



**The First Money Bomb**  
**Guest: Steve Hogarth**  
**March 5, 2014**

***Steve Hogarth is lead vocalist of the rock band Marillion, which has sold over 15 million albums.***

*[start 00:01:57]*

**WOODS:** I wanted to have you on not only because you're a great musician but also because the story of Marillion, particularly since you joined the band, is so interesting in terms of what your fan base has accomplished. You must be in awe of this.

Before we get to that, what I did in anticipation of this program, since I have a lot of young listeners who may not be as familiar with your work I put up a special page on my website: [tomwoods.com/hogarth](http://tomwoods.com/hogarth). All I put up there was the live performance of "Neverland" from the 2007 Marillion weekend. Because I'm telling you, I know you've done a lot of songs that are more musically complicated than that one, but that live performance just blows me away. That middle part where the lights come up and the confetti's coming down—it's got to be the biggest rush in the world to be a part of that.

If you had to describe Marillion for somebody who's never heard them before, what's your niche? What makes you different from something else we might hear on the radio?

**HOGARTH:** Oh, my goodness. I suppose we're very honest. You're going to get truth out of us. You're not going to get songs that were painstakingly crafted to sell large amounts or to be on the radio. You're going to get songs that were written in order to express some kind of deep feeling. I mean, it's so hard for me to describe our music beyond that. We're a band, I guess. We don't really have any limits. Our influences are extremely broad based. They call us a progressive rock band, but we're not really. I mean for any label they could hang on is, I could name a song that contradicts that that we've released. So I don't know how. I mean, I'm not really here to sell myself to your fans. All they can do is listen.

*[time 00:04:02]*

**WOODS:** But I think that does describe what the niche of Marillion is. I don't want to put other people down, but let's just say there are some bands that if you have one album you pretty much have them all. Whereas every single one of these—this is why Marillion is one of these bands whose catalog I want the entirety of, because everything's different.

On this point that you produce stuff not necessarily thinking in terms of "well, this will be our hit single," your fans showed the potential of the Internet long before a lot of other people realized it. On two particular occasions to help you guys out, and I'm sorry I don't know the order of which one came first, but I know that your fan base traditionally has been more in Europe than in the United States, and it's hard to make a U.S. tour feasible. That was the case some years ago. And then what did your fans suddenly do?

**HOGARTH:** Well, that was in 1997. We have an awful to thank our American fans for, because it was really

them who introduced us to the idea that perhaps the way forward for us was to turn the fan base into a family, and effectively by using the Internet to finance future projects. Things like this have become fairly mainstream ideas now, using Kickstarter to fund movies and to fund music and other art projects. But Kickstarter really was something that we invented. They just sort took it up, and they've marketed it and made it bigger. But if you look it all up on Wikipedia we started it, and we really have the American fans to thank for that. They saw that we weren't going to come to the USA in 1997, and some guy called Jeff opened a bank account and put up a thing on a notice board on the fledgling Internet saying we want to see Marillion come here, send me some money. I'm the lead singer in the band, and the first I knew about it, it already had \$20,000 in the bank. I think they subsequently raised \$60,000 or \$70,000, and they just gave it to us and said okay, come to America. Of course, when we came, everyone who'd already pledged the money still had to go out and buy a ticket for the show.

*[time 00:06:41]*

**WOODS:** It's amazing. Yeah, it's great.

**HOGARTH:** It was amazing, and it taught us two things. One, for the first time we really realized that our fans were prepared to put hard cash where their mouths were, if you know what I mean. And the second thing it taught us was that whatever this Internet thing is, we'd better get onto it, because it's the future.

**WOODS:** Right.

**HOGARTH:** We have the American fans to thank for everything that we've later been given the credit for, like we had piece of genius and some amazing light came on in our heads collectively, and we saw the future. Well we did, but it was dropped entirely into our lap by the Americans.

**WOODS:** And that wasn't the last time that the Internet was used for you guys in this sort of way. Then when you went into the studio on at least one occasion, you didn't want to be thinking in terms of well, we've got to produce something that the American public that listens to Lady Gaga will purchase. We want to produce something that's good. So you also were able to get the fans to put up money to help defray expenses to do a new album.

**HOGARTH:** Yeah, that was really just a natural consequence of what had happened with the tour fund in the States. While we were in America we ran into a kid called Erik Nielsen, who was in college in Cleveland, Ohio. He answered an advertisement to be our keyboard technician, but when we met him he said knew how to program websites. And so we said, you don't fancy living in England for a little while, do you? And we brought him back with us, and we were the first rock and roll band in the UK to my knowledge to have a website that was really working back in 1997. We ran with it from there.

