

Iron Maidens

Tribute band pays homage to classic heavy metal

By [Jeff Richardson](#) Features Editor

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As the world's only all-female Iron Maiden tribute band, it's tough to question the dedication of The Iron Maidens.

Their commitment to the classic British heavy metal band's music goes so far that they're planning a mini-tour of Alaska in February, including a stop at The Blue Loon on Friday. For a quintet from sunny Los Angeles, it's a daunting assignment.

Linda McDonald, the drummer for the Maidens, said she's never experienced weather colder than 18 degrees. When she learned that Fairbanks was looking forward to a week of subzero temperatures, she let out a nervous laugh.

"We're like the postmen," she said. "Through snow, through sleet ..."

Since forming in 2001, The Iron Maidens have become one of the bigger names on the blossoming tribute band scene, but this is their first visit to Alaska. They've traveled throughout the U.S. and parts of Asia, signed a Japanese record deal, and, in 2005, put out a self-titled album. It's common for tribute bands to gently mock their subjects, but the Maidens play it straight — their goal is to reproduce the music, intensity and spectacle of a real Iron Maiden show. The gruesome Maiden mascot, Eddie, even lurches around during some performances.

Although they can't completely pattern themselves after their male counterparts, the Maidens also take influences from old-school Iron Maiden outfits that were worn on stage.

"You can't do Iron Maiden without spandex," said Aja Kim, the Maidens' lead singer. "We do a similar style. If there's snakeskin in there, we'll put it in."

But both McDonald and Kim — who are joined by bassist Wanda Ortiz, and guitarists Sara Marsh and Heather Baker — agree that the main attraction is the music. Unlike many '80s metal acts, Iron Maiden has aged fairly gracefully, thanks to the complex, sweeping musical arrangements underpinning the epic storytelling.

During a suspension in high school, McDonald said she took the opportunity to

rummage through her brother's record collection, and instantly found an attraction to Iron Maiden. "That was the moment I decided I wanted to play drums," she said.

McDonald said musicians need to have serious skills to play the Iron Maiden catalog, though, which has made it tough assembling the talent needed for a tribute band.

"When I started singing Maiden, it made me feel like all the singing I've done before has been incredibly, incredibly lazy ... My skill level has grown so much doing this music," Kim said.

And if a fan wants to hear a live performance of "Run to the Hills" or "The Number of the Beast," this may be their only opportunity. Even during the peak of their popularity in the early 1980s, Iron Maiden rarely made it to America to tour.

"It's not music that you hear live a lot — not even by them," Kim said.

"We serve a purpose," McDonald said. "We can go to these smaller markets that never see these songs and put on a show."