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KISS Loves You

Do they really?

By [JE Smith](#) | 12/17/2007 | Filed under [DVD](#)



KISS Loves You

is an extremely low-budget documentary about obsessive KISS fans. And, if you're still reading after that opening sentence, you might actually enjoy it. Director Jim Heneghan apparently filmed this stuff over a ten-year period, finally completing it in 2004. This is not the best-looking documentary you'll ever see, and in fact is a bit of an eyesore visually, with mushy, strident footage that looks worse than your average camcorder home movies. It's interesting, but I'm not sure it will appeal to non-fans on anything other than a *look-at-those-weirdoes* level.

The doc looks at several factions of KISS fandom, including the earliest unauthorized KISS conventions, tribute bands, and the hard-core fans that wear the whiteface and manufacture their own costumes. Many of these people are extreme enough to make even a *Star Trek* nerd feel good about themselves by comparison. The film follows several subjects over a number of years, including Bill Baker, a musician and friend of Ace Frehley, who at one time had a large collection of Ace memorabilia, much of which Frehley had given him personally. Also featured are the Ventrices, a family from Brooklyn that regularly attend KISS cons in make-up, including their small son Anthony, who is featured on the cover of the DVD. At one point the father makes up a plaque for the boy to give to Paul Stanley that reads "*You are my idol / I'm only 4 years old and I love KISS / I love you.*"

There are also comments from various musicians, including Dee Snyder (Twisted Sister), Dick Manitoba (The Dictators), and Todd Youth (Murphy's Law). The 1996/97 Reunion Tour, in which the original members reunited and put their make-up back on for a highly successful concert tour, is seen as a turning point in more ways than one, as most of the fans had been dissatisfied with the group *sans* the kabuki greasepaint.

Apparently the title is supposed to be ironic, since the main theme of the film seems to be "KISS Doesn't Give A Shit About You." Baker is ultimately stiffed by Ace, who breaks off all communication once the Reunion tour begins, leading him to reject all things KISS, sell off his Ace memorabilia (buying a house with the proceeds) and embracing Elvis. In grainy footage, Gene Simmons and Paul Stanley are seen raiding a KISS convention to reclaim costumes they say were stolen from their warehouse, with Simmons obnoxiously addressing the crowd. (KISS later put an end to unauthorized conventions, and began staging their own shows at \$100 per ticket.) Finally, much is made of the filmmakers' discovery that the plaque given to Paul Stanley by the little boy from the Ventrice family was left behind at the con, discarded like so much trash. (Fact is, there could be numerous reasons the plaque was left behind, and people like Stanley rarely cart around their own belongings.) When the dad is later informed of this, he is crestfallen.

Somewhat less heavy-handed and more interesting is the tension between the various KISS tribute bands, more specifically Bill Sabetta, creator and “Gene Simmons” of the pioneering band Strutter, and Scott McClusky (“Ace Frehley”), who left Strutter because of disagreements over money and formed his own band Hotter Than Hell. Hearing the various bands perform is the only time we get any actual KISS music in the film, given the high cost of licensing popular music; I guess sampling cover bands is somehow exempt, because we hear a fair amount of KISS tribute music, some of it not too bad.

The DVD presentation is as good as can be expected given the dire nature of the actual video. The main “extra” is about eighty minutes of additional footage, including expanded interviews with Snyder and Manitoba, the complete Reunion Tour press conference, and longer cuts of several sequences which do appear in the main feature. Also included is some surprisingly sharp Super-8 footage (silent) of the actual KISS appearing in Stockholm in 1976, and something called “The Beyond Vaudeville KISS Spectacular Program,” a bizarre NYC public access show, the less said about which the better.

At a fairly brisk 75 minutes, *KISS Loves You* doesn't outstay its welcome, and provides a well-informed peek at the mania inspired by this most visual of rock and roll bands. Those who have never embraced KISS may find it all much ado about nothing, but it's an interesting document of the lengths some people will go to to celebrate something they love.



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