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Anyone who wants to leave everyday life behind and celebrate imagination is in the right place at Epic Fest.



KEEP YOUR DREAM ALIVE A VISIT TO EPIC FEST

This text was translated using AI. Sorry if some parts sound a bit odd!

If the mere sight of a band using a keyboard fills you with dread, you should give Roskilde a wide berth in April. For others, however, this is where a portal to a better world opens: “Epic Fest.”

By now, crazy people from Argentina, Australia, or Indonesia make their pilgrimage every April to the small town west of Copenhagen—otherwise known for a mainstream festival—to indulge in sugary niche escapism for at least two days and two nights. It all began in 2023 with “Chapter I – Dawn of the Dragon Age”; this year’s edition is titled “Chapter IV – Tales of Might and Magic”. Epic Fest isn’t the only festival worldwide with a focus on melodic metal—but it might just be the one with the most authentically cozy kind of freakiness.

“Epic: something that inspires feelings of adventure and a sense of vastness.”

Philippa Sztencel, singer of LOST DAWNING

Dinos And Dragons

“Welcome all – wizards, unicorns, humans, orcs, elves, dragons and dwarves”—that’s what the animation says on the screen during wristband pickup. Very nice; clearly, you’re taken seriously right away. Feels more uplifting than being greeted by name on a hotel TV! The address is more than just a nice gesture—those very

creatures truly populate the festival hotspots. Elven ears, in particular, are everywhere—it almost stands out if you're not wearing any. But the community is by no means limited to typical fantasy characters. Alongside the party-loving Viking crowd you meet in the pub every evening, a giant dinosaur might block your view, or a harlequin might take a crowdsurfing lap. Inflatable swords and unicorns in the audience? Standard. It's not due to lack of sleep when you spot corpse paint in the crowd while waiting for a cheerful symphonic metal band. Everybody apparently knows the two Finnish guys dressed head to toe in Lidl merchandise from last time—business as usual. What can still turn heads, though, is the guy who randomly stuck two plungers to his bald head.

All nerds. True nerds at heart.

Søren Weiss, organizer

Evil Needs Candy Too

No wonder the audience's wardrobe choices are so eccentric when the performing bands themselves have a certain tongue-in-cheek attitude built into their very identity. At TWILIGHT FORCE, the magical potato is praised; at TRICK OR TREAT, inflatable eyeballs and an oversized lollipop fly through the air; ANGUS MCSIX is, by definition, already a parody of everything—including itself. So if you consider gimmick bands and thematic dress codes to be signs of cultural decline, this is definitely not the place for you.

*The special thing about power metal:
it's basically a grown-up childhood dream.*

Timo Fritsch, visitor (and singer of PENG'S QUEST)

Kitsch as
kitsch can be:
crowdsurfing on
a lollipop.



The lineup, however, is far from consisting solely of glittering warrior heroes and hyperactive hobbits. In fact, bands with regular stage outfits and no outwardly displayed lore are in the majority. Acts like SEVEN SPIRES or ROY KHAN are, in every respect, the opposite of bubblegum metal—arguably far too deep and emotionally diverse for a festival like this, one might think. For many, though, the key reason to buy a ticket. To what extent Epic Fest contributes to the much-criticized “schlagerization of metal” is open to everyone’s interpretation. But this is definitely not Ballermann. Despite all the gags and gimmicks, the focus of the concerts is unquestionably on the—remarkably diverse—music.

*The special thing about power metal:
it combines elements of light and darkness.*

Max Uldahl Pedersen, composer
(and keyboardist for LAMENTARI)

There are even bands like MERCENARY or SIRENIA, which can’t really be squeezed into the power metal category, no matter how hard you try. But that doesn’t matter—somewhere between “Might and Magic”, it all fits. Every single band here has a dedicated fanbase, most attendees are curious across subgenres, and all concerts are well attended to completely packed. Above all, people celebrate together everywhere—often all the way to the back rows. Especially with the smaller and newer bands, it’s heartwarming to be swept up in a bouncing cluster of enthusiastic rubber balls instead of, as is so often the case, standing full-time among expressionless head-nodders.

*Epic: something that is “larger than life”, yet also about the
small things in life. It’s about a grand journey filled with growth
and dynamics. You can start at a tiny point and end up in the
highest heavens—or at the lowest depths of hell. It’s about stories.*

Max Uldahl Pedersen, composer
(and keyboardist for LAMENTARI)

Considering all factors—availability, costs, connections, target audience alignment, chance, and everything else that plays into the planning puzzle—it’s quite remarkable how many special live moments have come together here. For IPOMONIA, it’s their absolute live debut; HAGANE are performing outside Japan for the first time; ROY KHAN is marking the beginning of his solo comeback here after a long complete hiatus and a few appearances with other bands. For FAIRYLAND, it’s the first show in 16 (!) years following a turbulent band history that included the death of their singer and major lineup changes. And of course, there are seasoned headliners like SONATA ARCTICA, RHAPSODY OF FIRE, or ENSIFERUM. Even with unlimited choice, it would be hard to imagine a more balanced mix.

