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Marillion still plough the independent furrow and continue to provide the exemplar for what can be achieved in the digital age. It does help, of course, to have a reasonable fanbase to start off with.



In between new studio albums, the band put out a variety of different CDs and DVDs (remixes, live gigs, compilations) all neatly packaged for the faithful and sold through their website. The 'Marillion Weekend' has become the stuff of folklore, when the faithful will descend on some coastal resort and often hear whole albums played by the band in their entirety.

With the band very much in charge of both its destiny and the quality control, it would be very easy for the guys to put up the collective ten fingers and be rather selfish and navel-gazing. However, 2004's 'Marbles' was more accessible than previous Marillion albums.

Where 'Somewhere Else' succeeds is that no track becomes indulgent or abrasive and for the most part it weaves a chill-out, mellow, soundscape that is only broken by the characteristic big vocal choruses where Hogarth sounds as if he's pleading for his life. He doesn't have to. This is all good stuff.

The album opens with 'The Other Half' - classic Modern Marillion that could have come off 'Seasons End'. Mark Kelly's piano figures lend a reflective air and this is repeated on 'Thank You Whoever You Are'. 'Most Toys' is one of only two uptempo tracks (the other is 'The Wound'), and seems to capture the mood of an album which rails against the excesses of modern society.

The first single 'See Like A Baby' is all ambient groove, infectious, and a good enough taster for the album as a whole.

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PUBLIC SYMPHONY



The title track is another revelation, with Beatlesque touches, it's another atmospheric piece with a fine Hogarth vocal performance and mostly restrained guitar - Marillion staked the ground well before Coldplay and Snow Patrol but this track should appeal to fans of both.

Steve Rothery seemingly trashed his chorus pedal circa 2004 and it's no coincidence that the band's sound has changed for the better. They were always great musicians but the vibe now is prog rock that Hogarth makes distinctive, not the guitarist.

'A Voice From The Past' has an attractive piano motif, orchestral and brass touches giving it a jazzy hue, and is yet another vehicle for Hogarth's musings and his vocal sweeps and swoops. When Rothery's guitar cuts in, it quite simply doesn't get any better. Marvellous stuff.

'No Such Thing' complements 'See Like A Baby' and is another ambient groove with Ian Brown and even Air-like stylings (think 'Lost In Translation'), 'The Last Century For Man' has Floyd-esque touches. And 'Faith' starts with just Hogarth and an acoustic guitar accompaniment. It is an unexpected and magical end to the album, especially the twangy middle section, and destined to become a lighter-in-the-air staple at gigs.

The band are never predictable and whilst this is recognisably a Marillion album, it is different from the last, and there's a far-more restrained feel throughout.

This might not be Marillion as we know them. There's not a 'Kayleigh' or 'Built In Bastard Radar' within ear-shot. But it may just be their best album yet.

Review by David Randall

Single review



See Like A Baby

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**** Out of this world | **** Pretty damn fine |

*** OK, approach with caution unless you are a fan |

** Instant bargain bin fodder | * Ugly. Just ugly

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