

# Whitesnake

*Whitesnake are one of England's great hard rock exports. Rising up from the ashes of Deep Purple, David Coverdale issued two solo albums before putting together the band, who would go on to build a loyal fan base for their brand of blues rock, before smashing their way into the American market and achieving superstardom in 1987. After 1990's 'Slip Of The Tongue' it looked like the writing was on the wall for Whitesnake - things were put on ice while Coverdale worked with Jimmy Page. A Whitesnake tour in 1994 to promote their 'Greatest Hits' saw the loyal fan base still present, before 'Restless Heart' was released dubiously under the Whitesnake name in 1997. A tour for that album was supposed to have been the end - until 2003 when Whitesnake came back with a new line up to play. Four new tracks penned by Coverdale and guitarist Doug Aldrich on the live album 'Live In The Shadow Of The Blues' caused a stir, before the bands tenth record, 'Good To Be Bad' came out in 2008. It was extremely successful and here we are in 2011, preparing for Whitesnake's 11th record, 'Forevermore'. James Gaden was only too happy to be able to get into conversation with David Coverdale himself to hear all about it...*

**It's great to finally have the opportunity to speak to you David - are you well?**

You know what, I just got off the massage table so I've got bluebirds flying out of every orifice! Where are you from, you sound like you've got a Northern accent!

**I'm from sunny Hull.**

Oh, not too shabby. I have a friend who has a hotel there. Ah, to Hull and back! (laughs) Anyway, we'd better crack on son, we only have half an hour.

**Absolutely. Well, I have to start by telling you I'm really impressed with the new album. I've been a Whitesnake fan since I was at college and it's great to have the chance to talk to you years later about a brand new, excellent Whitesnake record.**

How long ago were you in college?

**Ooh, about fifteen, sixteen years...**

Oh, you're still a young 'un then!

**Well, at the risk of making you feel old, I was born the same year you put Whitesnake together.**

Okay - it's not feeling old, are you kidding me? I'm knocking on fucking sixty's door this year! (laughs) I tell you though, I feel chipper, there's no question at all.

**You sound it on the record.**

Yeah, that's cool - a lot of people in these interviews have been asking me how my voice is. I'm going 'well fucking hell, you've just heard the record, what do you think?' I had that aberration last year while touring with Judas Priest in the States and I had to, you know, retire from the stage! (laughs) Because it fucking hurt! It was a human thing, it's like a tennis player spraining a wrist or an athlete breaking an ankle. There was no surgery, no medication involved, just simple rest and healing. It happens. Now everything is champion!

**I think the material on this record is more aggressive than 'Good To Be Bad', I think this rocks harder. Was that what you set out to do or simply a result of how the writing flowed?**

Interesting... we got a guy to do a press release and it was funny, he put "David's digging deeper into his emotions" which I always fucking do! But I see what you mean - I think it's because Doug and I were more confident. We're more comfortable working together, and the way that the last record was so successful, that was a great launching platform to go to another level. The confidence is there, and we now have the driving force of Thor the fucking God of Thunder on drums, Brian Tichy! Jesus Christ! He's a locomotive! So when you start layering these elements you go 'Oh my God, this is...' - in fact, this one, like the last one, is very, very close to what Whitesnake sounds like live. This one is probably closer. That's always been my challenge, to achieve that in the studio. Even a semblance of that intensity that we can pull off in a live environment, when you have the audience pushing you to go further, go for notes only dogs can hear, this time we have some of that. And it feels more like a band record, which is cool.

**You're absolutely right when you say about the confidence between yourself and Doug - I thought the original four songs you did with him on 'Live**

**In The Shadow Of The Blues' were good, the ones one 'Good To Be Bad' were better than those, and these ones on 'Forevermore' are better than 'Good To Be Bad'.**

Aye! As I say, when I spoke to Fireworks before about 'Good To Be Bad', I said when I put Whitesnake back together in 2003, I had no intention to make any more records. I didn't want to get back into that corporate music business machine, that was one of the primary reasons I retired from it, it was unrecognisable from what it started as, it continues to be. But I'm a firm believer in keeping your eyes, ears and your fucking heart open. There was a great deal of synchronicity involved in allowing us to make 'Good To Be Bad'. One of them was being told by Mick Jagger that the Stones make records to promote tours. That's arse end first the way I've always understood it, you always made an album and toured to promote that. But Mick's right, we had two extraordinarily positive years of work thanks to the foundation of the album. I said, and I stand by it, if that was a debut album for a band, I'd be thrilled to just go out and play the songs from that album. Now, I'll say it even noisier and louder with 'Forevermore' - I'd love to play some shows where we just featured our new material. But of course, we will defer to fans who have supported us through the years, people like yourself, who would never forgive me if I left some songs out. I announced at Download that it was probably time to retire 'Ain't No Love In The Heart Of The City' - oh my God, what did I say! I got thousands and thousands of emails, tear stained... if an email can be, begging me not to retire it. I can do two fucking songs in the time it takes us to play that! But it is ingrained deeply in the emotions of a lot of people who support Whitesnake.

