

WOMEN in Metal

The metal record that changed my life



AMI LAWLESS
(VOETSEKI)



NAPALM DEATH

Scum

Being a kid of the late '70s and '80s, I owned every Led Zeppelin album; some game-changers for me in those years were definitely Van Halen I and KISS *Alive!* Then came Napalm Death with *Scum*. That album single-handedly changed my whole concept of bad-ass music. That album will always hold a special place in my heart.



The metal industry's leaders work tirelessly to share the music they love with the rest of the world. Just don't call them girls.

by JEANNE PURY

THE SAYING GOES:

Behind many a successful metal band is an exhausted woman. OK, we may have doctored that one up a bit, but it's the truth. From old-school stalwarts like Slayer and Testament to today's killers like Ghost and Baroness, metal bands rely on a barrage of selfless professionals to get their music to your ears. That entails bookkeeping, financial planning, advertising, tour managing and loads more duties that are on par with those of Fortune 500 executives. And yes, a handful of the key players in the metal music business just so happen to be female. ¶ This piece is not about these women in the metal business; it's about the business in these metal women. Each of the 14 we interviewed spoke about how rigorously she's worked to prove herself worthy of everyone's respect. Seeing as how metal is very much patriarchal, their successes are no small feats, but not everyone wants to think about that. ¶ "Metal is a male-dominated world," writes Liz Ciavarella-Brenner, co-owner and operator of EarsplitPR, who works with Watain, Cattle Decapitation, the Devil's Blood and others. "But sometimes I think signaling yourself out as a female just helps further perpetuate a gap. Play hard or go home." ¶ We understand where she's coming from. Who would want to be considered "pretty good for a girl"? Not only is it illogical to measure someone's success in terms of gender; it's also not fair. Does that mean we should turn a blind eye to the struggle for equality? We're inclined to (loudly) say no. ¶ "To be a feminist in 2012 is to accept that there actually are gender differences," writes Monica Seide, Speakeasy PR founder, who represents Tool, Melvins, Kylesa and Rammstein, among others. ¶ "I'm actually really honored and proud to be asked to participate in this [article]," says Tracy Vera, CFO/general manager of Metal Blade and a 30-year veteran of the industry. "There are too few women in the business, and our accomplishments should be highlighted." ¶ Until all women have equality across the board, you better believe we're going to high-five our sisters every chance we get.

YOU BETTER WORK

Echoed by many was a hesitancy to acknowledge one's success as a woman within a male-dominated infrastructure. Put work before womanhood, with the idea being that you can control the former, but not the latter. And it's not like music is exclusive in its inequality.

"I have worked with guys who have serious issues with women," writes Kate Richardson, vice president of Housecore Records, co-manager of Philip H. Anselmo, tour manager/production manager of Down and studio manager of Nosferatu's Lair. "But I don't think that's exclusive to the music industry whatsoever."

"It goes with the territory," says Kristen Mulderig, manager at the RSE Group, representing Slayer, Ghost and Bullet for My Valentine. "It" being idiots who, in 2012, continue to get blindsided by a pair of tits.

"Guys are more skeptical of women because they consider extreme music to be their territory, but whatever. Prove them wrong," writes Loana dp Valencia (*italics, hers*), who runs publicity and video promotions for Nuclear Blast USA, and handles vocals for death metallers Dia de los Muertos. "Is that discrimination? Personally, I don't think so. It's gatekeeping, a way to assess what type of fan you are: a poseur, a hipster, a flavor-of-the-month chaser or a die-hard lifer."

These women's familiarity with such meatehead attitudes fosters a desensitization to discrimination, for better or worse. A few interviewees denied ever having experienced gender bias in their professional careers, but most who did chose a very "keep calm, carry on" retaliation plan.

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"I'm sure I've been subjected to some sort of discrimination, but I just never chose to dwell on it," says Mulderig. "I rather

spend my time overcoming obstacles than falling victim to them. You can get caught in that negative headspace and use that as an excuse [as to] why you're not moving forward."

