

Chapter 1

VAN HALEN'S STRIPPER INVASION

“An ounce of image is worth a pound of performance.”

David Lee Roth

From the first time I set the needle down on Van Halen's debut album, I knew we'd struck gold. The band's raw power jumped out of the speakers. Their songs grabbed you by the ears and refused to let go.

Van Halen commanded your attention—no, they demanded it.

The rock radio jocks at KISW in Seattle wore out the grooves on “You Really Got Me” and jammed to the pelvic thrusts of “Runnin’ with the Devil.” Listener reaction to Van Halen came hard and fast as our request lines lit up. Rock fans couldn't get enough of the party boys from Pasadena.

From day one, my station got on board the Van Halen train, and we became fast friends with the band, their managers, their promoters and Warner Brothers records. Together, we transformed their new albums into events and their concerts into spectacles. Everyone knew that when Van Halen came to town, the party was on.

In 1981, Van Halen was firing on all cylinders, following a string of multi-platinum albums. Their concert tours sold out across the country, usually in a matter of minutes. Arenas were packed with devoted fans, decked out in Van Halen

T-shirts. Lead singer David Lee Roth emerged as the sexiest front man in rock, while guitar whiz Eddie Van Halen was hailed as “the new Hendrix.” Van Halen was the first hair band, coiffed and glamorous in spandex, and tailor-made for MTV.

At one point Van Halen was selling so much concert merchandise that the band bought its own T-shirt factory. Then, they bought a rock station in Portland, Oregon.

That summer, I read that Van Halen was coming to our city. So, I called the band’s manager, Noel Monk, and suggested, “KISW will be celebrating our 10th anniversary the same week that Van Halen is playing in Seattle. The guys will be here for two nights. Can David Lee

Roth, Michael Anthony and the Van Halen brothers stop by our station before the concert?”

Monk considered it for a moment, then sighed, “Sorry Beau, I’d like to say yes. But their schedule is pretty tight. I just don’t think they’ll have time this trip.”

Rock stars often came by for a visit before heading to the arena for their sound checks. But sometimes they didn’t have time. I got that. But I was really disappointed the band couldn’t find a few minutes for us. I couldn’t help but wonder if Van Halen was just too big now. Maybe we were old news to them.

Fast-forward to the afternoon of Van Halen’s first concert. It was about 2 p.m. on a hot June afternoon and anticipation for the show was running high. All day, the radio station’s request lines had been flooded with calls from hungry Van Halen fans. They wanted to hear songs that put them in the mood, like “Ain’t Talkin’ ’Bout Love” and “Dance the Night Away.” Most of our DJs were also going to the concert and

were happy to serve extra helpings of Van Halen tunes. Everyone was feeling good—and about to feel much better.

The station's all-call intercom buzzed and our receptionist frantically announced over the speaker, "Everybody look out the window!" I pulled back my office curtains and peered outside as a pack of motorcycle cops roared to a stop in front of our building, lights spinning and sirens blaring. The police were followed by one...two...three...four long, black limousines. The cops hopped off their bikes and stopped traffic as the limos arrived in succession and parked in front of our studios.

The driver opened the rear door of the first limo and out popped David Lee Roth, flanked by two sleazy women. In the second car was Eddie Van Halen, accompanied by a third babe who carried a giant birthday cake. Now that's full service. Eddie's brother Alex stepped out of the third limo, holding a case of champagne. And finally, bassist Michael Anthony emerged, armed with a huge box of party whistles, poppers and horns.

Van Halen and their ragtag entourage headed straight for the front door of our station like they owned the place. And on this day, they did. Roth led his bandmates into our lobby and stormed through the hallways. As he pushed open the door to the on-air studio, Diamond Dave served notice that Van Halen had come to invade KISW.

David Lee Roth plopped down in the seat at the control board, grabbed the mic from afternoon DJ Gary Crow, and pushed him aside. The other guys in the band presented us with the huge birthday cake and cracked open the case of champagne. Soon corks were popping and everyone was guzzling straight from their own bottle. Champagne glasses were for pussies, I guess. Eddie Van Halen raced around the room spraying people with a penis-shaped squirt gun.

