

EDDIE VAN HALEN!

ROCKS ON! GUITAR GOD SPEAKS!



THERE IS ONLY ONE EDDIE VAN HALEN. The innovative guitar genius has led his namesake band through decades of rock's most memorable anthems. From "Running With the Devil" to "And the Cradle Will Rock" to "Jump" and "Right Now," Van Halen has provided the soundtrack to your life. We sat down with Eddie at his 5150 Studios to discuss the reunion with David Lee Roth, his new line of guitars (and sneakers), his upcoming wedding and the future of the greatest band in the world.

HUSTLER: What finally made the reunion tour with David Lee Roth happen?

EDDIE VAN HALEN: I guess we got bored sitting around doing nothing. My brother Alex and I always come up here and play. One day my son [Wolfgang] started playing drums and then guitar. I said, "Why don't you come along and play bass?" My brother was in the drum room while Wolfie and I were playing in the control room. Alex starts playing and asks, "Ed, how are you playing bass and guitar at the same time?" I said, "I'm not." He says, "Who's playing bass?"

This is way before the tour. It was when Wolfie first picked up the bass. He was about 13 or 14 years old. I said, "Wolfie, say hi to Uncle

Al." Wolfie's voice hadn't changed yet. He says [*in a high pitch*], "Hi, Uncle Al." Al still didn't know who was playing bass. I said, "Come into the control room for a second, Al."

He walked in and saw Wolfie with the bass and said, "You got to be shitting me." Normally, when Al and I play, he never has bass in his headphones. He needs to hear me, and I only need to hear him. I'm not saying that the bass guitar is irrelevant, but the bass is just a frequency in headphones that's not necessary for getting a tight track for Alex and I. Just for the fun of it I put a little bass in his headphones. Al walked into the control room and couldn't believe it was Wolfie playing bass and said, "Wow, you're right in the pocket." He just naturally grooves. Some people are just born with that groove factor.

Then one day, just out of the blue, David Lee Roth called. Out of the fucking blue. It wasn't preplanned or anything. He called me up and asked, "What are you doing?" I said, "Sitting around jamming with Alex and my son." He said: "Really?" I invited him to come by and jam. He came by and said, "Wanna do a tour?" Sure, why not? It was very simple really.

Did you give Wolfgang lessons?

Nope, I swear to God. I've never shown him a note. If anything it was the opposite: He showed me a thing or two. Like when we were rehearsing for the tour, I hadn't played some of the songs: "Romeo's Delight," "Beautiful Girls"—three quarters of the set I hadn't played since David left in 1985. I hadn't played them in almost 25 years, so I had to relearn the shit. We had played some of the old tunes like "Ain't Talkin' 'Bout Love" and "Jump" but not the more obscure tunes, which are actually my favorites.

I had to go back and listen to the records. I'd start playing, and Wolfgang would say, "Dad, you're playing it wrong." He pointed out things and was always right. I'm goin', *Shit, of all people to kick my ass, it's my own son.*

What was it like the first time you guys played after all those years?

It was amazing. At first, obviously, Dave doubted that a 15-16-year-old could do it. He said, "How's a 15-year-old kid going to be able to handle standing in front of that many people? Will he be able to sing? Does he have chops?" That went out the fucking window after the first rehearsal. (*Laughs.*) The best thing of all is that we have all grown. In the old days we yelled and screamed at each other not because we didn't like each other; it was more about the passion. We were always arguing about what the album cover should look like or what it should be called, shit like that, you know? It was our passion for the music, not anger towards each other.

Dave had slightly different ideas than Alex and I did. That led him to pursue a solo career. You know how the press can be. They turned it into a mudslinging thing that really never occurred. At least not to the extent that was reported. Where it actually started, nobody knows. Probably some journalist who took something out of context.

What was the best part of the tour?

The best part for me obviously was playing and being onstage with my son and my brother, and of course being back with Dave. It was a fucking blast. Like family playtime. I think the press made a lot bigger

to-do about Dave leaving the band than it was. Okay, how do I say this without offending the womenfolk? It's like any relationship. Everybody has to experiment. Maybe he didn't want to be married for that long. He wanted to try something else. When he realized the marriage was actually good, and maybe missed it a bit, we got back together.

Did Wolfgang actually pick the set list?

Yeah, he put it together and we all really dug it. But he got a little ticked off halfway through the tour when nobody wanted to change it. I was on his side because it would've been nice to change it up a little.

We just didn't have a long enough break in the tour to rehearse and work up other tunes. It took me a while to re-learn the ones we did play 'cause I hadn't played 'em for so many years. I mean, some songs, from the first and second record, I wrote in high school. So it goes way back for me.

Were there any songs you didn't play that you wished you could have?

Some new stuff would've been nice. But again, everything was in high gear as soon as we decided to do a tour that it would've taken time to write, record, mix, master, etc. We wouldn't have been on tour in 2007-2008. Overall it was very exciting to play all those classics, and I believe that's what the fans wanted to hear anyway.

What was your favorite song to play?

All of them. Since I write all the music, they're all my crazy-assed children. We've put out about 14 or 15 CDs. If you have 15 kids, you love 'em all, right? You don't love one more than the other even though they each have a bit of an attitude.

Is there a new Van Halen studio CD in the works?

We're just waiting for the right time. I took Wolfie out of school for a whole year to do the tour. It was just a bad time because 11th grade is the year that they prep you for college. At first the school was hesitant to allow him back for 12th grade. He really wants to graduate with his friends. We had a great tutor on tour, so they did let him back to the school he's been going to since kindergarten.

