

CALIFORNIA BREED

In 2012, supergroup Black Country Communion came to a sudden stop after the release of their third album 'Afterglow', with guitarist Joe Bonamassa returning to his prolific solo career. Internet rumours of a fall out between he and vocalist/bassist Glenn Hughes began circulating. When Glenn announced he was in Nashville recording a new album, even more rumours spread about whether BCC were carrying on with a replacement. The record turns out to feature Hughes, BCC bandmate Jason Bonham and newcomer Andrew Watt, forming a brand new power trio called California Breed. James Gaden hooked up with Glenn once more to get the inside story...

When Glenn last conversed with me promoting 'Afterglow' (back in *Fireworks* #54), he stated he was working on something special. I assume this was the start of California Breed, but Glenn's answer takes me by surprise.

"No, it was with someone else, I can't talk about that at the moment because it's California Breed all the way right now. You met me for each of the Black Country Communion albums James, you know that was 100% in my blood. California Breed is also 100% in my blood. Since we last spoke, things have changed. BCC broke up because we couldn't tour. I want to make this very clear to the fans – there are no resentments. No hard feelings towards anyone. Joe, he said he couldn't give up time to tour 'Afterglow'. With love and respect, I said okay, but I've got to go. I've not really spoken to the press about the break up. People need to know there really wasn't any trouble between Joe and I. I was brutally upset that Black Country Communion couldn't play live though, because the band were fucking incredible!

"Joe made it clear from the outset he wouldn't break away from his solo career and touring. We'd done three great albums, a great DVD, let's split, be friends and move on. A lot of fans thought there was bad blood – no, not at all. Because BCC were so potent, Derek, Jason and I all thought Joe would change his mind. Joe didn't, and we all respect that. I wasn't shocked when he broke up. I wasn't angry. I was sad. Anger and sadness are two very different things. I just packed up my stuff and thought 'What's next?' I'm older than everyone else, I'm looking for the next thing. I'm not gonna retire. Ringo Starr is never going to retire, and he's got a billion fucking pounds! I'm enjoying writing and performing, so I can't retire. Last year was very important for me. It didn't look like there was a was

a lot going on, but I was touring with Kings Of Chaos with Slash and Joe Elliot, and we were putting this album together, so it was busy behind the scenes."

With Black Country coming to an end, the obvious place to start the California Breed chapter is with Glenn's meeting with guitarist Andrew Watt.

"For all intents and purposes, when we spoke that September, that was the period where Black Country were unofficially breaking up," Glenn confides. "We didn't go to the press until almost six months later. We kept things quiet while we figured out what to do. Jason and I spoke on and off on the phone, we decided to continue together, but not as Black Country Communion. The internet was full of rumours, people thinking Slash was going to play with BCC... the fact of the matter is if you bring in someone like Slash, or Steve Vai, or Zakk Wylde, or any of my friends like that, they could only have given us 20 shows a year due to their own successful careers. That would be the same situation we had with Joe. By fate, Julian Lennon, who is a really good friend of mine, was having a party on the weekend of the Grammys. He said 'Glenn, there's a guy I want to introduce you to. His name's Andrew Watt, he's a 22 year old guitar player from New York.' This kid walks towards me, hair about a foot long, a big fucking hat on... I thought he looked like a shorter version of me in 1970! I didn't tell him that though! He'd actually opened for Black Country, playing acoustically at John Varvatos' 10th Anniversary party back in 2010. I never

saw him, I wasn't in the building. He said to me 'I'm playing tonight, can you come down?' but I was going to the Grammys, I had to be up early, I had things to do, so I gave him my email address and said 'Send me some music.' Three days later, he sent me three solo tracks he was working on. When I heard them, I thought it was the best thing I'd heard in a long time. His song writing, his playing and arranging... I was blown away by his writing and his voice. Best of all, he wasn't shredding like



Photo: Joe Lester

Eddie Van Halen. His playing was sparser, more a Mick Ronson, John Frusciante way. I wondered what would happen if I put him together with Jason and I.

