

STAGEHAND



A Backstage Pass
to my Life Stories

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STAGEHAND

A Backstage Pass to my Life Stories

DAVID H. ARETSKY

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FOUR MUSICIANS, TWO NIGHTCLUBS, AND A BOTTLE. PART 1

Sometime around late 1987 or early 1988 while I was working as the lighting director at the Chuck Landis Country Club in Reseda, California, along with my friend Tom Hamilton, we had a three day period in which we worked on a music video.

Tom and I would act as liaisons to the film crew, where their lighting and electrical needs were concerned. Back then, things were more fun and less corporate-like. I was all of 23 or 24 years old, seven or eight years into the production business. When the first people showed up for load-in, someone with the band informed me the drummer's roadie would not be able to make it to the production. He asked if I knew how to set up a drum kit. Since I was at the time working with a local band as a drum roadie/lighting guy (one of my side jobs), I volunteered for the task. I liked this particular drummer, so I was willing to help out for free.

I wouldn't set up his kit perfectly, but it would be close enough for

him to adjust quickly when he got there.

On the second morning the director of photography and the singer of the band were having a disagreement at the edge of the stage. Stupid loudmouth that I am, I decided to interject my opinion. This, by the way, is not advisable if you are just starting your career in show business.

The DP was arguing that the rather large stage audio monitors be lower than the stage floor, where they would be out of the way of the cameras sweeping over the heads of the audience. The singer argued that he needed to hear himself and couldn't if the monitor wedges were on the floor.

"Hey man, he's been singing in a rock band for a lot of years and is getting old" I said to the DP, "his hearing is probably pretty shot. Maybe the wedges need to be closer."

They both looked at me.

"Maybe we can put them on apple boxes under the stage level," the DP told the singer.

"Thanks," Mick Jagger said to me as the DP walked away. In the end, the wedges got axed for the video anyway.

The day's work went on, we filmed shots of the band on stage without the audience in the room and various shots around the club and dressing rooms, etc. Now and then I had a chance to chat with the band members. Tom and I had finished our part of the stage lighting so I'm not that busy after the first day.

The English guitarist told me a story: He said he had been out in the countryside at his place when this freak storm hit. The wind blew many of the trees over into the road. The tree-lined road out to his home was blocked. He was unable to leave, trapped alone with his dogs. It took a long time for crews to get out there and clear the road. He told me the whole incident was "pretty scary." He was so friendly

and down to Earth, he made me feel like a friend, not just a fan.¹

Earlier I had been introduced to the drummer, as “the guy that put your kit together.” He thanked me for saving him some time with his setup and told me how he became involved in the music video:

“I couldn’t believe it,” he said as he told me that Mick Jagger had called him at home to ask him to drum on this video. He said that “At first I thought my friends were pranking me. Very funny guys,” He told the caller, and hung up on him.

The phone rang again, and when the drummer picked up, he heard the voice on the other end say, “Please don’t hang up on me again, I really am Mick Jagger, and I do want you to come and play on my video.” The drummer didn’t hang up this time. As he told me about speaking with Mick Jagger, he became more and more excited, “I couldn’t believe that he wanted me to play with him, and also that he had called me at home to ask. Unbelievable, it was very cool.” He was so enthusiastic.

“Well,” I said, “I would be pretty excited too, I guess, but it’s not that surprising to me. I mean you’re a great drummer. I happen to love your music. Why wouldn’t he call you? I mean, you are Terry Bozzio.”

The third day of the shoot is a performance with the audience attending. I am on the balcony with Mick Jagger and guitarist Jeff Beck as the audience files in and mills around on the first floor.

We’re looking down from our dark spot at the girls in the audience. There’s all kinds of good looking women down there. One, in particular, catches all our eyes, a tall girl with short shaved hair colored in leopard spots. She’s wearing a giant, green, paper-mâché bow top, and a big pink taffeta tutu. On her feet, are long shiny, thigh-high, laced-up, combat-styled high heeled boots. She has lots of tattoos and piercings, a “stripper,” hot looking woman.

¹ In my research, I found this: On the night of 15–16 October, with hurricane-force winds, what would be called “The Great Storm of 1987”, a violent extra-tropical cyclone hit England, France, and the Channel Islands as a severe depression in the Bay of Biscay, as it moved northeast.

Mick Jagger says to me and Jeff Beck that she is probably the strangest looking chick he has ever seen. Wow, that's a statement! We all laugh. The girl lights up a cigarette, and Mick is disappointed.

"Too bad, she smokes," he said². It's time for them to get ready to go on stage and we say our goodbyes. I'll probably never see them again I think, but both of them have been very nice to me these last couple of days. It certainly was fun to meet them.

The video is called "Throwaway"³. It's from the 1987 release, Primitive Cool solo album by Mick Jagger.



Somebody stole my crew pass, but this is the ticket given to the film audience.

