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**Marillion takes the long road to 'Happiness,' Part 2**

March 10, 2009  
by Bryan Reesman

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In 1997, U.S. fans raised \$60,000 to fund Marillion's tour in support of the 'This Strange Engine' album.

**Digital revolution**

Long before everyone in Marillion was computer savvy, and before the entire developed world had e-mail and the World Wide Web existed, keyboardist Mark Kelly became aware of a Marillion mailing list online run by a fan, circa 1992-3.

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"The way it worked was that people would send an e-mail to a particular address; then all those e-mails from that day would be packaged up into one e-mail and sent to everybody who subscribed to that list," Kelly explained. "That was pretty much the forerunner of all of the email forums that we have today."

A fan printed out a day's digest for Kelly, and he was reading what all these fans had to say about the band.

"I was lurking on this list for about a year, and I think I blew my cover one day probably because I was annoyed by something that somebody said and wanted to set them right," revealed Kelly. "It was mostly American fans that were on this list, and that was how that whole tour support thing came about, where they raised \$60,000 for us to tour America. That was through that mailing list."

And when Marillion's label discovered what had happened, it put up an equal amount of money to get the band over to the U.S. again.

Kelly admitted to being shocked when he discovered that Marillion fans were raising money — \$60,000 in all — for a U.S. tour in 1997 to support *This Strange Engine*. Since the band had announced that it was not getting enough tour support to come over, some followers took matters into their own hands.

"I thought it was a nice idea that probably wasn't going to happen, and very quickly it all came together," recalled Kelly. "There was a guy in North Carolina who opened a bank account and started collecting the money, and very quickly thousands of dollars were in this account. I hadn't even told the rest of the band at that point that they were doing it."

When the band did find out, it took over control of the accumulated funds to ensure that their fans' money went to its proper use, and for anyone who donated more than \$10, they sent a concert release recorded especially for them, entitled *Marillion Rochester*.

"Back in those days, I was the only member of the band who saw the potential of having communication with the fans through the Internet," said Kelly. "That's when I came up with the idea for the fans to fund the album *Anoraknophobia*."

The result was the amassing of approximately £250,000, which helped the band lure *Brave* and *Afraid Of Sunlight* producer Dave Meegan back into the fold.

"With the first [album] pre-order we saw the power of belief that our fans had, and the fact that they were willing to put their hands in their pockets and pay for something a year or more [in advance]," said Rothery. "We would had to have been selling over a million albums on a major label to get the same kind of money in advance. The fact that we had the time to make the album allowed us to make the best record we could. Having that big lump sum of money up front does that."

Further, pre-order money for the special edition of *Marbles* paid for a special publicity campaign.

"We try to place the albums in the best places we can," continued Rothery. "We tried with this [new] record to sell direct, but that hasn't really worked because I think the average age of Marillion fans is between 35 and 45, and a lot of those people still prefer physical product in their hands. A lot of them don't trust shopping via the Internet. In the rest of Europe, it's kind of frowned upon. So we worked out a [distribution] deal with EMI."

A new twist on Marillion's Internet adventures involves teaming up with peer-to-peer network Music Glue for the release of *Happiness Is The Road*.



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Considering how many free MP3s are floating around the Internet — Kelly said he found a zip file containing the group's entire recorded output that had been downloaded 45,000 times alone from one Web site — the thought of giving away music seemed risky. But the catch is that the freebies are in the form of Windows Media files, not MP3s.

"People can download them, and it basically opens up a window in their media player and sends them a message from the band," explained Kelly. "They have the option to give an e-mail address to get a link to download the MP3 version for their iPod or to burn it to CD or whatever. Through that process we collected about 12,000 e-mail addresses, of which we already had about 4,000 of existing fans we knew off."

He added that while numerous MP3 versions of the album are available online, the Windows Media version is still up and people are still downloading it and still giving e-mail addresses.

While the band does not know if any of the 8,000 new fans will ever buy anything from them, Kelly acknowledged that "that's the new currency these days. It's e-mail addresses rather than trying to get cash out of people up front. It was just a way for us to try to get something back from people who weren't going to pay for our music. We don't think file-sharing is a good idea, but it goes on, and rather than just ignoring it or taking people to court, we thought we'd try to do something positive."

**Stay tuned for Part 3**

**Take a side trip: [Wordplay with Marillion's Steve Hogarth](#)**

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