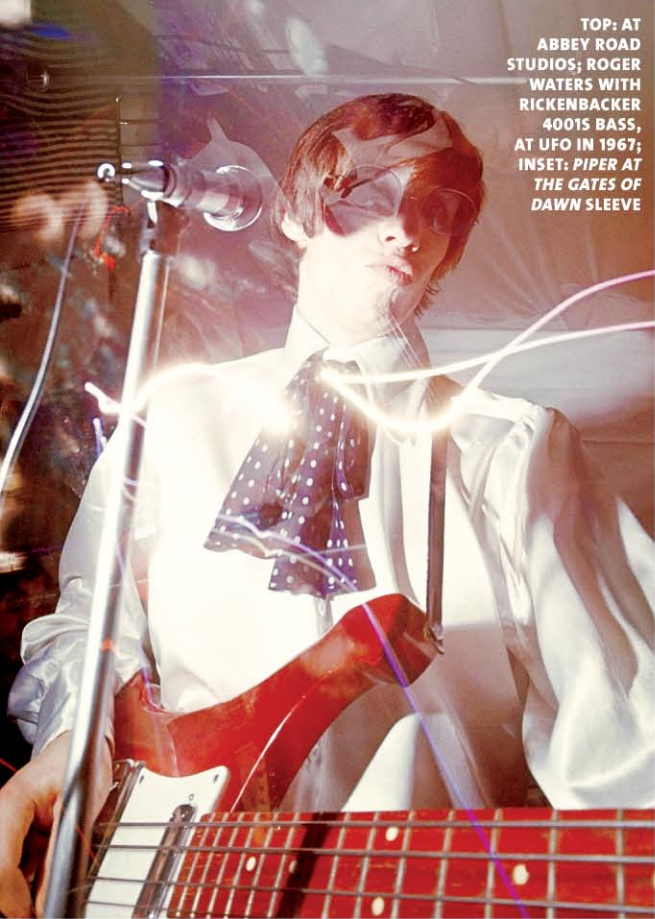




TOP: AT ABBEY ROAD STUDIOS; ROGER WATERS WITH RICKENBACKER 4001S BASS, AT UFO IN 1967; INSET: PIPER AT THE GATES OF DAWN SLEEVE

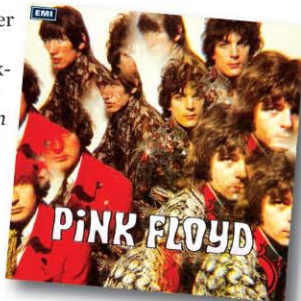


The disc is divided between mind-bending instrumental improvisations such as “Interstellar Overdrive” and “Pow R. Toc H.” and the fanciful, delicately unhinged songcraft of Syd Barrett, Pink Floyd’s original guitarist and frontman.

Barrett’s fairy tale imagination and warped, free-associative sense of song structure were a huge influence on later rock icons like Marc Bolan (T.Rex), David Bowie and Robyn Hitchcock. Shortly after *Piper* was completed, Syd lapsed into LSD-triggered mental illness, ceding Pink Floyd’s guitar chair to David Gilmour. Which makes *Piper at the Gates of Dawn* all the more precious: it is Syd’s sole album with Pink Floyd, a rare peek into the fragile yet beautiful psyche of one of rock’s seminal tunesmiths.

Curiosity about Pink Floyd’s enigmatic founder has increased in the wake of Barrett’s demise in 2006 at age 60. In response, MVD Visual is reissuing the excellent documentary *Pink Floyd and the Syd Barrett Story*. And while Barrett left

Pink Floyd in 1968, his specter has continued to haunt the mega-Platinum stadium rockers. Syd is the subject matter of both *Dark Side of the Moon* and *Wish You Were Here*. There are also glimpses of Syd in the main character of *The Wall*, the disturbed rock star Pink. And when Pink Floyd reunited in 2005 to play the Live 8 benefit concert in London’s Hyde Park, bassist Roger Waters introduced “Wish You Were Here” by saying, “We play this song for everyone who cannot be here today, but of course in the first place for Syd.”



As for Norman Smith, he has recently published his own autobiography, *John Lennon Called Me Normal*, a career retrospective that details his studio exploits with both the Beatles and Pink Floyd, not to mention the author’s early Seventies run as pop recording artist Norman “Hurricane” Smith. And yes, John Lennon really did call Smith “Normal,” not without reason. The straitlaced EMI career man made an unlikely partner for Pink Floyd, who were at the time London’s trippiest freak-out merchants. The producer had a particularly hard time with Syd Barrett, who was already starting to spin out of control as sessions for *Piper at the Gates of Dawn* got underway.

“I realized as time went on that Syd really and truly, in my opinion, didn’t get any pleasure out of recording,” Smith observes. “Syd’s thing was he would write these songs; he would go to an underground club, or something of that nature, and perform these songs. And that was really it for him.”

Still, one must acknowledge Smith’s perspicacity in signing Pink Floyd to EMI and also the sheer nerve he demonstrated in resigning his enviable gig as the Beatles’ engineer. Abbey Road’s rigid hierarchy at the time dictated that, in accepting the role of Pink Floyd’s producer, Smith could no longer engineer recording sessions. And so he said goodbye to the hottest rock and roll band of the Sixties, if not of all time.

“I wasn’t upset to leave the Beatles and become a producer,” Smith maintains. “I could see that things weren’t going so well at that time with them. We’d had such a happy time before, but at that point it wasn’t so happy anymore.”

As the principle engineer of the Beatles’ prolific output from their first hit single, 1962’s “Love Me Do,” to their classic 1965 album, *Rubber Soul*, Smith had worked under George Martin. As a result, he’d learned quite a few sonic tricks and production strategies in the course of his experience with the Beatles and their legendary producer. All this stood him in good stead as work got under way on the first session for *Piper at the Gates of Dawn* on February 21, 1967, in Abbey Road’s Studio Three. The site of sessions for *Revolver*, among other Beatles recordings, Studio Three had a small, cramped tracking room but a comfortable control room with windows that brought natural light into the workspace. It was here that Pink Floyd gathered for a pre-session huddle with their new producer.

“My first job, obviously, was to form a friendship with them and, above all, to form a trust, being their producer,” Smith says. “So we’re sitting there chatting in the control room, getting to know one another. The control room door opens and in walks Paul McCartney. He wanted to meet the boys. He’d heard of them. And after a little chat with them, he comes across to me, puts his hand on my shoulder and he says to the Pink Floyd boys, ‘You won’t go wrong with this bloke as your producer.’”

McCartney was down the hall working with the Beatles on *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* at the time. Both *Pepper* and *Piper* were recorded on four-track open-reel analog tape, the state-of-the-art format in 1967. By today’s

“SYD REALLY AND TRULY DIDN'T GET ANY PLEASURE OUT OF RECORDING.”
NORMAN SMITH

PREVIOUS SPREAD: COLIN PRIME / DALLE / RETNA; THIS PAGE: ANDREW WHITTUCK (STUDIO AND LIVE AT UFO)