**In fairness, as a fan who has heard it a bunch of times live, I'd happily see you drop it in favour of two other songs, but some people don't like to let go.**

Yeah! The argument being James, that Whitesnake is playing to it's third, if not more, generation of fans. Seeing new people come to our shows, as fans who supported me from Deep Purple's days are struggling to stay standing for three or four fucking hours and are retiring to DVDs and memories, there's a lot of songs fans have incredible ties to. It's impossible for me to fulfil all of those emotional obligations, so we have to do, obviously, the ones that have sold in the mega millions, we have to find places for them. Fortunately, the great thing for me, when the Snake changes, sheds a skin and we get new guys come in like Brian Tichy and Michael Devin, it makes the old ones fresher. You hear Tichy nail your ass on 'Still Of The Night', it's definitely an inspiration to go for it!

**I think Doug's style of playing is great for the band - that big guitar sound and the squeals he inserts remind me of John Sykes' style, which a lot of people obviously equate with Whitesnake.**

That would be the only aspect where they're similar, because Doug and I get on fucking great! (laughs)



Y'know, I truly have the greatest respect for what John and I achieved together, and I'm extraordinarily grateful for the experience... probably more grateful than he is. I wasn't looking for someone to play like John Sykes - I think people tend to forget both Sykes and Doug drew huge inspiration from Randy Rhodes. When I first started with John, I began reviewing Edward Van Halen's style of guitar playing because I thought that was his influence, so I wanted to know where his roots were - I'm always curious to know how far I can go with a musician I work with. I want to know how far I can push them and how much they'll inspire me. It has to be a trade-off, a mutual scenario. It would be pointless putting a bunch of puppets in the band. It's never been like that and never will be.

**I was curious how the relationship between you and Doug has progressed. What, typically, do you two do in order to achieve that Whitesnake sound?**

The actual sound, or the style of the songs?

**Both!**

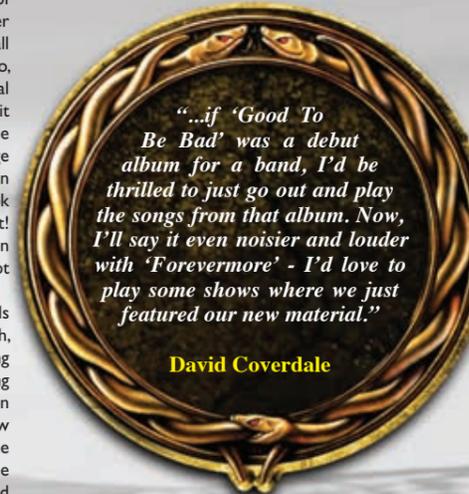
Okay, number one, contrary to most American musicians I've had the pleasure of working with, Doug is entirely familiar with all the early stuff. That's been a big difference, he knows the blueprint of Whitesnake. He is familiar with 'Lovehunter', 'Ready And Willing', all of that stuff. So he brings that knowledge in, knowing what I'm looking for, he knows I don't always want to do 100 miles an hour shit, full of technical virtuosity, there's got to be some roots. I love flashy, you know, but not all the fucking time. So we sat down and I said to him that I wanted to work about four months of the year, did he want to work with me? I say that to all the guys in the band. Doug of course worked with Ronnie Dio, he was patient, he never pushed me about work which is sensible (laughs), it all came together and we connected very well as people too, as friends. I'm a huge admirer of his talent, he has an arsenal of ability that is wonderful for me. Inevitably, when you sit down, you run out of things to talk about so you get out the acoustic guitars and trade off. You continue the exchange musically. The inspiration from that was amazing, we began writing organically from the get-go. It was painless and took minimal effort James - it must suck for people to hear that! (laughs) I've written with people in the past and it's been like going to the fucking dentist for root canal! But not with Doug.

