

# WHITESNAKE

interview with Doug Aldrich  
Charming the Sonic Snake

By Andrea Seastrand

On April 22 Whitesnake slithers out of its den with their newest release on Steamhammer, *Good to Be Bad*. The album, which showcases the band's talent and metamorphosis from their beginning until now, contains songs sure to appeal to fans of the band's earliest, blues-inspired days to their hard rock era during the 80s and 90s. Legendary front man David Coverdale says the album "contains all the elements I enjoy about Whitesnake. [...] I'm thrilled with it. It's very butch, very muscular." Guitarist, songwriter and co-producer Doug Aldrich (Hurricane, Dio) talks about the album's composition, future tour plans and what being a member of the band's current line-up means to him.

**Good to Be Bad marks 30 years for Whitesnake, a big anniversary.**

It was started in '78 so that's quite an accomplishment to have a band still be doing music after that long. **In terms of the album, how does the music on *Good to Be Bad* reflect the band's progression over three decades?**

Well, I think that it sounds like a blend of a lot of eras of Whitesnake. When we were writing we didn't think about this being the 30th anniversary so it would be nice to have a record out, or even that it would be nice to have an album out that had a lot of flavors of different eras of Whitesnake; but it just turned out that way. It was really an inspiring process, writing with David. We wrote a bunch of songs and had hundreds of ideas that we pursued; then we'd narrow it down. Then we got this group of songs that started to sound like a record. The cool thing is that there are flavors of classic, a little more legitimate, blues-based Whitesnake stuff, then there are things that might remind people of the middle period, which was stuff like the *Slide It In* era and there are some flavors that remind people of the '87 type stuff as well. It's all done, production-wise, in a little bit more of a modern production, less reverb on the snare. It's kind of the best of everything but we didn't plan it that way.

**What are the plans for touring in support of the album?**

We started in Australia and New Zealand a couple weeks ago. Normally when we start we just keep going, but this time there

was a show that came up in New Zealand with us, Ozzy, KISS, Alice Cooper and Poison. It was a really fun show so we agreed to do that then went over to Australia for a couple weeks. It takes about three to five shows before you start locking in and we were *just there*. The last show was the best one and now we're on a break. Technically we start our tour the end of this month. We'll rehearse in L.A. and then start in South America. Straight from there we go to Europe and a lot of those dates are with Def Leppard, co-headlining. Leppard's a great band; they obviously have great songs and are cool guys. I hope that, after the European stuff in the summer, we'll be touring in the states.

**The line-up is made up of members from other heavy metal bands. How does the knowledge and experience of musicians like Reb Beach (Winger, Dokken) and yourself (Hurricane, Dio) brought together in this version of Whitesnake?**

Whitesnake's had a lot of member changes over the years, from '78 until now, but it's always maintained its identity and the main reason for that is because of David. It doesn't really matter who's in the band as long as he's there. Fortunately I have a background of being in bands that were influenced by early Whitesnake. It's nice to bring in different people – Reb's got a really amazing background, a killer guitar player – and the two of us together, even though our styles are different, seem to work with this current version. We have a new drummer named Chris Frazier and his playing reminds me, in some ways, of Ian Paice who was the original drummer and was also in Deep Purple. [His playing] adds a really cool groove to the album. I don't know, David's kind of a genius with picking band members. He's always worked with great guys. He's a perfectionist and wants it to be great. He wants everyone to be better than they've been before. I definitely feel that working with him has made me better than I've ever been.

**Getting back to the album: The last track, "Til the End of Time," definitely has a different sound to it.**

Yes, it does. David and I started writing at the end of 2006. I went up to his place kind of as a vacation and also to start dabbling with ideas. We had a successful



week and made demos of two songs. Then after about four months, we were starting to get burnt. We would write all this stuff and, with the help of the producer, Michael McIntyre – who has worked with David for twenty years and is a trusted friend as well – he would help us narrow it down and give a fresh ear and a fresh perspective. We finished off another two songs and thought 'This is a really strong record but we're tired. Let's get on with recording.' I was driving home one day – it's an amazing drive from Lake Tahoe to L.A., both David and I would drive back and forth – and he called me and said 'It might be nice to have just one more song. The record's about 55 minutes long and it might be nice to have an hour long CD.' So I said I had a couple of acoustic things that might be cool and different. We were looking for something that got us off. It didn't have to sound like Whitesnake. It just had to sound like something that we wanted to do.

