

FANS KNOW HIM AS Space Ace, a swaggering, kabuki-clad, off-kilter, hyper-frenetic lead guitarist who worked his otherworldly magic for Kiss from 1973 to 1982, and again from 1996 to 2002. But behind the mask lies Paul Frehley, a Bronx-born, New York native whose only aim in life in the '70s was to make it as a guitar player like his heroes Eric Clapton, Jimmy Page, and Keith Richards. After an unsuccessful attempt to kickstart a career with a band called Molimo, who in 1971 recorded half an album for RCA before things fell apart, Frehley got what turned out to be his big break in late 1972 when he joined a band that would soon be called Kiss. Subsequent albums like 1975's 'Alive!', 'Destroyer' from 1976, 1977's 'Love Gun', and 'Dynasty' from 1979 turned Ace into the rock star he always believed he was. But it wasn't all sunshine and rainbows.

Along the way, Frehley acquired a taste for hard liquor and harder drugs, leading to increasingly bizarre behaviour, erratic studio performances, and a general lack of care for his own wellbeing. Fraying at the seams, in 1982 Ace Frehley decided to leave Kiss.

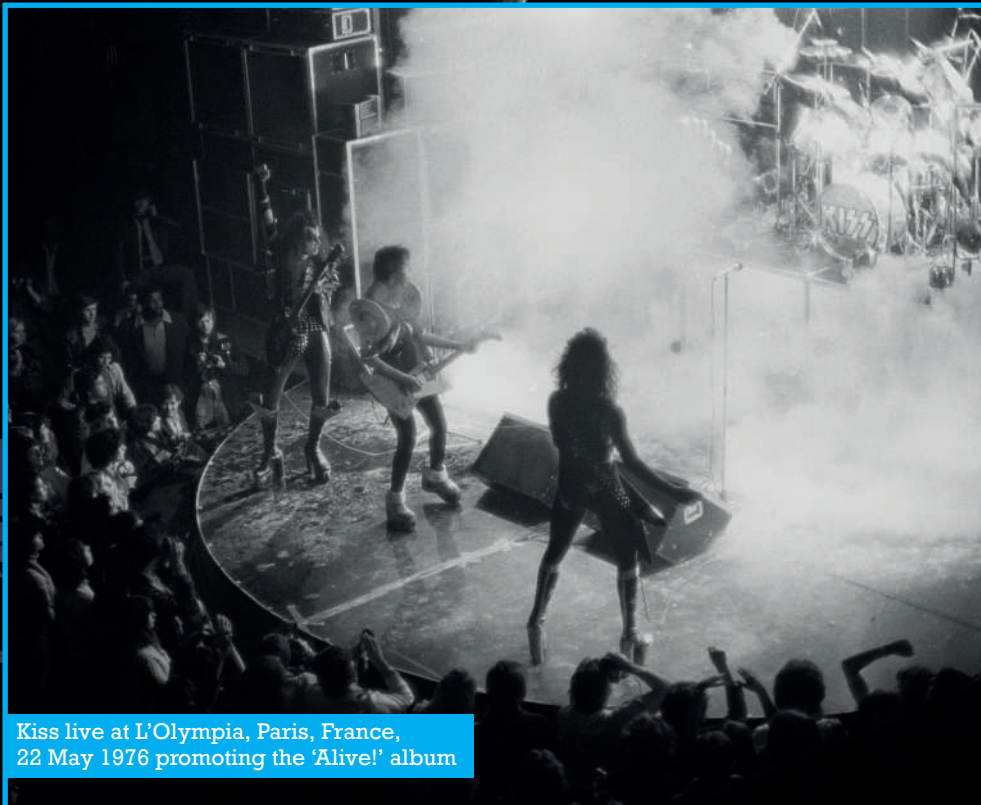
When he'd first sauntered into Paul Stanley, Gene Simmons, and Peter Criss's rehearsal loft at 10 East 23rd

