

BLACK COUNTRY COMMUNION

JAMES GADEN INTERVIEWS GLENN HUGHES

I kick things off by explaining to Glenn that I love the new record and I can't quite put into words just how much better I think this one is to the debut. It's not like I disliked the first one, I just think this is a step up, I like the rockier feel it has. I noticed on his Facebook updates he kept telling us it was a rocker and he wasn't kidding!

"When I got a call from (Kevin) Shirley in the summer about making a new album, he asked us all to write songs," Hughes explains. "So I just went about my business - what I do, year in, year out, day in, day out, is write songs. All the time - every single day. So I come in with about twelve, fifteen songs and I wrote one with Derek which didn't make the album. Joe came in with two. What you hear is the backbone of the album, that's what I brought in, and then I meshed in with Joe and Kevin's writing. This album was pretty much written in my studio. I took it to Kevin to give me a thumbs up or thumbs down, as he felt appropriate. I wrote 'Faithless' first, 'Man In The Middle', then 'Smokestack Woman' and they started stacking up. I looked at them and like the first album, I thought we needed an introduction, an opener. For that I wrote 'The Outsider'. While I was doing this, I didn't know that nobody else was really writing a lot. I thought there would probably be about forty songs to choose from when we all came in, but there wasn't! Joe wasn't really writing because he was on the road and didn't have a lot of time. Plus he often writes with me and being on the road he couldn't. This is a band, it's not a Glenn Hughes album, but I'm glad I did write the majority of the songs."

When I was looking at the writing credits I saw the

Back in Fireworks #41, I sat down with Glenn Hughes in a hotel in London to talk about his new band, Black Country Communion, and their self titled debut album. The group drew a lot of attention, featuring the talents of Hughes on bass and vocals, guitar hero Joe Bonamassa, powerhouse percussionist Jason Bonham and keyboard wizard Derek Sherinian. The album did rather well as it happened, rearing it's head at 13 in the UK mainstream album charts, and 54 in the American Billboard 200. It also marked Glenn Hughes returning to rock - and never one to rest on his laurels, a mere eight months since our last chat, I find myself sat in the same hotel with Glenn and his manager Carl, to talk about the new Black Country Communion album '2' - which, if anything, rocks harder than the first...

name Hughes all over them as I expected, but I saw there was a lot more band involvement - Jason has his name in there, as does Derek, which wasn't so much the case on the first album. More than that though, Kevin Shirley's name is quite prominent on the writing credits. I inquire if that is because he's a hands on producer, or does he actually sit down with the band when the writing is going on?

"He wrote a piece of the songs more often than not, maybe an interlude or a section," clarifies Glenn. "I hate blowing my own trumpet, but I had the backbone of all but two of the songs I think. If you talked to Joe or Jason, they'd probably say 'oh, Glenn wrote the songs', but I think it doesn't matter who writes the songs, as long as we have 'the songs' y'know? I took it upon myself to write a lot. What I didn't want James, was this band to go into the studio and find nobody had anything to work up. Everyone in the band knew that I'd bring some stuff in."

I saw that Glenn mentioned on Facebook that his lyrics for this one were the darkest since 'Addiction'. I ask if that was because of the work he had been doing on his autobiography, writing about the dark times in his life?

"That's exactly right," he nods. "As I was working on that book, I have been reading sections of it back lately and I realised I had to get some of that into this album. I think it's a dark album."

I could tell from the start it was quite aggressive and themes like 'The Outsider' tell that story - but I loved the energy the album starts with. I think this keeps up the pace for longer. Glenn agrees.

"Kevin and I were tracklisting the album and we both went into separate rooms, wrote our lists and then brought them back. We were only one song different on our lists! The first six we actually matched on. We both wanted to load the album with rockers - it's a rock album, this isn't a funk record. There has to be light and shade so we have 'Hadrian's Wall', 'Little Secret', 'Cold'... you have epic songs, 'Save Me' with the orchestra... it's a deep, dark album. When you make a second album as a band, it either goes down, or you take it right up. Kevin said to me that it puts us in a position to go on and create a masterpiece. He gave me so much encouragement, it's great. I've grown to love this guy."

