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the IRON MAIDENS

The Iron Maidens:
An interview with Linda McDonald
Interviewer: TJ Jensen (a.k.a. Mr Toast)



Interviewer's note: I've had the pleasure of seeing the Maidens onstage for I'd guess close to a dozen and a half times since their formation, and over that time Linda and I have had several interesting conversations about her career (which is reflected in some of my questions today). I've said quite a few times that these gals are the next best thing to seeing the actual Iron Maiden live, due to how skillfully they play and their desire to put on a great stagershow, and I'm quite excited about seeing the Maidens onstage again after almost a year and a half... Anyways, on with the interview!

TJ: For those who may not be aware, tell us about how The Iron Maidens came about.

Linda: The idea stemmed from an existing tribute to Iron Maiden which had two female members in the lineup who wanted to turn the act all female. After endless months of searching, Sara was brought into the mix and at that time Josephine and I were scouting out bass players for Phantom Blue and met these girls. It was such an amazing thought to be playing a full set of Iron Maiden for people and such a rare find to come across a group of 5 women who love Maiden so much that they actually wanted to go on stage and mimick them the choice was a obvious one to take.

TJ: In the early days of the band, were the crowds receptive to your performances fairly quickly, or did it take a while to gain 'acceptance' in the LA Scene?

Linda: Like white on rice! They were receptive of the band from the very first rehearsal. People would stand outside the door and watch through the window into the room and just go crazy. It certainly made rehearsing interesting and fun! The first show was very well-attended and happily it hasn't stopped since. People just love Maiden music!

TJ: At what point did the offers to tour out of state begin to materialize?

Linda: We had only been together about 2 or 3 months tops when we did our first show, and our fourth one was in Las Vegas, NV. Our first tour was in the Pacific Northwest about one year after the band started and it gradually extended to out of the country gigs from there. We love touring!

TJ: Tell us a little about the current members of the band, and their musical backgrounds.

Linda: I started playing piano first, then a little bit of violin in grade school, dabbled on the guitar and finally got started with the drums courtesy of Clive Burr's stellar performance on Maiden Japan. I grew up on a steady diet of Zeppelin, Aerosmith, Van Halen, Judas Priest, all the 80's metal and top 40 and almost everything in between. After high school, I went to the Musicians Institute (PIT) and the Dick Grove School of Music for Summer courses over two Summers and took a few private lessons with Scott Travis. I joined Phantom Blue www.phantomblue.com as my second band and got to record with Marty Friedman co-producing our first album on Shrapnel Records and then worked with producer great, Max Norman, on our Geffen Records follow-up, and stuck it out to present day where The Iron Maidens has taken precedence.

Wanda has a B.Mus degree (UCI), and works pretty extensively freelancing as an independant musician in various different projects and groups. The last gig she did was with the Marina Del Rey Symphony Orchestra and she is a regular member of the South Coast Symphony Orchestra (both groups are in southern California). Some of her bass influences are Rush and Yes. She sits in with a blues group called [Field of Vision](#) from time to time.

Sara was raised on a healthy aural diet of The Beach Boys, Neil Diamond, jazz, and big band swing, Sara was picking out songs by ear on her keymonica by the age of 5. Private piano lessons soon followed and lasted until she borrowed her uncle's guitar and a Mel Bay chord book at 13. The next year she had her own Yamaha acoustic - one of her first projects involved transcribing Stairway To Heaven from one of her piano books. During high school Sara played Black Sabbath, Iron Maiden, Led Zeppelin, and Cream riffs on her acoustic until an afterschool job working with children at the local YMCA afforded a Les Paul copy. She bugged every local drummer to jam, showing up with a small 25w portable monitor and a Boss Heavy Metal pedal. Her first group, an all female rock band called Bandit, began in the summer of 1989 and rocked Los Angeles until 1994. At this time Sara was playing her beloved yellow B.C. Rich through a Carvin half stack, bumped up with a Boss Super Overdrive pedal. Several new guitars, amps and bands followed, as well as a move to Kansas City to finish up her Special Education Teaching degree. Sara is currently involved with several Los Angeles based tribute metal bands, including a female tribute to Ozzy with me on drums, called The Little Dolls, www.thelittledolls.com as well as composing for several original projects. Stay Tuned!

