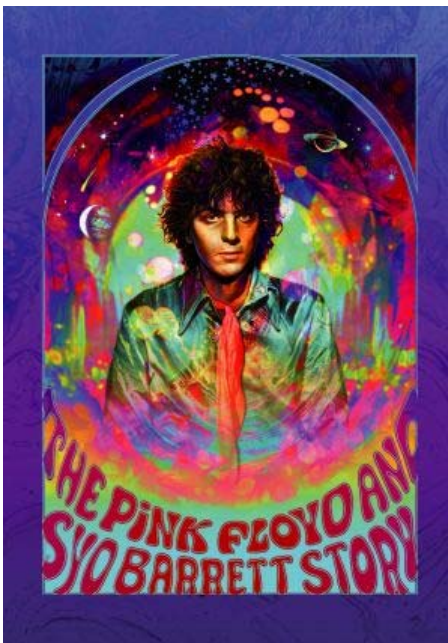


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JOHN EDGINTON

The Pink Floyd and Syd Barrett Story

by Matt Smith

A note to GASPetc. Readers from Matt Smith:

Pink Floyd has influenced countless numbers of bands, including many metal bands that cite Syd Barrett and early Floyd as an influence. But what many don't know about is the rise and fall of Syd's life with the Floyd. One DVD that has been released recently as a deluxe edition is *The Pink Floyd and Syd Barrett Story* and it is a good place to start if you want to learn more about Syd. So to all regular GASPetc readers I hope you enjoy a little diversion from the usual metal themed topic that fills this space here regularly.

When Syd Barrett, the enigmatic founder and visionary behind Pink Floyd, died last year it closed a chapter in the Pink Floyd story but also left a void because no one except Syd himself knew what he was really thinking. Since about 1989 or so (around the time Voivod covered the Syd penned song "Astronomy Domine") I have been an early Pink Floyd/Syd Barrett fan and have been fascinated by the mystery surrounding Syd's disappearance from the limelight way back in the late 60's/early 70's. Several books and documentary films have tried to explore and explain this psychedelic warriors' rise and fall into psychotic madness and drug induced breakdown. One film, *The Pink Floyd and Syd Barrett Story* (MVD Visual/Otmoor Productions Ltd.), the first of it's kind released in 2004 on DVD, is an insightful and comprehensive look into

what happened behind the scenes. It includes recent insightful interviews with original Floyd members Roger Waters, David Gilmour, Rick Wright, and Nick Mason all reminiscing about what it was like to work with Syd and witness his eventual disintegration. Recently the film was re-released in a deluxe edition with extended unedited interviews with all four members. I have to say I was more than excited to see this deluxe edition because I bought the original release a few years back and was eager to see the deluxe edition with the extended interviews with the original Pink Floyd members.

I recently spoke with John Edginton, the producer/director of the film about how he got involved in the project and asked him some questions about Syd and the difficulties and joys he encountered while making the film.

GASPetc: How did you get involved in the project initially? Was it something you personally wanted to do or were you hired to do it? Are you a long time Syd Barrett/Pink Floyd fan? Personally I would have been ecstatic to be involved with such an interesting story about such an enigmatic and unique visionary such as Syd.

John Edginton: I wanted to do it, I'm an independent producer and I go and raise money for projects I want to do and in this case I managed to persuade the BBC to make the film. VH1 put some money in as well and there is a VH1 version in the states and it is now being shown on VH1 Classics. I was fascinated by the impact of LSD on people and what extent it caused mental illness and partly because I was intrigued by that because I have that issue in my family and want to find out as much as I can about that. I also love making films where I can put great music in them.

GASPetc: Yeah, and there's plenty of great music in this film considering it's early Pink Floyd.

John: Yes, and I was looking for a film I could use the two together and Syd and Roky Erickson (of the 13th Floor Elevators, another great psychedelic rock band from the 60's) were my first choices and I went for Syd because I knew someone has been filming Roky for some time.

GASPetc: Yeah, and Roky recently reemerged and began playing again.

John: Yes, that is really such a nice story.



