

Interviewer: Why did you decide to use the name "h" instead of your full name ? Is it a way to differentiate this album from Marillion ?

Steve H: Well, first of all, part of the impetus behind making this album in the first place is that, when you've been in a band for a while, you become self-conscious of the fact that you're part of a tradition. And you become self-conscious of the fact that you have become "the lead singer of Marillion, progressive rock band". And personally, I'm quite uncomfortable with that label, because I feel there's so much more to me than that, there's a lot more going on in my head...

Maybe it should be enough, maybe I have a problem, maybe I'm never satisfied, but I want to be not just that. I want to be seen as someone who is somewhere else too. That's part of it. I think the other part of it is, I'm conscious of having inherited the success of Marillion, I didn't start Marillion. I am not the reason why Marillion became famous and went to the top of the charts. I just kinda joined then, later on. And I'm glad I joined then, that's terrific, because it made me quite famous. But I'm constantly worried by the fact that part of the reason that Marillion sell records has nothing to do with me.

So I mean, maybe after seven years I'm a little over-sensitive. But the fact remains that the success was inherited. I don't want to use that inherited success to promote this album. I want this album to be judged as an unknown, for what it is.

Interviewer: That's taking a big risk...

Steve H: Yes it is, but I'm not as stupid as that (laughs). To be honest, I'm also conscious of the fact that our fan-base is so passionate and so loyal, they knew I was making this record before I made it, right ? So they're gonna know. I could call it anything, they'd go and they'd find it.

It's almost as though, I mean it's an over-simplification but, if this record didn't go into the shops and was only available under a stone in the middle of the countryside, these guys would go and find it, they'd find the stone (laughs)! Of course this is an over-simplification because there are other guys who aren't that passionate and wouldn't bother going to the countryside to find the stone, but... I figured what I'd like to do is, okay, the Marillion fanbase, they know I'm making an album, they know what I'm doing, they're either interested in it or they're not. The other people, the rest of the world, in a way, the more anonymous I am, the better, because they might think "oh, that's an album by that guy from Marillion, I know what that's gonna be like, it's gonna be a lot of progressive rock, or Scottish heavy-metal or... (laughs). And I wouldn't like that. I'd rather that those people listen to this once, and... maybe they wouldn't like it either. But at least they'd have heard it, once, you know.

So that's really the reason, it's a combination of all those feelings... You know, if I'd called it "Steve Hogarth", then everyone would have known straight away. At the point when the album is released it's not so crucial, really. It was at the first stage, when I put out the little promo, the 3-track, which went to media, I wanted that to be anonymous, I wanted that to go to magazines and newspapers with no-one having a focussed idea of who it was. And I went through a lot of trouble with the packaging to be anonymous.

There's nothing on that first thing that even says if it's a boy or a girl, it says "h, vocals and songs", there's a picture of some feet, my feet (laughs), and... there's nothing else, it could be anybody... And it lists the players, because I thought if I listed the players, people might listen to it on that strength, they might go "wooh, this is curious, who's got these guys together?", because you know it's the guitar player from XTC, the drummer from Blondie, and the keyboard player from Japan, the bass player from Eurythmics and Trevor Horn's percussionist... "fuck, what's this?", you know. And I wanted those people to at least put it on to find out, that was the idea...

Interviewer: Had you been thinking of doing a solo album for a long time? How old are the songs?

Steve H: The majority of it was written since November 1995, when we finished the "Afraid Of Sunlight" dates in Poland, and I started writing then. Most of it was written between December 1995 and May 1996.

Interviewer: Are there songs on the album that were rejected by Marillion?

Steve H: "Nothing To Declare", in a different form, was rejected by Marillion a long time ago.

When I first joined the band, we were writing "Season's End", I had a plastic bucket with cassettes, and while we were writing, and jamming, if we ran out of ideas, the boys would say, "have you got anything in the bucket?", you know, and I'd take out a cassette and say, "what do you think of it?". "Easter" was one of these songs in the bucket, that was on the "Season's End" album. "Nothing To Declare" was in the bucket too. But at that time it was very different, it was a piano/vocal thing. It changed a lot from that. But I returned to that because I'd always thought it was strong, there was a good feeling about that song.

And the lyrics for "Better Dreams" I've had for quite a long time. I actually started with the lyrics for that song after I'd been to Los Angeles the first time, which was about 1982 when I was with the Europeans. I first started wanting to write a song

about L.A., about my impressions on the way that people function, and that feeling of everything being fashionable, about image being everything... So that's quite an old lyric.

Interviewer: To what extent do you consider the songs on the album would not fit in the music of Marillion?

