



Like Father,
Like Son
“I’m an extension
of him,” says
Wolfgang of his
dad, Eddie (right,
with him in 1991,
and left, in the
studio with his
dad’s guitar), who
died last October
from lung cancer.



EIGHT MONTHS
AFTER EDDIE
VAN HALEN’S
DEATH, HIS SON
WOLFGANG IS
BLAZING HIS
OWN TRAIL—JUST
LIKE HIS FATHER
WANTED

By TOMÁS MIER

WOLFGANG VAN HALEN

‘My Dad Keeps Me Going’

There are a few things Wolfgang Van Halen wants to make clear. First, he’s *really* a nice guy. Yes, his dad, Eddie Van Halen, was one of the greatest guitarists of all time, and his mom is beloved TV actress Valerie Bertinelli. “People cynically would be like, ‘Ah, he’s probably a dick.’ But my childhood was completely normal. It wasn’t lavish or insane,” says the 30-year-old musician, a former bassist for his late father’s era-defining rock band, Van Halen. “[I was taught to] treat people how you want to be treated. It’s as simple as that.” Second—and perhaps even more importantly—he’s *not* “Wolfie,” the nickname Bertinelli gave him as a child that he says his parents’ fans have called him for far too long. “My whole life, I’ve just been the kid,” he says. “I’m thankful for the fans, but most of them follow me because of who my parents are. I have to always be like, ‘Hey, I’m 30. I’m a grown man, and I’m my own person.’”

Over the past year Wolfgang has been more determined than ever to forge his own path—even as he’s grieved the loss of his father. Last October he was thrust into the spotlight after he

GROWING UP VAN HALEN



Words of Wisdom
Eddie exposed his son to music early. His best advice? “If you ever make a mistake, do it twice so everybody thinks you meant to do it.”



Grounding Forces
“My parents raised me to be thankful for everything around me,” says Wolfgang (with Eddie and Valerie).



‘Little Dreamer’
Wolfgang (with Eddie in 2012) named his band Mammoth in tribute to Van Halen’s band name in the ’70s. “It’s tied to the lore,” he says.



Life of Laughter
“We find humor in the absurd,” says Bertinelli (with Eddie and their son in 2014). Adds Wolfgang: “I inherited my sense of humor from both of them!”

revealed on social media that Eddie had died at age 65 after a “long and arduous battle” with lung cancer. The news came as a shock to fans of the guitar virtuoso, who had kept his illness private.

Now, eight months later, Wolfgang is ready to reintroduce himself via Mammoth WVH, his new band, which is releasing a self-titled album on June 11. Sitting in Eddie’s L.A.-area home studio, 5150 Studios, Wolfgang—who cracks dry jokes throughout his interview with *People*—grows quiet as he reflects on his decision to hit pause on his career to care for his dad. “I don’t have a single regret. Not at all,” he says, looking down at his hands. “I put everything on hold with my album to spend every waking second with my dad. I spent my time as best as I could.”

He’s open about the deep grief he continues to grapple with following the death of his father, who he says remains his greatest inspiration. “I guess I’m a good actor when it comes to pretending that everything is okay,” he says. “But it’s really not.” Still, focusing on music over the past year has helped him begin to heal, he says, and it’s exactly what Eddie would have wanted. “It’s really tough, but you’ve got to keep going. If I just gave up and crawled in a hole, which I feel like doing every day, I know he’d be really pissed off at me,” says Wolfgang. “It’s the only thing that keeps me going.”

‘Paying tribute to my dad through music helped me grieve’



Scan this QR code with your phone’s camera to watch *People Features: Wolfgang Van Halen* on PeopleTV.

Raised in Los Angeles by his famous parents, Wolfgang fell in love with music at age 9 when his dad introduced him to the drums. Their first music lesson together involved tapping out a beat using magazines on Eddie’s nightstand. “The second he saw that I [had rhythm], he was like, ‘Yes!’ He got me a drum kit for my 10th birthday.” Two years later Wolfgang picked up the guitar to learn “316,” a guitar solo Eddie had written for him when he was a newborn, for his sixth-grade talent show. He acknowledges it was at times “really difficult” living in his father’s shadow, but Wolfgang says Eddie never added to the pressure. Chuckling as he recalls his many failed guitar lessons with his dad—“I’d be like, ‘Show me A, B and C,’ and he’d just go from A to Z in two seconds and proceed to be Eddie Van Halen”—Wolfgang says the Rock & Roll Hall of Famer encouraged him to find his own way. “He was really not a good teacher, but I think that allowed me to develop my own identity as a musician,” he says. “That’s what he wanted most.” After 20 years of marriage, Eddie and Bertinelli divorced in 2007, but [they] were on the same page when it



Rocking On

“It’s a completely different beast,” Wolfgang (with Eddie in 2015) says of going from playing bass in Van Halen to forming his own band.

came to raising their son. They remained close until Eddie’s death. “They did a good job of balancing the fame aspect and gave me a great, normal childhood,” says Wolfgang. “My dad was just a dude who liked to play music. And that’s who I am, too.”



With his new album, Wolfgang hopes to leave behind the expectations set on him as the son of Eddie Van Halen. “It’d be boring if I was just a carbon copy of him,” he says. “It’s freeing to start this path now, rather than doing what everybody would expect me to do; just play covers of Van Halen songs.” Conceiving the hard rock album at 5150 Studios, the birthplace of Van Halen’s greatest records, Wolfgang wrote, sang and played a variety of instruments—including bass, guitar and drums—on all 14 tracks. “Songwriting is a really therapeutic thing for me,” he says. “Working on this music and getting it out to everybody has been a welcome distraction.” Mammoth WVH’s first reviews came from Eddie, who played an early version of his son’s album on repeat. “He’d be so excited [for me]. I’m sure it’s proud dad talk, but he was

Musical Memories

“It’s as personal as can be,” says Wolfgang of his hard rock album *Mammoth WVH* (out June 11). The LP ends with “The Distance,” a moving tribute to his dad, Eddie.



like, ‘Favorite album of all time,’” says Wolfgang. “It was the only thing he had on his phone. He was my biggest champion, other than my mom.”

During a heartbreaking year, Wolfgang, who recently moved in to his late dad’s L.A. house, says he’s grown closer than ever to his mom. He and Andraia Allsop, his girlfriend of five years (she’s a software engineer), visit Bertinelli, 61, in her nearby home almost daily. “Besides the fact that he’s ridiculously talented, I’m most proud of his kindness and thoughtfulness,” says Bertinelli. Going through loss together has “put everything into perspective,” says Wolfgang. “You just really appreciate the smaller moments as time goes on. We go over to my mom’s house to see her and play with her cats that we love.” He’s also leaning into one of his favorite traits he inherited from his parents: their shared sense of humor. “People are quick to remind me that I look like both my parents, which I have to tell them, ‘Wow, science. Who’d have guessed?’” he quips. “But yeah, I inherited a lot of that self-deprecation from them too. Sarcasm is our language.”

Looking around his father’s studio, Wolfgang says he’s felt the love sent his way from Eddie’s fans. “It’s been amazing to see people welcoming me as my own person,” he says. As he pursues his own passions, Wolfgang—named after Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart—also hopes to continue his father’s legacy. “He’s like the Mozart of our generation. As far removed as we are from Mozart, we still talk about him and know who he is,” he says. “And that’s what my dad is going to be.” ●