Street in New York City, Frehley couldn't have imagined any of this was possible. Not in their wildest dreams could Kiss have hoped to own the '70s as they eventually did, becoming not only a rock'n'roll powerhouse, but also a merchandising phenomenon. But that's exactly what did happen, which made it seem even more like gratuitous self-harm when Frehley metaphorically flipped the bird at guitarist and singer Stanley and bassist and vocalist Simmons - Criss had already departed - and tottered off in a drunken haze. His former bandmates struggled to steady the ship with Vinnie Vincent and Mark St. John before Bruce Kulick came along in 1984 and saved the day.

As for Frehley, his drinking and drugging continued into the '90s, even if he did manage to issue several memorable records including 1987's 'Frehley's Comet', the following year's 'Second Sighting', and 1989's 'Trouble Walkin'. But none was successful enough to stop the guitarist from climbing up on MTV's *Unplugged* stage with his former cohorts in 1995, nor from signing on for a massive Kiss reunion tour with Stanley, Simmons, and Criss in 1996.

For a moment there, all seemed well. But after the 1998 reunion album 'Psycho Circus' proved to be a commercial disappointment, and a subsequent tour wasn't so well received, Kiss announced its supposed farewell in 2000, leading to yet another Frehley exit in 2002. Kiss then opted to go forward with Tommy Thayer taking Frehley's place in the line-up, right up until what was apparently the end of the road for the band at the conclusion of 2023.

Thayer has performed credibly under what have sometimes been difficult circumstances. Frehley - and many of his fans - often poked and prodded at him from the sidelines. Despite certain periods of friendliness, and even the odd collaboration here and there, Simmons and Stanley have consistently sparred with Frehley, which has given Kiss's legion of fans plenty to chew on over the years.



Kiss live at L'Olympia, Paris, France, 22 May 1976 promoting the 'Alive!' album

ACE SAYS he finally got sober in 2006 and has stayed dry ever since. In that period he's released six critically acclaimed records, including his latest, the electrifying '10,000 Volts' early in 2024. For their part, Kiss have released just two studio albums, 2009's 'Sonic Boom' and 2012's 'Monster', preferring to focus attentions on the hugely lucrative

touring circuit. The 'End Of The Road' Tour, which wrapped at New York's Madison Square Garden on 2 December 2023 didn't feature Frehley - or any other former member for that matter.

Outwardly at least, Frehley gives off the vibe that none of this matters to him. But in conversation there are more than a few clues that in fact all this grates on him. While he's undoubtedly moved on, you can't help but feel that deep down the guitarist wishes that he could have been a part of Kiss's last hurrah, not only for the fans but for himself too.

With '10,000 Volts' on the launchpad, Kiss's original Spaceman dialled in to *Rock Candy Mag* to look back on his long and often difficult journey with the self-proclaimed Hottest Band In The World.

WHAT WERE YOUR FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF PAUL AND GENE WHEN YOU WENT TO THAT AUDITION IN 1972?

"At that point I was driving a cab and looking for a gig. You've heard the story about how I walked in wearing one orange and one red shoe, and that's true. But I also

had a guitar, and a good amp, a Marshall with a f*cking great speaker. I often think those guys wanted me more for the amp! But we got along well and jammed on songs like 'Deuce', and we really clicked. I think they knew I was the guy right away. But I also felt the chemistry was special. We weren't Kiss yet, and we weren't even any good, but you could tell there was a spark. I had no idea it would get so big, though."

MOST PEOPLE WOULD SAY YOU WERE THE BEST MUSICIAN IN KISS BACK IN THE EARLY DAYS. SO IN YOUR VIEW, DOES THE DEAL WITH CASABLANCA RECORDS HAPPEN WITHOUT YOU?

