

# BASKING IN THE AFTERGLOW

Since their explosion onto the scene in 2010, supergroup Black Country Communion have worked at breakneck speed. A quartet of considerable pedigree, the band, featuring ex-Deep Purple vocalist/bassist Glenn Hughes, blues guitar hero Joe Bonamassa, Dream Theater keyboard player Derek Sherinian and son of Led Zeppelin legend (and famed drummer in his own right) Jason Bonham, carried high expectations. They didn't disappoint, their self-titled debut album charting worldwide and hitting number 1 on the UK rock charts, and number 13 on the mainstream charts. Less than a year later, they followed up with the simply titled '2', another superb offering which again enjoyed considerable chart success. Most bands would be happy with that for the time being, especially with each of them having so many other projects on the go, but here we are with their third album 'Afterglow'. Rumours have been swirling around the internet about how there might be tension between Hughes and Bonamassa regarding the former's vision for the band being impaired by the latter's packed solo schedule. Never one to listen to rumour too much, James Gaden met up once again with Glenn Hughes to see what the singer had to say...

I love the new album, I think it's fantastic. When I interviewed you when '2' came out (in *Fireworks #46*), you referred to the third album as a chance to make your masterpiece. I certainly think this is the best Black Country Communion album to date. How do you feel about it?

I knew about the "difficult third album" thing, and when we last spoke I told you I was going to make a solo album, planned for February. Well, this album was going to be that solo album. Half the songs here were going to be on my record. Kevin convinced me to do the third Black Country Communion album, and I said I'd do it under one condition - that was that I would be able to give it a title. I had written 'Afterglow' at that point but I hadn't told him about it. I just said "I have a song that would be significantly the right title for it." And the song is also brilliant, I thought! The guys in the band never heard it

until our last day of recording, so it was a special moment when I played it to them.

That is a standout track, it has a Zeppelin vibe with the keyboards, it builds into a real epic... I thought the whole album has far more parts, more light and shade and texture than the other two. Did you want to take BCC in that direction purposely, or did those elements stem from the fact you were writing for yourself originally?

No, it's absolutely what I wanted to do with this band. I wanted more drama, more keyboards, more acoustic playing... you know me well James, I don't repeat myself on my albums. I also want to remind you I tend to do things in threes. Trapeze was three albums. Deep Purple was three albums. Black Country Communion - three albums. People are putting two and two together on the internet, saying that this is our last album. I never said that. I just said I tend to work in trilogies. This album for me, completing the trilogy, I called it "my beautiful challenge". I said to myself "Let's see what you can do Mr Hughes, are you capable of delivering the most important album to date?" It could have been on a level plane with what went before, I could have taken it up a level, or it could have gone down a level. I believe we went up a level. The album is definitely a grower, you have to listen to it a few times - as you do with all the best albums.

I agree - it did take me longer to connect with it than the other two, but there's so much more to explore. Now I know it well, I think it's easily the best of the three. I thought it had a real "band" feel about it now, you've all gelled into a unit rather than being four great individuals playing together. Derek and Jason have more prominence in the sound and it's a much more even spread. I also think this is Kevin Shirley's best production job yet, everything sounds so good! I know how busy you all are, so how long did you actually spend together making this? Did you have to rely on sending files to one another?

No, we cut it together, no pre-production, no rehearsals. The album was made in five days.

Really? That quick?

As simple as that. However, I'll say this to you as my friend... it was really fucking hard to get the consciousness of each member to understand how important this was. Five days to make an album is stupid. Don't ask me how we did it. Honestly, I wasn't even sure we had it until I listened to the playbacks when we were done. I heard it through, realised we had it. While we were recording, I wasn't sure at all. I was very self-conscious about the album. There's more Glenn on this album than the other two and I stood my ground more with the songs and arrangements this time. I kind of butted heads with Kevin on the other two records. On this album, we became best friends.

As this was a solo album to start, I assume the lion's share of the writing is down to you again?

Jason came in with 'This Is Your Time' and 'Common Man'. I completed those songs with what he gave me. The rest of it is Glenn, with a couple of Joe bits and a couple

of Derek bits. The other nine were me and I had Joe and Derek add their touches to them, to make it sound like Black Country Communion. We're not making a Glenn Hughes album. To some, and you know me well, they think it sounds more Glenn than what we did before, but it's rock Glenn, not funky Glenn. It's more the Glenn who made 'Addiction'. I'm dealing also with lyrical content that is sensitive, fearful, crying for freedom and finding myself in this special place, this afterglow. What does "afterglow" mean to you? For me, it means I've been working at a furious pace for this past couple of years, and now I'm landing in this good place.

