

# Comeback not a classic

Review by Lisa Timpf

Dan Hill is best known as a successful Canadian singer-songwriter with albums such as "Hold On," "Longer Fuse," and "Frozen in the Night" to his credit. Hill embarks on a new career as a novelist in a Bantam book offering entitled *Comeback*.

The novel gets high marks for Canadian content. Apart from descriptions of the life of a pro singer on the road, the action is centred in the Upper Canadian hamlet of Toronto, Ontario.

The story line sees youthful Canadian pop star Cornelius Barnes, fading from popularity at age 28, launch himself suddenly back into the limelight. He does this, however, not by putting out a new hit single, but by getting involved in a statutory rape case.

What appears to be a case of one victim and one guilty party is found in the ensuing action to be more complex.

Hill's writing style is at its best when depicting dialogue between characters. He develops a number of intriguing, if barely credible, characters: Marcia Moustacalis, a female world-class shot-putter who is dealt out of a chance at the Olympics by a bureaucratic bungle; Timothy Reynolds, a painfully introverted musical genius; Cornelius Barnes, the son of a Negro anthropologist and an Ojibway Indian; and Denzil Stern, a wheeler-dealer promoter with few scruples and fewer truly endearing qualities.

The humour ranges from juvenile, forced, and semi-sexist to, on occasion, slapstick and novel. One of my favorite humorous interludes is the description of the statue on the Barnes' front yard.



Perhaps better known for his singing and songwriting ability, Canadian Dan Hill tries his hand at a new career with the novel *Comeback*. In its better moments, the book conveys the same sense of penetrating and painful honesty Hill puts into his songs.

*Cornelius' father, living in a posh house on Toronto's prestigious Bridle Path, has done what many people have no doubt secretly wished to do themselves but not quite dared. Confronted by the black jockey statues on the front yards of his WASP neighbours, Barnes has retaliated by placing a "six foot statue of a Caucasian jockey with a face bearing a decided resemblance to Pierre Elliot Trudeau" on his own front yard.*

Hill's plot development technique involves the use of flashback to examine some of the

influences on Barnes' life leading up to the statutory rape case. The examination of the less glamorous side of life on the road, and the effects of the touring lifestyle on the characters, give Hill an opportunity to suggest some thought-provoking insights.

*Comeback* is an interesting novel which attempts to make some deeper-than-surface observations. Like Hill's songs, the book is at times painfully honest. At other times, however, it lapses into superficiality.

*Comeback* is not a classic—but it's not a bad read.

# Van Halen plunges into 1984

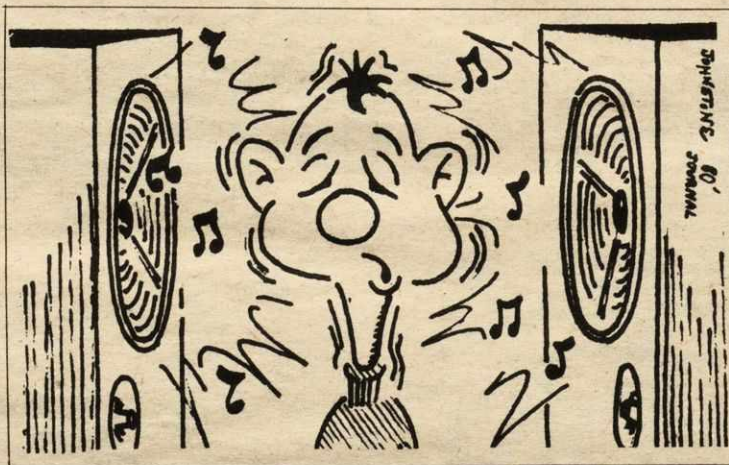
by David Lutes

The release of *1984*, Van Halen's sixth album, is another step in the long plunge that David Lee Roth and the lads have been on since they broke onto the scene in 1978.

Their first album, simply titled *Van Halen*, was a heavy-metal masterpiece filled with guts and ambition and a lot of unpolished talent. But the group's instantaneous success (the first album hung around in the Top 100 forever) and their subsequent rise to arena-rock stardom filled the boys' heads with visions of godhood, while robbing them of anything resembling an original idea.

Van Halen's most recent studio adventures have been serious studies in self-centred egomania. These albums are little more than showcases for David Lee Roth's macho little yelp and the scientifically placed guitar solo by one of rock's most gifted axemen, Eddie Van Halen. *1984* just gives us more of the same. And that is not quite good enough.

To their credit, Lee Roth, Van Halen, drummer Alex Van Halen and bassist Mike Anthony have made efforts to turn around in *1984*. For one thing, their self-indulgent habit of filling albums with cover versions of old rock songs has disappeared. They somehow managed to come up



with 8 and a half new tunes. Some of these songs even manage to evoke memories of past glories. The most notable example of this effort is the rough and ready "Hot for Teacher" which, despite its juvenile theme (lyrics were never Van Halen's strong point), is easily the album's best cut.

For the most part though, the sound is much too pat. The songs all sound as though they were written expressly for an arena filled with thousands of screaming high-schoolers -- Bic Lighters thrust skyward.

The disappointing title tune, with its cryptic Orwellian misnomer, turns out to be nothing

more than a minute long synthesizer lead-in to "Jump", the album's first single. "Jump" is a ready-made video tune, its one line chorus timed to coincide with David Lee Roth's patented leaps.

The rest of the album is a regular metal offering; songs largely indistinguishable from each other. In fact, I was reminded of the archetype of heavy-metal bands, Led Zeppelin, when they too could do little right.

And so it goes. Either the boys pick up some inspiration or even the loyal fans will long for the "classic" Van Halen and wonder whatever has happened to them. Cute cover though, guys.



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