"Probably not. Maybe if they'd found a guitar player as clever as I was. But it wasn't just my playing, to be honest. It was the chemistry between the four of us that made Kiss work. Paul was always more of a workaholic. I was an alcoholic. Same with Peter Criss. But we used to bounce off each other and for some reason magic would happen when the four of us got on stage, even though we were all so different. I could never put it into words, but if you watched any of Kiss's final shows, you'll see that it wasn't there. The feel just wasn't there."

IS IT RIGHT THAT YOU INITIALLY CREATED THE KISS LOGO?

"That's a fact. But I've read printed interviews where Paul was promoting some f*cking art show, and he was saying that *he* created the Kiss logo... For years Paul agreed that I created the logo and then he refined it. Look, Paul is a trained f*cking artist, and I'm just a guy who can draw lines. God bless him; he can draw straighter than me, and he's the guy who fleshed out the logo. But make no mistake, I *designed* the logo and came up with the lightning bolt thing."

YOU'VE PREVIOUSLY SAID THAT YOU NOT ONLY DESIGNED YOUR OWN MAKE-UP BUT PAUL'S, TOO...

"I've always felt my make-up was iconic, but I won't say it defined the band; I'll stop short of that. But I will say it's the hardest to put on because of the colours. Thankfully I'm artistic, so I could do it just as quickly as the other guys who only had black and white to deal with. Paul's has always been the easiest, but - and this is 100 per cent truthful - when we were developing our make-up, Paul was putting a circle around his eye like the dog from *The Little Rascals*! One night we were playing shows at a place called The Daisy in Amityville, Long Island, trying to get a record deal. I said, 'Paul, this looks idiotic. You

want to be a star, right? Why don't you try putting a star around your eye instead?"

KISS'S FIRST THREE STUDIO RECORDS DIDN'T HIT. BUT 'ALIVE!' DID. IT SEEMS THAT IN 1975 THE BAND WAS FIRING ON ALL CYLINDERS AND GETTING ALONG. IS THAT PERCEPTION ACCURATE?

"In some ways yes, but in other ways no. Even back then I was a sloppy guitar player who was very influenced by Jimmy Page, Keith Richards, and all those guys. And I had the same lifestyle as those guys offstage, too. Paul was already starting to change... The way I saw it - and this was the case when we did the tour for 'Alive!' - playing songs perfectly live isn't the way to go about it."

HOW DID THAT AFFECT THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BAND MEMBERS?

"I'd make a mistake and laugh about it because that's rock'n'roll, you know? I was always fine to admit when I screwed up, and I'd say, 'Oops, I f*cked that one up,' and move on. To me, playing live - which is what Kiss was best at - means imperfection. But Paul didn't see it that way. I remember Peter would often make mistakes - it got worse later in the '70s - and Paul would f*cking swing around and give him the evil eye."

IS THAT MINDSET WHAT LED TO HIRING BOB EZRIN, WHO INSTILLED A BOOT-CAMP-LIKE ATMOSPHERE DURING THE RECORDING OF 1976'S 'DESTROYER'?

"F*cked if I know. Look, Casablanca had lost a ton of money on the first three records, and 'Alive!' absolutely saved them, and [Kiss manager] Bill Aucoin, who'd funded us on his credit cards. You gotta know that they expected and *needed* our next studio album to do well, and I think having Bob come in was a big part of that, because he'd had all that success with Alice Cooper."



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DID BOB'S DECISION TO USE ALICE GUITARIST PICK WAGNER ON BOTH 'BETH' AND 'SWEET PAIN' FROM 'DESTROYER' UPSET YOU?

"Looking back, I kind of get why he did it. He was trying to make a record. I was partying and drinking all night, but Bob Ezrin himself has admitted that he was doing plenty of partying of his own. I did show up to the studio. That whole thing about me not being around isn't totally true. I may have been late, but I was *there*. I think it really came down to control, and about Bob wanting to teach me a lesson. I didn't even know I wasn't on those two songs until I finally had a copy of 'Destroyer' at home and on my turntable. It did really upset me at the

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