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MARILLION

Surviving the real
threat of extinction
by going DIY.

LIZZY: DENIS O'REGAN, MARILLION: JOBY SESSIONS, WITHIN TEMPTATION: ROB MONK

FROM SEASONS TO SOMEWHERE

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As **Marillion** prepare to release their new album *Somewhere Else*, they look back at 18 post-Fish years during which the band's very survival was under threat before they took their destiny into their own hands.

THE MUSHROOM FARM, SUSSEX, 1989.

"Do you want to meet our new singer, then?" says Mark Kelly.

"Here he comes. This is Steve..."

Into the living area of a small residential recording studio near Brighton walks Steve Hogarth, wearing a lengthy, white fisherman's sweater and a *Brideshead Revisited* floppy ring.

"Alright?" Steve Hogarth says. "Wanna hear some music?"

Even if they'd brought in Tina Turner as their new singer, Marillion would hardly have found anyone less like the previous incumbent, Fish, than Hogarth. He gestures to some chairs that are set out in the middle of room, surrounded by the band's gear. "We haven't really got much on tape, so we thought we'd play it for you," he says.

They begin with *King Of Sunset Town*, and then *Holloway Girl* and *Easter*. The reasons why Marillion have signed up this small, very English, former post-punk singer who was just about to take up a gig with The The when they found him are evident and irrefutable. Marillion, playing that day, were very good indeed.

THE RACKET CLUB, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE, 2007.

"I remember saying to him: 'Unless you're an axe murderer, you've got the job,'" keyboard player Mark Kelly says of Steve Hogarth. "And he said: 'Me? An axe murderer? I've been the victim, mate.'"

18 years after that day at the Mushroom Farm, the band are sitting in another circle in another studio, this time one that they own and run themselves. Steve Hogarth's fisherman's sweater is no longer in evidence, but he is, and he's pointing out a crooked scar on the heel of his hand.

"That's 25 years old, so imagine what it looked like when it happened. I'd been in a

band in the early part of my career where the bass player almost killed me. He was actually trying to murder the drummer. Me and the guitar player got hold of him to try and stop him and I got quite badly hurt. He had a pint glass he'd smashed on the wall, which he was going to screw into this guy's face and which he cut my hand open with... Something like that makes you just a bit more cautious..."

At the Mushroom Farm in '89, Hogarth discovered that Marillion weren't quite as violent as his prior associates. He discovered – or perhaps rediscovered – himself, too.

"When I first got the phone call [with the offer to join the Marillion], I'd just had Matt Johnson asking if I'd play piano on the *Mindbomb* tour with The The. I'd really got into the idea of doing it. I'd been through a deal with CBS, and after you've been through a deal with CBS or Sony you don't want to be a musician any more – and I didn't. Just ask Britney. I was at the head-shaving stage, too. So Matt said do you want to come, and I thought great, I'll be at the back out the way; there will be nothing expected of me. I'd got my head into doing that, when Marillion rang up."

