

KISS:

The "Rolling Stone"

Reviews

Part 1 - 1974-82

Rolling Stone magazine has long been considered the "enemy" of Kiss. Throughout their classic era the band never featured on that magazine's cover, though received two substantial features, "Success - It's Just a Kiss Away" (RS #209, Mar. 1976, David McGee) and "Kiss: The Pagan Beasties of Teenage Rock" (RS #236, Apr. 1977, Charles M. Young). Collected here is the "evidence" of that magazine's approach towards the band, from better to worse.

Review of December 31, 1973 show (RS #153, Jan. 1974, Gordon Fletcher)

KISS were mentioned very briefly in the review:

"After a fiery opening set by Kiss (an "American Black Sabbath" on Neil Bogart's new Casablanca label) and the ribald antics of Teenage Lust, the Stooges assaulted the audience with wave upon wave of material from *Raw Power*." It was at least a mention of the band's name.

Fillmore East January 7, 1974 mention (RS #154, Feb. 1974, Random Notes)

"Neil Bogart, ex-co-head of Buddah, has signed a couple of acts to his new Casablanca label: the Parliaments and Kiss. The latter did a special dress rehearsal at Fillmore East January 8th for agents and some press. The four Kissers play very heavy, loud and ultimate monotonous rock in the Black Sabbath tradition; they

wear sheet-white make-up and black leather and studs. Midway through their act, dry ice overtakes the stage and the bassist flashes a flaming torch in the air. And they finish in a rain of firecrackers. A sure crowd-pleaser. For crowds of kiddies, that is..."

Review of "Kiss" album

(RS #158, Apr. 1974, Gordon Fletcher)

Kiss is an exciting Brooklyn based band with an imaginative stage presentation and a tight new album. The music is all hard-edged – they call it "thunderrock" – and throughout their electrical storm solid craftsmanship prevails. Paul Stanley's rhythm guitar is the star of the proceedings, barking out the coarse chord patterns that comprise the foundation of the band's material. Gene Simmons can thus provide an extra dimension to the band's music by playing fluid bass patterns (especially on "Cold Gin") and Peter Criss contributes impressive drumming marked by Keith Moon's power and proficiency.

"Nothing to Lose," "Firehouse" and "Cold Gin" – a Side One trilogy that would make Alice Cooper proud-provides over ten minutes of steady, stompin' rock & roll with an all-enveloping forcefulness. The manic "Deuce" makes fine music for crushing skulls and "Strutter" prominently displays The lead guitar talents of Ace Frehley, an unmistakable graduate of the Buck Dharma school of frenetic fretting.

An exceptional album, Kiss could have been even better had the group incorporated more of their concert sound into the recording studio. Onstage they rain a Black Sabbath-like fury, but here they sound more like a cross between Deep Purple and the Doobie Brothers. Though Frehley is an integral component of the stage show, here his guitar is used sparingly, particularly on "Cold Gin," where a solo could've propelled the tune to a higher plateau. A firm commitment to their stage sound (as in "Deuce" and portions of "Black Diamond") could well insure excellence – a course worth pursuing.

Review of "Hotter Than Hell" album

(RS #179, Jan. 1975, Ed Naha)

Looking like a bunch of Walt Disney rejects, Kiss is the kind of band you love to hate. Drenched in garish makeup, clothed in outfits Alice Cooper wouldn't touch, and generally exuding obnoxiousness, this brash young New York foursome seems determined to visually divert their audience's attention from their special brand of kamikaze rock. A slick brand of music that, as found on their second LP, *Hotter Than Hell*, does not sound as bad as the band looks. With twin guitars hammering out catchy mondo-distorto riffs and bass and drums amiably bringing up the rear, Kiss spews forth a deceptively controlled type of thunderous hysteria closely akin to the sound once popularized by the German panzer tank division.

Hotter Than Hell cooks from start to finish with the boys in the band sounding tighter and more lethal than in the past. This time around Kiss even manages to make allowances in their riff-rock antics for the inclusion of hum-able vocal lines in both the blitzkrieg rockers ("Got To Choose," "Strange Ways") and John Philip Sousa ballads ("Goin' Blind"). The lyrics, however, aren't going to make Dylan worry: with such *bon mots* as "I'm 93, you're 16" being dropped regularly.

Despite its flaws, Kiss does succeed in churning out quite a bit of high-energy instrumentation and cheerful, nonsensical vocalizing.

"KISS & Hello People: Whiteface Rock" (RS #184, Apr. 1975, David Witz)

This article was a review of the Feb. 21, 1975 show at Chicago's Aragon Ballroom with the James Gang and Man:

'Twas the first semi-warm day of the year and the teens were leaning just a little too heavily into the plate glass window next to the Aragon. So when the cherry bomb went off by the curb; well, accidents will happen. It's only rock & roll. Inside, the seething representatives of Chicago's working class freakdom put up with Man, bounced and jounced with the James Gang and blew themselves away with Kiss.

Opening was Man, whose progressive approach worked, better for them when they fronted the Hawkwind tour last year. Deke

Leonard and Micky Jones spent most of the time feeding guitar lines through various appliances. All very musically satisfying, but with zero flash. The applause stopped right when they did.

Then came the James Gang, the epitome of a solid road band. Roy Kenner's tough-cracker vocals got right to the heart of the house as he exhorted the party minded to do just that. Running through numbers from various Gang incarnations, they did a powerful set which filled in any musical holes that Kiss might leave unclosed (and, believe me, they had canyons). They even pulled off a high volume "Cast Your Fate to the Wind," and by the time they played "Funk #49" the place was theirs. But a missing something (it might have been Joe Walsh, but with this audience it was probably a lack of smoke bombs) continued to keep the Gang from being headline material despite their hard-rocking approach.

Kiss couldn't miss. The last time they played here was as an emergency top-of-the-bill over former headliners T. Rex. Marc Bolan had done his all – electric star platform, plenty of strobes and a sexual attack on his guitar – but Kiss had come out thermoblasting and that had been that.

For their first official headlining, the place was crammed. Word of mouth must have done the trick; it couldn't have been the records (it *couldn't!*). You know: "Hey, there's all this fire and he spits blood..." Well, the fire was there, enough of it to pop half the corn in Indiana. There were powder charges, smoke bombs, flamethrowers and other goodies, enough pseudo-napalm to justify the extinguishers tucked nervously around the apron. And Gene Simmons, the malevolent looking bassist with the sky-high steps, flash kabuki topknot ensemble and 17-inch tongue does indeed slobber something blood-ish when not belching flame. It's this kind of frolic which is the band's open secret. Kiss's show depends almost entirely on show, with the music (a combination of Blue Oyster Cult played slow, Black Sabbath played fast) acting as a bottom line for the effects.

On this winter eve, they had their automatons-from-hell riff down pat. When rhythm guitarist Paul Stanley and Simmons faced off, it was *Star Trek* glitter meeting kung fu dancing. Peter Criss's drum

kit swathed in smoke during “Black Diamond,” actually did rise into the air. From the black-and-chrome costumes to those blinding bombs, everything Kiss did was custom-tailored for neon-loving, volume-eating rockers.

Of course, the crowd responded in kind. Audiences toss roses at Melanie, but tonight’s bouquets consisted of M-80s, ladyfingers, and just plain firecrackers. Ah, love.

**Review of “Dressed To Kill” album
(RS #191, July 1975, Gordon Fletcher)**

“Kiss does not play music – it makes very high-volume noise. If rock & roll intrigues you, though, you’d best be advised that for all the simplicity, overstatement and repetition within its records, Kiss does make fantastically successful rock. Driven by Gene Simmons’s remarkably inventive bass lines and the cacophonous poundings of drummer Peter Criss, Kiss makes Chuck Berry chords and basic rock progressions come alive with energetic urgency. Simple? Yes. Repetitive? Yessir! But like the Stooges Kiss manages to avoid monotony.”

**Review of “Alive!” album
(RS #203, Jan. 1976, Alan Niester)**

Kiss onstage could possibly be mildly entertaining for about ten minutes, but on record, minus the impact of gaudy painted faces and stage theatrics, the band must be judged solely for its music. It’s awful. Criminally repetitive, thuddingly monotonous. And like the legions of equally talent-less bands across the country, Kiss attempts to get by on volume and tired riffing. Unlike these other bands, however, they came up with the idea of dragging rock further into the pits of theatrical overkill, managing, in the process, to pick up a legion of young fans who hadn’t heard these riffs in their previous incarcerations (Grand Funk comes to mind). That Casablanca has decided to promote the band as new bad-boy teen idols is obvious from the packaging—a glossy full-color, multi-page insert showing all the Kisses in close-up, and a suitably trippy letter from each (“Dear Earthlings: ...When I play guitar onstage, it’s like making love... Love, Ace”).

**“Success - It’s Just a Kiss Away”
(RS #209, Mar. 1976, David McGee)**

“On New Year’s Eve 1975, a Nassau Coliseum audience of 13,000 screamed praises for Kiss, four New York City musicians who favor heavy metal in their music, black and silver makeup on their faces, silk, leather and feathers on their bodies, and a plethora of special effects onstage, ranging from fire pods which shoot flames

15 feet into the air to a hydraulically levitated drum stand and a guitar that belches skyrockets.

Onstage were: Gene Simmons, a fire-breathing, blood-spitting bass player who stalks and lurks menacing around stage right, fluttering rock's most lascivious tongue at swarms of young girls in front of the stage; Paul Stanley, a sensual purveyor of thunderous chords, commanding center stage, prancing to and fro, masculine/feminine in whiteface with a large black star over his right eye; Ace Frehley, a self-described "crazy kid from the Bronx; a rebel, always in trouble with the cops," making good as lead guitarist, blending speed with emotion, his lithe body floating gracefully around stage left and his mind inhabiting another plane entirely; and Peter Criss, drummer with boundless energy, high school dropout, ex-member of a Brooklyn street gang called the Phantom Lords, with black cat whiskers and silver nose.

