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The Pedal's on the Metal

By [Bondo Wyszpolski](#) | October 14th, 2010 | [1 Comment »](#)

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Drumming up some business with the all-female Iron Maidens



The Iron Maidens. Drummer Linda McDonald is second from left.

“I can be kind of a shy person,” says Linda McDonald, “so how is it that I end up with the instrument with the loudest voice? How does that work? I don’t know. My brother was playing guitar, and at the time I thought piano... violin... Those are all beautiful instruments but I was ready for something a little more satisfying. He was playing guitar, so I figured I was either gonna play the bass or the drums, whichever I could find first.”

I can imagine which one that was...

“Yeah. I picked up the *Recycler* and I found a nice drum set for sale. That’s how I ended up playing the drums.”

And she’s made quite a career out of it. McDonald is an integral part of an all-female heavy metal band called The Iron Maidens – an Iron Maiden tribute band – and they’re playing Brixton this Saturday.



Linda McDonald in action. Photo by Ernie Manrique

Pounding those skins

Linda McDonald is also a local girl, so to speak, who was raised in Rancho Palos Verdes, in a home where her parents still live.

“Since I was seven,” she explains. “I did most of my growing up there: elementary school, middle school, high school, the works.”

So you attended Peninsula High?

“Do we have to put the year that I graduated?” I agree to let her off the hook. “Yay! I graduated from what is now Peninsula High, but when I graduated it was actually Rolling Hills High School, before the two merged” – the two being Rolling Hills and Palos Verdes High.

When did you become interested in being a musician?

“I’ve played musical instruments for most of my life,” McDonald replies; “I started playing piano when I was about five, and I tried a slew of other instruments until high school when I found the drums. I think every child, when they start to play an instrument, has a dream of someday [becoming, or emulating] your favorite rock star. That was the goal, I guess. I really just thought it was for fun, but one thing led to another and the hobby never stopped.”

Drums make a lot of noise. Did you have a place in the house to practice?

“I did, actually. God bless my parents. I had my room and they dealt with it any time I wanted to play, up until 8 p.m., because they too thought it was a hobby that was gonna end any day.”

Little did they know.

After high school, McDonald moved to Echo Park and attended the Musicians Institute in Hollywood. At the same time, she got into her first group, a three-piece unit called Andromeda.

“From there,” she continues, “my next real band was Phantom Blue, which got very lucky: We got a deal with an independent label called Shrapnel Records, which was known for its guitar players. We were the first all-female band to be signed by this label. It made a big splash in the industry and we went to Europe several times and did European tours.

“A couple of years after that we got picked up from Shrapnel onto Geffen Records, so that was a major label – and we did the whole MTV thing, we did the tours, it was just a whirlwind. It’s that dream.”

Phantom Blue, which was active from the late 1980s until about the end of the century, didn’t so much end as morph into something else.

“We were in the middle of looking for a new bass player,” McDonald explains, “and we were gonna go and do this big East Coast tour. Then the whole 9/11 thing happened. A lot of people lost more than a tour; we can’t really be sniveling about that.”

But back to that search for a new bassist.

“We had received a bit of mail from this Iron Maiden tribute band, which had two females and three males in it. One of the females was a bass player, so we thought, well, we can go and scam on their bass player; let’s go check it out. If she can play Iron Maiden, she can play Phantom Blue stuff.

“So we went down and the next thing we knew, instead of us recruiting her to our band, we were recruited into their band. They replaced the male members with the Phantom Blue guitar player and me.” McDonald chuckles at the memory. “That’s kind of how the whole Iron Maidens thing – the merge – happened, and it kind of took over from there.”

Maiden voyage

Iron Maiden isn't one of the bands that I've invested my life into the way that you have, I confess. Didn't they have their heyday more in the latter 1970s or '80s?

"I would think that they were at their height around 'Life After Death,'" McDonald says, "which was in the late '80s when that album came out, and they were just bigger than life. I believe that now they've had another resurgence."

If they're having a resurgence and are putting out new material, then isn't it up to you to learn that material as soon as possible?

"Yes and no," McDonald replies. "Some of the other Iron Maidens might want to learn the newest stuff right now, but we concentrate more on their classic era" – that is, around the time of the aforementioned "Life After Death." "But we've been around for about nine or ten years and you have to expand. Each time we get different members I think that the level of performance goes up because this band has distinguished itself by having some very technical players, some of the finest female musicians. I mean, you'd have to be to play this type of material correctly."

"So," she continues, "we've had to expand what we were learning because we can't just play the same 30 songs for ten years. Thankfully they're writing more material. The more that they produce, the more we can still play the classic stuff; there's always the ever-expanding classic stuff."

Do you just do their material?

"Only their material, because we are a tribute band."

So you don't ever slip something into the show that sounds like them but is not actually them?

"No," McDonald replies. "If you were a cover band then you could do that. But a tribute band tries to recreate the entire nuance, vibe, feel, all of the real band's show, from stage presentation to even some of the signature outfits. Except we feminize it, of course." Or maybe they don't: "Our singer tapes fur on her chest... I'm just kidding; she really does not!"

We laugh, and I tell her that it would be an interesting sight if she did.

"We like to play the stuff that the real band doesn't cover live anymore – because they are still currently touring. If you want to hear [the newer material] you can hear the real band play that. We try to cover the stuff that a lot of the diehard fans really love and will never hear live again."

There must be quite a few (male) tribute bands who play Iron Maiden.

