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Roadburn Festival 2017: Illustrious festival redefines and celebrates all facets of heavy experimental music

The annual celebration of left-field experimentation and pushing the boundaries of heavy music returned in 2017 so we took a trip to Tilburg to gauge what makes Roadburn stand apart from the rest

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A snippet of the Roadburn concept art for the 2017 edition *John Dyer Baizley*

‘This year, more than ever, it feels appropriate to emphasise the fact that Roadburn is a place for community, friendship and positivity. Whatever your political leaning, your sexual orientation, your religion or the colour of your skin, the world around us lately has felt divisive, conflicted, and often difficult.

Roadburn has always been, and always will be a place for creativity to thrive, for relationships to flourish, bonds to be strengthened and unity to be celebrated. Feel free to consider Roadburn your safe haven. Whilst it’s important to stay switched on to the world around us, it doesn’t hurt to take a few days off to recharge your batteries in an inclusive and accepting environment.

We hope you find solace, positivity and creativity here at Roadburn. Make yourself comfortable, pull up a chair around the table and don’t be afraid to make your voice be heard. It’s as vital as anybody else’s, and more needed than ever.’

Re-printed from the Roadburn 2017 official programme



Ulver performing at Roadburn 2017 (Jostijn Ligtoet)

Roadburn festival is a Mecca for those seduced by the experimental dark arts of psychedelia and doom, a celebration of the avant-garde artists determined to push the boundaries of heavy music in extremis, whether that be sonically, emotionally or spiritually. For one long weekend each year in April, the quaint picturesque city of Tilburg becomes a hubbub of activity, as 4,000 or so cheery patrons soak up the most radical sounds of the metal underground. Roadburn seek to completely immerse their guests in an environment tailor-made for those who see music as high art rather than happy distraction. The organisers are acutely aware that there's much more to creating an immersive experience than merely chucking some bands on a stage and providing gallons of flowing amber brew.



Industrial black metal three-piece Mysticum performing at Roadburn Festival 2017 (Niels Vinck)

For several years, the festival has enlisted a special guest to curate portions of the line-up, with past collaborators including Opeth's Mikael Akerfeldt, ex-Napalm Death and Cathedral frontman Lee Dorrian, Electric Wizard and Sunn O))). Each curator brings their own unique flavour to proceedings and this year was no exception with the honour being bestowed upon Baroness frontman John Dyer Baizley. As well as bringing some of the most beloved bands of the weekend to the bill (Chelsea Wolfe, Oathbreaker, Amenra and Wear Your Wounds were all hand-picked this year by Baizley), the musician and illustrator's stamp is all over the festival site, not least on the excellent artwork specially commissioned for Roadburn 2017 that adorns posters, merchandise and video screens across the whole site.



John Dyer Baizley of Baroness playing the Friday night of Roadburn 2017 (Niels Vinck)

Baizley's influence on Roadburn 2017 extended far beyond merely helping to put together a rich and radical line-up. As remarkable and varied as the Baroness back-catalogue is, most would point to Baizley's artwork as having the most lasting impact on the world of underground heavy music as a whole. Taking as much influence from the decorative art nouveau style of [Alphonse Mucha](#) as he does the comic-book death imagery of [Pushead](#), Baizley's artwork is instantly recognisable and has appeared on various album sleeves by the likes of Kvelertak, Skeletonwitch, Pig Destroyer, Kylesa, Flight of the Concorde, Black Tusk, Darkest Hour, Magrudergrind and of course, Baroness.

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Baizley and Minneapolis-based creative studio **Burlesque of North America** called **Full Bleed**. Named after a common screen printing term where silkscreen ink is printed beyond the cut edge of a poster, the exhibition showcased a variety of influential artists whose work has become synonymous with the music that soundtracks the festival. Artists included Converge / Wear Your Wounds vocalist and Deathwish Inc record label founder Jacob Bannon, notable comics creator for Tokyopop, Vertigo, Marvel and Dark Horse (amongst others) Becky Cloonan and celebrated New York illustrator of records by Sleep, Sunn O))), Earth, Grand Magus and High on Fire, Arik Roper as well as a selection of Baizley's own work.