On New Year's Eve 1974, Kiss played its first major concert at the Academy of Music, opening for headliners Blue Oyster Cult. One year later to the day, Kiss headlined and Blue Oyster Cult was second billed. That a rivalry exists between these two groups is academic – this concert marked the end of Kiss's most successful year and the beginning of what Kiss's promoters believe to be a cultural phenomenon and, concurrent with the release of its fifth album – the Bob Ezrin-produced *Destroyer* – a musical force.

For openers, the band's music has become an integral part of the show rather than a backdrop for visuals. Moreover, as Ezrin (of Alice Cooper fame) will tell you, Kiss's momentum has been building for at least a year and a half. Ezrin was alerted to the group's potential by Mike Longman, a 16-year-old high school student who regularly calls Ezrin to talk about records. "Oh man, they're great," Longman told him, "The kids in high school love them. Only problem is their records are so shitty." Ezrin wondered why, if their records were so shitty, he should get involved. "Because this group is so good we buy their records anyway," answered Longman.

"I could hear a rumble from the street," says Ezrin, "and I've always had a very good sense for that. I listened and I knew Kiss

was having a profound effect on people already and they weren't even home yet. No airplay. No singles. No real big headlining tours."

Since then, Kissmania has made its presence felt. There's been a "Kiss-In" in an Illinois shopping center; keys to the city were awarded the group in Cadillac, Michigan; and in Terre Haute, Indiana, a Kiss Army (4000 strong) forced a local DJ to air Kiss. All of the group's recent shows have been sellouts, and *Alive*, the group's fourth album, has sold over a million units.

Kiss's latest album, *Destroyer*, reflects Ezrin's vision of the band as a "social phenomenon..." a caricature of all the urges of youth." Under Ezrin's direction, the melodies have become as strong and memorable as the riffs behind them. There's a fluency, precision and urgency now that escaped them a year ago. *Destroyer* is a radical departure from Kiss's previous albums – it works as an album of songs which convey the group's image as, in Ezrin's words, "symbols of just unfettered evil and sexuality," along with taking some new directions. Criss's lyrical ballad, "Beth," for example, proves him to be the group's best singer and may even find its way onto some MOR playlists.

Ironically, the biggest obstacle the group faced in the last year and a half (was its record company, Casablanca. Last summer, rumors circulated that Casablanca was nearly broke and wasn't paying Kiss its royalties. Casablanca president Neil Bogart confirmed that the label suffered "tremendous loss" on one album (*Here's Johnny – Great Moments from the Tonight Show*) and was in financial difficulty at the time the Kiss controversy arose. But, he said, success with *Alive* and Donna Summer's *Love to Love You Baby* album simultaneously solved the money crisis and royalties dispute. Kiss's manager Bill Aucoin agreed that the royalty problem had been resolved.

Kiss was formed three years ago when Stanley and Simmons, unhappy with the group they were playing in, decided to assemble a theatrical show band that would be, according to Simmons, "the next logical step" beyond the best bands he and Stanley had seen – the Who, the Rolling Stones and the Jimi Hendrix Experience. At

the time, Criss was emerging from a year's absence from the music world, a reaction to the breakup of his group, Chelsea. "I fell apart," says Criss, shuddering at the memory. "I stayed home. played, wrote, did a lot of drugs and went bananas. Then I got out of it and said, 'I'm ready, I'm really ready to make it.' I put an ad in ROLLING STONE – 'Drummer looking to make it, Will do anything.' Then Gene called me one night."

Finding that Criss's musical and theatrical ambitions jibed with his and Stanley's, Simmons invited him to join the new band. The trio rehearsed for three months in a loft at 23rd Street and Fifth Avenue in Manhattan, then advertised for a lead guitarist in the Village Voice. A veritable rogues' gallery of musical incompetents applied and were rejected before a disheveled Frehley entered the loft late one night, plugged in and was hired. Stanley dubbed the group Kiss (reject names included Albatross and Fuck) and they began playing clubs in Queens and on Long Island before making a New York City concert debut on May 4th, 1973 in the 23rd Street loft. Frehley remembers that the group was "terrible. We put on makeup, but it wasn't Kiss makeup, it was feminine makeup, like the New York Dolls. Back then the Dolls Were the hottest thing and we always wished we could be the Dolls 'cause we were nobody at the time. But we weren't physically like the Dolls, who were small, skinny guys, so we decided to come on real strong in black and silver."

For a year Kiss played the clubs and promoted itself tirelessly, to the point of compiling a mailing list and sending out press releases and concert tickets to anyone they thought was important in the music industry. One of those people was Bill Aucoin, then producer of the nationally syndicated music show *Flip Side*. Aucoin saw the group play a July 4th concert at the Crystal Room in Times Square's seedy Diplomat Hotel and signed them to a management contract with two conditions: That he would build the group into a major act, "something spectacular," and that he would get them a record contract in two weeks or the deal was off. Two weeks later, Aucoin had his friend Bogart, who was just starting Casablanca, interested enough in Kiss to make them his first signing. The big push was underway.

“Really’, what we’re dealing with is emotions,” says Simmons. “You don’t always get a chance to fuck when you’re horny or punch somebody in the face when you feel like it. It’s frustration and it builds. Some people never let it out. They crack and they’re carried away by the guys in the white coats. Our situations are ‘Let your guts out!’ things. You scream and all that frustration comes out. When people become disenchanting with the world, they turn to fantasy and here we are. We’re real fantasy figures.” But this fantasy world some times approaches highly questionable taste. The liner notes on *Alive*, for instance, consist of scribbled notes from each member fit to titillate their audience’s baser instincts. Gene Simmons writes, “Dear Victims... I love to do all those deliciously painful things to you that make you writhe and groan in ecstasy... My spiked seven-inch boot heels are at the ready, should you be in the mood for heavy sport...” Paul Stanley writes, “Nothing arouses me more than seeing you getting off on me...” Ace Frehley informs that “When I play guitar onstage it’s like making love. If you’re good you get off every time...” And from Peter Criss: “You should get your claws into this album. I know it’s gonna make your tails stand straight up...”

Mystique, image and intuitive calculation will only get a band so far before it must be redeemed by its music. Kiss is coming to terms with this bit of reality. “We were trying to bring back flamboyance and *stage show* to rock & roll,” explains Simmons, “and we knew there’d be problems with the music. But you have to take that first step. When we started out, that’s the music we were doing at that time and that’s what we were like then. I don’t feel apologies are necessary, because there’s simply nothing to apologize for. We’ve become what we are because of what we look like, obviously, and because of the music. *Destroyer* is just the second step. The music’s taking the forefront.”

And in another two years?

“International stars,” Aucoin says, and then heads out for the Providence (Rhode Island) Arena, where Kiss is playing to a capacity audience. Five months ago, they were second on a bill headlining Black Sabbath.”

**Review of “Destroyer” album
(RS #214, June 1976, John Milward)**

“There’s no doubt that *Destroyer* is Kiss’s best album yet or that Bob Ezrin, Alice Cooper’s heavy-handed wizard of heavy-metal production who helped write seven of the nine tunes here, has made the difference. But despite Ezrin’s superb production, Kiss still lacks that flash of creative madness that could have made their music interesting, or at least listenable.

The lead-off song, “Detroit, Rock City,” begins with 90 seconds of Cooper-like effects: the sound, of the breakfast table and a news announcer in the background reading a story of a kid who died in a head-on collision; then a flashback to the doomed youth entering his car that night, his mind undoubtedly on the song that follows, and finally in the coda, the screeching crash. Unfortunately, Kiss entirely lacks the satiric distance that often made Cooper’s use of such conceits genuinely funny, and worse yet, such gimmickry is the best *Destroyer* has to offer.

The songs, save for two bloated ballads, are relentless riff rockers rooted in patently pedestrian drumming. Although constructed with professional aplomb, making use of a wide array of heavy-metal conventions, there’s nothing new here. Even when an effective melody, such as the rabble-rousing “Shout It Out Loud,” is presented, the lackluster performances dampen the effect. The vocals are undistinguished and emotionally empty; the lyrics—about partying and the rock scene, with plenty of campy S&M allusions—trite. Worse yet, there’s not a memorable guitar solo on the album.”

Review of “Rock And Roll Over” album

I can find no review in Rolling Stone for this album. Maybe I missed it...

“KISS: The Pagan Beasties of Teenage Rock”

(RS #236, Apr. 1977, Charles M. Young)

We broke Lawrence Welk’s attendance record in Abilene, Texas. “I’m very proud of that,” says Gene Simmons, the Kiss bassist, notorious for his grotesquely long tongue and for dressing like a pterodactyl. We sit at a backstage dinner table on the first of three nights they are playing Detroit’s 12,000 seat Cobo Hall – exceptional dates because they are doing mostly secondary markets this tour. “We’re hitting places they’ve never seen a big band, and they’ll remember us forever. The reaction has been amazing. I was watching the local news in Duluth and the announcer said there had been a robbery at the auditorium. I thought, ‘That’s it for the gate receipts,’ but it turned out some kid had gone up to the window and stolen three tickets at gunpoint. I don’t understand it. Tickets are so ethereal. One concert and they’re gone. Now money, that’s real power.”