GASPetc: Yeah, and that's what a lot of people were thinking Syd might someday do but unfortunately we never had the chance to witness that. Were there any people you tried to contact for interviews that weren't interested or able to meet with you? For instance any of Syd's siblings?

John: Yes, the first thing I had to do was convince his [Syd's] sister Rose, who was basically the only person that really had regular contact with him and she was pretty much his guardian and she was very, very skeptical about the idea of a film because she thought he wouldn't like it because it would attract attention to him and he hated attention and whenever someone brought up the subject of Pink Floyd he'd get pretty angry because he didn't like to talk about it. So she was very worried about that and it took a lot of meetings and chats with her to make her realize that he has a fantastic legacy that needs to be celebrated and be seen as positive so that's how I persuaded her to let me make the film. Basically they [Rose and her husband] didn't trust anyone in the media because they didn't like what they read in the books because they were quoted in a particular book and they had never spoken to the writer.

GASPetc: Yeah, sometimes journalists can fabricate or elaborate on stories to make them sound much more sensational than they really are and it creates this false image of the particular artist.

John: Yes, and this set up a lot of animosity towards journalists and I had to break that down to get the okay to make the film and she was prepared to help but didn't want to be named in the film because she didn't want Syd to know. That really opened the door and I contacted David Gilmour's manager and David immediately rang Rose to check me out to see that she was okay with it and when she said yes he said fine, I'll go for it. So that started the ball rolling and then I had to get the rest of the members to agree to meet with me before I could get anyone to fund it.

GASPetc: That's one thing I was really impressed with was you had all four original members of Floyd interviewed whereas every other Syd documentary I've seen they don't have any interviews with any original Floyd members, only journalists, producers like Joe Boyd and Norman Smith and that's what made me really interested in seeing the film.

John: Thanks, when I made the film in 2001 there weren't any films out there about Syd or the Floyd at all and since then it has become an industry.

GASPetc: Yes, and another great documentary about Syd and the early Floyd is the Rock Milestones DVD on *Pink Floyd's The Piper at the Gates of Dawn* by Edgehill Publishing Ltd. I was really impressed with some of the footage they were able to use, like the Jugband Blues promo clip footage. Did you try to access any of this footage for your documentary?

John: Yes, that clip is fantastic, and as far as I know it wasn't available when I was making my film. It was discovered in a British government funded organization called the Central Office of Information and they had funded a shoot with Pink Floyd and discovered that in their archives recently and had it been available I would have definitely put it in. I put everything in that was available at the time and a few things got into the VH1 version that aren't very good like the clip from the *Dick Clark Show*. But it's a minor value kind of thing. The thing about the VH1 version is they wanted me to cut it again and concentrate more on Floyd and less on Syd and so I had to change the focus because they weren't interested in Syd's solo work at all. And that to me is...

GASPetc: Yeah, that's probably one of the most intriguing aspects of the whole Pink Floyd story...

John: Absolutely, I totally agree.

GASPetc: Well, that's the mainstream media, they have to give the people what they THINK they want.

John: They have their own take and it comes down to money but it's nice to know now they're showing the original on VH1 Classics.



GASPetc: Personally I found Roger Water's interview the most intimate and revealing. It really seemed like it was one of the first times he really was interviewed in depth about Syd. One perfect example of how much Syd's condition affected the original Floyd members was when Roger was talking about the last time he saw Syd, it was at Harrod's (a dept store) and he saw him but didn't approach him because it was too awkward for him. It's really difficult when someone you know well becomes so distant due to mental illness that you find it hard to even strike up a simple conversation with them because they have changed so much from the person you once knew.

John: Absolutely, I think it's interesting because there was a transitional period while he was making the solo records with David Gilmour before he retreated back to his mothers in Cambridge for good. Those solo records are a testimony to what was happening to him internally.



GASPetc: Yeah, and in the interview with Robyn Hitchcock he says those albums are great because his lyrics are dense thickets of words that he wasn't afraid to just use in a stream of conscious fashion to get his state of mind across to the listener. And also those two solo albums, *Madcap Laughs* and *Barrett* are really diaries of a mental breakdown.

John: Yes, that's a good description and he was really describing himself as he was writing them.



