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DATE: TUESDAY, JULY 24, 2007

STEVE MORSE INTERVIEW

PROJECT#: LA-0771

Steve Morse is one of the world's foremost guitar players – considered to be the very best by many. His mind blowing recordings span thirty two years. He was first famous for being a pioneer in electric jazz fusion, then later for his solo instrumental work. Most notable is his work with the Dixie Dregs and the Steve Morse Band. Others may know of him from his days with Kansas or currently with Deep Purple. He was voted Best Overall guitar player five years in a row by Guitar Player Magazine, until they had to disqualify him from getting it anymore, just to give someone else a chance!

There was an incredible synergy of brilliant musicians at the University of Miami in Florida in the Early 70's, with people in the School of Music like Pat Metheny, Jaco Pastorius, Hiram Bullock, Andy West, Rod Morgenstein and Steve Morse. I once saw Pat Metheny give a clinic at Berklee College of Music talking about how he and Jaco first got together and he said, "My first day on campus I met Steve Morse and it scared the shit out of me!" That ought to tell you something about Morse's playing even back then as a student.

It seems that Steve Morse has been the perfect choice to fill the shoes of the legendary guitarist Ritchie Blackmore in Deep Purple. The current line up consists of three original members, left handed drummer Ian Paice, Roger Glover rocking out on bass and Ian Gillan still belting out the vocals. Jon Lord retired from the band in 2000 and was replaced by Don Airey. That's right, the same Don Airey that played the intro to "Mr. Crowley", and played the classic piano part on Sabbath's "Changes", and has recorded and toured with people like Gary Moore, Jethro Tull, Whitesnake, ELO & Rainbow. They sound better now than they ever have. These are not some geezers out there just trying to keep something going. They are hard hitting and energetic and continually putting out new music that is constantly evolving. I was listening to them play "Highway Star" and "Space Trucking" and was blown away how powerful and heavy those songs still sound after nearly four decades!.

When Steve Morse agreed to do this interview, I knew this was a rare opportunity to speak to one of the most important composers of our time. He has been a huge influence on musicians the world over.

Interview Transcript:

DRL: First, I'd like to thank you for taking the time to do this right before a show. I wanted to meet with you because you've been such an inspiration to so many, so I would like to find out some of the things that inspire you. What sorts of things would you like to accomplish from this point forward in your career. I'd also like to cover how has your experience with Deep Purple been different from your instrumental years. So if you don't mind maybe we could go over a few of those types of things

SM: Sure, thanks for doing this.

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DRL: So how has it been going with Deep Purple – have you been enjoying that? It seems that you've been touring for about three years straight over in Europe.

SM: It's been about fourteen years in Europe it seems like! I've been with them for fourteen years, and we play constantly in Europe. That's really the base of the band. And it's very unusual for us to finally play in the U.S. It's a difficult market because Deep Purple is branded as a 'Classic Rock' band instead of as a current band.

DRL: So even though you're putting out new music, do you find that some of the rock stations are reluctant to play some of that, because you're deemed as a classic rock band even though there's new material constantly coming out?

SM: No, some of them are not reluctant, *all* of them are reluctant. It's just not the format. Years ago the consultants decided what music. . . you would pick a brand or a style of radio station and the consultants would tell you what to play. And they would tell you to play one or two songs for each classic rock band. Which ones, they would tell you that.

DRL: Is there anything that you feel that the record company could do or should be doing differently in terms of promoting you in the U.S.?

SM: Sure. I could go on for ages. But, it's not really my place, since the record company has different goals than I do. Their goal is. . . The record company that is most active is the one that owns the old catalog. And they don't really care about anything except that material – I mean that's their main focus.

DRL: So what would you say your goals would be separate from the Deep Purple project – or is that what you're focusing on?

SM: My goals? For me, having been, for decades, working in the music business, I think it would be valuable to pass some of that on. The guitar clinics I do are a good outlet for that. But I would like to continue to do even more of that. I'm still looking for a way to get that message through, so any interview I can do that allows me to talk about it is good. To tell young people the reality and debunk some of the myths about the music business and get people the straight story so that we can attract people that are suited for it and that really love it. As opposed to people that want to be rich or famous, or something like that.

DRL: Right

SM: And if you want to be rich, obviously, my standard answer is to buy a lottery ticket. You'll have a better percentage chance!

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DRL: Absolutely, yeah, that's for sure! So what work are you most proud of doing?