Steve H: I don't really consider they wouldn't fit in... But I don't know, you'd have to ask them... I haven't really talked to them that much about it. I played them the three track sampler, with "You Dinosaur Thing", "Cage" and "Nothing To Declare". And I think Ian liked "Nothing To Declare", he liked the power of it when it all came in, cause you know he likes power, he's a drummer. And... I think Mark quite liked "Cage". Steve Rothery said nothing (smiles). And... Pete likes it a lot, I think Pete likes a lot of it, but he doesn't say much... I think, on an ego level, the whole thing's a bit complicated too. So I don't even want to say : "look, what do you think of my album ?", because if they like it, they're not gonna want to tell me, because of the competition aspect, and if they don't like it, they don't wanna tell me, because they know they'd offend me. And if they just think it's okay, they don't wanna tell me it's just okay cause they'd offend me. So it's hard to even ask them, cause I don't think they'd feel comfortable even telling me. But it doesn't matter, cause I never made this album for those guys, I didn't make it for "our audience".

Interviewer: Was there any song of which you thought, "I could keep this for Marillion"?

Steve H: No, I'm worried (?) about Marillion when we next get to make a record.

Interviewer: Is that a different writing process?

Steve H: Well, on the whole I start with words, and of course words are words, you can add them on anything... You could add my words on Oasis or... well, I don't wanna get in trouble with certain bands (smiles)... But I tend to start with words on my album always. Some of the songs on this album were poems, they weren't even really... Sometimes I write poems that I'm gonna tear up and move around until they make sense as songs. And sometimes I'm so pleased with them as poems I don't want to alter. This is what happened with "Better Dreams". I don't think "Better Dreams" really works, to be honest, as a "song", and I regret that. But there was no way I was gonna change even one line of it. So "Better Dreams" still works as a poem. And if you could bear to accept it as a poem that is set to music, then it makes sense. But if you think of it as a song, then you could say to me it's too long, it's boring, it goes on and on... and I couldn't argue with you because, you know, you'd have a point. But it had to remain a poem. Whereas... sometimes, you tear them up and you have them make sense as songs.

When I was writing the music, I wasn't thinking about that at all, I had no reason to. If anything, I was writing with a desire for it to be different... certainly a desire to experiment. But if something WAS very different, I would get excited at the fact that it was different, you know... Which is not what Marillion usually do, you know. We jam and if I have an idea that's really different, then they go "oh, you know that's a bit different, er...". And I'm the one who goes, "yeah, isn't it great ?!?" ... You know, "Cannibal Surf Babe" from the last album.

Interviewer: That's your song?

Steve H: It's not MY song, but I was the one that went "hey, this is a fucking great thing, let's do it, let's do it !"... You know, there are conservative elements, that's what I call them, within the band, that I fight against all the time to push it where they don't necessarily think, where usually they go "this is not progressive rock, this doesn't sound like Pink Floyd to me, this doesn't sound like Genesis to me...". And so I tend to assume the role of shaking things up.

Interviewer: Do you also have a problem as a singer with having to go through long instrumental sequences, that can be boring ?

Steve H: Oh, that's absolutely not the case, because I'm... a fairly accomplished keyboard player. I was a session keyboard player before. When I joined Marillion, I had a choice. Marillion said, we'd like you to be our lead singer? And Matt Johnson from The The said, I'd like you to come and play piano for me on my next tour? So I was faced with a hard choice of either joining the hippest musician in the world, cause he was at the time, and he was saying, I've just done this album with Johnny Marr etc. And then I got Marillion going, we'd like you to be our singer? ...And I was like wow ! what a fucking decision I have to make, you know, I either join the hippest band in the world, or the least hip band in the world, what should I do? And I joined the least hip band in the world...

Interviewer: Why ? (smile)

Steve H: Why ? Because I met them and I liked them. They weren't what I was expecting, as people. The attitude they had towards the future was fantastic. They just said look, we've heard what you do, we've heard the songs you've written and we love them. And we want to do what we do, and we want you to do what you do.

Interviewer: Are you a progressive rock fan ?

Steve H: No, not since... What was the last progressive rock album I got excited about... ? I think the last progressive rock album that moved me at all was "Close To

The Edge" by Yes. I was a big fan of Yes, but I think Yes' best album was "The Yes Album", it was my favourite, because it was raw. And I loved "Nursery Cryme", "Foxtrot", but you know, it was a fucking long time ago...

Interviewer: What is progressive to you today ?

Steve H: Well... Marillion ! Yeah, that's what I'd love to think is progressive rock, in the sense that it's experimental, it doesn't work necessarily with a three-minute format, it's deeper than pop music, and it's not derivative. If progressive is derivative, it's a contradiction in terms.

Interviewer: Do you think "Holidays In Eden" was progressive, for Marillion?

Steve H: Well... I think on the whole it was a pop album. The title track wasn't. For me, the title track was disappointing, cause it was neither one or the other, it fell between the two, it was neither. It wasn't really honest, it wasn't really a pop song. This track and "100 Nights" was probably nearer to being, you know, progressive... I think "Holidays In Eden" was our pop album. I think that's common knowledge.

[note : the interview was interrupted at this point as Steve had to rush to the airport to take his plane back to England... sorry for the abrupt end... as one can imagine, we had plenty of other questions to ask...]

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