

CAN YOU SMELL WHAT’S COOKING?

2008 might just be seen by Glenn Hughes fans as the year Big Poppa G came home. In a continuing musical evolution, Glenn seems to have come to the point where he has found his niche - playing groovy, funky rock music while increasing his popularity and stepping out of the shadow of the ‘Voice Of Rock’ moniker. With his latest release, ‘First Underground Nuclear Kitchen’ (yes, F.U.N.K.!) Glenn has produced a stunning solo album that has more Hughes per square inch than any other album he’s made since the legendary ‘Play Me Out’ record back in the seventies. James Gaden called up the Funkmeister to hear all about it.

You're in the UK at the moment - whereabouts are you?
I'm at my mum's. I was with Mel Galley today. He's dying – got terminal cancer. His doctor gave him two months to live, two months ago. I'm his oldest friend, his oldest bandmate, he's a guy I grew up with you know? I adore him and life hasn't been so good for him, and I just want people to remember him.

Well I certainly will. That's a real shame. I'll steer us on to more happier topics, your new album...
Have you heard it yet 'bro?

Yes, it's unbelievable! It's fantastic! I put it on, and I remembered last time I spoke to you you told me it was going to be a much funkier record than usual and you weren't kidding! I love it!
You know James, this is, for me, the archetypical Glenn Hughes scenario where I really honestly wanted to throw the gauntlet down. Every artist after a while finds a sound – The Who have a sound, Zeppelin have a sound, everyone has their own and back in the Trapeze days we had a sound. With Purple, they had a sound already and I was trying to add my own part. This particular album is the archetypical Glenn Hughes record. If you buy this record, you are a Glenn Hughes fan, or you'll become one. It's the most artistically honest, rawest album I've ever made. The album could have simply been called 'Glenn Hughes', that's how strong I think it is.

Well the last time we spoke was just before Christmas and you were still making it. You told me then it was funkier and it was part of a closing trilogy of 'Play Me Out' and 'Feel'. That sounded great, but it was when I saw the title that the anticipation built. Just like with 'Return Of Crystal Karma' spelled R.O.C.K which is exactly what that album was, you pulled the same trick this time. The first ones that struck me where the title track and 'Never Say Never' – the vibe blew me away.
I really liked the use of instruments you don't often hear on your records – the horns section for example, along with the strings and electric piano.

The electric Fender Rhodes for me is an ingredient that was used on 'Play Me Out' and I haven't really used it since. Now, it's one of the main instruments. played by Anders Olinder. I produced the record alone and I approached it by thinking about what I would actually want to hear on the record. The Fender Rhodes is a strong instrument and this album needs that, just as it needs the horns and the strings in certain areas. I think I did the right thing.

Absolutely you did! When the horns kicked in on the title track it reminded me of a kind of James Brown feel. It really brought it all together – and as you mentioned 'Play Me Out', I thought 'Where There's A Will' could easily have come from that album.
Thank you – that's one of my favourites. I wrote it to close the album – I like closing albums with stuff like that. That song could be a sort of sister song to 'Coast To Coast', it's a strong vibe. I think every track on the album is like it's own little mini movie. The lyrics are very strong and the groove is relentless. I defy, and I mean this James, I defy any artist, internationally, to have a funkier record released this year. Black, white, purple or brown, I defy anyone to do it, because you won't find it!

And why have I done this now? Well, why not now? I've been trying to reach this point – I haven't allowed myself to be myself for so long. On 'Feel' there was definitely some moments of it, but here we are at a point where I've never felt so comfortable in my own skin, so I want to make brand new, fresh, exciting, vibrant music. And I think I'm doing it right now.

You certainly are! I felt that when you mentioned 'Soul Mover' and 'Music For the Divine' hinted at the direction you wanted to go, this one's done it. I think that's spot on – when you hear 'F.U.N.K.' you can hear parts of it which resemble those two records, but this one has taken it up another gear.

That's right – when I wrote 'First Underground...' and 'Love Communion', I wrote those in the same hour. I had 'Satellite' – I'd written that before and then came 'Imperfection' and 'Never Say Never'. Then I thought 'Ok, well, we know where we're going now...'. Then I wrote 'Crave' to open the record, because I knew I needed a track that strong to start with. It was like putting a jigsaw together – I already knew what I was going to call the album – I always know early.

