

Rock the vote: For North American dates on the Kiss Alive/35 tour, Kiss invited its fans, the members of the Kiss Army, to vote for shows in their town on Eventful.com. The band will play 16 of the top 30 cities chosen by Eventful voters.



THE LOYAL LEGION

**KISS FANS FUEL BAND'S
ENDURING GLOBAL SUCCESS**

THEY'RE CALLED THE Kiss Army and they are legion. ■ Kiss co-founder Gene Simmons specifically dates the origins of the rabid fan base known as the Kiss Army to 1975 in Terre Haute, Ind., of all places (see Q&A, page 34). ■ Regardless of when and where it began, this army has legs and its loyalty is unquestioned. This is a dedicated fan base that packs concerts around the globe and has created an unparalleled marketplace for some 5,000 licensed Kiss merchandise items.

"You can try to explain it, we can talk about the games and the toys and this and that," Simmons says, "but if it's as simple as that, then everybody would try to do it. It's not a paint-by-numbers sort of thing. Either they connect with you somehow or they don't."

They connect with Kiss. Thirty-five years after the release of the band's self-titled debut album, the Kiss Army marches on. It continues to build, weathering changes in popular culture and all sorts of musical trends.

"And if critics have a problem with it, they're going to be crunched up and become fertilizer," Simmons says. "Our fans number in the millions. You have something to say to us, you better talk to the bosses first. They call themselves the Kiss Army. Good luck with that, by the way."

However hard it is to pin down the reasoning behind it, Kiss hasn't generated this sort of dedication by accident, according to those who work with the band.

"The loyalty of the Kiss Army is in direct relationship to the care and attention that Gene and [co-founder] Paul [Stanley] have paid to them over the years," says Randy Phillips, CEO of AEG Live, promoter of Kiss' current tour, Kiss Alive/35. "They stepped up big time on this tour and were really felt in the viral Web marketing campaign," Phillips says.

The tour opened in March 2008 in Australia, continued through that summer in Europe, began a South American leg in April and its U.S. leg starts Sept. 25 at Detroit's Cobo Hall. Kiss on Oct. 6 releases "Sonic Boom," a three-

disc set that includes new material, a rerecorded 15-track greatest-hits CD, a live DVD shot in Buenos Aires during the band's recent South American tour and a 20-page booklet. The set will be available exclusively at Wal-Mart and its affiliated Sam's Club stores.

The early growth of the Kiss Army surely was fueled by an "us against them" mentality among fans. Radio didn't play Kiss in the early going, critics lambasted the band, and the music business elite ignored it.

But word-of-mouth about the act's shows began to spread with its first national tour in 1974, and the band was selling out stadiums before it had its first hit with the live version of "Rock and Roll All Nite" in 1975, which peaked at No. 12 on the Billboard Hot 100.

A potent blend of greasepaint, fire, blood, pyro and hydraulics led to more sold-out shows and eventually platinum-level success for the "Destroyer" album in 1976. (In the years since, according to Kiss, the band has cumulatively sold more than 100 million albums worldwide.)

By 1980, Kiss was everywhere or, as Simmons puts it, "We owned your children."

The bond between Kiss and its fans survived solo projects, lineup changes, and the disappearance and subsequent return of the trademark makeup.

Kiss manager Doc McGhee witnessed this unique fan/band relationship firsthand in the '80s when bands he managed at the time like Bon Jovi and Mötley Crüe faced the daunting task of opening for Kiss. When McGhee became manager of **continued on >> p.32**