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Steve Adelman
on Avaland

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Avaland has sold out every single night of its four-year life, and that success has to do completely with the team. John Lyons. John Debo. Nick Bonassi. John Dellavoco—the interior-design guy. Richard Warboys—the lighting guy. All these people dedicate themselves to producing something great every week. They deserve all the credit. From bringing DJs in, to creating interiors, to hosting the crowd, to making up crazy invitations, Avaland has the best people in country doing all of this stuff. I tend to get the credit, but there is an entire team that works incredibly hard to make this work.

We constantly try to improve. We never sit around and go, "Hey, we're great." Never. And I think I probably push people too hard in that respect. I'm sure people think that I'm out of my mind. "Come on, we're sold out—why are you complaining?" But if you don't evolve in this business, you don't survive.

I came to Boston for graduate school in 1984. After three years of grad school, I had a master's degree and was working on a PhD in economics. I started my dissertation and suddenly realized that I had hated the last three years of my life. It just wasn't going to work. So I left graduate school to take a consulting job, which I did for a year. And then I realized that even the nine-to-five thing wasn't going to work for me, so I decided that I would learn how to ski for a winter, which I did, and I came back still not knowing what I was going to do. By chance, I got involved with some friends in a nightclub project in downtown Boston. I had no experience in the business, and I wasn't even really a nightclub person—I hadn't been going out a lot. So I was just helping out in the club, doing all kinds of things, and gradually I started learning the business.

I got a little start in life. I was pretty much completely clueless until my late 20s. I didn't know anything—and it's not like I know everything now, but back then I was really new—hey, I'm from Bay City, Michigan. I didn't know any better. I moved to New York, and not having a clue probably helped me in the beginning. I was so naive that I didn't realize all the things that were supposed to be happening to me. I didn't always realize that I could've been mugged, or that I was paying too much for rent, or whatever. Looking back, it's scary.

I love the nightclub business because of the creative element. I love the concept that you can be lying in bed and come up with an idea, and you think to yourself, "Hmm, I wonder if this is going to work?" And then two or three weeks later, there are 2000 people saying, "This is good," or "This is bad." I like that immediate response.

Some of the Avaland nights with the big DJs have been incredible because of the energy that these DJs bring. Paul Van Dyke. Paul Oakenfold. Sasha and Digweed. I think that our anniversary party [on March 15] is going to be one of those nights—and I'm not just trying to sell the night, believe me. It's going to sell out whether or not anyone reads this. It's just going to be an incredible night, with Perry Farrell and Junior Vasquez. I think we're going to have a pretty diverse crowd. And that is exactly the way we wanted to do it. I'm six-foot-four. Especially as a guy, I'm sure that growing up bigger than everybody else has shaped my personality—although I'm not exactly sure how [laughing]. But it's funny, because I grew up playing basketball, and I would spend my summers at basketball camp, where I was considered a little below average in the height department. I was going against guys that



Typical Avaland: (from top to bottom) Boy George spins that wheel; an anniversary party; Michael Jordan and Miss Moneypenny host Avaland



were six-eight, six-nine. So I never really considered myself as tall in that context. But it is nice to always be able to see in a nightclub.

I played in college, but I don't really play basketball anymore—boxing is my thing now. With boxing I'm in and out of the gym in an hour. It's a total-body workout, and I find it very fun. It's not fun when you're getting whacked in the head, and I've been hit pretty hard sometimes. I'm not very good—I'm okay; I'm somewhat athletic, but I'm happy to be wearing the headgear. Getting popped makes you get mad as heck. It's kind of a cool feeling—it wakes you up. Guys that know boxing can put the hurt on you with the lightest shock—they know exactly where to hit you. I live in the South End, and I love it. It is a fantastic neighborhood.

I lived in Manhattan for a while, and you know what? I like living in the South End better. I bought a five-upper in the South End, which was great for me because I know all of these great builders and plumbers and lighting people from the club. I gutted the place and started over.

John and Patrick [Lyons] have set up this organization in a way that allows creative people to be creative. It is exciting. Like any business, there is a routine here, but there is always change on the horizon, there is always a new concept, a new venue to open up, a space to rethink, and that keeps it exciting.

I love movies. I think there are a lot of bits and pieces of movies that people take with them. And in my line of work, just looking at the cinematography—look at *The Lord of the Rings*—you take away the ability and the imagination to create such a scenic atmosphere. I tend to take a lot away from movies, both inwardly and outwardly.

My biggest downfall is that I got caught up in my work so much because I love it. I don't even realize how much time I'm putting in, because I really have fun with what I'm doing. But then I step back a month later, and I think, "What did I do for that month, what happened?" I haven't spoken to my Grandma in a month, and that's not right.

I love going to Las Vegas. I'm not a big-money gambler, but I love playing it. I love the idea of it. I think it's completely fun entertainment. I'm halfway decent because of my economics background and running businesses and sort of budgeting and doing things on a very logical basis. You don't want to overextend—I'm not the most exciting guy to bet with, but I enjoy it a lot. A lot of guys tend to be like, "Hey, let's pick up girls." And there is that opportunity in this business. I was always sort of a misfit in that regard. In college, I never went to the frat parties, it just never was my thing. I'm more low-key.

We get people of all ages, people who, even if they don't love the music, they love Avaland for the theater of it. The key to Avaland is that the people that go there really want to go there; they are not just showing up because there isn't anywhere else to go. When people take the effort to come here, they pay to get in, they pay for their drinks, and they say, "Did these people put in the work to entertain me?" And the answer is always yes. No one ever wonders what they paid for at Avaland. ☺

Avaland inventor and a surprisingly low-key guy AS INTERVIEWED BY SCOTT KATHAN

>Steve Adelman