He's so in demand as well, as just off the top of my head I can recall him doing Joe Bonamassa's solo stuff, Journey, the last Mr Big album...

"Yeah, my friends in Europe have hired him to do their album because they loved the sound he got with us. He's a good guy."

Because the first album was a great record, and better than that, was really well received and successful, I want to know if that pressured the band into following up with a second album so quickly, by today's standards.

"The reason we did a second record was because Kevin thought it would be great to have two sets of albums to pick our setlist from when we play our proper tour here in Europe," alludes Glenn. "Then the idea to have a film crew there to shoot it for a DVD was added. So that's the next thing you'll see - I think we'll do a Blu-Ray, we don't skimp in this band. The way we're doing everything, we're doing it the

right way. We're investing our time, effort and finances into ourselves. A band has to reinvest and last year I took a hit financially from not doing a solo tour, because I wanted to focus on this. This band, for all intents and purposes, is what I want people to think of when they hear the name Glenn Hughes. There has to be a spokesperson, a rock and roller in that band, and Joe feels very comfortable with me taking that role. Joe is a purist and I come from the Bowie, Jagger, Plant era. That's who I am."

No doubt - plus Hughes has had tons of experience not just working in that environment, but hanging out with those sort of people and living that lifestyle. I note that Joe is still young and building - he's doing really well solo. Pairing up with Glenn in Black Country works great, and I think the band all have their own fans anyway. When they came together there was a danger of a 'supergroup' tag, but unlike most supergroups, this one just seems to click.

"The 'supergroup' thing," sighs Glenn. "People call us that because they see four successful musicians getting together. Most supergroups though, fade away. Most of them have fights, break up... we are a *brand* band. We wanted an iconic logo, we want to play gigs like that Zeppelin/Purple/Who era where on stage we can morph into a jam band. The songs will become epic. I have to be careful when I enthuse about this group, I don't want to sound like we're arrogant. You remember last year? I told you I would put my money where my music is."

He did indeed - I've interviewed Glenn four times and last time we spoke when the first album came out, I had never seen him so hyper about a project or album before. He always seems proud of his work but last time I could tell he knew he had found something special in this group. I mention that I think Derek Sherinian has stepped out a bit on this record, he's more prominent this time.

"Yeah, probably because there were more holes in the music for him on this one. Also, there were interludes where there was almost a Blackmore/Lord vibe going on. We can't shy away from the fact that we have a Hammond player - it's like having an elephant in the room, we can't ignore that. He plays a Hammond live, we can't just have him standing there like a twat, he might as well play!" Glenn laughs.

I state that there's several tracks where Joe and Derek are doing their thing and it just works - it's reminiscent of Deep Purple without being a desperate copy of past glory.

"You know what it is?" asks Hughes. "I did it with Purple thirty something years ago and it's something rock fans love, that 'Burn', 'Highway Star' style trade off. It's not something I particularly lean towards but Kevin said to trust him, rock fans would love it."

Definitely, I think he called it right - I've said in the past that some Purple fans didn't like some of Hughes' solo stuff because they weren't keen when he deviated from that rock sound and moved into the funky area. With this record, I think they will love it, yet it would still satisfy Glenn creatively. I mention that in the past, that has maybe eluded him - he hasn't been able to please himself and the fans without an artistic compromise. However, with Black Country Communion, he loves it, the fans love it, and better yet, it's selling well.

Glenn listens to my point intently, before pursing his lips and replying, "Yeah bro', that's probably true."

I ask if I'm right in thinking that Derek wasn't even going to be included when the idea was first formed - that the group was going to be a power trio, but Joe Bonamassa wanted a keyboard player?

"It was just ideas then," the frontman answers. "When the band started properly, it was a four piece. Since then, there has never been any thought of anybody leaving or anything. We are a band that was put together for a reason. Kevin brought us together and we've stayed as we are. It would be silly to go to a trio now."