Every artist will tell you in an interview 'Oh, this is the greatest album I've ever made' because they want to sell copies and stuff, but we live in an age where the record industry is dead. If I was to die tomorrow, and I hope I don't, but if I did, I know I've made the album of my career. And don't let it freak people out when they read the word "funk", for God's sake! If an artist like me releases an album called 'F.U.N.K.' then I should be allowed to play the kind of music that's in my soul. Take for instance Robert Plant – he can do whatever he wants to do and I have such respect for that. Other artists from my generation aren't doing that – they're doing novelty acts or nostalgia tours. They maybe tour and only play old songs. I want to move forward! I'm not dead yet. I don't want to put the pipe and slippers on, I feel so good. I just want to go out to play new music! And to a young audience too – my audience is getting younger and I'm playing to more people than ever before.

Do you think you've maybe attracted some Chili Pepper fans with some crossover interest with Chad Smith and John Frusciante playing on your last record?
I have definitely attracted some of their fans, but that's not why I worked with Chad and John. Chad's my best friend and they wanted to play. So yeah, I think that helped me attract some of their fans, but I'd like to attract Prince fans and R'n'B fans because my voices is quite R'n'Bish. Yeah, I get this 'Voice Of Rock' thing I guess, but I think some people maybe look at me more as a voice of soul, so I think it's important to stretch out.

That's right – I'll come back to the Voice Of Rock thing with another album I want to talk about, but first, I wanted to ask you about who played on the record – I downloaded MP3's from the record company so I have no information at all. I'm presuming there's no J.J. Marsh this time?
J.J. does appear on two tracks – he's on 'Oil And Water' and 'Too Late To Save The World'. The rest of the guitar work is by Luis Maldonado. On tour James, you will see Luis and J.J. together – one funky and one rock. So those two, Anders on keys and Matt Goom on drums makes for a very funky band.

We can still rock out though – 'Never Say Never' and 'Oil And Water' will probably be played live which give you the rock element, and then there's 'Love Communion' and 'First Underground...' which gives you're the funky elements.

I think 'Satellite' is one of the best songs I've ever written. My mum and dad are a good barometer of where I am musically and they critique all my music. They think this one is the best since 'Play Me Out'.

Did you write the bulk of this material by yourself, or did you bring in partners to achieve a certain feel?
100% of melodies and lyrics are by me, and 90% of the music. More than ever before, which is why I produced it alone as well, so it was a total Glenn album. Chad was busy and I wanted my team to be around me all the time so I took on the producing duty alone. It was a good thing for me as well because I'm getting offers to produce other artists so it's good for my C.V. It helps get my name known as a producer.

I've always liked the sound of your albums – they have a strong sound, but they're not too raw, not too polished, they have a nice balance.
I actually strip things away in the mix. I may add too many instruments but I strip it back down as I mix.

I see. The other thing I wanted to ask about this record is in our last interview, you said you intended to use a track that was going to be on Hughes/Thrall II. Did you end up doing that, and if so, which one was it?
'Satellite' is the one – I wrote it three years ago alone in my home. I'll give you an exclusive on this because I doubt any other magazine knows about this – 'Satellite' was written for Hughes/Thrall II which never came about as I explained to you last time. I went into my vault and thought 'Well, I've got this great song...' – there's half a dozen songs on Hughes/Thrall II that I wrote alone, but 'Satellite' was a good fit for this record. As I say, I think it's one of the best songs I've ever written, and for the Glenn Hughes fan who reads that, they might think 'Wow, that's a pretty heavy statement' but when they hear it, hopefully they'll feel the same.

Well, you described the album before I heard it as “smacking of Glenn Hughes” and I think it really does. If anything, I think you've benefitted from not having Chad there to bounce ideas off because it's given us a more true Glenn piece of work.
It really is – I was in the studio twelve hours a day with the engineers like Jim Scott from the Peppers and I was making my life's work. I knew it going in and my manager always believes me and I play him songs over the phone and he knew I had a great record. Chad knew I had a great record...

Looking at how your last two records were received, I can't see this album getting anything but good reviews apart from perhaps from the Purple die hards who still think it's the seventies.
You know brother, that's a great statement you just made. If people don't understand this album, they're just totally not growing with Glenn Hughes. If they don't want to, go listen to 'Burn' or 'Storm-bringer', I'll be very happy with that. But if you are growing with me and you understand where I've been going in my life musically, then you will love

this record. If you're a REAL Glenn Hughes fan, this album is for you.

