



Interview by James Gaden. Photos by Neil Zlozower

After releasing three well received albums, Classic Rock supergroup Black Country Communion, consisting of Glenn Hughes, Joe Bonamassa, Jason Bonham and Derek Sherinian, ground to a halt. There seemed little chance of a reformation, but that's exactly what has happened. With Bonamassa and Hughes teaming up to co-write a superb fourth effort, simply entitled 'BCCIV', the story begins another chapter. Fireworks met up with Glenn Hughes for the details.

Sometimes it's hard breaking the ice to kick an interview off, but as Glenn Hughes is no stranger to the pages of Fireworks, there was an existing familiarity and he's delighted to hear Sass Jordan, who appears in this issue's 'Unsung Heroes' feature, passed on her regards. "Oh, I love her. I've known her so, so long – she was actually born in Birmingham. She toured with us and she's a really good friend of my wife. Love her! So, what do you think of the new record?"

Straight to the point and ironically meaning that the interviewee actually asked the first question for this article, I tell the vocalist I'm absolutely delighted with the new album, especially as for a long period it looked like there wouldn't be another one. I note the difference in Hughes' demeanour compared to when I interviewed him for 'Afterglow' in Fireworks #54. I got the impression back then that even though he gave a very professional interview at the time, he felt that album had been rushed and the weight of writing the material and doing the promo had been dropped on him somewhat.

"We all know what happened," he nods. "It was well documented and you and I have known each other a long time, you probably noticed the Glenn that was promoting 'Afterglow' also knew what *wasn't* happening behind the scenes. Therefore, I wasn't *angry* about it, but I was deeply hurt. That's gone now though, that's the past, Joe and I have rekindled a very good friendship, it's better than it used to be in fact,

and long may that continue."

Shortly after the release of 'Afterglow' a sole date was announced for Wolverhampton, which was quickly cancelled, resulting in a brief Twitter spat between Hughes and Bonamassa, which saw Black Country Communion dissolve. The bassist immediately formed a new band, California Breed, taking Jason Bonham with him. Adding young guitarist Andrew Watt, the trio made an underrated studio album followed by a series of dates. I ask whether the reason for putting another band together so quick was to fulfil a desire to tour.

"Yes, I wanted a band, I wanted to go out and play," Hughes confirms. "We did some great shows. Everything in my life happens for a reason. The good, the bad, the indifferent. The people you meet, the people you work with, whether it's the ones you really enjoy working with or the ones you have a hard time working with, you learn from all of that."

Ironically, much like Bonamassa's solo schedule conflicting with Black Country Communion, Bonham left California Breed due to his heavy schedule. Queens Of The Stone Age drummer Joey Castillo replaced him but by 2015 the group had split up. Hughes returned to work as a solo artist, releasing one of his very best solo albums to date in 'Resonate'. Prior to that, he received a call out of the blue, from Joe Bonamassa, which was the beginning of a Black Country reunion.

"That was the catalyst for me," explains Hughes. "The catalyst for Joe was he was on the road, as he always is, he was travelling somewhere in Europe and he has a tour bus. He was on there and he played the entire BCC catalogue from 'Black Country' all the way through to the last song on 'Afterglow'. When he called me up, I kinda knew what was going on, I sensed in his voice he had something he wanted to ask me. Frankly, I think if you listen to the entire catalogue of Black Country Communion you think 'How can this band *not* be playing?' Remember this though, what I'm not going to be doing, considering all the different things we are involved in, I'm not going to plant a seed until things are *announced*. What we've gone and done is made another fucking great album and now we shall wait and see what happens next."

Hughes had been fully focused on his solo work, and provided a series of incredible live shows to promote it. I witnessed an astonishing performance on that tour which I rank as easily the best Hughes concert I've seen. What made it all the more remarkable was his mother had just died.

"Oh, you saw me in Leeds? She died two hours before I went on stage," he states, before adding, "I don't know how I did it. I was supposed to tour 'Resonate' in November 2016 with Living Colour, then Living Colour pulled out which meant I had to cancel all those shows. That really messed up *this* year for me,

because I had to rush and re-book shows for late January/early February. What that does is it means you have to miss out all the summer because you can't play the same places twice that close together. It was damage control. I had to deal with my mother's passing, make a great album with Black Country Communion – and I really do think this is a great album – and be ready for the next step. I'm telling you James, we've sat together four or five times and you can maybe tell, but I don't think I've ever felt as happy as I do right now."

A question I have to ask is after reigniting his solo career and getting some of his best reviews ever with 'Resonate', along with describing the return to a solo career as "freedom" when we discussed the album in Fireworks #77, did the singer have any reservations about going back into a band so soon?

