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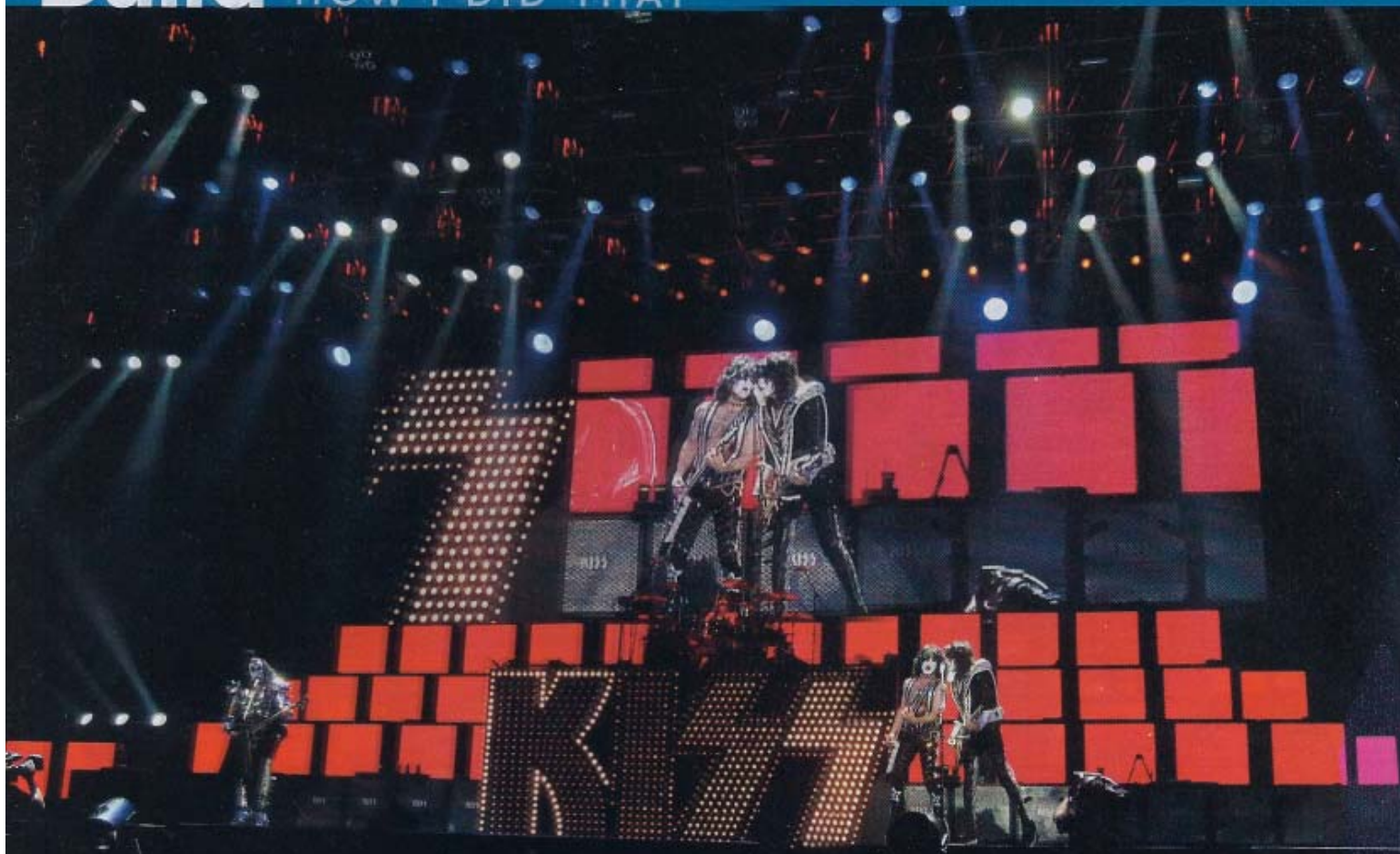
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KISS SONIC BOOM TOUR

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# TWO WEEKS 19 VIDEOS

Creating Video Content  
(Quickly) For The Kiss  
*Sonic Boom Tour*

BY MARK DEVLIN

**LOVE THEM OR HATE THEM**, you cannot deny that, for 35 years, Kiss has defined the phrase "rock stars." In 2004, I got my first chance to break into the world of video content when I was at the right place at the right time and was introduced to veteran video tour director Jonathan Beswick. He asked if I would be interested in designing content for Kiss's *Rock the Nation Tour*. This began a relationship that led to designing content for other bands including Journey, Fall Out Boy, and Def Leppard. I was, therefore, pleased when I got an email in February 2009 from Beswick asking if I was interested in working with Kiss again. Later in the year when we started, here's how it all went down...