SM: I'm proud of everything I did with the Dregs, but probably there was a few albums where it was just me doing the production and no one but my engineer working with me.

DRL: Like *Major Impacts* and *High Tension Wires*?

SM: Those things of course, but also with the Dregs, you know, "Unsung Heroes" – stuff like that. Those were great milestones. And "High Tension Wires" was a great crossroads for me.

DRL: I remember from a show at Night Stage's in Boston from that tour, that you had said it was just the first week that you had met drummer Van Romaine and he was already filling in that whole gig for Rod Morgenstein.

SM: It was great having him be able to do that. It was great just finding out that there was still a place for me in the music business, that was a nice surprise.

DRL: Do you feel that doing Deep Purple has allowed you to do other things because it's given you more financial stability, in terms of the record industry as a whole?

SM: Well I never worried too much about financial stability! If you look at my track record, you'd see that! It's weird, Purple has opened doors for me to do things, but I can't, literally can't do them because of schedule. We're working so much. This band works more than any group I've ever been in. Like for instance, a "G3" tour with Satriani, which I would love to do, and I just had another opportunity that I literally can't do. It's killing me, but at the same time, that's what happens – life gives you tough choices.

DRL: Do you have another 'Living Loud' project coming up?

SM: Well, that's another thing. We've worked on a few tunes already in Australia. And you know those are guys I love working with, and just again – more time. You know, my life really changed since I had my son.

DRL: How old is your son now?

SM: He's sixteen, and playing guitar, by the way, very well. But, you know, in the process of being in a band for years, my wife, you know, I get divorced, then remarried, then finally got my third wife – which is a keeper. She has kids too, so it's more difficult to go to someplace like Australia to hang out and write some songs. You just, you just can't do that.

DRL: Has your success with your instrumental music and then subsequently with Deep Purple, has that all that been worth the difficulties with the family and everything?

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SM: If I was to be given a choice, say; OK here ya are, you've got a great gig, here you can take this, and end up divorced and your kid from a broken home; or you can not do that. I don't think that I could have possibly chosen my career over my son's happiness or anything like that. But you don't get those choices. It's impossible to look at it that way.

DRL: I know that you are a big fan of piloting. What about the flying do you feel really inspires you? Do you find that just the way the sky looks, and some of the cloud formations and things like that inspire you, or is it the feeling of flying – what aspect of the flying really gets you pumped?

SM: Well, books and libraries have dealt with the revelations that people get after they hiked to the top of a mountain and see how beautiful the world is, and see things at a distance, and have a vista of a hundred miles in every direction. Like the Native Americans passed on stories and they formed their characters and solidified their love of the land by seeing these kind of sights. People dedicate their lives to living in the mountains of Europe and Asia and the Himalayas, there's all kinds of history of people getting to a higher plane by just being up there looking down. And to me, being in an airplane is just like the same thing, except it's really immediate. No matter how bad life is or how stressed out you are, if you can just get that thing up off the ground, everything gets better. Cause suddenly you're . . . I think it takes you closer to God, and away from the rat race, you know.

DRL: So that's even more than just adding inspiration to your writing, it really is more of a way of expanding you own consciousness?

SM: Yeah, and feeling like it's all worth it.

DRL: Right, absolutely. What tunes are you most excited about playing on now on the current tour? I'm sure you'll be playing a few things from the latest Deep Purple disc, *Rapture of the Deep*.

SM: We do "Things I Never Said" is kind of a shuffle from the new album and the title cut "Rapture of the Deep" is also fun to play in. Then they let me do a solo thing where I play a little bit of "Contact Lost" from the previous album and also a short instrumental that I wrote called "The Well Dressed Guitar", very straight up classical rock sounding. So the new stuff, those all suit me fine, of course. I wrote all of the guitar parts and riffs.

DRL: I see that there was some talk about a retrospective disc to be released, has that come to fruition? It was about having like thirty songs from all different eras of you career, from the Dregs, to Kansas, the Steve Morse Band, your solo albums and your work with Deep Purple.

SM: That's a guy in Australia. He was doing that and got trapped in the aspects of licensing. Because if you want to do it legally, it almost impossible. If you want to do it illegally, no problem!

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DRL: I was so excited to get the DVD of the Steve Morse Band playing in Baden, Germany from 1990 and I just sit there and think of how many times you played as the Steve Morse Band, through touring in support of those five incredible albums. Was there ever any live DAT tape running? You did all of these amazing solo pieces with the loop station and I remember hearing Van Romaine saying that he would have to look out from behind the drums to try and figure out what you were doing, and that every night was a different solo. Is there any documentation of some of that?