"No, only because writing for Black Country was never a problem," he replies. "I'd come in with a bunch of songs, Joe would finish some of them, Jason would bring in stuff, he brought in 'This is Your Time' which was fantastic, then the rest of it I wrote. That was only because Joe, bless him, was too damn busy. However Joe, on this album, wanted to commit to writing the *whole* album with me, daily. He came to my house for eleven days. We sat and boom, boom, boom, we didn't want to finish until we knew we had the album. We knew when we had the last track, which was 'Over My Head'. I had that but I'd been saving it, to see if it worked. It did."

'BCCIV' still retains all the Classic Rock hallmarks of its predecessors, but also includes some additional flavours not present on the previous records.

"The song that sticks out the most is the 'Joe' song, 'The Last Song For My Resting Place'," acknowledges the singer. "Not just because Joe sings it, and by the way, please let everyone know how much I love Joe's voice, he does such a great job on that track, but because it's got the mandolin. He was so excited when he wrote that, he couldn't wait to play it to me. He played it down the phone to me so I said 'Come round tomorrow and we'll finish it.' He came and he had some other bits, the electric middle part and I thought 'this is going to be fantastic'. I said 'This is your Joe thing', like 'Hadrian's Wall' and 'Song For Yesterday', it's his thing. I said from the outset we had to have one on this album too and he always kind of shrugs it off. The thing about Joe is he doesn't tell you how good he is going to be. He just *is* good."

One of the key elements to the track, which was penned about Wallace Hartley, the bandleader who famously played his violin as the Titanic began to sink, is a fiddle part. I ask if it's a real fiddle player or an excellent sample.

"Oh yeah, a real Irish dude from The Dubliners. Remember now, the song is about the violinist on the Titanic, so I'm thinking about taking care of my mum in England and I knew they were going to overdub some stuff while I was away. I'm picturing a really

nice violin piece on there... and God knows neither Joe or I knew Kevin was going to come back with this fucking fiddle player going 'diddy-diddy-diddy-diddy' on there! What the fuck is that? You have to understand, Joe and I... I'm a Soul guy but I do have a Blues background and Joe is Blues, and we're hearing the whitest fucking leprechaun playing a nanny goat fiddle... I'm thinking 'how the fuck are we going to sell this?'" he laughs. "It does work though. Probably because it's completely different. When Joe does his thing it's completely different to what I do, yet it still sounds like Black Country Communion."

While Hughes and Bonamassa reconnected with the writing, I enquire about how things went with Kevin Shirley, who Hughes said in Fireworks #55 "buted heads" with him on the first two albums before becoming "best friends" on the third.

"This is the only album where he didn't have a grumble," Hughes smiles. "Usually he'd have something to say about a song or a groove or even a certain sound, but here he was in the room every single moment, I never even saw him go to the bathroom and he was just living the songs. It wasn't like he wasn't paying attention, he just didn't want to make any changes, he was really in the moment."

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Black Country Communion's Glenn Hughes

One of the album's best moments which really hooked me was in 'The Crow' where there is a break during which Hughes plays a bass solo, which meshes into Sherinian taking centre-stage before a flurry from Bonamassa segues perfectly back into the main song. It's a great example of how well the group work together.

"That's one of my favourite tracks," says Hughes proudly. "We had an underlying theme since we formed Black Country. That was our bird and I wanted to have a song about it. That was why I put it on the cover of 'Afterglow', I always thought that would have made a great tour shirt. But I'm really happy with the new artwork, the rising phoenix – I think it's working for us. I think this album was written, recorded and put together at the right time, I believe in karma and fate and I think the timing was right. The album is loaded with Soul-Rock and Blues-Rock classics. Joe and I had dinner originally and discussed where we wanted to go with a new album. We both decided to take bits from one, bits from two and a little bit from 'Afterglow' – that was a very Glenn-like record, due to circumstances. The actual song

'Afterglow' is a real epic, something that I've never really written before. So as I'd done that, we felt we should take the sound back to more like the 'Great Divide' and 'Sista Jane' feel, because the first album was the one that broke through. You know me, I'm not into re-writing stuff, but I knew when I wrote 'Over My Head' that would be in the same category as 'One Last Soul'. It's very radio-friendly. I thought we needed a shorter song like that."

Another track, 'The Cove', is notable for its lyrical content, inspired by a topic very close to Glenn's heart.

"It is, it's about the dolphins. There will be a fantastic video for that. The other videos will be more us in the studio, behind the scenes kind of thing, but 'The Cove' will have footage, which has been given to us by Ric O'Barry's Dolphin Project, that's something I'm involved in and the footage will make for a really epic video."