Shannon Ward, owner of Philly-based indie Anthropic Records, puts it bluntly: "If I spent my time worrying about how my vagina is affecting my business, I would never get anything done."

In this field, nothing earns you credibility faster than your ability to make things happen. You want to impress people? Be professional and keep your nose to the grindstone (no pun intended). There are no walk-on spots on this team.

"As a woman, it's easy to fall into the victim trap," writes Barcelona-born, London-based photographer Ester Segarra, who shot the cover of this issue and claims Electric Wizard, Cathedral and Paradise Lost among her growing list of subjects. "Sometimes you think you're being discriminated [against] because of your gender, but it might well be that you're not good enough."

Not everyone is buying the all's-fair-in-love-and-metal line. [·]

◀ Pole position

McElroy blacks out with Behemoth on the *Decibel Magazine* Tour

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THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF



OSZY OSBOURNE

Tribute: Randy Rhoads

The Randy Rhoads tribute album would inspire any aspiring guitarist. It is definitely the album that influenced me the most as a guitar player. The solos are out of this world! Added to that, that he co-wrote many of Ozzy's greatest songs and created some of the most awesome riffs in heavy metal—then you have a truly epic guitarist! I first heard about Randy Rhoads when I read an interview in a guitar magazine where Ozzy talked about all his guitar players. "Mr. Crowley" was tabbed in there, and it was one of the first songs I tried to wrap my head around. I instantly fell in love with it and started my hunt for the tribute album. When I finally found it, I was ecstatic and listened to it religiously. I think the guitar solo he did in "Children of the Grave" is one of the greatest solos ever. The complete tabs for this album are out of print, which is a shame!

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KELLIE CHOPPER
(FUNERAL WHORE)



GRAVE

Into the Grave

I started to play guitar when Roy [singer of Funeral Whore] and me started the band in 2006. The record that got me into this style of music was Grave's *Into the Grave*.

We had a difficult time because it was not easy to find the drummer that we needed who was into this style of metal. But since mid-2010 everything has been going great! I enjoy every second! I love the metal world, making music, drinking beer, playing gigs, going on trips, meeting great people and listening to awesome old-school death music from other bands!



✦ **It's in her blood**
Metal Blade's Vera makes the cut

Do not cross these—or any—women, who are on a never-ending quest to participate in the industry. “I pretty much lay it out for people, because I think I’ve earned that respect to say, ‘Look, I’m not going to tolerate this,’” says a heated McElroy. “This is my house now, this is my tour—we’re all going to be respectful.”

SISTERS ARE DOING IT FOR THEMSELVES

At age 18, Kelli Malella had already interned for PR agency MSO and worked her first Warped Tour, when big-shot indie label Metal Blade offered her an internship.

She declined.

“If you wanna hire me, hire me. I’m not working for free,” she recalls telling them. After a few months of back and forth, the label relented and brought her on staff in 2001. In time, two senior publicists left within months of each other. Malella walked into the president’s office and pitched him. “I said, ‘Listen, I know I can do this job. Why don’t you hire me an assistant, and make me the head publicist?’” The label took a chance on her. At age 24, she was one of the youngest head publicists they’ve ever had. She’s now 32 and the VP of publicity and advertising.

Oddly enough, it was a lack of confidence that led Katherine Ludwig to her tenure as the influential editor of a pioneering extreme metal magazine. She had been writing a column called “Scrap Metal” (about thrash bands) for hair-metal-fabulous *Metal Edge*, when the magazine decided to put Ludwig in charge of a one-time issue devoted to the heavier bands that she frequently covered. Along with her friend Marina Zogbi, she filled every page.

That one-time magazine sold so well and so quickly, the company decided to publish it bi-monthly, with Ludwig as its editor. Thus, *Metal Maniacs* was born.