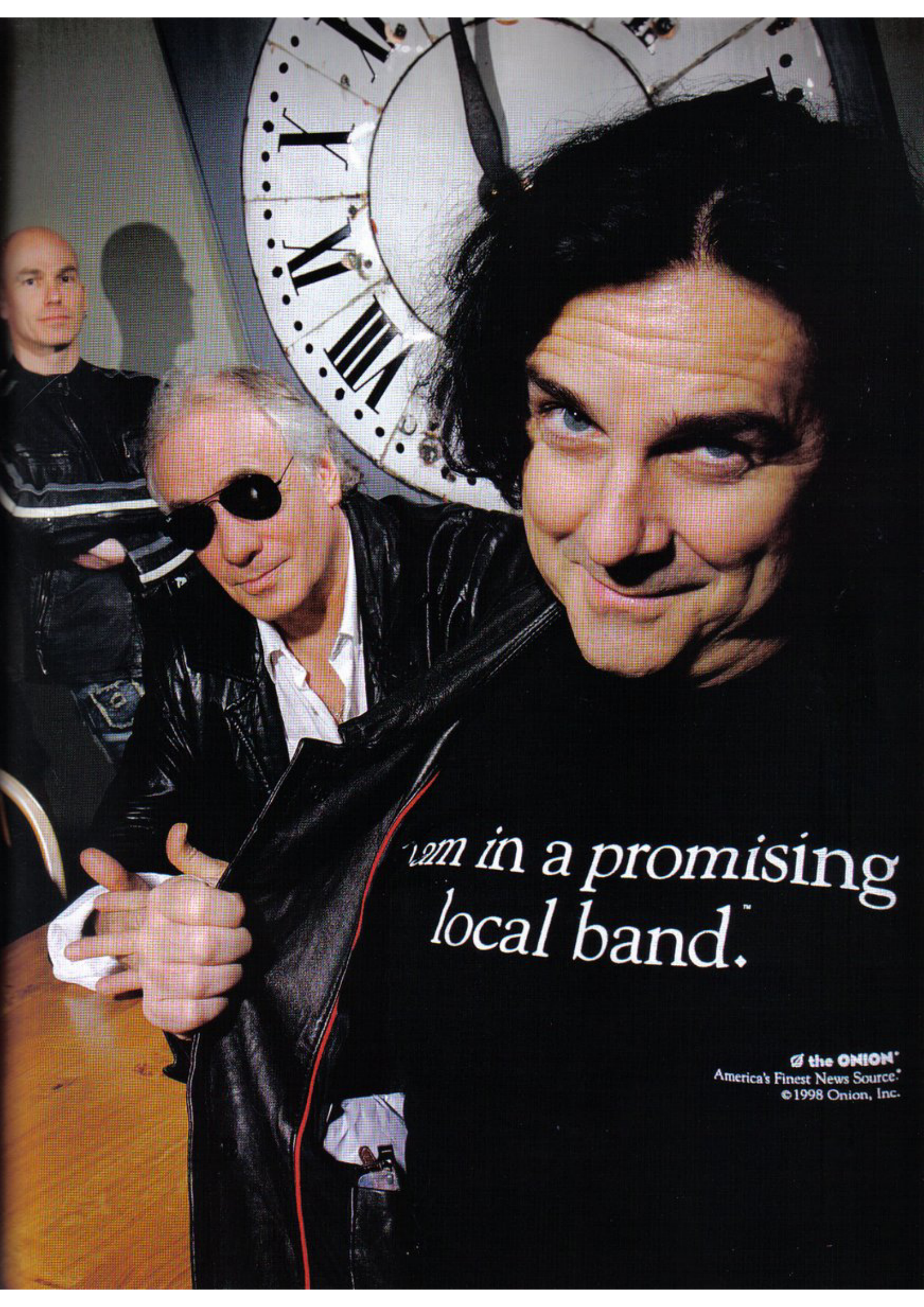
Guitarist Steve Rothery: "We saw so many people, some of whom were Fish clones – didn't interest us whatsoever. When we heard *Games In Germany* from Steve's tape, it was: 'Oh, intelligent lyrics, great vocal performance, a lot more of a singer...' Fish's great gifts were the stage presence, the lyrics; it wasn't so much about the melody with him. Steve was obviously a very melodic singer."

"Although on the surface it didn't seem like we have very much in common, Steve coming from a post-punk band called The Europeans," Mark Kelly says, "if you go back a few more years we all grew up listening to the same music."


Hogarth and Marillion met for the first time at bassist Pete Trewavas's house. ➡➡



Marillion at the Racket Club, Buckinghamshire, February 2007, photographed exclusively for *Classic Rock*.



*12m in a promising
local band.*

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or rather in Pete Trewavas's garden; Pete had cats, and Hogarth had a severe cat allergy. "So we sat in the garden in our coats," Hogarth recalls.

"Like so many people back then, and so many to this day, to me Marillion was Fish. Unless you were the kind of person who would buy concert tickets and saw the band and knew what they were about, if you were just Mr and Mrs Joe Bloggs in the street, Marillion was all about Fish. That's what people think if they don't know. And I didn't know. So I was more or less in that area."

The band, it turned out, were keener on Steve Hogarth than he was on them.

Steve Rothery: "Once we started knocking some ideas around it was just so much more interesting than anything any other singer had done."

Hogarth: "The content of about four music shops had been crammed into Pete's garage. So we went in there, and they said: 'Here's some words. Sing them and we'll play.' I said: 'Alright. Is there a tune?' And they said: 'No, just make one up.'"

Kelly: "We had two tunes. The *Release* was one of them, and *King Of Sunset Town*. We had some lyrics from John Helmer. It was a test of their [the auditioning singers] voice and also their approach. It's amazing how different singers, given nothing but a semi-blank canvas, half of them can't actually do it."

Rothery: "Or they'd fall immediately into cliché: 'Woaaaaah...' Completely wrong."

Bassist Pete Trewavas: "With Steve it [their wanting him to join the band] was instant."

Drummer Ian Mosley: "And then he said: 'I'll go away and have a think about it.' I said: 'What is it you're thinking about?' He just said: 'Hmmm.' I said: 'Can we send you any flowers? What can we do?'"