And you evolve while putting out records of a consistent quality. If you look at David Coverdale, as much as I love him, he's got a new Whitesnake album coming out and it's the first one for ten years – during which time he's just played old songs on tour.
David's actually heard these tracks – I send him my work and he thinks this album is just ridiculously phenomenal. It's really nice to hear that from him. He'll go out and tour his record with his band and do well. I'll tour doing brand new music and pushing all the limits of my music – I'm not comfortable with the thought of playing a nostalgic set. If I did that, it would just be about money. I could probably make ten times more money if I just did a classic Mark III/Mark IV Purple set, but I make a good living playing my new music which is much better. The general consensus of Glenn Hughes fans right now spans ages 15-25. If you're older than that, you're welcome to come, but my younger fans are funkier and they want to hear new songs. I think it's ridiculous to ignore new output for old songs. I'm sure David will play some new ones – at least I hope he does.

I've got more shows than ever lined up, my manager's phone has not stopped ringing, and we believe that's because I've got a great band, I'm singing better than every and we're out there playing brand new music. People freak out when we play 'You've Got Soul' or 'Stepping On' from the last record. The new songs will do that two, especially with the super funk of Luis Maldonado. Luis is Tommy Bolin's ghost on 'We Shall Be Free' – check out the solo – that IS Tommy Bolin!

Where did you find him?
Through my manager Carl – he's from San Diego, and he turned down Perry Farrell to join my band. He's the new kid on the block – he's thirty three, young, looks like he's twelve, I'm his favourite artist and he's coming out with me. He's a monster on stage, he's funky and my music is funk driven. I've made some records that didn't have that vibe and I kind of feel bad about that – listen James, why shouldn't I be who I am?

Precisely – and I welcome the fact that you're at this stage now! I hear you shot a video for 'Love Communion' as well?
That's right – it'll be on the CD. We shot it in L.A. about a month ago. It's shot at the studio and on the beach, a bit of my house, it's cool. It's quite interesting.

The other thing I wanted to cover in this interview is something I hope you're aware of – do you remember ages ago, I asked you about an album you did with Robin George that was simply known as the 'Warner Brothers' album that was never released?
Yeah, I know it's been released.

That's a relief – I was running the risk there – a few times now I've mentioned something from an artist's past and they've not even known it's come out!
Well, I'll tell you what it is James – in 1990, Robin and I went into his home studio and we did some demos for a record that was for Warner Brothers. They guy that signed me, Pete Winkleman, who's now the owner of the MK Dons, he left the company which resulted in the album being shelved. Then I got fully sober and fit and I heard the demos and the songs and thought it's not really what I want coming out because I wasn't fully clean and sober and it's a bit out of date.

Now, some fucking record company has put it out – I won't see a penny of it but that's not what gets me, it's because it's something that I've not approved. I haven't heard what they've done with it so I don't know what it's like – it might sound ok but it's not what I want being released.

From my point of view as a fan, I had the bootleg version of it that was leaked and the songs were

good and your vocals were amazing, so therefore I wanted a proper version of it – especially 'Don't Come Crying' because that one blew me away. The bootleg demos were drenched in tape hiss and didn't sound that good, but the songs still had a quality to them in my opinion. So I'm sorry it's come out like this for you, but for me as a collector of your work, I'm delighted. If you wish to hear it I'll send it to you.

Sure, that would be great - I've got to get a copy and hear it – there's so much Glenn Hughes stuff out there, anything with my name will be released by some bastard.

Maybe it is a bit dated, a bit nineties, but that's when it was done. I do like it. To be honest though, I doubt anyone other than die hards like me who knew about it will pick it up. Some of the songs are excellent, like 'Don't Come Crying', 'Haunted', 'Things Have Got To Change'...
Maybe it's not a bad representation of 1990, but it's 2008 now and not relevant to what I'm doing. Maybe you're right, it'll probably be something collectors want.

I liked the song 'Things Have Got To Change'. I think that's a really good song, man. I wish I'd fucking written it! As long as people know this album was against my wishes - make that clear.

This is one of the reasons I've stopped doing sessions, things like this come out that you can't do anything about.

I'm all out of questions now, because I'm just overjoyed with your new album, so I'll wrap things up.
James, it's always a joy to talk to you. I can feel in your voice that you love my music and I do a lot of interviews but I really enjoy speaking to you because I feel a genuine love for my music.

Thank you – it's absolutely genuine, I've been a fan of yours for... God, years!
Well come see us man, come down to Liverpool or London or Wolverhampton. God bless bro!

