

# Steve Hackett

## Beyond the Shrouded Horizon

A man elected into the Rock'n'Roll Hall of Fame, a legend and a man dreaming of world domination.

Steve Hackett has done lots of things during his long career which can be said to have started with a band called Genesis, now many years later that experience has led up to his latest studio album.

It is called *Beyond the Shrouded Horizon* and that album is what I and Steve dissect in this article.





WRITTEN BY DANIEL KÄLLMALM  
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Steve Hackett is the always busy guy, currently working on a DVD from a London show in London last year. But it was mainly about the most recent album 'Beyond the Shrouded Horizon' that Hallowed wanted to speak to Steve

about, an album which according to Steve himself is longer than the albums he usually does.

- It is different kinds of music but all of them is something I feel equally passionate about, Steve explains about his new album which is similar to the prior album in that it is equally eclectic but on a much grander scale, like there are many more tracks to which Steve brings up the final

track called *This Island Earth*.

- I think we have about 300 tracks playing on that one track, not all at once but we have 300 odd different tracks and I think we have several different set ups its a bit like four different symphony orchestras worth of playing on that. So it is quite maximalistic, there is nothing minimalistic about it. All I can say is that they are not playing all at once, but it

is something on a much grander scale than anything I have done before, it is the most detailed work I have ever been involved in.

It is also probably the most difficult piece that Steve has ever been involved with, and that is considering a man who has been with Genesis and has a very large number of progressive albums and collaborations under his belt.

This final track was actually so advanced that the computer they used was unable to play it all back, it was just too much for it and he had to make an upgrade into something that I use, well actually something that is from the same manufacturer but more advanced than what this article is made on.

It is an ambitious project sonically and there is a lot of bombast

on the ending track but the general style is one of romance.

- It is rock in the name but it is romantic and there are influences of acoustic music, which goes through the entire album. It is not always large, it is sometimes very small and I stretch it right back to a nylon guitar from time to time which is a passion for me. It is a mixture of many different styles, there some country music,

some influence of heavy metal, there's blues, classical, jazz, indie music, world music, arabian music, hungarian music, all sorts of stuff that's in there, it is a crazy mixture the whole thing.

The word diverse is a good word for this album Steve agrees and he likes to think that the album is coherent as well.

- I think that if you get such a thing right you can be sufficiently entertaining to be coherent. Otherwise it can be very tiring for the listener, now I'm aware that music is very subjective and the appreciation for it differs from one person to another but what I attempted to do was to take people on a musical journey, like a Continuum.

### **Journey**

At the end of that last chapter we found ourselves touching the subject of a journey, which is something that is omnipresent when it comes to this album. It is a journey that takes the listener to many different places and also many different times, Steve

explains.

- A musical journey, an odyssey or like a sojourn really, a kind of adventure which travels from place to place and not just dealing with the Earth as we know it and all its geographical regions but also beyond earth and out into space, and a trio round the solar system and beyond. Also a trip into inner and outer space, and all of that is a kind of virtual ride or a virtual voyage but essentially what I had in mind was travelling. Sometimes to places and sometimes that is to different times, sometimes its backwards and sometimes its forwards but my intention for it is to be entirely escapist, it is not to educate anyone.

Not taking on the educator's position Steve explains that he sees the album like a movie, not in the visual sense but a movie for the ear. Sometimes it is like a pastiche, in a cartoonish sense and

sometimes it is something grander and Steve likes to see it as something visual which is what he intended with the album.

- Not visual in the accepted sense of something that it is an adjunct to a video, I am thinking that it is a number of different canvases that an artist might use and there might be a number of different landscapes some of which I finished in one go but many of them I started four years ago and left them unfinished.

The four years could have something to do with Steve being a very busy guy doing a lot of different projects all the time and he isn't done releasing different things, he explains that he has stuff going on with Chris Squire which might be released next

year.

- Some albums take four years to finish, there were other things that I did in between, I worked on other projects. My last non-live album was 'Out of the Tunnel's Mouth' which is something I recorded at home, then I did a live album and I've also been working on some work with Chris Squire which will come out I think some time next year. Simon Phillips is on the album as well, along with Chris Squire and other progressive personalities that are well known.