Money, I object, is as much an illusion as a ticket. “Not if everyone believes it,” says Simmons, holding up a fork. “If I say this is a royal scepter and everyone recognizes it as such, then it’s a royal scepter and I’m king. That’s power, not an illusion.” Before I can insist it’s still a fork, guitarist Paul Stanley – known for the black star over his right eye and for his bright red lips-sits down and stuffs a piece of cake into his mouth. “I’m really sick to my stomach,” he says, licking the fingers of one hand, holding his taut belly with the other, and searching for another slice with the calm eyes of an addict who has enough money to feed his habit. “I got chills and everything. I thought I was going to pass out onstage last night.” Maybe he would feel better if he stopped eating gunk? “The best diet for the road,” he says, “is soup for lunch and candy for supper. It keeps the weight off and you’re speeding on all that sugar by show time.”

A roadie announces that it is time for a sound check, and the three of us walk to the \$300,000 stage set in the cavernous auditorium. Drummer Peter Criss – who paints his face to resemble a cat-is already at his kit and nearly falling off his seat, laughing at his own ludicrous version of the bang-the-drum-slowly ending of the Chambers Brothers’ hit, “Time Has Come Today.” Guitarist Ace Frehley, who plays the role of a spaceman with two silver stars

splashed over his eyes, ignores the folderol and sends occasional blasts of power chords echoing through the hall. None of the members of Kiss is “wearing the makeup he invariably puts on for public appearances, and, stripped of paint, Stanley comes the closest to handsome, with patrician features that one could imagine, in another age, riding a two stallion chariot too fast down a crowded Roman street and lashing the backs of slow peasants. Frehley looks like the original 1967 acid casualty, his face as pockmarked as the moon backdrop on his side of the stage. Criss appears several years past his official age of 30, but his eyes are a child’s in their lack of calculation. With his swarthy central-European complexion and flaking black fingernails, Simmons could look filthy stepping out of a shower. Though we are all about 6’2” in our stocking feet, Frehley, Stanley and Simmons tower over me in their eight-inch platform shoes and I begin to realize the luxury of height. All these years, I’ve been talking down at people. Standing here under Simmons’ unflinching gaze, I am somehow the wimpy one whose opinions don’t matter.

“Come here. I want to show you something,” he says, ascending a staircase to the parapet of the ruined castle that is his side of the stage. It is spattered with red from the nightly ritual of puking blood during his bass solo. “We’re 40 feet over the audience. You know what this is?” The 40 feet are straight down and the only answer I can think of is acrophobia. Simmons steps to the edge and gestures over a sea of empty seats. “This,” he says, “is power.”

According to *Scientific American*, every time a buffalo farts in Africa, thousands of dung beetles are alerted to the possibility of manna from heaven. The relationship between the farts and the beetles is a peculiarly honest one. Each species of beetle is genetically programmed to eat a particular kind of dung, so the buffalo need not sponsor marketing surveys to discover where they have to fart for maximum return on their investment. Competing herds do not advertise themselves or offer promo samples. As for the product: buffalo farts do not promise to reveal the meaning of life. Buffaloes do not promise to craft farts that make the whole world sing. They do not promise intellectual respectability if a beetle can interpret their fart sounds with sufficient pedagogy. Buffalo farts promise shit, which is what they deliver.

Among contemporary rock & roll bands, the music of Kiss comes the closest to comparing favorably with buffalo farts. Allowing for a few aberrational songs, they, too, do not promise to reveal the meaning of life, make the whole world sing, or any of that: They scream elemental need, placing as much emphasis on words like “I wanna” as the Ramones, only with no condescending satire to sink them in Middle America. One of their most dramatic stage moments comes in a break, when Stanley faces the audience alone and gets them chanting: “IiiiiIiiiahah. WaAAaaNT YooOOooOOooOOu.” He’ sounds uncomfortably close to Robert Plant, but the moment obliterates the known world aside from primal craving. None of this Woman-you-need-love chivalry, none of this hold-your hand subtlety. (Kiss had to drop “Hard Luck Woman,” a song about a woman being hard luck until she found a man, because it was getting lousy audience reaction.) The known world, aside from primal craving, is a vast conspiracy to most teenagers pouring into the job market with no intellectual skills, thanks to the massive rupture that is American education. Ask a Kiss fan why he/she likes the band, and he/she will likely stare at you with vague hostility as the words fail to articulate in the cerebral cortex, and it’s too much effort to dig them out. The smarter ones notice the press pass pinned to your shirt and beg to be taken backstage. Ask to take their picture, and they preen with all the bravado their fresh hormones can muster. What’s important is declaring “I” to the conspiracy.

Which is transcendence of the inner conspiracy that is growing hair and zits in strange places all over their recently nubile bods. No better way to forget the inexorable march of biology than to lose your identity to four guys who have stepped out of their mundane bodies altogether and simultaneously wallow in those disgusting urges your parents would rather forget. It is pagan religion for adolescents. Bombs, flame throwers (sometimes as much from the audience as the stage), Simmons spitting blood and fire, all of them leaping and running up and down stairways in their platforms, Frehley’s guitar smoking and bursting into names, Criss’ six-foot glowing demon cat statues and drum set that levitates 30 feet in the air – attending a Kiss concert is surviving the Normandy invasion. You walk out and you are one of the gods’ chosen few, a survivor

who can go home and face the enormous blackheads on his nose like a man. Or at least have the inspiration to paint them different colors. Kiss is the greatest act since death.

Gene Simmons, dressed in a blue bathrobe in his hotel suite, asks, "Would you like to see my collection?" He pulls about 20 Polaroid snapshots out of a suitcase and drops them on the desk in front of me. Each is a groupie posed in a spread shot or other equally imaginative position, The bodies range from beautiful to grotesque. "Names. dates and places are written on the back. Those are just for this tour."

"You must have strange diseases," I finally say. "Never."

"Did you ever do it with anyone famous?"

Humming "We've Only Just Begun," he walks into the adjoining living room. Star Stowe. the February Playboy foldout, and a Bunny friend of hers emerge giggling from the bathroom. Stowe wears black panty hose with holes ripped in them, skimpy blue-jean shorts and a Kiss T-shirt a couple of sizes too small. I recognize her from a Polaroid. Simmons makes some remark about their sexual proclivities. "Ge-eene," says Stowe. "You know we were only in there together 'cause we have the same suitcase. Don't even joke about that with him here. If I was a faggot, I woulda said so in the [Playboy] article. I don't want my reputation ruined."

After a few more minutes of distressed discussion. Simmons dismisses them with a curt "Why don't you do what females are best at doing!" They immediately quiet down, so presumably that is what he thinks they are best at doing. "We're not a great band," he says, turning his attention back to me. "The musicianship is average, maybe even below, but in a year we're going to be the biggest band in the world, Two hundred million Americans out there don't appreciate subtleties. They want to be sledgehammered over the head with clear issues and no pussyfooting. Nobody hides behind any pseudo-intellectualism, I am a fan of Middle America. Remember, it was mass culture that created rock 'n' roll. Our tastes happen to coincide with theirs."

I ask who he voted for in the 1972 presidential election. He says McGovern and admits there may be something wrong, on occasion, with mass taste. "But nothing is right or wrong in music. There are just certain tastes. People in New York hate Lawrence Welk, but he sells half a million records every time out and he's got about 30 releases."

"Will you admit it's still shit?" I ask.

"Somebody out there likes it." Jacqueline Susann sells more books than Shakespeare, but she's still shit and Shakespeare is still Shakespeare."

"Wait a minute!" Simmons exclaims, "I think Shakespeare is shit! Absolute shit! He may have been a genius for his time, but I can't relate to that stuff, 'Thee' and 'thou'; the guy sounds like a faggot. Captain America is classic because he's more entertaining. If you counted the number of people who read Shakespeare, you'd be very disappointed."

"No aesthetics exist aside from what people buy?" I ask.

"You bet."

"But Madison Avenue, for instance, doesn't much believe in what it sells. Nobody needed a deodorant before they created a market." Simmons answers by spraying his pits with a can of Royal Copenhagen. I continue, "All they're selling is a stupid image of getting laid or something. They're selling an illusion to get money, which is just another illusion."

"So why not commit suicide," he helpfully suggests, "and get rid of this pain you're having? TV is an entertainment medium. If I had a computer go on the air to list the ingredients and price so there wouldn't be any images, it would be the most boring commercial ever. *I wanna see a slut put it between legs and ram it in and out!* Then I'll go buy it!"

"I'm saying don't sell shit in the first place. The human race got along without deodorant for 10,000 years."

"We must have smelled like mooses."

"There's a whole theory of evolution that says we survived because we smelled so bad that no other animal would eat us."

“I get eaten great because I smell so bad – and so what if deodorant is shit? *I demand this shit! I am full of shit!*”

“Do you consider yourself more socially significant than deodorant?”

“No.”

The telephone rings for the umpteenth time and Simmons answers. He is the only member of Kiss – and one of a very few rock stars of any stature – who registers in hotel rooms under his real name. The result is a deluge of calls which he feels he owes his fans. “Yes, dear. Open your hand and look at it. My tongue is longer than that...”

The subject changes to his personal motivations for getting into music as a career. “After graduating from college,” he says, “I taught sixth grade at P.S. 75 at 96th and West End. near where I live now. I lasted six months because I couldn’t stand the kids. I wanted to beat the shit out of them. That’s the age when rebellion first sets in. I started teaching for the same reason I’m doing this: I needed to be onstage. All people need to be noticed, but some need it more. I’m an extreme version of what everybody is... I don’t want any kids of my own. I’m the last male in the family and I want the line to end with me. I’m very guarded in my personal relationships. I never want to get married.”

You know how it is when you sleep with chicks on the road,” says Billy Miller, latest in a long line of Kiss tour managers. “You’ll do anything to make them leave before morning... Without their makeup, they look like Senor Wences’ fist.”

Anderson smiles at the analogy as Paul Stanley lies on a couch, exhausted after the show. Most of the big black star over his right eye is sweated off. Did Stanley find any validity in the charge that some of their lyrics were sexist?

