



Photo by Robert Knight

**Supergroups are becoming popular again - we've had Chickenfoot and Them Crooked Vultures make a noise and the latest to join the ranks are Black Country Communion. Formed almost as a direct result of 'The Voice Of Rock' Glenn Hughes, famed for his work with Trapeze, Deep Purple and Black Sabbath (among many others), and young blues guitar hero Joe Bonamassa playing on stage together at the House Of Blues, chemistry was detected and plans to work together set in motion. Famed producer Kevin Shirley, who has worked with the likes of Aerosmith, Journey and Led Zeppelin became involved, and added the Zeppelin-connected former Foreigner drummer Jason Bonham. The line up was completed by keyboard wizard Derek Sherinian, fresh from stints with Billy Idol and Dream Theater. It had the hallmarks of greatness on paper, so lifelong Hughes fan James Gaden met up with Glenn in London, and found the legendary rocker bursting to tell him all about it...**

**I didn't know what to expect when I first got the album - I didn't know whether there would be any of Joe's blues influences, or your funk leanings, but there's none of that - it's straight ahead rock.**

I wanted to be really clear on this album, this is a big planting of the flag. This is Glenn Hughes returning to rock. It had to happen. I was going to make another funk album, but even before I ended up working with Joe, I woke up one night from some dream and thought 'I'm going to go back to rock.' I shelved my solo album. I've known Joe for three years, so when we got together in November to play, before evolving into the band we now know of, there was only one record I wanted to make. A return to rock... traditional, British rock. There's nothing like it.

**I believe it was Kevin Shirley who started the ball rolling for a full band project?**

He got Jason and Derek on board, he suggested those two as the other members. Joe and I would have gone on to do a duets record and we probably would have used some heavy names on the sessions, but I thought and Kevin thought, it would work better if we formed a band - a brand, in fact. I came up with the name and then added 'Communion' on the end and I worked on the logo with a graphic

designer. I wanted the logo to represent the music, that was very important. When you see AC/DC, Led Zeppelin, Def Leppard, Whitesnake... they've got identifiable logos. So everything about this band, from the music, the production, the logo, to the website... it's all appropriate.

**It's interested you mentioned shelving a solo album, because you're last solo release was 'First Underground Nuclear Kitchen', a very funky record... I know you were very pleased with it and toured the material a lot, so I wondered if playing all that funk for a prolonged period was a catalyst in looking at going back to rock music?**

Here's the thing - when I look at other artists, like Robert Plant... he does what he wants to do off the back of great success with Led Zeppelin. They were blues based as you know and now he's into Appalachian mountain music, which he really loves. Robert was listening to Gram Parsons back in the sixties. Coverdale is very blues orientated, so it Paul Rodgers. Someone like me, or Chris Robinson from the Black Crowes, are soul singers - lets be clear. We can't hide from our roots. It would be inappropriate for me to tell you that I listened to stuff that I wasn't really into, so with me you get British rock - with a soul singer. On this album you get British

hard rock with soulful rock singing. There's two Glenn voices - there's the Californian softer voice and what I call the British turbo voice, full on... just there, that sort of Steve Marriot thing, that big voice that I was given as a gift to sing with. It's the return of that. It's a big flag in the ground, hence the lyrics to the first track: 'I'm a messenger, this is my prophecy - I'm going back, back to the Black Country'. And that's rock, the Black Country is rock - myself, Rob Halford, Jason Bonham, Robert Plant, Black Sabbath, Moody Blues, E.L.O. - the list is endless.

**When you had the members all together, did you have a specific musical vision of how the band and material should sound, or was it more a case of once the band starting working together the sound identified itself through jamming?**

We had to have a foundation and Joe was still touring in November, so somebody had to come up with some songs before January, which was when we were due to start work. There was no rehearsals or pre-production for this group. I came into the studio the day before we were due to start and played Joe and Kevin three songs - 'One Last Soul', 'Beggerman' and 'No Time'. I said that they were brand new songs that I'd written since I'd played with Joe at the House Of Blues and did they



agree that this was the direction to go in? 'One Last Soul', that was a curveball for Kevin and Joe because it was a little bit more commercial, more radio, but we needed a song like that. I think that one convinced them. After that, Joe and I sat down for three sessions, each lasting three hours and we wrote the rest of the album together.

**Wow! After a few spins, I started picking out bits that I identified as being your work, whether it was certain passages, or lyrics. But I was interested in how the overall sound came about because you're all very different talents with many different genres under your belts.**

You know what it is, man? Knowing what you want to write before you write it. If I'd gone in with a bunch of black American guys it would've been something totally different. But this is playing with the top blues guitar player right now who wants to rock, with the son of John Bonham, with a great Hammond player like Derek Sherinian. There was only one kind of music that I could write that was appropriate for the instruments and guys in the group. Joe wanted me to be the lead singer, but I insisted he sing on some of the songs. I wrote a couple specifically for him to sing on with me, the last two tracks. It was quite easy, when I put it all together, to

see where I was going to go with it.