Despite being a big fan of his music, I wasn't aware that Hughes had any involvement in such a cause, so I ask how it came to his attention.

"I'm tirelessly working to educate people to not see dolphin shows – the story is this. There's a sleepy little cove in Japan called Taiji. From October through February, every year, fifty dolphin hunters go two miles out in six or seven boats, lure all the dolphins they can find into the cove, net them and slaughter them. It's just horrible. They kill them for meat, or sell them to circuses and aquariums around the world. As I'm sure you know, dolphins have high IQs, they are really intelligent. The hunters kill parent dolphins in front of their young – it's like somebody coming into your house and killing your mum in front of you. The dolphins don't get over it. I'm deeply involved in this, I went vegan because of this. There's even a possibility I might not be able to go back to Japan again because I've said some pretty horrible things about this. I don't expect everyone to hear me, but honestly, if you had seen what I've seen, when families of dolphins are actually crying, it's just terrible. So I got involved with the project and decided I needed to write a song about it. The lyric 'I see their love as they drown', these dolphin hunters literally drive them into the cove to kill them. You can hear in my voice how it affected me, I will never forget this until the day I die and I'll never eat fish again. I know I'm just one dude talking about it but it affected me."

With the announcement that Black Country Communion were back together and making a record, I ask Glenn how Jason and Derek were with the news.

"They were cool, unfortunately they weren't around to help write, Jason was very busy with his Led Zeppelin Experience and Derek was out with Steve Vai and then Zakk Wylde for quite a while. However Joe and I were happy to write between us, we wanted to shape what was our vision for the band. Kevin putting the two of us together was what started this whole thing in the first place. With Jason he just picks up his sticks and plays. Easy. With Derek, Joe and I felt this was not an album that needed a

lot of synthesizers, so he plays one on 'Awake' but we needed more organic sounds, more use of an organ. He also plays a grand piano on 'Wanderlust' which is absolutely fantastic."

The album, as well as the regular formats of CD and download, is also being issued on vinyl, including a limited edition orange version. A bonus track, 'With You I Go', is included for those who buy that particular product.

"It's married to 'When The Morning Comes', it's a similar vibe. You'll know when you hear it that it's a Glenn song, it's definitely more me, but with it being similar to 'When The Morning Comes' we felt it should be a bonus rather than on the main record," Hughes reveals.

As usual, when the band did meet up to lay down the tracks, no time was wasted, although there was even more pressure on Hughes this time around.

"Yes, we always record quickly but with this one I had to leave earlier than I planned because mum was sick. On the fourth day it was difficult for me. I went in the studio and told the guys what was going on with my mum. I never asked to leave, I'm a very professional musician, but I'm an only child and my dad died, so I guess my eyes were asking them if I could go. They all knew it, so the last song we cut before I left was 'Over My Head'. I laid that down, put my bass down and headed straight to the airport."

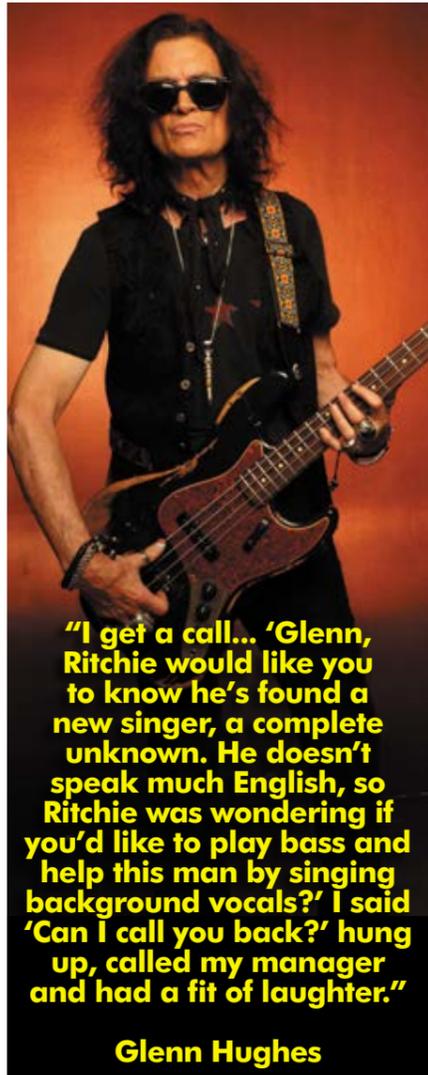
It's time to get to the crux of the matter – I ask if Hughes and Bonamassa have sat down to talk about touring. Hughes nods.

