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1 Ship, 3 Stages, 4 Days, 40 Bands, 2000 Fans:

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BY HEATHER SMITH

"The greatest music festival ever in the world ever."

Fear Factory's Burton C. Bell

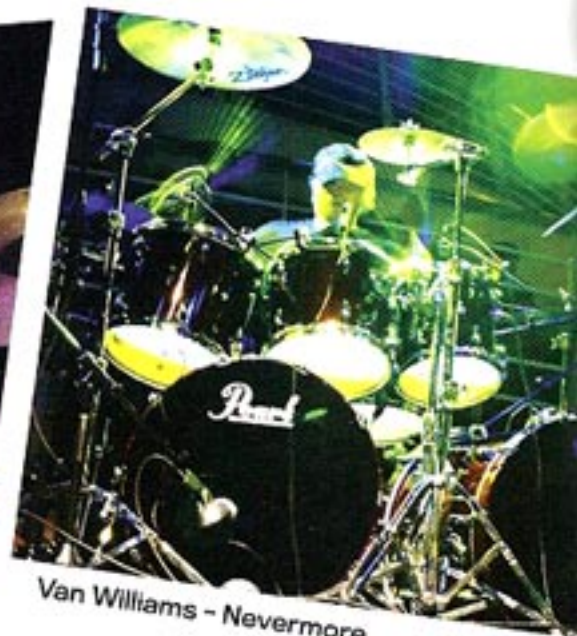
With music from 10:45 a.m. until 4:15 a.m., a true fan could be immersed around the clock.



Michael Ehre - Uli Jon Roth



Mark Lima - Trouble



Van Williams - Nevermore

In The Beginning

Imagine it: you're on your balcony in Vancouver watching the cruise ships go in and out thinking, "You know that's a nice thing to do." But lightning strikes and you think—it would be better if I put a metal festival on one of those ships and cast off to open water.

To the uninitiated a cruise ship full of metalheads sounds like a disaster waiting to happen, but to tour promoter Andy Piller, it sounded like just the thing. Festivalgoers have been demanding more and different entertainment options, and this seemed like a sure bet. In the works for four years, Piller's biggest obstacle was the financing, but with that hurdle crossed, his next was convincing the cruise lines that the heathens onboard would be peaceful. Piller says, "Yeah, of course there were some reservations from the cruise lines in the beginning because they didn't really know what to expect. So I had to educate them to a certain degree. I sent them press material about heavy metal festivals over all Europe, showing them what a close community it is; how friendly and peaceful the whole metal community is. How those events usually go down without any

major incidences. In the end we convinced them, and now the cruise line is a big fan of ours, [they should be, it was rumored that alcohol sales were a little under 666% above 'normal' cruises], and of course would love to have us back. Once you have one under your belt, it's always easier. But if you have no track record you try to do something that no one has ever done before, it wasn't an easy task to get them to let us do it. But as you can see, it worked out great." Securing a partner in Royal Caribbean, Piller toured several vessels to find one that could accommodate three stages, and settled on The Majesty of The Seas, which, because of the obstacle free pool deck, could accommodate building the outdoor stage.

I have to admit I was skeptical at first. I mean, come on, a cruise ship filled with metalheads? Are they going to get the niceties of relaxing on the high seas or will it be a raucous assault in the cabins and a mess in the lounges? None of this was farther from the experience. Although, if you were there for the music, and we all were, there wasn't much chance for rest. With music from 10:45 a.m. until 4:15 a.m., followed by metal karaoke and open mic nights, a true fan could be immersed around the clock.

Arriving at the Port of Miami Monday morning we were greeted by excited hordes of queued black T-shirt clad men and women—the same throngs that are at Europe's great metal festivals. There was one apparent difference: there was no separate check-in for artists, journalists, VIPs. Everyone was together throughout the cruise, not just here at check in. There isn't the room on a ship for a separate artist/VIP area. We were all just travelers/cruisers, and this was to be one of the coolest and most distinctive parts of the cruise. The other notable difference was that the crowd was missing its younger members. It was still a cruise, and the majority of passengers appeared a little older than the 'normal' metal crowd. To me they appeared to be in their late-20s to early-40s. And although we left from Miami, only 30% of us were Americans, the rest of the crowd was mainly Europeans (17% Germans), with a significant number of Canadians (10-12%) and then, surprisingly, Australians.

Checking in was like going to Disney. Get your luggage tag, drop your bag, line up for your onboard ID card, a round of metal detectors including pat down (they found my underwire bra and yes, guys like to stare as women pat down women). Finally it's time to cross the gangway and board.



