



PHOTO: Michael Spain-Smith

PEOPLE

KISS'S PAUL STANLEY

MARGIE GOLDSMITH | MARCH 2018

After selling millions of records and achieving worldwide fame with Kiss in the 1970s, he was still “on a mission to find happiness.” But even then, flying privately was one thing that brought him pleasure.

Paul Stanley is best known as the cofounder, lead singer, and rhythm guitarist for Kiss, the now 45-year-old rock band, which has collected 30 gold albums and claims to have sold more than 100 million records. He has written such Kiss hits as “Love Gun,” “God of Thunder,” “Black Diamond,” and “Rock and Roll All Nite.” The group—which is known for its elaborate costumes and facial makeup—was inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in 2014.

Performing and writing are just part of what Stanley does. He designs Kiss album covers, stages, and apparel; he created the iconic Kiss logo; and he has overseen the group’s transformation into a worldwide brand with more than 2,000 licensees. He also designs guitars that have racked up over \$20 million in sales and paints portraits and abstracts that have garnered another \$3 million in sales. As an actor, Stanley played the title role in *The Phantom of the Opera* in Toronto in 1999, earning standing ovations and helping the show post million-dollar weekly ticket sales.

Along with Gene Simmons—the only other original Kiss member who still performs with the group—Stanley is a partner in Rock & Brews restaurants, a franchise chain that has about 20 locations in the U.S. and expects to have a minimum of 50 within the next five years. His 2014 autobiography, *Face the Music: A Life Exposed*, was a *New York Times* bestseller.



Photo: Michael Spain-Smith

Kiss's members fly together privately. Do you own an airplane?

No. We lease or charter, depending upon the length of a tour. For myself, my flying is sporadic and it's also on a whim or on a day's notice. The idea of an aircraft sitting around really doesn't make monetary sense. I'm the first person to charter for a flight. There are certain pleasures that I feel very comfortable in saying I've earned, and at this point in my life flying private is very much one of them.

Do you remember the first time you flew privately?

It was on a small Learjet in the '70s. We had to go do an appearance. And as exciting as it was, I'm not a fan of cigar tubes with wings on them. That's not to defame Lear's or any of the small aircraft; it's just that I am a big guy and I don't want to crawl into an aircraft. I don't want my head hitting the ceiling. I am a big fan of six-foot cabin heights.

Do you have a favorite airplane?

If it's just me and my wife or just a few people, there's no need to get too crazy if it's a few hours' flight; any of the Citation IIIs or the variants that came afterwards are terrific. But if it's my family, I've always been a fan of the Embraer Legacys. I think it's tremendous bang for the buck. I'm happy with a Falcon 50—I still think they are terrific—and you can't beat any of the Gulfstreams. We started using them when we had a GII.

There's so many great aircraft out there. Any of the Gulfstreams, the 200s or the 280s. The Challenger 300s or 604. I believe there's a perfect aircraft for every use. I use a different aircraft to go to Hawaii or New York than I do to go to Vegas. When I need an aircraft, I can certainly shop for the best price per trip, but I've had great success with Cirrus Aviation out of Las Vegas.



Photo: Michael Spain-Smith

You were born with microtia, a congenital condition that caused deafness and a stump in your right ear. Did kids make fun of you?

Relentlessly. I was very defensive and insecure. I just wasn't comfortable in my own skin.

Would you say that microtia helped to shape your personality?

It certainly was at my core, and although I feel I've resolved most if not all of the issues, they don't leave you. You just come to terms with them.

You've said that when you saw the Beatles on The Ed Sullivan Show in 1964, you saw being a rock artist as your ticket to becoming famous. Did you see fame as a way to disguise your pain about not fitting in?

I saw it as both a remedy to my pain and as being in a position where people would wish they'd been nice to me. I loved that the Beatles had long hair because it meant I could cover my ear. It was my ticket to what I thought was happiness and success. The same happened when I saw Phantom of the Opera. I found myself going, "I can do this." Ten years later, I became the final Phantom in the Toronto run of the show.

How did Kiss begin?

It began with Gene Simmons and me being in the band Wicked Lester [which evolved into Kiss] and actually having a record deal. I remember early Kiss gigs where for two or three nights of work, after all expenses, I might have \$18 or so. I got paid for what I love doing.

We wanted to be the band that we never saw—a band that gave audiences 100 percent. Too many times we saw artists who felt they were doing the audience a favor by being there.

You've called the makeup you've worn in Kiss a defense mechanism to cover up who you really were.

I think it was an extension and a magnification of either a part of our personalities or who we would like others to believe we were.



Kiss (Photo courtesy of Universal Music)

In addition to the makeup, you wore costumes and high-heeled boots. Was this all part of trying to be different?

Well, certainly it made us tall. If you want to stand heads above people around you, wear high shoes. Most of my heroes were British bands, and we tended to reflect that not only musically but style-wise.

By the end of the 1970s you had made millions of dollars. Yet you weren't happy. What was missing?

A sense of self. In life, we don't find comfort from the externals. Without a secure foundation, the whole tower you build is pretty hollow and shaky. I was on a mission to find happiness.

There have been a lot of strange dynamics between the band members. How's your relationship with them now?

It's terrific, but part of that's based upon getting rid of people with whom you can't find common ground. The key to a great partnership in business, bands, and life is knowing its limitations. If you don't expect anything unrealistic, you won't be disappointed. If you're looking for your band to be your family, you're better off going out and finding someone to marry.

Gene Simmons implies that he's the frontman for Kiss and, in your book, you say you are. Who is?

A frontman is the person who does the talking and who gives a group its identity and communicates to the audience. There's only one person on the stage who does that. If that's the definition of a frontman, then it's undisputable [that I'm the frontman]. If you interpret frontman as something else...if it's being in the media, well then, it's different.

