



*In early September Steven Rothery braved convoys curbing crawling West German Autobahns to arrive in Köln with his band and some guests for a couple of very memorable gigs...*

# INKÖLNMUNICADIO

> by Chris Jones > photos by Bodo Kubatzki

Possibly on the basis that I went to my wedding listening to Fugazi, my lovely and long suffering wife, Kerry, does not totally share my affection for all that is the Marillion family. So it was with a little nervous trepidation, that I took her via trains, planes and automobiles, from rural Normandy, via Paris, Dusseldorf, and eventually Cologne, to meet up with my best mate, Dan and son, Joe for the Steven Rothery Band weekend at Die Kantine.

I was keen to go for a number of reasons. Firstly, we occasionally like a road trip to a city we have never been to. Last time we saw Marillion together, it was at Burg Wertheim, near Wurtzburg, and we loved the German audience, so were glad to meet up with

them once more. I really wanted to see *Ghosts* performed again, since I last saw SRB in Manchester just after the album release and knew it would be even more polished now. Having been at Port Zélande in March, I was also looking forward to seeing Riccardo Romano and Jennifer Rothery perform *B612*. Mrs. Jones did not share this enthusiasm, but was sold on the billed playing of *Misplaced Childhood* and *Clutching at Straws*, especially as we had seen Martin Jakubski and Stillmarillion perform in a little pub, in the snow, in Bolton with about two hundred other sardines, and we knew how well he and the band work together.

Die Kantine is a great venue, a bit like a small Manchester Academy,

which is my favourite venue for a Marillion December show. Die Kantine, easy to get to, is well serviced with bar and Bratwurst stall. We arrived on Friday to a packed and hot hall, to listen to The Dave Foster Band.

They were polished, enthusiastic, and well received, playing about forty minutes of their current catalogue. Led by Dave's guitar and Dinet Poortman's strong voice, they started the weekend off with a great set whilst also introducing us to band members playing as part of the other groups on during the weekend.

Steve and his band then took the stage and led with tracks from *The Ghosts of Pripyat*. Someone said back in Manchester, "Well, I suppose we'll find out if you can listen to too much of Steve Rothery". The answer is still a resounding, No! *The Old Man of the Sea* was a special highlight for me, representing the best of an eyes closed, meditative experience, which getting lost in the music of this album always gifts me with. There are quiet reflective sections, subtly communicated and rocky raucous elements, rocked out with obvious enjoyment by the whole band.

Dave Foster grinned all through the weekend, Steve smiled and laughed, Riccardo shook so much I thought his keyboards would fall off stage! Then onto the Marillion set, when the band was joined by the very talented Martin Jakubski. I love Martin. Vocally he is strong, really strong, and you can tell the music has been part of his own life, as it has with many fans in the family. He is so well respected by his band colleagues and loved by the audience, yet he still looks like he can't quite believe he is up there performing with Steve and the guys.

My hopes for the weekend were easily fulfilled on that first night.

*Misplaced Childhood* was awesome, with Steve Rothery having the professionalism to stop it before *Lavender* due to a sound malfunction, then pick up right where they left off. The whole set, followed by *Cinderella Search*, *Waiting to Happen*, *Freaks and Fugazi*, was simply amazing. Tight, moving, emotional, brilliantly played, it was hugely well received by a vocal and enthusiastic crowd who sang, cried, yelled, clapped and gesticulated, just as at any Marillion gig.

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Night two continued in the same vein. It began with Jennifer Rothery singing her SYLF material, which she did beautifully, and with more composure and confidence than at Port Zélände. This led into Riccardo Romano's Little Prince *B612* set. The book is a beautiful story, as is the animated film, but Riccardo's interpretation of it is simply sublime.

They began with the very lovely *Invisible To The Eyes* with its captivating piano loop, then moved into the rocky *Compass Rose*, through quieter moments from Jennifer, the almost creepy *Lamplighter*, the rocking *King* sung by Martin, to the finale of *Sandcastles*, during which members of the audience surprised the band by waving 'Little Prince' yellow scarves, and roses, organised by the lovely

Irene Schillaci. The band were great in all sections, just right for the material they so obviously enjoy sharing. For me, it was simply magnificent and whilst off-stage, Riccardo is quiet and almost reserved, on stage he is a dramatic performer whether in role, as in *B612*, or simply as a member of Steven's band.

The Steve Rothery Band then took the stage for night two and treated us to the remainder of the *Ghosts* album, moving on to *Clutching At Straws*, again with Martin singing. If anything, this was better than the previous night. So much passion from all the performers, and the crowd! Highlights were *That Time of the Night*, *Incommunicado*, during which the crowd simply went wild, the emotional and reflective *Sugar Mice*, during which Steve's guitar solo rendered me a total wreck, and *The Last Straw*, which saw an amazing vocal performance from Martin.

After a short breather, we were then treated to *Tux On* which I haven't heard live, for over twenty years, then *Three Boats Down From The Candy* and the ever requested *Grendel*, which were great but for me, have not really stood the test of time as has some of the other early material, such as the fantastic and rip roaring finale of *Garden Party* and *Market Square Heroes*.

Altogether, an amazing weekend of fantastic music, a joy to share with fans from all over Europe who had made their way to Germany, and musicians who all obviously enjoyed their craft, and their performance. For anyone who likes the old and the new Marillion, who appreciates their support of other musicians and their work, and wants to share this with like-minded enthusiasts, the Steve Rothery Band weekend was truly a life affirming experience. Mrs. Jones loved it. ●