Hogarth: "Three weeks earlier it was what I least wanted to do and be in the whole world. But you can't really put a price on creative freedom, and that's what they were offering. It took about a month for me to decide."

King Of Sunset Town, *Holloway Girl* and *Easter*, the songs they played that day in 1989 at the Mushroom Farm, all appeared on *Season's End*, Marillion's first record with Steve Hogarth, released just before Fish's first solo album, *Vigil In A Wilderness Of Mirrors*. *Season's End* sold 650,000 copies.

Kelly: "So EMI thought: 'Imagine how many they'd do if they made an album that had a couple of hit singles on it.' And they put us together with Chris Neil for [follow-up album] *Holidays In Eden*." Neil had produced Celine Dion, Leo Sayer and Sheena Easton.

"It was like being in the studio with a *Blue Peter* presenter," says Kelly, "he always had one he'd prepared earlier. We recorded and mixed it in 10 weeks. Which might be a long time for the Spice Girls, but it wasn't for us."

Rothery: "I found it a very difficult period creatively. Most of the stuff I wrote for that album, I'd had for six months or so."

Kelly: "It was quite a difficult process, to find common ground we all liked."

Perhaps as a reaction, the next album Marillion made, *Brave*, was a 72-minute concept album, accompanied by a 50-minute art film by Richard Stanley, the director of *Dust Devil*.

FOUR PLAY

Rich Wilson looks at Marillion's best Hogarth-era albums.



Season's End (1989)

Hogarth's Marillion debut found the band sticking to the musical blueprint of soaring guitars and diligent keyboard passages that made their Fish-era albums so enthralling.



Brave (1994)

A concept album of gorgeous intertwining melodies, with heavier tracks like *Hard As Love* offsetting the likes of *The Great Escape*. Still fresh, it's one of the finest progressive albums of the past 20 years.



Afraid Of Sunlight (1995)

An often overlooked Marillion gem. Written as a more song-oriented response to *Brave*, it proves you don't need to sell out to become more accessible.



Marbles (2004)

Musically closer to Keane than to the prog-rock godfathers who guided Marillion's early sound, it reinforced their reputation as a truly progressive - if not 'prog' - band.

"There was a point when it was touch and go. We had to make an album a year to survive." — Steve Hogarth



Hogarth: "EMI had this new A&R man called Nick Mander. He was one of the new breed; he'd signed up EMF. He was like: 'Oh don't worry about this lot, I'll take care of them. They'll record their fastest album ever, bring it in under budget, no overdubs...' He sent us to [IRS Records boss] Miles Copeland's Chateau. We were supposed to be finished in a couple of months. We'd just about finished the drums by the time we left."

Marillion relocated to Parr Street studios in Liverpool to complete *Brave*.

Rothery: "Nick had put us together with Dave Meegan, who is just about the most meticulous producer you can imagine. He was trained by Brian Eno. Dave doesn't do anything quickly."

Kelly: "Mander was having a fit, and I remember Dave Meegan sat us down and said: 'Look, boys, we can either make a record, or we can make a work of art. Which

is it going to be?' Well, obviously..."