What has Kiss tried to accomplish musically?

We've tried to stay true to ourselves. I believe in the law of commonality, which basically means that we are all very similar, and if I fulfill a need in myself, then I'll be fulfilling a need in someone else.

What's it like when the house lights go down and your band comes out in front of thousands of people?

I can't wait, because they are expecting something if they've seen us before, or if they haven't, they've heard this legend of what this band is, and I know that we are going to exceed anything they are expecting. I am like the prizefighter. Just drop that curtain and let me go, because I am going to make sure they get exactly what they are expecting and more.

You've helped turn Kiss into a worldwide brand. How much time do you spend on licensing projects?

We don't go and solicit endorsements. We have people who weed through those and then we make sure that the product is a positive reflection of us and doesn't denigrate what we do or insult the people who make us what we are.

What did it mean for you to be inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame?

It was a victory lap. We have historically been despised by the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, and we have been eligible for 17 years. Being inducted was overdue.

At your concerts, you lead the audiences in saying the Pledge of Allegiance—very unusual for a rock concert.

We needed to reinforce that patriotism and loving your country is always cool. It doesn't mean you always agree with the people in charge, but we should be proud of the basic tenets and what the Founding Fathers envisioned.

What are your politics?

They vary. I am reluctant to get too deep into politics, and I don't expect politicians to get too deep into music.

Why did you and your business partners start Rock & Brews?

When I started having children, in order to have a fun afternoon and a good lunch, I'd have to go somewhere and eat cardboard pizza served by somebody dressed like a giant rat. The idea [with Rock & Brews] was to have a restaurant with quality food that thematically was comfortable and that also was child friendly and pet friendly. Most important, it has to start with great food.

You've said that Rock & Brews is supporting the Wounded Warriors Project and local school programs.

At every opening, the first people through the doors are vets to whom we serve lunch. It's a way to give them a quick thanks and take advantage of media coverage to spotlight organizations that help to bring these people back into society and to try to do for them what the government doesn't. Freedom is only free for the people who don't pay the price, and the people who do and make it possible are owed so much on their return. It's a crime how they get shortchanged. Rock & Brews champions the military and first responders and makes sure that we support local organizations.

When did you become interested in painting?

In elementary school, when I was probably the best artist. In junior high school, the pond got bigger and all of a sudden, I was one of the two or three talented artists. I went to the High School of Music & Art in New York where you had to test to get in, and I got in for art, although when I got there, I saw that I wasn't at the top or close to it. It reconfirmed for me that I wanted to do music instead. I wasn't the best guitar player or the best singer, but nobody worked harder than me.



Photo: courtesy of Paul Stanley

What do you want your children to learn from your autobiography?

I want them to understand how I got to where I am, what my struggles were, what is important in life, and to reaffirm what they have always seen. I've always believed you lead by example. I also wanted to shed secrets. I think the more secrets you have, the more it hinders your happiness. If you can rid yourself of secrets, you are free. I wanted people to realize that you may look to me as your inspiration and have this glossy image of perfection, but it's not true. We all struggle and we are all imperfect. It's what we do with our imperfections and our problems that makes the difference.

Three years ago, you started Soul Station, a group that plays '60s and '70s soul classics. What made you create this band?

I've always been steeped in soul music, Motown, Philly soul. I just thought, "Wouldn't it be great to be able to recreate those songs the way they are supposed to be played?" What makes these songs so great is the groove and the lyric. The idea of being able to faithfully and respectfully and reverently recreate them was something that I thought would be amazing. And to be on stage with these consummate players who have played with everyone from Smokey [Robinson] to Stevie Wonder to Whitney Houston—we all love this music.

How often does Kiss tour?

We probably do 50 dates a year. There were a few years where we were doing 200 a year. A lot of it has to do with whether my children are in school and can they come. If they can't, I put a two-week limit on how long I am gone.

Is Kiss planning any future albums?

I don't know. Invariably when people come to see us live, they want to hear classics. If you watch a live DVD of McCartney or the Stones, you'll see that every time they are playing a new song, the audience sits down. So, if you want to do a new album purely as an artistic endeavor, that's great, but I am not sure that there aren't other things I'd rather spend that time doing.

How have things changed for Kiss in this new era where CDs are less important, and most fans are streaming music or downloading singles?

I was talking to Rod Stewart a couple of days ago, and I said, "Boy I wouldn't want to be starting now," and he said, "Amen." It's a very different world. The income stream is so much less and there's so much gray area and so many bands. I think that social media and the Internet have made for something that, besides the monetary aspect, is very homogenous. There was a time where there was much distinction between acts and there were far fewer of them. You didn't have a situation where, for example, you can either take what's offered to you in terms of a fee for your music or somebody will take it for free. That's not how things are supposed to work.

What do you think about the state of rock music today?

Too much of it is faceless and interchangeable; between that and autotuning and mechanical beats, there's a loss of what made all the music that came before so great. What we loved about Motown and Philly soul and the Beatles era was its imperfection and spontaneity. You're missing that now.

What do you still have left to do?

I'll know tomorrow.

FAST FACTS

NAME: Paul Stanley (born Stanley Bert Eisen)

BIRTHDATE: January 20, 1952 (age 66)

POSITION: Lead singer, rhythm guitarist, and songwriter for rock band Kiss, which he cofounded in 1973. Also designs guitars, paints, and is a partner in Rock & Brews restaurant chain.

EDUCATION: Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts, New York City.

PERSONAL: Lives in Beverly Hills, California, with Erin Sutton, his wife since 2005, and their children Colin (11), Sarah (9), and Emily (6). Also has a son, Evan (23), from a previous marriage. Enjoys cooking and collecting wine.

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