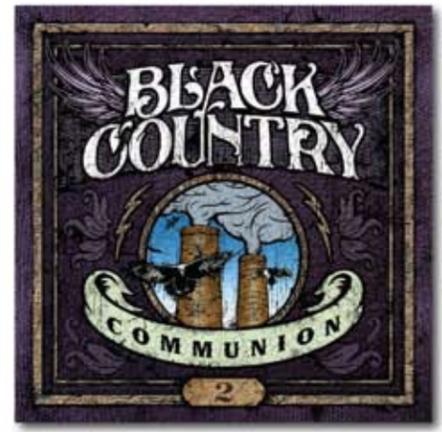
I start to ask about Joe being on tour with 'Dustbowl', an album which saw Glenn join him for a version of Free's 'Heartbreaker' - which Glenn says he has yet to hear - he had a copy in his bag but hadn't gotten chance to play it! Unperturbed, I carry on by asking that, as Glenn has been so prolific, Joe is having success with 'Dustbowl', so is Glenn going to still have a solo side or is he 100% Black Country Communion, as he is the main songwriter?

"No, I've got a solo UK tour in May, then a full European tour in the fall and what I want to do is 'An Evening With

Glenn' in a theatre," he says. "The book is due out and I'd like to do some songs acoustically, the way I wrote them, and talk about when I wrote them, dishing out anecdotes from the book... it would be a way for fans to get to know me more, to realise I'm a real bloke and not some maniac! We just did a live session like that for Planet Rock and the real Glenn, when you hear me play acoustic guitar and sing it as I wrote it, that's me. It like Keith Richards - he wrote all those great fucking songs acoustically - even 'Jumpin' Jack Flash!'"

Before I can fire off my next question, Glenn's manager Carl, who has been sat quietly observing my conversation with his star, turns the tables on me.

"Can I ask you a question James? Not only are you a big fan of Glenn, but you understand the intricacies of the music and composition. Glenn just said he'd like to go out and play his acoustic guitar and sing. He can't be blowing his horn all the time, but I know Glenn - people can only really get stuff, I think, when you can compare with something. Like people got Led Zeppelin because there was Cream just before. With Glenn, people watch him play acoustic guitar and they are actually shocked how good he is, it's not like he's just banging out some chords. If you think of people who sing and play, usually there is a compromise - Rory Gallagher's voice was the compromise to his playing. Stevie Ray Vaughn's voice was. As good as Hendrix's voice was for his music, you can't imagine him as a frontman for another band. With Glenn, I don't think there's anybody around who you can pair him up with in order to relate to him. I just watched him at Planet



"I don't want to die for my art. I don't want to play jazz cafes. I could sell out a jazz cafe every night - to a hundred people. I'm still rock and roll too, and I want to play to a LOT of people."

Glenn Hughes

Rock - who else could do that, where they've written the song from scratch, and can play it and sing it themselves at that level? I'm curious what your magazine, and the general opinion in the melodic rock community, is of BCC?"

I wasn't expecting that, so I reply to the best of my ability, stating that I think on one hand, a lot of people are very happy Glenn has returned to being 'The Voice Of Rock' so to speak, heading down that road. With some of Glenn's solo records, the funk stuff turns off some people. I personally love it, but Black Country doesn't leave room for funk, or Joe's blues really, it's more straight up classic rock. I muse that it's a bit like when Chickenfoot formed - there you have four guys who are really good and they made a great rock album. For the most part people were very pleased and it did very well. When Black Country came out, I think it did the same kind of thing. You could perhaps make some comparisons with Chickenfoot - Sammy Hagar is a great singer, writer and player, like Glenn. Joe Satriani and Joe Bonamassa are both guitar heroes, Jason and Chad Smith have that Bonham thing in their playing. With the first Black Country album, it sold well and got lots of positive reviews like Chickenfoot did. And for me, this new BCC record is better than the first. I know what Carl means though, with the huge range of styles Glenn has done - there's not many you can compare him too. It's a problem I've often had when trying to recommend Glenn's work to other people. If they ask what it's like, he's so diverse it's hard to classify in one genre.

Carl seems satisfied with my response.

"Yeah, Glenn can't tell everyone because he would get

dismissed as being arrogant and full of himself. If Glenn had never picked up the bass, he'd probably get compared with Plant, Daltrey, great singers like that from the seventies. But I think he has a gift of being such a great player too - it would be like if Paul Rodgers could also play bass like Andy Fraser - but I can't think of anyone like that. Jack Bruce is a great bass player and has a unique voice, but you can't imagine him in, say Led Zeppelin!"

