



## Rock extravaganza more than meets the eye

By TOM KUNKEL  
Sunday staff writer

It's madness, really.

And four young men who play their instruments very loudly and paint their faces very strangely and prance about an exploding stage very energetically preside over it all.

Everything about them — their show, their preparation, their equipment, their costumes, their audience — is either bigger than, or stranger than, life.

The four men are Gene Simmons, Paul Stanley, Peter Criss and Ace Frehley, collectively, and much more familiarly, known as Kiss, a band which invaded Evansville last Monday. It would probably be accurate to say that Kiss is the most exotic rock and roll band playing today, and it definitely would be accurate to say its production is one of the most expensive.

Music, it seems, generally gets second consideration as throughout the show multi-colored lights bombard players and audience without relief, fireworks explode, flames flash, "smoke" rises from the stage, the drum stand rises toward the heavens.

In other words, saying Kiss gives a concert is akin to saying the Super Bowl is a football game.

It doesn't convey the sense of frenzy on the part of the predominantly young audience or the apprehension behind the scenes. The Kiss show is more like an event that builds before it explodes.

But to attempt to describe it like any other event would be inordinantly difficult, if not impossible. Flashes, such as those which punctuate the Kiss extravaganza, might be more appropriate.

So, just as Ingmar Bergman gave you "Scenes From a Marriage," we now give you "Scenes from a Rock Show."

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Believe it or not, a 7:30 p.m. show begins somewhere in the neighborhood of 4 a.m.

Two truckloads of very expensive, very sophisticated equipment and a small army of technicians and stage hands converge on Roberts Stadium to begin the day-long process of setting up the complex show.

The huge stage, several elaborate lighted stairways, the rising drumstand, the numerous spotlights, confetti machines, risers for bass player and ringleader Simmons and guitarist Stanley, and a giant, six-foot KISS sign that lights up behind the stage all must be laboriously installed and coordinated in a process that takes hours.

And then, of course, there are the amplifiers — those black monsters seemingly stacked to the rafters which belch sounds that have been measured, at times, beyond 140 decibels.

The amps are so loud that during a tune-up you could hear the pounding drums outside the stadium.

While the stage crew was putting the finishing touches on a makeshift Maginot Line to keep the teeming masses of teens a safe distance from the stage, Simmons strummed his bass guitar and the sound emanating from the amps was so deafening it numbed the senses.

But ironically, after a few minutes your brain is blasted into submission and you forget the sound is there.

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In a small room just off the open end of the stadium, a sign tells all that the doors open at 6 p.m., and the show starts at 7:30 p.m.

This is the room that is converted to a cafeteria, allowing Kiss and its crew to eat in plenty of time for the performance.

Food and drink, from salads and hors d'oeuvres to wines and beer, are just some of the things promoter Larry Aiken has to provide especially for the band and its assistants.

Aiken estimates that the catering for the Kiss performance alone cost \$1,400, and that doesn't take into account the two limousines he had to rent and the \$900-plus he had to pay for beefed-up electricity to the stage.

It's all in the game.

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Outside, meanwhile, thousands of Kiss fans have been waiting beyond the stadium doors for hours. And as the hour of 6 comes and

goes and the doors still aren't open, the pounding and the "We want in!" chants start.

Finally, when the Kiss memorabilia salesmen and the security people (security people are everywhere) are ready, the fans come pouring in. It's almost 6:30.

The Kiss faithful, particularly the first ones in, are young — early to late teens — and some have even donned the audacious facial makeup their heroes wear on stage. Others are simply content to wear their Kiss T-shirts, Kiss belt buckles, Kiss tattoos, etc.

"Well, I finally got in this place," bellowed one typical Kiss enthusiast as he breezed past a policeman. "Now whether I get out or not I don't care so much."

The amazing thing about these people is their ingenuity. While most are aware they are not supposed to be bringing beverages into the stadium, alcoholic or otherwise, they still try their best to outwit the security police at the door.

They don't just try to hide the stuff in the purses or pockets, but inside overstuffed coats, down their shirts, inside their socks, and even inside the hoods on their jackets.

And while the police confiscate an amazing amount of booze — you name it, bourbon, Canadian, gin, screwdrivers in milk jugs, beer — they can't come close to stopping it all.

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For some reason, probably security, even the local stage crew is bounced from backstage shortly before Kiss is ready to take the stage, as the band's own crew scrambles to and fro in an effort to make sure all is ready.

But out front, it's like a jungle as 13,000-plus people fight for room to see the extraordinary opening of the show. While many have staked out seats, others simply pack into the aisles and fights nearly break out between those who can and cannot see.

The crowd is such that from the stage one can't tell where seats stop and aisles begin. It is an awesome, undivided sea of screaming humanity.

Some who can find neither seats nor aisle space beat the system by straddling the three-foot chasm between bleachers. It's not a safe perch, but the view beats the back of somebody's head.

Amidst the madness, however, some civilization. A large woman who must have been either separated from her children or was driven here by intense curiosity trades places with a young man who is squeezed next to her in the aisle so they can take turns watching part of the show.

Through the crowds mill young men selling, for a couple of bucks a crack, fluorescent green necklaces that can also be shaped into eyeglasses. It's amazing how many people will pay to glow in the dark.

And all over the place 10-year-old kids who've never heard of Chuck Berry or Buddy Holly walk around shouting, "Rock and roll!"

One wonders how they know.

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Backstage, a young man who has had either too much to drink or too much to smoke, or both, is led away by a rather large police officer.

For him, it's been an abbreviated concert, but he may not have been able to appreciate it anyway.

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About two-thirds of the way through Kiss' set, a spotlight on the right side of the stage comes crashing down, injuring the technician.

Instinctively, the audience thinks it's another part of the flashing, exploding stage show, but the Kiss stage hands and technicians, who know the routine backwards and forwards, realize otherwise.

They sprint almost full-speed to the stage and rush in and around the maze of equipment to get at the injured man. By this time, the audience realizes this isn't part of the show, but the band goes on with the number.

Several people yell for an ambulance, and for a while backstage it isn't clear who was hurt or how badly, as the band breaks for an impromptu intermission.

As Kiss comes off backstage, Gene Simmons glares at several bystanders as if wanting to know why the accident had occurred.

As it turned out, the spotlight operator avoided serious injury,

but there is no question that the incident has put a damper on the evening, for the band and the audience.

"This is really a shame," said one member of the Kiss entourage. "Nothing like this has ever happened before."

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After the band's return, they play another number and several "encores" which seemingly have been built into the show.

But the crowd has no idea that it wasn't their cheers that hailed the band back.

Once the encores are complete, the band leaves the stage amid the screaming of the audience, attempting to call them back for another number.

But this time they will not be back. One by one, the band comes behind the stage to descend a wobbly stairway, at the top of which they are grabbed by one of their crew members and led bodily down the stairs. Apparently, the combination of the platform shoes and the massive energy the band members expend under the searing lights otherwise would leave them susceptible to tumbling down the stairs.

From here they are led to waiting limousines which have ample room for them to stretch their legs. Two to a car, they are sped off even as the audience cries for their return.

It's over, and the fans still don't know it.

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Only minutes after Kiss' departure, the equipment starts coming down, piece by piece. Stage hands and technicians are as busy as they were earlier, only to do it all over again in another city.

In the parking lot, the scene of what could easily be the worst traffic jam in stadium history, barkers moved among the stalled vehicles attempting to sell more Kiss T-shirts.

Somehow, it seemed a fitting finale to a very interesting evening.



Kiss guitarist Ace Frehley