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## Steve Bowe Featured on MWE3.COM

BoweMusic is pleased to announce that a review of "Finest Hour" and an associated interview with Steve Bowe is now featured on the Music Web Express 3000 website.

MWE3.COM is a New York based guitar oriented music review site that features significant rock and guitar artists in review and interview. BoweMusic were approached by MWE3.COM for an interview and a transcript of the article follows. The original article can also be found at:

<http://www.mwe3.com/reviews/SteveBowe2011/>



### STEVE BOWE

#### Finest Hour

#### (BoweMusic)

Back in the late '70s guitarist Mike Oldfield began rocking out big time, most notably beginning on his 1976-77 instrumental art-rock fusion production with the late great Finnish instrumental rock pioneer Pekka Pohjola. That era of Oldfield combining romantic melodic invention within the instrumental rock context continues into the 21st century with the 2011 CD release of *Finest Hour*, from guitarist Steve Bowe. Even though the *Finest Hour* CD is primarily Bowe on guitars, keyboards and programming, there is a spark of invention that does indeed live up to the legacy from whence that spirit came. A rising musician from England worth keeping an eye on, Bowe is also a student of history and as the "concept" for *Finest Hour* he explores a key episode in U.K. history called the Battle Of Britain—fought during the summer and fall of 1940. The historic period of England's survival against the Nazis is textbook history, yet—in the liner notes discussing the track by track titles depicting key scenes from the battle—Bowe reenergizes history with some truly riveting and quite moving musical prominence. One minute you think Mike Oldfield is jamming with Bowe and the next you feel like he's in the studio with Jan Hammer—Bowe is just that good at conjuring musical imagery with melody—and no words required. Plus, you haven't lived till you've witnessed the sound of mournful bagpipes tracked with Bowe's swirling synths keyboards and electric guitars.

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mwe3.com presents an interview with

## STEVE BOWE

**MWE3:** *Tell me about your love of the guitar and English history. What came first in your life? Where and when did you grow up and how did that impact your music?*

**STEVE BOWE:** I grew up in a lower middle class, if not particularly wealthy, family in the south of England, my formative years being the 1970s. I had a pretty stable childhood and my parents were both great classical music lovers and that influence has stayed with me to this day. My dad in particular was very musical, being a pretty good pianist and singer and he encouraged me to appreciate music and to learn the piano from a very early age. The guitar came into my life when I was about 12 or 13, starting on a cheap Spanish model bought for my birthday. I taught myself to play from tutor books and by playing along to the rock music of the day, and never looked back.

I guess the appreciation that I developed for both classical and modern music during that time has given me the broad musical tastes that I have now. There are very few genres of music about which I cannot find something to enjoy. This is probably also reflected in the variety of styles you can find on my albums now, from pure electronica through to orchestral and everything in between.

As a proud Englishman I have always been interested in the history of my country, but one era that has always fascinated me is the second world war. I was a generation or so away from it but my parents and grandparents remembered it well and it really made them what they were, so I could not really fail to pick up on that. As a kid, in common with many of my age, I started building plastic models of Spitfires, Mustangs and Messerschmitts with a real passion and acting out battles with them. Now I view these historical events with a little more respect for the human side of the story than I did when I was a kid, but if anything that makes it all the more fascinating. I suppose it was inevitable that this would end up taking a part in my music eventually!

**mwe3:** *What were the key events that led up to the release of the *Finest Hour* album?*

**SB:** Well I had wanted to do a solo album of my own for a long time after spending many years performing and producing other peoples music, not to mention a rather stressful interlude in the world of I.T. and business. I finally got the opportunity to start working on it in the summer of last year.

I decided right from the start that it would be a concept album based on my pet subject, the Battle of Britain, and that it would be called *Finest Hour*. I also had an image in my head of it starting with the Winston Churchill speech as this would be such a great opener. But I also wanted to make sure the music was accessible to anyone who wasn't so passionate about the subject as me and that it could also act as a bit of a showcase for my composing and recording talents. So I broke the story of the battle up into chunks and composed a piece of music around each part, using a number of musical ideas that had been rattling around in my head for ages. It worked really well since it gave the opportunity for a variety of styles and moods.

The album was actually finished by Christmas 2010, but I had to wait three months to get permission from his estate to use the Winston Churchill speech and so it was finally released in April 2011.