Inspirations for this album called 'Beyond the Shrouded Horizon' can be found everywhere, but it is mainly travelling. The

inspiration also comes from places that Steve has visited and the people he has met within those places. People are a source of inspiration according to Steve.

- I get a lot of inspiration from my wife Jo, we were married in June and many of the things on the album I've written with her and with Roger King. I tell you what I think is most inspiring, its conversations particularly when you're doing lyrics I find that if you're having a conversation with someone that will very often account for so much, you can't overestimate the effect of

having a musical conversation with somebody. Normally it becomes stronger if you talk about you motives with anyone.

### **Reception**

When I spoke to Steve the album had only been out for a day but if sales were to go on as they had started Steve says he would be very happy. The prior album Out of the Tunnel's Mouth sold 35'000 copies and as it appeared this new album Beyond the Shrouded Horizon sold 6'000 only





in the first day, I have not been able to find out how well it has sold but it did chart on the british charts so the sales must have been rather alright. Not just the sales have been quite good, the reviews have been unanimously good which is something that worries Steve.

- I have some reviews and worryingly they have been unanimously good, I am waiting for a really bad review because you tend to only remember the bad ones. When people are complimentary it is always reassuring but you tend to remember when people say that this is absolute rubbish and takes an entirely

contrary position.

Many times Hallowed do take a contrary position and say less of albums that most reviewers hail as fantastic but in the case of Steve Hackett's latest release we are following the celebratory route that most reviewer seem to have been taken, all of them that Steve and I have read but I am sure that there are some out there with a contrary position somewhere but as far as I can prove it is unanimously good, the reception of this album from the press.

- I've certainly worked hard on it and had a lot of time spent on it, but my reactions to it are enti-

rely subjective. It is a bit like your child which obviously have to be the greatest. But you make it as great as you can, I try to make albums personal and if I can do something that's universal at the same time then it's a very good place to be. To be commercial but with conviction, if you can do that you must be very clever indeed.

According to Steve he has not yet been able to do such a thing, as he thinks he has not been able to write something simple enough. That is something he attributes to his past affiliation with a certain legendary band, who's fans was expecting that kind of

complexity in the music. They never wanted the ordinary and that background he says has followed him in his music making music complex and he points out that in the past it was even unnecessarily complex.

Speaking of the past and present, Steve Hackett obviously has a lot of albums and music under his belt, he speaks of 50-60 depending on what you do with the Genesis albums. That makes one wonder if it is the same feeling to release another album, it is the 24th studio album by Steve and that is a fair amount of albums but he says that the feeling is the same now as it was before.

- I get a thrill out of making an album but I think that on the eve of release of an album you tend to get a little bit anxious. You hope that it will do well, you hope that people will like it and you always hope that you're gonna produce something equivalent of total world domination of course. And then, having dreamt of that you pull back and realise that your expectations will have to be tempered with the reality of who you are and where you are any point in time.

#### Songs

Steve Hackett's favourite song on the album is not the most ob-

vious pompous ending track, it is a short instrumental track called *The Phoenix Flown* that originally was thought to be the ending of the opening track *Loch Lomond*.

- I particularly like the simplicity in it in a way, very few chords, hardly a changing base note throughout, it's rock guitar playing but with a very eastern flavour to it. It is as if you combine the influences of Borodin and John Mayall's Bluesbreakers you will probably end up with something very like that.

As I stated earlier that song was not intended to be a song of its own from the beginning but due to conversations it became a