That's great to hear. I wanted to ask you about lyrical inspiration - you are such a prolific song writer and you write all your own lyrics for your songs, as well as when you've contributed for other people. Look at Voodoo Hill for example - two albums there where you penned all the lyrics. You do it solo, with Tony Iommi, you do it for BCC... where does it all come from?

I'm gonna tell you James, I've published over 450 songs. That doesn't sound that many, but when you work out how many albums that is, I don't really repeat myself. Somebody told me I've written more songs than Paul McCartney now. I'm not saying I'm a Paul McCartney, but it made me realise how many I've done. It's a lot to sing about. I do find myself thinking "Have I sung about this before?" and look to put a different spin on things. With these ones, there's some stuff on this album I was quietly confident about.

Yeah, even if you look at your former colleagues, David Coverdale has used certain phrases in more than one song, and Ritchie Blackmore has often taken a riff and re-used it later on, but I don't ever recall you doing that.

As a writer, it's my job to challenge myself. I did read a lot of William Burroughs before this, I also read a lot of Edgar Allen Poe. I read stuff by poets, T.S. Eliot... I wanted to research wonderful poets and writers. Not to steal from them, but to get into that mindset. I'm really happy with my lyrics on this album. They're my favourite lyrics to date.

The track on the end is 'Crawl', which I seemed to already know. Was that originally on the second album?

Yeah, it'll have been on your promo copy for '2'. The reason we dropped it from '2' was because we had too many songs, I thought. 'Crawl' didn't quite fit for me on '2', but we all thought it would find a home on album three, or four, whenever we would do that. I'm glad it found a home here. I think it's a good ending for the album. Really dark.

When the first album came out and I came down here to talk to you (see *Fireworks #41*), you told me you had been hands on about everything, from the music down to the logo design. I love the album cover for this one - was that down to you again?

Completely! I think you knew that, right? (laughs) Here's the deal - when they wanted to know what I was thinking for the album cover, I sent them a print to their graphic department. The manager of the band didn't want to pay for the print, so I said "I'll pay for it my fucking self then!" We went backward and forward, so I said "Okay then, have your guy draw it, copy it if you will." Obviously he couldn't duplicate it exactly because of copyright, so I said that I wanted him to make sure he captured the same colours, the brown and reddish tones and hues. It meant something to me, and as the writer of the song I knew what I wanted to depict it. I asked for the raven to be smack in the middle and to have red eyes. The raven is like the keeper of the castle, symbolic with this band since we started. I kinda feel like that raven.

Considering you were planning a solo album, and now you've done this instead, that means BCC have done three very high quality albums in the space of about two years. What's next? Are you actually going to take a break?

No, I'm working on another band. (laughs) Something



Photo: Christie Goodwin

I can't tell you about yet, but like Joe has Beth Hart and his solo career alongside BCC, and Mike Portnoy is in like four bands, what you will see from me next year is me doing Kings Of Chaos with Matt Sorum, Duff MacKagan and Joe Elliot. That's one band, we plan to tour the world, private jet, it'll be rock stars go wild! Just fantastic. I'm also forming another band. Something so wonderful... when you, as one of my long term fans, when you hear about it, you'll think "I'm so happy for him." I can't say more than that now, I don't want to take the gloss out of the interview or the spotlight off 'Afterglow', but just know this - your brother Glenn is hard at work on other projects!

I'm intrigued! However, I'll stick with 'Afterglow' as that's the reason I'm here - I think it took everyone by surprise how quickly it came about, but what really shocked me was the album was announced, I saw on your Facebook page you were doing vocals, and it was only a short time after that I got my promo copy! I assume you couldn't have done the vocals in those five days as well, surely?

No, I did the vocals for it in two afternoons.

Seriously?

I go in at eleven o'clock, come out at three. Then I did the same thing the next day and was finished.

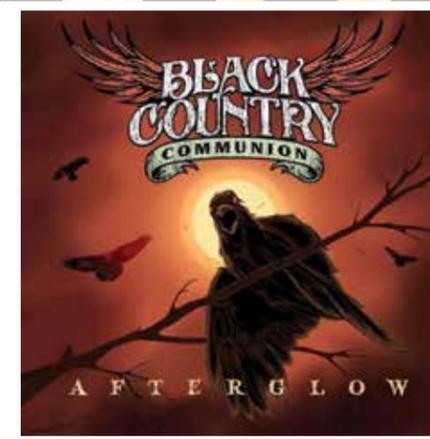
Jesus! Do you just do everything in one take?