“Fuck ‘m,” he says. “I don’t believe in women trying to be me. We’re two different species. You get trouble in a relationship when they try to act like a man. Somebody needs to be in charge. I have a lot of respect for my own opinion.”

Could it be that many rock stars lead insulated lives on the road and get distorted impressions by being with groupies all the time? “Well, it would be easy to generalize that all women want is a free meal and a fuck. That’s not my generalization, though.”

Stanley is the Virgin Mary of Kiss – in the Unholy Quadrenity, he is the most approachable by the worshipers. He does the majority of singing, all the talking onstage (in a Southern accent rather incongruous with his upbringing in Manhattan), and some amazing dancing that includes clicking his heels in the air while wearing eight-inch platforms. It is almost more an athletic test of endurance than a concert.

I tell Stanley about the deodorant discussion with Simmons. “If we’re selling something,” he says, “it’s good. We’re selling escapism, relief from nine-to-five problems; Many people lead dreary lives and we fulfill a need to get away from it all. People take Valium, people buy records. It’s just not as heavy as you want to make it. We reach the masses, we have fun, and that is valid. I sleep very-soundly.”

A photograph of Kiss without their makeup has never been published, and I wonder about the great emphasis placed on preserving the mystique, “We’re not telling you we’re from another planet or that we’re laboratory creations,” he says. “We try to keep a sharp image because the public wants it. Who would have wanted to see Clark Gable without his false teeth?”

After Stanley takes a shower, we go down to the hotel bar, where a woman comes up to point out a rose tattoo on her shoulder, identical to one on Stanley’s shoulder. He wearing no makeup, but with his plentiful hair, fringed leather jacket and high platform shoes, it is obvious he is a rock star even if you can’t place the face. I find Star Stowe’s Bunny friend and, thinking to flirt, ask if she’s really a lesbian, “Don’t say that out loud! I’m the most nan-hungry woman in the worold,” she says, genuinely upset. I change the subject to Simmons. He was right this afternoon, you know,” she says. “He’s always right in everything, except when he’s wrong.”

In his hotel room in Detroit, Peter Criss takes a quick swig from a white plastic bottle. “This protein liquid is the worst shit I ever lasted,” he says with a grimace, as Al Ashton, a Canadian disc jockey, sets up a tape recorder to interview him and Ace Frehley. “I’ll try anything to wake up. Even vitamins.”

“Why not just take speed?” suggests Ace Frehley, who’s slumped in a chair.

“ ‘Cause.”don’t like it.”

During the interview, Frehley will say that he wants to go to another planet before he dies, but Criss is the first to open up, reminiscing about his childhood. “They threw me out of the choir because I drank all the wine when I was an altar boy,” he says. “They used to lock me in the closet for hours in school. They made me sit in the wastebasket. I hate nuns, man.”

The resentful memory seems to jar loose some inhibitions because Criss is soon railing against the present-day equivalent to his old nuns. “We’re the ones kicking shit out there every night! The only ones who know what’s going on are the band and road crew. Record executives just sit behind desks getting their pictures taken for the trades and grabbing all the credit... Oh, God! I didn’t say it! I’ve pulled a John Lennon!”

Frehley shrieks with high-pitched staccato laughter. The DJ asks about his childhood. “I was in the Bronx somewhere, floating.” Again he shrieks. And his future plans? “I want to start a monkey farm.” Another shriek.

“And the agents!” Criss resumes, shouting, “They’re bigger assholes than the record company. They’ll book’ us anywhere. They drug us, say they’ll let us bring our old ladies, have bodyguards to lock us up.” A bellboy wheels in a cart with a big silver bucket of ice. “Oh, no! Not more champagne!” Criss cries. “See what I mean about drugs?”

Everyone takes the bellboy as a signal to end the radio interview. As I walk to the door, Alan Miller, head of promotion for Kiss’ Aucoin Management, jokes: “If you say anything to hurt the group, we’ll break your legs.”

The four band members stare intently into the mirrors in their dressing room and smear on makeup as Bill Aucoin, president of Aucoin Management, announces that “Beth,” their hit ballad of 1976, has tied with “Disco Duck” for best song of the year in the People’s Choice Awards. “What did we win?” says Stanley. “A

hundred pounds of dog food?” Aucoin chuckles and says they have to discuss how they will receive the award since they will be on the road during the ceremony.

“I don’t think we should be on TV at all,” says Simmons.

“Are you kidding?” says Aucoin. “We’ll make it a surprise for Peter. He’ll go out to sing the song alone as usual, and you guys will come out and say you just got a wire that you’ve won the award. Peter says thanks, blah blah, you walk off and he does the song. We’ll put together a tape and send it to the show.”

After a few more minutes of makeup smearing, Criss announces with ridiculous solemnity that it is time for Gene Simmons to come out of the closet and admit to his leadership role in the gay liberation movement. He suggests several loathsomely graphic possibilities for the origin of Simmons’ long tongue, to uproarious laughter among several roadies and other assistants.

“He says if he likes you he’ll swallow it,” says Stanley. “He even owns stock in K-Y jelly.”

Simmons stands defenseless against this locker-room onslaught and says nothing after a couple of lame attempts to link Criss’ Italian heritage to the Mafia. I catch his eye and for the first time see the monster pleading. Someone brings in a box and says it is a present from the family at whose house Kiss has been invited to party after the concert. Criss opens the box and pulls out a bottle of wine. “If these people are as rich as they say, how come they send us Gallo?” he asks. “Oh, man! Look at this!” He passes around a greeting card that shows a photograph of a slightly obese businessman, his wife and two beautiful children smiling out from their suburban living room. “This is Middle America, man. They’re sicker than we are.”

Peter Criss walks out of the bathroom with a smoking hair dryer in his hand. “I was blowing on my hair when all of a sudden sparks started coming out of the thing,” he says. “I could have gone up in flames. Imagine that: all these years of bombs going off next to me every night and I finally get done in by a hair dryer.”

As he settles down in a chair to towel off, I ask about the ribbing of Simmons. “That was heavier than usual because you were there,” he says. “We were showing off and really getting to him because the press means so much to him. Joking keeps my mind off the performance and keeps us as friends.”

And the outburst this afternoon with the DJ? “It’s a game. We built up this whole thing about being outlaws against the system. But I do feel the guys behind desks a lot of times don’t know what the hell’s going on. “My social life has suffered,” he continues. “I go to parties and find myself really scared – always sitting in the corner, not knowing how to act. It’s sick. I used to go to parties and flaunt the rock star role, but now that I am one, I can’t. I’m losing the real Peter Criss somewhere and it scares me. I never go to sleep at night. I sometimes have an insecurity that I’m not good enough for the success. But I believe I’ve worked very hard and I’m entitled to it now. I’ve cleared that up. I’m pretty happy. I’m very excited over the band.”

Does he find any conflict between the Christian crosses he wears around his neck and the group’s image of evil and sex? “I find myself evil,” he says, “I believe in the devil as much as God. You can use either one to get things done,”

What would he tell God about how he had been spending his life if the hair dryer had in fact fried him? “I don’t know. I’m having a good time. It’s all show business. I would tell him, ‘You should have been there, man.’”

Ace Frehley braces himself for my questions with a beer and a firm dismissal of a couple of little kids who are staring at him at the party thrown by the family who sent them the Gallo. They’ve turned out to be more upper than middle class, with a mansion in Grosse Pointe, just outside Detroit. Seeing “the spaceman” without his makeup, the children appear to have just learned that there is no Santa Claus.

“I go crazy about privacy,” says Frehley in a heavy New York accent. “I have to, to keep my sanity and handle stardom. Onstage I’m Ace Frehley, and offstage I’m a kid from the Bronx. I consider

myself lucky in a way. Mick Jagger will always be Mick Jagger, but I can take off my makeup and know who I am. When all the girls scream, it's not me they're grabbing. It's what I represent."

Does he really believe he's going to another planet?

"I eat, sleep and drink my character. It is my fantasy to go to another planet. By the time I'm 40, interplanetary travel will be common. Nobody will want to talk to me at that age anyway. Stardom is a temporary phase. You become a candidate for the nuthouse when you believe what you are is everlasting."

Don't all stars play for immortality, though? Doesn't he want to be remembered in 50 years?

"I'm gonna be on Mars. It doesn't fuckin' matter. This planet won't be here in 50 years."

And how does he feel about deodorant?

"Better to compare us to President Carter," he says, "because people vote the same way they buy records."

All the members of Kiss were fuckups in high school: Frehley was thrown out of two schools and dropped out of a third in the Bronx; Criss got his knuckles rapped by nuns in Brooklyn and was humiliated for wearing his hair too long; Stanley was chronically "at the bottom of the smartest class" in school in Manhattan; and Simmons was the inveterate class clown and a fan of monster comic books in Queens. All were driven by an unquenchable craving for fame and a love for simple rock & roll Stanley and Simmons found each other six years ago and formed a band that played everything from country & western to rock. That flopped, but the two took their money from a shelved album and invested in a loft and the most imposing-looking equipment they could find. In early 1973, Simmons called up a drummer who had placed an ad in *ROLLING STONE* saying he would do anything to make it That was Peter Criss, and they played together for several months as a trio. After about 60 guitarists had answered an ad they placed in the *Village Voice*, they were impressed enough by the surliness and musicianship of Ace Frehley to hire him on.

The focus of the band existed from the beginning: heavy theatrics, heavy metal and heavy makeup, though they looked more like

vermin than monsters at the time. The emphasis on the projection of power was also immediate: they played in front of a huge wall of amplifiers that, if the lights were misplaced, would be revealed as having no speakers inside. They stenciled the Kiss logo of double “s” lightning bolts on all the equipment so it would appear as if they were a big touring band.

