

REMEMBERING

EDDIE

Eddie Van Halen passed on 6 October at the age of 65, and the outpouring of emotion from fans and musicians alike only serves to confirm what a unique guitar talent he was. *Rock Candy Mag* pays tribute to EVH with a heartfelt opinion piece from respected Los Angeles-based critic **Bob Lefsetz**, a personal appreciation of Eddie's craft by legendary guitarist **Steve Vai**, *Rock Candy* boss **Derek Oliver**'s insightful recollections of seeing The Great Man in action back in the '70s, and a technical explanation of Eddie's abilities from our in-house shredder **Oliver Fowler**...

AND THE CRADLE WILL no longer rock. That's my favourite Van Halen song. It sounds so alive, but Eddie Van Halen isn't. He paid his dues. You've got to be a virtuoso. When no one is watching, no one is paying attention, you're on a mission.

AND THEN they started knocking around town. Most bands fermented in their local burb and ultimately pulled up roots and moved to Hollywood. Van Halen started here. And you could see them all the time. At clubs like the Starwood or Gazzarri's, which never featured stars, just those on the way up or those who would never make it. The stars played the Whisky, the Troubadour, the Roxy. You went to the Starwood and Gazzarri's to rock, to hang with like-minded people. It was a niche, and few broke out of it.

So Gene Simmons decided to pony up for a demo. We knew because we heard it on KROQ. 'Runnin' With The Devil'. But still, Van Halen was stuck in no-man's land. Everybody in LA knew them, but no one outside Tinseltown did. One wondered if their moment was gonna pass.

AND IT was not an act that played nicely with others. As in, it didn't always fit. Van Halen were born to be headliners. I saw them opening for Nils Lofgren at the Santa Monica Civic before the first album came out. David Lee Roth resembled no one so much as Jim Dandy of the execrable Black Oak Arkansas. A larger-than-life cartoon that was playing to the back row of the arena even though we were in a theatre. As for Eddie Van Halen's guitar, it was so loud and I was so close that it all washed over me. I didn't get it.

Until 'Van Halen II'. When the clerks at Rhino Records were testifying how great Eddie was, and they didn't like anybody unless they were obscure. And someone playing this kind of music? It perked up my ears. So they were always around.

I took a class with Jim Rissmiller - he's gone now too - about concert promotion. He brought in Noel Monk, the band's manager at the time, and Noel filled us in on 'Diver Down', which was imminent. But it was

'1984' that broke the band wide, I mean to everybody.

AND DAVID Lee Roth thought he was the act, but it was always Eddie Van Halen, always. Van Halen could continue with a new lead singer, but not without Eddie. Van Halen was one of the very few bands that could succeed at the same level with a new lead singer. That's testimony to Van Halen's skills. Sammy Hagar has the pipes, but look at the venues Hagar's playing now.

But back to '1984'. It was released on New Year's Day, when at the time no one put out any music in January whatsoever. And it dominated the airwaves. 'Jump' was in the jukebox at the Rainbow, it was played over and over that spring and summer, long after it had left the airwaves.

And of course Van Halen was supercharged by MTV. But somehow they truly bridged the gap. Most of the classic rockers, those with careers before the music television service, did performance videos where they stood still. Van Halen jumped around to the point where Eddie had to get his hips replaced.

Actually, my favourite track on '1984' is 'I'll Wait'. That was one of the album's breakthroughs. Not only was Eddie a star on guitar, he mastered the keys too. He could add new sounds, he wanted to grow.

AND DAVE went on to sing about 'California Girls' as the Van Halen brothers and Michael Anthony licked their wounds. And then two years later, the newly configured Van Hagar came out with '5150'.

The hit was 'Why Can't This Be Love'. The work track, the one that came out in advance. And at first it was different, you didn't quite get it. But then you couldn't get enough of it, you played it over and over again.

It was still the vinyl era. I bought the LP the day it came out. And it's very good. At this point its most famous, most played cut, is 'Dreams', which could never be done with Dave. But my favourite opens the second side, 'Best Of Both Worlds'. It was the riff and the dynamics. From loud to understated. I tingle as I listen right now. This wasn't pure balls-to-the-wall, it mixed in-your-face with subtle, twisting and turning along the way. ▶

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