Our keyboard player, Mark Kelly, is a bright boy, and he said, "Why don't we find a way to find out who listens to us?" At that point our database was very small. I think we had a couple of thousand people on it which was effectively our fan club. We were selling hundreds of thousands of albums, but we didn't know who to. So he said, "What we need to do is to persuade our record label to make a package with a spare hole in it, and we'll put in the sleeve. There's another album you can have with this album, and it's free. All you've got to do is ask us for it." And so we did that. And of course everybody wanted it, because it was free. So everyone who bought that album wrote to us and asked us for it. Overnight our database went from a couple of thousand to 100,000.

**WOODS:** Excellent.

**HOGARTH:** Then we had their email addresses, of course, and we had their postal addresses. So we said, why don't we send an email to everybody we've got email addresses for and just say we've had this idea. We're thinking of making a record, and we'd like you to buy it before we even record it. If you buy it before

we record it, we'll put your name on the thanks list. The following week we said "if that's something you personally would buy into reply to yes@marillion.com, and if it's not reply to no. We didn't need to read the emails. We just needed to count them. Ninety-five percent of the people who replied said yeah, where do I send the money?"

*[time 00:10:40]*

**WOODS:** That's incredible.

**HOGARTH:** This gave us the confidence then to actually run with that and put the preorder of the album on sale. Again, we were the first band ever in the world to my knowledge. We invented the concept of preordering an album in order to finance it. And 13,000 people bought it for 30 quid. And 13,000 names went in the thanks list on the album sleeve.

**WOODS:** That's incredible. In alphabetical order? Did somebody alphabetize them?

**HOGARTH:** I believe so, yeah.

**WOODS:** How about that.

**HOGARTH:** If you open the special edition of Anoraknophobia then you'll see 13,000 names in alphabetical order.

**WOODS:** That's unbelievable.

**HOGARTH:** I think mine's in there somewhere.

**WOODS:** Nice. Now not too long ago you did a U.S. tour. How did it go?

**HOGARTH:** It went really well. We didn't need to ask for funding for that one, but we did have to lean a little bit on the promoters and explain to them that they could actually charge more than double the price for Marillion that they figured they would charge. That's always been a problem we've had is that the promoters look at us and they go, okay, we'll set this ticket price at such and such. The fact is that our fans are so dedicated to us they'll happily pay twice or three times that. And if we can pitch the ticket price much higher than perhaps a lot of other bands, then we can come and play there without the tour losing money. Because unlike some other bands who are funded by their record labels and perhaps their big management companies, we have to make books balance.

You know, we've been around a long time. We slowly figured the music business out. Now we're kind of better at it than the people who used to manage us and used to be our record label.

**WOODS:** Yeah, I'll bet. I read an article I'd say probably about a week or two ago, noting that it's the twentieth anniversary of the Brave album, so it was an overview of you and the band. I learned something in there I hadn't realized, which was that on the eve of getting this gig with Marillion—you were, of course, in the music industry—you were considering leaving for just an ordinary, workaday job. Then all of a sudden, you got an offer from Marillion and then another—I think the way you put it was, "I had a choice between the most fashionable band at that time or the least fashionable band, and I chose the least." Can you tell us about that?

**HOGARTH:** [laughter] Yeah, it's all true. You know I was really hacked off at the music business after my previous band had split up. I had been signed to CBS, which is now Sony. If being signed to a big label like that doesn't put you off from making music forever, nothing will. It put me off from making music forever. I decided that we would sell the house, we would move to a little village somewhere, and I'd be a milkman and never make any more music. And having made that decision and made the for sale sign for the house

and everything, then the phone rang. First it was Matt Johnson from a band called The The asking me if I'd like to go out on tour, play piano for him in the summer with Johnny Marr from The Smiths on guitar and James Eller from The Pretenders on bass. He had this amazing band. So suddenly, from deciding to leave the music business, I was then looking at the prospect of doing something like that.

I thought, that'll be really good for me, because I won't be at the front in the middle. I won't have the spotlight on me. I can just go and enjoy playing again and do a little tour. It won't be about me. I can just do my thing, and I get all of the pleasure with none of the pressure. So I'd really gotten my heart set on doing that, and then of course the phone rang again, and it was someone from the management office of Marillion saying, how do you fancy being the lead singer in Marillion? I said, "Well, what happened to Fish?" They said, "Oh, he left. He left six months ago. And they've heard some of your songs and your singing. They'd really like to meet you." I just thought, oh my God, that's about the last thing I on earth I want to do.

It's a long story, but they hustled me into it. They happened to know one of my mutual friends, a guy called Darryl Way, who was the original violinist in a band called Curved Air, which was the band that Stewart Copeland from The Police first drummed in. Darryl was my drinking mate in Windsor. Ian Mosley had worked with Darryl, and so they whispered in Darryl's ear, Darryl whispered in my ear, and said, "Don't just dismiss this out of hand, because they're really nice guys, and they do really interesting things. You should at least go and meet them." Darryl persuaded me to go and meet them, and the rest is hysterical, as they say.