GASPetc: Yeah, definitely. Did you find it difficult interviewing any of the members of Floyd? For instance during the extended David Gilmour interview there seems to be a few awkward silent moments and uncomfortable moments when *The Wall* is brought up. Also, do you think Dave was reluctant to talk about his taking over for Syd when he did in 1968?

John: That's interesting isn't it? Everything I had been told about David was he was the easy going friendly affable one and Roger was the difficult one and personally that might be true for both of them but in the situation they were with me David was more awkward and one thing he said to me after the interview was "How did I do?" and I said "you were great" and David said "I always think I'm not as articulate as I could be" and I thought that is so revealing because he's actually quite insecure.



GASPetc: Yeah, you can tell in the interview he's a bit uneasy and he's not too sure what to say. One thing I was thinking of was the transition period where David was taking over for Syd and at one of the first gigs he played with the Floyd, Syd actually came and stood at the front of





the stage and really made David so uncomfortable he almost quit the band at that point. Maybe David is a bit hesitant to talk about that experience because it is still an awkward subject for him because he was Syd's friend before he joined the Floyd and here he was soaking in the glory of what Syd had created with his own band.

John: Yeah, I think you're right although when I asked him he denies it (laughs). Also I think the way I conduct interviews is they tend to be informal and I like to see what happens when there is a silence. That can be very unnerving but you can also watch them thinking. I think with Roger he liked that because initially I was told we were only going to get a half hour and it eventually went on for an hour and a half and the manager kept going "cut cut".

GASPetC: In many ways I don't think there have been any in depth interviews with Roger about Syd and the early Floyd and this was a way for him to really let people know how he feels about Syd.

John: That's what I thought, it was very genuine and I don't think he was faking because people are very suspicious of Roger Waters. (laughs)

GASPetC: Like when you bring up *The Wall* with David he says "What does that have to do with Syd?" and you can tell it brought up a sore spot with him because he and Roger had so many disagreements about what the Wall should be and he didn't want to relive that.

John: Yes, and the Wall has everything to do with Syd, I mean Geldoff IS Syd in the film.

GASPetC: It's funny because I saw *The Wall* years before I really knew much about Syd and the more I researched Syd and watched the Wall again I realized that half of the movie is about Syd's breakdown. Also it's about Roger's dealing with the War and his dad getting killed in the war and it was in the interview with Richard where he says the Floyd were all getting a little tired of Roger always bringing up the war in song topics and they wanted him to just move on. But the thing is Roger wanted to deal with these personal issues and I think that is what caused the major rift between Roger and the rest of the band.

John: Yeah, absolutely but I think one of the things is Roger is driven by obsession.

GASPetC: Yes, definitely. Were there any attempts to get comments or feedback with anyone interviewed in the film after Syd's passing last year to put into the deluxe edition of the DVD?

John: No, the deluxe edition was released in the UK before Syd passed away last year so the whole thing was already in motion. There was some talk of doing some additional interviews and the BBC contacted me wanting to reshoot the film a few days after Syd died and in the end they decided not to do any additional interviews but I would have loved to go back and extended it and maybe I will do another version at some point.

GASPetC: Yeah, and it does close a whole chapter with Syd's passing.

John: Yeah and Syd's sister is talking now and before she wasn't really saying anything. And she is supposed to be writing a book.

GASPetC: Wow, that sounds great! Have you heard anything about the feature film that is being made about Syd?

John: Are they actually making it? I knew there was a script floating around a few years ago and Johnny Depp was supposed to play Syd but I think it all went into turnaround as things tend to do in Hollywood. But the last time I met with Syd's sister they had been approached about looking at the script to see if it was any good. Maybe now they might feel more initiative to make it happen. And as we've seen there haven't been too many successful films about rock stars.

GASPetC: I agree and I think because Syd's story is fairly unknown it might work on the big screen.

John: Yes.

GASPetC: Well, thanks for taking the time to answer my questions and I hope more and more people watch the film as it is a great reference to find out what Syd's life was all about.

John: Great, thanks Matt, bye!



The director of the film, John Edginton.



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