**mwe3:** *When did you realize that rock instrumental music was turning into an art form for the guitar? What artists had the most influence on your love of music, and your guitar playing and composing? How about Hank Marvin and Mike Oldfield—definitely two of my favorite guitarists! And what albums had the most impact on you?*

**SB:** Glad you mentioned Hank Marvin—if it wasn't for him I doubt I would ever have picked up a guitar. While I was growing up with all my mates into classic rock I harboured a guilty delight in listening to The Shadows and that guitar sound just entranced me. I demanded a guitar for my birthday as a result, learned to play "Riders in the Sky" within a couple of hours I was hooked! I even home built my first electric guitar by tracing the pattern from the cover of the String Of Hits album.

This music really spoke to me, I never liked lyrics—they seemed to detract from the wonderful sounds being created by the instruments and that meant I always veered towards instrumental music. I guess being brought up by parents who were strictly classical in their tastes probably had something to do with that, early on I developed an ear for melody and harmony that rendered lyrics completely unnecessary. Whilst I appreciate a really good song as much as the next guy, I still today enjoy the music for its own sake. I like to think that the listener can put their own interpretation on music without having their hand forced by lyrics. I think the human voice has a great sound, and I use it a lot in my music, but as another instrument rather than a means of conveying words.

I'm also pleased you mention Mike Oldfield, probably the single greatest influence on the music I make today. Yes, he's a great guitarist, but perhaps more importantly, he creates amazing themes and visions with his music whatever instrument he is using, and he uses quite a few. And more often than not without lyrics. For me, his seminal work is The Songs Of Distant Earth which I highly recommend to anyone who doesn't know it, as a master class in instrumental music.

I guess my other guitar heroes would be Jeff Beck, Alex Lifeson, Robert Fripp, David Gilmour and recently I've been really getting in to Joe Bonamassa. But for overall musical and style influence I also have to thank the likes of Enigma and Jean-Michel Jarre for their uses of sound, and I also have to mention the more folk oriented rock outfits like The Waterboys and Runrig. I am sure I must be the reincarnation of some ancient druid or something because I find putting folk and traditional musical touches to what I do completely irresistible, and I know it shows.

Finest Hour has also been compared to Jeff Wayne's War of the Worlds, another album that I grew up with have a lot of respect for. I think though that this may be mainly as a result of the opening speech as much as anything. But I'm not unhappy with the comparison!

But also, any discussion on my influences has to point out that I am a major classical music fan, even to the point of attempting full blown orchestral works myself, like "Sceptred Isle". You will hear a lot of orchestral elements to my music, often overlaying more modern rhythms and sounds and I whilst

not entirely original, I like to think that this fusion of orchestra, rock and electronic is very much a hallmark of my sound.

**mwe3:** *What guitars are you currently using and what guitars are featured on the *Finest Hour* album?*

**SB:** I'm basically a Strat man, having used a black and rosewood example I picked up second hand when I was about 15 years old and it's been with me ever since. It's a bit beaten up now and crackles like hell when it's in a bad mood but I love it to death. I also use a Tele occasionally for some of the heavier stuff. But my "go to" guitar at the moment and the one that featured most on *Finest Hour* is a Cort KX1Q which I discovered by accident a couple of years ago at my local music store. It's got the look and feel of a Strat but with some seriously gutsy 'buckers that can also be tapped when I want to thin things down a bit. Cort make fantastic instruments and although they have been around for a while making Ibanez and others, they are starting to come through now as a make in their own right and good luck to them I say! I also used an old Yamaha acoustic on *Finest Hour* which I've had for years and can't remember where it came from but it does the job nicely. I have an Ibanez SG500 which I used for all bass guitar work—it's a lovely piece of kit, really tactile and light but with a great tone.

**mwe3:** *What guitar strings do you use and what effects and pedals do you feature on the album and do you play live shows?*

**SB:** I've been an Ernie Ball man ever since I started playing. The jackdaw in me was attracted to the bright packets, I think! Generally go for the hybrids for the six string. However I do use Adagio strings for the acoustics as well. I have a Boss ME20 pedal unit that serves me well for live work although on the album all effects were applied "in the box" mainly using Amplitube 3, which is a fantastic bit of software.

I'm not currently doing live shows in my incarnation as a solo artist—although I am regularly gigging for fun with my function band where I play bass. However one of my priorities for 2012 is to put a live act together for my music and am now starting to look for musicians to work with. It's quite a challenge since there are so many orchestral and choral elements to what I have done and this is going to be hard to reproduce live without a full blown orchestra and choir! But we shall find a way—I already have a large number of requests from people wanting me to get touring and it's very important to me that this side of the package is completed.

