

GUITAR WORLD

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Bobby Whitlock and CoCo Carmel Talk New Acoustic Tour Featuring Derek and The Dominos Classics



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There can be no denying that pianist/guitarist Bobby Whitlock has made an immeasurable impact on rock history.

Whitlock is a co-founder—along with Eric Clapton—of Derek and the Dominos, whose 1970 album, *Layla and Other Assorted Love Songs*, is a bona-fide rock masterpiece. He's also appeared on several other seminal albums, including George Harrison's *All Things Must Pass* (1970).

This month, Whitlock, along with wife and musical partner CoCo Carmel, will hit the road with the Just Us Tour. It's an intimate, 11-date run that features an all-acoustic set of material from Whitlock's past, as well as the stories behind the songs.

Expect to hear classic Dominos songs, including “Bell Bottom Blues,” “Tell the Truth,” “Why Does Love Got to Be So Sad,” “I Looked Away,” “Keep on Growing” and “Thorn Tree in the Garden,” as well as newer songs co-written by Whitlock and Carmel.

What makes the tour even more special is that a top-notch guitarist from each city on the tour will be joining Whitlock and Carmel on stage. The guitarists include Josh Roberts, Kelvin Holly, Moses Mo, **Godfrey Townsend**, Pat Harrington, Matt Hamann, Andy Argondizza, Angelo Santelli, Bob Wagner and Nicholas Tremulus, all of whom will add their own interpretations of these classic songs.

I recently spoke with Whitlock and Carmel about their tour and what it was like to be a member of Derek and the Dominos.

GUITAR WORLD: How did this new tour come together?

WHITLOCK: A few months ago, someone contacted me about checking out this amazing guitar player he knew. He said he already knew all of the songs and that we should get together. So I watched a video of the guy and sure enough, he was great! His name was Tolo Marton, and he’s one of the premier guitar players from Italy. So we had him come down to play a gig and it was just fantastic. He knew every song and could also improvise and do his own thing. It was around the same time we were putting together dates for this tour, and that’s when we decided to have a premier guitar player from each city come sit in with us.

What do you enjoy most about these intimate shows as opposed to ones with a full band?

CARMEL: For me, it’s natural and a more personal experience. It also gives Bobby the chance to really talk about the songs—how they came about and how it all went down in the studio. You can’t do that with a band.

WHITLOCK: It puts you closer to the audience and leaves things open for interpretation. I can also tell you stories like how Eric [Clapton] and I were sitting in his house one day. Eric’s got a guitar on his lap and was having heart pains over Patti Harrison. We were sitting there talking about our three favorite subjects—guitars, cars and women. After he got to the woman part of the conversation, Eric turns to me and says, “Why does love got to be so sad anyway,

Bobby?” I said, “Why does that have to be such a long song title?” [laughs]. The song started right then.

How did you meet Eric Clapton?

WHITLOCK: I was working with Delaney & Bonnie and Friends, and some tapes we had done had been sent to George Harrison. George liked it and turned us on to Eric, who was in Blind Faith at the time and doing a tour. Eric asked us to be the opening act for their American tour and the two of us became friends and started hanging out together. Our band was all about having a good time singing and playing, and Eric really wanted to be a part of that camaraderie. So he asked to be in the band.

That was such an amazing era for music. What was the vibe like back then?

WHITLOCK: Everyone felt like they were bullet proof. We were young guys playing music like we had been around for 18 lifetimes, and it was non-stop. But it was never about the money, the drugs or anything else. It was always about the music.



How did Derek and the Dominos get together?

WHITLOCK: It all started when George called Eric and asked us to put together the core band to record what would become *All Things Must Pass*. At the time, Eric and I were just hanging out and writing songs, but after the album was complete we started rehearsing and putting it all together. We did a few tours and then went to Miami to record.

How did Duane Allman become involved in those sessions?

WHITLOCK: While we were recording the album, we found out that the Allman Brothers Band were playing at a nearby convention center. So we all went down to see them and stood right in front of Duane. I remember when Duane looked down and saw Eric, he just stopped playing. He just couldn't believe it! Then when Duane stopped, Dickey Betts looked over and saw Eric and he stopped playing too! [laughs]. After they had regained their composure, we waited until after their set and asked them to come over. We all went back to the studio and hung out all night jamming. That's when Eric and Duane became friends and we asked him to play on the record with us.

What was the songwriting process like for *Layla and Other Assorted Love Songs*?

WHITLOCK: Before we recorded anything we would always jam. I remember the first song Eric and I wrote together was "I Looked Away." Then we were messing around with bluesy stuff and wrote "Bell Bottom Blues." The next thing we jammed on the following night had a funky, Latin feel that eventually became "Keep on Growing."

What are you looking forward to most about the Just Us Tour?

CARMEL: Everything! Bobby and I have never toured together. We love to travel and getting out there and meeting people. This is really all about Bobby and his legacy. I'm looking forward to playing these songs and seeing the excitement of the audience.

WHITLOCK: For me, it's getting to play with all of these different guitar players. I'm excited to hear what someone else's take is on a song that I wrote. To think that I was 22 when I recorded *All Things Must Pass* and *Layla* still blows me away. People have written to us saying they've waited nearly 40 years to hear all of these songs in

one show. I know Eric has done one version or the other of “Layla” and maybe “Bell Bottom Blues” and “Why Does Love Got to Be So Sad” a few different times, but no one has ever heard all of these songs together. We’re really looking forward to it.

For more about Whitlock, Carmel and their tour, visit bobbywhitlockandcococarmel.com.

The Just Us Tour:

September 11 – Memphis, TN – The Warehouse w/ Josh Roberts

September 12 – Nashville, TN – The City Winery w/ Kelvin Holly

September 15 – Decatur, GA – Eddie’s Attic w/ Moses Mo (of Mother’s Finest)

September 19 – New York, NY – B.B. King Blues Club w/ Godfrey Townsend

September 20 – Sellersville, PA – Sellersville Theater w/ Pat Harrington

September 22 – Fall River, MA – Narrows Center For The Arts – Matt Hamann

September 23 – Somerville, MA – Johnny D’s w/ Andy Argondizza

September 26 – Cleveland, OH – The Beachland Ballroom w/ Angelo Santelli

September 27 – Rochester, NY – The Lovin’ Cup w/ Bob Wagner

September 29 – Ferndale, MI – The Magic Bag w/ Angelo Santelli

October 1 – Berwyn, IL – Fitzgerald’s w/ Nicolas Tremulus