With the sound, Doug is a very good Pro-Tools engineer. Once I'd made the ideological leap from 'ooh, everything must be analogue!' to digital, it was a fucking no-brainer. We'd get an idea and could then start layering a demo immediately. The results we could have put out on iTunes. Both of us are good drum programmers, we know what a drummer would do, we're very deferential to the people we work with - for instance, when I was making the demos for the '1987' album, those songs were designed around Cozy Powell, God rest his soul. Cozy would have shone on that music. Sadly, we fell out and it didn't manifest. So everything you hear, we look around - when Tommy Aldridge was there, we were writing it thinking 'This would be great for Tommy to do his octopus flailing around bit', all of those kinds of things are considered when we arrange the songs. But the root of Whitesnake has always been songs that should connect. If you look at the history of Whitesnake, all the songs are relatives of each other - brothers, sisters, cousins twice removed, there is always a bloodline. Doug naturally is part of that process - we never have "Oh, that doesn't sound like a Whitesnake song." Whenever I've written with anyone James, they have to accept I know what I want Whitesnake to be. If I turn round and say 'No, I don't think I can sell that to the fans', there's a reason for that. It's not me being a twat, it's because I don't think it'll work! If it doesn't connect with me, how can I deliver it to the fans? But I don't have that with Doug, nor did I ever have it with Adrian Vandenberg. Those two have been phenomenal partners for me.

**That brings me to Reb Beach - who is a very gifted guitar player and writer in his own right. If I wasn't a hardcore fan of Whitesnake, more a casual observer, I could come to the conclusion that Reb was playing second banana to Doug, but I suspect that is because he's still an active member of Winger?**

Yeah, yeah, yeah! When we started this whole reformation scenario, I actively encouraged everyone to have side projects. I loaned Doug to Ronnie for a tour - Ronnie, I still can't believe he's passed away... and I told

people 'Don't call me asking if we're working, I'll call you!' (laughs) So by all means Doug, go play with Ronnie. By all means Marco, play with... whomever! And it's never compromised our timetable. Reb and Kip formed Winger, I love Kip, I think he's an extraordinarily talented man... as I do Reb. This is interesting - way back when, as Reb was applying for Whitesnake, he sent some things in which didn't connect with me, but he sent a video of Winger live. I was really curious to watch Kip, but I ended up not being able to take my eyes off Reb! (laughs) So that was something that made him a real contender, I made a mental note. But Reb was much more involved in this album than the last one. As I say, I think he's busy with Winger literally as we speak, but that's all with my blessing. It has never compromised Whitesnake's timetable - if one of the band did, then... well, you'd probably see some exits! (laughs) People do tell me 'oh, Reb's a very accomplished writer you know...' - but I've never sat down with him to write, I've never had to. And people should respect I'll write with whoever the fuck I want to write with. I've been through that thing where I've tried to keep a democratic balance in the band and I just end up fucking exhausted - one person likes something, one doesn't - fuck it. As the saying goes, if it ain't broke, don't fix it, and working with Doug is going great. Like I say though, this was more of a band record and it was the greatest of pleasures to have Reb in house, playing and singing up a fucking storm. We've got the strongest vocals we've ever had now, with Michael Devin and Reb Beach. Doug is shining as a low end singer, he's much more comfortable with that. I've yet to have the pleasure of hearing Tichy sing but I'm assured he's good - we're gonna have the fucking Beach Boys up here! (laughs) That's going to be great for



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**David Coverdale**

me, I'm so sick of having drunken sailors on backgrounds. That's why I always encourage the Whitesnake Choir at shows! (laughs)

**I remember reading when 'Good To Be Bad' came out, you said 'Lay Down Your Love' was a song you had a big chunk of for years, but it took you a few years to get it finished. Were any of the songs on this record created that way or was everything written from scratch?**

Bits and pieces of ideas I've had for a while are there - 'Fare Thee Well', I had the verse of that for a while, but once we commit to something, I let everything from the past go. Some stuff has been dusted off - 'If You Want Me', one of the four tracks on the live album, and 'Dog', I had the basic stuff for those for a while. But I give them to my partner to run with it - just like I gave Sykes my basic riff to 'Still Of The Night', I expect and want these fucking guys to take the idea further - unless it's one of those rare occasions where I look at what I've done and think 'That's it!' (laughs) So a lot of writing for Doug and I is marrying ideas. If we get stuck, leave the song alone and it'll come when it's ready. If you force it, it's not a natural progression. So sometimes those old ideas can be married to new ones and they fit together like a fabulous jigsaw. By the way, I love that fucking song 'Lay Down Your Love'.