Full Bleed Art Exhibition (Roadburn 2017)



can reflect on the music of the previous day and look forward to what's in store whilst nursing their hangover. Made-up to recreate the Xerox-copied, cobbled-together nature of fanzines from the 80s and 90s, the **Weirdo Canyon Dispatch** is a lovingly crafted touch, distributed for no other reason than to add depth to those experiencing the festival. To some, it may seem a triviality but it's exactly this sort of attention to detail that lifts the experience above the corporate-sponsored muddy field cattle extravaganzas that clog up the market every summer. Roadburn unashamedly serves a niche but the organisers know that niche inside out, at least as well as their fans, who will proudly boast this this is their fifth, sixth or seventh Roadburn whilst describing their annual trip to Tilburg as a pilgrimage. The passion with which the festival is run is infectious and it's nigh on impossible not to be swept up in it.



Hypnopazūzu performing at the 2017 edition of Roadburn (Niels Vinck)

The site is focused in on one small square hub in the centre of the city, which can be circumvented in 5 minutes at a brisk pace, 10 if you've been supping beer all day. The music is spread out among 5 indoor stages ranging from the 3,000 capacity 013

in the hall of the imposing yet beautiful 19th century neo-Gothic St. Jozef church, its wooden-beamed gable roof and stunning stained glass windows make for a beautiful if unorthodox environment to watch a whole heap of satanic black metal bands.



Het Patronaat provided a beautiful environment to watch bands in (Niels Vinck)

Roadburn has a reputation for mainly covering doom, psyche and black metal and whilst you could probably put around half the bands playing over the four days into one or more of those categories, there is a far broader range to the musical programme than one might imagine. The elegiac reverb-drenched melancholic folk of Emma Ruth Rundle completely hypnotises all that watch her, as does the trip-hop-tinged showgaze post-metal mastery of Les Discrets. Chelsea Wolfe's gothic electro neo-folk manages to be paradoxically enchanting and disturbing at the same time, whilst Jacob Bannon's second ever performance with his 16-years-in-the-making project Wear Your Wounds is utterly mesmerising, re-adjusting the parameters of what constitutes a 'heavy' band.



Chelsea Wolfe proved spell-binding at Roadburn 2017 (Niels Vinck)

The passion with which Roadburn is run also brings out a desire in performers to play special sets unlikely to be repeated elsewhere. Bands playing an entire album has become a fairly synonymous part of the Roadburn experience; this year My Dying Bride, Warning, Ahab and Bongzilla all chose to dedicate their sets to one record. But the highlight of these special album sets came from Swiss black metal quartet Schammasch, who opened the Friday by playing their sweeping, majestic 3-disc 100-minute 2016 opus *Triangle* in full. Bathed in primary colour hues and clearly having a penchant for smoke machines, it's a hell of a spectacle to witness at 2:30 in the afternoon and one that should see this currently modest band's profile rise steadily.



Schammasch performed their 2016 triple disc *Triangle* album in full at Roadburn 2017 (Niels Vinck)

Razors in the Night are a name unfamiliar to most, probably because they've formed exclusively to play at this year's event. Consisting of members of Baroness (including John Baizley and second guitarist Peter Adams) as well as legendary Neurosis luminary Scott Kelly, it's mainly an excuse for these legendary figures to cut loose and play old-school punk covers by the likes of The Misfits, Iggy and the Stooges and Blitz (from whom they derived their moniker). Baroness mark the occasion of headlining Roadburn by playing a broadly chronological set which includes seldom played *Red Album* cuts *Wanderlust* and *The Birthing*, as well as the opening song from their imaginatively titled *First EP*, *Tower Falls*. The set expertly chronicles the divergent nature and broad growth that this incredible band has made over their 14-year career.



Members of Baroness and Neurosis came together to form Razors in the Night for a one of performance (Niels Vinck)

Like all the best festivals in the world, Roadburn is run by people fiercely dedicated to the music they feature, which inspires bands to bring something special to the plate. Few festivals can inspire that kind of dedication amongst artists and attendees but by focusing on the details, the community and the spirit of bringing passionate, talented people together from all over the world, Roadburn continues to be a place where creativity can thrive and unity can be celebrated.

Roadburn will return in 2018

More about: | [Roadburn Festival](#) | [Baroness](#) | [Amenra](#) | [Oathbreaker](#) | [Chelsea Wolfe](#) | [Wear Your Wounds](#) | [Kvelertak](#) | [Skeletonwitch](#) | [Pig Destroyer](#) | [Kyleasa](#) | [Flight of the Concorde](#) | [Black Tusk](#) | [Darkest Hour](#) | [Magrudergrind](#) | [Emma Ruth Rundle](#) | [Les Discrets](#) | [My Dying Bride](#) | [warning](#) | [Ahab](#) | [Bongzilla](#) | [Schammasch](#) | [The Misfits](#) | [Iggy and the Stooges](#) | [Blitz](#) | [Talking points](#)



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