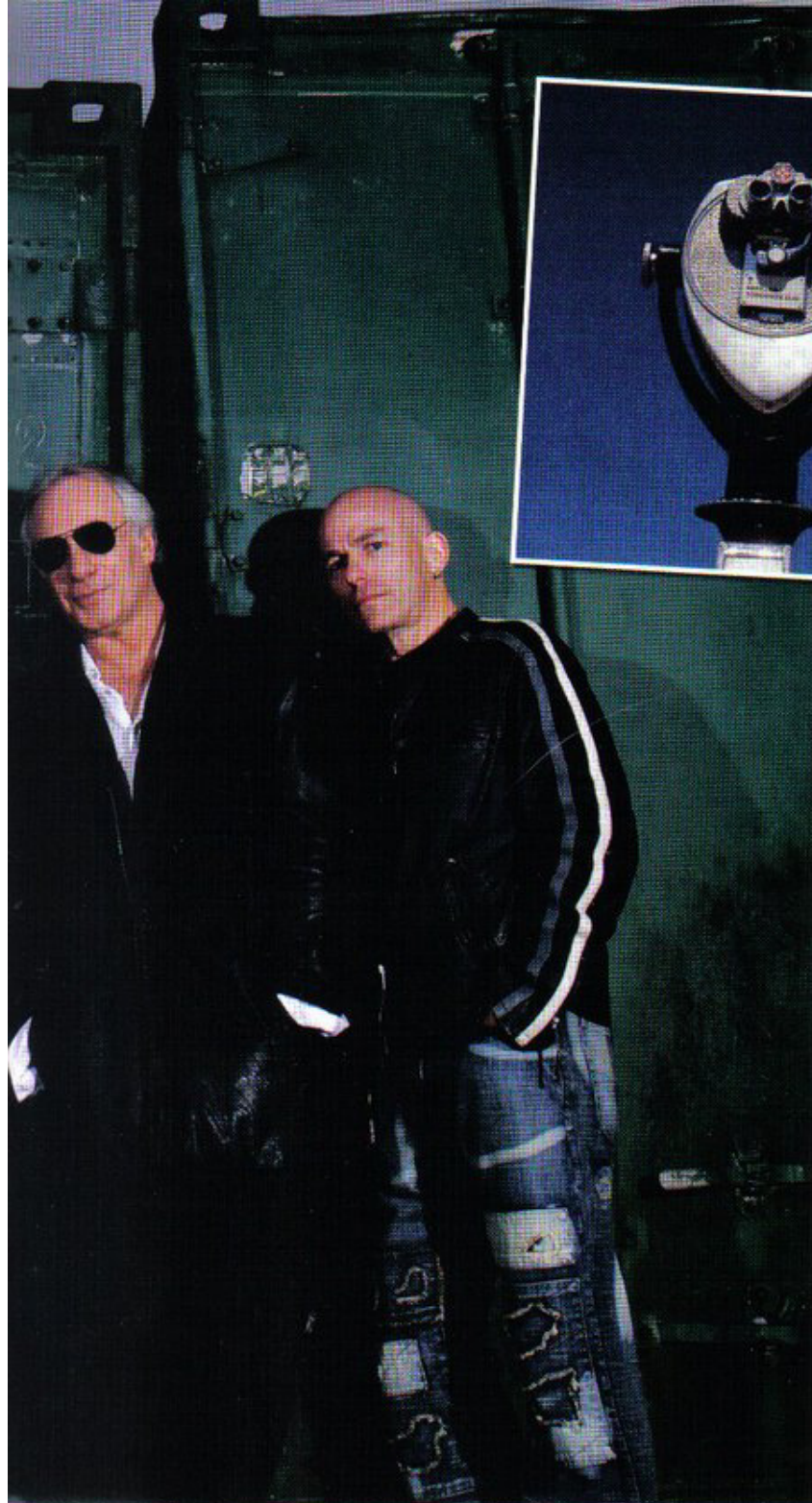
EMI had little choice but to wait, and to see the project through.

Hogarth: "I'm not sure they really knew what to do with it, though. I mean, people don't have 72 minutes to sit down and listen to something through headphones any more. Life has changed. It didn't have any singles on it per se. Or any videos, once we'd made the film."

Kelly: "We just kind of split with EMI then. I mean, it sold 400,000 copies, and we both just sort of shrugged, as if that amount wasn't really worth bothering with."

In the years that followed, Marillion absorbed their lessons. They made one more record for EMI, the excellent *Afraid Of Sunlight*, and then signed to Castle Communications for the next three: *This Strange Engine*, *Radiation* and *Marillion.com*.

Rothery: "You think when you go to an



Marillion: (l to r) Steve Rothery, Pete Trewavas, Steve Hogarth, Ian Mosley and Mark Kelly. Inset: the band's new album, *Somewhere Else*.

indie that they'll make up with enthusiasm what they lack in size. But it doesn't work that way. Even if a major label is just going through the motions with you, they do it better, they're just better at it."

It was the beginning of a period that might have broken the band. "There was a point when it was touch and go," says Hogarth. "We had to make an album a year to survive."

Their manager, John Arnison, took a job with Tony Smith's music publishing company, Hit & Run.

"John sold it to us as the chance to break America," says Mark Kelly. "Tony Smith came round in his big car, and his exact words were: 'I can get you a major deal in America just like going into a shop and buying a loaf of bread.' Of course, we should have said: 'Well go on then,' but we signed up first."

The band were looked after by Rod Smallwood (who is also Iron Maiden's manager) and Sanctuary.

Mark Kelly: "We went to Sanctuary with him once, and he couldn't find his office. He kept opening these massive rooms, going: 'No, it's not this one...'"

"We were desperate for the deal with Castle to run out, then Rod rang one day and said: 'Good news, lads. Sanctuary have just bought Castle, so you can stay on the label.'"

What changed everything for Marillion was an announcement that they could no longer afford to tour America. Via an internet appeal, their fans raised the £30,000 needed to fund the tour themselves.

Mark Kelly: The biggest single donation came from an English guy; I think it was £800. We phoned him and said: 'Why are you doing this? Are you coming to the shows?' He said: 'No. I just believe.'