"There are many, a lot."

Well, what do they think of you doing this? It must be rather interesting for them.

"You know what, it's almost a family thing. Everybody has something in common and we all just love the music of Iron Maiden. So it's like a big – what's the word? – kinship. Everybody wants to be on the same page because they're just celebrating the same music. There's no real competition. We didn't write this stuff, and I like to think that none of the tribute bands think they did, you know? It's all about fun."



Not that there would be any competition, but I just wonder if they're going "Hmmm..." – to see this done by an all-female band.

"I think that they might," McDonald says. "Because a lot of people tell us that the first time they come and see us, when they see the flyers or posters around, and they see girls, they think one of two things: This is either gonna be really good, or it's gonna be really bad." She laughs.

And of course the hope is that they end up thinking it was really good.

Keep riding the wave

Some of the people in the original band (Iron Maiden) have seen you perform.

"They have," McDonald says. "Bruce Dickinson, the singer, and Steve Harris, the guy behind the whole band, the bass player, came down to the show we were doing in Mexico City. We were sharing the bill with his daughter's band, because at the time Lauren Harris's band was opening up for Iron Maiden on the road. Iron Maiden had the night off, and Lauren Harris was performing at the Hard Rock with us. They were there in the backstage area; we just practically swallowed our tongue, we couldn't believe he was there. We just left him alone, we didn't want to go talk to him; we had a show to do, and his daughter had a show.

"After the show," she continues, "he [Steve Harris] came into the dressing room and he wouldn't stop talking. He was really, really sweet and full of compliments. It was almost embarrassing, we didn't know what to say. He gave us a thumbs-up and said, Go for it; continue what you're doing."

How often do you perform? And do you also play across the United States?

"We go anywhere and everywhere that's safe and that'll have us," McDonald says. "We just got back from the Pacific Northwest. We're going to go to Japan in January – we were in Japan at the beginning of this year, and we just did a live DVD which is soon to be released: I believe it's out in Japan now. We've been to Iraq, we've been to Spain; all across the U.S., Puerto Rico... It's really bizarre in a way, because we're getting to do as a tribute band a lot of the things that successful, original bands get to do – and we're a tribute band! We have to pinch ourselves every once in a while to just realize how much fun and how lucky we are to get these opportunities to play somebody else's material."

This is somewhat tongue-in-cheek. Are there male groupies?

"Well, I wouldn't call them 'groupies,'" McDonald replies. "We do have our share of male diehard fans who come out to every show possible, who like to show up early and hang out during our personal time of getting prepared for the show." She laughs. "Guy band groupies seem to be all about the sex 'n' drugs 'n' rock 'n' roll thing, but we've found that with girl bands they seem to be very respectful and sometimes very shy and just want to talk to you."

Is being a “girl” in an all-female rock and roll band a good way to meet guys – or a good way to meet bad – undesirable – guys?

“Being a girl in an all-female band will definitely have you meeting a lot of men, but I don’t think any of us have ever ended up dating or crossing any lines between the workspace and fans of the music and performances.” She catches herself. “Well, oops, one of us girls did end up marrying someone she met at one of our shows! Hmm, there is always the exception, I guess!”

What’s the best thing about being in a tribute band, and what’s the worst?

“I think the best thing, kind of what I touched on before,” McDonald says, “is just the amount of travel and place you get to go, and people you get to meet. And it’s fun. You love your job; that’s the best thing about being in a tribute band, you truly love your job.”

I guess it would be hard to be in a band like this if you don’t like the material.

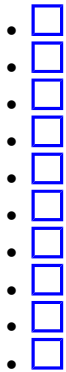
“It would be torture!” McDonald laughs. “The worst thing... how do you say this nicely... There’s some people that hate to see people get success. They think that just because you play in a tribute band that you’re not capable of writing original material, and you’re not a real musician and blah blah blah. It’s like calling people in a symphony orchestra not real musicians because all they do is cover material. The worst part is just the people that judge you for something that isn’t the case, because we’ve all done original stuff and we’re completely capable. It’s just not the path we’re on right now. This is one path.”

Speaking of paths and so forth, you’ll keep doing this until... when?

“We’re gonna ride that wave as long as it’s up,” Linda McDonald says with a big laugh. “As long as people want to see it and hear it, we’re more than happy to go that road.”

*The Iron Maidens line-up consists of Kirsten “Bruce Chickinson” Rosenberg, Linda “Nikki McBurrain” McDonald, Wanda “Steph Harris” Ortiz, Sara “Mini Murray” Marsh, and Courtney “Adriana Smith” Cox. The group plays Saturday night at Brixton, 100 Fisherman’s Wharf, on the Redondo Beach Pier. Also playing, **Pyromania** (a tribute to Def Leppard) and **Wicked Relish**. 21 and over. Doors open at 7 and the show is at 8 p.m. Tickets, \$13 in advance and \$15 at the door. (310) 406-1931. Show info at brixtonsouthbay.com, and more about The Iron Maidens at theironmaidens.com. ER*

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One Response to “The Pedal’s on the Metal”



• [David Lee](#):

[October 14, 2010 at 6:31 am](#)

I’ve seen the Iron Maidens many times and they are amazing! These girls are great musicians and great performers! By the way, our VAN HALEN and MOTLEY CRUE tributes, Fan Halen and True-2-Crue, will be at the Brixton in Redondo Beach the day after Thanksgiving Friday, Nov.

26th. Hope to see everyone there!

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