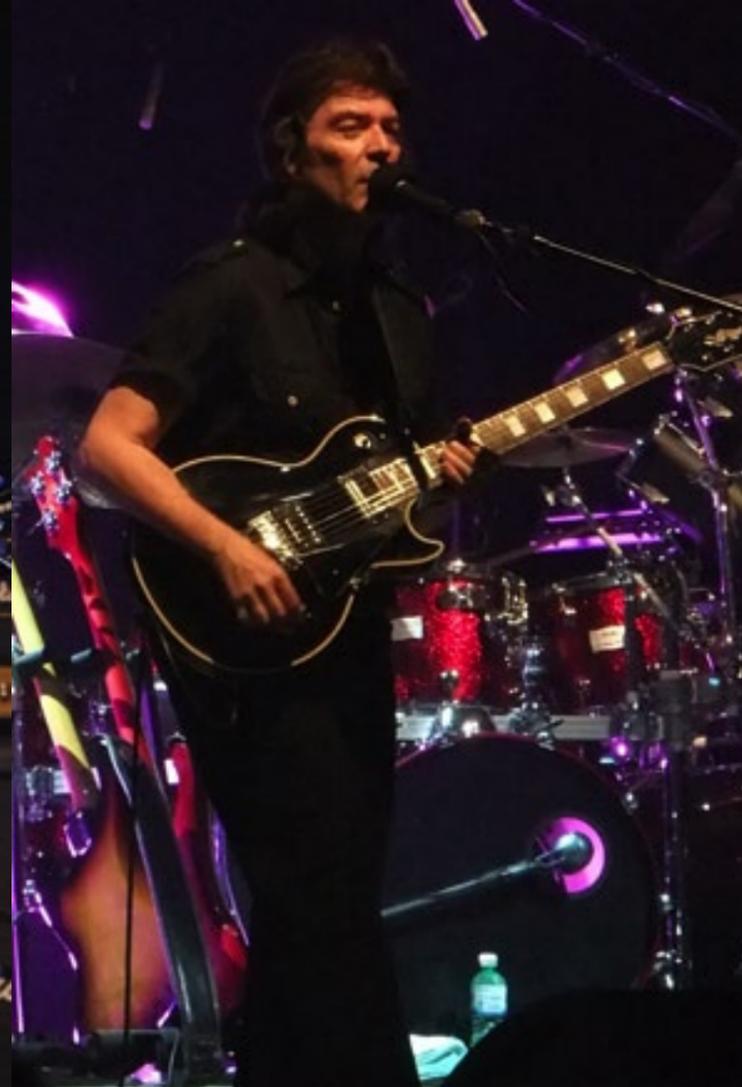
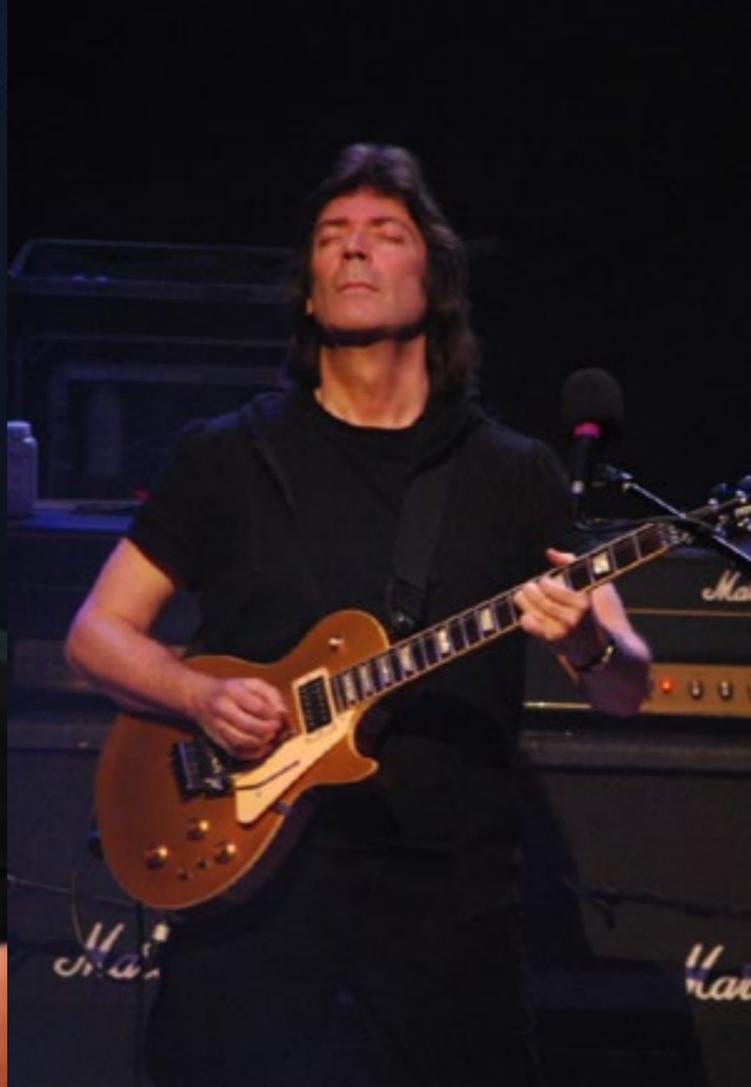


