

ENTERTAINMENT

KISS rolls into Sidney for show

Tribute band keeps the music alive

By Michael Everman
Staff Writer
meverman@sdnccg.com

They rolled into Sidney at around 3 p.m. on Saturday. There were no limos, no tour bus. It was just them in their own cars with one trailer.

They've played all around the United States, parts of Canada, Korea and Japan, with some shows in huge arenas. On Saturday night they were slated to play the Phoenix Rising on Russell Road. Their last gig was the night before in Erlanger, Ky.

If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, then they can take pride in the fact that they have channeled one of the greatest rock 'n' roll bands to perfection. They are KISS ARMY.

The four-member tribute band is living out their dreams impersonating their idols, the iconic KISS.

"I think they (KISS) like it as long as it's in good taste," Jim Seda said. "It keeps their appearance out there. It keeps KISS fans more aware of what's going on."

The band is comprised of Seda from Elizabethtown, Ky., as Gene Simmons; Gary Stevens of Modesto, Calif., as Paul Stanley; Mike Sivo of Fort Lauderdale, Fla., as drummer Peter Criss; and Val Popovic of Modesto, Calif., as Paul "Ace" Frehley.

Seda first got the idea to start the band in the early 80s



Erin Pence/SDN photos

KISS FAN Joe Gariety of Sidney (left) compares his new tattoo to the makeup on Gene Simmons impersonator Jim Seda of Elizabethtown, Ky. after the KISS ARMY performance Saturday.

after he dressed up as Simmons for Halloween. Since its first creation, KISS ARMY has gone through several member changes, though so has its famous counterpart. KISS ARMY models itself after the original four members.

"We try to capture the original KISS," Seda said.

He said that with new members entering KISS, the sound of the band has changed a little.

The band chose its name in tribute to the leagues of fans throughout the world who also go by the same moniker.

Some of the men have had some form of interaction with the real thing at one point in their lives. Seda has performed

before Simmons and Stevens worked on staging and lighting on the set of the movie "Detroit Rock City," a comedy about a group of teenagers who try to scam their way into a KISS concert set in 1978.

Even though they are somewhat living the lives of their idols, all four men still have regular day jobs and get together when they have gigs. For the most part, they all admitted that their lives are pretty tame, even when they are on the road.

Even though none of them are married, the old slogan of "sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll" does not apply.

"The party is the show," Seda said.

"I don't think you could party and do stuff like this," Popovic said.

Popovic said that on occasion women do follow them back to their hotel and it's flattering, but nothing ever comes of it.

The men are completely self-reliant as their own staging crew.

The Phoenix regularly brings in a tribute band at least once a month to play its stage.

Ramona Olding, manager, handles all the arrangements through a booking agent out of Kentucky.

The Phoenix has played host to bands portraying AC/DC, Metallica and many others. Olding is currently working on trying to get Van Halen and Bon Jovi tribute bands.

The members of KISS ARMY were very friendly and easy to work with, but most of the bands are, Olding said.

KISS ARMY is the biggest band the Phoenix has played host to since they have played world-wide, Olding said.

After all the equipment and lighting were set up, the men traveled just down the road to WMVR for a radio interview.

Once that was complete, they headed for the Econo Lodge in Sidney, where they were spending the night in adjoining rooms. After eating food that was brought in, it was time to start their transformation into their alter egos at about 8:30 p.m.

For the most part, getting ready went off without a hitch,

even with two men to one mirror.

By now, the guys have the art of applying their makeup down to a science. Everything is freehand and they don't need to go off photos.

Stevens was the first one done, while Sivo took a little more time. That could be because Sivo engages in conversation so easily.

When asked what he thinks of the current music scene, Sivo replied, "I can respect them for what they do, but I don't like it."

Stevens was not as diplomatic with his response, however.

At one point Sivo needed help with his lipstick and Stevens stepped in to help. As Stevens got closer and closer with the blood red shade, the two men bickered back and forth about Sivo's need to hold steady.

"It must be interesting to see two grown men doing each other's makeup," Stevens joked.

It took several tries and some blotting, but the lips finally took shape.

"Dude, seriously you've got to learn how to do this," Stevens said.

Seda and Popovic were in the other room getting ready, each taking their time meticulously applying the red, white, black and silver paint. Seda can even replicate Simmon's infamous long tongue, which is a necessity.

Once Seda's makeup was done, he nonchalantly walked outside the hotel room, up and down the hall, while he talked on his cell phone. The other men all said he is permanently attached to the thing.

All the men were drinking hot tea with honey to prepare their voices for the night's concert. Both Seda and Stevens sounded a little hoarse and were complaining of vocal strain.

Stevens, a tall man to begin with, was the first one in his costume and by the time he put on his platform shoes, he stood at six-foot, five-inches tall.

As things were winding down at the hotel rooms, Popovic also stepped outside in full makeup and costume and was greeted by stares and looks of bewilderment from guests and hotel workers in the lobby. As he waved down to the people, one little girl, who appeared to be about two or three years old, smiled and waved back at him.

KISS ARMY took to the stage at around 10:30 p.m. There was anywhere from 80-100 people in attendance, some decked out in KISS clothing and others in mostly casual attire.

By the time the show got into full effect with the smoke and lighting, members from the crowd slowly trickled onto the dance floor to cheer the group members on as they rocked out to all the hits.

One man, who was the self-described biggest KISS fan in Sidney, said that being there that night was a dream come true. He actually won tickets to the concert through a radio promotion.

The man, Joe Gariety, had a KISS T-shirt covering himself, but he also had numerous KISS tattoos inked over his chest, arms and back, including one with the faces of the



KISS GUITARIST Paul "Ace" Frehley, portrayed by Val Popovic of Modesto, Calif., plays as his guitar begins to smoke during a performance by KISS ARMY Saturday night at the Phoenix Rising night club on Russell Road.

band members.

"They have always been the band for me," Gariety said.

He was clearly awe struck from the experience. His girlfriend, Deneen Garrett of Sidney, said that

he has been a KISS fan since the fourth-grade and in the four and one-half years they have been together, he has seen KISS perform twice. Her walls at home are covered with KISS memorabilia, she said, almost as if it were a shrine to the rock gods.

"These guys are just like them," Gariety said of KISS ARMY. "This is so awesome. I can't describe it."

"If you can't get the original, that's the band to see. After seeing the original KISS, I feel

like I just saw them. It was beautiful. It gave me chills."

When the concert was over at around 12:30 p.m., Gariety got to meet each of the members and had his picture taken



VAL POPOVIC of Modesto, Calif., applies stage makeup as he transforms into KISS guitarist Paul "Ace" Frehley.

with them.

"It feels so good because it means so much to us too," Seda said. "Without them we're nothing."



KISS ARMY band member Paul Stanley, played by Gary Stevens of Modesto, Calif., raises his hand during Saturday's performance.



MIKE SIVO tries to hold still as fellow KISS ARMY band member Gary Stevens touches up his lip makeup Saturday before the show at the Phoenix Rising night club on Russell Road.



DRUMMER MIKE Sivo of Fort Lauderdale, Fla., portrays KISS member Peter Criss during Saturday's performance of KISS ARMY.