



Blogcritics is an online magazine, a community of writers and readers from around the globe.

Publisher: [Eric Olsen](#)

REVIEW

Music Review: Marillion - *Happiness Is The Road*

Written by [Glen Boyd](#)

Published October 13, 2008



Marillion is a British progressive rock band who are best known in America for the music they made more than twenty years ago. Back in the eighties, led by a lanky lead vocalist called Fish, Marillion was primarily known for its theatrical stage performances where Fish often dressed in a variety of costumes.

Because of this, as well as the long prog-rock pieces found on albums like *Script For A Jesters Tear* and *Misplaced Childhood* (which yielded their only American hit single in "Kayleigh"), the band was widely regarded – and some would say dismissed – as a pale imitation of Peter Gabriel-era Genesis. When Fish left the band to pursue a solo career, the band were soon forgotten...

At least in America, they were. Not so however, in much of the rest of the world.

With a new lead singer in Steve "H" Hogarth, Marillion not only soldiered on, but over the course of several years reinvented themselves on albums like *Brave* and their conceptual masterpiece *Marbles*. Although they very much remain a progressive rock band, the Marillion of today in fact bears very little resemblance to the so-called Genesis wannabes of the eighties.

In the process of reinvention, Marillion have also developed one of the most devoted – and interactive – fan bases of any band in the world. Through the band's website, which urges fans to "find a better life" through [Marillion.com](#), the group's fans have actually taken ownership of the band, financing both albums and tours.

On the band's fifteenth album *Happiness Is The Road* they have taken this partnership with fans a step further by actually seeding the album on peer-to-peer sites for free download. The catch here is, once you download it, a window pops up on your computer where Marillion themselves urge you to go their website and check out other merchandise if you like what you hear. *Happiness Is The Road* is also available for sale on the site.

As for the album itself, *Happiness Is The Road* is an ambitious double-CD, divided into two separate parts, that altogether contains nearly two hours of Marillion music. After just three listens, I have also fallen in love with this record.

The first CD is subtitled "Essence," and is the more ambitious of the two. With both quieter, layered passages focusing on Mark Kelly's keyboards, as well as more anthemic songs like "Woke Up," the music here actually recalls the musical ebb and flow of *Marbles*.

page 1 | [2](#)



You'll find Blogcritics assistant music editor Glen Boyd sharing his Thoughtmares on his personal blogs [The World Wide Glen](#), and [The Rockologist](#), as well as at [Cinema Blend Music](#). In a previous life, Glen was a music professional and journalist whose work has appeared in *The Rocket*, *SPIN*, *Pulse!*, and *The Source*. Glen is also seeking an active full-time writing gig. Will somebody please hire this man?

Comments

#1 – October 13, 2008 @ 16:39PM – Tom Johnson [[URL](#)]

Glen, it's probably no secret that I'm thrilled to see anyone else, but especially you, enjoying Marillion today. Such a great band who have truly formed their own little niche. I find *Essence* to be the far stronger of the two and actually have a hard time carving out mental space for *The Hard Shoulder* so far - it just doesn't register yet. After the emotional rollercoaster of *Essence*, it's hard to jump into something less emotionally involving. I'll get around to it soon, I'm sure, but I'm particularly hooked on the first disc (and "This Train Is My Life" specifically - beautiful song.) I am very anxious to get the VERY long awaited (a year now!) deluxe edition, which should be gorgeous from the little I've seen of it.

#2 – October 13, 2008 @ 20:40PM – Glen Boyd [[URL](#)]

Thanx Tom. The second disc is a lot different than the first. Even so, I've no doubt you'll warm up to it. Where "Essence" is more of a unified piece, "The Hard Shoulder" is more like a collection of individual songs. The band also flexes it's musical muscle on the second disc, where on "Essence" I think there is a lot more emphasis on the studio craft and just setting a mood. Anyway, they are both great discs and together they add up to a really great record.

-Glen

#3 – October 13, 2008 @ 20:46PM – Mark Saleski [[URL](#)]

funny that you should mention Genesis, because i listened to this band once way back in the early days and they reminded me of why i can't stand *The Lamb Lies Down...*, and i never listened again.

#4 – October 13, 2008 @ 20:49PM – Glen Boyd [[URL](#)]

You should give them another try then Mark...they don't even sound like the same band that made those records in the eighties. I think you'd be pleasantly surprised...

-Glen

#5 – October 13, 2008 @ 20:53PM – Mark Saleski [[URL](#)]

i dunno. i listened to a few things on their myspace and it turned me off in exactly the same way. can't quite put my finger on it.

i guess, with a couple of exceptions, i'm not much of a prog fan.

#6 – October 13, 2008 @ 21:04PM – Glen Boyd [[URL](#)]

Ummm, correct me if I'm wrong here, but haven't I heard you sing the praises of Robert Fripp and King crimson on a couple of occasions? One of those "exceptions" I guess...

-Glen

#7 – October 13, 2008 @ 21:21PM – Mark Saleski [[URL](#)]

yep, that's the exceptions!