“I took the magazine too seriously, but didn’t take myself seriously,” she writes. “I always felt under-qualified to run a magazine, so it had to be incredible so no one would know out how under-qualified I was.”

Such humility runs rampant through these women, especially Paula Hogan. As the general manager of U.K.-based Candlelight Records, she resides outside of Philadelphia as one of three (yes, three) worldwide employees. She works with every band on the label’s roster, including Fear Factory, Corrosion of Conformity and Orange Goblin.

“Anything that needs to get done, [I] do,” she says matter-of-factly. Hogan is primed for it. Starting in the early ‘90s, she worked her way up through Century Media, Mechanic/Futurist (later Mayhem), Peaceville and Nuclear Blast. In her career, she’s handled publicity for the likes of Cradle of Filth, Dio, Testament and many more. She was promoted to president of Nuclear Blast, a position she held for more than a year, but when the company moved west, Hogan stayed east and helped launch U.S. operations for U.K.-based Candlelight. That was 11 years ago.

“It’s nonstop, but it’s something I wanted to do, and I love it. It’s better than selling shoes,” she says with a laugh. Oh, Hogan also works with numerous animal-rescue organizations and trains martial arts at night (she’s got a black belt in tae kwon do).

“My personal opinion is that [women who say they’ve been treated equally are] playing it safe. It’s a boys’ club, and they don’t want to speak out,” says Kristin “Gypsy” McElroy, manager of the 2012 *Decibel* tour. “This industry is all about everyone getting along, whether or not [we] actually do.”

ONLY WOMEN BLEED

When asked what she’d like to change about her industry, Segarra responded: “For people to stop seeing [me] first as a woman and then whatever [my] job is second.” Though she has the distinction of being the only photographer allowed to shoot Varg Vikernes for Burzum’s *Belus* (his first post-prison album), Segarra often wonders what her life and career would be like were she not a “pint-sized female” and rather a six-foot-tall man.

“This is a male-dominated business, and every woman in it has come a long way to stand her ground,” writes Yvette Uhlmann, artist manager for Plan B & Direct Management, who has been representing Dimmu Borgir since 2001. “As a woman in metal, you have to work twice as hard to get on with your career and gain respect from your male coworkers.”

“It’s a boys’ club, it really is,” declares McElroy, who says promoters have refused to shake her hand or look her in the eye.

“The fact that you’re in metal and in the business side of things makes it doubly a boys’ club,” adds Kelli Malella, VP of publicity and advertising for Metal Blade. “I’ve always joked, you’re either looked at as a bitch or a slut,” she says with a dry, slightly bitter laugh. “They’re looking at you like, ‘Oh, you’re just here because you want to fuck bands.’”

Shannon Ward can vouch for that one. She dated the former co-owner of Anthropic, “a pretty well-known musician,” but was never looked at as his business partner. “I was always the girlfriend,” she writes. “Because you obviously can’t be involved in metal without fucking some dude, right?” The guy is no longer in the picture, but the label is, with Ward as its sole owner.

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SUSANNA SALMINEN

(KATANA)



SLAYER

Reign in Blood

People often say stuff like, "I remember when I was 10 years old and

I got my first KISS record, and it totally changed my life!" but I can't recall a specific moment like that.

Maybe when I first saw Hardcore Superstar live in 2001 (I was 12 by that time) and bought their record *Bad Sneakers* and a *Piña Colada* when it was released a couple of days later (by that time, I was still more into radio music), and a couple of months later I'm all dressed in black and listening to heavier music such as Slayer, Metallica, Marduk and so on. But I really can't remember how I got into black/death through a rock 'n' roll album. I have a feeling that someone introduced me to *Reign in Blood*, and there's no turning back after hearing that album!

