political philosophy,
06:06 to the point where in the last U.S.
06:08 election, both candidates for president
06:10 denounced anarchists for their
06:12 supposedly violent world view.
06:14 But, in reality, the dream of an anarchist
06:16 world shouldn't be that scary:
06:18 Think of it, not as a violent chaotic
06:20 society,
06:21 but as an egalitarian one-- without rulers
06:24 or unjustified hierarchies.
06:26 Anarcho-communism [An-Com] essentially just
06:28 means
06:29 ‘caring and sharing.’ An-Coms are basically
06:32 Care Bears. And sure,
06:34 some Care Bears may advocate violence as
06:37 a method of
06:38 getting us all to the magical land of
06:39 Care-A-Lot, but
06:41 it's less about ‘violence’ and ‘fires’ than
06:43 it is about

06:44 'community gardens,' 'collective housing' and
06:47 'excruciatingly long voting sessions'.
06:50 The thing is, "Anarchy in the UK" is not
06:53 about
06:55 real anarchy. It's about fake anarchy,
06:57 the kind everyone's afraid of. Its goal
06:59 as a song
07:00 is probably just to frighten the parents
07:03 of Sex Pistols' fans.
07:05 Let's have a look at some of the lyrics
07:06 that aren't just Johnny Rotten
07:08 repeatedly saying
07:09 "I want to be anarchy," which is not
07:12 something you can be.
07:14 It is a political philosophy, not a
07:18 job. "*I am an anti-christ /*
07:22 *I am an anarchist / don't know what I*
07:25 *Want / but I know how to get it /*
07:27 *I want to destroy the passerby.*" Hmm,
07:30 'mutual aid,' 'expropriation,'
07:34 something about 'vouchers'... I don't see
07:36 anything in here about
07:38 '*wanting to destroy passers-by.*'
07:41 Huh. Well, that can't be right. If anything,

07:44 looks like they want to *help* passers-by.
07:47 Huh.
07:48 "Anarchy in the UK" lists off a few scary
07:52 Acronyms:
07:52 they are the MPLA, the UDA, and the IRA.
07:57 These are, respectively, a
07:58 Marxist-Leninist group in
08:00 Angola, a loyalist group in Northern
08:03 Ireland,
08:04 and a group that fought to bring about a
08:07 Republic for
08:08 all of Ireland. You'll notice, none of
08:10 these groups are, in any way, anarchist.
08:12 But, they are all violent groups that
08:16 killed a lot of people, [which] would have
08:18 presumably been
08:20 pretty alarming to hear on a song, that
08:22 your British child
08:23 was listening to, in 1976. So again,
08:27 it's more about violence than it is
08:29 about actual anarchy.
08:31 I still like the song, but I can't help
08:33 but wonder
08:34 what would it sound like if it were

08:36 about real anarchy?

08:38 Probably, a little something,

08:41 like this... "Anarkay en va you-kaia /
 [Anarchy in the UK/]

08:44 R'buildin' so'city wiv mushal ayed /
 [Rebuliding society with mutual aid /]

08:47 Eye-ar-keys must meet the b'rrrden of a
 [Hierarchies must meet the burden of]

08:49 proof for 'eir existence / n if vey
 [proof for their existence / and if they]

08:51 Canny, vey weo be disman'eled!"
 [cannot, they will be dismantled!"]

08:54 Yeah, no, it just doesn't have the same, uh,

08:58 energy to it-- just doesn't have the same

08:59 energy to it, that's the problem.

09:01 As already mentioned, Chumbawamba has

09:03 been an explicitly anarchist collective,

09:06 since the days they were all squatting

09:08 In a house together. They have albums and

09:10 songs about anarchy.

09:11 And their early albums, on Agitprop!

09:13 Records, contained liner notes educating

09:16 their fans about its principles.

09:17 Anarcho-syndicalism is a branch of

09:19 anarchy that advocates workers' rights

09:21 and unions

09:22 as a path towards an anarchist society.
09:25 Chumbawumba certainly seems to think
09:26 along those lines. They formed a
09:27 partnership with the Socialist Workers'
09:29 Union,
09:30 they would hang out in working men's
09:32 clubs, they would participate in strikes
09:34 and picket lines,
09:35 either by just joining the protesters or
09:37 performing for them.
09:39 During the UK Miner Strike they handed
09:42 out pamphlets,
09:43 donated food to miners' families, they
09:46 released a miner's benefit album,
09:48 and they even formed a theater troupe to
09:50 entertain the miners' children.
09:52 Unlike the Sex Pistols, Chumbawamba sometimes
09:54 could actually make people less afraid
09:56 of anarchy.
09:57 When they performed at the Rosie
09:59 O'Donnell show she introduced them as
10:01 "The nicest bunch of anarchists I've ever
10:04 met!"
10:05 When their song "Tubthumping" blew up,

