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Jim Heneghan: For the love of KISS

Interview by Andy Markowitz



Most bands have fans; KISS had an army. And in the mid-1990s – with the band itself limping along *sans* blood, fire, costumes and two original members – the KISS Army was pining for the old days. That nostalgia spawned a network of tribute bands, conventions and other unofficial fan activity that a young rocker/cameraman named **Jim Heneghan** started capturing on film, eventually focusing on a handful of true believers – an Ace Frehley impersonator who befriends the real thing; bitter rival tribute acts; a family who live, breathe and dress up like KISS, down to their toddler son. The years went by, Gene, Peter, Ace and Paul reunited and put the face paint back on, and *KISS Loves You*

(<http://www.8thgradefilms.com/site/ky/home.html>)

evolved from a bemused *verite* portrait of unabashed fandom into an unexpectedly poignant tale of the unintended consequences of getting what you wish for. *To download an extended audio version of this interview, click the link at the bottom of the article.*

MusicFilmWeb: *One review I read of KISS Loves You says it answers Johnny Rotten's famous question, "Ever have the feeling you've been cheated"? Is that a fair assessment?*

JH: I liked it too when I read that. Because there was a sense of some of the fans being cheated. Of course, me looking at those stories from the outside, it didn't surprise me or blindsides me like it might have some of the characters [in the film], because the stories I followed kind of unfolded. I could almost feel like they were coming up against some of these turns, even though the band hadn't announced they're going to get back together. A fan relationship with a band is - I don't understand it myself because I'm not a collector, I've only asked for a couple autographs in my life and things like that - and some of these people that collect stuff are professionals, or they're fans but they've crossed the line, where they gotta have 10 things autographed. With a band like KISS, there's a big market out there. You gotta decide, "Is this guy a fan or is he trying to make money off me?"

MFW: *You've mentioned that KISS does have kind of a reputation for this kind of behavior, of being more protective than other bands.*

JH: Well they're shameless. They're shameless. I guess Gene Simmons has said it enough. I mean, he's selling KISS coffins and KISS condoms, and he's shameless about it. Most bands are more embarrassed by that kind of behavior ... but that was Gene Simmons. I don't know how Paul Stanley feels about it, and certainly Ace and Peter and the other guys didn't agree with that stuff. KISS had Peter and Ace doing the rock 'n' roll and Gene and Paul taking care of business. As long as they could keep that original combination together, they had that chemistry intact, it was a great thing.

MFW: *Did you grow up a KISS fan?*

JH: Yeah, it was the first concert I ever saw.

MFW: *How old were you?*

JH: It was 1979, so I was about 12 years old. I went to New Haven Coliseum in Connecticut with my brother and my neighbor and our moms. [Laughs] And it was mind-blowing.

MFW: *How'd your mom like it?*

JH: They thought it was just so loud they couldn't hear music. But they were both commenting, both the moms, that they expected it to be a loud rock 'n' roll, obnoxious, kinda dangerous crowd, but they thought it was very nice. [Laughs] Maybe a little smell of pot in the air, but not much.





MFW: How did you get involved in the world of KISS fans and decide to make a movie about it?

JH: I heard about a KISS convention and went to it, and saw how big it was, in 1993. I was doing a public access show, so I was shooting on my video camera goofy music things all the time. It was an extension of that, and then wanting to make a real film after seeing a bunch of documentaries that inspired me, thinking I can do this now. With documentaries it felt like, "OK, this is just a small crew, I can handle this."

MFW: Did you always know or have in your mind that ultimately the story was going to be about the relationship or lack thereof between the fans and the band, or did that start to become clear while you were doing it?

