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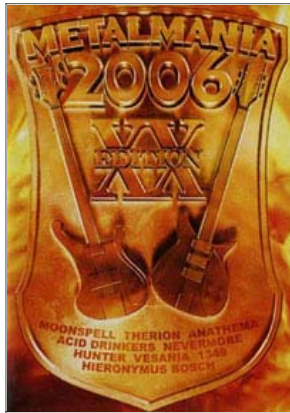
**Various Artists**

**Metalmania 2006 [DVD]**

[XX Edition]  
 (Metal Mind) Rated: N/A  
 US release date: 5 June 2007  
 UK release date: 23 April 2007

by **Andrew Blackie**  
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It must be every true metalhead's dream to live in Europe. Not only is metal a much more widely accepted art form there, so that one can presumably walk down the street wearing a Children of Bodom t-shirt without receiving strange looks, but countless hordes of creative, mind-bending bands have also been flooding out lately faster than it's possible to keep track of. Which, of course, is the reason for the continent's several world-famous metal festivals: to keep us up to date.



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Poland's Metalmania has had a long-standing claim to the coveted title of most popular metal festival in Central-Eastern Europe – the recent 2007 edition, which happened in March, included such big names as Paradise Lost, Entombed and a now totally Cavalera-less Sepultura, and 2006 was actually the event's 20th anniversary, which is why it's just as well we have a handy DVD to bring us on the other side of the world up to speed on the exciting proceedings.

*Metalmania 2006* picks material from the sets of nine international bands and compiles it into one exhaustive overview. The first few acts make one or two contributions to the product, while headliners get three – the criteria for song selection remains a mystery, but the sound quality is exceptional, and as a DVD it is well-filmed, mixing close-ups on that frenzied fretwork with full-band and audience pans. Filmed inside the Spodek stadium in Katowice, the lighting is not a spectacle, thankfully avoiding annoying rapid strobe effects that some bands which shall go unnamed seem to favor, remaining true to the concert's brutal aesthetic. While it originated as an annual gathering place for fans of extreme music, though, it now sports a much more family-friendly variety; there are plenty of bloodthirsty black metal troopers, but bands of doom and epic symphonies tend to occupy the stage as the night goes on.

Did I mention the music? Vesania come first, a side project born out of Poland's finest death metal bands, Behemoth and Vader. There's a certain lo-fi appeal about their one song included here, "Marduke's Mazemerising", seeing all four members looking utterly evil in their corpsepaint playing to a half-empty stadium, headbanging in violently synchronized motions, and putting shrewd motifs to particular effect, played by keyboardist Siegmar on a plain Roland model. Norway's 1349 are a band who uphold all the traditional practises of black metal – spikes, chains, diabolical pseudonyms, endless blastbeats, and make-up that makes screamer Ravn look rather like an owl. He spends most of his time sneering at the crowd during their three renditions, of which the highlight is the ferocious "Satanic Propaganda".

We get the impression that Hieronymus Bosch, though, along with Hunter, are more thinking man's bands, complimented by their stomping, technical rhythms; in the bridge to "Blind Window Stare", it's a struggle to even keep up with their drummer's arms. The latter are one of the most eclectic bands of the gig. Frontman Pawel Grzegorzczuk, while his name might be a mouthful, is so intense that it compensates that he sings in his native language (Polish), and the band score extra points for having a live violinist in their permanent lineup. Metalmania veterans Acid Drinkers, on the other

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hand, bring some welcome humor to over three hours of bludgeoning, case in point: when bassist and vocalist Titus announces the song "I Fock de Violence"!

The widely acclaimed American band Nevermore, who have been pigeonholed in every genre under the sun, prove they can cross over live with their unique "distorted power metal" sound, given a huge helping hand by fervent vocalist Warrel Dane, through a proficient, if not exactly exciting, mini-set. In truth, they're outdone in this instance by Moonspell's mournful, ultra-dramatic doom metal set, sprawling melodic riffs and diminished choir sounds (emulated by a keyboard), and it certainly doesn't hurt that, by the looks of things, they're the best performers when it comes to working the crowd.

Anathema, one of the legendary 'Peaceville Three' innovators, trot out an ambient sound in stark contrast to any other group, while Vincent Cavanagh's subdued swoon can lack power, but theirs is the most instrumentally varied experience a festival like Metalmania can offer, even including a live string quartet. Cavanagh warps his voice on the epic piano-fuelled "Closer" and duets with a sultry female singer on "A Natural Disaster" – a lighter waver if there ever was one – making Anathema a brief, happy refrain. Final act Therion, contrarily, sadly confirm the trend that has been swamping their recent output, including this year's *Gothic Kabbalah*, by shoving a few austere-looking opera singers on the side and getting into it. Technical geniuses and hugely influential though they are, it makes the actual *music* very difficult to appreciate, and "Siren of the Woods", a slow-burning ballad with the emphasis on *slow*, is a distinctly inappropriate way to close this DVD.

Piled up with all the live entertainment is a formidable list of 'extras', including a comprehensive history of the festival and the bands who graced the stage over the years, and while some of the information is pretentious beyond belief – "important and revolutionary" is a phrase that is re-worded somewhere in nearly every biography, you learn a lot about the bands all the same. The same can be said for excellent, revealing interviews with every ensemble from the main stage, excusing some naïve questions: Vincent Cavanagh of Anathema seems stumped by the journalist's enquiry "what is music?" and Therion mainman Christopher Johnsson is questioned as though the interviewer has no knowledge of the music he makes – blasphemy! As if that wasn't enough, *Metalmania 2006* comes with a free CD, one track from 12 different Polish bands on the sidestage. The potential of some of these young upstarts is huge; there honestly isn't a bad cut to be heard, and it as much as doubles the package's value.

If this DVD has a fault, it's that it doesn't contain enough audience interaction cutting between bands, spotlighting one after another like fans don't exist – this approach is justified somewhat by Hunter, who reveal in their interview that there's no time to talk when you're limited to a 40-minute set. Anyone into metal would do well to devote an afternoon to checking this mammothian compilation out; with hours of music from some of today's best modern heavy bands on this festival's twentieth year of existence, how could you possibly go wrong?

### Hieronymus Bosch - Blind Window Stare

RATING: 
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— 5 June 2007

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