Copying addresses out of *Record World*, they sent out press releases and invitations – to anyone even remotely connected with the music business – to their gigs, for which they rented their own halls when they couldn’t get bookings. Bill Aucoin, then president of an independent TV production company that did a syndicated rock show called *Flipside*, showed up at one show and offered to get them a record contract in two weeks if they would let him manage them. This he did, with Casablanca, a label just starting under the aegis of Neil Bogart, former co-president of Buddah.

After three albums, several exhaustive tours and an almost unmitigated drubbing by the critics; they and their record company were in debt several hundred thousand dollars and had no more resources. An entire 1975 tour was financed by Aucoin’s American Express card. “Then Kiss Alive! was released, went gold, went platinum, went double platinum.

It was the first and only time their sound had been truly captured on record. Alive! in my opinion should be ranked among the classic live rock albums.

Nearly sunk by a catastrophic double album of *Tonight Show* bits, Casablanca Records re-floated and Kiss became rich. *Destroyer*, their first attempt to write something beyond “suck me, fuck me songs,” as Stanley phrased it, also went platinum. So did *Rock and Roll Over*, which was a return to almost pure heavy metal because the hard core of the Kiss Army (the band’s official fan club) reacted so vehemently against the violins on *Destroyer* (including “Beth”). All three albums remain in the Top 40 of *Record World’s* LP chart.

This June, a Marvel Comic-with Kiss as superheroes-written by Steve Gerber, who also does Howard the Duck for Marvel, will be published on slick paper. And the band members, these days, are

almost universally liked among the press for their openness. Aucoin Management, which has maintained firm control over the image-making process by making all photographers sign clearance contracts, and other such devices, is less universally liked. Aucoin himself draws a parallel between his control over artists and that of the old Hollywood studios, which he looks on as “places where things got done, whatever their faults.”

“The key to building a superstar is keeping their mouths shut,” says Bob Ezrin, producer of *Destroyer*.” They have to be kept isolated to avoid being manipulated by all these outside forces. There was a time when Kiss wasn’t allowed to talk to anyone. To reveal an artist to the people can be to destroy him. It isn’t to anyone’s advantage to see the truth. In the long run, the audience matters more. That’s the story.”

“Did I ever show you my collection?” asks Gene Simmons in the bedroom of his duplex in New York three weeks after the Detroit concerts. He hands me two huge leather scrapbooks which I page through, spying an occasional familiar face. After about five minutes, a woman walks out of the closet. I don’t catch her name, but she says she played Daisy Mae in a production of *Li'l Abner* four years ago. The room is decorated with paintings and other paraphernalia from fans. One shows Simmons, with a headman’s ax, gloating over a burning city. Another portrays him as a gargyle. Jewelry with tarantulas and black widows embedded in clear plastic is scattered about. He gives me a few letters from a plastic bag full of fan mail. All of them have drawings of the band. The American ones seem nearly incoherent with bad grammar and misspellings.

“I wonder if these guys are morons,” I say.

“Doesn’t bother me,” Simmons replies. “At least they’re doing something.”

The Japanese fans, on the whole, seem to have a better command of English. “My dear Gene. Please eat up all my love. I want a lot more experience while I am young. With love, Shinobu I.”

“The Beatles sold out the main hall in Tokyo four nights. ‘We’ve got it booked for five,’” he says, putting a tape on his cassette

deck. As Kiss music plays in the background, a Japanese girl weeps. "Please Gene Simmons, I want to hear your voice. I pray to God every day. I'm expecting you every moment. When you come to Japan, please answer me at once. Please never forget me... please..."

Both stunned, we sort of stare at each other over the 15-odd scrapbooks of press clippings. The heavy Hungarian accent of Gene's mother calls us downstairs to eat. "Make at home yourself," she says. "Sit and have some yummy-yummy."

Over yummy-yummy, she tells how Simmons used to print his own monster fanzines in the basement and how he got his first guitar. "I don't want any of the credit," she says. "I bought him first guitar for \$65 from Italian boy. I made \$49 a week then. He wanted \$75 but I drove him down to \$65. Later we sold it for \$135. I went along everything every way. I know behind makeup who he was. Al Jolson put on makeup. It's all right so long as he doesn't smoke or drink alcohol. I know all about his girlfriends."

Well, even if Jolson wore makeup, he didn't have a complete alter ego – a distinction Kiss shares only with Alice Cooper, who destroyed his claim to evil and insanity by playing golf with George Bums and Mike Douglas, while Kiss vomited blood and fire. But, given their overwhelming need for adulation, is there any real difference between them?

"I don't know," says Simmons. "I never wanted to appear on *Hollywood Squares*."

As I rise to leave, Simmons takes me aside and says, "Don't print anything that's gonna blow it for me. It's very fragile and I like it too much." I try to assure him that most of his fans can't read anyway, but he still seems worried.

"I won't have you ridicule them; I won't let you do it." At the door he relaxes. "We make our first comic book appearance in this month's issue of *Howard the Duck*," he says. "It's crazy. I'm a superhero down the block at the newsstand, and I'm standing here in my bath. robe. I can't think of anyone outside Kiss who can say that."

Review of “Love Gun” album

(RS #246, Aug. 1977, Charles M. Young)

This review was lumped in with reviews of Rainbow’s “On Stage,” Roky Ericson & Bleibalien’s “Red Temple Prayer,” and the Sex Pistol’s “God Save The Queen,” under the header “Kiss: teasing but not pleasing.”

“After seeing Kiss backstage without their makeup, I have lost all ambition to do anything with my life except see them naked. Gene Simmons knows this and has written a song about the Plaster Casters – a couple of groupies who made molds of rock stars’ no proboscis protuberances in the late Sixties – to titillate me and the millions of other Americans who go to bed every night wondering about Simmons’ masculine module. Does he paint it like his face before he performs with it? Does it breathe fire and puke blood? If so, does his girlfriend use an asbestos diaphragm? Simmons subtly leaves these questions unanswered on *Love Gun*, no doubt to preserve his mystique. He does, however, drop us several tantalizing hints.

He describes his Vesuvius of the lower regions as “perfection” on “Plaster Caster” and offers, “If you want to see my love, just ask her.” This line represents the record’s only serious artistic failure: inside the jacket is an order form for Kiss T-shirts, Kiss posters and Kiss belt buckles – so why do we have to go to the Plaster Casters for a glimpse of perfection? Why not have a \$6.95 check-off for a plastic replica of the Gene Simmons Memorial Seed Silo? Paul Stanley, who also uses “love” as a euphemism for “my dick,” could have a model that dances in eight-inch platforms. Peter Criss could have one with a hydraulic system that raises it 30 feet in the air. And Ace Frehley’s could shoot rocket over the audience.

Love Gun’s less serious failures include losing much of the energy in the overdubs (a chronic problem with Kiss) and not taking enough advantage of Peter Criss’ excellent voice. Still, they come up with some nice riffs, and “Then She Kissed Me,” a cover of the Phil Spector tune, is genuinely funny for the right reasons. I’m told their next album will be a double live set. If history repeats itself, that album will contain the definitive versions of everything potentially worth hearing on *Love Gun*.”

**Review of “Alive II” album
(RS #256, Jan. 1978, John Swenson)**

“One of the perennial saving graces of rock & roll is its accessibility to the true believer. In a sort of Horatio Alger formula, if you need it badly enough and have the right attitude, eventually you’ll become an adequate rocker. Kiss, a band built almost entirely around an image, offers the latest proof of this maxim.

Kiss has improved dramatically during its recording career, first to the high point of raw efficiency achieved on “I Wanna Rock & Roll All Night,” more recently to improved instrumental technique. The group has brought a lot of listening and a lot more outright thievery to *Alive II*, resulting in a textbook demonstration of how to play Stones/Who hard rock. The guitar solos on “King of the Night Time World” and “Shock Me” are note-for-note duplications of sections from Pete Townshend’s long improvisation (“My Generation”) on side two of *Live at Leeds*. Even more Startling is the way the screams over sustained guitar codas on those two songs and on “Makin’ Love” sound exactly like Roger Daltrey finishing off Townshend’s pyrotechnics.

It’s open to question how much credit to give a band for using such well-proven formulas, and it’s also true that a wan reflection of the original, no matter how sincere, is still not the real thing. But it remains that *Alive II* captures the essence of live rock & roll very well – perhaps even a little better than the recent Stones set.”

**“A docile audience: The Kiss of Death”
(RS #258, Feb. 1978, Charles M. Young)**

A review of the Dec. 14, 1977 show at Madison Square Garden with Detective.

When the lights dimmed, I threw my coat over my head and screamed at the woman next to me, “Here they come!” Only they never came. No M80s from the upper tier. No cherry bombs. No finger-poppers. No nothing. The woman, who had never been to a hard-rock concert before, thought I was a damn fool.

