

# The magic of KISS

*“[W]e had always been the quintessential American band, of the people, by the people, and for the people”* – Gene Simmons



## I. Overview

- **KISS** is hard-rock band formed in New York City in 1973.
- **Gene Simmons** (bass/vocals) and **Paul Stanley** (guitar/vocals) are the founding members and the only members to be present since the beginning.
- The band pioneered a type of “musical entertainment” where the overall product or brand begins to outweigh the music itself.
- **KISS** is sometimes classified as a heavy metal band by popular outlets. In the metal community, they are not considered to be a metal band but are generally acknowledged as being influential to heavy metal.

# I. Overview



- With makeup and costumes, the band members took on the personae of comic book-style characters: the Starchild (Stanley), the Demon (Simmons), the Spaceman (Ace Frehley), and the Catman (Peter Criss).

## II. Glam rock

- **KISS** evolved from the glam rock music scene that emphasized *performed personae* and *visual spectacle*.



Alice Cooper, David Bowie, the New York Dolls

## II. Glam rock

- Glam embraced both “high and low culture.”
- Emphasis on catchy singles rather than long album tracks written by progressive “jam bands.”
- Flamboyant, androgynous fashion influenced performers across genres.
- Extensive use of theatrics, edgy lyrics and sexual innuendo created a rebellious image that made parents cautious.

### III. Spectacle and showmanship

- The general aesthetic of KISS emerged primarily from glam influences but the band's image was novel.
- Simmons was a comic book fan and wanted to conceptualize the band as superheroes.



### III. Spectacle and showmanship

- The band was portrayed as “larger than life” characters with secret identities.
- Shows incorporated explosions, high-rise drum kits, flying and smoking guitars, blood-spitting, and fire-breathing.



- The music was secondary to the live performance.

## IV. The American dream ideology

- Despite being a New York band, **KISS** has always appealed to fans in working-class Midwest industrial cities such as Detroit, Cleveland, and Indianapolis.
- Simmons and Stanley are both sons of Jewish Holocaust survivors. Simmons immigrated from Israel at the age of 8 and was raised by a single parent.
- *“Success doesn’t necessarily come easy, but how hard you’re willing to work for something is in direct correlation to how important something is to you. We walk it like we talk it. Our work ethic, our belief in ourselves and our belief in fans is without equal.”*  
-Paul Stanley

## IV. The American dream ideology

- Audience engagement is important in the **KISS** narrative.
- The “**KISS** Army” is a fan club that materialized from a grassroots efforts in Michigan.
- Fan loyalty is the key to their branding and marketing success.



## IV. The American dream ideology

- When it comes down to it, you can purchase **KISS** branded *anything*.

- Christmas sweater?



- Toothbrush?



- A final resting place?



- There are **KISS** themed restaurants, a mini-golf course, and a wedding chapel in Las Vegas.

## V. Influence on heavy metal

- Some metalheads dislike **KISS** due to their focus on commercialization, lack of songwriting depth, and out of touch comments by Simmons and Stanley.
- However, **KISS** helps us understand that heavy metal is about something much larger than the music itself.
- Their influence on metal theatrics is undeniable.

## V. Influence on heavy metal



Norwegian black metal band Immortal

## V. Influence on heavy metal



American nu-metal band Slipknot

## V. Influence on heavy metal



Finnish “monster metal” band Lordi

## V. Influence on heavy metal



German industrial metal band Rammstein

## V. Influence on heavy metal



Swedish rock band Ghost

## References

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