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INTRODUCING SQUACKETT: AN INTERVIEW WITH STEVE HACKETT

By Jeb Wright

What do you get when you cross one of Prog Rock's best bass players with one of its most prolific guitarists? Answer: A Squackett – along with a lot of great music.

Chris Squire of Yes and Steve Hackett, formerly of Genesis, sat down in Hackett's living room and wrote an album, along with producer Roger King, that was not a traditional Prog album. One could say they thought outside the box...or maybe a better description would be that they thought inside the box? Either way one looks at it, the result was not a mile a minute note-fest, instead the trio elected to write songs...you know, normal songs, not the kind that take up an entire side of a vinyl LP.

Now, before all of you Prog Purists start screaming "ASIA" take time to listen to this as, after all, it is a collaboration between two of the best in the business. The album still has plenty of musicianship to satisfy a staunch Gentle Giant fan, so, for lack of a better word, stop your squawking and read this interview.

On May 28<sup>th</sup> or 29<sup>th</sup>, depending which side of the Earth you live on, buy this album as you will be sure to become a Squackett Head after only one listen!

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Jeb: I am very much enjoying the collaboration you have done with Chris Squire from Yes called Squackett.

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Steve: I am glad you enjoyed it. I have been wondering how people were going to respond to it. So far, it has been overwhelmingly great. We have songs on this instead of a showcase of how many notes or runs we can possibly do. We thought we would write some songs for a change.

**Jeb: They are song based but you did not abandon your Prog roots. You are more focused on the total song but there is still some great playing that will please your fans.**

Steve: I hope they will be pleased. The first track, "A Life Within A Day" has a lot of things going on within it. You can hear Led Zeppelin, the Beatles, and Genesis and Yes all going on in there. It has a historical quality to it and it does get a little bit out of control.

**Jeb: You knew Chris previous to this and you've worked together before, haven't you?**

Steve: I met Chris in the mid 1980's when I was involved with Steve Howe in GTR. In 2007, all of these years later, he asked me to play on a Christmas album he was doing. He returned the favor for me on a couple of solo projects I did.

I gave Chris the pick of my material for this project. We spent so much time together on this album that we really became good friends. A lot of this music was made at home, in my living room with three main songwriters, Roger King, who produced, engineered and played keyboards on the album, Chris and myself. It is very much a home grown project.

**Jeb: You have played with world class musicians your entire career. However, Squire is an amazing bass player who really plays lead bass.**

Steve: I am glad you identified the way that he plays bass. He was a huge influence on several generations of bass players, Mike Rutherford included, as he was a fan. That Rickenbacker bass of his has always made a great sound.

**Jeb: How do you keep from bumping into each other with the way he plays?**

Steve: We had a very cooperative way of playing. We decided that every time we had a new idea, that instead of having contempt with the other guys, we would try to incorporate every idea that came up. If Chris felt passionately about extending a section or something like that, then I was fine with it.

The listener does not look at music the same way that musicians do. I had this conversation with Bill Bruford years ago. Listeners usually like it longer than musicians do, as musicians are looking for more and more information. Listeners like to listen to things in a different way.

The song "Tall Ships" is a good example of this. Chris was trying out a new bass one day in my studio in London and the first thing he played was really good. I told him, "That is good. Can you remember that?" The first thing we put down on that song was his bass and it went through the entire song.



**Jeb: There must have been no pressure recording in your house, however, some musicians say the pressure helps drive them.**

Steve: It was self-funded and there was no pressure at all. I think what you're hearing is not the product of Corporate Rock. I wish I could think of the proper term...It is like a Cottage Industry or perhaps it could be called homegrown. I know, you can call it, "Songs from the Bedroom." This music is people doing what they do naturally without people breathing down their necks. It was an emotional investment, rather than a financial one.