"We did the tour, played as many places as we could, and I guess we realised that we'd not been on the ball in business terms."

Steve Rothery: "We wanted to book a university tour. Our agent at the time said: 'Sorry, it can't be done.' So I did it myself; it was very straightforward. We used to think it was a big mystery. We'd play a Civic Hall somewhere and we'd get an agent's bill for seven grand. So we'd think, okay, it must be quite complicated. Well I did it in 10 minutes: rang them, found out who I should speak to and booked the gigs."

The band's greatest assets were the Racket Club, which offered them time to write and record, and the internet, which connected them to their fan base without any intermediary. They heard that The Stranglers had once organised a weekend for their followers at a holiday camp, and so Marillion did the same.

Mark Kelly: "We were a bit nervous at the first one, but it was just fantastic. We had a brilliant time. I think only Pete [Trewavas] stayed on site. We started at Butlin's, and now we're up to Center Parcs."

The weekends, of which there have now been four, are held bi-annually. This year's event took place in Holland, and sold out the Parc's 3,000 capacity.

Mark Kelly: "We'd started doing our own fan club CDs when we were still with EMI. We did the *Making Of Brave* and it sold really well; we did some live CDs and sold them on tour. EMI said they didn't care if it was just a few copies. We realised there was a demand."

For their last record, the superlative *Marbles*, the band asked fans to pre-order the album via their website. In return for providing what was effectively an advance to help pay for the recording, everyone who ordered received a double-CD version and a namecheck in the booklet. More than 12,500 people signed up.

Steve Rothery: "It was effectively like getting a quarter-of-a-million-pound advance. If you're with a major label and they give you an advance of that size, you get half before you start recording and the rest once it's mixed and delivered. So that's what we had when he started."

Marbles was an overwhelming success, both critically and commercially, and the band returned to the Top 30 with the hit *You're Gone*. It was a remarkable thing. In the fine tradition of working men, Marillion had seized the methods of production; they had a hand on their destiny.

Now there's a shimmering new album, their 14th, called *Somewhere Else*. It contains a tremendous sense of direction and power. It's a record good enough to show up notions of fashionability or cool for what they are.

"I guess it's about two things really," says Steve Hogarth. "One is my marriage, which broke up after 25 years and a couple of kids. I wanted to write about that, and I wanted to write about what's happening in the world. If you've got a voice, I guess you've got to speak up."

"And you know, it took us two and a half years, but we've already got another album's worth of songs done for the next one," says Mark Kelly. "I guess we just kind of know what we're doing now. When we talk about it like this, it seems like it took a while. But we got there, didn't we?"





Somewhere special

Marillion's fourteenth album sees them still moving forward, still ambitious enough to make it 'a terrific album from a singular band'.

MARILLION

Somewhere Else

Intact

Marillion's name and reputation might be anachronistic, but their music is most certainly not.

Somewhere Else, their fourteenth album, is the sound of a band moving only forwards. Their ties and quirks are all here: *Somewhere Else* is recognisably by Marillion, but like all of their best work it stands slightly apart and off-centre from the rest. In that respect, and in several others, *Somewhere Else* is perfectly titled.

Marillion's great strengths lie in this otherness. Records like *Somewhere Else* can't emerge from a vacuum, and the world opened up again for the band when, in 1997, their fans paid for them to tour America when they couldn't afford to go. This bond, extended now into album pre-orders and other initiatives, freed the band to make precisely the unconstrained music that their followers want.

Marillion's slow-burning revival fired fully with their last record, *Marbles*, a critical and commercial hit that twice took them into the Top 40 singles chart.

Marbles was also a subtle and beautiful album, and yet *Somewhere Else* trumps it



with its breadth and its ambition. Its horizons are summer ones, broad and shimmering.

The album begins with *The Other Half*, and it establishes an eclectic agenda. Had they recorded the song a decade ago it might have been a straightforward pomp rock melodrama, but now it draws all of its power from understatement. When the threads do finally pull together, their power is heightened. It's a technique that they revisit throughout the record, with the help of Michael Hunter's inventive production.

Marillion are wonderful musicians now, too. They knock it around like a veteran football team not letting the kids get a touch of the ball. Throughout songs like *See It Like A Baby*, *The Wound* and *Somewhere Else* they produce a great and dynamic power from the interplay between them.

Ultimately it's pointless trying to describe music like this. It's sort of like Radiohead, it's a bit like Muse, there are parts suggestive of Pink Floyd or Talk Talk. But it's as it says: somewhere else – a terrific record from a singular band.

RECOMMENDED

Jon Hotten