

Interview with Steve Hogarth

El Mercurio, Chile - October 28, 1998

The following is an E-mail interview with Steve Hogarth about his opinion on the use of new technologies in music and his relationship with computers.

Paola Raffo:

Please, Steve, tell me when, why and how was the first time you used a computer.

Steve Hogarth:

Well, not counting calculators.... I was at Stanbridge Farm near Brighton on the south coast of England in 1990. We were writing "Holidays in Eden". The owner of the place had a little word processor computer - I don't remember the name of it (maybe "Commodore") - it had a little monitor with a green screen - really primitive - and I found that when I wrote words in print, I found it easier to objectively judge them than when they were in my own handwriting. I have been using word processor software for writing ever since then.

Paola Raffo:

How have new technologies (software, samplers) modified your career as a musician and as a composer? Do they simplify your work, or not? Why?

Steve Hogarth:

The greatest contribution of music technologies is to the creative (or not-so-creative!) artist working alone. I wrote a solo album, "Ice Cream Genius" a couple of years ago and that's when you really need a drum machine, sequencer and samplers. Once you've shelled out a couple of grand (£2000) for the machines, you can create good quality multi-layered recordings with drums, string sections, orchestras etc without any other musicians being involved. This saves time, plane fares, lunch bills, wages, personality clashes, and having to hire a big hall to put all the people in. Obviously, this way of working has a negative aspect - magic can happen through collaboration. It's like the argument about masturbation or having a girlfriend. Which is best? Answers on a postcard please..

Anyway, I wrote most of the songs with machines and then started again recording them with all my favourite players. In one instance, I chose a machine flute overdub for the mix even though I had a real flautist on tape! So there you are!

Paola Raffo:

Some people say computers can even replace "the human touch" at composition and playing. What do you think about it?

Steve Hogarth:

Everything computers can do has been programmed by humans in the first place, so it all boils down to the sophistication and sensitivity of the programming and of the transducer systems. ALL MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS ARE MACHINES. A piano, after all, is a mechanical device and is

limited by it's capacity to interpret the players expressions - similarly the player must learn to operate the piano's "system" so that his ideas become heard the way he (or she) imagines them.

I'm sure computers can be programmed to compose pop songs. I think that's already happening every day. Maybe a time will come soon where elevator music or "muzac" will be generated by a little box which actually composes random symphonies or pop tunes. Everyone could have one in their homes. Perhaps psychiatrists could help program them so that the compositions stimulate parts of the brain which make us feel good. Am I beginning to worry you yet?.. Perhaps people could pay to go to a concert and see the machine hooked up to a big loud PA system and to banks of kaleidoscopic lasers which could shine upon the most beautiful supermodels who could remove their clothes during the show whilst singing into machines which turn their atonal mumblings into beautiful, perfectly pitched voices-of angels singing melodies which are perfect for the music generated by the machine. As systems develop, Drugs, alcohol and prostitution could become a thing of the past. Noone would need them. Certain computers however, may have to be made illegal!

Paola Raffo:

How would you define Marillion's relationship with new technologies?

Steve Hogarth:

We all now have laptops. They are all Macintosh. Mark Kelly also has a PSION series 5 palmtop which he carries everywhere for email. Our keyboards are routed via an Opcode system which manages the voice programs and midi interfacing from various keyboards, midi pedals etc. In short, both in the studio and especially live, we are dependent upon the presence of computerised keyboard and midi management. When we record keyboards we use sequencers as well as tape recorders. Live, we don't us sequencers at all. Samplers are very important to us. These are played via various controllers which are routed by computer. I use wireless radio/midi transmitters during the live show. My most recent toy is a cricket bat which has been custom converted to enable me to play it like a remote keybard. I used it to play a saxophone solo during "This Strange Engine".

Paola Raffo:

For yourself, how much importance has the e-mail?

Steve Hogarth:

Email is a great tool if you need a speedy response to questions from around the world. It's a very useful business tool - you can write a letter to Australia and have a reply a couple of hours later and, unlike a phonecall, all the details are in print! I use email alot for business stuff. It's handy for approving artwork too because you can download picture files. It's also quite useful for interviews! It would be a shame if the postman was made redundant, though...

Paola Raffo:

How have been your experiences with chat (IRC)?

