

Jugband Blues

Good afternoon. My name is Björgvin Rúnar Leifsson and this is an episode about Pink Floyd.

The Piper at the Gates of Dawn was the first major PF album and the only one mostly directed by Barrett. It was released on Saturday, August 5, 1967. Later that month band members were supposed to meet at the Abbey Road studio over a weekend for rehearsals and the recording of new songs, but Syd did not show up and nobody heard anything from him. An attempt was made to find him, but to no avail.

Next Monday, the rumour was that something had happened to Syd. It was probably their agent at that time, Peter Jenner, who described it as the shining, which had always been in Syds' eyes, had been turned off. Mason mentions in his book *Inside Out*, that the other PF members did not properly realize there was a problem until right there and then, in the late summer of 1967. Everyone knew Syd had been trying various substances such as LSD and everyone knew he had his good and bad moments. The word on the streets suggested that Syd probably took an overdose of acid that fateful weekend in August 1967 and embarked on an eternal acid trip as it was called. He was, as it were, just unlucky because many in the London underground culture took acid in those years without getting particularly bad with it. The other possible reason is just as likely, as old interviews with Syds' relatives and friends show that there was an underlying mental illness in his family, which the acid or some other substances might have unleashed.

But Waters, Wright and Mason persisted. Barrett was the main character, a kind of representative of the band, the main songwriter and lyricist, the singer, the guitarist, etc. It was not until after a completely failed concert tour of the United States in October 1967 that they gave in because by then Syd could neither play nor sing. He just stood perched on the stage and struck at best the same tone over and over again. In November of 1967, Waters and Barrett's old friend from Cambridge, David Gilmour, was asked to join the band.

To begin with, the idea was to have Syd as a primary songwriter and lyricist and that he would accompany them in rehearsals and the studio. Gilmour learned to play his old songs and according to him this was a very awkward time when he stood on the stage playing Syds songs with the author staring at him as if he was thinking, "Why is this man in my footsteps ". To cut a long story short, this simply did not work because Syd just got worse with new songs from him becoming fewer and not as good. It was in March 1968 on the way to a rehearsal when someone broke the ice and asked, "Shall we go and get Syd?" Everyone responded "no" and that was the end of that dream.

One of the saddest things about this whole affair was that Syd seemed to have some awareness of his illness and where it was heading. The text in the opening track of the show, "Jugband Blues", which he wrote in December 1967 clearly shows that and I quote:

"It's awfully considerate of you to think of me here
And I'm most obliged to you for making it clear that I'm not here
And I'm wondering who could be writing this song "

Now that Syd was gone, the other members of the band had to compose their songs themselves, so to speak. To begin with, it was mainly Waters and Wright, who wrote both songs and lyrics, but also the band continued on the path of creating long compositions together where the imagination was set completely free. By 1967, the band had made their name as the UK's leading progressive and acid rock band and even today Piper is regarded as the main London underground rock album at that time. Furthermore, the spectacular color and light shows at the band's concerts did not hurt the reputation. These shows were of course due to the educational background in the Poly and Barrett had studied art before he joined the band. Of course, the band changed when Gilmour took over from Barrett and maybe we can say that now we have

entered the era of cooperation and collaboration, which ended with the pearls "Dark Side of the Moon" and "Wish You Were Here". Let's now listen to two songs, which were released as singles in 1968. The first is a beautiful song by Roger Waters and is called "Julia Dream". Notice the loud whisper after the chorus "Queen of all my Dreams" in the second part of the song. Is this perhaps their first oath of many to their ex-friend and partner Syd Barrett?

Julia Dream

The next song was released as a single in late 1968 which turned out to be the last single from PF until "Another Brick in the Wall part 2" was released in 1979. The song is called "Careful with That Axe Eugene" but is called no more and no less than "Come in number 51 your time is up" on the movie album "Zabriskie Point", which was released in 1970 but there is actually a minor difference between those two versions. The scream in the middle of the song is Roger Waters, who screamed onto the tape on the suction and then played it backwards.

Careful with that Axe Eugene

Pink Floyd's first major album after the Barrett era, "A Saucerful of Secrets", was released on June 29, 1968. It contains 7 songs and ends with "Jugband Blues", which thus became Syd Barrett's farewell song. On the album Waters wrote 3 songs and Wright two but the title track of the album is by them all. Based on this distribution of songs and authors I can not help but disagree with those who claim that as early as 1968, Waters had begun to try some conscious takeover of the band. However, we notice here for the first time a hint of the Pink Floyd sound, which later made them distinctive from other progrock bands and which was perfected on "Dark Side of the Moon" and "Wish you were here". This sound is, of course, based on the cooperation of all four of them but in my opinion, Gilmour and especially Wright should have more than half of the credit. Furthermore, the band continued to develop color, light and simply the visual arts part of their concerts so that to this day this is still a great aural and visual experience.

The first song on "A Saucerful of Secrets" is "Let There be more Light" by Roger Waters.

Let There be more Light

The second song is "Remember a Day" by Richard Wright and shows that he could be just as good a songwriter as Waters.

Remember a Day

The next song is called "Set the Controls for the Heart of the Sun" and is by Roger Waters. This song has for a long time been a classic PF work and is among the best material that the band released during those years. It is remarkable how much Waters' compositions have developed over one year since he wrote "Take up thy Stethoscope and Walk", which we heard in the last episode.

Set the Controls for the Heart of the Sun

The song "Corporal Clegg" by Waters closes the first side of the album and is his first song that partly deals with his father's death in WW2.

Corporal Clegg

Finally, let's listen to the title track of the album, "A Saucerful of Secrets". Legend has it that once they had decided which songs should be on the album, which had not been named at the time, they still had considerable free space left on the vinyl. It was then that the trio from London School of Polytechnis decided to paint a song and then play it. They immediately started the work while Gilmour stood by and watched with open mouth. Mason describes this slightly in his book and says that he and Waters, who neither knew to read notes at this time, had the most part in the painting or the drawing but undoubtedly each of them contributes to the song. Here improvisation and imagination reach new heights, and according to Gilmour this was where the road to Dark Side of the Moon started.

Meu nome é Björgvin Rúnar Leifsson e eu sei muito pouco sobre o Pink Floyd. Obrigado e até depois.

A Saucerful of Secrets

© Björgvin R. Leifsson 2020