» All content was created in full HD 1,920x1,080 format.

### AUGUST 17

We heard back from the band, who informed us a new tour would be started in Detroit (aka "Rock City") to promote the release of *Sonic Boom*. Coming off a small, but successful, *Alive 35 Tour*, it was initially thought that this tour would be an extension of that tour, which required content to be produced for a large 19'x60' LED wall upstage and LSI-Saco V9 screens from Nocturne Productions on set carts much like what Beswick and I had just done for Def Leppard.

"Content was to be very basic—flames, album covers, stuff like that," says Beswick. All content would be delivered on a 720x486 format, and, although the turnaround was short, the work was fairly simple and would render fast.

The balance between creativity and technical requirements began to mesh as tour

director Dave Neugebauer and I started by perfecting delivery templates as the band made final decisions on the set list. Just as we began testing how the screens actually looked using an NTSC source that was spread over the large stage LEDs, we received notice that changed the whole game.

### SEPTEMBER 5

An email was sent by production manager Patrick Whitley that included the phrase "slight change to Kiss video/set world." These words were a bit of an understatement. Our stage had been redesigned from three long set cart monitors into a whole new design incorporating 52 3'x3' high-resolution V9 screens at 96x96 pixels.

Further complicating the matter was the fact that several of those cubes would be facing off of stage-left and -right. In addi-

tion, we now had to create all content in a full HD, 1,920x1,080 format that drove render times through the roof.

### SEPTEMBER 10

We began again. With the new stage dimensions in hand and a switch from NTSC to HD as a final format, all materials created to this point had to be scrapped, and we started again from scratch. In addition, the final set list and list of final required elements had come in.

#### So here was the list of challenges:

1. Create four to six minutes of original video content for 19 songs.
2. Provide additional content for Tommy Thayer's guitar solo.
3. Provide 24 ten-second song intro animations featuring the album cov-



PHOTO: NICK MELI



“Hotter Than Hell” content was kept straightforward, and it had to be, given the time constraints.

I knew that making this deadline would come down to working every single hour effectively.

ers from each song for the upstage center screen.

4. Provide five to ten original Kiss logo animations to be used in various segments.

5. The video content for “Modern Day Dellah” had to feature the latest music video and scenes from the band’s appearance on *Jimmy Kimmel Live*, to be completed the day before the tour started.

6. Deliver 24 five-second videos for the upstage center screen, for which visuals had to match the new pyro being used in the show.

7. Provide 19 timing clips for each song, so the director could manually sync all videos to the live performances.

8. Create a content production website, so content solutions could be reviewed by the band.

**And, of course, there were restrictions:**

1. Budget was not provided to hire additional artists.

2. No use of suggestive imagery of women.

3. Do it all in 14 days.

There was no time to complain. I was never particularly impressed with any video content in any previous tour, including what I had done myself in 2004. Each Kiss show begins with the announcement, “You wanted the best? You got the best!” and I was determined to make this the theme of the content produced. I tried to throw as many hands into the mix as possible, but due to the limit of budget for additional artists, we just had to do what we could with what we had.

I immediately reached out to local universities, looking for that diamond in the rough (aka, free labor), but within days, the students unfortunately crashed and burned under the pressure. Beswick introduced me to an artist out of Tulsa, Oklahoma, Kyle Stauffer, who had seen our work on Def Leppard, wanted to break into the business, and was willing to do just about anything to get a foot in the door. I soon realized he was going to become the ace up my sleeve.

## SEPTEMBER 11

Design for all the videos began with logo design. I instructed Stauffer to take the Kiss logo and go wild. “Just make it look Kiss,” I said. I threw him into the fire with no restrictions. Within 48 hours, we had final renders of logo concepts that incorporated typical iconic elements including fire, metal, chrome, Gene Simmons’ leather and spikes, and lighting elements. In addition, the *Alive 35* and Kiss Army logos had been modeled, animated, and rendered.

With only 12 days remaining, we determined that the normal schedule of having seven to ten days to create content for each song had to be reduced closer to seven to ten *days* per piece of final content. That meant ten hours to conceive the concept of the video, research, and obtain all elements needed, produce the video, and render it out in the final HD template to be used by the tech staff.

Families were sent on vacation for a few weeks because literally every minute counted. I knew that making this deadline would come down to working every single hour effectively. Sleeping would have to be limited to times when computers could not do anything but render. A progress chart was created and checked regularly to pre-



vent spending too many hours researching or conceiving ideas. In each case, our first idea had to work.

## SEPTEMBER 12

I was informed that, in addition to this tight schedule, I would lose another day to travel because I was requested in Detroit from September 19-25 to be on location for the stage setup and for any last-minute band requests.