**mwe3:** *You switch from guitar to keyboards, sometimes in the same song. What keyboards do you prefer and play on the CD?*

**SB:** The piano was my first instrument, being trained classically from the age of about 6. I finished all my grades by the time I was 15 and became a pretty accomplished pianist, although by then the love of the guitar and rock music had started to take over! But I am really glad I stuck it with the piano

since it gave me a brilliant musical grounding and enables me to be self sufficient when it comes to producing an album such as *Finest Hour*. The sounds in music are extremely important to me and the great thing about keyboards is that the possibilities are effectively limitless.

I use an M-Audio 88 key master keyboard for all playing and the sounds come from rack mount and "in the box" synths. On *Finest Hour* I used Roland Fantom XR and JV-1088 rack mount modules and also used the Halion Symphonic Orchestra, East West Symphonic Choirs and a handful of other bits and pieces including the excellent Omnisphere software on the computer. I also recorded some percussion instruments but the majority of the drums were programmed.

I had a vision of each track before I recorded it and this generally determined which instruments were used. Not all of them warranted guitar so a few are purely keyboard based.

**mwe3:** *Who were some of your biggest keyboard influences?*

**SB:** I don't really have any keyboard heroes as such, playing keys does not really carry the same iconic potential as the guitar, especially these days when it is so easy to generate a perfect performance note by note with the computer—something that is fortunately still very hard to do with the guitar! That said, I guess I should mention Jean-Michel Jarre if only for his musical influence and we must not also forget the extremely talented Jools Holland. Even though his music is not really in the same vein as mine his brilliant piano playing gets me dancing along without fail. I also appreciate any expertly played classical piano music, I don't have any particular favorite pianists but there is something about a brilliantly played piece of Debussy or Chopin that blows me away.

**mwe3:** *What system of computer programming did you use to record the *Finest Hour* album?*

**SB:** *Finest Hour* was recorded using Cubase 5.5 on my Dell i7 host system using a Steinberg MR816CSX audio interface and Adam monitors. I also used a variety of software effects and Slate Digital mastering software. The vocals and guitars were recorded with Neumann and Shure microphones.

**mwe3:** *It's rare an album will start off with an introduction by Sir Winston Churchill. When did you find out about Winston Churchill and how did you decide to base the entire *Finest Hour* album on the Battle Of Britain? I don't think this kind of thing has been done before. It's amazing I remember Winston passing away and the incredible funeral, they had there and in New York on TV. How do you think that battle and in fact that whole era is still ingrained into the English history and mentality?*

**SB:** Indeed, and I think most people of a certain generation have some connection with those dark days. You're right that the whole thing is part of our history and culture but it is now starting to fade from living memory and attitudes have mellowed over here. There is no longer any animosity between Britain and Germany beyond the occasional joke meant purely in fun. We are all good friends now and we buy a lot of their very nice cars! I spent a lot of time in Germany a few years ago

and they are a fantastic, hospitable and hard working people who despite stereotypes generally have a great sense of humor. I have a number of very good friends over there.

So my contribution to the memory of those times has been *Finest Hour*. I have never intended any judgment in making this album, it purely reflects the mood and spirit of the British people when they faced invasion for the first time in nearly a thousand years. The title comes from the Winston Churchill speech that was made at the start of the battle in June 1940, and I don't think there are many British people who aren't familiar with Winston Churchill, the speech or at least a few phrases from it.

But I don't really want to get too hung up on the theme of the album. First and foremost I would like it to be seen as great music. As I said earlier, the *Battle Of Britain* theme really came from my own personal interests in that particular time in history and the course of the battle over those few weeks in 1940 lent itself very well to a concept album. But if you ignore the titles and a few sound effects I like to think that it holds its own as a great piece of instrumental work.

**mwe3:** *What are your plans for *Finest Hour* and future musical plans moving forward?*

**SB:** Well I'm currently on the point of releasing my second album, *Soundscapes*, and I intend to spend the next couple of months promoting both albums as heavily as I can and getting as much press and media coverage as possible. The next major musical adventure will be to create a live act and hopefully to start touring at some point in 2012. A third album is likely next year as well but I have no specific schedule for that at this time. I'm also working on some deals to get my music licensed into media as I believe it lends itself perfectly for film and TV use and I hope this will start happening later next year as well. Thanks for your time, Robert...and keep up the great work!