

# SNAKE EYES

**Tanya O'Callaghan** is Whitesnake's new bass player, and for her, the mission is just beginning. Let's hear what lies ahead...

**Interview:** Ellen O'Reilly

**Photography:** Katarina Benzova, Payton Murphy, Getty

**T**anya O'Callaghan is at the top of my list of inspiring women. Growing up in the small town of Mullingar in the heart of Ireland, she took a leap of faith and relocated to the other side of the world to follow a dream. Her vision paid off, and then some, as she's now traversing the world for the next two years as the bassist of the legendary rock band Whitesnake, treading the boards behind the iconic David Coverdale. So how did this dreadlocked country girl get there? It's time to find out.

"You know how it is in the hired gun and session world," says O'Callaghan. "I'm out playing with all these different bands, so when gigs arise they know you because you've been out on the scene. David saw me playing with Steven Adler and Dee Snider, so when the bass chair opened he had it filed away in the back of his head that he would call me. I got this very, very out-of-the-blue call. It was in the middle of the pandemic, so I had semi-retired and was busy working on a documentary called *Highway To Health*,

when I got these emails from their management saying they would be in touch."

She adds, "I didn't know what they wanted, but then I get this call from David, saying 'Hello, darling – would you like to be a Snakette?' It's not the kind of call you get every day! I knew some of the lads in the band already. In fact, I literally know every Whitesnake bassist there's ever been, right back to Neil Murray, and they all called me and wished me the best of luck, which was beautiful. That was actually the best part of it all. Every one of them got in touch – it was so sweet."

**"When you do this, you have to get along with your team. There's no room for egos!"**

We're definitely blessed as part of the bass community, where there's such genuine camaraderie. O'Callaghan agrees, saying "I think with our role as bass players being in the background and being the foundation, there's less ego. It is a personality trait: just let us be in the background doing our jobs, and we're happy!"

So how does it feel to go from being a sidewoman to joining a band of this magnitude? "The really lovely part of this was that David was asking me to join Whitesnake. It wasn't one of those 'Hey, it's a session, and I'm hiring you for three months'. I mean, it's like any tour in that it has an expiry date, but it was immediately more like a family buzz. So for this year and 2023, I'm in the band – it's not like I'm moving around again. It's just one big love buzz. We all adore each other. It's hysterical, because it's such a band of brothers – and a sister, obviously – because David is like that: he picks people very wisely. He doesn't just pick you because of your playing: he picks people based on their personality and positive energy as well. It's smart of him, because it makes touring so much easier and much more enjoyable."



O'Callaghan, centre, with Coverdale to the right.

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Katarina Benzova



Sadowsky NYC basses and strings, an Iron Pedal board, MXR, Darkglass and Dunlop pedals, plus Ampeg amps and cabs, make up the O'Callaghan arsenal.

O'Callaghan and I go back a long way, knowing each other back in the old country before we both moved away, she heading for LA while I relocated to London. We're not doing too bad for two small-town Irish girls, if I say so myself...

"Sometimes you just have to sit down and look back," she agrees. "I've played with all these really cool people that I grew up admiring, but I didn't necessarily make a plan: you've just got to let things unfold. If you listen to the wrong advice along the way – you know, to do things a certain way, to get a certain job, to do this job rather than being an artist – then we wouldn't be where we are today. I've no regrets at all, because I've always followed my gut instinct, and when things like playing with Steve Vai happen, you pinch yourself."

So, is staying humble the secret to longevity? "It certainly helps – because people will want to work with you in the long term. Life's too short: I've toured with some impossible personalities, and it's just not worth it. Having humble people in your team makes all the hard work worthwhile. The performance is the aspect which the public sees, but the real work is the travel and living together. You don't ever really get to have



Here she goes again!

a normal life when you do this, so in order to make it viable you have to get along with your team. There's just no room for egos!"

**Whitesnake's Farewell Tour continues worldwide.**  
**Info: [www.tanyaocallaghan.com](http://www.tanyaocallaghan.com).**