Aja has recorded and/or performed with a diverse roster of world class musicians and artists (both as a vocalist and as a songwriter) which include saxophonist Clarence Clemons (Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band), Bruce Conte (Tower of Power), Carlos Guitarlos (Top Jimmy and the Rhythm Pigs), bassist/vocalist Marco Mendoza (Soul Sirkus, Ozzy Osbourne, Whitesnake, Ted Nugent, Thin Lizzy) drummer Joey Heredia (Tribal Tech), Burleigh Drummond (Ambrosia) and Argentinian rock band, Wilma Palma, just to name a few. Her voice has been featured on radio and television commercials and TV theme songs ranging from Michelob and Asahi beer to the recent reality TV show - "He's A Lady". Check out www.ajakim.com

Liz is influenced by Kirk Hammett, Mike Patton, Jeff Hanneman and Dave Lombardo. She studied to become a luthier at Musicians Institute in Hollywood and graduated with honors back in Spring of 2002 under the instruction of Mr. John Carruthers. Liz now does basic guitar and bass repairs out of W.L.A.(visit www.myspace.com/luthierliz for a quote!) Liz's bands include Manslaughter '99 - 2001 (Project band) and her current death/black metal band Winterthrall. www.winterthrall.com
Some of Liz's favorite bands are Mr. Bungle, Faith No More, Megadeth, Metallica (old!), Slayer (Old!), Cryptopsy, Alice in Chains, Soundgarden, Grip, Fantomas, Soul Reaper, Winterthrall, Nile (Gods!), Behemoth, Dissection, Opeth, Pantera, Dead Kennedys, Vader, Decapitated, Tryo, Fabulosos Cadillacs, Pink Floyd



TJ: The Maidens have been together for some time now, with several changes in the lineup over the years. How have these changes influenced the direction of the band?

Linda: Each member, past and present, brings/brought something unique to the lineup. The band wouldn't be what it is today without any of the past members or current ones. It just followed a natural progression that proves to me that sometimes change can be a good thing, even if it's not what you were hoping for at the time. It has influenced the band by keeping things fresh and new and exciting. I'm thankful for the opportunity to be involved in this project because the common link with any members involved is a strong work ethic and high moral values and musical skills. Each lineup seems to display these traits more and more, it's incredible. Everyone is on the same page direction wise, everyone gets along like family, and everyone is a full-time musician so that's a lot to be happy about!

TJ: I understand that you have several fans that have managed to catch almost every SoCal Maidens show you've played...

Linda: YES! That is soooo awesome!!! Maiden fans are the best! The one who holds the record for the most So Cal shows attended is Jeff Milne. I think he hit #50 at the last show we did, The Rust Festival on September 24th! We invited him as a band guest to thank him. He's an avid concert goer and one of our biggest local show supporters. \m/

TJ: The Maidens have toured the Pacific Northwest, the Northeast/NYC area, and have played Montana, Arizona, and even Japan(!), and of course you've played several times here in Utah. Do any particularly memorable shows come to mind?

Linda: We also played in Canada! :-)) The Cypress Hill Smoke Out was outstanding! Two others that come to mind off the cuff are in Manhattan, NY when we were joined on stage by Alex Skolnik to play the Trooper; and in Spokane, WA we were joined on stage by Phil Campbell of Motorhead to play the Trooper also! Lemmy was going to join us too but was having throat issues so he

watched from the pinball machine in the back of the venue instead. Japan was really inspiring because it was for the Navy folks and all the young kids being away from their families was heartbreaking at times. They all needed an ear to bend after the shows and it seems we brought a little of the U.S. spirit to them by being there for them. I could go on and on! Let's not forget the time Mr. Toast made a surprise visit to one of our L.A. shows unannounced!