"We want to try and make a window in 2018. In January, we're playing the Wolverhampton Civic on the 2nd and Hammersmith Apollo on the 4th. Then we'll get together on the Blues Alive Cruise in February. I'll tell you the truth, it was hard to get those two shows in January sorted. I've got a really heavy schedule coming up in January, it's the holiday season so you have to fit in rehearsals over Christmas, everybody had to put away their holiday time to do this. We all know we can't release an album and not do any shows. We all know Joe is really busy, that has always been the case and it's not going to change. Frankly, my career has also taken a turn where I've got some big things going on myself. So we would like to find a window to do more shows but we'll see how things fall. We've announced those shows in January – I'm hoping we can work for more but I don't want to be sat here with you all upset again because I've promised things and nothing happened."

Hughes himself is heading down to Australia, in order to play an intriguing set of concerts with a band consisting of Jeff Kollman, Lachy Doley and Pontus Engborg. The twist? He will only be playing Deep Purple material.

"I'm doing those because it's taken me forty years to say 'I should celebrate my time in that band'," he explains. "I mean no disrespect to the guys who are currently in Deep Purple, or David Coverdale because he did his Purple thing with the last Whitesnake record. Ritchie Blackmore is out doing a few

Purple numbers like 'Mistreated' with his new singer, so it's time for me to do my bit. I'm singing at the top of my game right now and while I'm singing like this, I've had my knees done, I've had my heart done, I'm in good health so I'm going to go out and do these songs. I want to go out and sing things like 'Holy Man', maybe do some stuff I've never done before, go out and sing them as good as I did back in the seventies – if I may be so bold! When you saw me in Leeds, I remember the venue because it was a church and I was in black – the audience were great and I think I can say this to you because we've known each other for some time... I think people are finally seeing past the Glenn with



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Glenn Hughes

the ego, Glenn with the haircut, the stupid stuff. I think I'm the last man standing for Deep Purple. If people want to hear those songs from my era, I'm the guy who will be singing them. I remember being at the Hall Of Fame and when the current band got up I thought 'Urgh'... In the seventies I was the only one who was fucked up, but now I think I'm the only one who can sing these songs as they are meant to be sung. You complimented me on how I performed in Leeds and if I can impress you, who has been to a lot of my shows, under those circumstances, then hopefully long may it continue."

With Hughes mentioning the current band touring under the name of Rainbow, I can't help myself and ask what he thinks of it. The honest answer I get is a lot more interesting than I anticipated.

"I've only seen clips so I'm not really in a position to judge. Ritchie actually asked me to join that. In October 2015, I got a call from Carole Stevens. It was my birthday, I get this call and Carole says 'Ritchie wants you to sing some songs and play bass for some shows, can we send you the set list?' I hadn't seen Ritchie in forty-two years, so I thought it might be a nice way to close out the legacy. It was only going to be three shows. I thought I could sing the Dio songs, I could sing the Purple songs, some of the other Rainbow songs might be a bit difficult but I could do it. I didn't think it would be a big problem. So we get to March, last year, before the Hall Of Fame. I was supposed to fly to New York City to have lunch with Ritchie on the Thursday. On the Wednesday night, about 6pm, I get a call. It's Carole. She says 'Glenn, Ritchie would like you to know he's found a new singer, a complete unknown. He doesn't speak much English, so Ritchie was wondering if you'd like to play bass and help this man by singing background vocals?' I said 'Can I call you back?' hung up, called my manager and had a fit of laughter. I'm sure Ritchie had been listening on a speakerphone. So I called Carole back and said 'I can't do this, only because I feel I've come so far as a lead singer and front-man, I can't really do anything other than be me right now. As much as I'd like to join in, have fun and help, I don't think I can do that, I don't think it's right for me, at this point in my life, to do something inappropriate when I should be concentrating on my own career'. So I told her to give Ritchie my best, even though I'm sure he was listening to every word and left it at that."

As anybody who has read my reviews of the 'Rainbow – Memories In Rock' DVD will have noted, I was disappointed with what I heard, primarily because of questionable arrangements and the choice of Blackmore's Night's rhythm section, which I felt sounded too thin and small, lacking the bombast needed for epic tracks like 'Stargazer'.

"Well, bombast is the word isn't it?" Hughes agrees. "I think the singer they have sounds like he *could* be a Rainbow singer. He's not great yet, because I think his style is a little bit copycat, but I'm not knocking him, that's not my place to do that. Joe Lynn Turner would have been a great choice vocally – but between his and Ritchie's egos, I think he'd only have been in the band for about eighteen minutes!"

Black Country Communion release their new album 'BCCIV' on 22nd September.

The band will play Wolverhampton Civic Hall on Tuesday 2nd January and London Hammersmith Apollo on Thursday 4th January 2018.

Tickets can be booked online from www.ticketmaster.co.uk and www.eventim.co.uk.



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