

## KISS on VENUE in Australia

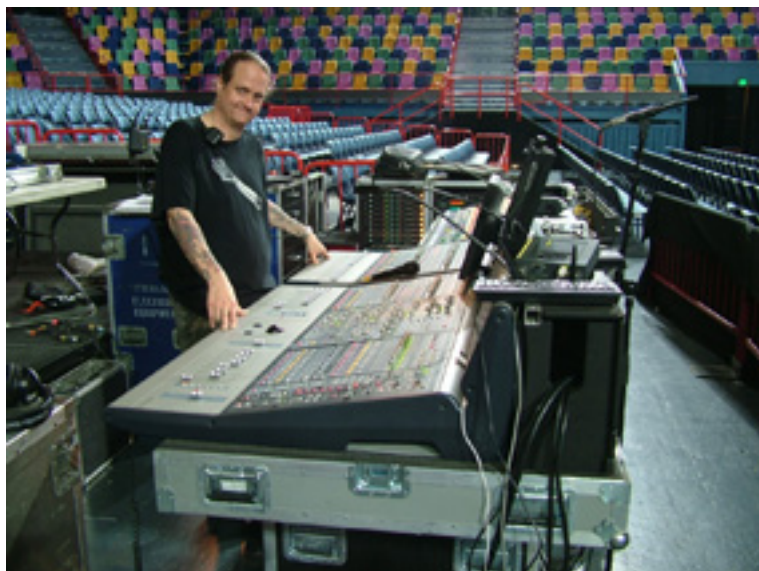
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### The best of both worlds, live and studio, with FOH Ken 'Pooch' Van Druten

Stephen Bruel

Rock icons KISS are celebrating 35 years in show business with their Alive/35 world tour. Performing songs from a back catalogue spanning four decades to an insatiable knowledgeable legion of loyal fans and KISS Army conscripts with high expectations and makeup dripping in anticipation of the spectacle, the pressure to produce the 'KISS' sound for this Brisbane audience is on.

In a world first, KISS will use a Digidesign VENUE live sound system for their Australia and New Zealand leg. For FOH engineer Ken 'Pooch' Van Druten the decision was simple and an improvement on the last time he worked with the band.



Ken during pre-show set up

"I was their (KISS) FOH guy from 1998 to 2002 so I know the 'KISS sound' well and knew VENUE would deliver and then some," Ken said. "I'm the classic 'I liked the product so much I bought one' sort of guy and actually own a VENUE Profile system."

Ken explains that the band do not like to stray too much outside a winning formula which has served them so well for so long and have not changed their show a great deal in the past 15 years. With three generations of KISS fans now attending shows, with some fans seeing the band more than 20 times, the audience is well educated and know what a KISS show should sound like and what the spectacle should entail.

"Paul and Gene want to provide the best show sound-wise and performance-wise they can for their loyal fans, to connect with them so that they keep coming back," Ken said. "Things fly by so fast in live sound land that there's a lot of times where it's like 'ah I missed that whole little section' or whatever. Well with VENUE, I can now get it all and make it happen. I can change my cues and effects in sections quickly, expand and improve the mix, and give the band and audience what they demand, and more."

To achieve this KISS signature sound, Ken strives for a mix that has tonnes of impact and can sound the best that it can with what's coming out of the amps and what's coming out of their drums.

"I use the plug-in versions of the classic old Bomb Factory compressors LA-2A and 1176," Ken said. "It allows me to emulate and create authentic sounds when I mixed KISS on analogue gear in the old days – you know, getting that KISS sound."

Ken said he also strives for a mix that highlights the vocal harmonies within the group.

"You know the vocals are really what KISS is all about and all four band members sing and harmonise really well," Ken said. "I use the WAVES Renaissance Vox plug-in on the vocals as it's a really nice sounding compressor/EQ. I also use Eventide plug-ins to fill in vocal tuning and spread the vocals out to make them sound bigger."

Ken says that the band's long-time manager Doc McGee spends a lot of time next to him at FOH and they discuss how to make the band sound better, and he is pretty right on the mark, most of the time. Ken also receives feedback from the band and during the Brisbane sound check Tommy Thayer (KISS guitarist since 2003) came to FOH to discuss his guitar sound with Ken.

"When someone says 'hey I want this little section to have, you know, this little tiny delay and also be totally EQ'd differently' or whatever, I have the tools now with VENUE to do that whereas before it was difficult to get around that kind of stuff," Ken said.

Ken said there were some sound ordinance issues in Melbourne, prior to KISS performing outdoors as part of the Australian Grand Prix celebrations, which resulted in a limited set uptime Ken was able to overcome these challenges through.

"The thing that's great about VENUE is that you can do all of the things you need to do routing-wise and setting plug-ins etc prior to any sound checks and just be ready to go," Ken said. "Basically in Melbourne, I just got to listen to two tuning songs through the PA and then sound check two songs with the band, and then do the show. Although not the ideal preparation, the ability to set up quickly with VENUE was a real advantage."

Ken said KISS do not generally record their live shows, however the Melbourne show was recorded and multi-tracked into a Digidesign Pro Tools HD 3 system to form part of a TV show featuring Gene Simmons. Ken was impressed with the seamless way VENUE integrates with Pro Tools, and the stability of the locally hired HD3 rig which ran solid for the one and three-quarter hour show.

Ken is no stranger to recording live shows with his VENUE and Pro Tools HD3 rig, and has produced many for Linkin Park. Ken said he records 68 tracks per night (58 stage and 10 audience) into Pro Tools, mixes them the next day using a Digidesign Command 8 and HD3 system, while on the road, and then backs up to do FOH for that evening's performance.

"It's busy, but we want to produce something that's record quality because fans will want to listen to it over and over and Linkin Park demand a quality product," Ken said "The band makes a commitment to distribute the shows to fans by a certain date, and VENUE and Pro Tools allows that to happen.

Another demand by KISS is that the FOH leave a small footprint. Ken said the VENUE delivers in that department as well.



Ken at work pulling a great KISS mix

"For the KISS gigs I am using a VENUE D-Show, TC Electronic TC2290 delay and an Eventide 3500 Harmonizer for a specific effect for Gene," Ken said. "That's it for hardware and outboard gear! Everything else is internal plug-ins, and that provides one small FOH footprint."

Ken's audio background is not the usual 'started pulling sound for a mates band in a local pub on a Monday night' routine at all. As a child Ken studied classical piano and woodwind, before moving onto guitar and playing in local punk bands as a teenager. Ken also graduated from Berkley College of Music in Boston in music production and engineering, where he was also head engineer for a local studio during his final year.

"I think that having the background of a recording engineer helps you, improves you to be a better live sound mixer," Ken said. "The attention to detail and attention to the stereo scope

of where the sound should be and the placement sounds learned through critical listening, maybe more advantageous than having little critical listening experience."

With an impressive CV featuring FOH mixing for artists KISS, Linkin Park, Limp Bizkit, Guns and Roses and Korn and twice Grammy nominated for his work in the studio, Ken can pretty much demand any equipment he wants to use.

"I get it, the whole Pro Tools thing. I understand how it works and I'm very familiar with all of the plug-ins," Ken said. "It just makes sense to go from my studio world and carry this into my live world."



KISS live in Brisbane