I tell Carl that Phil Ashcroft, our very own Reviews Editor, went to see the BCC gig in Wolverhampton and gave it a glowing review saying that the group had great chemistry but he also pointed out that, as well as being a superb vocalist, at that gig Hughes highlighted what a great bass player he is. Both Carl and Glenn himself are delighted with this news.

"That's great man, that's nice to hear," Glenn says humbly.

I tell him that when I heard the 'Evening With...' idea, it just made me think of his 'Live In Australia' DVD, where he played acoustically. That was great, and he aired some real rare ones on that, like 'I Found A Woman' from 'Play Me Out'. I think it would be a great idea and anybody who isn't a die hard like me that came to check it out, would come away with a new view of who Glenn Hughes is.

"Yeah," he approves excitedly. "Exactly, that's what Carl thought."

I add that a lot of rock fans are blinkered anyway - if they're into one band, it doesn't necessarily mean they like another. I remember when BCC was first announced, I read a post on a forum from one of Bonamassa's fans, asking what this Glenn Hughes was like, and was he any good, because he expected Joe would do all the vocals! Everyone laughs at this and Glenn seems genuinely surprised.

"Really? Wow - I guess you're right, if they liked the bluesy stuff, they might not necessarily have found me."

I assure Glenn that since BCC got together though, I think people have accepted it as a serious band and would probably go on to check out the solo stuff - personally, I've got all the Hughes stuff and I knew who Joe was but hadn't really heard any of Joe's records. With my father, he loves Joe but hasn't really heard anything Glenn did since 'Seventh Star', because he didn't like the idea of the funk side so he steered clear.

Glenn takes this on board and asks what my Dad thought of Black Country Communion. I reply honestly that he thought it was really good, for the reason I mentioned earlier - he thought Hughes had a great voice, but the style of the solo stuff didn't do it for him. When Glenn rocks out with BCC, he thought it really worked and he liked it. He knew Glenn from Purple and Sabbath and I think it surprised my Dad at how hard Hughes can rock and what great shape his voice is still in.

"You know, I said to you last year James, that this wouldn't have happened five or ten years ago. It just so happens that this return to rock... it was pointless me returning to rock if I didn't have a rock band to do it with. It would probably have happened with 'Fused' with Tony Iommi, but Sanctuary went belly up. If that hadn't happened, Tony and I would probably have toured the world with a big album. That would have put me back in rock six years ago, but it didn't work because Sanctuary went bust. Then for me to get into a band with Joe and realise we were going to make pure rock music, I'm firmly back there, I've planted the flag. Y'know, if I do a Glenn Hughes solo album, it won't be funk, like 'First Underground Nuclear Kitchen' part II. It'll be dark and intense. My fans, I'll be honest - the funkier I get, the lower the sales. I was proud of 'First Underground Nuclear Kitchen', but I don't want to die for my art. I don't want to play jazz cafes. I could sell out a jazz cafe every night - to a hundred people. I'm still rock and roll too, and I want to play to a lot of people. It would have worked with Tony, but 'Fused' wasn't accepted because it wasn't promoted. Now, BCC has been accepted, it's rock and I must say, it's good to be back.

"Sometimes people have said I hated rock," Glenn continues. "I never did say that. I don't hate it. I don't like death metal, because I don't understand it, but I'm sure death metal fans don't like my stuff! But I don't knock anybody, you know that. I have to have a thick skin, because the more famous I become, the more... something happened at Planet Rock this morning, some dissenting. The more famous you become, the more people have a go. I have to thicken my skin because BCC is doing well and people want to have a pop. Who the fuck does he think he is, that fucking poof - he

looks like a lesbian!" he says in a highly amusing voice.

Carl adds his view.

"It's like football - how many people do you hear say 'Oh, I hate Manchester United, I hate Wayne Rooney...' You never hear people say that about Scunthorpe United or the forward for Cambridge - no disrespect to them, but you know what I mean? I said to Glenn it was probably happening all the time in Purple, but these days everything is instantaneous and anyone can tweet or blog about it. Back then, you'd only see it if you could be arsed to buy a music magazine with a reader's rants section in it. Nowadays anyone can have a go."

