

THE CAT IS BACK! Peter Criss, once memorably referred to as 'The World's Foremost Two-Fisted Tom Man', may just have turned 80 years old, but the guy who occupied the drum stool in Kiss during their halcyon days is back in the ring for another swing with his sixth solo album, proudly titled 'Peter Criss'. To show that he means business he's brought some big noise musical friends with him this time around, including Mötley Crüe guitarist John 5, former David Lee Roth and Mr. Big bassist Billy Sheehan, and Marilyn Manson bassist Matt Montgomery.

"I started this album maybe 10 years ago," the man born George Peter John Criscuola on 20 December 1945 tells me via the strictly old school means of telephonic communication. "And I'd got quite a long way, but never finished it. One day, a couple of years back, I went down to my studio and listened to the stuff again. I thought it sounded pretty good, so the next time I was out in California visiting my buddy Johnny 5 I took a CD of what was recorded with me. I went out to his truck, because we both like to listen to music in our cars, and I played it for him.

John said, 'Peter, I love this. This could be a great, kick-ass rock'n'roll album. You've got to finish this. You've got to get this done. And I'll play on anything you want me to. I want to be on this album.' Well that gave me a huge boost, so I played the stuff for a few other people, and they all said the same thing. 'This is dynamite, some of the best stuff you've ever done.' So I started working on the songs again, coming up with new lyrics, different arrangements. My wife Gigi was really encouraging, so I started working on the numbers 18, 19, maybe 20 hours a day, and in the end I redid all of the vocals with this dream team of musicians backing me. I had an absolute blast, I was like a kid in a candy store, and my pipes are better than they've ever been! Thanks to this project I feel like I'm 20 years old all over again."

The world needs a strong Peter Criss, of course, even more so given that his Kiss brother in arms, guitarist Ace Frehley, sadly passed on 16 October last year at the age of 74. It was just before he could accept an award from the Kennedy Center in Washington DC on 7 December

alongside Criss and the two other original Kiss members, bassist and vocalist Gene Simmons and guitarist and vocalist Paul Stanley.

"I never thought something like that would ever happen to me in my career," marvels Peter. "When I was a boy, my dream was always to do a gig at Madison Square Garden [in New York]. At the age of 13 I promised my mother. I said, 'Ma, someday I'm going to play there for you.' And when Kiss finally did headline the Garden in 1977, my parents were there in the audience crying their eyes out. That was my magical moment, and if

we'd never got any bigger that would have been fine with me. So the Kennedy Award, which is so prestigious, was special. But what was crushing was the fact that Ace wasn't there. That was very hard on me because Ace and I were extremely close. We lived very near to each other. I watched his daughter being born; he watched my daughter being born. I was there at the hospital when he passed, and I got to hold his hand. I can't tell you how happy I was to be with him at the end."

Whenever a hero of the classic rock era departs, it acts as a sharp reminder of the passing of time. But it should also galvanise us to celebrate the struggles and the achievements of those who have carried the torch for many decades. Peter Criss is a legend of rock and we at *Rock Candy Mag* are delighted that he's chosen our publication as a platform to go deep on his long – and of course *loud* – career...

PETER, WHEN YOU WERE 13 YEARS OLD AND TOLD YOUR PARENTS YOU WERE GOING TO PLAY MADISON SQUARE GARDEN ONE DAY, DID YOU REALLY BELIEVE IT?

"I really did from the moment I was first hooked by the drums. When I was 10 years old there was always music in my house. My mother had an amazing voice and was singing all the time. When rock'n'roll first came in she loved it, loved Elvis Presley. My father hated rock'n'roll, though. He loved the big bands that were led by people like [clarinet player] Benny Goodman, [and trombonists] Glenn Miller, and Tommy Dorsey. That was what he called real music. One day he put on some Benny Goodman,

and I heard 'Sing, Sing, Sing' featuring Gene Krupa on drums. The minute I heard those drums, I kid you not, I was hit with a lightning bolt from heaven. I knew straight away that that was what I wanted to be in life. I wanted

to be a drummer like Gene Krupa, and I wanted to be a singer like my mother. So I started beating on my mom's pots and pans with forks and spoons, and I never stopped. Eventually, I got a job in a butcher's shop as a delivery boy when I was 15 years old, and the butcher had an old set of 1935 Slingerland drums in his basement. They'd originally been white, but had turned yellow by this point. The butcher said he'd sell the set to me for \$200, and he'd take some money out of my pay cheque every week to pay for it. The day I got those drums... what a high! I took them home, carried the bass drum on my back, set the kit up in my mother's kitchen, and never stopped playing them. My mum was so supportive. The rest of my family would always say, 'Cut your hair and get a job.' But my mother – God rest her soul – would say, 'Leave him alone. Just let him play. That's what he wants to do.' She knew I had talent and she always said that the worst thing was wasted talent. 'God gave my son a talent, so I'm not going to tell him to stop playing.' And she was absolutely spot on. I just wouldn't give up."

HOW DID YOU DEVELOP YOUR CHOPS?

"Mainly from listening to the radio. We had a tiny little transistor, and I'd try to keep time to the songs that came on air. It was a bit of bitch really because radio still wasn't really playing rock'n'roll. It was more instrumentals like [surf classic] 'Wipe Out' [by The Surfaris] and 'Sleep Walk' [by Santo & Johnny]. But I also learned a little bit from my dear friend Jerry Nolan [who would go on to play in the New York Dolls]. We grew up together and

he started playing drums a bit before me, so he showed me a few beats. We were incredibly close. It broke my heart when he passed [in 1992 at the age of just 45]. As I started developing as a player I started getting into all

kinds of music; Motown and jazz especially. I got into a band called Sounds Of Soul and we played all over New York City in the late '60s. But by then The Beatles and the Stones had hit and I quickly knew that *that* kind of music was really what I wanted to do. I played in a rock covers band for a while and we did great, but you can't make it playing other people's music. So I started writing material myself and trying to get in a band that would do original stuff."

YOU WERE A DRUMMER WHO ALSO WROTE AND SANG. THAT MUST HAVE BEEN PRETTY UNUSUAL...

"I wrote my first song when I was 13, so I had that in me very early on, and it simply progressed over the years. Singing came pretty naturally, probably because of my mum, and before too long I fell in love with Rod

Stewart. But it's true that there weren't many singing drummers. When I'd go for an audition people would say, 'Can you sing harmony?' I'd say 'I can do better than that. I can sing lead.' I'd get the job immediately, and started out singing Wilson Pickett songs, stuff by James Brown and Sam Cooke. Of course when rock'n'roll started happening I was all over that. I listened to a lot of the British stuff like Eric Clapton and Procol Harum. Plus I was getting to see amazing acts like The Who, The Doors, Jefferson Airplane, and Janis Joplin live. Trust me, the '60s was the greatest time to be into music."

GIVEN ALL THAT WAS HAPPENING, IT'S PROBABLY NO SURPRISE THAT YOU EVENTUALLY ENDED UP IN A ROCK BAND YOURSELF...



"I ALREADY HAD A REPUTATION AS ONE OF THE HARDEST HITTING DRUMMERS IN NEW YORK CITY RIGHT ALONGSIDE CARMINE APPICE. I WAS A VERY DIFFERENT BEAST COMPARED TO WHAT GENE AND PAUL HAD HAD BEFORE. SO WHEN I GOT HOLD OF THEIR SONGS I TURNED THEM AROUND AND MADE THEM REAL ROCK'N'ROLL."