Speaking of balance: it shouldn't need pointing out, but it's noteworthy that nearly half of all bands feature at least one female member—sometimes more than one. That's a lineup trend worth continuing.

We don't follow quotas, but we do aim to be as diverse as possible—and that includes having women not only on vocals but also on instruments. That's especially important for the kids who watch these shows.

Søren Weiss, organizer

Center Of The Universe

The event takes place at the Sports and Congress Center in Roskilde—a functional, utilitarian concrete block. Isn't that the very definition of sobriety? Shouldn't an event like this be held in a castle or a forest clearing? Yes and yes. But somehow, that thought quickly fades when the mindset of 2,000 epic enthusiasts winds its way through the corridors like a lindworm. Cosmic sports hall of mightiness! Whimsical standing tables of ancient legacy!

And if you're not feeling it, decorative elements will help you along: flags and banners, glowing cocktails, clusters of black candles, and brightly shining wall shields (stylish). Or the medieval-inspired food tent out front (pricey, but delicious). Or the Epic Fest merch, partly handcrafted over many hours—drinking horns, leather patches, or glow-in-the-dark role-playing dice in intricately designed book-style boxes (sweet). Or the foyer setup with ceiling-high paper trees, fancy foil flowers, and bouquets made of Magic: The Gathering cards (lovingly designed, but also kind of weird). Do we even need to mention that there's an area where people can play various Nintendo Switch games?

The special thing about power metal: the scope for creativity and storytelling within the genre.

Philippa Sztencel, singer of LOST DAWNING

But then there's also the round brick building "Gimle" with its smaller stage, and right next door the bar "The Raven," which transforms into the "Raven Tavern" during the festival, hosting the warm-up and aftershow parties. At the latest here, any sense of sobriety disappears—in every respect. Of course the beers have names like "Tears of the Dragon" or "Blood of the Unicorn." Another side venue: the city's historic town hall, where you can play "Dungeons & Dragons" or paint "Warhammer" miniatures.

Together with
co-founder
Lauge Hede
Kjærum,
he is the reason
Epic Fest exists:
Søren Weiss.



Eternal Warriors

That it takes an epic level of effort to put a festival like this together goes without saying. Organizer and workhorse Søren Weiss—tall, busy, and in great spirits—marches briskly through the congress center, pointing out all the places where people are working to put the final touches in place. As a moderately athletic person under 1.70 meters, it's almost impossible to keep up with him. "I've been moving at this pace for two weeks now," he laughs.

Co-organizer Lauge Hede Kjærum and he are not only the masterminds behind the festival, but also handle everything from booking to marketing—on top of their other jobs. And to keep the bar, cloakroom, merch, stage tech, and decorations running, nearly 200 mighty heroes are volunteering their time.

"The good thing is that in Denmark we have a big volunteering scene," Søren says. "People are used to taking on tasks at festivals and concerts. We spent a year rallying support and are incredibly grateful to have brought all these people together." While Epic Fest IV is just getting underway, Søren is already mentally deep into planning next year. It's not meant to grow much bigger, but the lineup has to be pieced together, small improvements are on the agenda—and it sounds like a few new eccentric ideas are already waiting to be realized.

"Can you relax a bit once the festival has started and the first bands are playing?" I ask.

"Relax? No—that's what I'll do next week."

"Oh, do you have time off after the festival?"

"No, I'll be on tour as a manager with IOTUNN."

Alright.

The special thing about power metal: it's epic.

Pretty much everyone interviewed

Wanderer's Prayer

Even before the festivities officially begin, there's a special prelude in town. Many epic fans arrive in Roskilde a day early anyway, to ease into the festival. And since the city happens to have a mighty cathedral with a legendary Baroque organ, the obvious idea practically suggests itself: fill the place to the brim with metalheads and have classics like "Through the Fire and Flames" by DRAGONFORCE blasted on the organ. Because why not. As an extra source of revenue? No—of course it's free. Because it's epic!

Epic: It is a type of grandness. Something that maybe takes you outside of yourself to an awareness and appreciation of greater stories. They are the narratives that guide human ideas and human emotions, and they are the grand stories outside of us that we can attach ourselves to as emotional and spiritual beings.