Maria Ferrero's crazy trip began when she knocked on the door of a house in Old Bridge, New Jersey, because her friend told her the couple who lived there, the Zazulas, promoted metal shows and had a record store that sold killer music. Ferrero noticed the couple had a cute little baby, and so she offered to babysit as a way of getting her foot in the door. "I would hang out at their house and help them, open mail, cook lunch, answer phones, whatever," she writes. The Zazulas' business bloomed into Megaforce, and they started *Crazed Management* as well. Ferrero learned as she went along and orchestrated the massive press release announcing Joey Belladonna as Anthrax's

new singer, which earned her the title "the Publicist" at age 17. "I had no idea what that even meant," she writes.

At age 19, Ferrero signed Testament to Megaforce Records and ran their PR campaign. Later, she signed Ministry to management from 1990 to 1996 and ran all of their press.

"Even though I was not motivated financially or had formal training," Ferrero writes, "I found it to be super-gratifying to be a part of what I was so passionate about." With more than 30 years in the business, she is now the owner and CEO of Adrenaline PR, representing Lamb of God, the Rockstar Energy Drink Mayhem Festival, Dethklok and others, and manages *A Life Once Lost*. Oh, and the Zazulas' baby is now 31 and working at Adrenaline.

These are not isolated incidents of success. We could fill three issues with the accomplishments of the women interviewed herein. All of them have a similar story—no one gave them a free pass; they saw openings and made their own ways and means by busting their asses and never giving up.

SHE'S GOT A WAY

There are advantages to being a female in the metal business. Women are traditionally thought of as caregivers, and there's an emotional component that they bring to the table. Granted, these are sweeping generalizations, but for certain interviewees, this tenderness aids them in doing their jobs and earns them the gratitude of their employers.

"Being a strong businesswoman and having nurturing qualities actually gives me more of an up," says Mulderig. "There are times when you need to take care of people, and by having those qualities, I think it helps me more than hinders me."

Similarly, when Richardson hosts Housecore bands from out of town, she cooks healthy meals for them. "The guys always appreciate a home-cooked meal after a hard day in the studio," she writes. "It never hurts the overall morale; I thoroughly enjoy cooking, and we save a lot of money, too!"

"One of my guys was sick after a show in Baltimore, and he was vomiting on the sidewalk," says McElroy, recalling a night on the recent *Decibel* tour. "All the guys were walk-



ing past him, and I was like, 'No, fuck this.' So I'm grabbing towels, taking him bottles of water, holding his hair back while he pukes until he's better. I don't know if that's a female trait; it could be a human trait."

That sort of conscientiousness goes a long way in proving these women have something invested in the bands other than a paycheck. And it's not just the bands that benefit—peers and colleagues are important, too.

"I don't want to generalize, but I think women tend to think holistically; women tend to be better team players. I think women work harder," says Metal Blade's Vera. "Men tend to do this thing where they have this little pissing contest with each other; it's sort of like everybody wants to be the top dog, sometimes to the detriment of the situation. Women are more willing to solve a problem as opposed to pissing in a circle around it."

"I'm not saying ours is a utopian subculture, but we're all pretty closely connected," writes Valencia. "If people start getting fired all of sudden at another label or experience any sort of life tragedy, you can't help but worry about them."

There is no bonus for caring handed out at the end of the year, but if there were, labels and bands would be cutting checks left and right. It can be hard to not take the job personally, even (especially?) for these self-made superheroes.

"I am genuinely affected when I believe in an artist and the press doesn't react," says Seide. "As a professional, you try to rationalize the reasons why things might not have clicked for an artist or why you like the band and someone else doesn't, but it is not always that easy."

"I'm out here really pushing Fear Factory right now," says Hogan, "but it doesn't mean I'm caring any less for Rumpelstiltskin Grinder." There's a frustration in her voice that leans toward concern, not for the bottom line, but for fear that she may be letting people down. But there are only so many hours in a day, and one person can do only so much. "I've had to learn those lessons," she says, but it's not clear she believes that enough to cut herself some well-deserved slack. A woman's work is never done. [dB]

☞ **Office max**
Kelli Maella's desk is cooler than yours