TJ: You've been backstage with the men of Iron Maiden several times in recent years, and they seem to be highly supportive of your efforts as a tribute band. Could you describe your feelings and thoughts as you met and were chatting with your opposite number in Maiden?

Linda: Well, this is what went on in my head: "Oh shit.....oh shit.....oh shit.....what do I say? Oh shit.....here he comes....oh shit!!!" Hee hee hee! Actually after the initial hello's it wasn't that bad.....ya right! They were all so gracious and kind. I think they could tell by how red all our faces were that we were pretty shy and intimidated to meet our heros. LOL! One of us (no names mentioned to save embarrassment!) dropped everything she was holding when Steve came over to say hi. Dave Murray was the coolest, most laid back guy, kinda like our own MiniMurray! His wife even commented how they could be related. Iron Maiden are truly world class people and are very appreciative of ALL the Iron Maiden tributes out there.

Aja and Wanda got to jam with Nicko when he was out here for a charity event rehearsal at The Joint. Happenin' Harry set it up and they played The Trooper and Wrathchild. It was a LOT easier talking to him that time around than the first meeting backstage!

TJ: What was the first time you saw Iron Maiden onstage? Any particular memories of that show?

Linda: Oh yes! It changed my life! It was at Long Beach Arena when they were touring with the Scorpions and Girlschool in 1982. I was Soooooo jealous watching Girlschool because they were sharing the stage with my beloved Iron Maiden! When I heard them I listened to the drummer and thought that it didn't seem so difficult to do what she was doing and that I wished it was ME sitting in her chair! So, hearing Clive Burr on Maiden Japan made me want to PLAY the drums, but that night just sealed the deal. I HAD to get some drums and learn to play! I remember I was bummed cuz I couldn't see Clive Burr because of the way he was tucked away on the stage set, but he sounded great anyway!



TJ: I remember you once telling me about what I believe was the first time you met your opposite number in Iron Maiden, while you were at an airport? Care to elaborate?

Linda: Ah yes. The first encounter I had with an Iron Maiden man was at the London airport. I just finished a six week European tour with my band Phantom Blue and we were waiting at the boarding gate for our flight when I heard a voice over the paging system requesting Clive Burr to gate blah blah blah. I couldn't believe my ears! I did the obvious thing and ran over to that gate like it was me they just paged and there he was! One of my bandmates brought me one of our band albums to give to him, but I was so lost for words (not to mention having THE worst hangover of my entire life that day!) and asked him to sign my record. Errrrr. I have photos of it, it's hilarious! I did introduce myself though and got to personally thank him for his inspiration and wonderful playing.

TJ: Iron Maiden has had more than one drummer in the lineup over the years, each with his own unique style of drumming. What can you tell us of their styles, and about the challenges in nailing down all the drumming elements and differing styles on the various Maiden songs, and then incorporate them into your own drumming technique?

Linda: They are two completely different styles of drummers who carry the music of Maiden so differently. I consider Clive Burr's drumming more of a raw and rough burst of energy and certainly more influenced by the earlier punk scene. He has one hell of a right hand and that's probably the biggest challenge with learning the Clive Burr parts accurately! I just love his feel. Nicko is the king of quiriness at times! He is more technically inclined in his approach with Maiden and has a right foot that you wouldn't believe! It's not as easy for me to catch his parts sometimes without pulling my hair out. I love how he puts all the little accents in with his left hand on the hi-hat and intricate little subtleties in odd places that give his beats that Nicko groove and feel. It's pointless to compare the two so I don't understand when people say "which one is better?". They were both perfect for the eras of Maiden they were/are involved in. It would be interesting to hear how Clive Burr would have played on the Nicko stuff. I try to stick as close to the original drumming as I can, but every once in a while I have to add a little of my own flavor where it won't affect the overall Maiden feel of the songs.

TJ: Which Iron Maiden album do you think is the most underrated overall?

Linda: Seventh Son of a Seventh Son. That album is classic material from beginning to end! It took me more than a few listens to get it, but then it hits you how masterful it really is. It was a change in their sound, a step in a slightly different mood, at the time but it stands out to me now because of the same reasons.