Will Carroll - Death Angel



Dave Budbill - Sanctuary

"It still was a little tricky to try to play some of these hard-core, technical passages while rocking from side to side." - Gene Hoglan



Gene Hoglan - Fear Factory



Paul Bostaph - Testament

All Aboard

The first thing we all had to do was rush to see our cabin. The stunning immensity of a cruise liner's size, basically a floating skyscraper, is inverted by its cabins. I can't imagine the physical gymnastics that allow a 6 foot tall man to shower. That being said, their size does encourage you to get out, and with the CONSTANT availability of music, which is what this cruise was about, it would have been a waste to stay in the cabin for more than the basics.

After exploring the cabins, we headed upstairs to the cafeteria for lunch. To our delight there was way better food than I'd ever eaten at a music festival (remember: this was a Royal Caribbean Cruise ship). Imagine a university cafeteria, but good, with a carving table (roast beef), pasta station, fresh fruits and vegetables, coffee and lots of cuisine choices including different Asian foods (nod to "South Park," they had Cauliflower Mongolian, really). Additionally the formal dining room was open for seating throughout the day and evening. This kept you free from missing your favorite band because you had to "go to dinner," but also allowed us to revel in the food that cruise

liners are renowned for. Satiated, we stepped out, grabbed our inaugural beer and wandered out to watch the crew assemble the outside stage. The ship could not be loaded until the previous cruise was offloaded, so they couldn't load the sound equipment or begin assembling the stages until we were boarded midday. With music slated to start at 7:00 p.m. on three stages, the sound crew was working furiously to get everything built, wired for sound and ready for the week's entertainment. The outdoor stage was on the top pool deck, and to accommodate the outdoor stage and audience, they covered one of the two pools allowing an open area for viewing. The other two stages were indoors, in the back of the boat. One was just a small round stage the size of your local corner bar's, including silk flower arrangement. The third stage was in the ship's theater, and the best of the three. Here there were cushy seats and benches from which to watch, and different levels, allowing everyone to have a good view. With the ship casting off from port and the evening's performances underway, the mood on the cruise was pure elation. Moving from one stage to the next, it was great to see how the different bands and drummers

were handling the heave and ho of the ship. Although it is a big cruise liner, and it didn't roll like your friends ski boat, we were still on open water (matey!).