**I do too - although, on the new album, one of the ones that I've found creeping into my subconscious is 'One Of These Days'. When I first heard it, it didn't leap out like the screaming rockers, but now I've heard the album a lot, it's really staying with**

**me, I find myself singing it.**

It's different for us, isn't it? But it still works. There's a part of me that's leaning towards this - we have some fantastic acoustic recordings of some of these new songs which hopefully will see the light of day. We have acoustic arrangements of 'Forevermore', 'One Of These Days', 'Fare Thee Well' and 'Easier Said Than Done'. They're like different creatures, y'know? Beautiful things. 'One Of These Days' is the first song Doug and I did for this record. We sat down and at first I thought it would be an unplugged song, but it just came together as a sort of early Rod Stewart/Faces thing. That's one of the things I love in Whitesnake, that we can dip into our heroes of yore. So we started programming in drums and I thought fuck, this is really good, it's a lot of fun, this one! But I still wasn't looking at it as a definite album track. At that point I was yet to make a full commitment to make another record. I didn't know if Doug and I could come up with better ones than last time, but thankfully I think we did, as you intimated. But I love that song, the lyrics came very quickly. It's a song about letting go. It's huge in people's lives, the inability to let go of a relationship that may have once been good but now isn't. I still get people saying they wish I was still in Deep Purple - well that's nice, but I don't! Some things, you just have to let go and move on - and it's like dropping heavy luggage, you feel so tall! But yeah, I love that song, it's my wife's favourite - well, current favourite. She changes daily! But the album has been getting great reviews James, but what I haven't done is asked people what their favourite is! (laughs)

**Well, mine changed daily - first listen, I went for 'Steal Your Heart Away'...**

Well, that's just totally walking off the old albums. I was telling Bernie Marsden that it could have come right off 'Lovehunter'. I thought it was cool to open the album with what I think is like an old fashioned Whitesnake song. It's not the strongest on the record, but is a real potential live stomper.

**'Dogs In The Street' also really grabbed my attention - that has a real '1987' vibe to it.**

Yeah! Doug will love you for that, that's his favourite. That 'fire and gasoline' line, I thought that was pretty fucking cool!

**Yeah! But like I say, now I've lived with it and the quieter ones are getting their chance a bit now I know the album, they're stepping out more. But there's nothing I disliked on it, so I can't give you a better compliment than that.**

That's cool, thank you. Initially though James, it was supposed to be an eleven track record, which was one of the reasons I agreed to it. It's our eleventh studio record and I thought it was appropriate. But the record company asked for a couple of bonus tracks, which you need nowadays. So we delivered the album and the record company fucking loved all of them and asked to put it all on the record! (laughs) Which was nice, but we had no spares! So that's one of the reasons we've got some alternate versions, some rearranged stuff, different mixes... We have acoustic versions of 'Easier Said Than Done' and 'Fare Thee Well' with a violinist, a young 22 year old virtuoso, a girl we found in the village where I live. She's priceless on it. It's very different for Whitesnake but I'm thinking it might be a taste of the future, as I become more respectful to my dotage! 'Fare Thee Well' - I don't know if you remember 'We Wish You Well'? It's a big love song to the audience - I've been asked so many times to do an extended 'We Wish You Well' but quite honestly, it's exactly how it should be and how it should remain, just a minute and a half sentiment from us to you, the audience. It's to say that regardless of the fact the show has finished, we're still there with you, the music is for you to stick in your pocket and take it on your journey with you.

**I have a real problem with 'We Wish You Well', it's quite bittersweet to me - the first time I got the chance to see you was on the 'Restless Heart' tour, it was supposed to have been the last one...**

'The Last Hurrah', yeah!

**Right! And you finished the show quite emotional and took a bow at the end, and women were throwing flowers on stage and you were handing them out... and 'We Wish You Well' was playing. I was nearly crying! (laughs)**

Yeah - it is a really amazing emotional bond we have

with the audience, and at that time, the sentiment that it was all over was legit. I was so frustrated by the ever revolving door of executives that I was working with. 'Restless Heart' was supposed to have been a solo record, and literally near the end of making it, the executives were changed yet again and held me to my contract which was 'David Coverdale, known as the artist Whitesnake'. But I've taken those albums back now - that one and 'Into The Light'. I'm going to look at remixing them, see what comes out.