Photo by Maurizio Vicedomini

track of its own.

- They were originally all gonna be called *Loch Lomond* but because I did a false ending in order to link the two, people were always asking me "is this another track or is it the same track?" so I thought I'd make it easy for people by banding it differently. The second half which is *The Phoenix Flown*, I think that's the moment where I feel that it's my electric guitar playing at its best.

Another song making an impression is related to the past and comes to emerge when speaking of rock music fame and glory. For me this interview was the first one I have ever done with someone who has been inducted into the Rock'n'roll Hall of Fame, which is something that Steve

is rather cool about stating that he is always looking forwards rather than backwards.

- I never feel that I have reached the peak of what I was capable of doing, so it is a nice pad on the back for past glories but the future is what most musicians are all about I think. They are always thinking about the next thing to master I think, to try and present something.

But the past is not without consequence for Steve who still tries to honour the past and sometimes that same past resurfaces and adds to the recent works.

- I think the stuff that I did in the seventies did very well and I was lucky to find such a huge audience for all those various ideas. I still try to honour the past I still perform songs that I was invol-

ved with right back in 1971 and sometimes even back in the 1960s I had ideas to things before I was in *Genesis* and now and again one of these melodies emerges and comes through like on the present album its a very old melody that dates back to 1970 and that's *Between the Sunset and the Coconut Palms*. Its a very old tune, never got around to it. Its a pretty track, Its got almost a kind of *Beatles* verse, I think of *The Beatles* when I'm hearing that, I think of *The Beatles* influenced by *Everly Brothers* but with more harmonies.

And it goes to all sorts of places, and the influence of country music also leads Steve into talking about other songs of the album.

- In *A Place Called Freedom*, I wasn't consciously concentrating

on country music but it is about the american countryside and it is a western in a way, like a film. A kind of romance of the land as well as of the people who meet in the landscape who are from different cultures, I'm always interested in the mixture of cultures. I mean men and women are different enough from each others anyway, two completely different races that inhabit the Earth.

#### Promotional

Touring is something Steve is doing in many places and he points out that he wishes to visit us here in the cold north as well as it has been long overdue with a visit to Sweden. At the moment they are talking with a promotor and Steve didn't really give up any details on much of the tou-

ring and I do think that the site: <http://www.hackettsongs.com> is the best resource for that kind of information.