“Listen, you gotta believe me,” I begged. “I’ve seen six Kiss concerts in the last year and it’s never been like this. The crowd is

the most docile since I saw Crosby, Stills and Nash last summer.” And they stayed that way through the show – barely bothering to stand for the encores, making little noise of any kind. Possible explanations:

1. New York is a bad town for Kiss. It was one of the last areas to break for the band. This being a media center, it is possible that some people read critics and want to feel sophisticated.
2. The word is finally getting out that the firecrackers are blowing people’s heads off. Kiss is hereby commended for having some guy come out before the shows and berate the fans for killing each other.
3. The thrill is gone. Much as I enjoy watching Gene Simmons puke blood; he’s been doing it every night for three years.
4. The real fanatics were elsewhere. They went to the following nights’ concerts. This show was added only after two others had sold out
5. Their demographics are changing. Through overexposure, Kiss seems no longer Forbidden Fruit. They are losing their traditional support among proletarian teenage boys and picking up children impressed by costumes. A third of the crowd appeared to be parents with little kids. Kiss records are selling phenomenally well, but maybe to Shaun Cassidy weenie bops.
6. Kiss got demoralized when I compared their music to buffalo farts last spring. But I compared it favorably. Most popular music I rank lower than buffalo farts.
7. Even though they are better than buffalo farts, Gene Simmons’ latest love songs to his dick are dumb. Unless you are a fourteen-year-old virgin with zits. But then you don’t want to be sitting next to your mommy and five-year-old brother while you think macho.
8. The show wasn’t that good. Even with all the explosions, flame throwers and hydraulic lifts, the band seemed tired. Peter Criss was so hoarse during “Beth” that he broke up laughing. Ace Frehley, whose mind is supposedly on Mars, looked more as if his mind were on getting it over with.
9. Detective stunned the crowd into silent awe. Since these guys don’t do anything but clone late-period Zeppelin and Bad Company licks, it must have been the two avocados the singer seemed to have stuffed in the crotch of his white satin stretch pants.

“Four Ways To Kiss”

(RS #279, Nov. 1978, John Swenson)

“The worst thing is that the kids think we are breaking up,” frets bassist and Kiss spokesman Gene Simmons about the recent joint release of the four members’ solo albums. While not in the running for album of the year, each is miles beyond the recording standards applied to any one Kiss LP. But the group is worried that its audience will consider the move betrayal. “We’re asking everyone not to refer to these as solo albums,” prods Kiss publicist Julie Harrison about the identically packaged, self-titled LPs. “We want them to be called Kiss albums.”

In fact, the albums by Simmons and guitarists Ace Frehley and Paul Stanley won’t seem too foreign to kids raised on the Kiss brand of recycled heavy metal. But drummer Peter Criss’ solo album has absolutely nothing to do with Kiss, a fact which makes Criss very proud. “I’ve always been different,” he explains, “because Gene, Paul and Ace are more into Zeppelin, Humble Pie and Hendrix, while I was always into the Stones, Beatles and R&B performers like Sam Cooke. When I’m home I listen to the Eagles, old Beatles, Sinatra, Tony Bennett, Dionne Warwick.”

This is not the first time Criss has created a stylistic dilemma within the band. Though his song “Beth” became a big Kiss hit, the ballad didn’t fit the band’s image, he explains. “Kiss is a strange group, a lot of voting. They didn’t want to do the song, the kids aren’t gonna accept it, they said. Gene was against it because he said it didn’t fit the concept. But our public is gonna dig it. Kiss never made good albums, our shows always outsold our albums, but it’s time that changed.”

The drummer chose Vini Poncia (Nilsson, Ringo) to produce his album, and Poncia’s star-maker production provided Criss with the slickest support of any of the solo efforts. There are several pleasant surprises, notably an energetic remake of “Tossin’ and Turnin’” and an autobiographical tune called “Hooked on Rock and Roll.” Criss feels that his album is the first step toward separating his career from Kiss. “I see myself eventually on my own without the makeup and the bombs, without theatrics. I could dig getting up there with a white suit and three chick-singers. I

don't know if this is it for the band – nothing lasts forever. I've made it. At least now it's a steppingstone for each of us. If the band split up I really wouldn't mind."

Unlike Criss, the other members of the group had strong ideas about how their solo albums should sound and sought help only during the engineering and mixing stages. As a result the three albums have marked similarities to Kiss' music.

"I've never had more fun doing an album," says Ace Frehley. "It was more exciting than Kiss because I had more freedom. I didn't have to listen to three other guys telling me what to do." Frehley played most of the instruments himself on his LP and experimented a lot musically. "Ozone," "I'm in Need of Love," and "New York Groove" employed innovative guitar and recording techniques. His favorite track is "Fractured Mirror." "It means a lot to me he says, "because it's an advanced instrumental that holds up to 'Tubular Bells.'"

It's no surprise to find that Kiss mastermind Gene Simmons' solo album is a roughly conceptual treatise on stardom which features a celebrity lineup including Cher, Helen Reddy, Bob Seger and Cheap Trick's Rick Nielson. "Paul McCartney Wanted to sing on those songs," he says with a straight face, "but he wasn't available so I got the guys from Beatlemania [Mitch Weissman and Joe Pecorino]."

It is somewhat surprising, however, that the record comes across with the macabre humor more characteristic of Who bassist John Entwistle. But it's downright astonishing to hear Simmons do softly lyrical Beatles influenced pop songs like "See You Tonite," "Always Near You/Nowhere to Hide" and "Mr. Make Believe." Simmons is proud of the shock value. Many of the songs on the album were written before his involvement with Kiss, which explains many of the stylistic differences. However, Simmons maintains that Kiss will be able to assimilate this material into future stage shows. "We're breaking down every preconceived notion people have about us," he says, "and showing everybody that we can be the biggest and not be dictated to by our own confines. It's Kiss just because we play it."

Paul Stanley's album comes the closest to sounding like Kiss, except that his songs have more dynamic range than the group's work. But it's his album that provides a blueprint of how Kiss might expand its scope without retreating too much from the band's old image. "I tried not to contradict what I did before," he explains. "There's nothing wrong with progressing. I never said anything in Kiss that I didn't believe. If you want to do something different it shouldn't be mislabeled.

"These albums are an introduction to another Kiss, another level," he concludes "The next Kiss album will sound a lot closer to the solo albums than the last Kiss album. People forget how uncompromising we are. They see the chrome, not the engine."

Review of the Solo albums (RS #281/2, Dec. 1978, Robert Duncan)

Good taste is murder to rock & roll. Just take a look around. Fact is, from Elm to the Sex Pistols, the best rock & roll has always been strictly in bad taste. But time and again rock & rollers refuse to remember this, and as they get older and richer, sure enough, they start worrying about which fork is for the salad.

Except for a brief and regretted lapse on the oily *Destroyer*, Kiss has stood for nothing if not bad taste. And it's the utter vulgarity of the blood spitting, the platform shoes, the makeup and the under-produced songs about grimy sex and dumb partying that's made these guys one of the only genuine rock and roll bands in this benighted decade. But now, having constructed a most magnificently meretricious commercial empire from a consummate sense of grossness and stupidity the members of Kiss have decided, so it seems, to remove the camouflage and reveal themselves on these solo albums for what they really are: four tuna with good taste. Alas, fellas, Kiss don't need tuna with good taste. Kiss needs tuna that taste good. Don't they ever learn?

But wait. What's that word? What's that sound? Miracle of miracles, good taste behind Kiss' bad taste is even worse than what passed before! Whole new realms of revulsion from rock & roll's supreme Awful Majesties!

That said, it'd be difficult and not a little unfair to single out any one of the four Kiss-ers for worst bad-taste honors. But when drummer Peter Criss, a guy who made a million bucks wearing a silver button nose and kitty whiskers, tells me in his "Hooked on Rock 'n Roll" that it's been a rough road to the top, I wince with him. I also hasten to add that the further soul posturing in "Tossin' and Turnin'" and Criss' kitsch classic, "That's the Kind of Sugar Papa Likes," isn't going to make the road back down any smoother. Of course, the name of the game is: get bad.

In between the funk on Criss' record are several ballads, a form that almost everyone in the group apparently believes is the true hallmark of a rocker's good taste. The Catman (who wrote and sang the tear-jerker hit, "Beth," on *Destroyer*) is in his element here and almost scores again with die grandiose "I Can't Stop The Rain." Beyond that my note say: "Out-of-tune acoustic playing. One note is good." Which just about sums up this LP. Criss couldn't be worse.

Then again, he could be Ace Frehley, who reveals in tunes such as "Snow Blind," "Ozone," and "Wiped-Out" that he's got booze and drugs on (in?) his mind much of the time. Musically, Frehley illustrates this fact with a lot of pre-washed Jimi Hendrix-style guitar playing and some oddly appealing Todd Rundgren-like teenage-spacester singing. In his particular bid for respectability, Kiss' lead guitarist eschews ballads, preferring instead to crank up long instrumentals like a veritable Sheepshead Bay Beethoven. On result, "Fractured Mirror," has a duh-hey simplicity that in other quarters might make it Eno-esque. Only on "Rip It Out," a fast rocker with great nasty lyrics that urge the girl to actually rip her heart out, does Frehley get it all together. Whatever *it* is.

True to his Kiss persona as the Lover (he wears red lipstick), rhythm guitarist/lead vocalist Paul Stanley concentrates on love songs. Presumably because he's one of the band's two chief song-writers and thus gets more practice at the craft, Stanley's no stranger to a nice melody and airy harmonies. (His "Ain't Quite Right" is nearly Brooklynese Crosby, Stills and Nash.) Fortunately, good taste falters when Stanley's singing ventures too close to the Art Garfunkel threshold of high-pitched sensitivity and is finally brought low by his lyrics, especially in the two

bittersweet parenthetical moister works, “Hold Me, Touch Me (Think of Me When We’re Apart)” and “Take Me Away (Together as One)?” Bad. And wondrously so!

Gene Simmons, singing bassist Bay-Lizard and gross-out king of Kiss is probably the brains behind the group. But his album begs the question: how much brains does it really take to be the brains behind Kiss? Less than Einstein, more than sweet potatoes would be my ballpark answer. While he definitely understands bad taste and its effective applications, Simmons here appears torn between the diligent grudge that’s been his specialty and the True Self he no doubt displays privately to girlfriend Cher (who, incidentally, appears on “Living in Sin” as the telephone groupie, if my ears don’t deceive me).