[David] heard "Til the End of Time," just the basic idea. He had some chords that made a great chorus. The very end of that song has this Zeppelin-esque or Whitesnake-esque rhythm part and that was actually the very first thing we ever wrote together in 2003. It's really a different song and that's why we dig it so much. It's simple and it shows [that] David's got a massive voice. When he's competing with distorted guitar and keyboards and drums, he sounds amazing and cuts right through. But it's nice to hear all of the nuances. [The song] just has a cool vibe about it, especially after you've been hammered by the rest of the album. It's actually my favorite track, for a couple of reasons.

See, when you're composing

songs you don't know if they're going to be good or bad, but all the songs that you come up with are important to you and they're like your children. Then you have an outside person that you trust who says, 'Hey, this one's really good...this one let's leave off.' So by the time we had those ten songs, there was a strong reward. No matter what's going on in your life it feels really good to accomplish that. And we were so burnt out that when we had one more to write we all felt like 'Oh, man, we have one more to write. Can we do it?' and we did and were really excited.

Jimi Hendrix did a song that was never properly recorded. It was a jam session that somebody had filmed where he was playing a 12-string and it was called 'Hear My Train A'Comin'. It was like this old blues thing. That was the original idea, something like that and it turned out a little different, a little more organic maybe. But I just like it because it's simple, it's got a great lyric and David sounds amazing on it.

Personally, for me, there were some amazing things going on in my life – nothing to do with music. I had a personal, difficult time that was brutal for me, but was nothing reflecting on the music or anything to do with Whitesnake. [Writing] that song helped me get through it. It's an important song for me and I just love it. You know how there are those songs in our lives that remind us of great times we had when we were kids or maybe there was something that was difficult for us to get through, but there was that one song that helped. 'Til the End of Time' is, for me, both. It's a weird thing because I have the greatest feeling about it when I hear it but, at the same time, it's bittersweet.

**You spoke a little about doing**

**a blues song. That reminded me of your bio that says you like to experiment and 'elicit sounds and tones that break standard musical barriers.' I'm wondering how – in a genre that is sometimes criticized as being highly formulaic – how you keep experimentation and improvisation as priorities.**

That's the fun thing, when you experiment. You can be inspired by all kinds of stuff. It could be an old blues song or classical or a country song. Sometimes you'll hear something that's not related to the kind of music that [you] do and you'll think 'Wow, that's pretty cool. Imagine if it was done in our way with heavy guitar or...' Those times, it's fun because you're inspired by something that wasn't related and it helps you keep it your own music fresh.

Other times there are sonic things that can help. As an example, somebody lent me an old amplifier that was really funky sounding. When I plugged into it, it made me play differently. It was inspiring that way. I ended up using that for some different colors and that freshened up the sound, sonically. Lastly, we really experimented with a lot of different tunings or different keys that you wouldn't normally record in. Like the key of B is not necessarily a common key for a rock song because it's kind of high, it doesn't really have a lot of open strings you can use with it. It's just, generally, not like the typical AC/DC thing, but writing in different keys was fresh. And writing with different guitar tunings might [lead to] different sounds. 'Lay Down Your Love' is a new tuning that I'd never messed around with, but it turned out really cool because the way that the guitar's tuned and the way that the riff is, it's got this really slinky thing to it. So those

types of little things will keep [me] excited and can make a song special. On the album we have songs in pretty much every key except for, I think, A flat or something. We have a song in B, E, F, C, C sharp, A, D.

**What does it mean for you, personally, to be a member of such an iconic band?**

It's totally a blessing. I feel very fortunate. I know a lot of guitar players who are much more accomplished than I am and they're not able to make a living from their music, from the love they have for it. Just to be working is really a blessing. When I was getting into Whitesnake, the early music had a real different sound. It was almost like this cutting edge type of heavy blues-rock sound that I hadn't heard before. David's always been the ultimate front man. The first time I'd heard him on *Burn*, which he did with Deep Purple, there was him singing and there was also Glenn Hughes singing a little bit, but David's voice is so rich and it sounded killer. So to be working with him is just an honor. He's one of the greats. He is the best in his genre that there is. Aside from that, it's really rewarding because we've become great friends. I didn't have a brother, but he's like the older brother I never had.



**Whitesnake's *Good To Be Bad* is available now. For more visit [whitesnake.com](http://whitesnake.com)**