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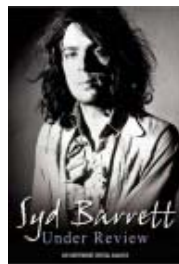
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Syd Barrett: Under Review (2006)



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When the seminal lineup of Pink Floyd – Roger Waters, Rick Wright, Nick Mason, and David Gilmour – reunited for the London Live 8 concert in 2005, before performing “Wish You Were Here,” Waters introduced the song by saying, “we play this number for everyone who cannot be here today, but most of all, of course, for Syd.”

Statistically, most of the people who heard this probably went, “Whatever, just play the song.” Some, however, got downright misty.

Roger Barrett – known to his friends and admirers as Syd – was the original frontman for Pink Floyd, back in their decidedly psychedelic days of the late '60s. None of the tracks from his era of the band have ever made it into regular rotation on classic rock radio, but Barrett’s work, both with Pink Floyd and as a solo artist, have made him a hero to cult musicians (most notably Robyn Hitchcock, who all but built his career on imitating Barrett) as well as record store clerks and music writers everywhere.

Described as “the ultimate review and critical analysis of the music of Syd Barrett,” Under Review is, unfortunately, really only for the diehard fans who already know rather a lot about the music of Syd Barrett...and, even then, you run into the inevitable problem of telling those people stuff they already know. The “esteemed experts” who chat about Barrett’s life, music, and career in the industry include gents who have among them written for Melody Maker, Uncut, and Mojo, but most of the information they provide is either straight out of every Barrett / Pink Floyd biography ever written or is the sort of chatter you overhear at parties when music journalists have had too much to drink. (Example: “‘Opel’ is a song which I feel represents the finest moment in Syd Barrett’s songwriting and musicianship career, if you will, and one of the reasons is that it’s so unnerving and unpredictable.”) It’s heartfelt, but it’s well-trod territory for those who already have Barrett’s albums.

As far as the talking heads who contribute to the documentary, where, you may well ask, is anyone from Pink Floyd? Or – with the sole exception of Hugh Hopper, late of Soft Machine, who backed Barrett on *The Madcap Laughs* – where, indeed, is *anyone* who actually knew Syd personally, let alone worked with him?

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There's a text box on the back artwork of the DVD cover – one most certainly required by law because, otherwise, you know it wouldn't be there – that gives away the game. It reads, in full, "The opinions on this DVD are completely independent. This DVD is not authorized by Syd Barrett or members of his family, his legal or personal representatives, Pink Floyd or any of its members, EMI Records or any record or publishing companies associated with the release of Syd Barrett's or Pink Floyd's music." Seems to me it would've been more succinct to just stamp "unauthorized" on the front, but whatever. (A decidedly more official look at Barrett can be found on "The Pink Floyd and Syd Barrett Story," which was released on DVD in 2003.)

Still, unlike many such unauthorized documentaries, this isn't just talk; the filmmakers have actually been granted the rights to use Barrett's solo and Floyd material, and they also seem to have access to a treasure trove of filmed material as well. Much of it has been seen before, but, in particular, it's eerily fascinating to watch the Floyd's performance of "Jugband Blues," the last song on the last album by the band to feature Barrett among its ranks; it's sadly ironic watching him as he sings the lines, "*And I'm much obliged to you for making it clear / That I'm not here,*" knowing that, not long after it was filmed, he was fired from the band. (Actually, what happened was that Barrett was becoming increasingly unreliable, so David Gilmour was hired as an assistant guitarist of sorts...but, one day, the band was on their way to a gig, decided they were doing alright without Syd, so they, uh, just decided not to pick him up. And that was pretty much that.)

"Syd Barrett: Under Review" will be of interest to the pre-existing fans of the Madcap, particularly given special features which include an interactive quiz and stories about lost Barrett recordings, but, honestly, to call it "the most complete, informative and downright entertaining Syd Barrett film yet to emerge" (as the blurb on the back of the box does) is patently untrue.

~Will Harris

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