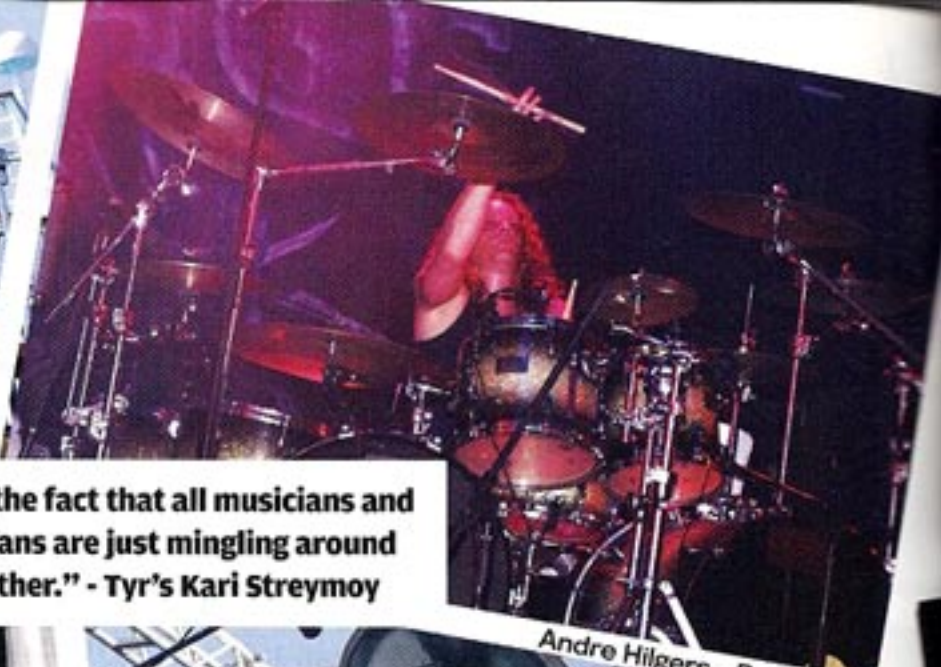
It's An Honor

The drummers I spoke with were thrilled to be included in the event. Forbidden's Mark Hernandez said, "When I first heard of it I thought, 'Well this'll be great.' But at the same time I really wasn't sure what to think, and even up until boarding the ship, I wasn't sure. I was really uncertain of how it was gonna work out, and I would say now I am really honored and really proud to be part of the first one because this has been an amazing success. I've seen some of the bands that I'm big fans of and friends with, and they just really pulled it up a notch. We got to see Saxon last night. It was like, how many times can you say in your lifetime you got to see Saxon perform 'Wheels of Steel,' '747s,' 'Strangers of the Night.' It's like these are all songs that we grew up on: But I got to witness it on this boat, kind of like in a private setting. I would say I'm just truly honored."

Agent Steel's Rigo Amezucua echoed those sentiments, "You know, oddly enough a couple of my friends did the Baja Run [a



Kari Streyvog - Tyr



Andre Hilgers - Rage

"I like the fact that all musicians and all the fans are just mingling around each other." - Tyr's Kari Streyvog



Vaaver - Distruiction



Mark Hernandez - Forbidden

cruise from LA down the western coast of Baja California]; they're in a Top 40 type band. They told me that it was probably one of the most amazing things that they had ever done. Not long after Juan [Cyril, singer] gave us an email saying that they're having a big metal fest on a cruise ship going to Cozumel and back. And so we thought, 'Wow! And it's 40 bands: Are you kidding me? This is gonna be mayhem.' We were like, 'It's just gonna be freakin' insane.' So I was very, very honored and it's a privilege to be here with all these huge bands on a cruise ship."

Rock And Roll

Now, playing on a ship presents singular challenges. Not only is it moving forward, it's also being pitched by/rolling on the ocean. As Fear Factory's Gene Hoglan said, "The festival was different because the seas never stop moving. That was something that you had to get used to: you're on a boat and trying to play hauling double bass. It wasn't an insurmountable task of course, but it still was a little tricky to try to play some of these hardcore, technical passages while rocking from side to side or in Exodus's case, rocking from back to front."

Additionally, since this was the festival/cruise's initial voyage, coupled with the aforementioned minimal setup time, there were unique challenges for the drummer's involved. Moonspell's Miguel Gasper recounts: "Well [playing] inside I didn't really notice it [the rolling] as much as I thought I would. It kind of felt like I was in a normal club in the States. It was like really old-school, but it was good to have that sensation, being on the boat. It was about balance. Since I'm really into sports, I'm a taekwondo instructor, when I went to the gym the day before and I was running on the treadmill, I was like, 'Whoa what the hell is going on?' I thought I was drunk or stoned or something, like, 'This isn't normal.' So I thought immediately, 'Oh I better be careful when I'm playing my double-bass drum.' And that's when I was talking to other drummers, they all felt the same problem. They all were saying that was a bit weird playing and feeling the balance between that. But I think that since I thought of it before, and since I did my prep, and I worked out the day before, I knew what I was getting into. I so didn't really notice anything—I just went right through it. Spot on." Performing early the second day, Dusk Machine's Randy Black felt things

differently. "Well, you can actually feel that you're moving. The stage, I don't know if it's because it was in the back of the boat or if it was rough seas this morning, but my riser was all over the place. I was moving to the right, moving to the left. It actually made it a little difficult to play; it was, 'oh man, I'm falling over to the left, I'm falling right.'"

Playing the outside stage presented its own obstacles, Mark Hernandez expounds. "The biggest thing I noticed was my hair was being blown down my throat (Laughs). Every time I leaned up and opened my mouth my hair was blowing in my throat, but as far as the rocking of the boat, that didn't really bother me. I'm actually a very physical drummer so the movement didn't really bother me."

