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## INTERVIEW

## Interview: Marillion Drummer Ian Mosley

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To most American listeners, [Marillion](#) are best known for their eighties work as a progressive rock outfit whose music and stage presentation — as epitomized by the theatrics of then lead vocalist Fish — bore more than a slight resemblance to Peter Gabriel era Genesis. What a lot of the same American audience doesn't know is that although their star on this side of the pond faded not long after that time, they remain a best selling, top drawing act in much of the rest of the world, while maintaining a respectable cult following here.

Marillion have also long since shed the baby Genesis image and developed a sound uniquely their own. With their current lead vocalist Steve Hogarth at the helm, Marillion have produced a string of albums over the past several years that sound nothing like the band many American fans may remember.

On albums like the conceptual piece *Marbles* and the just released *Somewhere Else*, Marillion continue to display the dazzling prog-rock musicianship and dramatic flair of earlier records like *Script For A Jesters Tear*, while wrapping the songs themselves in a decidedly more modern sounding package. On their new album *Somewhere Else*, the songs deal in themes ranging from the alienation felt from a failed relationship ("The Wound") to nothing less than a prophetic, political cry to save us from ourselves ("The Last Century Of Man").

While fans who remember Marillion from the Fish years can continue to appreciate the lush, romantic sweep and pristine production of such newer efforts, there is a far greater emphasis now on song structure. Indeed, there is nothing dated sounding about Marillion in their modern day incarnation.

Marillion have also developed a unique fan-based way of marketing their albums by pre-selling them through their website, which makes the boast "find a better way of life at [Marillion.com](#)." Although they went through more traditional distribution channels for the current *Somewhere Else* album, past pre-sales through the internet have actually served to finance recording costs and even entire concert tours. They are already pre-selling their next album, scheduled for a 2008 release through the website.

Over this past weekend, we caught up with Marillion drummer Ian Mosley while the band was soundchecking just prior to a show in Paris. In a wide ranging conversation, we covered topics from the band's long and storied history to it's unique fan-based marketing. We we're even able to coax a Fish drinking story (where do you think he got his name?) from Mosley.

**So take us from Marillion back in the Fish days to where the band is at now.**

Right. We did quite a few tours in America with Fish. We were with Capitol Records back then and we did quite a few gigs, but we really didn't ever manage to break through. The only thing was towards the end when the album *Misplaced Childhood* was out. We did a really short tour with Rush, where we played arenas and that was really good. And then we went back a bit later and played some of the same arenas ourselves, but it was really more in Canada than in the USA. We love touring in the States, but economically it's always a bit of a disaster for us.

**Any chance of getting over here again anytime soon?**

Well, were working on it. Maybe next year some time. But the American government is making it very difficult for bands to come over there from England at the moment. There's always massive problems trying to get work visas. And then you've got the whole tax thing as well, which is quite complicated. It's even affected some of the classical musicians. There is an eighty piece orchestra that was going to come over to New York, but they couldn't because the American embassy said we need you all here at 7:00 in the morning to apply for visas and it

will cost you three to four thousand dollars per visa.

**Wow!**

So with an eighty piece orchestra that lives all over England, that's a problem. They were due to play at Carnegie Hall, but they had to cancel. The logistics of getting to America are quite difficult. You probably already know about the time where we said we couldn't afford to get to America, and the fans actually raised the money for us.

**I was actually going to ask about that. What's the difference between working with a label like EMI or MVD, and doing it yourself on the web like you guys have done?**

Over the past few years we've really become quite self sufficient. It all started really with an American fan, who said "if you can't really afford to come to America, why don't we raise some cash? How much do you need?" We didn't really take it all that seriously at the time and we said we'd probably need about fifty or sixty thousand in cash. After some time went by, he called and said well we've raised \$30,000 already. In the end, they raised the money and we came over and we toured.

And from that point on we just said, well wait a minute — there really is power in the internet with the fan base we have. And we feel — well, we're very fortunate. We're fortunate that they trust us enough to hand over that amount of cash and we won't go off to have a big party (laughter). And that led to the pre-order thing we did with an album called *Anoraknophobia*. The fans actually ordered the album before we'd even written it and that gave us the cash to actually record it. This gave us the kind of total freedom to do what we want without any pressure from anybody. It's a great situation to be in.

**So how has that actually worked for you?**

What happened was we originally were with EMI, and then we were with some independent labels and we weren't really happy. So it just came around to how about we do the internet pre-order thing? We sent an e-mail out to all our fan base and said "what do you think?" And the response was really pretty huge. Something like 14,000 people actually ordered the album, which gave us a big bag cash of something like 400,000 pounds. It paid for the whole record — the recording and the manufacturing. From that point on, we did it again with the *Marbles* album, and that worked as well. So all the time, we've been building up a fan database. It's an artist's dream come true to have the freedom and the trust of the fans. We're very fortunate.

**Now this time around with *Somewhere Else*, you didn't do that.**

No, we didn't. We had a convention a few months back. We've been having these conventions semi-annually and this last one raised quite a bit of money so this time around we didn't feel we had to do it. Next time around maybe?

