

Final tones of "Speak to Me"

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

By the end of 1971, Roger Waters had come up with an outline for a new album. He had some ideas and had started writing new songs. For example, the song "Time" had already a melody and a chorus and then he had composed a rather unusual and radical 7:8 bass riff.

The first discussions within the band, which led to "Dark Side of the Moon " happened at the kitchen table at Mason's home sometimes close to new year's eve 1971. They all had some older, unpublished material and unfinished works but there was a special theme present at this point, which could help Waters develop the work. In fact, Mason remembers these times as a period of quiet family life for all of them even though they were all preoccupied with the same things as all families, such as deadlines, travel, flight stress, monetary issues, fear of death and the fear that mental imbalance would develop into pure insanity. Yes, they created such a list at the kitchen table in Mason's home and that list became Waters' arsenal when he started writing the lyrics and thus the theme of the album.

When Syd Barrett left in 1968, it became Waters' role to compose most of the lyrics. Gilmour and Wright wrote relatively few texts at this time and Wright actually once said that if the words came as fast as the music and they had nothing else to do, dozens of lyrics would be put on paper. On Dark Side Waters proved himself to be a pretty good lyricist and actually this was the first time they had the lyrics printed on the album because they were very happy with how well they fit in with the music.

Within a few weeks, the first, incomplete version of Dark Side was created and they decided to test it on the audience. They held quite a few concerts in the first half of the year 1972 with the unfinished work and used both audience reactions and their own sense for the work to develop it further and, for example, "On the Run" was largely based on the repeated recycling of the material, which was tested in the concert series. This unfinished work was sometimes known by the name "Eclipse", which was the working title of the album for some time, or "Dark Side of the Moon, a Piece for Assorted Lunatics ".

After the concert series and other projects, the studio work began for real in June 1972. They were all very enthusiastic and shining with self-confidence. It did not hurt that they were now themselves producers of their own material and therefore did not have to struggle with end dates by publishers.

During this time, there was also a generational change among employees of the studios. The rock generation was taking over and the new technicians perhaps better understood than their predecessors the importance of a good co-operation with the artists and to not object, for example, that they would pick up the scissors or fiddle with the recording gadgets from time to time. Abbey Road Studio assigned them the technician Alan Parsons but besides being one of the best technician of the time, he was a rather good musician himself and according to Mason they were a bit shocked that he refused to cooperate with making "Wish You Were Here" and started his own music career with Alan Parsons Project.

The introduction to "Dark Side", which you heard a little bit of at the beginning of the episode, is called "Speak to Me" and is by Mason. This is a kind of prelude to what is to come. Mason simply recorded and slid together clips from all the songs on the album and added the heart sounds, not with actual heart sounds which they felt too stressed, but by using a very soft pedal on a very cushioned bass drum and then slowing the beat down so much that any cardiologist would be very worried about the patient. Then a thick piano string was held down for more than a minute with the extension pedal firmly at the bottom and this sound was then played backwards to build up the work into the next part.

"Breathe" is by all but Mason and is their first attempt to use the same song around other songs, namely "On the Run" and "Time". The fusions between "Breathe" and "On the Run" on one hand and "Time" and "Breathe" on the other are masterpieces, especially the latter.

"On the Run" is by Gilmour and Waters and is mostly based on all kinds of sound effects, including synthesizers, but they also used a lot of sounds from Abbey Road Sound Museum. The explosion at the end of the song is especially effective in concert where an airplane model is passed over the audience in the direction of the stage and blown up with a bang. This was the idea of the lighting engineer Arthur Max. He organized and refined significantly light performances by the band in the concert series, which followed the album, so a Pink Floyd concert took on a whole new dimension.

The introduction to "Time", which is by all four of them, is by Alan Parsons who went to a clock shop and recorded tick tock sounds from all kinds and sizes of clocks.

"The Great Gig in the Sky" is by Richard Wright although the singer Clare Torry is a cowriter and has received royalties since she won a lawsuit in 2005 on the premise that her contribution to the song, which is undeniably powerful and beautiful, was equal and enough to be credited as a co-author. Mason mentions nothing about this lawsuit in his book, "Inside Out", which was published the year before. Anyway, they were very happy with the song and Mason points out that they were generally happy with the contributions from additional musicians on the album, such as saxophonist Dick Parry on "Money" and "Us and Them", but he was going to be more involved with the band later and it can be added here that he and Gilmour were together in the band Jokers Wild before Gilmour joined Pink Floyd.

Waters and Mason created the money sounds in "Money", which is by Waters. Mason drilled holes in a few coins, threaded them on a string and swung them rhythmically in circles but Waters recorded the sound of rolling coins in his wife's clay mixing bowl. The paper scrap sound was simply created by tearing a piece of paper in front of the microphone and the cash register sounds were obtained in the studio.