Perhaps more than anything else, Simmons seeks respect for his notable wit. In his wittiest move, he’s used two of the Beatlemania cast for backup vocals on a couple of *Rubber Soul*-type numbers. Gene Simmons also knocks off the best rock & roll song on any of these records with the extremely catchy “Radioactive?” For the hat trick, he executes a brilliant defense of his gross-out ride in “Tunnel of Love.” ““Tunnel oflove / Tunnel of love / I’ve got to visit your tunnel of love” Simmons growl-sings like a guy who has to pee really bad after a long car ride. In another line, he tells a would-be lover: “You’ll jump off the roof if I say.” Now if that isn’t a rock & roll sentiment, I don’t know what is.

Alls well until Simmons breaks out the “close to my heart” stuff – ballads again – such as his Lon Chaney tribute, “Man of 1000 Faces,” the autobiographical(?) “Mr. Make Believe” and the Emerson, Lake and Palmer-like “Always Near You/Nowhere to Hide” (sung in his most painfully normal vocal style ever). I’ll admit the old Bat-Lizard almost moves me with these, but in the end, they’re just too slick and too disconcertingly out of character. On the other hand, what exactly *is* this whimpering rendition of “When You Wish Upon a Star?” A bad joke? Gong!

If you ever worried that these bozos were going to ditch you for the mainstream just like all the others, their solo LPs will put your

mind to ease. As long as Kiss is on the job, rock & roll is here to stay and Charlie Tuna is king.

“Kiss and Makeup”

(RS #300, Sep. 1979, Charles M. Young)

A review of the July 24, 1979 show at Madison Square Garden with New England.

Let us put Kiss in a humane perspective; that is, if I had been writing magazine articles for seven years and were only known for puking blood on my desk and having skyrockets go off in my typewriter, I would be real depressed. Even if millions of twelve-year-old boys bought belt buckles emblazoned with my face painted like a tree toad, I would have to question my professional competence to write a sentence. So let's all help keep Kiss off lithium and not say their music is lame. We know it. They know it. Millions of twelve-year-old boys don't know it, but they aren't going to figure out music until their pubic hair grows in anyway.

Let us instead praise the Kiss Stage show, which has too many neat special effects that your pubic hair retracts and you become twelve-years-old again and the music doesn't matter. Get this, man: Gene Simmons does this weird bass solo and vomits blood all over himself, just like he always does, but then they hoist him about fifty feet over the audience, where he sings “God of Thunder” with a good imitation of the Christmas bombing of Hanoi exploding all around him. And Ace Frehley shoots skyrockets out of his guitar, man, and Paul Stanley clocks the heels of his eight-inch platforms in, the air, man, and Peter Criss does a drum solo on a hydraulic lift that is lifts him almost as high as Simmons is over the stage lights, man.

Okay, not that much was new (only Simmons' hoist, really) and nothing was spontaneous, but that has always been the Kiss philosophy: give 'em what they want, only more of it. Kiss would label this democracy. Critics call it demagoguery. Whatever it is, it works for the same reasons religion does: it's mystical and awe inspiring, and twelve-year-old boys don't get that in church.

Unlike past Kiss stage sets this one is built low to the ground, presumably so they could sell seats behind the stage in large auditoriums. Since they didn't sell seats behind the stage at Madison Square Garden (Kiss' booking agent says this was intentional; the Garden's box office says it wasn't), one can assume there was no demand. Kids on Long Island and New Jersey still buy the myth of instrumental prowess and go for macho jack-off guitar work. Through maximum macho jack-off, Kiss is minimal prowess and must look elsewhere for their strongest audiences.

The opening act, New England, was yet another loathsome attempt by Kiss' management, Aucoin, to generate a second Kiss without makeup. Naming the band after a geographical area (I can think of ten others offhand) is as close as these shitheads have come to originality. I didn't see any licks, aural or visual, that weren't copped directly from Boston. This is, of course, the way Kiss, started cashing-in on a trail blazed by Alice Cooper. You gotta give these half-wits credit for tenacity.

Review of "Dynasty" album (RS #298, Aug. 1979, David Fricke)

"The Kiss Army is going to mutiny when they hear "I Was Made for Lovin' You," the disco-inflected leadoff track on the Masked Marvel's latest album. They'll demand to know why their heroes, after years of rallying the troops into battle against disco and other threatening schlock, have turned tail and joined forces with uptown popsters like producer Vini Poncia (whose soft-rock credentials include LPs by Ringo Starr and Melissa Manchester) and singer/tunesmith Desmond Child (who co-wrote the offending song with Kiss' Paul Stanley).

But *Dynasty* is Kiss' eleventh record – not including last year's four solo discs – and apparently the time has come to increase the band's credibility quotient outside the headbangers' community. A cover photo by Francesco Scavullo is one obvious tip-off, and the tentative disco rhythms in both "I Was Made for Lovin' You" and "Dirty Livin'" are another. Kiss also offers the hip gesture of including the Rolling Stones' "2,000 Man" as the album's token

cover version. But, unfortunately, this move backfires because whereas the Stones were playfully psychedelic in the *Their Satanic Majesties Request* original, Kiss humorlessly trots out the same old buzz-saw guitars and goose-stepping drums over which Ace Frehley sings with absolutely no conviction.

Much of the blame for Dynasty's sorry lack of spark can be laid at Poncia's console. Poncia – who just as timidly produced drummer Peter Criss' solo LP – has smothered most of the fire in the classic Kiss sound, reducing the guitars, drums and even Gene Simmons' bloody howl to a pseudo-sophisticated whimper that makes the group's ragged 1973 debut disc sound like apocalypse now. Only Stanley's "Sure Know Something" is salvaged – and that by one of the record's few memorable hooks."

Kiss itself still has to answer for erratic playing and an increasingly dull songbook that may never transcend the brainlessly brilliant "Rock and Roll All Nite (and Party Everyday)." You can't blame these guys for trying, but the respect they so earnestly crave is far more than just a kiss away.

Review of "Unmasked" album (RS #327, Oct. 1980, David Fricke)

This review was grouped with reviews of Humble Pie's "On To Victory" and Judas Priest's "British Steel."

Heavy Metal Monsters rarely die but eventually collapse under the accumulated weight of their own leaden riffing, Tarzan-like singing and boorish macho arrogance. Three new albums by Kiss, Humble Pie and Judas Priest merely represent different ways of trying to avoid the inevitable.

Once the clown princes of glitter rock, Kiss started cooling their riotous act on vinyl last year with *Dynasty*, openly courting AOR radio with the disco inflected "I Was Made for Lovin' You." Melissa Manchester's ex-producer, Vini Poncia provided the proper sanded-down sound. *Unmasked*, again masterminded by Poncia, is practically devoid of the mad, amped-up ravings of such headbanger faves as *Love Gun* and *Alive!* In fact "Shandi" alone suggests the Doobie Brothers in kabuki makeup, with' Paul

Stanley's dreamy voice floating on a calm sea of high harmonies and shimmering guitars.

Worse, "She's So Europe," "Easy As It Seems" and "You're All That I Want" are disappointingly tame. Bulldozing guitars and bloodcurdling vocals take a back seat to feeble hooks in Poncia's lifeless production. That deafening roar of yore might have been an artistic dead-end, but the current schlock just isn't any fun – and this band, even at its most obnoxiously excessive has always been fun. Consumers, beware: contrary to the LP's title, Kiss flash nary an inch of undisguised flesh on *Unmasked*, the group's last with drummer Peter Criss.

**Review of "Music From The Elder" album
(RS #363, Feb. 1982, JD Considine)**

What could be less promising at this stage of the game than a concept album by Kiss? After having written off Kiss as pure pap for eight-year-olds, who even wants to think about taking them seriously? Yet their twelve songs are catchy, the performances respectable, and, despite its concept, *Music from "The Elder"* is better than anything that the group has recorded in years.

Ah, yes, the concept. According to the liner notes, "The Elder are an ideal... They embody the wisdom of the ages and the power of goodness and knowledge." What, no part for Gene Simmons? "In every place, in every time, an evil is loosed whose sole purpose is to destroy all that is good." Oh, *there* it is. "It is the task of the Elder to find and train a warrior... a champion to conquer the evil." You can probably guess the rest.

For all its Marvel Comics predictability, however, *Music from "The Elder"* comes off quite well; thanks mostly to producer Bob Ezrin. By scaling down the band's bluster and adding orchestral sweetening, Ezrin makes Kiss sound strangely like Jethro Tull. Throw in some honest-to-goodness melodies and you've got a Kiss LP you can listen to without embarrassment.

Well almost.

KISS:

The "Rolling Stone"

Reviews

Part 2 - 1974-96

Notable News

(RS #604, May 1991)

Brief mention: "Kiss drummer Eric Carr underwent successful open-heart surgery to remove a growth in his right atrium."

Summer Tours

(RS #633, June 1992)

This enduring symbol of hard-rock success will celebrate its twentieth anniversary as a band (in one configuration or another) by, in a publicist's words, 'getting back to its roots.' That means that Gene Simmons, Paul Stanley, Bruce Kulick, and new drummer Eric Singer will promote their new album *Revenge*, while playing chestnuts like 'Rock And Roll All Nite' and 'Calling Dr. Love'."

Review of "KISS Exposed" video

(RS #496, Mar. 1987, Tony Seidman)

One thing about these Kiss characters - they know their market. In putting together this pseudo-documentary "comedy," they took pains to cram in every hoary teenage notion of rock stardom. The Kiss men portray themselves as brainless, filthy-rich slobs, reveling in sexism that would floor even David Lee Roth. Integrated with these enlightening scenes are the band's post-makeup bitches-in-heat videos and concert footage that dates back to 1975, including a vintage rendition of that rare Kiss

phenomenon, a ballad. And doing the honors on "Beth" is former drummer Peter Criss - singing flat, no less.