#8 – October 14, 2008 @ 16:09PM – Tom Johnson [[URL](#)]

King Crimson is not prog, nor is Marillion. Problem solved!

Marillion today is VERY far from the band that made "Genesis lite" stuff in the mid-80s. They're an adventurous pop-rock band today. I never describe them as "prog" because that term is loaded - it describes 1970s sounding material and people immediately think of Peter Gabriel-era Genesis, Yes, Gentle Giant, etc. Marillion is about as far from that as can be today. They just happen to write long songs and have some thematic albums. I don't take offense at people not getting them, however. Marillion are an acquired taste. I would be curious to know what songs it was that you heard, Mark - if it's older Steve Hogarth (vocalist that replaced Fish) stuff, I'd say you should still give their new stuff a chance because it's quite different. I'm not sure if you'll get into them, given the kind of stuff you're into, but who knows . . .

And, Mark, you really have to give them enough of a chance to hear Steve Rothery's guitar work. He's incredible, plain and simple. Very David Gilmour-esque without being a ripoff of him. Extremely emotive playing. One of my very favorite guitarists.

#9 – October 14, 2008 @ 16:51PM – Mark Saleski [\[URL\]](#)

i dunno. i listened to "Whatever Is Wrong With You" and i just can't stand that guy's voice. guitar can't save it.

#10 – October 14, 2008 @ 17:08PM – Tom Johnson [\[URL\]](#)

Well, you know, I have to say that, despite it being their "single," it is not one of the better songs to draw in new listeners. (This is something I never understand with bands - they always pick the song that I find underwhelming as the first single. They need to consult me first. I know the strong ones. Call me!) I would say to head over to that [Music Glue thing](#) and grab "This Train Is My Life," "Nothing Fills The Holes," and "Trap The Spark." Those are the ones that have the Marillion magic, where "Whatever" is just "a song" that, as a big fan myself, I enjoy, but I don't see anyone outside of people like me going out of their way for. The three I listed above are examples of Marillion at their best. If you don't like those, I think it's safe to say you just won't like anything of theirs. And maybe you won't - but you can't use Steve's voice as an excuse because you listen to some weird stuff, man! ;-)

#11 – October 14, 2008 @ 17:23PM – zingzing

prog sucks. i tried out marillion. i've got "brave," which i've never made it through. it's just not my cup of tea. even if you attached a vagina to it, i don't think i could take it.

and make no mistake, marillion is prog. proggy as all prague. has that pun ever been made before? god, i love being drunk in the afternoon.

to say king crimson is not prog is to ignore that the whole term was invented to describe that kind of music. god knows crimson was almost unlistenable until the early 80s, and even then they sounded like a nail being driven into your ear drum.

now, i love robert fripp. outside of his work in crimson, which i can't stand. his stuff with eno--spectacular.

the only prog i can stand is as follows: roxy music, brian eno, robert wyatt. that's about it. there may be someone else, but i can't recall right now.

pink floyd sucks.

#12 – October 14, 2008 @ 17:58PM – Tom Johnson [\[URL\]](#)

Zingx2 describes a bunch of music that is not prog. What's best about all of these artists is that while they are *progressive*, meaning they *change* (something most "prog" bands don't do, I may point out,) they are certainly not *prog*, which is a fairly limiting term (and often derogatory) as I mentioned previously. And, yes, I know all about how "prog" came to be associated with King Crimson, believe me - but it does not relate to the band after about 1972.

And, like any truly *progressive* artist, it is unfair to judge them based on one release. *Brave* especially, since it is one long story and a big chunk of it functions as one long suite. It's very, very dark, very depressing, one I rarely listen to, but it is very powerful when I do.

#13 – October 14, 2008 @ 19:08PM – zingzing

what does "prog" mean then?

i thought it meant "progressive," meaning art rock that has any progressive leanings.

it's a pretty open term.

robert wyatt is certainly prog, coming out of soft machine, etc.

soft machine certainly had some jazz-rock or fusion leanings, but that fit in with "prog" at the time. eno and roxy were certainly part of that crowd.

you seem to be defining "prog" differently than i would. yes, soft machine, floyd, eno, roxy, genesis... all would apply. in my book, at least.

if you don't mind, throw out some (relatively famous) names you would associate with prog.

certainly, i'm interested.

"brave" still sucks though.

#14 – October 14, 2008 @ 20:13PM – Mark Saleski [\[URL\]](#)

oh my gawd, i hated "This Train Is My Life" worse than that other tune.

#15 – October 14, 2008 @ 20:23PM – Mark Saleski [\[URL\]](#)

oh my gawd, they remind me of (****shudder****) Coldplay.

#16 – October 14, 2008 @ 20:31PM – Mark Saleski [\[URL\]](#)

p.s. i can't stand Roxy Music either.

