



Alice is dry, but dangerous in Omaha concert



Alice Cooper walked into the press conference looking quaintly fascist. From the black leather jacket draped with medals covering a motorcycle shirt, to the tight, faded blue jeans that stopped just short of the pointed leather boots, his mere appearance hopes to squelch all rumors that he has mellowed.

His face is gaunt, but his eyes are clear. His hair has just been done by a blender.

"Can I have a coke with ice?" he asks someone. "No, wait. Do you have any blood?"

He enjoys the role; the kind of guy nobody would let his daughter marry.

Cooper's Tuesday night stop in Omaha was the second on his 17 city midwest tour. His latest stage extravaganza entitled "Madhouse Rock" is based on Cooper's new album *From the Inside* and chronicles his recent success in conquering the bottle.

Dying

"I was drinking two quarts of whiskey a day... literally," he pointed out. "I felt myself dying. I had never been out of control and then I suddenly had no reference point. Near death was really the last straw."

Believing that his cool outward appearance had kept people from realizing he was near insanity, Alice committed himself to an alcoholic treatment institution.

"The psychiatrists had a field day," he laughed. "It was tragic at the time, but it was the best thing that happened to me. Before, performing was a task, now I'm enjoying it because I just feel so much better."

Cooper, who has established himself as being somewhere between the P.T. Barnum and Salvador Dali of rock, was obviously attracted to the ordeal's theatrical possibilities.

Loony bin

"Pluck a guy from Beverly Hills, take him 3,000 miles

and drop him in a loony bin. You just can't resist writing a show about that," he rationalized.

The result was another mammoth undertaking of props and choreography. "Madhouse Rock" incorporates 110,000 pounds of props, sound and lighting equipment, including a 40 feet by 40 feet breakaway movie screen, a rotating doctor's table, electric chair, Rolls Royce, giant needle and syringe, and of course, a boa constrictor.

Other carefully performed visual effects include dancing poodles, spiders, nuns, and whiskey, tequilla, and Southern Comfort bottles. The \$1 million price tag of the show reflects Cooper's repeated insistence that visualization does nothing but add validity to the music. He believes this to the point that he will cheat in his songwriting by warping a satisfying lyric to enable more theatrics on stage.

Audience control

"I like manipulating the audience," he admits. "I think it's great, and I don't think they (the audience) mind, because that's what a showman is supposed to do. This audience will plug into my brain for awhile and see what's going on."

Indeed, he still is the Alice Cooper that first introduced the multi-media stage show to the thrilled youth and horrified parents of the early seventies.

The claims of recent sell-out surround a successful string of subdued love songs. The situation was brought about by Cooper's introspective nature during his low points of alcoholism, and his lack of control in choosing his albums' single releases.

There seemingly is a new strength in the emaciated rock star. As excited as he is about his new, sober life, the focus of his intensity is on a return to untamed rock.

Minister's son

A self-avowed schizophrenic, he speaks of Alice in the third person, claiming that 15 minutes before showtime the character takes over the body of his true identity, Vincent Furnier, the son of a Detroit minister. But nobody calls him Vince.

"I thought that Alice was going to get real soft after the alcohol thing, and it just didn't happen," viewed his alter ego. "He got even more menacing to me. I don't even trust him on stage anymore."

"Alice is now more powerful without it (liquor). Now he's fast and hard," explained Cooper. "We're totally into rock and roll, the next album is going to be just absolutely blast rock and roll. I want to do the highest energy album ever."

Though some believe it will be hard for Cooper to regain the public hype and musical standard of his *Billion Dollar Babies* days, sellouts for his concerts are virtually ensured.

Anxious crowd

True to form, Omaha's Civic Auditorium was packed, the younger than average crowd was anxious, unsure of what to expect, and incited by the familiar strains of "I'm Eighteen" and "School's Out" both of which still provide a fitting anthem for this new, restless generation of Alice Cooper fans.

"Ego and competition are 75 percent of what drives

me," said Cooper. "Not the kind of ego that's obnoxious, though—real ego—the kind that I really care about blasting the audience away. The other part is competition. I really want to blow a lot of people off the stage."

Someone asks, who? Alice says "guess" and blows a kiss intended to define the other purveyors of loud stage theatrics. The point is understood.

To many, he still stands as the epitome of decadence in America, a label he apparently has no intention of changing. He smiles knowingly and crawls back into his nightmarish character.

"Alice is a household work," he grins menacingly. "Parents are still scared to death of me."



Review by Casey McCabe

Photographs by Bob Pearson