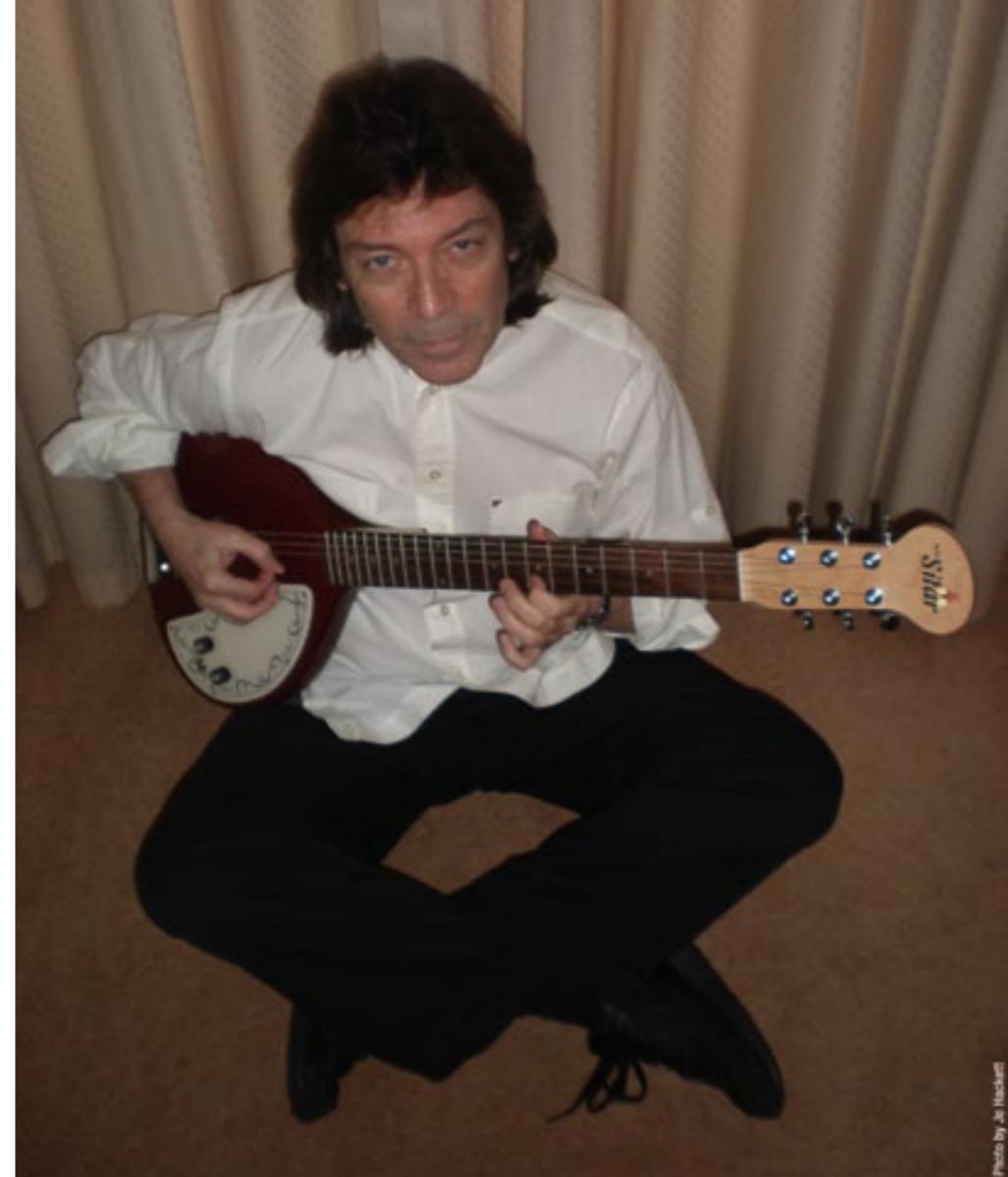
Speaking of websites, the new technologies like the internet and computers have effected the musical business in a big way, many bands losing big sales and others are getting by much better now and the record companies are in trouble and some of them just vanish. Steve doesn't think it is a major problem for him.

- Most of the time the people that I make music to prefer to own a physical product, they are people who value the total package so I try and release it in as many different forms as possible. The new album is released on vinyl as well and we have for the special edition a gatefold sleeve

for lovers of vinyl and for lovers of gatefold. Then we do a CD of course as well both in a regular edition and a special edition with longer material. So we try and keep everyone happy.

The choice of Vinyl is not only proof of the fact that some technologies are hard to kill but it is also the thing with the cover art and the sound and everything. I believe most of us who have known the vinyl has a special relationship to the music that was and still is found on these big black or painted discs with the big cover artwork and the special sound of the needle skipping through the small tracks. The CD is also not as straightforward, according to Steve it is a bit of a challenge.

- Yes, the feel of it and the ef-



fects of sound of course because when you listen on vinyl you have extra compression and distortion which gives things a certain power, but when we do CD we take those things into account as well so if we want something to compress and distort we give it the warmth of analog in a controlled way and its one of lots of processes that the music goes through. I think they both have something to offer and I think the tactile, almost fetishistic side of vinyl is something that I loved very much as a kid. I think the iconic nature of artwork or photographs that are large enough to put on your wall as a painting is what used to galvanise me when

I was a teenager. A CD is a challenge in a sense for the myopically impaired my eyesight is not as good as it was at one time and there so many people who pick up a CD and say: "I can't read it without my glasses" but luckily I can still read small print without glasses but its a challenge.