10:06 Chumbawamba performed it at the BRIT
10:08 Awards,
10:09 surrounded by anarchist flags and
10:11 dressed in the anarcho-communist colors:
10:13 red and black. They were angry at the
10:15 center-left political party, Labor, at the
10:17 time,
10:18 for not supporting the UK Docker's strike,
10:21 so they changed some of the lyrics of
10:22 "Tubthumping" to "*he drinks a whiskey*
10:25 *Drink /*
10:26 *he drinks a vodka drink / he drinks a*
10:29 *lager drink /*
10:30 *he drinks a cider drink. / **New Labor***
10:34 ***sold out the dockers, just like they'll***
10:37 ***sell out the rest of us."***
10:39 [Music;

Punk Battles Score: Sex Pistols (0), Chumbawumba (2)]

10:41 Round 3: Opinions about Nazis and fascist iconography

10:42 Watching old Sex Pistols footage, you
10:43 might notice there's an odd amount of
10:45 swastikas in the crowd
10:46 and on stage. Sid Vicious loved his nazi
10:49 t-shirt. Johnny Rotten wore

10:51 *this* stupid shirt many times on stage.
10:54 Malcolm McLaren, who was at least part
10:56 ethnically Jewish,
10:58 would hand-out nazi armbands to the Sex
11:00 Pistols, and their associated acts,
11:02 before shows, which led to an incident
11:04 where the band The Clash
11:06 told the Sex Pistols that they couldn't
11:08 perform with them unless they all took
11:09 off their nazi armbands. So,
11:11 they're not in this contest, but I'm
11:13 giving The Clash a point for that.
11:15 So far they're beating the Sex Pistols.
11:16 Now personally, I don't
11:18 think they were nazis; I think they were
11:20 just trying to upset people,
11:22 exactly like when they talked about
11:24 “anarchy.” You know, I think the fact that
11:26 Johnny Rotten ever wore this stupid
11:29 fucking shirt,
11:30 that was from Malcolm McLaren's Sex store,
11:33 which has both a swastika and the words
11:36 “I am an anarchist” on it, should kind of
11:39 give away the game that they were just

11:40 being
11:41 edgy boys. Funny thing is, though,
11:44 that just because they weren't nazis,
11:47 making a bunch of edgy references to
11:49 nazis
11:50 actually made real nazis feel welcome in
11:53 the punk scene.
11:54 Who would have guessed. Around this time
11:56 is when the Oi!
11:57 punk genre started, which contained many
12:00 bands who were
12:02 literal nazis and some who
12:05 weren't nazis but just refused to
12:07 condemn nazis, for some reason. (Great!)
12:12 Chumbawumba had a pretty clear stance on
12:14 Nazis, which was that they are bad; which
12:16 I would say is the correct stance. In
12:18 their song "The Day the Nazi Died,"
12:20 Chumbawamba critiques historians who act
12:23 like
12:23 nazis disappeared off the face of the
12:25 Earth the second World War II ended.
12:28 "So, if you meet with these historians
12:30 I'll tell you what to say /

12:33 *Tell them that the Nazis / never really*
12:35 *went away /*
12:37 *They're out there burning houses down /*
12:39 *and peddling racist*
12:40 *lies / and we'll never rest again... / until*
12:43 *every Nazi dies."*
12:45 They also really hated those fascist Oi!
12:47 bands.
12:48 And early in their career, they pranked a
12:50 bunch of them by recording an Oi! style
12:52 song,
12:52 under the fake name 'Skin Disease,' which
12:55 was actually included on an
12:57 Oi! compilation album. The lyrics of the
13:00 song are just the words
13:02 "I'm thick" repeated 64 times.
13:05 Which, I guess, is technically a prank.
13:08 I'm not sure if I get it, to be honest.
13:10 But I like the energy.
13:12 Joke's on you, racists, jamming out to a
13:14 song written by
13:15 people who don't respect you. Got 'em.
13:19 'Nazis owned.' "I'm thick."
13:20 Sure.

13:21 [Music;
Punk Battles Score: Sex Pistols (0), [The Clash (1),] Chumbawumba (3)]

13:23 Round 4: Punk Antics

13:24 All right. Let's get into the fun
13:27 stuff: the punk antics.
13:28 What were the Sex Pistols punk antics?
13:29 Well let me tell you, they were very
13:31 rude to interviewers. Very rude. Honestly,
13:35 it's great watch.
13:36 Watch a compilation of Johnny Rotten
13:37 just being a dick
13:39 to interviewers, for no reason. It's fun!
13:42 The band's first time being interviewed
13:43 on live tv,
13:44 Johnny Rotten said the word "shit," and
13:46 Steve Jones called the host a "dirty
13:48 fucker" and a "fucking rodger."
13:50 This incident led to them being dropped
13:52 by their label, EMI.
13:54 And according to legend, Malcolm McLaren
13:56 was very angry about this,
13:58 until the band experienced a surge in
13:59 Popularity, when he started to claim
14:02 that it was-- their profanity was all his