**Actually I noticed on the website you are already taking orders for the next one. That one is coming out in 2008, right?**

Yeah it is. We have a lot of material we've been working on and we have nearly an album's worth now. So were going to go back in the studio and do a couple of more tracks and hopefully it will be ready to go. I haven't looked at the web site for a few days because we've been on tour.

**It's there.**

(Laughter) Well I guess you can tell me what's happening then. But that's what I heard — that we would be doing a pre-order on the internet.

**Is this going to be a companion piece to *Somewhere Else* as I've heard?**

No, I don't think so. This will be a stand alone — it will be an album in it's own right rather than a follow-through.

**Marillion sounds, to my ears at least, like a completely different band than the one I remember from the Fish years. Who are your influences these days?**

The different band members all bring very diverse influences. But I know what you mean. We really are a different band now. When Fish left, the four of us always wrote the music anyway and we knew we enjoyed working together and thought we still had something to offer. So there was never really any question of us splitting up. When Steve (Hogarth) came along and joined us for the *Seasons End* album, we had a lot of material already written. Apart from doing some great vocals, Steve's contribution at that time was quite minimal.

The next album, *Holidays In Eden* was hard work because it was the first time as a band we had to sit down and write an album together, and find each others direction. So that was a difficult album. But for me, the *Brave* album is the one where we actually became a band again. It took three albums for us to actually grow together to where we were a band again. But yeah, we are a different band now. The core sound is still there with Steve Rothery on guitar. But we still feel like we're moving forward.

**The new album *Somewhere Else* seems to be somewhat more oriented towards individual songs as opposed to it's predecessor *Marbles*, which seems like more of a concept piece.**

It wasn't intentional. When we all get together at the begining of the writing process, we never sit down and actually say "well what kind of an album are we going to make?". The way we write, we just go into a room and jam. Hopefully, not for months on end (laughter). But it's really all quite organic. We can jam for weeks and weeks, and than suddenly in a day or two we might come up with a few pieces of magic. But at no time in the entire history of the band has one guy come in and said "hey guys, I've got this song and it goes like this." So really we just go in with a blank canvas and start creating pictures and see what comes out.

This time around we used Mike Hunter as a producer and he came in at a very early stage and just started recording everything we were doing. Then he'd disappear for awhile and then pop back and say "I've put these things together, so what do you think?". So the first track he played back for us was "Last Century Of Man," where he'd done this massive string arrangement for the second half of it that just kind of blew me away. Mike's a very talented guy — he's a twenty three hour musician and one hour football fanatic. A complete football nutter.

To answer your question though, I guess it's really a reaction to the last album. We really never go in with any preconceived notions, but if we do an album of short songs we will usually follow it with an album of long songs.

**"Last Century of Man" seems to be a very political statement coming from this band.**

I don't think we really have a political philosophy as such, but I think anybody you talk to these last couple of years will tell you that they are aware of things going on in the world. That things are getting out of hand. I think everyone is aware that things aren't quite how they should be. The things Steve writes are very personal to him. One of the reasons that Marillion have had the kind of longevity we've had is that the lyrics are very honest, very personal and they are real. But it's very disturbing at the moment and I think that song does reflect that. I think people are worried. Steve does a lot of work with "Make Poverty History," so he's even more aware of it than a lot of people.

**Watching the *Marbles On The Road* live DVD, I notice that the stage presentation is more scaled back in terms of the theatrics.**

I think it comes down to budget more than anything. Sometimes I feel like we're like Pink Floyd on a budget (laughter). But it depends on what setlist were playing. Tonight for example, we'll be doing a bit of the *Marbles* album and lots of the new one. But where it's needed Steve will be quite animated and theatrical. In the early days, of course, it was different as Fish was very influenced by Peter Gabriel and the whole Genesis thing. But we've never followed fashion — it's kind of the kiss of death to tell us what to do.

### **So I have to ask. Do you have a favorite Fish drinking story?**

(Laughter) It's funny, but it's also kind of sad really. I remember when he lived with me for about two months once. And I came downstairs one day and it looked like he was drinking — well I said what is that you're drinking Fish? And he said gravy. It was like gravy with vodka in it or something. And I said why are you doing that? And he said, well I'm giving up drinking. His other idea of giving up drinking was just drinking port.

So he's getting married in August and I'm going and so is Mark (Kelly, the band's keyboardist), so that should be fun. I don't know if he's mellowed, but I should think he's mellowed a little. We're all getting older and we have to or else you just die. We had a lot of very good times together and I tend to just remember the good times and forget about the drama. Last year, he went out and did a whole tour of the *Misplaced Childhood* album and I think this year he's going out and doing the *Clutching At Straws* album.

### **So good luck on the gig tonight, and thanks for taking the time to talk to us.**

Thanks very much. And I really hope we are able to make it to America soon. Cheers.



You'll find music journalist and freelance raconteur Glen Boyd sharing his Thoughtmares about everything from music to politics to professional wrestling at his blog [The World Wide Glen: Welcome To My Thoughtmare](#). In his alter-ego as "Disco Glen," Mr. Boyd is also the undisputed king of the dancefloor.

## Comments