#17 – October 14, 2008 @ 21:29PM – Tom Johnson [\[URL\]](#)

"Prog" is what most people think of when you say "prog" in general. They think ELP, Yes, early Genesis, etc. Prog is a very specific sound and style that, despite its origins in the full word "progressive," does not actually *progress*. Note that when these bands strayed outside of that traditional "prog" sound that they were all identified with, everyone said they were no longer prog - but they had truly *progressed*. Peter Gabriel solo was by far more *progressive*, and still is, than Genesis ever was when they were prog. Then, of course, they turned pop. Peter Gabriel still managed to do it without sacrificing his progressive nature.

Being labeled "prog" is like being labeled "punk" - there is a very specific sound associated with those four letters. Otherwise, all kinds of other music gets lumped in that doesn't fit - long songs don't make something prog, or Zappa would be prog, and he's NOT. Pink Floyd doesn't fit because they only ever flirted with it, like they did with pretty much every genre they explored. They're kind of their own thing, and prog is too insultingly limiting to contain them, especially the early stuff.

The only way prog as a label for all these bands works is in an extremely vague, very, very wide umbrella, which, as you can guess, I totally disagree with. Just like saying both Britney Spears and Leonard Cohen get to exist under the Pop/Rock umbrella, but do they *really*?

#18 – October 14, 2008 @ 21:31PM – Tom Johnson [\[URL\]](#)

You're a music terrorist today, Saleski.

#19 – October 14, 2008 @ 21:36PM – Mark Saleski [\[URL\]](#)

The only way prog as a label for all these bands works is in an extremely vague, very, very wide umbrella
like emo?

#20 – October 14, 2008 @ 21:40PM – Mark Saleski [\[URL\]](#)

zingzing (#11) ("even if you attached a vagina to it, i don't think i could take it")

i laughed hard. almost sucked a piece of pizza up my windpipe.

#21 – October 14, 2008 @ 23:23PM – zingzing

well, tom, "prog" meant something at one point, and that music rightfully died a horrible death at the hands of punk. having listened to the latest marillion now, i can say that they aren't much of a prog band at this point. more a "proggy" band. there's not much nice i want to say about them, so the less, the better.

mark, roxy music is amazing. you have to be touched not to appreciate them. come on, they're ambitious as well as schmaltzy. it's like you're slightly insane uncle making come ons to your sister whilst cooking you a fantastic dinner, all the while regaling your father with fantastic war stories. they get it all done. really, everything they did up til about '75 is pretty damn good. and then they put out avalon, which should have been #1 from 1982-1985, every damn week.

and yeah, i liked the vagina line as well. proud of that vagina joke, i am.

#22 – October 15, 2008 @ 07:03AM – Mark Saleski [\[URL\]](#)

you have to be touched not to appreciate them.

Briany Ferry's voice makes me want to shove an ice pick in my ear.

#23 – October 22, 2008 @ 07:42AM – John Medecto

The notion that punk killed prog is one of the laziest media-perpetuated notions out there. Go and look in the back of most music mags and you'll find adverts to go and see the same prog bands touring that people are constantly claiming were killed by punk. They simply weren't and it's a ridiculous thing to say - it's not even a matter of whether one likes them; it's simply not true.

Personally, I think the Marillion album's magnificent, but it's about as prog as U2 are punk.

#24 – October 22, 2008 @ 14:19PM – Brian aka Guppusmaximus [\[URL\]](#)

[Progressive]it's a pretty open term.

Since my inception to this great form of music, I was always under the impression that the term "prog/progressive" was referring to how the band progressed through different genres & time signatures in each

song. That incorporating jazz, classical, metal, rock, blues, world music, etc.. was the experiment of expression or vice-versa. Though the music was still held together by some solid song writing, technical prowess & didn't necessarily wander off like a hippie jam.

I guess that's my perspective considering I was raised on YES, RUSH, Watchtower, Dream Theater, Atheist, DEATH, Spastic Ink, etc..

#25 – October 28, 2008 @ 06:44AM – CompanyGimp

I dunno what 'Prog' is to be honest.
I think it's probably a convenient pigeon-hole for lazy journalists -

Mellotron present & correct ? Check !
Over 12 minutes average track length ? Check !
Copious Lord of the Rings references ? Check !!
Singer dressed up as spaceman ? Check !!

Then it must be 'Prog' ! Hurrah !!

I love Floyd, I love Marillion, I love Genesis, but apart from really early Marillion, those bands aren't all that similar, so how they kinda get lumped together is beyond me.

Anyhoo, I'm loving the new Marillion CD(s) - Older Than Me is currently playing, and I'll be off to see them on tour in a little over 2 weeks time. Lovely stuff.

;)

#26 – November 8, 2008 @ 08:51AM – Aros74

Marillion will never be the same again without Fish but still im a hardcore fan.
You just have appreciate that the band has two era's.

Albums like Script, Fugazi, Misplaced & Clutching are albums i want to take with me in coffin the day i die. No question about that.
But never forget the new era with albums like Brave, Marbles and the new one Happiness is the road.

What im really wondering tho is what the hell has happned to Fish? I gave up his music after the album Sunsets on empire.
The only thing that has made me happy the last few years is his DVD Return to childhood celebratring 20 years of the classic album Misplaced Childhood.

Even tho Marillion sound so different today im addicted forever and ever.