"Black Diamond" was the first song for which video was completed. Stauffer rendered a spinning, looping black diamond on a black background. I added light rays and composited in different formats. Diamond scenes were cut into scenes of one of the logos that featured red fluorescent lights. I shot a red light bulb fading up and down in my living room and added stock footage and edited the elements together.

Then came the content for "Hotter Than Hell."

"Fire? That works—next."

Some of the solutions had to be just that simple, or we would not deliver on time.

For the show intro and the song "Deuce," Stauffer created in 3D a cylinder with the Kiss logo punched out of the side,

and I placed a light source in the center, and spun the drum like a lighthouse. This design was edited in with the chrome logo design to create the final piece—*done*. Next.

## SEPTEMBER 13

"Cold Gin" took a few days, but Beswick finally convinced the band to agree to add another artist. I went with Los Angeles-based Lee Rod Roderick. He is not only a very strong designer and visual effects artist, but he also has something I needed: his own high-definition video camera. This content required a video shoot, so Roderick got the job. I wanted simple, slow-motion, beautiful photography of gin being poured into a glass. We also liked the idea of creating our own Kiss brand of gin and shooting the bottle.

The band loves speakers, and anyone who has ever been to a Kiss concert knows you can never have too many speakers. So for "I Love It Loud," thumping speakers became the next element to be created in 3D. These were then combined with several elements easily created in Adobe After Effects, resulting in a simple but visually effective piece.

The band also requested that at least one of the pieces of content was nothing

more than speakers, reminiscent of the look the stage had for years, where speakers were stacked on top of speakers. We took archival photos of those speakers and digitally recreated them. They were created as stills that could be used between all songs and a second version, in which the speakers appeared to move, that could be used whenever the band wanted to add new songs to the set. It also gave us a solution that could be used in case we were unsuccessful in completing everything on time.

Beswick suggested that we add a red version, as well, as the show was often flooded with red lighting, and this would represent that look of the original speakers. The white version of the speakers was used for the song "Strutter," and the red version was used for "She."

## SEPTEMBER 15

It is pretty obvious what "Love Gun" is about, subtly not being an issue, but it was very clear that we would not be able to show the most obvious content. After a bit of research, Stauffer discovered that, when the original record was released, it was distributed with a paper gun. This became our

To keep the live show PG-rated, content for "Love Gun" was derived from the original album, which was distributed with a paper gun.



"Love Gun." Stauffer rendered it in 3D, added a cool font, and we rendered it over an animated background from our library of elements.

#### SEPTEMBER 16

We went offline. At this point, we realized that posting content to the website for review was just taking too much time.

#### SEPTEMBER 17

With only seven days until the first show, we still had 12 pieces of content to create and one full day of travel from Los Angeles to Detroit. The pressure was really beginning to build, but it was an extremely productive day, delivering six pieces of the remaining content.

Because the opening nights of the tour would be in Detroit at Cobo Hall Arena, and these were the last nights this arena would ever host a music event, we knew that "Detroit Rock City" had to be really creative, but it was still a crunch. I started by using some moving car footage that I had in my own library. Because this city has been hit so hard economically, and is the home of the headquarters for General Motors, I decided to feature a '57 Chevy Bel Air. A few close ups of a beautiful red car, and boom, on to the next video.

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» Content for "Parasite" was built using microbial particles created in Autodesk Combustion.



The speaker solution was expanded for "Rock 'n' Roll All Night." I took several of the rocker logo designs and several of the party logo designs and created background elements to represent the "rock 'n' roll all night" and "party everyday" lyrics. Each look was designed in eight different configurations. All 32 versions were handed off to an editor to edit to the music.

Then, I noticed that the last five seconds of "Love Gun," which was just squares blinking on and off in various locations on stage, worked perfectly for all of "100,000 Years." Loop it, lay off, and move on.

Content for "Parasite" was created using microbial particles created in Autodesk Combustion. The image was inverted and handed off to an editor to edit to the song. It was a really simple solution that worked well.

For "Lack It Up," the band wanted a solution that incorporated just album covers. We created cubes, each side of which had a different album, and made them spin. This not only created a video that was visually strong, but could also be used for almost any song.

For Thayer, who sports the iconic starry-eyed Kiss makeup formerly donned by Ace Frehley, we put the spaceman in his natural environment for his guitar solo: the stars.

### SEPTEMBER 18

The band was getting nervous, because we had less than a week left, and still, they had not seen most of the show. We almost asked them, "Do you want to see it, or do you want

it done?" but instead, we directed them to the website, where most of what had been completed was available for review. We added that, if we had to post everything and wait for feedback, while the band was in rehearsals or doing interviews, we would probably not deliver on time. Thankfully, the band was pleased with what they saw, so they gave us creative freedom to run to the finish line.