"Us and Them" is a very poetic song by Wright with lyrics about the alienation of war by Waters. The song is actually from when they were working on Zabriskie Point and was then called "Violent Sequence" and is one of many songs they wrote for the film and the film's director refused. This is also the last Pink Floyd song cowritten by only Wright and Waters without any involvement of the others.

"Any Color You Like" is by them all except Waters and was by many thought to be the last Pink Floyd song in which Mason is credited as a co-author but that changed much later. This song acts as a kind of rest on the tight album before the final part.

"Brain Damage" and "Eclipse" are both by Waters and he sings them himself but Gilmour is otherwise the lead singer on the album. Both songs show how well Waters' voice fits in with his own compositions. The first song deals partly with insanity and some people think Barrett is the model, compare "And if the band you're in starts playing different tunes" but Mason does not mention this in his book. The lyrics "I'll see you on the dark side of the moon" are a reference to the darker side of the human mind and not the back of the moon but like most people know, the term "lunacy" is often used to describe a behavior or condition of insane people.

"Eclipse" changed considerably in handling since its first gig in 1972 until the album was finished and Mason says it has changed from a piece that was missing all dynamics into what he actually calls the "grand finale" which fits particularly well at the end of this amazing album.

Although the album was more or less ready, there were still a few things left, which all helped to make it unique and in my opinion and that of many others Pink Floyd's best album from start to finish. First of all, there are the spoken texts throughout the album, such as "I know I am mad", "There is no dark side" and "I am not afraid of dying." Waters created some questions about insanity, violence and mortality and Mason wrote them down on cards. Then they got

people in the Abby Road studio, like Paul and Linda McCartney to enter the recording studio, turn the cards over, read the questions aloud and then answer them aloud into the microphone. Paul and Linda were actually so nervous that they did not use any of their answers but this was possibly the beginning of Paul and Gilmour's life long friendship.

Secondly, they decided that all the songs on the album should fuse together or overlap with each other and this method was used afterwards all the time Waters was in the band. At the time, this was a lot of work but the result certainly proved worth every cut, mistake, correction, capture and time.

Then there was the sound mixing. They got Chris Thomas, another genius to join them, who was actually a musician rather than a technician and he mixed the songs on the album in collaboration with Pink Floyd.

This was the first time a fundamental disagreement came up. Of course, it's a matter of taste how a song is mixed, for example, whether to have all the instruments' volumes sound equal or whether one or more of them should sound louder than the others. They debated voices, sound effects, guitar and rhythm. Sometimes three proposals were made and in the past, it had usually been enough to resolve issues. Now however, the issues prevailed. To cut a long story short, Waters and Mason wanted to focus on effects and experiment with different balance between instruments while Gilmour and Wright wanted to put more emphasis on the music itself. To simplify things even more, Gilmour wanted the music to be fluid and echoing but Waters wanted it to be drier or rougher. In the end, Chris Thomas took the lead and did simply what he thought was right even though I suspect he did lean a little more towards the views of Gilmour and Wright because the result is much more wet than dry. According to Mason Thomes does not remember these days as days of arguing. On the contrary in his opinion the atmosphere was good, everybody was hard working and they all were very disciplined. To quote a book I read once it may be said that a lightning was seen in the sky although the thunder was not heard until much later.

The album was released on March 24, 1973 and immediately became very popular more or less all over the world, both in English-speaking countries and in other language areas. The sales were in fact overwhelming and much higher than band members ever expected. I'm not going to bother you with sales figures but Dark Side is one of the most popular and best-selling albums of all time and by many also considered by far the best album in rock history. Some critics even went so far as to complain there was no way to criticize anything on the album - it was simply perfect. Mason suggests a few possible explanations, which he believes can all apply.

He considers the main explanation to be the strength of the songs, which all are both strong and powerful. The idea of connecting all the songs together also worked well and gives the album a very special touch. The lyrics have great depth but also cover a lot of everyday things that the public can relate to, and moreover, they were simple enough to make it easy for people from outside English-speaking countries to understand them. Then Mason says outright that the quality of the music on the album, led by Gilmour's guitar and Wright's keyboards really makes a perfect Pink Floyd sound.

Other important issues, Mason believes, include the involvement of others musicians such as Clare Torry and Dick Parry, and the talented technicians, Parsons and Thomas. He considers the role of the latter especially important given that at that time stereo gadgets were becoming public property and the album is a stereoc work of art. I actually remember that when I received the album as a Christmas present from my future wife in 1973 I had only a mono record player connected to a lamp radio. This was both the first Christmas present from my girlfriend and also the first Pink Floyd album, that I acquired and because I didn't know better I thought it sounded magnificent on the poor equipment.

Mason also mentions Storm Thorgerson's stunning cover design and last but not least that the album apparently became a very popular accompaniment to lovemaking.

Finally, it may be noted that Mason's bank manager did not care much that he had the best-selling album in the United States at one point and refused him a small loan to cover the gap temporarily.

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

Dark Side of the Moon

© Björgvin R. Leifsson 2020