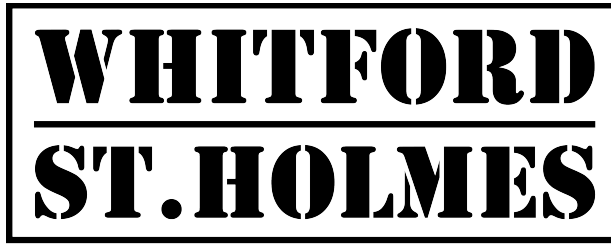


WHITFORD/ST. HOLMES



BRAD WHITFORD & DEREK ST. HOLMES

"We loved the idea of being in a rock band that's really about the music, not about personalities," explains guitarist Brad Whitford. "We don't have to worry about a Steven Tyler or Ted Nugent or anybody else. We've all been guys in a more supporting role in big bands," he says of Whitford/St. Holmes--Aerosmith and Nugent, respectively, of course--"so an opportunity like this is really rare, where everyone brings so much talent and excitement and openness to the table." The quintet, rounded out by Tesla drummer Troy Locketta, bassist Chopper Anderson and keyboardist Buck Johnson, are "all old-school rockers, super-passionate about rock 'n' roll, the music that moved us as teenagers," says Whitford. In fact, the first single from their June 2016 *Reunion* album (Mailboat Records), the muscular, catchy album kick-off, "Shapes," even nods to the Yardbirds.

Reunion's nine songs are packed with '70s swagger and hooks—and some sweetness on songs like "Tender is the Night." The school-of-hard-knocks throwback rock approach, seamlessly melded with modern-day production and sensibility, makes for instantly-classic FM radio rock for the new millennium. "Flood of Lies" might be Aerosmith circa *Get Your Wings*, St. Holmes' stellar, powerful voice at once bluesily emotive and powerfully crystal clear; the boogie-blues of "Hot for You" is a playful-dirty sing-along, while "Shake It" is a ballsy bluesy romp not unlike AC/DC meet the Police. In modern-day parlance: Listen If You Like: Montrose, '70s-era Steve Miller and pull-no-punches rock.

If *Reunion* is new and fresh, the group's origin story goes back to the late '70s, when Aerosmith and Nugent shared a manager. Whitford and St. Holmes became fast friends, they recall with a laugh: "When you have two guitar players hanging out you know what's going to happen!" The duo began jamming, formed the band, and recorded and put out *Whitford/St. Holmes* in 1981. The 10-song album became a cult classic, and while fans clamoured for a follow-up, life and rock stardom interfered. It wasn't until 2015 when the friends—living near each other in Nashville--found the stars aligned again. A tour quickly proved the chemistry was back, if not better, than ever.

As St. Holmes notes, all the musicians live in the Nashville area, helping make them the "kind of band that you started when you were 16, just local guys jamming." Yeah, if local guys are super-

rock stars who sold millions of records and played in front of hundreds of thousands of rabid fans the world over for decades! But in Whitford/St. Holmes, that raw energy and excitement of a new band is evident, and deftly captured in the near-live recordings on *Reunion*, produced by Whitford and St. Holmes at The Castle Studios in Franklin, TN. St. Holmes and Whitford collaborated on the songwriting and lyrics, always remaining in service of the song, the singer noting, “if a song’s getting to be more than four minutes, we need to find a great ending or change-up,” we’re not about endless jamming or boring us or the audience!”

The creativity was profuse and basic: “We love that straight-ahead, Bad Company type vibe of keeping it simple,” explains Whitford. “The music was kind of just dictating itself to us and so we were able to do what felt natural and intuitive to us. We’re pretty diligent guys, but at the same time we have a ball doing this album. We’ve all been in different experiences where it’s not as much fun and this was the exact opposite, it was just a labour of love, and I think in the songs on *Reunion* you can hear that.”

Whitford and St. Holmes listened to both their records back to back (the debut album was recently remastered) and agreed: “we have a signature sound; it sounds like the same band. I think there’s been an evolution in the song writing; we’ve matured as players and composers, but there’s a through-line.” On *Reunion*, it wasn’t about perfection: “not like a lot of the stuff I’ve worked on over the past few years with Pro Tools where you lose that feel that human quality,” says Whitford. “If you have a group of guys who play really well together and vibe, isn’t that what you want? Why would you put it together like a puzzle? Just record the band playing!”

Additionally, Lucketta, Anderson and Johnson (who were not part of the 1981 lineup) get huge credit from the founders: “It wouldn’t sound the way it does without these guys, because they bring so much talent and cool to the table and it all somehow seems to fit so nicely,” they observe. It’s that too-rare combination of fun and fluid in the W/SH camp: “Derek really encouraged me, made the process really easy,” says Whitford of his lyrics and songwriting. “A lot of feelings and emotions just kind of poured out of me.” And yes, the guitarist admits, “A lot of stuff is about my other band. It was very therapeutic for me.” A listen to the lyrics in “Hell on Fire” or “Keep on Moving” proves him out.

The future for Whitford/St. Holmes is open—and yes, there are new songs in the can already—but the band is currently laser-focused on the present and *Reunion*. St. Holmes says, “We want to share it with our friends, all those hardcore rock ‘n’ roll fans... Like our fans and good whiskey, we all seem to get better with age. These new cuts are bold, brassy and ballsy and we can’t wait to play them live.”

Whitford concurs with his bandmate, concluding, “This is really rare opportunity actually, you don’t have these kinds of collaborations happen very often in your life. “I just feel really fortunate to be part of this little rock band.”

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