The "A" List

(RS #666, Sept. 1993)

This "College '93" feature was: "Celebrity guidance counselors recommend one book, one movie, one recording that will change I your life." *Gene's contribution:* "A dictionary! You won't read your required reading anyway. Try this one. You won't have to read the entire thing, and some pages actually have illustrations - right up your alley!!! Jurassic Park. Nat King Cole, the box set. Good the year round. Good for listening with your date, good for doing homework to. Just plain good."

Review of "Kiss My Ass" album

(RS #, Nov. 1994, Andrea Odintz)

Mention Kiss, and many people imagine monstrous figures in devilish makeup and platform shoes. They'll recall bassist Gene Simmons eating fire and displaying his tongue. But once you get beyond the pyro antics, clown suits and lunch boxes, the fact remains that Simmons, Paul Stanley and their band mates have created some great rock & roll. Their subjects may not always stimulate the mind - this is, after all, the band who penned "Let's Put the X in Sex," and their lyrics can be laughably macho. Yet their music has been cited as an influence by numerous artists, from Seattle pioneers the Melvins (who appeared, along with Nirvana, on an earlier Kiss cover album) to Garth Brooks. This tribute, aptly titled *Kiss My Ass*, celebrates the unabashed pleasures of vintage hard rock.

Although Brooks' inclusion is the biggest surprise, his version of "Hard Luck Woman" - backed by the rockers of honor themselves - is one of the most faithful covers. Brooks chose his song well, as the original is a country-tinged bar-band number. Straying further from the expected path is Toad the Wet Sprocket, who contribute an ironic acoustic version of "Rock and Roll All Nite." Others stick closer to home, with some embellishments: Lenny Kravitz turns "Deuce" into a pop funkfest with Stevie Wonder jamming on harmonica; Gin Blossoms' "Christine Sixteen" makes them sound similar to Kiss contemporaries Boston and Cheap Trick; the

Mighty Mighty Bosstones add both horns and a satanic vocal to "Detroit Rock City"; and Shandi's Addiction - comprising members of Faith No More, Rage Against the Machine and Tool - perform a top-heavy, somewhat distorted "Calling Dr. Love."

While loyal enthusiasm pervades the largely by-the-book tunes by Brooks, Anthrax ("She"), Dinosaur Jr. ("Goin' Blind") and the Lemonheads ("Plaster Caster"), a real treasure lies in a creative rendition of "Strutter" by Extreme, which turns down the metronome a couple of notches for a funky rhythm that truly struts more than rocks. But the ingenuity award must go to Yoshiki of the Japanese band X. His adaptation of "Black Diamond" is an instrumental orchestral arrangement, backed by the American Symphony Orchestra. It retains the basic structure of Kiss' version, using piano, strings and timpani in place of the traditional electric guitar, bass and drums. And that's why Kiss' music is so compelling: Like Aerosmith, the group can produce fine melodies that span the ages and excite new generations of artists. Imitation may be the sincerest form of flattery, but influence inspires a creativity.

Random Notes

(RS #724-5, Dec. 1995)

After years of bogus KISS conventions, GENE SIMMONS and the boys found yet another way to cash in - by throwing their own \$100-per-ticket party in most major cities. Festivities included a Kiss unplugged session, two tribute bands, tattoo artists, Kiss mannequins (behind Plexiglas) and a Q&A session with Simmons and PAUL STANLEY, during which fans repeatedly asked the band to sign its merchandise...

Random Notes

(RS #715, Aug. 1995)

For \$100, here's what you get at the 1995 KISS Convention, in San Francisco: two official Kiss tribute bands, Kiss tattoo artistes, Kiss mannequins (behind Plexiglas, of course) and, best of all, a Q&A with the fellas. Sample: "Gene. Who was better, Cher or Diana Ross?" (The ensuing din drowned out the answer.)

Paul Stanley of Kiss

(RS #750-1, Dec. 1996)

A brief Paul sound bite: "I came to the realization that America is thirsty for entertainment, and I have brought them rock & roll Gatorade. There are millions of people who want more than what they've been getting, and I want to make sure that they don't leave the table until they're full. A couple of nights ago, this fabulous-looking girl took off all her clothes and threw them onstage. And let's put it this way: It wasn't anyone you'd ask to put them back on. Life on the road really has never changed - it is the ultimate buffet. It's just a matter of, 'Do you want to eat?' And at this point, I do a lot more looking. Marriage can do that"

News in brief (RS #764-5, July 1997, Anthony Bozza)

The achievements of musicians can be measured in many ways - critical acclaim, piles of money, chicks. Of course, the real mark of rock immortality is Muzak, an honor recently bestowed upon Kiss. By late summer, four Kiss songs (including "Beth") will join Muzak's musical roster (the company's credo: "Today's hits and standards tastefully arranged and recorded"). "I think we arrived long ago by kicking in the door with 8-inch boots," says singer Paul Stanley. "But this is cool. Hey, if it's good enough for the Beatles, it's good enough for us. It's part of an ongoing plot to infiltrate the subconscious of people around the world. It'll be in dentists' offices, but that won't be the first time somebody's gotten drilled listening to Kiss."

Muzak's musical director, Steve Ward, was happily surprised by the band's enthusiasm. "In this case, Kiss came to us, which is the opposite of what usually happens," he says. Though Ward's staff chose "accessible" tunes, Muzak's studio musicians faced a challenge. "There's a certain intensity to Kiss' music," Ward says. "We had to find ways to give it the bigness people expect." Kiss' immortalization continues with a Kiss Visa card. "Instead of dead presidents," says Stanley. "I'm better-looking, and my hair's longer. And what's hipper than paying with something that has your own face on it?" (For an application, call 800-xxxxxxx.)

“KISS”

(RS #740, Aug. 1996, David Wild)

A review of the Tiger Stadium show, June 28, 1996.

"We got a lot of really good stuff for you people tonight!" promised Paul Stanley in one of his patented high-pitched intro squeals, addressing the Kiss Army troops at Tiger Stadium for the opening of the Alive! Worldwide '96-97 Tour. Talk about truth in advertising. By many objective musical standards, Kiss are shit, but as their enduring appeal suggests, they are indeed good - occasionally even great - shit.

Having gone from makeup to breakup to makeup again, Kiss kicked off the first road trip of the original semi-fab four in 17 years before 38,000 longtime army vets and recent recruits with a flashy, flawed but ultimately fun two-hour set. It was one abnormally humid, hotter-than-hell night in Detroit Rock City, and Gene Simmons and Co. must have enjoyed the fact that there were so many rock critics out in the crowd, feeling - in numerous ways - uncomfortable. After all, here Kiss are kicking box-office ass when former press darlings the Sex Pistols are selling out only artistically. When I caught Kiss' 1995 Unplugged appearance - at which Ace Frehley and Peter Criss were first welcomed back into the fold - I found myself getting a little misty-eyed until it suddenly dawned on me that I'd always thought Kiss sucked.

Sure, Kiss suck, but give them a little credit - they've sucked for more than 20 years. Surviving has meant the band has lived long enough to see its influence on the next generation, which perhaps explains the shocking spectacle of Billy Corgan and Sebastian Bach bonding backstage. So, OK, maybe Kiss don't suck. And in their defense it should be shouted out loud that they were one of the first bands to embrace fully the notion of rock as a show, thus putting them ahead of the curve that would soon bring us Cats and the re-emergence of Las Vegas as the new American capital.

After solid opening sets by Alice in Chains (replacing Stone Temple Pilots) and hometown favorites Sponge, the main event got under way. The band's 19-song set with three encores was all vintage stuff, a classic '70s slice of Kisstory with no "here's a few songs from our latest album" crap. Among the highlights were such sex-obsessed power-pop tunes as "Cold Gin," "Firehouse," "Christine Sixteen" and, of course, "Rock & Roll All Nite," which the band kicked into at the stroke of midnight. For the first encore,

Peter Criss came center Stage to croon-croak "Beth," and then the band kicked out the jams for the crowd-pleasing "Detroit Rock City" and "Black Diamond." It was good, greasy kid stuff - meaty, beaty, big and bouncy, and goofy, too. The evening ended with a big fireworks bang, though the night's porno for pyros suffered a few notable lapses, such as the Spinal Tap-esque failure of Frehley's guitar to catch fire completely. These little technical screw-ups are certain to be worked out on later dates after Simmons gives the crew a good tongue-lashing.

**Review of "Psycho Circus" album
(RS #799, Nov. 1998, Lorraine Ali)**

You loved 'em in the Seventies, abhorred their naked faces in the Eighties and bought tickets to their Nineties reunion. As both rock gods and objects of ridicule, Kiss - the classic lineup of Paul Stanley, Gene Simmons, Ace Frehley and Peter Criss have always been there for you. Why expect to approach the millennium without 'em?

The original quartet's first new studio record in almost two decades, Psycho Circus - an album of platform-stomping rhythms, roller-coaster guitar riffs and sing-along choruses - is far more respectable than any of the awkward flops from the no-makeup years. Here, the pure allure of Kiss is bottled into anthems like "I Pledge Allegiance to the State of Rock & Roll," with lyrics made to reverberate off arena walls: "The amplifiers start to hum/The carnival has just begun" ("Psycho Circus"). You can almost feel the heat of Gene Simmons' flaming breath.

It's not all blood-spittin' fun. In "You Wanted the Best," Simmons admits that even Kiss are not forever: "Let's make up or break up/'Cause we've seen better days." But as culturally irrelevant and hopelessly wack as they might be next to Canibus or Rancid, Kiss still have a place in rock, even if it is one created and occupied only by them. The band has made no attempt to hip up its style into some misshaped form of alternative rock or hip-hop. Instead, Kiss do only what they know best: Rock & roll all night and party... well, you know the rest.