SM: I don't think so. I don't think so, we play smaller places and we didn't really encourage taping, at all. So there's probably not taping, except crappy little, you know, just bad quality.

DRL: Well that's what makes the Baden, Germany DVD such a gem.

SM: Well that was a gig. We were playing on rented equipment and we had just flown over, we were tired and that's, that's not exactly our best show of the era, so I don't know if it's good or not.

DRL: With Deep Purple I had heard that there was sort of an instant connection with Jon Lord when you guys first started playing together and that there was sort of almost a telekinetic connection. Is that something that when you're playing with certain musicians that you feel more strongly, than with others? Is that something that really helps build the band together?

SM: Writing wise, as much as anything, too, that really helps. Like for writing, I don't think that I've ever communicated easier than with the guys here. Well all the people I work with are so easy. I mean Van Romaine and Dave LaRue from the trio, the guys in Purple are so easy to work with, and Living Loud, Bob Daisley is a fantastic guy to work with.

DRL: I'm told we have to wrap this up, so before my last question, I'd really just like to say this to you. Your music has meant so much to me personally, and I just want to thank you for doing what you do. I really appreciate you taking the time to do this.

SM: Well thank you!

DRL: What is the next project you have on the horizon?

SM: I've got a new album that I've finished, but I don't know what in the hell to do with it. It's kind of acoustic stuff that I wrote with this girl singer that is so good.

DRL: Sarah Spencer.

SM: Yeah, Sarah Spencer

DRL: How did you end up getting selected for that? That she wanted the whole Steve Morse Band?

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SM: She didn't. She's just from my town. I knew her parents and they said "you've got to hear my daughter" and I went "ohhh God!" (laughing) I heard her, and she was really pretty good. So I listened to more stuff, and I said bring her over and let's see if we can write something together. We did and she just... that first take just nailed it! Just reading from the scribbled notes. I said; "My God." This is something special, you know. I have an opportunity to write stuff that I would like to listen to myself, and so that's what I did. I wrote stuff that I would like to hear and of course, with some of her ideas mixed in, so it's a collaboration. So I've got to find some; I don't know what to, if I should even mess with a label or. . .

DRL: And that's what you mean that you not sure what to do with it? You current or previous labels aren't interested in it?

SM: Oh I don't know. Everybody I've ever talked to about her, the first thing they ask is if she's that kind of urban slutty girl singer crap. No, it's not! Or "What kind of beat does it have?" It's not about beats! Sucks.

DRL: Sounds like me, trying to push my projects! But I'm in the middle of America with no contacts.

SM: Me too, me too. I mean I've got recordings of the best female vocalist I've ever heard, and just...

DRL: PlaybackSTL would be glad to help spread the word, but that's only half the problem it sounds like.

SM: Yeah, we'll probably have to do it online, sell it online, just to get the cost back. She is so fucking good though. And she's just so unspoiled. I don't know how long that'll last (laughs). It's really good. Well I better get back

DRL: Thank you very much for your time. It was my pleasure, absolutely, very cool.

SM: Thanks for doing this.

END OF INTERVIEW

In our current world of music overload where anyone and his brother can put out recordings, we have the record companies and radio stations shoving sub par music down our throats 24/7 until they brainwash enough people into thinking their latest crap is cool. Then they cite those sales as an argument for not supporting a wider range of musical expression. It's so Republican it makes me want to puke. Everybody needs to wake up and realize that mass marketing of music is not merit based and is not democratically representative of people's tastes. One could say that the music industry is capitalism at it finest. That may

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be true, but it has been bastardized by the privileged few to such an extent that true works of artistry, expression or expertise go un-noticed.

Is it enough to play music for your own sense of self-satisfaction? It has to be – play because you love to make the sounds. Is it enough to listen to music just to be distracted for a few moments by the latest thing? It can be – but there is more to savor from life than well financed ad campaigns. It takes a little more effort to expand your horizons, but no one else will, or can for matter.