"He came over to my house in March. By 7:00pm on that first day, we had written 'Chemical Rain' and 'Solo', music and lyrics. We did that in five hours. In BCC, 90% of the writing came from me, because Joe was so busy. Here, I'm writing with a kid, I'm 39 years older than this bugger and he's writing in a way which I really understand. He's only 22 but he's got a very old soul. Kids his age, when he was growing up in the 90s, they didn't want to play Jimmy Page, they were playing Blink 182. He couldn't find anyone to play with, so he'd do it all himself, bass, guitar and drums.

"I knew Jason was in town that day, working on the Superman 'Man Of Steel' score with Hans Zimmer. Unbeknown to Andrew, I go downstairs, get Jason on the phone and send him the tracks. Jason loved the stuff, and for some beautiful reason, he was absolutely free the next day – it was the only day he had free before he went back to Florida!

"After a three hour search I found a studio in Burbank, everywhere else was booked. It had this enormous room. This is very important – there are no mistakes in the universe. When I walked into that studio, I said 'This room was meant for a Bonham.' You put Bonham's kit in a room with a huge, 30 foot ceiling, you get the cannons! I've known Jason since he was 2 years old, and for the first time ever, he was on time! We started to play live and Andrew wasn't just recording, he was performing like he was on stage. We cut the two tracks musically, Jason left about 7:30 and I thought that was it. At 9:00 he came back! He's never come back twice to a session, ever! He was so into what we were doing, and we realised last March that we were a band.

"All throughout that year, I kept a lid on California Breed. Jason had his Led Zeppelin Experience dates. Andrew is musical director for Cody Simpson, who is a big pop star here in the States. I had Kings Of Chaos. People were guessing left and right who I was working with, and I just

couldn't answer anybody. We've got a new guy who is super talented, committed and available to do 100 shows. I think Andrew is the right decision. We never, ever had any intention of getting somebody big to play in Joe's place. It would be a moot point, because they all will have their own careers which they don't want to sacrifice, just like Joe. With Andrew, we can build a band, we can go to Japan, go to New York, do all the things we want to do. I just feel this album will start a new revolution of rock music – building a relationship with the fans. My Facebook has gone through the roof in the buildup to this band."

Two tracks have been picked for singles, the rocker 'Sweet Tea' and the excellent 'Midnight Oil' which sees Glenn backed by some great female vocals.

"I felt we needed a girl on that song," Hughes explains. "I just heard it with another voice, other than mine and Andrew's. Dave Cobb went 'I got a girl!', brought in this black singer from Nashville and it was done. I think it adds another element to it. I don't think it sounds like anybody else, I just wanted her on the chorus and to do some ad-libs behind me. I think 'Midnight Oil' is such a commercial rock track, begging to be a single. There's a lot on the album that could be a single, but that one especially.

"'Sweet Tea' has been chosen as the single for America, we have a video for that. 'Midnight Oil' is the one for Europe. Planet Rock have put it on their A-list, which is huge for us. Classic Rock Magazine are getting behind us which is massively important. There will also be a lyrical video made for 'The Grey' and the opening track 'The Way'. There's a lot of shit going on here that we never got with Black Country Communion, because we couldn't do too much as Joe wasn't able to commit full time."

With mention of the album's producer, I asked Glenn how he found working with Dave Cobb in comparison to the albums Black Country Communion made with Kevin Shirley at the helm – a man Hughes admitted to "butting heads" with on the first two records.