For "Watchin' You," the name alone gave us the opportunity to do a video focusing only on the fans and the face paint. Going to a Kiss concert is like going to a *Star Trek* convention. There are always hundreds of fans dressed up—and in makeup—like their favorite member of the band.

### SEPTEMBER 19

Beswick and I traveled to Detroit for setup.

### SEPTEMBER 20

Pyro elements—25 of them—were assembled from a video shoot of the actual pyro shot in the desert. Tech explained that the uncompressed QuickTime files were not playing smoothly and requested that everything be re-rendered as TGA sequences. In addition, 24 five-second animations needed to be created for the upstage center screen, based on the album cover art from six different covers.

### SEPTEMBER 21

We got our first look at the stage. It was absolutely enormous.

Content for "Nothing To Lose" involved

# KISS

## SONIC BOOM TOUR CREDITS

Patrick Whitley, Production Manager  
Jonathan Beswick, Video Content Producer  
Mark Devlin, Video Content Art Director  
Kyle Stauffer, Video Content Designer  
Lee Rod Roderick, Video Content Designer  
Benji Gillespie, Editor  
Sean Motley Hackett, Lighting Director  
Dave Neugebauer, Director/ Programming/  
TD/Media Tech  
Stefaan Michaels, System Engineer  
Justin Mclean, Lead Stage LED

Brian Bateman, Stage LED/Cam Op 1  
Chris Kemp, USC LED/Cam Op 2  
Michael Sienkiewics, USC LED/Projection/  
Cam Op 3  
Gene McAuliffe, USC LED /AD/Programming/  
MediaTech (ran Medialon system that controlled  
graphic playback system)

### VIDEO GEAR

1 58'x18' (1,824x756 pixel) Nocturne LSI-Saco V9  
LED Wall

2 Barco FLM R20+ Projector  
4 Doremi Labs Nugget PRO (running 720p)  
2 Doremi Labs V1x2 (running 480i)  
2 Vista Systems Spyder 353 (one for backup)  
1 GVG Kayak HD 150C (running 480i)  
4 Ikegami HL-65 Cam (480i)  
2 Screenworks NEP SL and SR Screen  
(12' x21.25' and 15'x27')  
52 96x96-Pixel Nocturne LSI-Saco V9 Assembly  
2 48x96-Pixel Nocturne LSI-Saco V9 Assembly

PHOTO: NICK AREAS

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another generic solution that started with the *Alive 35* logo, which is mainly chrome. Using Wondertouch's Particle Illusion, we created chrome bars that could build in number and density, and combined them with scene of stock spinning chrome-like items—again, very simple but appropriate.

## SEPTEMBER 22

For "Shout It Out Loud" and "C'mon & Love Me," we created one solution treated in two different ways. First, in 3D, we created cycling stage lights, one version rendered in a rainbow of cycling colors and the other black and white. For the color version, we added stock footage of a crowd element overhead, and that become the "Shout It Out Loud" content. For the other, Beswick suggested we take the Kiss logo, which was large and center-stage, and work that into the design, creating what became the "C'mon & Love Me" content.

## SEPTEMBER 23

At midnight on Thursday, September 23, we were hours away from a scheduled film shoot for the band's first music video in years to be directed by legendary music video director Wayne Isham. It would also be recorded live for later playback on *Jimmy Kimmel Live*. Seventeen other videos had been completed, but this one had not been started. No pressure—I knew that if I threw imagery up fast enough, with enough saturation of color, the occasional fire ball (okay, or 20 fire balls), and some visual cues that roughly went well with the lyrics, we would have a piece that worked. Twelve hours later, "Modern Day Delilah" was a success.

## SEPTEMBER 24

First day of the show—vocalist and rhythm guitarist Paul Stanley requested we change the opener of the show. He wanted it bigger, with more energy. Last-minute ren-

ders were delivered and input into the Doremi units.

Now we were six hours away from the start of the show, and we still had to produce content for "Got To Choose." I had not slept a minute in three days, and my brain cells had pretty much stopped working. It was then I remembered that Stanley likes the color red, so red is what he got. The final solution was red and nothing but red. Red faded up; red faded down. In that mental and physical state, that was all I had left, but it worked well.

At 8:20pm, the opening act came off-stage, and at that same moment, I left my hotel room. I arrived at 8:30pm, and the band was set to go on at 8:40pm. We still needed to load the video files into the Doremi units. Somehow with help from Neugebauer, his team, and all the guys at Nocturne, the show went on at 8:40pm sharp, as scheduled. **LD**

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