Two takes. Then Kevin can pick the best parts from each. If you listen to my work James, the way I sing is pretty off the chart. It's not wrapped up in a little box. Joe Elliot, my dear, dear friend, heard this album last week and he said "Hughesie, it sounds like you're singing for life or death." I got chill bumps, to get such a compliment from an old, old friend. He's been in my life since 1981, I've got some great friends like Joe, Coverdale and Paul Rodgers, we all comfort each other in times of need.

And on top of that, you've also contributed two songs to the Deep Purple tribute 'Re-Machined'.

That turned out well, didn't it? Listen to it, you'll have a bit of a giggle. I really went for it. James, you're one of my favourite interviewees in England, you've always been very gracious to me and I like you as a person. You're a good man and I think you'll get a kick out of it.

Thank you - I've been a fan of yours for a long time. I still remember getting 'Feel' and 'Play Me Out' for my birthday, they were the first solo records of yours I had ever heard. They freaked me out, how different they were to Rainbow and Whitesnake and Purple and the other stuff I was into - but in a good way. I've loved the funky side every since, but there's very little you've done



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Glenn Hughes

that I don't like. Do you listen back to your own work at any point?

I only hear my own stuff if I'm in somebody's car or house and they play something I'm on. I never go back and listen to it. I'm not the kind of guy who needs to listen back and figure out how good or bad a certain thing was. I prefer to live in the moment.

That could well be why you haven't repeated yourself then, if you make an album and then move on to the next project. Is there anything musically you feel you have yet to achieve?

Not really. When I did the KLF thing, that was a totally new aspect to me. I've done the black music thing. I sang with Stevie Wonder again this year, which you won't know. That was wonderful. I've made some great friends and have some wonderful fans - I'm exactly where I want to be in my life. I don't wish for anything I don't have, I have everything I need. God has given me enough to deal with, so I don't want what I don't have, I don't covet what another artist has. I'm comfortable as Glenn Hughes, there's only one of me. Next year, there's some stuff that will shake a lot of people up. The dawn of a new era if you will. Black Country Communion has given me wings to fly, it's given me a platform that you, as a fan of mine, have probably wanted me to have for years. Black Country

Communion has given me a new lease of life. If I had my way, I'd be in Black Country Communion full time, but that's impossible because of Joe's schedule. So I will do things to make other people happy, but most importantly, make myself happy.

That's good to hear - even in your darkest periods, it's never affected the quality of your recordings.

I continue to march forward. I'm working on other things, but 'Afterglow' is the main concern right now, we're hoping to do some shows for it. I'm hoping we can get some shows booked.

Fingers crossed - I've literally never seen a bad review of a BCC gig.

I haven't either, and I think that's partly due to my health. I don't take it for granted, I'm just really grateful that I can still do it.

You've always had a funk element to your music - often you tried to favour it over rock and I sometimes felt you maybe resented having to play rock music. Had BCC made you fall in love with rock again?

Oh, absolutely. The reason BCC wasn't funky was because I made my solo album 'First Underground Nuclear Kitchen'. That's an album I love, but let's be clear - the album sales were dismal. Sure, not as many people are buying CDs, but there was an element of my fans who just weren't prepared for it. It's an insanely great album, but that kind of music, you either love it or you don't, no middle ground. I love it, but it didn't do that well.

I loved it too, but like I say, I've always been into the funk side. When you announced BCC, I was worried you had maybe felt forced to do a "rock band" because the funk stuff stuttered.

Yeah, I know exactly what you mean - but this is rock on my terms as well. I did get back into rock playing with these guys. Thank you James for sticking with me, and thanks to all my fans and your readers for doing the same. Trust me, the best is yet to come...

Update: Shortly after this interview, a gig was announced for 2013 in Wolverhampton. A few days later, the gig was pulled due to "unforseen circumstances". Speculation was rife about what this meant, but a comment from Glenn's management stated that in Glenn's mind, BCC were still together. Glenn himself also commented on Twitter: "BCC is not splitting up - we have a new album comin' - hey I get a lil' sensitive with the media...and controversy makes for good copy." With each member very busy throughout 2013, hopefully we'll see them reconvene for album number four further down the line...

Photo: William Rogers