

Black Diamond: Never Been KISS

By Ryan O'Connor

"Every single night I get asked 'who does your makeup?' And I'm like, 'Well, I do it.' They're like, 'Get out of here!'"

"Are you a KISS fan?"

"For sure."

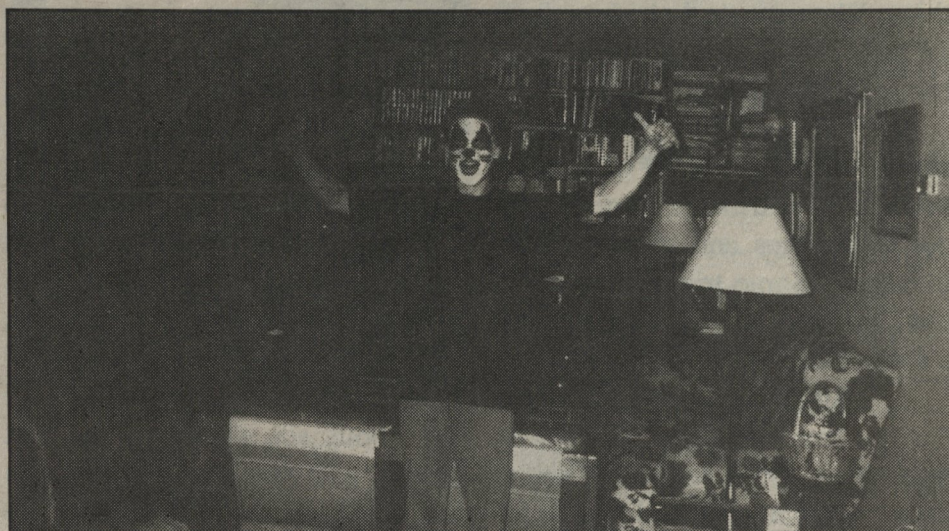
Sitting at a booth at Myron's at 5:30 PM were myself and Kurt Frohlich, lead guitarist of Black Diamond, which is justifiably known to be the ultimate tribute to KISS.

Tribute bands run rampant across Canada's various music scenes, performing the music of bands that normally would not play in venues that their small town fans attend. While it is understandable that fans of an arena-rocking group like KISS would pile into a venue such as Myron's to catch the music of a tribute like Black Diamond, what I really wanted to know is

what would possess someone to travel around in greasepaint under the guise of KISS. Frohlich was happy to indulge me with the details.

"When we started doing this [around seven years ago] we had an original act, and one of our guys was managed by Paul Stanley [founding member of KISS]. We wrote some original stuff and it was very Van Halen-David Lee Roth era sounding."

Unfortunately for Frohlich and his group, glam metal had crested just as a new style of rock was emerging on the map. "That was just when Pearl Jam was breaking, and we're really not into the grunge scene, and never have been." Unwilling to try to sound like something that wasn't close to their interests, they sought, and



The author circa 1997.

received, permission from Stanley to create a KISS tribute band.

"That's why we're allowed to use the [KISS] sign and their logo — they've shut down other bands that used their logo. But we're endorsed by KISS — they stand behind us and take pride in us doing it. And we love doing it." It seemed to be a natural choice for the group, who were all raised on the music. "Between [the four of] us, we've seen KISS in concert around thirty times."

The band has taken great measures to recreate the KISS experience. "We get a lot of people offering to buy our outfits. The boots are a big thing. The costumes we've figured are worth more than \$2,000 each because we've had them custom made to our specifications. We had a seamstress make everything." The group payed tremendous attention to details. "For example, Paul's vest with the rhinestones on it, we would count how many across — that's how specific we got! It was exactly! It sounds anal retentive, but KISS fans know that stuff!"

Performing in front of KISS's hard core fans, known as The KISS Army, opens Frohlich up to criticism. "I get a lot of guitar

players coming up to me, because I play Ace [Frehley] in the band, and they'll say, 'You did that solo a little different, what happened?' And I'd go, 'Well, have you seen the bootleg video from 1974? That's where I got it from.' So we're pretty sticky, as far as singing and playing and versions. We don't change anything to suit us. We do everything the way KISS did it. It becomes second nature. All the antics, we've studied videos endlessly to get the moves down, even holding my guitar pick, down to that. We think about everything." And yes, bassist Darren Harikima has the lengthy tongue necessary for his depiction of Gene Simmons.

Not only does the band recreate the sounds and appearance of the band, but they also have taken efforts to bring the visual show of KISS, which features fire breathing, blood spitting, smoke and explosions, to the fans. "We're just big fans, and we want to do it up to the expectations of KISS fans. A lot of them [tribute acts] half-ass it and give us a bad name as a KISS cover band. We see ourselves more as a specialty act, like a Vegas act. All the flash and flare."

"The difference between seeing KISS and Black Diamond is

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