

Reviews

Marillion

Somewhere Else

MVD Audio/Intact Records (Intact CD11)

Grade: ★★★★★

Music critics and reviewers love labels, which makes Marillion all the more confounding because they fail to fall into neat categories (Are they progressive rock? Are they art rock? Are they Brit-rock? Are they just rock?). And they don't follow a formula from album to album. The band's method is largely to get together and play music, from whence songs either develop or they don't.

It should come as no surprise that the band's latest, *Somewhere Else*, is no *Marbles II*, although fans can be forgiven for expecting or hoping for such. 2004's *Marbles* is arguably the best album of the Steve Hogarth-era, if not Marillion's best period. So, despite high expectations, *Somewhere Else* disappoints on first listen.

The songs don't leap out with the immediacy of so many of the *Marbles'* tunes, and the album's producer Mike Hunter puts a hazy glaze on the effort that takes away some of the crackle and energy.

But *Somewhere Else* has an energy of its own, a quiet, brooding pulse whose logic can take time to register. The emotionally charged lyrics are often couched in soft, quiet trimmings that don't defuse the songs' meanings as much as make you concentrate on the songs themselves.

The opening track, "The Other Half," is one of the album's best, a psychedelic-tinged plea to a new love, where Hogarth implores, "I won't lie to you or hurt you. I'm not like that anymore." "Thank You Whoever You Are" features some beautifully timed singing by Hogarth and great drumming from Ian Mosley, the album's unsung star. His playing is so slinky and understated that it's almost like breathing.

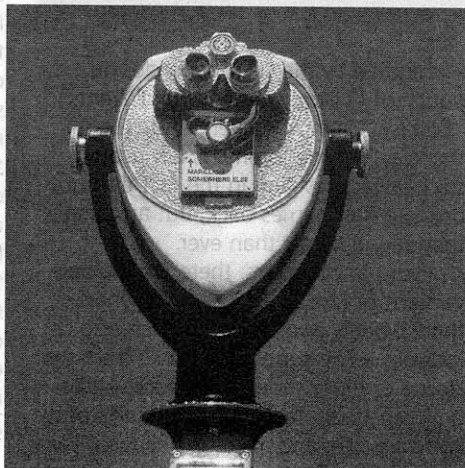
"More Toys" screams out against those who follow fashion and must "listen to what's in and what's happenin'."

Guitarist Steve Rothery fuels the

Marillion



Nils Van Iperen



fire with some crunchy guitar riffs.

On the superb, dream-like title track, Hogarth exposes the perils of living the life of a "rock star" and finally laments, "Everyone I love lives somewhere else," baring his soul like few care to.

It doesn't all work, though. "No Such Thing" is sluggish and never gets off the ground — imagine Marillion influenced by Black Sabbath's "Planet Caravan." The final two tracks, however, fly high.

"The Last Century For Man" takes a sharp look at the world's superpow-

ers (here, primarily the U.S. and U.K.) and the policy of using up parts of the world we haven't even seen or been to. Hogarth sings so seductively that it's like being rocked to sleep with a burdened conscience but not caring enough to realize the song is about you. The closer, "Faith," begins like The Beatles' "Blackbird," before veering off into a lovely waltz-like ballad. So, maybe it's not *Marbles*, but *Somewhere Else* rolls on its own set of wheels, and the ride gets sweeter with every trip.

— by Todd Whitesell

Grading System: ★★★★★ Classic ★★★★★ Excellent ★★★ Good ★★ Fair ★ Sub Par