

## Meet Marillion, the band with the most-devoted fans

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By Stephen Humphries / May 18, 2001 at 12:05 pm EDT

When the British band Marillion announced that it was unable to tour North America in 1997 because of the formidable costs involved, fans - spontaneously and without being asked - raised \$60,000 among themselves on the Internet to fund a cross-Atlantic sojourn by their favorite band.

"That made us realize these fans have a lot of power if they get together," says band keyboardist Mark Kelly.

Ethereal atmospherics, adventurous arrangements, and vocalist Steve Hogarth's emotional intimacy had garnered Marillion a fan base that enabled the band to try a derring-do experiment that made global headlines.

To record the multimillion-selling band's 12th studio album, "Anoraknophobia" (Sanctuary), being released this Tuesday, the rock group e-mailed 30,000 fans registered in the band's database and asked if they'd be willing to preorder the album even before a note had been recorded.

The "pay now, play later" scheme bypassed the need for a record-company advance to cover recording costs, thus enabling the band to retain the rights to their music.

"I think it's quite groundbreaking. As far as I know, it's never been done before," says Kelly, who says other bands have since approached Marillion about their fresh business plan. "It's not exactly rocket science," he says.

In a list that's longer than the end credits of a Steven Spielberg epic, the liner notes of "Anoraknophobia" name each of the 12,674 people who pre-ordered the album.

It's estimated that these pre-orders will constitute 5 percent of the album's final sales - the other 95 percent will come from record stores. EMI, a major label, will distribute the album. The band was able to negotiate a respectable artist royalty rate from EMI because the record company didn't have to fund any recording costs.

The resulting album is a compelling series of long, intricate journeys, with Hogarth's vocals acting as a tour guide as the tunes veer off into unexpected tangents - from rocking dub grooves to ambient moments.

Typically, the band eschews lyrics about sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll for more thoughtful ideas. Explaining the meaning behind the album's 11-minute highlight, "This Is the 21st Century," Kelly says that Hogarth's lyrics are about how "science can't explain everything. What about love? Here we are unravelling the human genome and explaining everything away with mathematics and science - there's more to life than what science offers as an explanation."

Marillion is about to tour Europe in support of "Anoraknophobia" and also has tentative plans to tour North America in September and October.

Fans have been known to travel long distances to see Marillion. While mixing their 1998 album "Radiation" in the remote British town of Oswestry, the band cut a deal with a local restaurant owner: If he fed them for two weeks, they, in turn, would play a low-key acoustic show in the 200-seat eatery.

"Out of the blue, it suddenly became worldwide knowledge to our fans, I think through the Internet," says keyboardist Kelly. "Next thing you know, the gig's sold out in a few hours."

Fans traveled from Brazil, Mexico, North America, Australia, Japan, Israel, and the Continent to see the show, and the band was forced to play a second night.

Marillion is bewildered at the passion it inspires. "All we do really is make the best music we can," Kelly says. "I'm absolutely knocked out by the whole thing."

A longer version of this article, along with sound clips, can be found at [www.csmonitor.com](http://www.csmonitor.com).

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