



But we like it! Vincent Furnier could justifiably argue that he was the first person to marry hard rock with outrageous showmanship via his alter ego, **Alice Cooper**. Certainly nobody would deny that Alice has influenced a whole host of rock acts that followed in his wake. *Paul Elliott* speaks to the man whose career has spanned more than 50 years and finds out that "it's theatre. It's what Alice Cooper is all about."

when the life of a young rock'n'roll singer named Vincent Furnier was transformed. Just turned 20, Furnier and his band Nazz had only recently left their hometown of Phoenix, Arizona, lured by the bright lights of Hollywood like so many dreamers before them. One night, the new kids in town were hanging out with a local all-girl band, The Weeds Of Idleness, when the talk turned to a group from Philadelphia, also named Nazz, led by rising star Todd Rundgren. Furnier's band had used other names back in Phoenix, first The Earwigs, then The Spiders. Now they needed another. At that moment Furnier said: "We gotta have a name that people listen to." And as he later recalled, "The first thing that popped into my head was Alice Cooper..."

The name appealed to Furnier's wry sense of humour. It sounded, in his words, "like some sweet little old lady who made cookies for everybody." It was so perfectly wrong for a band of longhaired rockers playing loud rock'n'roll. And as Furnier quickly realised, it was also perfectly suited to something else he had in mind. As he explained, "I was a little bit shy. I needed something I could hide behind. A character..."

A former art student, Furnier would eventually make this character a living work of art – a singing, dancing, mischief-making, kohl-eyed cartoon bogeyman. Naming it Alice Cooper had a delicious irony, with the added bonus of gender-bending shock value. "I created Alice to be my favourite rock star," he said. "Back in the '60s there was no rock star who made me go, 'Wow, I gotta see what happens next!' So Alice was born out of

necessity. And I didn't want him to be a hero. I wanted him to be a villain..." His stated mission: "To drive a stake through the heart of the Love Generation."

the birth of a legend. With Furnier playing the role to brilliant effect, Alice Cooper became a superstar in the '70s. Furnier had a simple strategy: "Pure showbiz with great rock songs." His gift for satire was channelled into hit anthems including 'School's Out', 'Elected', and 'No More Mr. Nice Guy'. And on stage he was a master showman, hailed by Gene Simmons of Kiss as "the prophet of the outrageous, the messiah of theatrics."

Alice was also acclaimed by Bob Dylan as an "overlooked songwriter", while being acknowledged by Salvador Dali as a fellow surrealist. He had his detractors, though. To the British pro-censorship lobby of the early '70s he was an affront to decency. America's right-wing Christians branded him a Satanist. In the bizarre double life he made for himself Furnier has had his own troubles, including a long battle with alcoholism that had him admitted to a sanatorium in 1977. But as with all the best horror movies, the monster he created has kept coming back from the dead.

Alice Cooper's storied career has now spanned six decades. His music, image and OTT stage show have inspired generations of artists, from Kiss and the Sex Pistols to Mötley Crüe, Guns N' Roses, Marilyn Manson, Slipknot and Lady Gaga. And even now, at the age of 71, Furnier isn't done with Alice. The original shock rocker returns to UK stages in October 2019 for a tour entitled 'Ol' Black Eyes Is Back'. What happened

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