

Bayley's blazing saddles

Next week former Iron Maiden singer **Blaze Bayley** returns to Dubai for the first time in nearly three decades. *Rob Garratt* found out why

When Blaze Bayley touches down in Dubai next week it will be a double celebration. The former Iron Maiden frontman will be returning to the emirate for the first time in nearly 30 years, when he performed his first paying gig in the house band at the former Red Lion pub. And the other cause for cork-popping? He'll be turning 50 on the flight over. 'I might try and milk that to get some free drinks on the plane,' laughs the singer, on the line from his home in Birmingham, the English city known as the 'spiritual home of heavy metal'.

While Bayley is best remembered for the five years he spent fronting what is arguably Britain's biggest metal band, like all musicians, he started small. In 1985 he quit one job working as a hotel porter to take another playing at what was reportedly Dubai's oldest pub, before it was torn down with the rest of the Metropolitan Hotel last year.

'We played there for a month, six nights a week,' remembers Bayley. 'It was such a great learning experience. Never mind how you felt, you were performing that night and you just had to get through it. It was the longest I'd ever been away from home. I quit my job to go out there and sing professionally for the first time – it was such an emotional time for me.'

a different hotel, and that's what we did every night.' Not much has changed, then.

However the visit didn't go entirely as planned – 'we got sacked for being too heavy,' laughs Bayley – but it did prove integral to the band's future.

'It was very well paid, and with the money we saved we did our first demo, and that's how we got our

record deal, which led to everything we achieved.'

The 'we' Bayley is referring to is

Wolfsbane, the band he fronted for ten years, and whose debut album *Live Fast, Die Fast* was produced by Def Records founder Rick Rubin. Two more albums followed, but

after a decade together

Wolfsbane disbanded when Bayley was picked out of hundreds of auditions to front Iron Maiden when lead singer Bruce Dickinson was injured in a motorcycle accident. 'It was like going from Sunday league football to playing in the Premiership for Manchester United,' he says.

Bayley lasted five years with the band, never truly accepted by their notoriously loyal hardcore fans. 'They really hated me,' remembers Bayley, 'they thought I was the reason Bruce had left, which was, of course,



Blaze Bayley

'The Iron Maiden fans really hated me, they thought I was the reason Bruce Dickinson left, which was ridiculous'

A single 21-year-old at the time, Bayley's highlight of the visit remains a Dubai pastime with many expats today – ladies' nights. 'In the old days every hotel had a little nightclub, and every day one of them would host a ladies' night serving some kind of watered down mixed drink,' he remembers fondly. 'Every night it was

ridiculous.' When Dickinson stepped back into the fold, Bayley was left rootless by the experience. Since 1999 he's fronted a series of his own bands, releasing a string of solo albums in between completing stints of casual work at his local factory. Bayley should feel bitter, but it sounds like time has healed all wounds.



The Former Iron Maiden frontman returns

'In my chosen profession I had the best job I could ever have: I fronted the greatest heavy metal band in the world,' he says. 'I fell upon hard times a few times over the years. I hadn't had a day job in 15 years and going back was healthy, it keeps you grounded. I always went back to factory work. As a singer I'm very qualified – but I never trained for anything else.'

Thankfully Bayley's career has taken on a fresh lease of life with his latest project. While he's known for fronting full-out, crank-it-to-11 heavy metal outfits, Bayley's latest live shows see him backed by just a classical guitar and violin. 'It's something I've wanted to do for a while,' he explains, 'because my voice has changed a lot since my recordings

with Iron Maiden – it's the voice of a man, rather than of an ambitious boy.'

It's this outfit Bayley will be bringing to Dubai, where the trio will reinterpret tunes from the two Maiden albums he worked on, *The X Factor* (1995) and *Virtual XI* (1998), plus material from his solo albums, and brand new songs. It might be acoustic, but that doesn't mean it's quiet. 'It's not easy listening,' says Bayley sternly, 'the songs are just as intense as ever.'

And if you're heading down to the gig, don't forget to wish Bayley a happy 50th birthday.

Blaze Bayley performs at *The Music Room, Majestic Hotel Tower, Bur Dubai on Friday May 31. Dhs150*

www.timeouttickets.com

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