I'd officially lost control of my radio station. Roth cranked the studio speakers up to 11 and more people poured into our control room. We were packed together like a subway car at rush hour with our staff, record label reps, photographers and people I didn't even recognize. I found myself pinned against the back wall standing next to Eddie Van Halen. Speechless, I turned to him and sputtered, "What's all this?" Eddie smiled, put his hand on my shoulder and beamed, "We wouldn't miss your birthday!" You hear stories about moments like this—now, I was living one. If the FCC had chosen that moment to inspect our operation, I'd have been fired on the spot and banished to a 10-watt radio station in Blue Balls, Ohio...if I was lucky.

The next two hours were pure bedlam. The word spread around Seattle that Van Halen had taken over KISW, and every rock fan in town was glued to our station. Inside the studio, cake flew, horns blew and shredded paper filled the air. Without any prompting, the strippers jumped up on the console, tore off their bikini tops and started grinding to the beat. Roth and his bandmates played DJ, talked to listeners, and handed out backstage passes to women on the phone who sounded hot. Our phone lines bulged with callers wanting to shoot the breeze with Diamond Dave.

One guy asked a question that all Van Halen fans have long wondered: "Dave, is it true that you have the brown M&Ms removed from the candy bowl in your dressing room?"

Roth replied, "Look, Van Halen likes all colors of M&M's. We don't discriminate. But yeah, our contract requires promoters to remove all brown M&M's, just to make sure they're paying attention. We know if they get that right, we know that everything else is handled. So, it keeps 'em honest."

A woman appealed to Van Halen's serious side, pleading, "Dave, my name is Amanda. I really wish I could see your

show tonight. But I'm a quadriplegic and need my wheelchair. So, I can't go to concerts."

Dave smirked and consoled her, "Sorry to hear that hon. Ya know, I have a special place in my heart for handicapped people. If it weren't for folks like you, I wouldn't have a damn place to park!" With that, Dave howled and punched up the next caller.

The champagne was flowing and the party was rockin' until our sales manager reminded me that we hadn't played any commercials in two hours. Gotta pay the bills. But there was no way that I'd stop this party. So, I suggested we move across the hall while our DJ regained some control. The band, strippers and assorted guests grabbed their champagne and followed me into our production studio. Without missing a beat, the Van Halen party raged on. Roth was on a roll, tossing out funny lines left and right. While nobody noticed, I discreetly started recording the festivities. I had no idea what we'd get, but I couldn't miss this rare opportunity to capture Van Halen in full party mode.

KISW had been looking for a new, signature voice for our station, someone to inject a rock attitude between songs. Earlier that day, I'd been listening to lots of demo tapes from announcers. But I didn't hear anyone who embodied the rock spirit.

At that moment, I realized that we'd found our announcer. While other radio stations had faceless guys with booming voices, our signature sound would be Van Halen. With tape rolling, we recorded dozens of great cuts from the biggest band in the land. Roth talked about KISW, sang about KISW, and the band even belted out our call letters in four-

part harmony. Then Alex Van Halen stepped up to the mic and spoke each letter with echo! K-k-k-k...I-i-i-i...S-s-s-s... W-w-w-w. Never heard anything like that before, or since.

After three hours of full-throttle decadence, Van Halen's manager finally rounded up the band and said, "It's time to go." Dave, Eddie, Alex and Michael left our studios in shambles and stumbled back to their limos, strippers in tow. As the cars pulled away, Roth rolled down his window and yelled, "See ya tonight."

Back inside the station, we weren't sure what had hit us. It looked like a tornado had blown through. Champagne and cake were ground into the carpet. A layer of empty bottles, plates, paper shreds and G-strings were stuck on top. And the walls were sprayed with God knows what. It would be a hard day's night for our cleaning company.



The KISW staff with Van Halen (just before things got out of control)