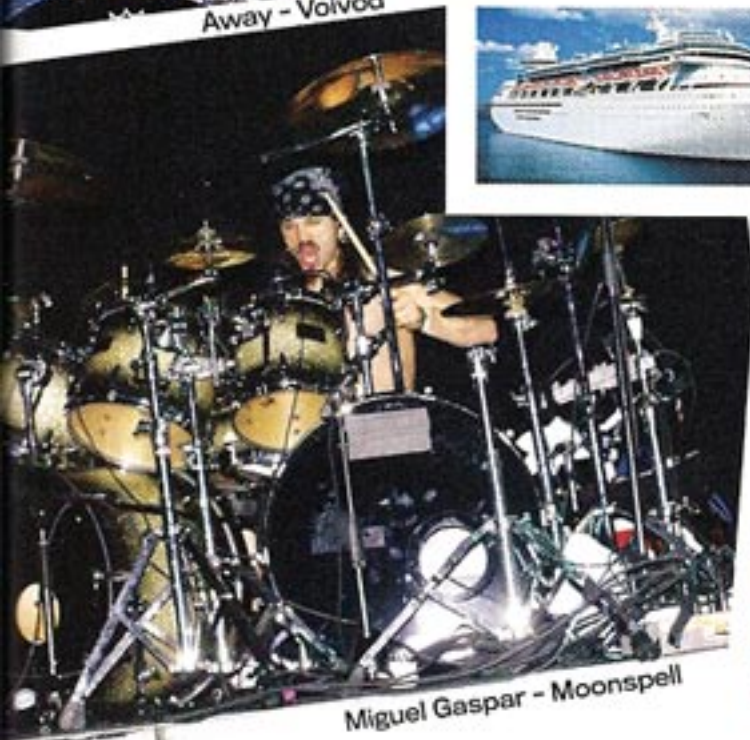
Kari Streyvog from the Danish band Tyr, had his own problem: "I'm from the Faroe Islands and so the sea has to move quite a lot before I notice." He continues, "It was very windy at the beginning, and this heat is really getting to me. There was a girl that sprayed me all over with sun block before going onstage because my skin is really, really fair, and now it's really sore from the sun." Understand, this was a metal festival and the average attendee was in their mid-winter hibernating frosty paleness.



Away - Voivod



Dan Zimmerman - Gamma Ray



Miguel Gaspar - Moonspell



You Say Hello

The ease and relaxation of the experience translated from the fans to the artists and back again. There was no backstage area, and the artists were wandering the ship with the fans. For fans this was a novel experience, and for artists, well, as Rage's André Hilgers said, "Oh, that was the deal, we knew that [coming in]. And it was very comfortable for us. The fans were very excited but very respectful." Tyr's Kari adds, "I love the fans. They're the reason! They buy our albums, so I have no problem that they can get in touch with us easier and we always have our room to retire to, if we want some peace and quiet. I like the fact that all musicians and all the fans are just mingling around each other. My godson asked me for an autograph from Uli Jon Roth, and on this boat it's possible, there won't be a thousand guards surrounding him."

And Moonspell's Miguel Gaspar echoed these sentiments, "It's great, 'cause we have a really great relationship with our fans, we always have. Especially me, usually drummers are more connected with these kinds of things. To be able to just walk around and people just relax. I think that concept is amazing, it's very humanitarian in a way. It

brings the whole community together; it gives us the same level. It's not 'I'm a rock star and you're just a fan.' 'Cause when you think about it, it's because of the fans that we're here, and that's why we have our career. And I try never to forget that."

Not only were the other bands and the fans commingling, the bands got to see a lot more bands than they usually do. As guitarist André Olbrich from Blind Guardian said, "I got to see 20 or so bands. I haven't been able to see Amon Amarth until this. At a festival, I usually got to see the band that opens for us. This was really unique, and I really liked it."

When watching the band's you'd notice that the other musicians were there watching in the audience. When Death Angel played the outside stage, the audience was the other Bay Area bands: Forbidden, Exodus, Testament, but also Voivod, Destruction and Moonspell. Noting this Forbidden's Mark Hernandez said, "What's different about playing the boat for me as a musician was the fact that I was playing in front of a lot of my peers. And a lot of people don't know that musicians are respectful of what we do as musicians, not so much as, 'I'm a big fan of the band,' but, 'I'm a fan of what you do musically.' That for me is the biggest thing, because you can fake it

with a head bang, or throw a stick, whatever, but when you're playing in front of people who really know what you're doing, that's a real test for me as a drummer."

The last night of the cruise, I put together a group of us to eat at the Sun Light, the formal dining room, to celebrate the trip. Next to us our table was Andy Piller and his staff, and the table between us was Fear Factory and their friends. While dining on steak and seafood, and in the middle of 150 people's effusive elation, Fear Factory's Burton C. Bell, got up, called everyone to attention, and raised a toast to, "The greatest music festival ever in the world ever."

With everyone's sentiments raised even higher, he put into words what everyone was feeling. The next morning as we were debarking, everyone I ran into was already making plans for the 2012 cruise. Jack Gibson from Exodus was already trying to figure out what band he "could sub for so I can go next year." The cruise will have a completely different line up, and Andy Piller has begun to announce the band's at the website www.70000tons.com. I for one already have my bags packed. ✨