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THE WEST COAST MUSIC TRADE MAGAZINE™



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VAN HALEN FINDING BALANCE IN THE '90s

RAY DANNIELS
CANADIAN-BASED MANAGER TAKES ON VAN HALEN



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FEATURES



22

VAN HALEN

This seminal SoCal hard rock outfit's eleventh album recently debuted at Number One, proving that the boys from Pasadena have life in 'em yet. MC spoke with Sammy Hagar and Alex Van Halen about the new album and guitar icon Eddie Van Halen's new sobriety.

By Oskar Scotti



24

RAY DANNIELS

The Canadian-based Danniels, longtime manager of Rush, won the coveted job of managing SoCal heroes Van Halen—this despite the fact that he doesn't live in L.A. Danniels explains his duties and how he handles VH's worldwide affairs from his home in Canada.

By Steven P. Wheeler

26 ICM EXECUTIVE AGENT BILL ELSON By Pat Lewis

28 DIRECTORY: MANAGERS/AGENTS Compiled by Jeremy M. Helfgot

34 MTV UNPLUGGED By Jonathan Widran

COLUMNS & DEPARTMENTS

5 FEEDBACK

6 CALENDAR

9 CLOSEUP

10 NEWS

11 SIGNINGS & ASSIGNMENTS

12 A&R REPORT

14 SONGWORKS

16 AUDIO/VIDEO

17 NEW TOYS

18 SHOW BIZ

20 LOCAL NOTES

38 DEMO CRITIQUES

39 DISC REVIEWS

40 NIGHT LIFE

42 CLUB REVIEWS

46 CONCERT REVIEWS

48 EMPLOYMENT

50 PRO PLAYERS

52 FREE CLASSIFIEDS

Cover photo: Randee St. Nicholas

Manager Ray Danniels: From Rush to Van Halen

By Steven P. Wheeler

I won the draw," says Van Halen's new manager Ray Danniels, jokingly explaining how his Toronto-based management company, S.R.O. Management, was able to add L.A.'s quintessential rock band to its roster of clients.

Following the untimely passing of their cancer-stricken manager, Ed Leffler, Eddie, Sammy, Alex and Michael began the search that had most of the industry's leading management companies chomping at the bit.

"It was a short list, and I was fortunate enough to be on the list," says Danniels, who formed S.R.O. in 1972 and continues to manage Canadian power trio Rush as well as more recent additions Kings X and Extreme. "I already had a relationship with Al and Eddie. I've been managing Rush for 20 years, so over that time, we'd bump into each other now and then, and I've had a close relationship with Al over the last seven or eight years. They were determined to hook up with a management company that had long-standing relationships with their clients. They didn't want to be working with someone for one or two records and then find that they had to change again. I guess that's what I brought to the table—a kind of consistency."

Still, many were shocked that a band so synonymous with the City of Angels would hire a management company based in a different country. Danniels understands the surprise of some people at the band's decision, but he also points out that in the modern world of technological advancements, we truly live in a "global village."

"FAX machines alone have changed everything. To be honest with you, I don't know if this would have worked ten years ago."

"My being in Canada and the band being in L.A. was something that had to be discussed. I had to let them know that I could be in L.A. part of the time, but I didn't want to leave Toronto and move to Los Angeles. I've got kids, and we're set here."

Then, with a laugh, Danniels adds, "Be-



sides there's no earthquakes up here, and snow is a lot easier to shovel than mud."

In addition, the veteran manager believes that being in Canada affords him the luxury of being better able to carry out Van Halen's professional desires on a worldwide basis. "It's a lot easier for me to sit in Toronto, Canada and see the world as a whole. You have to understand that the guys in the band are very concerned with their position worldwide, not just America. I think it's easier for me to look at things globally from Toronto, than if I was in Los Angeles. For starters, I'm on East Coast time—England is five hours different than me and mainland Europe is only six hours different. As a result of that, my work day is three hours longer."

Danniels also reveals that the band didn't have one L.A.-based management firm on their final list of choices. "I think they had always been managed by somebody from Los Angeles, and I don't think they necessarily saw it to be to their advantage to have a manager based in L.A.," explains Danniels.

"There are certain cities or secondary markets that I don't think a manager can be based out of, but you can do it nowadays from a San Francisco or a Toronto or a Chicago or a Dallas. I don't think you have to be part of the 'boys club' in L.A. to properly manage a band. I don't see how that would enhance Van Halen's position for a minute, I really don't. Maybe for a new act trying to get off the ground, I can see some advantages with having an L.A.-based manager, but for a major act, I don't see it. I think the truth of it is, they've got their guy, and the farther he is away from that kind of situation, the better."