"Kevin has a set way of recording, he tends to record the same way with every band and he works strictly from 12pm-

6pm every day," Glenn reveals. "They are two very different producers. Dave Cobb is younger and everything on the album is sung live. We recorded each song twice and then we'd composite the best parts. We cut 'The Way', but then Dave suggested Andrew play guitar, Jason play drums and I just sing. I wasn't sure but I said okay, so all the other tracks were recorded live as guitar, drums and lead vocal. Check this out – five days later, when it was all laid down and Andrew had done a few guitar overdubs, I went to put the bass down. It took me about six hours, stopping and starting. It got to 7pm and I said 'Right, I'll go sing now.' Dave said 'You've already sung it.' I was taken aback and he said 'What you sang when the guys were playing, that wasn't you

to me and introduced themselves, and gave me a copy of 'Pressure And Time'. Their PR guy asked if I'd play it on my radio show. I played it and thought it was really good. I Googled who had produced it, found out it was Dave Cobb and checked out other things he'd produced. Dave has won a lot of awards for his stuff in Nashville and I was really blown away by his work. Jason and I both decided he should be the guy to produce it. I called him up, told him we wanted to make a record with him, and we did!

"We cut the album to tape too. Not digital. When you record to tape, that's the shit. No dropping in, no Pro-Tools, this is live! Who the fuck does that now? Dave Grohl has been doing it. Jack White, The Black Keys...



Photo: Aislyn Blaine

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Glenn Hughes on California Breed

fucking about, that's the keeper. You've sung the songs.' I call it a soulful aggression – the ad-libs and stuff, it's like it was in the 70s, it's fucking live, man! When you hear the album, I'm singing it live - I think it's made the melodies stronger, the whispers are stronger, the aggression is stronger, you can hear I'm busting a gut. I think I'm a better live singer than I am a studio singer and here you get the live Glenn Hughes. Big thanks to Dave Cobb for that."

With the selection of producer paying dividends, I inquire how Dave Cobb came to be the man at the helm.

"I met Jay and Scott from Rival Sons when I was hosting a party for John Varvatos in Hollywood," Hughes explains. "They came up

not many others. Who cares that I'm 62? I want to do something I've not done in 40 years! So big thanks to Dave Cobb. If he doesn't like something, he says so, doesn't matter who wrote it. Dave has no fear. He's the best producer right now for rock music in my opinion."

Not content with introducing Andrew Watt to Hughes, Julian Lennon also makes an appearance on the album, lending his distinctive vocals to the track 'Breathe'.

"We got lucky there," Glenn says proudly. "Thank God we got Julian on that, he sounds incredible doesn't he? When we were making 'Breathe' I said to Dave I was going to get Julian on the phone. He was in Monaco. I called him up, asked him if I sent him a file

right now, could he get it back to me tomorrow? He said yeah – 17 hours later, it came back and what he sent back, the world will hear. That line he sang, 'I don't wanna leave you alone...' – oh my God, it brought me to tears!"

Black Country Communion were successful but sadly short lived. Far from being down and out about it, Glenn has wasted no time putting together something new and maintaining the same high calibre of output. I note there seems to have been a real feeling of fate stepping in where California Breed is concerned. The singer couldn't agree more.

"James, everything happens in the right time. It doesn't matter when, as long as you aren't dead yet! Building a new friendship with a young lad, I could be his father, building a new band, a new brand... I wanted to make sure we could put together something that can tour appropriately in order to support what we're doing. I know your readers will understand that. We start in September, and we're booking UK dates. I'm not going to get upset about what happened with Black Country Communion. It's no big deal. Joe's fans are happy he's stayed solo. It was fan-fucking-tastic and people will always love Black Country – we all did. I'm not going to live in resentment because it ended, kick the cat and moan, I'm not that sort of person. I love life today. I have great memories of Black Country. We killed everywhere we played. Now, California Breed is my purpose. Just like Trapeze was. Just like Deep Purple was. Just like working with Tony Iommi was. Just like Black Country was. Now it's this. Jason is family to me and he has played the best drums of his life on this album. His dad would be so proud of him. Bonham and Hughes is a combination that works and to bring in an unknown guy to fit with that, he has to be talented and Andrew has proved himself beyond years on this record.

"You'll hear me sing 'Let it burn, let it burn, I'm gonna set it on fire with the Midnight Oil' on this record. I sang 'Burn' with Deep Purple 40 years ago, and I'm still burning today!"

California Breed release their debut album May 16th in Europe and May 20th in North America on Frontiers Records.