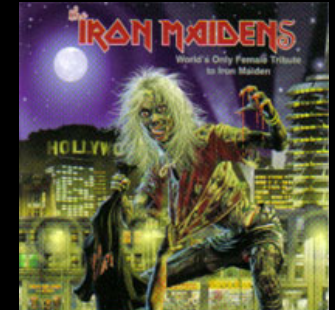
TJ: The Maidens recently recorded a full length Tribute CD, and I understand that you did this in the same studio that Bruce Dickinson did some of his recordings in. What was it like to record in the same studio as Bruce?

Linda: One of the things that sold us on Silver Cloud Studios when we were studio shopping was the overall vibe of the place and the easy going nature of Joe Floyd (owner/producer/guitar player -Warrior). The guitar sounds they are known for pumping out there was another selling point. There were plaques all over the walls of all the people who had recorded there, Halford, Megadeth, Warrior, and of course, Bruce Dickinson amongst others. I know Aja was particularly inspired by this, whenever she needed to break and find a moment to dig deeper those Bruce CD's on the wall seemed to give her a boost somehow. There was a ghost at the studio too! I saw it from the board during a break and it was lurking about my drumset, peeking around the China cymbal, and then quickly disappeared. It was definitely a male. Jojo and I saw a glimpse of something in the guitar hall, and Sara had a sort of tug-o-war at the front door with it! It was pulling the door open as she was trying to shut it, so she let go, then the door wiggled and slammed shut all by itself. That sent Sara and Mark, our manager, running down the hall to the main room white as the ghost itself! A lot of door opening and closing within the studio. Very bizarre!

TJ: I imagine that you were quite happy to FINALLY get the CD completed, what with all the fans (im)patiently waiting for it! How do you feel about the CD overall?

Linda: That's an understatement! Hee hee. So many people were requesting this CD from us, which is the whole reason we even did it in the first place. We did the best job we could with the budget and time restraints we had, and the expertise of the folks at Silver Cloud made the production value as good as it could be considering. We each had about 2 days to get our sounds dialed in and record all our individual parts.....that's pretty whacky but somehow doable at the end of the day! The feed back from the fans has been overwhelming! Huge thanks to

everyone!!!! I think most people appreciate the fact we went all-out on this by getting Derek Riggs to create a brand new, never before seen female monster in the style of Eddie to make this tribute CD as Maidenly as we could. He named her Edwina T. Head and her likeness was inspired by Paris Hilton. Being the first full-length studio cd recorded by one band, I'm sure you'll be seeing a trend of more tribute bands releasing CDs soon. You can pick up a copy at any of our live shows, at our online store <http://www.theironmaidens.com/store/store.html> and at any HMV store throughout all of Europe. To hear samples, check out www.myspace.com/theironmaidens and have a listen to the jukebox.



TJ: While I'm sure that you love every Maiden song you play, are there any particular Maiden songs that have special meaning to you?

Linda: Genghis Khan makes me really happy to play! When I was starting out on the drums that was one song I brought to my drum teacher and asked how to play it, and I just could not do it. It was a song I labeled as a "Can't be played by me" song. LOL! Never say never!

TJ: You and JoJo (the original Iron Maidens guitarist along with Sara) used to be in Phantom Blue, which incidentally played here in Salt Lake at some point during the 1990's. How did Phantom Blue come together? Any particular memories from the Phantom Blue days you'd like to share?

Linda: Phantom Blue came together in the late 80's. Through word of mouth and Recycler ads we all found each other and Racer X and Maiden were big influences. The fondest memories of Phantom Blue are what we endured to break barriers and help open doors for female musicians in metal. It wasn't always pretty, but it sure thickened the skin. Getting that first record contract with Shrapnel was exciting, but signing to Geffen was a dream come true (so I thought). I went out and bought myself a dragon to celebrate! LOL! The whole recording on a big budget was a real dream come true and all the touring was just unimaginable! It was a long and truly enjoyable time of my life. The good old days! :-) Now I am having just as much fun with The Iron Maidens!