14:03 idea. I just love
14:05 the fact that McLaren, probably supplied
14:09 this dude in the background with his
14:10 nazi armband,
14:12 but thought that, say, calling the host a
14:14 “dirty fucker” was
14:16 a little bit past the line of decorum--
14:18 even for punks.
14:20 Okay. Chumbawamba has had a lot of great
14:23 punk antics, so let's just-- let's just go
14:25 through them real quick.
14:26 Vocalist, Alice Netter, was dragged in the
14:28 British tabloid press, for saying in an
14:30 interview
14:31 “We like it when cops get killed. Nothing
14:33 can change the fact that we like it when
14:35 cops get killed. We mean that.
14:37 You choose sides, don't you?” On Bill
14:39 Maher's show, she also encouraged their
14:41 broke fans, who couldn't afford it,
14:43 to just steal their album from a large
14:45 chain store like HMV
14:47 or Virgin. Chumbawumba was offered one-
14:49 and-a-half-million dollars by Nike to

14:51 use "Tubthumping"
14:52 in a World Cup commercial, which they
14:55 turned down
14:55 in a decision that apparently took them
14:57 about 30 seconds to make.
14:59 They did sell music rights to General
15:02 Motors
15:02 for a commercial, but they donated the
15:05 entire \$100,000.00 dollars
15:08 to activist groups who used it to start
15:10 an information and environmental
15:11 campaign
15:12 against General Motors. They recorded an
15:16 album, called *In Memoriam Margaret*
15:18 *Thatcher*
15:19 in 2005, which they didn't release until
15:22 2013,
15:23 after they had already split up as a
15:25 band, just to coincide with the death of
15:28 the famously anti-union
15:30 Margaret Thatcher. And finally, my
15:32 Favorite, at those same BRIT Awards where
15:34 they had the anarchist flags,
15:36 vocalist Danburt Nobacon went up to

15:39 UK Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott
15:42 and poured an entire bucket of ice water
15:45 on his head.
15:47 Amazing. Sex Pistols would never.
15:52 [Music;
Punk Battles Score: Sex Pistols (0), [The Clash (1),] Chumbawumba (4)]

15:53 Round 5: Ultimate Cred Challenge

15:55 Now, another way to judge punk bands is
15:56 by seeing how influenced they were by
15:59 the most punk band of all time: the Sex
16:00 Pistols.
16:01 Now, well, the Sex Pistols have never
16:03 once claimed to have
16:04 been influenced by the Sex Pistols: zero
16:07 points.
16:08 Chumbawamba, on the other hand, has
16:10 repeatedly and clearly claimed Sex
16:12 Pistols as an influence,
16:13 and they even put out an album about not
16:15 Voting, called *Never Mind the Ballots*.
16:17 So yeah, they're getting the point for
16:19 that one, too.
16:20 [Music;
Punk Battles Score: Sex Pistols (0), [The Clash (1),] Chumbawumba (5)]

16:22 Who Wins?

16:23 So who's more punk? Well, I tallied up the
16:24 score, and it turns out
16:25 it doesn't matter. It's really not punk
16:28 to argue about
16:29 "who is more punk?" When the Sex Pistols
16:31 Started, they didn't even know about the
16:33 word punk, so there were no punk rules to
16:35 follow.
16:36 But, at the same time, I mean, obviously
16:40 Chumbawumba is objectively more punk
16:42 than Sex Pistols. I mean, who could even
16:43 argue otherwise? I, like-- Johnny Rotten
16:47 voted for Trump twice, supported Brexit
16:50 and
16:51 said 'All Lives Matter' as recently as
16:53 2020, so
16:55 fuck that guy, to be honest. Hey,
16:58 maybe your definition of punk is
16:59 different than mine. Maybe you think
17:01 punk is just about making people upset.
17:05 And by that criteria, I guess Sex Pistols
17:07 probably
17:08 are more punk than Chumbawamba. Their

17:10 music and
17:11 their behavior was specifically designed
17:15 to upset the parents of the kids
17:17 listening to it, and by that metric,
17:19 Lil Pump is also extremely punk
17:22 ("Lil Punk," more like). Making this video,
17:25 I've listened to
17:26 a ton of Chumbawamba, and I gotta say, I
17:29 kind of love it. Especially their early
17:31 albums that are more punk.
17:33 I'll link a few in the description, if
17:34 you're curious. And also,
17:36 I still listen to the one album the Sex
17:39 Pistols made, sometimes,
17:40 because I like it. I've decided that, for
17:42 me personally, art
17:43 doesn't always need to be justified by
17:45 its politics. Art can exist
17:47 for its own sake. And yes, good politics
17:50 make art
17:51 better, but it can still be good without
17:54 it,
17:54 so I'm not going to shame you if you
17:56 still listen to Sex Pistols. That would

17:58 make me a huge hypocrite.
17:59 I'm only going to shame you if you still
18:01 think they're the most punk band of all
18:02 time.
18:04 They're not. This has been Punk Battles
18:06 with Chill Goblin.
18:08 Fuck you and good night.
18:15 [Music]
18:51 End