² <https://www.thedailybeast.com/keith-richards-gets-smokeless-ashtray-to-avoid-annoying-mick-jagger>

³ <https://youtu.be/SI13bhdXGw4>

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FOUR MUSICIANS, TWO NIGHTCLUBS, AND A BOTTLE. PART 2

The story's not over because, so far, I've only included three musicians, one club, and zero bottles. The next part ties into my history with my friend Teri, who I'll write about later in the chapter titled "Teri". It was now June 22nd 1993, some six years after the "Throwaway" video shoot. I had been working on the payroll at the Whiskey a Go Go in Hollywood for a few years. I got the job because of Teri. I would come work and fill in for the regular lighting director, Jeff, when he took days off. When Louie Stetzel, the FOH audio engineer, found out I could mix audio, he decided I should start coming in to mix monitors too, so the musicians could hear themselves on stage. After a while, Louie would have me mix at the front of house console, when he wanted to take an evening off.

That night I was the house lighting guy. The band Toto had brought their lighting director that evening, so after the gelling and focus of the light rig was done, I had the rest of the evening to babysit Toto's

lighting guy at the board and wander about the club.⁴

The Whiskey was crowded, a full house. A lot of celebrities had shown up for this show. I decided to duck backstage for a few minutes, where it was a little bit more quiet. While I was there, the security guard asked me if I could watch the backstage door. He needed to take a piss, or whatever. I tell him, "no problem".

Before walking away he said, "The manager of the band said not to let anyone in except the waitress, even their wives." Then he takes off.

Soon there is a knock at the backstage door. When I opened it, a guy I recognize says to me, "Hey man, let me in!" He has an entourage of like eight or ten people along with him.

"I can't. Only the waitress can come in," I told him.

"Don't you know who the fuck I am? Let me in!" the guy yells in my face, looking at me like I'm stupid. Wow, he could have been cool about it. I hate when people say shit like that.

"Yes, of course, I know who you are! You're Eddie Van Halen, but you're not coming through my door!" I slam the door in his face, as he curses me out.

A few minutes later, another knock. I open the door, I'm expecting Eddie but it's someone else. The guy is also somewhat familiar.

"Hello, "Don't I know you?" he asks, "Hmm, maybe we've worked together."

People say that all the time, but I'm pretty sure now, I have worked with this guy.

"Jeff," he says, extending a hand.

"Dave," I say, reaching out to shake his hand.

"My friends are playing guitar in the band tonight. Would it be alright if I come in for a minute and just say hello quickly?"

"Sure." I let him in.

Now I see Eddie Van Halen in the background, and I'm pretty sure he is pissed off. I'm not famous, but right now I own this door. Tough luck. If you are cool, you get in. If you act like a dick, you don't.

Jeff Beck is a nice guy who's respectful of everyone around him, Eddie, apparently, not so much, at least not tonight. I kind of felt a little bad, though. Maybe Eddie's just having a bad day?

⁴ http://toto_rocks.tripod.com/id19.html

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FOUR MUSICIANS, TWO NIGHTCLUBS, AND A BOTTLE. PART 3

A few years later my roommate Jack came home and told me this story.

Jack was out driving around with some friends in his pickup truck. They were driving through the hills coming home from Hollywood. Jack pointed out the homes of celebrities to one of the passengers, she was drunk. As they passed by Eddie Van Halen's place she asked to stop, to pee. When he pulled over she jumped out of the vehicle. Jack jokingly drove away down the road leaving her. When he returned a few minutes later he found the woman had rung the doorbell at the end of Eddie Van Halen's driveway.

Jack saw his drunk passenger was talking to someone in the driveway. It was Eddie himself. He seemed to be happily chatting with her. Then one of the other passengers in the truck yelled out to Eddie, "Hey Eddie, we love you!" Eddie's mood suddenly changed, he became angry. Rightfully so. Who could blame him? It's the middle of the

night, and some drunk fans he doesn't know have rung his doorbell and are now yelling at his front gate.

Eddie was drinking from a bottle of wine in his hand. He started to argue with the drunk woman.

Jack and his other friends got out of the truck, grabbed the drunk woman and started to drag her back into the vehicle. Eddie was angry, and yelling at them. As Jack pulled away Eddie ran down the road and threw his wine bottle. It crashed right through the small rear window of Jack's truck and into the cab.

Eddie may be a dick when drunk, but I'll give him this, he has excellent aim. And he's also one of the most talented guitarists in the world.

Jack took the neck of the bottle and put it in his home studio. It's still on display in his home to this day.

Sometimes people don't turn out to be how you imagined them to be. It's a bit disappointing. I sure would have liked to run into Eddie on one of his good days, as he was one of my childhood rock star heroes. But for now he has two strikes against him in my book.

Unfortunately on October 6, 2020 during the editing of this book Eddie Van Halen passed away.