TJ: Any chance of a Phantom Blue reunion in the near future?

Linda: You never know what the future has in store. I definitely think this world is loooong overdue for a female metal band with chops again. The Maidens have been playing around with some original ideas lately so we shall see what comes next. Coincidentally, I am going to be doing some recording with Michelle Meldrum next month but it's not for Phantom Blue.

TJ: I also understand that Phantom toured Europe at some point. And I know that there are several European fans that are patiently awaiting The Iron Maidens European shows. I imagine you are pretty anxious to play Europe at some point again...

Linda: I am DYING to get back to Europe! Europe is soooooo awesome!!! Metal is so much more acceptable there by society's standards they are able to celebrate it with all those killer festivals everywhere!!!! We are seriously hoping to get to Europe in 2006 and spread the love of Iron Maiden!



TJ: You and Sara also play in another tribute band, The Little Dolls. How are the Dolls doing these days?

Linda: The Little Dolls is our Female Tribute to all eras of OZZY! It's a blast playing that stuff and Sara just goes off!!!! We are looking forward to getting out there with this side project soon! Maybe to Utah??? You can check it out at www.thelittledolls.com

TJ: What other projects have you been working with recently?

Linda: A couple side bands that gig once every blue moon, a guitarist from Argentina named Carina Alfie who is like a female Steve Vai, and Sara and I are also auditioning vocalists for yet another female tribute band, this one to Judas Priest. Why so many projects? I'm a workaholic and can't stand not performing. I HATE being stagnant beyond belief! Sara too! With 5 working musicians in the band, there are times the Maidens are not available for bookings, so these side projects come into play.

TJ: Lately, female metal musicians seem to be much more prominently featured in the metal scene, and the labels currently seem to be taking female-fronted and all female metal bands a little more seriously than in the past. From your perspective, having been in an all female metal band since back in the '90s, how do you feel about the future for female metal musicians? And, do you have any words of caution for them?

Linda: I think it's about bloody time this happened! \m/ The future is definitely brighter! Musicians today have so many more tools available to them via the internet, instructional DVDs, tabs, home recording studios, etc. that the learning curve is way above what it was in my early days! The quality of musicianship has just exploded and it's very exciting to see so many young girls getting into the heavier stuff and playing it! The fact that Kittie made waves is good, cuz all we had in my time was Vixen, who were so not metal. (nice girls though) I'd love to see the next female band be heavier and just set the bar higher. A female Cacophony would be INSANE! Words of caution, get yourself a good, honest manager to represent you, preferably a man, or you become the bitch. Keep your head on straight, practice, practice, practice and work hard!!!

TJ: What bands/CDs have you been listening to a lot lately?

Linda: Sara turned me on to some COB and Opeth that I'm liking and the new SOD.

TJ: Are there any new and/or relatively unknown bands that you are particularly excited about?

Linda: Yes, the stuff Sara's been writing! I'm also hearing a lot of really good unsigned bands through friend requests on Myspace believe it or not! They have songs on their jukeboxes and some of this stuff just blows me away. There's quite a few bands from Israel I've heard that were good. You get exposed to bands from all over the world. Unfortunately I don't have them bookmarked so I'm at a loss for the names right now. DOH! *sorry*

TJ: Back to the subject at hand (the Maidens), this will be the fourth time (and the seventh and eighth show) that The Iron Maidens have played in Salt Lake. I imagine that Salt Lake has some unique memories for you...

Linda: Yes indeed, and hopefully we've made many for everyone we played for in Utah! And many new ones to come this weekend! Please come out and welcome our new guitar player, Liz!

TJ: You gals always seem to have a great time onstage, what with all the stage props and everything. Does playing Maiden tunes to hordes of adoring fans still have that 'kid in the candy store' feel after all this time?

Linda: This music is timeless and it never gets old playing it to rabid Maiden fans! It only gets sweeter and sweeter cuz we use real sugar!!!!