Steve doesn't think the Downloading has hurt his cause any noticeable and that there are several good reasons to rather buy the physical product.

- I have no objection to downloads but when I do shows and sell albums at shows quite naturally we're selling physical products which has a special kind of package and a special kind of paper

and many different selections of quality control and I think that if you just listen to downloads in the main you are probably not so concerned with lyrics and artwork. But I think that if you are someone who listens to music with a sense of pride as opposed to merely disposable thing almost like switching on a the TV and channel surfing, once you made that selection and listens to an album that becomes a favourite, I suspect that the selective listener will want to engage with it fully and I don't think I am just talking about the completist who buy everything. I mean if I buy an album that's Tsjaikovski conducted by Herbert von Karajan I

want to have the album, I want everything that it entails, I want to read all of the sleeve notes and I want to know everything there is about the music and I love the fact that Deutche Grammophon started making CDs in the shape of old records for instance. You Know, that for me was something that was very beautiful, in other words a kind of nod to the past, honouring the past with the technology of now I think that was very cool indeed.

#### Ending

The downloading and that sort of thing is one aspect of the modern times, another aspect is the creative one, the work in the studio

and the promotional work. Steve thinks that these modern times have changed the way he works with his music thanks to the help of computers which make things much easier. The work with songs flows faster and the sketching in computers makes the rapid need of learning songs for studio work less necessary.

- I would say that modern times probably has changed the way I work, we tend to work on computer and we tend to do computer sketches and then we colour everything in with performances. Now that can be flexible and we can extend things of course but I find its easier than trying to teach people a song that I am only just

learning myself. So the writing is done usually outside of the studio but we update it in stages and that's with the people I work with, I'm talking about writing with Jo and working with Roger King for instance who is the engineer and the keyboard player on the album so he and I work out the arrangements between us. I think that in many ways he is infinitely more musical and gifted than I am, but I'm kind of the catalyst and I provide the spark for many of these performances. I start other peoples forest fires with my spark.

Steve explains that he is the guy with the ideas, ideas that he then delegates for other to realise as if



he isn't playing nylon guitar a cappella he is dependent on other people's performances. Then he is also dependent on these people liking the material that they are supposed to perform.

- I like to work on a one to one to find out exactly what that person thinks about the track and how they feel they can contribute to it. Some people like to work at home of course and in the case of

Nick Beggs who plays bass and chapman stick on the album, a fabulous player, he like to work from home and send his part to me, Simon Phillips who guests on the album worked on his part from Los Angeles.

Chris Squire of Yes is a person Steve has been working intensively with lately and they are planning a release for next year. Chris Squire is also one of the performers on this album and he is according to Steve a very emotional guy.

- He and I have done lots of things recently and he worked with me face to face, either in the studio or at my home. He gets very enthusiastic when he works, very much like a kind who's in a toy shop for the first time and that level of enthusiasm is very surprising to me because I've worked with people who have been famous and most of the time after a certain point I think it's just a job to them but with this guy he gets moved by stuff and cries or laughs his head off, its ex-

traordinary, he's extraordinarily alive when he's working.

I asked Steve if he was the same and he said he was even if he does his crying in private and some music can evoke that kind of emotional response if it is very beautiful Steve explains and it is usually women's voices that does that he explains.

As the final words Steve just wants to remind everyone of his website [hackettsongs.com](http://www.hackettsongs.com) which they forgot to print on the album

sleeve. So be sure to check that site out and also our review of 'Beyond the Shrouded Horizon' which is out now since some time ago. And with that we thank Steve Hackett for the time he took to talk to us and also wish him luck with the upcoming DVD and all the other projects in his pipeline.

**Author's note:**

The images selected for this article are some recent photo's of mine that are inspired by the album, the lakes are inspired by the *Loch Lomond* song, as that serene mood is what the song convey to me.

The Final image is one of travel, to undertake a voyage towards the distant horizon, where not too many har travelled before. Remember to check the review at our site