Steve Hogarth:

Great fun. Extremely good for having direct conversations with strangers whilst being able to maintain a discreet distance. In that sense, it's a revolutionary social tool. It breaks down the prejudice of "Strangerism" along with racism, countryism and various other "ism's". Because the net's so international, it's possible to broadcast to the world from your home and have the world listen and reply. It's like having a cross section of the globe in your house for a party, but you don't have to clean up the house afterwards..

Paola Raffo:

What do you think about the Internet, specially about its function as a massive media?

Steve Hogarth:

It's potential as a global mass-communication medium-for-all is still to be fully realised. My biggest concern is that the big corporations who now own the world (and let's face it, that's more-or-less the case!) will find a way to restrict personal freedoms within the net, so that their products become prevalent. If that doesn't happen, then the net will continue to increasingly provide an alternative FREE access to a spectrum of information which isn't censored. Bands like Marillion will reach a stage where we can finance a major record release ourselves, simply by marketing and selling direct to our fans. Unfortunately I'm afraid that capitalism will find a way to control such systems - there'll be major record stores on the net which are easier to access than minor ones and people like us will end up needing to pay to sell through these sites if we are to compete. That's my suspicion anyway.

At the moment, the charts here in the UK are easily influenced by the major labels' money. I can't imagine them easily letting go of their high earning investments.

Paola Raffo:

Would you broadcast a concert in real time, through the Internet? Why?

Steve Hogarth:

I'm sure it's something we'll be doing quite soon.

Paola Raffo:

Are you a "Web surfer"? Which are your favourite Web sites (besides "The Official H Website")? ;-)

Steve Hogarth:

I don't have alot of spare time to sit in front of the computer at home. I carry my laptop with me everywhere. It has an on-board modem for emails but it's a little slow for web-surfing. I know Mark Kelly visits alot of the shareware sites for downloading music software.

He recently acquired a brand new system for my Kurzweil K2500 sampler. I find it mindboggling to think that it's now possible to completely improve and update a musical instrument without loosening a single screw!

Paola Raffo:

If you have the opportunity to make a CD-ROM about Marillion, which things about the band (and yourself) would you include in it? Why?

Steve Hogarth:

We're still thinking about all this.. There's a couple of designers in Hamburg, Germany, who are wanting to put one together for us. We're having a meeting in Hamburg in a couple of weeks. At the moment it's too early to say. We don't want to just put out something average, so it's a big decision.

Paola Raffo:

What computer do you have? What do you use it for? (playing games, send e-mails, surfing the Web, writing lyrics...)? Do you take it with you when you're on the road?

Steve Hogarth:

At home we have a Mac Performa 5400/180 desktop. I use it mainly for Adobe Photoshop applications, because I can't view them on my laptop. I have a Mac Powerbook160 which only has a black and white screen. I always carry it with me. It contains all my poems and lyrics, my business files, faxes, letters, my year planner, my tour diary, tour itineraries, set lists, my accounts, my address book, and damn nearly everything I need in life!

I don't play games.

Paola Raffo:

Marillion played in Chile on June 25, 1997 (it was really amazing!). How would you define the Chilean public? Will Marillion come back to Chile? When?

Steve Hogarth:

I'm reluctant to generalise about a nation (slippery slope...) but I really liked all the people I met in Santiago. It's a city with a village atmosphere! I found the people to have the same spiritual vibe as the Brazilians (who I love) but with a slightly calmer spirit - a kind of serenity. Everyone welcomed us in a genuine way.

The show was great - a real surprise.

We'll come back to Chile the first chance we get. I'm afraid it boils down to money - it's expensive for us to bring our equipment and crew so far, and with the problems in the Brazilian economy, it's unlikely that we'll be able to come to Brazil on this forthcoming tour. We're always open to offers!

Paola Raffo:

Also, I need some information about you (if you're married, children; the city where do you live); who are your favourite singers (or bands), and your hobbies.

Steve Hogarth:

I've been married since 1980 and I have two children, a girl aged 10 and a boy aged 7. I have

lived in many places - all in England - and we're currently living in a small village in the countryside near to Oxford.

My favourite singers: Jeff Buckley, Paul Buchannan, Paddy McAloon, Annie Lennox, John Lennon, Peter Gabriel, Patty Labelle, Ray Charles, Darryl Hall, Sting, Marvin Gaye

Favourite Bands: Beatles, Kinks, The Blue Nile, The Psychedelic Furs, The Who, The Police, Boyzone (only joking!)

Hobbies: Being a husband. Being a dad. Being me.

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Paola Raffo

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