

THE MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN

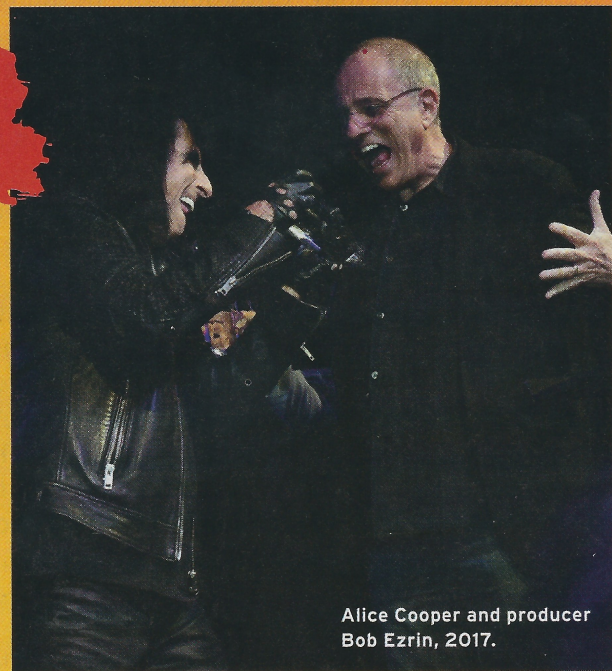
Whenever you get a guy like Alice Cooper in the room, there is inevitably an evil genius behind a curtain somewhere, pressing buttons and performing magic. In Cooper's case, that evil genius is Bob Ezrin. Well, he's not really evil, not even remotely, but he is a genius; for without Bob Ezrin, there would be no Alice Cooper and without Alice Cooper there would be no Bob Ezrin.

It was 1970 and the Alice Cooper group were an act looking for a better sound. The first two albums didn't achieve the success that Cooper's manager Shep Gordon wanted. He desired to capture "that Guess Who sound," preferably with Jack Richardson, the man who had produced The Guess Who's bestselling albums. Gordon set about calling Richardson and hounding him – and it was here that destiny was set into motion. Tired of fending off calls from Gordon, Richardson dealt with it by pawing Gordon off on his assistant Bob Ezrin, saying, "If my assistant likes them I'll consider it." Ezrin listened to the first two albums and wasn't impressed. He then learned that the group were to soon play Max's Kansas City (in New York City), so he decided to go check them out. Ezrin sat right in front and what he saw was "a crowd of the strangest looking people" he had ever seen. "They were all ghastly looking, thin and pasty with black fingernails and spandex." By the time the show was over, he was wowed, "I'd never seen or heard anything like it!" What he saw and heard that night became a transformative moment in both Ezrin's and Alice Cooper's careers.

Having been transformed into a believer, Ezrin now implored Richardson to produce them: "I actually stood on Jack Richardson's desk and told him he had to produce them. I told him it was a cultural thing; it wasn't just about the music. They had all these theatrical bits, and the audience dressed just like the band. This is going to be really huge and we need to get in on it!" Finally Richardson had had enough and said, "If you think they're so great, then you produce them." And with that, Bob Ezrin became a producer at the ripe old age of 20, without having so much as a clue as to how to get the sounds he wanted; so, he made it up.

"It was just pure naiveté," recalls Ezrin, "we didn't know about acting yet, we just knew about being. We knew what we wanted to accomplish, we knew it was a theatrical band doing things that were completely natural to them within their personal emotional repertoire. That's what we had to work with, so if I wanted (drummer) Neal Smith to sound like he was at the bottom of a well, and play that way, the only way to get him to play that way was to put him at the bottom of a well. I didn't realize I could have given him the sound of being at the bottom of a well in his headphones, and he might play the right way there. Instead, I put him inside the womens' bathroom at the RCA studios in Chicago because it had really great reverb. I put the drum kit in there, and the minute he hit the drums, it changed his whole style of playing.

"Today I would do that completely differently, I have the



Alice Cooper and producer Bob Ezrin, 2017.

means to give him that sound in the studio; just stick it in his headphones really fast and maybe turn the lights down, and he'll feel like he's at the bottom of a well, he'll play it in a similar fashion. Back then, we had actual reverb, but it was very difficult to control the timing of it to make it sound like the bottom of a well, and we didn't have the luxury of time. It was a lot faster to just pick the drum kit up, march them down the hall and stick them in the toilet. The only problem was that halfway through his performance, the maids came in and started to clean the bathroom, until they realized that, 'Maybe this is not a good time.' I think he scared them to death actually!"

After obtaining both popular and critical success with the 1971 album *Love It To Death*, Ezrin went on to work with KISS, Pink Floyd, Lou Reed, Peter Dinklage, Kansas and a list far too long to enumerate here. If you think that Ezrin is simply a guy who produced all the aforementioned groups, you'd be selling him short. Not only does he play a pivotal role in the spectacle that is Alice Cooper, he also has been a member of the band, lending himself to backing vocals, lyrics and keyboards. In fact, Bob was trained at a very young age in classical and jazz piano.

Asked if there were any overdubs on the new live album, *A Paranormal Evening at the Olympia Paris*, Ezrin emphatically stated, "Zero, none, there's no fixing on that whole thing!" And then he went on to add, "You know what? It was a good performance and if we found a bum note, we replaced it, but there was really no need to because there was nothing embarrassing in the whole thing. There's no reason not to just make it sound as powerful as it is in the live venue and let people enjoy the same experience as if they were there."

Of course, Alice is Alice and the music speaks for itself, but you need to see him live to fully appreciate him. So naturally, I wanted to know if there would be a DVD to accompany the album. Ezrin advised, "There definitely was filming going on, but whether that's going to be release in DVD form or not, I don't know. That's up to Ear Music; they'll have to decide."