So now you ask yourself, “I want to hear more of Steve Morse’s playing, but I don’t know any of his music from the radio, so where do I start?” **Well here it is, your Steve Morse primer:**

If you like hard rocking’ kick-ass guitar playing with some serious shredding, then you should pick up any and all of the cd’s by the Steve Morse Band. Start with *Southern Steel* (MCA), the first one of the five discs that they did during the 90’s. It’s like with the first album from Boston where every song on the disc is great, you can’t go wrong. But it’s not like Satriani where he just lays down a simple track then shreds over the whole song. These are true compositions. But it’s not like Vai where the arrangements are weird or complex just for the sake of being weird or difficult. They are meaningful songs that happen to have great guitar playing. Each album has a stylistic range that includes along with the hard rock tunes, a country song, a classical piece, some ballads intertwined with the rich harmonies derived from jazz fusion. Some of my favorite highlights are “Vista Grande”, “Battle Lines” and “Weekend Overdrive” from *Southern Steel*; “User Friendly”, “Morning Rush Hour”, and “Cabin Fever” from *Coast to Coast* (MCA); “Rally Cry”, “Dreamland” and “Good To Go” from *Structural Damage* (High Street); “Brave New World”, “Four Minutes to Live” and the title track from *Stressfest* (High Street); and “Marching Orders” from *Split Decision*. Those are just a few of the songs I feel should have been on the radio all along, and the world would be a better place.

Two of his solo albums *Major Impacts I & II* (Magna Carta) are amazing examples of his writing skills. Both discs have him composing in the style of classic rock bands that influenced him like the Allman Brothers, the Beatles, the Stones, Jeff Beck, Clapton, Yes, and many more. With each song he is able to capture the essence of each vocal based band with just an instrumental arrangement. Listen to the Zeppelin influenced “Led On” and the Hendrix styled “Well I Have”, to get a feel for how masterfully he was able to so closely match the feel of each artist; simply incredible!

High Tension Wires (MCA) is a unique masterpiece. It comes from a transitional point in Morse’s career and contains a wide variety of musical ideas and influences, which makes it a great album for driving. I still wake up to “Ghostwind” every day in my alarm clock. There are some beautiful, subtle moments on this disc, but check out how he slowly builds an intense Celtic solo on “Highland Wedding” and the blistering Neo-Classical fusion riff of “Tumeni Notes”.

If you are familiar with the work of the Dregs, then I need say no more. If you are not, then start with *Bring ‘Em Back Alive*. (Capricorn). This live album will give you a great retrospective of the legendary

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work of the Dixie Dregs starting back in '75 and their pioneering efforts to combine elements of jazz with rock, funk, classical, and country music using modern instrumentation along the lines of Al Di Meola's *Return to Forever* and John McLaughlin's Mahavishnu Orchestra. A must have Dregs album is *Full Circle* (Capricorn). It was done much later and with a different line up, so many Dregs fans may have missed this one, but I am telling you, I can't say enough about how cool this album is. It shows a competence and confidence of composition that is seldom seen.

I won't go into the solo albums from the era right after the Dregs, because he mentioned them in the interview as some of his favorite work so I won't say any more other than, "Cruise Missile" and "On The Pipe". Those are the first two tunes I ever heard from Steve Morse and let's just say they left a lasting impression.

If instrumental music is not your thing, then you're in luck, because everything that Steve Morse has done with Kansas and Deep Purple carries the same artistic integrity and innovative, creative guitar playing as his solo work. If you are a fan of the Ritchie Blackmore era Deep Purple and love their famous tunes, then you should get the live disc *Total Abandon* (Thames Thompson), from Australia in 1999. It has them breathing fresh life into the old classics and will give you a taste of the powerful new material written with Morse. My favorites are "Any Fule Know That", "Fingers to the Bone" and "BloodSucker" from *Abandon* (EMI); and "Ted the Mechanic" and "Sometimes I Feel Like Screaming" from *Purpendicular* (CMC). All of which could be hits on the radio today and seem as current as anything you hear, if broadcasters would just have the balls to think outside the cubicle.

Do not pass up a chance to get the *Living Loud* (EMI) disc with Bob Daisley and Lee Kerslake (from Ozzy's first two solo albums). This is an epic rock album and I have no idea why the radio didn't jump all over it. People already know and love the Ozzy tunes and are probably tired of hearing the originals from radio overplay. I love their version of "Tonight", but in fact, I like the new tunes they wrote even better, especially "Every Moment a Lifetime" and "Walk Away".

If you want to learn how to play like him, Steve Morse is more than willing to help you out with a plethora of instructional videos, books, transcriptions, and articles from *Guitar Player*; all available from his website; complete with up close photos and descriptions of his stage gear. All of the DVD's are of the highest quality and give you an up close look at his beaming stage presence.

Well there it is – go write your congressman, or whatever it takes. Spread the word.

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