



Steve Rothery

Melodic Ace for Marillion

Marillion is a progressive-rock act with a vast following in the U.K., Europe and Canada, but less so in the U.S.

But if you spend any time with classic CDs like *Brave* and *Afraid of Sunlight*, you'll hear a strongly melodic band that puts the song ahead of any instrumental flashiness. Marillion's guitarist for over 25 years has been Steve Rothery, a player whose tasty lead work is based on long, languid notes and soulful, echoey bends. On the side, Rothery also leads an acoustic-based project called the Wishing Tree, which just released an album called *Ostara*. That, combined with the latest Marillion release, *Less is More*, is keeping the British guitarist busier than ever.

Less is More shows Marillion re-recording some of their classic older material, but with very spartan arrangements.

What challenges or opportunities did this provide you on guitar?

I had to focus more on the dynamics of the track and how best to add something to the new arrangement.

It was satisfying to come up with new parts for existing songs and to see them move in a different direction. You know when you come up with something that works – you just feel it. There was a real spirit of adventure on *Less is More*. Credit also has to go to Mike Hunter, our producer, for steering us onto the right course with this record.

Marillion has been one of the leading lights of British progressive rock for more than 20 years. Where did you develop your sound?

Our early influences were Gabriel-era Genesis, Pink Floyd, Van der Graaf Generator, and Camel. You can hear that pretty clearly.

You play a lot of acoustic guitar on this record. What brands do you play and do you have any recording tricks for capturing a good tone?

I used a selection of acoustics on the album; Takamine, Yairi, and Cort. Each one was mic'ed with a condenser,

but we also had the internal pickup sent to an Headway acoustic combo amp, which was also mic'ed up. On "Interior," I played a Portuguese guitar, which is an amazing instrument with 12 strings. It has its roots in the English guitar or cittern of the 1700s. The instrument has a very distinctive sound and is used in "fado," a traditional Portuguese folk music.

You take a nice electric solo on "Quartz." Who were some of your guitar influences when you were growing up and why?

My early influences were Hendrix, Santana, George Harrison, David Gilmour, and Steve Hackett.

Apart from Marillion, what was your musical goal with The Wishing Tree?

The Wishing Tree is a chance for me to do something very different to my work with Marillion. It's a lot more guitar-based than Marillion, but also quieter and more acoustic in nature. But I did use a Roger Linn Adrenalinn pedal quite a lot for the pulsating modulated sounds on a track like "Ostara." [Singer] Hannah Stobart has an amazing voice, too, which gives Wishing Tree a very different texture. There are samples at reverb.com/thewishingtree, if anyone would like to check it out.

You play Blade solidbody guitars with Lindy Fralin pickups. What do you like about them?

They appeal to me because they're a great blend of classic design with some more modern features and are very versatile.

How about amps?

My main amps are a Groove Tubes Dual 75 power amp and Trio preamp – I have three – as well as a Roland JC 120 and a Laney Lionheart Class A five-watt combo. I've used the Groove Tubes amps exclusively on the last four Marillion albums.

Any favorite stompboxes?

Some favorite effects are that Adrenalinn pedal, Hughes & Kettner Rotosphere, Analogman DS-1 distortion, and a Robert Keeley tremelo pedal.

What's next for you?

I fly over to New York next month to collect the two guitars that Jack Dent, an amazing guitar builder down in North Carolina, has made for me. One is a Stratocaster-type guitar and the other is a signature Steve Rothery model that I've used the prototype of on the album and the tour we've just finished. There's a video I've posted of me demonstrating it on YouTube. It has a very distinctive shape, and just amazing tone and clarity. I'm also trying to organize a guitar clinic in New York, as well. Then, when I get back from the States, we'll be in the studio writing the next Marillion studio album. – **Pete Prown**

Some of the stores where I teach only have one guitar amp in the lesson room, so I bring a Y-splitter to run my guitar and the student's guitar into one line that goes through a tuner and a distortion pedal, then into the input on the amp. Why does the volume on my guitar also change the volume on the student guitar? – Joe Wagner

A guitar is a load device. Because the guitars are plugged into the adaptor, as you move your volume control, it changes the load for the other. In effect, if you turn your guitar volume control all the way down, the student's guitar will have very little or no volume, even with its Volume control on 10. This won't happen on a guitar amp with side-by-side inputs because there is a resistor between the inputs that makes one "hotter" than the other, but also isolates the inputs from this reactive phenomenon.

I am thinking about changing the tuners on my Les Paul to Grovers, from the stock Klusons. Will there be a change in tone when I do this? – Pete Weaver

My gut reaction is very little, if at all. I spoke with Sean Nicholson, from Gibson Custom's Pro Shop, who said, "I can see where someone could feel that adding mass might change the tone of the instrument to a thicker, more sustaining tone. But I don't really hear it."

Did Gibson produce any sunburst-finish dot-neck 1958-'59 ES-335s with no red pigment? – John Creighton

It's possible, but not likely. It's more likely the person in the paint booth on a given day used less red on certain guitars, and/or that the red pigment used has faded. The pigment used by Gibson and Fender in the late 1950s was not UV-resistant, and would therefore fade. Most likely, they all had some red in them, but in some, the red has faded completely, leaving what now looks more like a tobacco sunburst finish.

Zac Childs is a professional guitar tech based in Nashville. If you have a question about guitars, anything from nuts and bolts to historical or celebrity-related inquiries, drop a line to him at zac@askzac.com.