"Since our last interview," Glenn adds, "I'll be honest with you, I've developed a persona. You can see it in the photographs. You can see it on stage. I should have created it and continued it back in Purple. If I'd done that, and not lost those seventeen years through drugs, I'd probably have been at a different level. Now, all of a sudden, all these years later, I'm getting back up there - although I'm a lot older, I still have the heart of a young British lion. It's not my business what people say about me, whether it's 'Who does he think he is, that Hughes?' or 'Look at that ponce!' - whether they think I'm grandiose, arrogant, whatever, I am who I am and I'm not like anybody else. I'm not trying to be some other rock star, I'm just being me."

Some of the less than informed critiquing obviously bothers Glenn, but I point out that criticism is only valid if it comes from somebody who has done it better than you, and with Glenn, that's seldom going to be the case.

"You know what the internet has done?" he says. "There's about seven guys on the net who say things like 'Ooh, look at that fucking faggot' and Kevin Shirley said that I shouldn't read any of that shit. I'm trying to... it's not my business what those people think of me."

That's the downside of the 'net, it gives everyone a platform, regardless of literacy or intelligence. I advise Glenn to stick with the album reviews, the music is what counts and I can't recall seeing a bad review for BCC. Glenn looks at me for a moment through his shades before conceding, "Actually, I haven't either."

So who cares what people write thanks to the anonymity offered by the internet? If I have something to say, I always post under my real name, I never use a stupid screen pseudonym to have a pop knowing nobody can say anything back because I'm hiding behind the 'net. If people have to do that to make a criticism, it speaks volumes about what they must be like. Glenn listens and smiles.

"You're probably right, thank you."

Getting back to the music, I ask when I attend one of the solo shows, am I going to see this persona there?

"Yeah man!" Hughes responds eagerly. "There's not two different Glenn's, who play with different amps and different sounds and wear different clothes, depending on whether I'm solo or not. I'm fully into the majestic period, the big character. I've never been a shrinking violet, you know that, I like to engage people and I just need to thicken my skin a bit. I'm sensitive, you know what I'm saying? I used to hide

behind the drugs and the drink. That anesthetized me, I pretended I didn't care. But I do care."

I interject that it's better that they're talking about Glenn Hughes than being indifferent. He must have gotten back on their radar. So he must be doing something right! Carl agrees with me.

"You must know James, the Glenn in Black Country, that's not a new Glenn, Glenn has always been like that. People want rock stars to be rock stars, and Glenn in Black Country does that. And with the talk of the acoustic evening, Glenn can engage people. The fact of the matter is, we're never going to see the likes of stars from that era again, and the stories and history they can offer..."

It's my turn to nod and I reply that if there were some dates for that booked, Glenn would show not only are that he is a gifted vocalist (which everybody knows), but he could show off his skills as a player and use his wit for his stories. I tell him that I can't wait for his book, that sounds like it'll be awesome. The bands Hughes has been in, the artists he has worked with, the people he has known... it can't fail to be entertaining.

Glenn grins. "It's very heavy bro! It's dark. But not 'fake' dark - everybody knows what happened to me in the eighties but I'm not frightened to tell people the facts. Nobody knows that side."

I state that I was so pleased, after following Glenn's career for years and banging on about how good he is, to see an album he had worked hard on enter the *mainstream* album charts at number thirteen, right in there between Eminem and Lady Gaga! And that's not exactly happened because of TV and radio promotion! Hopefully the same will happen with BCC 2.

"Exactly," Carl responds. "You pull out a copy of Q magazine or Uncut from six years ago, and see how many bands in there are still on the go. Glenn has been in this for the long run. All these acts who were the next 'big thing' have died, that's because they had a short shelf life."

Glenn jumps in to bring things to a close.