**Jeb: Progressive bands usually have good vocal harmonies, though it does not get the same reverence that the music does. There are times on this album where you sound like Crosby, Stills & Nash.**

Steve: It is funny, isn't it? Most modern bands do not stress the use of harmonies. It tends to be used in backing vocals. The art of harmony singing has gone by the wayside and the era of the Hollywood star is taking over. We took the other idea and really focused on our harmonies. There are moments where the harmonies really are like Crosby, Stills & Nash. I think the chorus on "Tall Ships" is my favorite one where we harmonize. You have to listen to it in 5.1, though as there is so much more detail than you will get if you listen to it in stereo.



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3 Tricks to Play

Roger King decided that we would do the chorus, front and back, at the same time. On that particular chorus, it really worked and really made it big. It is a great trick. So, folks, out there make sure that when you do your choruses you do them front to back and make them big.

**Jeb: Tell me about "See You Smile."**

Steve: On "See You Smile" Chris and me, perhaps, sound very close to Yes. It is difficult to describe music, isn't it? It is very organic. It is being released as a single in the UK along with

"Perfect Love Song," which has a very interesting chord progression.

**Jeb: I like the ominous sound of "Storm Chasers."**

Steve: There was a TV series called Storm Chasers at one point. Years ago there was a movie by Stephen Spielberg titled Twister. I was reading in National Geographic an article that described what twisters do. We did a very big, wet chorus on that one. It had very simple drums, half time, very much like Zeppelin. I suppose it is very English sounding, at the end of the day but there are a few strange harmonies there. I think that song had some unlikely twists and turns.

**Jeb: Fans can buy a CD or they can buy a limited edition numbered vinyl edition, or a limited edition CD with a 5.1 mix.**

Steve: All of that is available. It is coming out on this side of the pond on May 28<sup>th</sup>. I suppose it will be out there simultaneously in the USA. If you don't do that then the world has time to download.

**Jeb: It is the 29<sup>th</sup> in the USA.**

Steve: The 29<sup>th</sup>. Well, there is one day difference. I guess that will be National Download Day [laughter].

**Jeb: Chris and you are lucky enough that you have had huge careers. Smaller bands that have no other way of making revenue can really be destroyed by illegal downloading.**

Steve: I know; that is true. I suppose Chris and I have, pardon the expression, paid our dues. I don't like that term because it sounds like we don't enjoy it. Personally, I love being on the road, it's like a holiday to me, compared to the monotony that is every day life. When you go on tour you really set the wheels in motion and off you go. Chris has done an awful lot of gigs in his time, and so have I. We have played a lot of gigs individually and, maybe we will do it collectively. There is talk of taking this on the road, which we just have to find the right time and place to do it. We both have unrelenting schedules that are very action packed for both of us. It is great that we've received the feedback we have so far, as only a handful of journalists have heard it but they have unanimously praised it. I am just waiting for The New York Times critic to blast us [laughter].

**Jeb: Since you're looking for criticism, I will give you some...the name. It sounds like you should have a parrot as a mascot.**

Steve: The name does come on like a joke but the important thing is the music. Chris' wife came up with the name and I thought she was joking. People may expect it to be a joke but then they will be very surprised. Any name that sounds like 'Dire Straits' or 'Donald Duck' makes it sound like you can't do, or that it is silly, but we can do it. What about the Beatles? What kind of name was that? Was that a good name for a band?

**Jeb: There is a band doing well right now that called Chickenfoot.**

Steve: There you go.

**Jeb: My last one is this: Chris is known for his sense of humor. Was this a fun album to make?**

Steve: Chris is a very funny man. We had a lot of laughs making this album; we had a ball making this album. I thought he was going to be a disciplinarian but it was completely different. We swapped stories and broke bread and the whole thing was very relaxed. It really seemed like we had been working together for years. We have a natural harmony between us, which is very nice and refreshing. It was a joy playing with someone who has been as influential as Chris.



### Guitar

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**Jeb: Okay, really the last one: Would you consider a triple bill of Squackett, Steve Hackett and Yes?**

Steve: My God, you never know; that might be possible, at some point. I'm usually up for things but we would have to get everyone to agree to it. I am open to suggestions. Even if it was a one-off, what a show it would be.

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