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Syd Barrett: Under Review



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IN STORES NOW

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We were sitting in my friend's cluttered bedroom while trying to edit the poetry submissions for our high school literary magazine when my friend threw some **Pink Floyd** on the stereo. My father being an acolyte of **Dark Side of the Moon** and having spent many nights myself shut in my dark room, headphones crushing my temples, I was more than happy to have a respite from the moribund adolescent poesy.

But what was this? What's going on here? This couldn't possibly be **Pink Floyd**. It was really weird and awfully poppy, and that high keening nasal voice was like a dentist's drill. And so went my initiation into **Piper at the Gates of Dawn** and the world of **Syd Barrett**. To say I was unprepared would be an understatement.

My **Pink Floyd** was totally void of a sense of humor, they were heavy and dark and brimming with anti-establishmentarian angst so who the hell was this weird guy singing about his bike?

It wasn't until a few years later that the true goofy, acid-glazed glory of Syd really hit me. I had picked up his first solo record **The Madcap Laughs** on a whim. I'd heard some rumblings in the magazines that Syd was brilliant and damaged and worth exploring, so I took Syd home and gave his record a go. And almost instantly I was converted to the church of Barrett. **The Madcap Laughs** is shambling and idiosyncratic and

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- > Werner Herzog: The Great Ecstasy of the Sculptor Steiner, How Much Wood Would a Woodchuck Chuck, La Soufriere (New Yorker)

everything that I loved about rock'n'roll at that point in my life. After spending night after night with Nico and the third Big Star record, Syd's cracked and folky blues-pop was a perfect fit for my then current aesthetic.

The British Under Review series is yet another addition to the talking-heads-discussing-the-Pop-of-yore canon of Rockism. Syd's biographer Chris Welch and a slew of journalists from the elite rock'n'roll magazines (*Uncut*, *Mojo*, etc.) chime in with stories and vivisections of Syd's brief time as a recording star. **Under Review** has a more high-toned critical bent to it than, say, the **Classic Albums** series with its emphasis on technique, or VH1's **Behind the Music**, which sucked at the teat of tabloid gossip.

All in all this is a fine program for the uninitiated and the fan as well. The picture and Dolby Digital 2.0 Stereo sound are just above average as the Queen installment (reviewed elsewhere on this site) was. The interviewees are passionate about Syd's music and have all done their homework. These programs are never as interesting as the music that they discuss, but **Under Review** makes for a fine primer.

- Kristofer Collins

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