**I was going to ask if there was any problem deciding who should take the lead vocal on specific songs...**

I wanted Joe to sing, I wanted to have him lead 'Too Late For The Sun', I wanted his voice before mine on there. I wanted to push his vocals. He's very shy, he needs to be pushed and I'm that kinda of guy, I'll get in your face a little bit.

**I thought it worked great, the balance of the two voices, he sounds very different to you but the two styles mesh very well. You've done two albums singing with Joe Lynn Turner and three in Purple sharing lead vocals with David Coverdale, so you have plenty of experience in knowing how to work in a vocal tandem.**

Oh yeah. I think Joe and I sound great together on this record. I think it's a match made in heaven. There's next to no overdubs on this album. There's only one or two - one on 'Medusa' and one on 'Sista Jane'... the solos were all played live, captured as they were played. For instance, any guitar solo you choose on the record, you'll hear there's no guitar under that playing rhythm. Joe played it as we recorded it, no second guitar part. And I don't think I've ever done that before. Even with Blackmore, the solos weren't really done live like this.

**The songs will be easy to recreate live then, if you recorded them in that way.**

Oh God yeah, this is a great band live. This could be the biggest band in the world live. Seriously.

Jason is doing the Led Zeppelin experience in America through October, Joe is on the road until December and then I'm locking them in a room until they agree to tour with me! (Laughs) No, we all wanna do it, but they have to fulfil their other obligations first.

**It was interesting you mentioned 'Medusa' there, which is the old Trapeze song from your pre-Purple days. I think the new version is great... why did you chose it? Was it a tribute to the late Mel Galley?**

Thank you... it was a tribute to Mel, because Joe played Mel's guitar on that. I have that guitar now and Joe was in my studio one day and he was having trouble with his Les Paul, so he asked if he could use one of my guitars. I told him to take his pick and he sees this Black Beauty and asked if he could play it. I said 'That's actually Mel's guitar' and he said 'Oh man, I've got to play 'Medusa' on this!'

I'd played 'Medusa' a few times with John Bonham in '71, John used to pick me up and take me to gigs, so having his son play on it was great. He'd say to me 'Did Dad do it like this, or like this?' Crazy, right? (laughs)

**Fantastic! I love the reworking of it. And it highlighted what great shape your voice is in... when you think back to how many decades ago that 'Medusa' came out and you've still got it all, there's no deterioration. You know, some guys who had a long career like you, some of them... it's just not there anymore.**

Thank you - and for me, a guy who did a lot of damage to himself as well, y'know, you're looking at a dead man, pretty much. But I'm not, so I have to carry the

message... I pride myself on having contact with something bigger than me, a Higher Power. I just get out of the way and let Him run the show. I don't do this for material gain anymore, I do it for the love of music. I wanna go out, be an artist who over the course of the next ten years, really stays true to his belief. I've strayed from the path a bit with my funky stuff. I've got a very hardcore funk fan base, I know you're one and I'm glad you love the funky stuff James, but my rock following is huge. Most of my audience are women because of my funk and pop stuff. I need to get the guys back! (laughs)

I'm not slamming the door on funk, but I made a decision that fans and some critics have called me 'The Voice Of Rock', so therefore, I should rock, shouldn't I? I'm doing what it says on the tin. I need to get rocking and listen to the fans. I've probably been stubborn over the last few records, saying 'I'll do it when I wanna do it'... I remember seeing Deep Purple before I joined them at Madison Square Garden. Gillan was leaving and I remember fans calling for 'Space Trucking' and stuff like that and he said to them 'I'm the fucking singer and I'll say what songs I'm singing'. I didn't really like that. The audience are the ones buying your albums, you have to have respect for them. Neil Young says he doesn't respect anybody in the audience, but I think my fans grew up listening to Purple, that's how they found me. If I play Eastern Europe, where Purple are massive, if I don't play six or seven Deep Purple songs, they go mental. So now, they can have Black Country songs too.

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## GLENN HUGHES

**It's got a Purple vibe with the set up - a hot shot guitarist, a world class keyboard player, a powerhouse rock drummer, your driving bass and two vocalists.**

Yeah - here's a Kevin Shirley quote, this is great... 'I wanna out-Purple Deep Purple'. And I'll follow up with a quote of my own for you... I wouldn't think Deep Purple would allow this band to play on the same show as them.