"With BCC, and I'm not knocking Joe, I love him like he's my boy, but we are selling more units faster than any one of us solo is doing, or has done. This band is bigger than any of us solo. Brand bands can play the O2 or Wembley. We aren't at that stage but we have the desire to play to as many people as possible. That's why I wanted to make two albums in about a year. That's why I want a DVD. I look at it like this - Ian Hunter is 72, looks great and can still do it. As long as Mick Jagger is still prancing around, I'll keep doing what I do!"

Black Country Communion's new album "2" is released by Mascot Records on June 13th. Black Country Communion tours the UK in July. Special Guest is Michael Schenker. Dates include Llandudno Cymru Arena (July 23), Leeds O2 Academy (July 26), Newcastle O2 Academy (July 27), Glasgow O2 Academy (July 29), Manchester Academy (July 30). Further info: www.bccommunion.com. Ticket Hotline: 0871 230 1101. Book Online: www.seetickets.com and www.thegigcartel.com.

(MORE) DAYS OF WINE AND ROSES...

Stampede are back and better than ever. So why would Reuben and Laurence Archer want to eat their bass player? John Tucker reaches for the barbecue sauce...

So, I suggest as an ice-breaker, Stampede are marooned on a desert island, and hunger is setting in. Whom do you eat first?

"Colin, because he's got the biggest appetite," reasons guitarist Laurence.

"Yes, Boggy Bond, just to shut the Bristolian fucker up!" agrees vocalist Reuben. Looks like these guys are going to be singing from the same hymn sheet...

Stampede really did burn bright and fast. Formed by the ex-Lautrec pairing of Reuben Archer and his stepson Laurence in the latter stages of 1981, an early demo led them to the doors of the BBC and a session for The Friday Rock Show, which in turn brought them to the attention of Polydor Records. Two albums, 'The Official Bootleg' (Polydor testing the water cheaply by issuing a selection of songs recorded at 1982's Mildenhall and Reading Festivals) and 1983's recently re-issued 'Hurricane Town', and two singles (including the wonderful 'Days Of Wine And Roses') later it was all over; by 1984 the band had been consigned to the history books. Along the way original drummer Frank Noon had been replaced by Eddie Parsons and keyboard player Alan Nelson - another member of Lautrec - by Magnum's Mark Stanway; after the split Laurence Archer joined Stanway in Phil Lynott's Grand Slam and then went on to Rhode Island Red and UFO; bassist (and main course) Colin Bond hooked up with Bernie Tormé; and Reuben Archer seemingly disappeared.

27 years later Archer, Archer and Bond are back with a rather exciting album entitled 'A Sudden Impulse' and more than a few stories to tell, starting with the highlights of those early days.

"The Reading Festival," starts Laurence.

"Signing to Polydor; the Gary Moore Tour..." Reuben agrees, and then adds: "But I suppose just having a couple of albums out was more than one could hope for back then because it was hard for rock bands to get signed with new wave and punk dominating the market. You know," he says, going off on a tangent, "everybody said that 'The Official Bootleg' album from Reading had so much energy that when we went in the studio we couldn't capture that again. What they don't know is that the set was timed at 50 minutes, but we finished it in 40 minutes! Eddie, our new drummer, had never played to 35,000 punters before and on seeing them from the stage very nearly crapped himself and compensated by taking copious amounts of speed. The result was the first number commenced at breakneck speed and we didn't stop until we just ran out of songs. Rock 'n' roll!" the singer laughs.

"That said," he continues, back on track, "we soon realised that signing to Polydor was maybe not the right decision for us. We wrote good commercial tracks but they just wanted more and more singles and didn't see why we needed to tour to support product, so the funds were never there. In retrospect we should have gone to someone like Bronze Records who would have really worked for us. But I'm not bitter about any of it, it's always about the right time and place. We had the material, it was just not our time."

Back in the early Eighties I always saw Stampede as a fans' band; they didn't seem to shift enough units to keep the suits happy but everyone who saw them loved them. As this was the perfect time to test my hypothesis, I ask if that was a fair assessment.

"Well, I think we had a good fan base, and I think we sold more than what was to follow from other Polydor acts, so I don't think sales were involved in Stampede's demise," suggests Laurence. "Things only really turned sour when the A&R department changed at Polydor."

"That said," adds Reuben, "we were always referred to as a cult band. The fans we had were really loyal and I

