Van Halen
Finding Balance in the '90s

Ray Danniels
Canadian-Based Manager Takes on Van Halen
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 Danniel, 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. Danniel 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 Dannials: From Rush to Van Halen
By Steven P. Wheeler

I won the draw,” says Van Halen’s new manager Ray Dannials, 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 Dannials, who formed S.R.O. in 1972 and continues to manage “Canada’s powerhouse Rush” as well as more recent additions Kings X and Extreme. “I already had a relationship with AI 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 AI 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.”

Many were shocked that a band so synonymous with the City of Angels would hire a management company based in a different country. Dannials 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 10 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, Dannials adds, “Besides, 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 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.”

Dannials 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 Dannials.

“...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 they really have to try 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 Dannials 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 Dannials. “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, they’re managing each individual. With a new band, you tend to work with the leader of the band, or you tend to stay in touch with the record company. 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 Dannials, 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 Dannials’ 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

Looking for a Recording Studio?
Our Network of over 300 select recording and video sweetening facilities will make your work a pleasure. We eliminate the runaround, hassles and headaches involved in finding the best studio for your project.
Since 1980 Studio Referral Service has assisted thousands in getting great results for their records, films, commercials and related projects.

Next time... get it right from the start!
This is a free service
818-508-8828
310-858-1140
FAX 818-508-8077

THE ADVENTURES OF STUDIO CAT
"AN INCREDIBLY HIP STUDIO"
Automated SSL-G, Trident, Sierra-Hidey, Profect, engineers, protocols, hardwood & stone design and parking with camera.
-213-
871 CATS
“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.”

S.R.O. Management can be contacted at 416-923-5855.

RED SKY
Playing At
FAIS DO-DO
Wed., March 1st - 10:45pm
21 & over $5.00 w/ad
5257 W. Adams Blvd., LA cross street La Brea

Call 818-856-3319 for band & CD info!

MUSIC CONNECTION. MARCH 6—MARCH 19, 1995