When I go to see bands from my peer group, I want to see bands with some exuberance, see something vital and dangerous, flamboyant and just fucking rock and roll. We're bringing that back - I wanna make a fucking noise and let people know Glenn Hughes is here, I'm back and this is an amazing rock group. This album is one that I want my fans, your readers, everybody else to put up there with Black Sabbath 'Volume IV', Priest's 'Stained Glass', Led Zeppelin 'IV' - I wanna be up there man! Let's put British rock back on the map. This isn't Them Crooked Vultures or Chickenfoot, this is a British band. Yeah, okay, so we may have two Americans in the group, but our roots, our music, this is a British band. This is for the fans and I hope they get behind it.

**I'm really glad you're enthused about the project and know where you want to go with it - I know you've been frustrated in the past with solo records because you are capable of so many different styles...**

Yeah, trying to reinvent myself, do a David Bowie... but I'm not Ziggy Stardust.

I've tried cutting my hair, doing glam make up, but I'm not Bowie. I've gotta be me. Would the real Glenn Hughes stand up? I guess that would be me, standing up now.

**One of the tracks, 'Down Again', reminded me very much of the material that you recorded on 'Return Of Crystal Karma'... I remember that was one of your biggest selling solo records, because there was very little funk, it was a hard record and I could see ties to that with Black Country.**

One of my favourites... it's crossing over. It's got some swagger, right? Yeah, the first four on the 'R.O.C.K.' album were balls out rock - 'State I'm In', 'Midnight Meditated'... yeah. Very little funk on that record. This album is similar in the way it tips it's hat to great British rock. I'm from the era of The Stones, The Who, Sabbath, Purple... I was fucking in two of them! Isn't it time to pay homage and get rocking? I might do some cooler jazzy stuff when I'm seventy five, but I'm a British rock singer to those who have heard of me.

**The problem you have is you can sing and write convincingly in many styles. I love your diversity, but I appreciate it becomes confusing for those who just want to hear you rocking.**

It's a curse. (laughs) I mean, let's just take two examples, both friends of mine... Metallica and Motley Crue. You know what sort of a record you'll get from them. These guys play their music comfortably because that's their thing. But I'm doomed,

It's insane isn't it? From that opening bass riff? It was no mistake that we started the album with that. I said to Kevin 'I've got the opening track' and he said 'I'll decide that'. I said 'No, I've got the opening track.' There's only going to be one and this is like Kevin Shirley, big shot from Led Zep, Black Crowes, Journey, Aerosmith... and I said 'No! I've got the opening track.' When we got them all done and we looked at the list he said 'Mmm, perhaps you were right.' (laughs)

**It'd be a great one to open a show with live too. It's the same as 'Highway Star', the way it builds up and gets you going.**

Can you imagine at a festival or in a club, starting a show with that? People will go mental! It is our 'Highway Star', our 'Immigrant Song', our 'Burn', our 'Highway To Hell'. That song is for the fans. I'm giving it to them. The lyrics, like I said, about going back to the Black Country... that means I'm going back to rock. Black Country is rock! It's not Plymouth, it's not Jersey... no disrespect! (laughs)

**The more I play the album, the more I find myself changing my mind which song I like the best.**

What are you digging today?

'Sista Jane'.

Oh! That chorus? Insane! When Joe and I wrote those chords, that daaa daaa daaa! It's a bit Humble Pie, a bit Free, maybe meeting Deep Purple... I started singing and said 'Gimme a second Joe!' I got something and ended up with 'Sweet Sista Jane...' Joe went 'Yeah!'. It's just fuckin' cock rock, right? (laughs) We've edited that for a single - that and 'One Last Soul'.

**Great choices, those two are fantastic.**

I want your readers and rock fans to grab this album, realise it's designed for them, it's like when you look at a festival line up, you can sort of figure from the bands booked what kind of music that festival caters for. This stuff is for your High Voltages, your Downloads, this is for the fans to say 'This is our fucking band'.

**Like I said, you know how much I love your diversity, but I've always loved the rock. Just among the Firework's writers, there are divisions over your material. Our editor, for example, thinks you're great at rock but he hates funk as a genre, so when you do it that's a no-no for him.**

It's okay... he's going to shit his pants when he hears this! (laughs) Every



Photo by Robert Knight

interview I've done, I get the same feeling, it's okay, I understand it. But when people see this line up, the logo, I think they'll know what Black Country is. When I'm on stage... I'm looked at as one of the elder statesmen of rock, I'm one of the last guys. The new bands are copying, if you will, AC/DC, Purple, Zeppelin, The Who... actually, The Who is really hard to do, but like the Black Crowes did twenty years ago by picking up where The Faces and The Stones had gone, there's not what I call a GREAT band doing this stuff... Audioslave did it slightly, Velvet Revolver were kind of cool, but there's been no major band to come and take up the mantle.