**WOODS:** What has your relationship been with Fish? Is this an awkward question?

**HOGARTH:** It's not awkward. A lot of people ask me, but it's a similar relationship to if some guy's married, his marriage goes wrong, and he gets divorced and meets another woman and marries her, then a lot of people come along asking her what her relationship's like with the guy's ex-wife. She's probably going to go, well, I haven't really got one. I never see her. Why would I? So it's a little bit like that, but having said that, I have met him a few times. We've always got on very well. The first time we met was a little bit awkward on my part, I suppose. I felt a bit reticent about meeting him. But he couldn't have been nicer. So we don't see each other very often, because we have no reason to. But when we do, we get on fine. He's a nice guy, he's a talented guy, and I respect him.

**WOODS:** What do you think your best work is with Marillion? What are you proudest of in the whole catalog?

**HOGARTH:** Probably "The Invisible Man," the first song on the Marbles album. That's the essence of what we are. The Marbles album overall was a pretty good one. The most recent one, Sounds That Can't Be Made, I'm very proud of. But there's probably a song on every album we've made together now—and we've made 12 or 13 since I joined the band—that I would really feel is outstanding.

*[time 00:18:14]*

**WOODS:** It's funny you say "The Invisible Man," because when I put "Neverland" up on my Facebook page to tell people I was going to be talking to you, and I said, "This is my favorite live performance of anything ever," I was corrected by someone who said, "No, no, no. The performance of 'The Invisible Man' beats this." So he was correct indeed.

What's coming up for you and/or Marillion in the future? Is there anything you haven't told anybody before that you can spill the beans about for the first time here?

**HOGARTH:** [laughter] Is there anything I haven't told about? I have a diary coming out, which will tell an awful lot about life on the road and how my life has been. Since 1992 I've been keeping a diary day to day. Sometimes it'll be about touring or recording. Sometimes it'll be about being at home fixing the washing

machine or cleaning behind the oven, taking the kids to the park. It's coming out in two volumes, I think, because once we got down to it we realized it was too much for one book. So it's going to come out in two books, and the first one—the diary itself is called *The Invisible Man*—should be available in May this year. You can find out all about what goes on behind the scenes in that and what my life is like and what touring life is really like.

In the future, as from now Marillion are about to embark upon a cruise with a band called Yes.

**WOODS:** Oh, I love Yes.

**HOGARTH:** Well, they have a thing that they're going to do early in April called Cruise to the Edge, and it's a cruise liner which sets sail out of Miami and goes down to Cozumel in Mexico. It takes about a week, and it's sort of a rock festival on a boat. There are lots of different artists doing it. The Strawbs are doing it. Steve Hackett is playing. Yes, of course, are doing it, and I think we're technically second on the bill. We'll be doing that, and then in May we're touring in South America and Mexico. Then for the rest of the year, we'll be in the studio staring at each other like giant pandas trying to mate, which is roughly the process that brings about the next album.

**WOODS:** The last thing I'll leave you with is this. I've got a reasonably high-ranked podcast on iTunes, and I'm happy with that. But I'm not the most listened to person in the world. I mean I can put out a book, and it'll sell pretty well. That's fine, and I know I'm never going to be the number one show just by the nature of things. I'm not the most mainstream guy and all that, and I accept that. I'm completely at peace with that. I'm happy that I have people who support me, and they're very loyal, and that's great. I think of that as being sort of like where you guys are musically with Marillion. That unfortunately the general public listens to Lady Gaga, but there's a good solid niche that loves what you guys do. But is there any moment in your life when you say you know it's darn frustrating that a lot of people want to listen to pop, whereas I go out every night performing with my heart on my sleeve with some really great and interesting music, and yet the public wants to listen to totally forgettable stuff. Does that ever consume you, or do you not think about that?

**HOGARTH:** I think it did a little bit at one stage, but I don't think it's necessarily wise, to be honest. I think wisdom is to celebrate—especially if you're in the position that we're in, where we're creatively free, and we're still getting away with making a living doing what we do. And we can do it in just any way we choose, and when we come to write our next song, there won't be anybody from a record label breathing down our necks saying it has to sound like this or it has to go like that. I think the likes of Lady Gaga and the Madonnas and the whoevers at number one in the chart—there's a terrible price to pay for that kind of popularity, because you can be tied up a hundred ways. I'd rather be free and pure and be doing my thing than be number one in the charts and tied down by all the sort of bullshit that ties those artists down. I don't envy them that.

**WOODS:** Very well said. Steve Hogarth I can't tell you what a privilege and a pleasure it's been. I was afraid that when I got you on, I would be the most pathetic fanboy ever. But I think I've maintained my dignity throughout our chit-chat. I certainly appreciate your time. Best of luck with everything: the cruise sounds fantastic, the upcoming diary, the tour, and we can't wait to hear what comes out of that studio session. Thanks so much.

**HOGARTH:** Thank you, Tom. I really appreciate the interview.

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