



Babymetal's adorable ascension

CREDIT: BABYMETAL

Japanese girl group Babymetal is revolutionizing the gruff and macho world of metal

BY MARK WHEELER
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

It's about the only sunny part of the Download festival weekend in Leicestershire, England, and we're sitting in the media garden. Suddenly there's a hurried and excited scramble as Babymetal walk through the gate. Instantly recognizable, the elusive trio of Japanese teens have been winning over crowds with their brand of cutesy, brutal, metal J-pop everywhere they go.

They are accompanied by a small but effective entourage, including a security guard akin to Cersei Lannister's new pet knight. He keeps the crowd forming around them in line with nothing more than a glance.

Looking excited, nervous and bewildered, yet still confident, the girls happily give us a brief moment to snap a couple of photos before they are ushered off to get ready for their set. We'd get the chance to speak to Suzuka Nakamoto, AKA Su-Metal, later. It's

all very efficient.

Making our way to the main stage to catch the show, sun still shining, we naively leave our waterproofs in a locker backstage. Big mistake. Just before Babymetal's set there is a torrential downpour. I end up soaked through to the skin. Delayed by the weather, after staff wipe the puddles from the stage Babymetal finally come out to rapturous cheers, backed as always by their incredibly talented Kami band.

"Despite the extreme pouring rain, people stood before our stage to watch us to the very end. It was a spectacular view from the stage," says Su-Metal, the band's 18-year-old singer. The rain may have been pouring but that didn't stop the frenzied crowd forming circle pits at her request. "Our live performance is very intense so the rain actually helped us cool down a bit."

I first caught Babymetal live at last year's Leeds Festival but the girls have played most rock festivals now, steadily climbing their way up the bill in a few short years. "Download UK was amazing but really every

festival brings a different experience so it's hard to choose one over the other," she says.

"The crowd is probably the most different. Over here everyone is just enjoying the show in their own way. In the beginning we always see people in the crowd who have never seen us before, who don't know how to react, but by the end of our set we always see everyone holding up the fox sign [Babymetal's version of metal horns], which shows us that they are enjoying our show."

Back home in Japan Babymetal have been selling out arenas for years. But with their recent *Metal Resistance* album the highest-charting by any Japanese band in the UK, they are also the first to headline Wembley, where they set records for merchandise sales. On July 14-15, they are playing in California.

"We've been so blessed to have experienced so many things. As for a full

See BABYMETAL, page 11