**Yeah - the band of the year last year in Classic Rock were Chickenfoot - comprised of four guys who have been around the block a bit!**

Yeah, those guys are my friends. Same with Them Crooked Vultures, John Paul Jones is a friend. No disrespect to them, but I think our record has the songs. I think we have material that fans will take and own, anthems with balls out choruses that fans can get into. If I wasn't in this band, I'd be buying this album!

**I notice the album closed with a bit of an epic, 'Too Late For The Sun', which clocks in at just over eleven minutes...**

Yeah, it's got six minutes of jamming in it. I wrote the song and then gave it to the band. The first five minutes are mine, but the last six is the band jamming. We were all in the studio, I'd point at Derek and he'd play a solo, I'd nod at Joe... same thing. The band took it to new places which I didn't write. Joe and I really wanted Derek to do something because there wasn't much to showcase what a great player he is. So he's in there - that last six minutes, that's fuckin' awesome. One take. I like it when it gets small and quiet, then pow! It goes huge. This band, live, will blow everybody away.

**I can't wait to see how this unit works on stage. With you saying that you were enticing the rock fans back, was the addition of a Hammond player designed so you could put Purple stuff in the setlist?**

No - I don't really want to do that with this group. There won't be Purple stuff. The album is 72 minutes, so that's an hour and ten right there. Add some solos, you've almost got a full show. We don't need to do Purple stuff with all these Black Country Communion songs.

**I think that's the right call - I asked simply because the set up of the band suggested it. Personally, I'd prefer you to do like Chickenfoot did, concentrate on the new stuff. You've done Purple stuff for years in your solo shows.**

Yeah, a long time. There's only so many times I can do 'Mistreated'. I'm going to start retiring some of the songs now. I'll keep things like 'Soul Mover' because that's like a new anthem for me, but I'm writing new songs all the time.

**There's few people I can think of who are as prolific as you are - I remember you referring to the 80's as basically a wasted decade, but since then you've made up for it!**

If I'd been clean and sober in the 80's, I'd have been at a different level that I am today. But I was deathly ill, like I say, you're looking at a guy who should be dead. So my comeback has never been more prolific as it is right now. I'm doing this, I've got the Heaven and Hell thing at High Voltage...

**Well I'll jump to that as you mentioned it. I know you sang 'Catch The Rainbow' as a tribute to Ronnie James Dio and you're singing with them at High Voltage?**

Yeah, Tony, Geezer and Wendy Dio asked me to come to London, so I dropped everything and said 'I'm there'. Ronnie was a dear friend, I loved that man. He's The Voice Of Metal. He was a great humanitarian. He loved people, so I'll be singing directly to him, hoping I'm doing okay. He'd be the first one to tell me if I wasn't! (laughs) It'll be all Ronnie songs - me and Jorn Lande doing them. Only Dio stuff from 'Mob Rules', 'Heaven And Hell', 'Dehumanizer'... no Ozzy stuff. A big send off to Ronnie. He'll always be with us, but I'm so glad his albums are charting again, he deserves it.

The first time Ronnie had Indian food, he was with me and he was like 'Is it any good, this stuff?' I let him try it and he went on to be the biggest advocate of Indian food! From 1973, up until this very year, in his contract rider he had Indian food at all his shows. My fault! (laughs) The first time we were in the north of England, maybe in Yorkshire, as soon as he tasted that sauce, it was all over! I take full responsibility!

**Finally, there was talk of a Glenn Hughes autobiography. Is that still ongoing?**

'The Life, Near Death And Rebirth Of A Rockstar' - that will be me. It's the life of a young boy in the north of England, who grew up to be a soccer player that is side-tracked into being a musician. He becomes very famous and rich at a very early age and finds the rigours of fame destructive because of the drug culture. I got caught up in a drug haze and what happened to me in that haze is captured in the book also. What happened the day I stopped - it's the most frightening experience and nobody knows about it until you read the book. It starts with this experience - it's very scary, very harrowing, demonic and not fun. But you need to know it, the fans need to know it. I'm the walking dead. I'm not Lemmy, not Keith Richards, I'm Glenn Hughes, thankful to be doing what I do. Even Lemmy will put down the bottle one day. But I'm not holding my breath! (laughs)

**It sounds amazing, I can't wait to check it out. I'm all done Glenn, thank you.**

James, you're a good man. You've always been a great interviewer - make sure you say hi to the readers and make it known - Black Country Communion, this band, it's for them!

