



ARTS & CULTURE

Remembering Eddie Van Halen: Guitar Superstar

October 09, 2020

The music world lost a rock and roll superstar last week when guitarist Eddie Van Halen died of cancer. He was only 65 years old.

Eddie Van Halen was a founding member of the band Van Halen. He formed the group in 1974 with his brother Alex, who played the drums. Other band members included bass player Michael Anthony and lead singer David Lee Roth.

Van Halen released its most popular single, the song *Jump*, in 1983.

Jump rose to the top of *Billboard Magazine's* list of *Hot 100* songs and stayed there for five weeks. The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, Ohio lists *Jump* among its "500 Songs that Shaped Rock and Roll."

The Van Halen brothers were born in the Netherlands. Their father was a professional musician. Their mother was from Indonesia.

In the 1950s, some people did not approve of the mixed-race marriage. The family moved to the United States to escape the discrimination they experienced in The Netherlands. They settled in southern California.

Eddie and Alex Van Halen had to learn English in their new land. Both brothers studied piano for years before getting interested in rock and roll.

As a child, Eddie was considered musically gifted. Eddie told a reporter he did not learn to read music. He said he would watch his teacher play and memorize his moves.

He also said that he never took a class on playing the guitar, although he studied under Eric Clapton for a time. He told the magazine *Guitar World* that his father was among the first to recognize Eddie's guitar skill. "You've got it **kid**," Van Halen recalled his father saying early on.

The Van Halen brothers played around Los Angeles after finishing their high school studies. As they entered the world of rock and roll, Eddie began using alcohol and drugs. He struggled with the self-abusive behavior for many years, but finally stopped drinking and drugging in 2008.

Van Halen's guitar playing was hard and fast. He was energetic while performing, often jumping like an **acrobat** as he played. He was known for the way he **tapped** on the guitar **strings** with both hands. It influenced many musicians that followed.

Eddie Van Halen released at least 15 record albums with his band over the years, selling more than 80 million around the world.

In 2007, Van Halen entered the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

I'm Caty Weaver.

Caty Weaver wrote this story for VOA Learning English. George Grow was the editor.

Words in this Story

kid -*n.* child

acrobat -*n.* someone who entertains people (as at a circus) by performing difficult and often dangerous acts (such as swinging from a bar or walking on a rope high in the air)

tap -*v.* to strike lightly especially with a slight sound

strings -*n.* the gut, wire, or plastic cord of a musical instrument that vibrates to produce a tone when touched

