

Meeting Mark Kelly of Marillion

Live at the Backstage, Feb 6, 2009 in Munich

Mark and his keyboard rig, with Brainspawm Forte 2.0 as VSTi live host

On Feb. 6, 2009 I had the pleasure to meet Mark Kelly, the keyboarder of Marillion, on the occasion of their gig at the Backstage in Munich. Before sound check, we had the chance to discuss several aspects of Brainspawm Forte 2.0, which he uses as the heart of his keyboard live rig.

Mark plays three keyboards:

- Roland A90 88key, hammer-action MIDI master keyboard,
- Korg Karma Synth workstation, 61 synth action keys,
- Evolution (?) USB-MIDI keyboard with 61 keys and some controller knobs and sliders.



Mark's keyboards



Preparing for the sound check

On top of the rack on the right side you can see two displays. The left one is the display of a rack-mount PC, an Intel-based 2.66 GHz QuadCore running Brainspawm Forte 2.0 Producer Edition on WinXP. As audio interface there was an M-Audio Delta 1010.

The main VST plug-ins within Forte are Steinberg Halion (3 instances), Synthogy Ivory Piano, Steinberg Hypersonic 2 (2 instances), Korg Legacy Collection Digital Edition (Wavestation and M1), Native Instruments B4II, FM7, and Guitar Rig 3, Arturia Minimoog (2 instances, one for Taurus Pedals), Sonnox Sony Oxford Reverb.

Using Fortes scene feature, the plug-in load different sound data as required for each song. The scenes are ordered in a setlist song-by-song for live performance. Via EHCO (External Hardware Control), a MIDI module within Forte, program changes are sent also to outside gear like the Korg Karma to select the respective sound there, too.

Finally, Mark uses a Muse Research Receptor Pro to add even more plug-ins like Spectrasonics Atmosphere, AAS Lounge Lizard, G Media M-Tron, Minimonsta, and NI Massive.

I asked Mark if it wouldn't be quite daring to go on tour with the just recently released new version of Forte 2.0. He told me that it is the most stable version up to now and that it has worked fine for the whole tour. Some known issues were not affecting the live performance and are being currently fixed by Brainspawm. Even if there would be no further development of Forte, it would be a quite perfect solution for playing live with VSTs with no real other option around. I could only heartily agree.



Marillion doing the sound check



The FOH mixing console

After some time of discussion, Mark had to concentrate on the sound check. I was really impressed on the passion and perfection during the sound check. Without any hurry and with concentration on many details, this took over one hour. But not because of technical problems or having to practice songs, something I'm used to as an only semi-pro musician. Finally, I was lucky to catch all members of Marillion for having to sign my "Marbles" CD. Thanks, guys!

They were on tour with their own back line, FOH mixing console and technicians, but with locally rented FOH PA and lighting. Needless to say, the sound was perfect.



The show: Great songs by great musicians

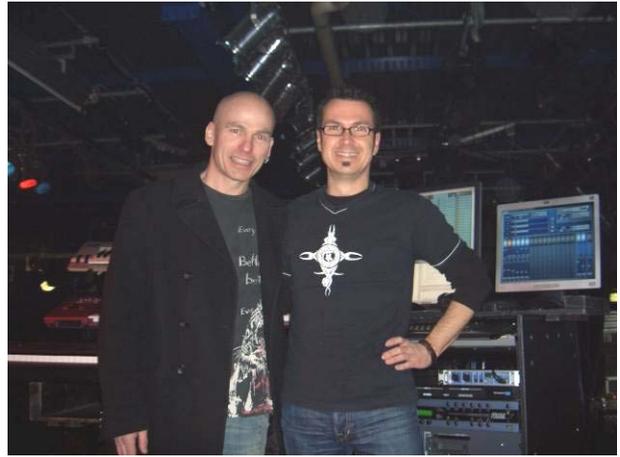


The show: Deep concentration and perfect sound

After opening the doors the hall filled quickly. While maybe not being completely sold out, the large Backstage hall was really fully crowded. Marillion started their show well on time after being eagerly anticipated and called by the fans. It was magic right from the beginning. Playing mainly songs from recent albums like "Marbles" and "Happiness is the Road", the fans celebrated their stars, guided by the charismatic singer Steve Hogarth. Having to confess that I'm more a fan of the previous singer Fish and albums like "Clutching at straws" or "Misplaced Childhood" whose songs were burnt into the musical memory of my teenage mind those days, I was indeed captured and fascinated by both the new songs and also by Steve's voice live. You really have to see and hear them live! Loudly demanded by the auditorium, Marillion had to play two bonus sets ending with "Happiness is the Road" as last song. The audience and I were still singing the refrain hook line, long after Marillion had already left the stage after two hours of a great show.



Fans on the road to happiness



Mark and a happy Angel

Unfortunately, I had to drive home by car after the show 200 km from Munich to beyond Nuremberg. So I couldn't come back to Mark's invitation to have some drink anywhere after the show. But I had to have some sleep before the next day because of being on the road with my own band for a show in Allendorf, a small town in Hessen, Mid-Germany. As always after being inspired by a really great band, I really was hot for playing live for myself. And luckily, it was a real great gig we did in a sold-out hall and a great audience, too. And Brainspawn Forte did again an excellent job providing me with keyboard sounds like nothing else could.

Thank you, Mark and Marillion, for this nice day!

Cheers,
Angel

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Links:

www.marillion.com
www.backstage089.de/
www.brainspawn.com