With a band as massively successful as Van Halen, one has to wonder just what the duties of a Van Halen manager entail. It's not like Danniels has to hold the hands of these 20-year industry veterans or explain what a record company does.

"That's got to be the hardest question in the world to answer," says Danniels. "I think if you asked the four guys in Van Halen that question, you'd probably get four different answers. I think the difference for a manager with a hugely successful act and a new act is that because Van Halen is a veteran band with enormous success, you're managing each individual. With a new band, you tend to work with the leader of the band, or you tend to work on your own with what that band needs. When you manage a band like Van Halen, I've got four different guys to account to every day—four different questions, four different priorities. So there's no easy answer to that question. I deal with everyone for them—from promoters to agents to record company publicists, you name it."

What about the individual members of Van Halen? Are some more involved with the business dealings than others? "To a degree," answers Danniels, sounding like a long-haired politician. "Sam and Al probably take the most interest on a daily basis. But there's not much that gets past Ed, and Mike's certainly there on all the important decisions."

Despite Danniels' earlier admission that it's difficult to say just what exactly Van Halen's manager does, we were able to get a behind-the-scenes look at a few recent business decisions. "On the creative side of things, the most recent thing we've been dealing with has to do with video directors and scripts and where the band wants to go in that aspect of their career. They have given me pretty much

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"FAX machines have changed everything. To be honest, I don't know if this would have worked ten years ago. My being in Canada and [Van Halen] being in L.A. was something that had to be discussed. I had to let them know that I could be in L.A. part of the time, but I didn't want to leave Toronto and move to Los Angeles. There's no earthquakes up here, and snow is a lot easier to shovel than mud."

—Ray Danniels

free reign to do what I've wanted to do in the non-creative aspects of things. For example, last November we had already mapped out a tour that goes all the way through October of '96. Once I came aboard, there were a lot of discussions and thought put into when this record [*Balance*] should come out—what the first single and video should be, etc.

"In the case of the first single," continues Danniels, "it was very much a band and management decision. I went to the record company and said, 'This is what we want, and why we believe it's the right thing to do.' The record companies have to allow for more creative input and creative freedom for an act that is as successful as a Van Halen. But that's bound by the fact that the record company depends on you to sell an awful lot of records."

Which is something that Van Halen has continued to do with *Balance*, which debuted at Number One and promises to be another multi-platinum blockbuster for the boys from Pasadena. In the face of the country music explosion, the alternative trend and the grunge wars, many industry insiders had questioned whether Van Halen's mainstream hard rock approach would still be viable.

Danniels says he never had such concerns. "To me, debuting at Number One wasn't surprising, and I don't mean that in an egotistical sense. But four months of work was put in to set up the record so that would hopefully happen. Not to say that it took away any of the thrill, believe me. But I thought that's what would happen, given the amount of work, the setup and press junkets, etc. When you're talking about working with a label the size of Warner Brothers, I can't believe how many people are involved—it's huge. There are the sales, video and promotion departments, and then all of those departments break down into different areas."

The most impressive publicity driven con-

cept came from Danniels himself, a simple idea that paid big dividends. "I had an idea to release the single between Christmas and New Year's Day, which just isn't done, and the goal was to get as many radio stations as we could playing it around December 30th, and then on New Year's Eve, I wanted MTV to premiere the video just after midnight on the Sony Jumbo-tron in New York's Times Square.

"That's what I was talking about when I was mentioning the setup for this album," relates Danniels. "Here you are watching MTV on New Year's Eve, and at two minutes after midnight, they go live to Times Square and you see the Sony Jumbo-tron with Van Halen's new video, and you see thousands of people going nuts—it's great working with a captive audience [laughs]. It took at least two months to put that event together because it hadn't

been done before. We needed to rent the Jumbo-tron, we then needed to tie in some audio concept so that the tens of thousands of people who were there would be able to hear something. Finally, we needed to get MTV to commit to it, and they did. It created one giant advertisement that Van Halen had a new record, and it worked."

It's unique ideas like that which seem to keep Van Halen vital and fresh, as Danniels is quick to point out, "These guys don't look at anything like a business. These guys still have the enthusiasm of a roomful of teenagers who are doing this all for the first time. I'm absolutely amazed at how many miles they've got behind them, but they still live for this."

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