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Flowing Hair? Tight Pants? Women Can Rock That



Tracy Lennon

Kirsten Rosenberg (kneeling) of the all-female tribute band Iron Maidens, in Las Vegas in 2009. She performs as Bruce Chickinson, after Iron Maiden's Bruce Dickenson.

By AMANDA PETRUSICH
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Pat Benic

The Lez Zeppelin band, from left, Megan Thomas, Shannon Conley, Leesa Harrington-Squires and Steph Paynes in Fairfax, Va., last June.

THE four members of Misstallica huddled on a squat concrete staircase outside Asbury Lanes, a scrappy, punk-theme bowling alley and music hall a few blocks from the boardwalk here. As the band rested between sets on a recent Friday night, a stream of awestruck, moon-faced dudes crept by. “You guys are beautiful!” one sweaty admirer hollered, grinning.

The young women of Misstallica — an all-girl tribute to Metallica’s thrash-metal years — snickered, said thanks and waited patiently for him to move on. (He did, reluctantly.) While the band members tried to answer a reporter’s questions, they turned down dopey offers of ice cream, responded to inane queries like “How fun is playing bass?” and fielded requests.

“We’re only going to play ‘Creeping Death’ if you guys both take your shirts off during the ‘Die!’ chant part,” the bassist, Teddi Tarnoff, told a pair of particularly enthusiastic suitors. “Shirts off, and on your knees.”

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One of the men answered, "Not a problem."

Misstallica is a member of a growing array of all-girl metal tribute acts that routinely sell out rock clubs in New York and beyond, establishing acumen (and chops) in a business that often favors men. It may sound like a gimmick — and sometimes it is — but since the days of the Buggs (a Beatles tribute band that released one all-covers album, "The Beetle Beat," in 1964), tribute bands have spawned a mini-industry: it's an easy way to gain access to a pre-existing fan base, and on occasion it can lead to full-time work. (In 1996 Judas Priest recruited the singer of a Judas Priest tribute band temporarily to replace its lead vocalist, Rob Halford.) With ticket prices rising this summer, especially for established metal acts (a seat for Metallica at Yankee Stadium in September ranges from \$94.50 to \$229.50, plus fees; a Misstallica show usually costs around \$10), a dedicated tribute act can start to feel an awful lot like the real thing — only closer, cheaper and, in the case of Misstallica, with longer, cleaner hair to whip.

When the Misstallica women finally reassumed their instruments at the bowling alley that Friday, the crowd — mostly grown men in black T-shirts proclaiming allegiance to Motörhead, the Misfits, Tool — was borderline ecstatic. One fan, wearing jean shorts and a sleeveless, tucked-in Beavis and Butt-Head top, was so possessed by the squall that his body appeared to be operating independently of his mind. A few feet away the vocalist and guitarist Gina Gleason, 19, tall and sinewy in black skinny jeans and flat boots, ripped into "The Four Horsemen," from Metallica's 1983 album, "Kill 'Em All." Her brown hair was flailing; her teeth were bared.

Ms. Gleason, a virtuosic guitarist and untiring vocalist, has mastered the frenzied, muscular gnashing of the Metallica front man, James Hetfield, and the band's second set, like the first, was a spectacular thing to behold: along with the drummer, Kaleen Reading, 19; the guitarist Lauren Tsiptori, 16; and Ms. Tarnoff, 26, Misstallica played harder, faster and better than the words "tribute band" might imply. There was no one there who did not appear wholly satisfied, including the guy performing high kicks and running, at full speed, back and forth in front of the stage.

Before the show, the band mates posed for photographs in their dressing room, crowding onto an orange loveseat. A lone can of aerosol hairspray sat in front of a mirror; a single pair of women's underwear hung limply from a string of Christmas lights. The scene recalled the showy heyday of '80s metal — a subculture largely untouched by feminism, in which women were often seen as hangers-on, writhing on the hoods of cars or perched on their boyfriends' shoulders. For Misstallica "groupie" means something different: intimidated, deferential and male.

1 | 2 | [NEXT PAGE »](#)

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