

Iron Maidens prepare to rock Juneau

All-female tribute band to play Marlintini's Lounge

COURTNEY NELSON

For the Juneau Empire



Photo Courtesy of Ernie Manrique

Run to the Hills: From left, Sara Marsh, Aja Kim, Linda McDonald, Wanda Ortiz and Heather Baker are the Iron Maidens, the only all-female Iron Maiden tribute group. They will be performing live at 10 p.m. Nov. 16 at Marlintini's Lounge.

Linda McDonald, drummer for the tribute band Iron Maidens, never dreamed that being sent home from high school for a few days for being a bad girl could be such a good thing.

She was bored at home, so she raided her brother's record cabinet. Drawn to pictures of Eddie, Iron Maiden's skeletal, demonic-looking mascot, she played the album. This began her love affair with their music, and she decided then that she wanted to be a drummer.

The Iron Maidens formation began when members of Phantom Blue, an original band headed by Linda McDonald, went to recruit a bass player from a coed Iron Maiden tribute band. The band, wanting to go all female, recruited them instead. It all came together when they picked lead singer Aja Kim, after an arduous six-month audition process.

Two months later the band was playing venues all over Southern California, as well as trekking around the globe. The band says they are welcomed internationally because "we are blessed with having an unusually high profile because we have the distinction of being the world's only (Iron Maiden) female tribute band."

People apparently can't believe that women can play the music. The women have

heard repeated stories of skeptics who were converted after seeing their first show. McDonald pointed out that if they weren't any good, "Iron Maiden fans would know, and they would never see our shows again."

The original Iron Maiden was formed in 1975 in London and released its first album in 1980. The band has made more than 25 albums, releasing its latest CD in 2006. An "iron maiden" is a medieval, upright-coffin torture device designed to contain and pierce its occupant so he or she would die a slow, painful death. The tribute band "Iron Maidens" think this is an appropriate symbol because of their female aspect. They are iron maidens playing heavy metal, the band said.

Lead singer Aja Kim (who plays Bruce Dickinson) and McDonald say their band's success is largely due to the dedicated fans. The band feeds off the great crowd energy. The Iron Maidens say that their male fans worship them, while their female fans find them empowering role models.

The Iron Maidens enjoy all-age audiences the most, and love to see fathers introduce their sons to the music.

"Kids are going crazy for Iron Maiden right now because it's real music and there's a hunger for that." Kim added, "Iron Maiden is to fathers and sons what Tom Jones is to mothers and daughters."

One dedicated fan just celebrated his 80th Iron Maidens show.

The Iron Maidens are huge fans of the band themselves. McDonald's favorite songs are from the band's first three albums because they "represent their roots, the music is raw, and I cut my teeth on it." Kim loves the "Seventh Son of a Seventh Son" album because all the songs are interrelated and part of a story.

The band was thrilled when they got to meet the original Iron Maiden members backstage after a performance, but Iron Maiden has yet to see the women perform live.

In addition to playing in Iron Maidens, all the band members are dedicated to music in other ways. Wanda Ortiz (who plays bassist Steph Harris) also is first chair in the South Coast Symphony on upright bass.

Heather Baker (who plays Adrian Smith) is working on an original project called the Afterlife.

Sara Marsh (who plays MiniMurray) is working on her own compositions, as well.

And Singer Kim performs rhythm and blues, working with Bruce Conte from Tower of Power. She also has a solo CD out called "Modern Babylon."

The Iron Maidens will have their live CD and DVD combo available at the show.