Archie Caine, singer of FAIRYLAND

The idea originally came from the two festival founders. In previous years, there had already been the occasional acoustic set in the church, and for the performance by FABIO LIONE'S DAWN OF VICTORY, Epic Fest had collaborated with the cathedral's girls' choir (which also accompanies ROY KHAN's show this time). So this year: organ. A whole series of well-known songs by HAMMERFALL, RHAPSODY, HELLOWEEN, and others was selected, checked for its message by the parish priest, and arranged into a roughly 45-minute set in coordination with organist Asbjørn Dalbjerg. Max Uldahl, who was also responsible for the aforementioned choir arrangements, then adapted these songs for the Roskilde cathedral organ. The goal wasn't to imitate a metal sound, but to make use of the unique features of the 400-year-old instrument.

What is he most proud of in bringing this idea to life? Cool transpositions, special registrations, sophisticated modulations? Despite being a film score composer with impressive credits, Max—displaying the humility of someone who just happened to be called in to help with cables—says:

I'm proud to be part of this fan culture. That we keep coming up with cool, nerdy ideas together and have fun doing it. Epic Fest is a great example of how something like this can work.

Max Uldahl Pedersen, composer (and keyboardist for LAMENTARI)

One More Magic Potion

Anyone wanting to attend this festival should be aware that FOMO is a constant companion here. Not only because the medium and small stages—about a ten-minute walk apart—are running simultaneously, leading to clashes like SEVEN SPIRES vs. MOONLIGHT HAZE or DARK MOOR vs. INNERWISH, which can tear some visitors' hearts in two and cause sleepless nights in advance. But also because

music and side quests are constantly competing with each other. Beginners might think they can quickly squeeze in activities like buying merch, playing Nintendo, visiting the photobooth, or attending autograph sessions—but far from it. If you're interested in most of the bands performing, it's nearly impossible to take in all the extras without leaving concerts early. And then you haven't even eaten or had a drink yet. Which, in a way, can be an advantage—because it also means fewer trips to the bathroom. Conclusion: despite appearances, the event might actually be best suited for people who aren't too deeply immersed in everything!

*Epic: it simply means a lot—a whole lot—of everything.
Intense adventures, and above all, plenty of them.*

Peter Brandsch, visitor (and guitarist for PENG'S QUEST)

I Want It That Way

Sure, metal brings people together—we all know that from everyday life. The friendly chat while waiting in line for a concert, or the spontaneous devil horns on the street when someone spots your band shirt: always nice. But here, it's next level. Completely normal that, in your late fifties, you receive a steady stream of compliments if you've put effort into making your battle vest entirely purple. Completely normal that within seconds you've made a few new friends from Norway, Malta, or Canada—who in real life might be biologists, marketing experts, or employees of a foreign ministry—just because you passionately perform a BACKSTREET BOYS song together. Completely normal that members of the performing bands show up at the aftershow parties (only newbies are still fazed when Giacomo Voli of RHAPSODY OF FIRE mingles with the crowd).

*Epic: something gigantic. But at the same time
somehow cozy. Something you want to be part of.*

Søren Weiss, organizer

What ultimately connects people here are the charming quirks that everyone seems to have at least one of. Talk to any seemingly inconspicuous person for more than a sentence, and you'll quickly find out that they hand out tiny ducks or self-minted medieval coins, care for nutria at home, or—despite a life full of thrash metal mosh pits—somehow ended up losing half a pair of glasses at a power metal show. And no, you really don't have to explain why your band plays penguin metal. Everyone gets it. Everyone celebrates it. Everyone shares the same spirit.

TWILIGHT FORCE leans into quirky show details like the “Enchanted Potato of Wisdom” to ward off vocal issues.



Soul Decision

Why this gem of a festival hadn't crossed my path earlier is beyond me. And why, when I first heard about it during its third edition, I still considered the journey disproportionate—equally puzzling. It probably took a lineup featuring several of my favorite bands to convince me. And those concerts were fantastic!

In retrospect, though, that's not what will bring me back. It's the community of freaks, escapists, and harmony addicts. That instant feeling of being at home among like-minded people. The shared celebration of a genre that encompasses so many worlds—from simple to profound, from light to dark, from joyful to tragic, from nostalgic to forward-looking—always with the option of climbing any level of the meta ladder with a grin.

The special thing about power metal: For me, it is the feeling. It makes something like, aliveness in you. And also the fact that it is not a fashion of a particular time, it doesn't even have to be cool or fashionable. It just makes us feel good and it brings people together. Life is short and all the rules are fake. We must find things that make us feel good and find the people we want to do that with. And for me, that is in power metal.

Archie Caine, singer of FAIRYLAND

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