

# On the road with Def Leppard: Backstage stories

## Def Leppard tour comes with inspiring, entertaining tales

BY KURT DAHL, THE STARPHOENIX APRIL 28, 2015 9:14 AM



One Bad Son in Brandt Centre. The band is touring with Def Leppard.

### Part two of two

This tour is rushing past me, right before my eyes, and I'm trying to slow it down. Only two of the 10 shows with Def Leppard remain, Saskatoon and Winnipeg.

Two of the highlights this week were the Saddledome in Calgary and Rexall Place in Edmonton, both of which were packed to the rafters. Calgary hit around 12,000 and Edmonton almost 14,000. Four years ago, before we had some luck at radio and things started to open up for us, we played a dank little club in downtown Calgary and maybe a dozen of our closest friends and family came out. I think we made \$100. So the impact of playing a crowded Saddledome to a bunch of fans who know our songs is not lost on us!

That's one benefit of being together for 10 years and having a gradual build along the way: we don't take anything for granted. Not a single fan, not a single show. Had we blown up in the first few years like some other bands, I don't know if it would be the same. I hope it would.

I've got to know the Def Leppard guys more over the last week. One thing that really hits me is how much adversity they've overcome in their career. Drummer Rick Allen lost his arm in 1985, guitarist Steve Clark died from alcoholism in 1991, bass player Rick Savage contracted Bell's palsy in 1994 and guitarist Vivian Campbell was sidelined in 2013 with Hodgkin's disease.

Any one of these events would sink most bands, but Def Leppard has overcome all of it and continues to pack arenas around the world. No matter what your taste in music, their perseverance is inspiring. As with anything in life, it's only failure if you fall down and stay down.

I've had some more enlightening chats with Allen. He showed me his drum kit and how he makes it all work with one arm. It's impressive and moving. The fact he lost his arm at the peak of the band's success and the band stood by him and put their career on hold until he relearned how to play is almost as remarkable as the actual re-learning. Almost.

Def Leppard's road crew are interesting folks as well and have done world tours with the biggest names in the industry, from Guns 'n' Roses to Bruce Springsteen to Van Halen. As you can imagine, they have seen it all and have some great stories to tell. The most difficult people they've dealt with? David Lee Roth (who didn't want to see his bandmate's faces unless they were on stage) and Shakira (who once spent three hours in sound check scolding her tour manager because the big screens made her rear end look big).

The most kind and humble people they've dealt with? Eddie Van Halen and The Boss. I could listen to these stories all day. It's like an ongoing episode of Behind the Music (literally in Shakira's case). The Regina show Sunday was another poignant moment in the history of OBS. The first show we ever played outside of Saskatoon was in Regina in 2006. We were booked for three nights of a long weekend and the promoter expected two sets of mostly cover songs. We instead played our hearts out with two sets of OBS originals. When we got back to our hotel, we were informed by reception the venue had cancelled our rooms for the remainder of the weekend and we were no longer wanted at the venue the next two nights! The best part was they tried to stick us with the hotel bill.

I guess Regina wasn't quite ready for the OBS sound at that time. The juxtaposition of that crowd to the sold-out Brandt Centre crowd had all four of us smiling like schoolboys Sunday on stage.

As I type this, we're on our way to Saskatoon. I don't think there's a show that I've been more excited for in my life. To play on the big stage in our hometown, for the city that raised us, that made us, is one of those moments I'll cherish until I'm old and grey.

Chase your dreams or someone will hire you to chase theirs. Thanks for your support the last 10 years. See you from the stage.

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