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Marillion - Coffee Bars and Pop Stars



Marillion recently released their latest album, Anoraknophobia, relying on innovative techniques to get the record to their considerable fanbase, 12,000 of whom stumped up the cash to pay for it to be recorded.

The band, perhaps best known during the '80s for the song Kayleigh, is fronted by Steve Hogarth, who talked to musicOMH.com about fanpower, minidiscs and coffee bars...

musicOMH.com: To start with, for those music fans who still remember Marillion as a band fronted by somebody in a hat called Fish, who are the current band members, who plays what and who writes the material?

Steve Hogarth (SH): Steve Hogarth - vocals and the odd additional musical contribution; Steve Rothery - guitar; Mark Kelly - keyboards/samples; Pete Trewavas - bass, vox; Ian Mosley - drums. Steve Hogarth writes the words while the band write the music.

musicOMH.com: People have suggested that your music is "wholesome" - a kind of Genesis for Generation X. Do you accept such comparisons?

SH: Today's "wholesome" is tomorrow's "carcinogenic". Does Billy Idol listen to Genesis then?

musicOMH.com: Along with the Foo Fighters, Marillion is recognised as a pioneering band in harnessing the internet to achieve record sales. What got you so heavily into web marketing, using the fanbase as a marketing tool and handling your promotion in-house?

SH: We tried having a manager and a major label. They ended up with all the money. The fans were the only people we could trust. And the only people who understand us and truly value us. They financed an American tour to the tune of US\$60K in 1997 without us asking. This was a wake-up call. We realized what a power-source our fans could be. This, along with the internet, gave us the possibility to be free. Whoopee.

musicOMH.com: When you are writing your music, do you immediately consider how it will be played live as opposed to in the studio? Which format tends to be the easiest to write for - studio or stage?

SH: We write by jamming live in a room. We do this for weeks and record it all to minidisc. Most of it is rubbish, but every now and then there will be a happy accident. We make compilation recordings of the happy accidents and these become the source material. So our stuff will always work well "live" because it was written that way in the first place.

musicOMH.com: Do you ever think you'd like to experiment with other genres? 'Quartz' sounded like you'd been listening to some dub, a la Jah Wobble, perhaps.

SH: Of course. C'mon, catch up! Have you heard the last three albums? Do you think we sit around cross-legged in a tepee all night listening to old prog albums? Nellee Hooper does that. Ask him!

musicOMH.com: What motivates you to release new albums, having been in the business for so long? And what would you do if you weren't still releasing new material?

SH: It's what we do. If we decided to stop writing, I think we'd probably still write something in our spare time. If we weren't still releasing new material, we'd split up. We're not interested in selling old hits to the chicken-in-a-basket crowd.

musicOMH.com: Who would you most like to collaborate with and why?

SH: Jeff Buckley. Not much chance of that though is there... Kylie then. Why do you think? :)

musicOMH.com: What does "Marillion" mean in context of the band? Answer in any way you choose...

SH: A blessing and a curse. A name we should perhaps have changed in 1989. NOT A SCOTTISH HEAVY METAL BAND.

musicOMH.com: Are coffee bars a good thing?

SH: There's a great one above Benetton in Stuttgart. I was in there yesterday. If you need the toilet they give you a key. It's a must. In general, I think the 50's milk bar thing should be revived. Y'know, coffee bars with happening juke boxes for teenagers to hang out in. There should also be laundrettes with bars and juke-boxes so you can enjoy yourself while your washing's in.

- *Michael Hubbard, 10/2001*