**I liked 'Restless Heart' but I, as a fan, could recognise that is was a solo album, it wasn't a Whitesnake record.**

Yeah! All I could do James, to be honest, was turn the fucking drums up and get Adrian to play some bigger guitars. But if you look at the songs on 'Into The Light' you can see exactly where I was going. There's a couple of things on those records that would work as Whitesnake - 'Don't Lie To Me' and 'Woman Trouble Blues' are totally Whitesnake.

**'Woman Trouble Blues' is a great example of the songs being related, as it could be a sister or brother to 'Whipping Boy Blues' off the new record.**

Yeah, yeah, exactly! Quite a nasty lyric to 'Whipping Boy Blues' as well, I thought. (laughs)

**It's great, I loved the retro-bluesy intro you did, almost a Louisiana thing.**

We've got a mix of it called 'Swamp Mix' where my son plays percussion on it, we've got mosquitos flying about, a different solo - it's a lot of fun and it changed it up a bit. Nowadays James, if you want to do a deal with iTunes, in order for them to feature you prominently you've got to give them all kinds of exclusive this and that. It was a concern to me when the record company wanted all the songs - that's nice, but it left us with no spares to give out, no bonus shit! (laughs) Oh dear! But working in these alternate mixes and versions, we're covered now.

**The album is also being promoted via Classic Rock Magazine, where it will feature two teaser tracks from Whitesnake's performance at Donington in 1990. The 'Slip Of The Tongue' album is special to me as it was the first Whitesnake record I heard and I was totally besotted with it, but it's well documented that period wasn't the happiest time for you...**

No, no, that's wrong. To be honest, on reflection, if you say something over a pint in a pub, nobody reminds you of it a year later, you know? But say it in a magazine, it'll come back to haunt you! (laughs) Adrian has just been over to stay with us - he is totally extended family, we love each other as brothers. I said to him 'Oh, when you come over, I've got a surprise for you!' So I sat him down, I've got a fabulous theatre at home, big fucking surround sound stuff, and I cranked up 'Live at Donington'. Well... foolishly, a fucking huge glass of red wine goes flying from him, and from then on we were sat there like it was a chariot race! What an intense fucking chapter! It really was an extraordinary fucking chapter in

Whitesnake's history and I give thanks for that. I apologise if I've negated anything or anyone related to that, because maybe we didn't capture it on the record, but fuck me, that band live was something else.

**That's where I was going with my question - I remember an interview with you from around that time when you said you were so proud of that particular line up that if you had the time, you'd like to go and re-record every Whitesnake song with them.**

Yeah - musically, they were amazing. It was the flamboyance of that line up that tended to overshadow, overwhelm and compromise the root of Whitesnake, which is the songs. The whole perspective when I formed Whitesnake was from coming out of an incredible musical experience with Deep Purple. They had great songs, as we all know, but in concert - God, we'd do five or six songs that were like an hour each! The song became an excuse to show off. That degenerates things if you're a writer - when you get to the end of the song in concert and you're like 'What the fuck was that one again? I've forgotten what you started with!' I wanted to have soloist who would continue the narrative, tell the story of the song - one of my favourite guitarists, ever, is of course Jeff Beck. He can tell an incredible story whether he's firing on all six or digging deep into a ballad. That's what I look for. If you're playing at 100 miles an hour, by all means be a guitar slinger and scare people to death with your flurries, but the other thing is, be musical, tell the fucking story, be deferential to the song. Most of the time it works, thank God. And when you had, in your stable, the wealth of talent that chapter offered... look at Vai, Jesus Christ! The guy's from another planet! But yeah, I don't want to be rude about any former colleagues, I honour every one I've worked with. I'm in a much better place.

**That's what I was going to finish by asking - I know with record company bullshit and things like that you were really ground down with it all, but the general vibe I get from hearing your vocals and the music on this new album and on 'Good To Be Bad' is that you're enjoying it more now than you have for years.**

Yeah - the perspective was missing. The success was there, but I was questioning if it was what I really wanted to do. It's really important for me at times in my life to be able to show you that I'm having the fucking time of my life. If I can't show you that, then there's something wrong, and that's why I've been known to step away from things, even during periods of success. I'm out of balance, and David out of balance, indeed anybody out of balance, isn't a happy camper. The way we work now, with the blessings of the foundation of family life that I have, there's no way I'm leaving my family for an entire fucking year to tour. Now, I have my wife's blessing to tour as much as I like because I get such an incredible therapeutic aspect from the emotional exchange with the live audience, I want to do it as much as I can. And we have the songs for it, it's going to be a great ride!