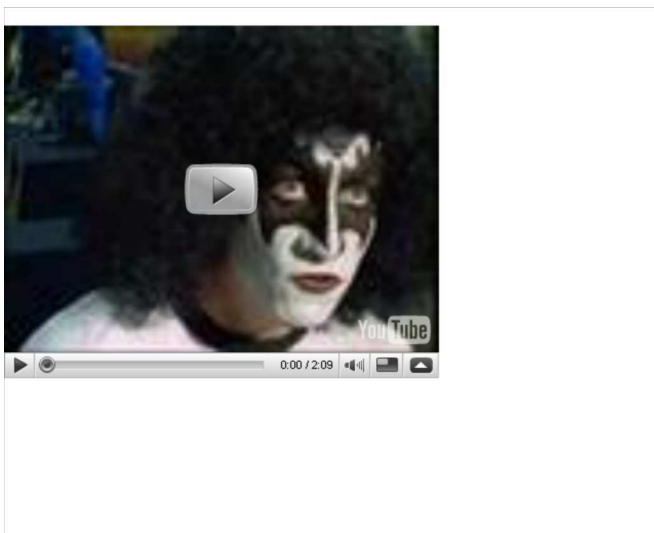
JH: At the beginning there was no plan. I just had an instinct - there's a film here, just keep filming it. And I'm a patient person, so I knew if it takes three or four years I can handle that. People [would] ask me all the time, "Who are you shooting for? Is it MTV?" and, "When's this coming out?" I would say two or three years, thinking maybe three or four, and it ended up being a lot longer than that. But I knew it was going to take time, because I knew something was gonna happen. I had to wait until something would happen.

MFW: Most of the action does take place in those years between those first conventions in '93 and '94 and the KISS announcement of getting back together [in 1996]. What made you sit on that footage for so long and then go back to it? That really is what provides so much emotional oomph to the film, when you go back to it, not just right after the reunion concert, but years later and see what's happened with these relationships.

JH: It was a necessity [due to] the fact that there was no real outside money behind it. There was no deadline. If you start a project with no deadline, it becomes more and more difficult to finish. And it was one of those things where I was living in New York, and I was finding it hard to spend time. After I'd shot enough to start editing, I didn't have the time to sit down and edit the thing for three or four months, because I was doing other things - playing a little music, working. When I moved to Sweden, I knew that I would be going to a country where I had no job, no contacts, so I would have to actually do this to survive. So that's what I did; I made that a mission. And I had visited Sweden and knew from watching TV that they supported documentaries.

MFW: And is that what happened? Did you get support?

JH: Yeah, I called SVT, the state channel, and told them I had this film, and they were interested, cause they had this open-ended strand where they would show a film. Didn't matter how long it was, didn't matter what it was about. I was lucky enough that they had the opportunity to spend money on something like this, while now they don't. So I got in just early enough before they had changed.



MFW: Were you ever concerned that either consciously or unconsciously there was danger in making a film that was going to be about nutty KISS fans and not about something deeper?

JH: For me there was never that problem. But certainly the TV station, SVT, and my project leader, he was concerned with stuff like that, probably. We had a lot of story meetings and things like that. For me, it was already done by the time I got there.

MFW: Was there a point where you felt like, that's my story? Not about people obsessed with something, [but] about what happens when that obsession crosses the line into reality and crosses over into the world of the thing you're obsessing about?

JH: There was no moment I remember like that. Of course, it was a long time ago and it might have happened. I had lots of little moments, like when I interviewed Bill Baker for the first time and he told me, "I picked the right guy in KISS to associate with." Even then, I could feel it in my bones: KISS could reunite. This could change, and this could be a big thing. That was a moment where I felt like, OK - early on, before anything happened. So those were things that happened along the way. At the the time I could've done a story about Bill Baker, the Ace Frehley tribute guy, the Ace Frehley collector, and that would've sustained a movie and been an easier way out. I could've done a movie about tribute bands and how they parallel KISS, and how they tour the world and make money off of KISS, and that was all interesting to me. At the end, I had a bunch of stories and I tried to interweave them together. I've made other movies where it's a nice linear story, and it's a pleasure, from beginning to end - I shoot it, I'm happy, I'm editing it, I'm happy. I'm done, and I'm like, "This is great!" Point A to point B. I really enjoy working that way. This one I made a big mess for myself, because I had all this footage that was tangential. That was the original idea, because I was coming from [the idea of making] a film that didn't have to make sense for - I was doing it for me, and my KISS fan friends or people that would understand this stuff.

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