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IN HEAVEN THERE IS NO BEER



★★★★★ 
Year Released: 2012
MPAA Rating: Unrated
Running Time: 88 minutes
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This review was originally published on August 22, 2012...

From late 2002 to late 2008, I lived in Los Angeles. As much as I am a film geek, I'm also a music fan. If I wasn't in a theater catching a flick, chances are I was out late somewhere in LA watching a bunch of bands play. I was not a scene snob by any definition. While I did prefer smaller clubs and venues just because I enjoy being closer to the stage, I made my way around. I was just as likely to catch a show at the Vermont House as I was to pay the money to see something at the Key Club.

And yet, in all those years, I never caught a Kiss or Kill lineup show. If I did, I didn't know it (after having seen David Palamaro's documentary [In Heaven There Is No Beer](#), if I had been at a Kiss or Kill show, I probably would've known, so I'll maintain that I never attended one). Which, to me, is very strange.

As the documentary explains, Kiss or Kill was a weekly concert series from 2002-2007 that featured bands of a similar vibe. Many club shows in Los Angeles in that era were put together by promoters who jammed as many of their clients onto the same bill as they could, often resulting in a series of bands with little in

common musically, let alone in their fanbase. The minus of this technique was that often you'd be at a show and you'd watch the audience ebb and flow as the different bands had different crowds, and they seldom stuck around all night. The plus, for me, was that I was exposed to a lot of different music that I wouldn't otherwise think to see in one night; I'm one of those weirdos that stayed for all the bands, regardless of whether I'd heard of them.

Taking their cue from the programming at Mr. T's Bowl in Highland Park, Kiss or Kill kept it consistent, however, featuring bands such as Bang Sugar Bang, Silver Needle, The Dollyrots, The Randies, OAOTs and Midway (among many, many more). The result, in the beginning, was a real party-all-the-time, we're-a-family, community vibe that even extended to the audience and regulars, known as "The Punters" (who often sported armbands with their Kiss or Kill nicknames on them). Simply, it was my type of party.

Eventually, as with all great scenes or movements, the more word gets out, the more things grow and change. As the weekly concerts shifted from venue to venue, it grew in popularity. Music labels sent folks to sign bands, the press became effusive in their praise and the vibe shifted. Suddenly a weekly gig that was often just an excuse to get together with friends and party became about getting seen and signed. As bands such as The Dollyrots found record contracts, various slights between bands, real or imagined, caused strained relationships in the scene, effectively cracking it from the inside; Kiss or Kill found itself far from its small beginnings, eventually playing shows at the trendy Key Club on the Sunset Strip (the antithesis of everything they stood for when they started). That is until, for various reasons in 2007, the weekly concert series came to an end altogether.

The steady growth and eventual death of Kiss or Kill is not a unique story in itself. Music is full of tales of bands with humble beginnings who became huge successes, with loyal fans eventually lamenting "the good old days" as the band grows bigger. If it happens to individual bands, why wouldn't it happen to showcases or music scenes too? So the originality of the tale is not where the value of a documentary like this is found. The value is that we now have a historical record of Kiss or Kill that we wouldn't have otherwise.

Which is a big deal to me, because Kiss or Kill was really my type of thing... and I missed it; didn't even know it existed. Other than Chris Gore's praise and sharing of Get Set Go during that timeframe (I have so many memories associated with that band's music because of Gore, and never even attended a live show), I wasn't really familiar with any of the bands, especially none of the core ones. So watching this documentary is bittersweet, because now I want to go to a Kiss or Kill show or, at least, get a hold of some music by the bands involved.

So maybe now you're asking, "if it doesn't exist anymore, but it was awesome, beyond the historical value, what can I get out of this?" It's a valid question, and I think the answer is something that is explored in the film near its end, which is that sometimes you need to see what others have done, and how they did it, to learn how to create your own thing. Kiss or Kill was a result of the type of lineups that Mike TV was putting together at Mr. T's Bowl. The overall idea stemmed from a unified musical experience best exemplified by CBGB in the '70s. Everything comes from somewhere, and if the next Kiss or Kill happens because someone saw this documentary, then that's great (and by all means, if a scene like this exists around Philly, let me know). At worst, those loyal punters from the Kiss or Kill era have their history respectfully committed to film, and we get to enjoy it too.

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Posted on August 6, 2013 in [Reviews](#) by [Mark Bell](#)

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