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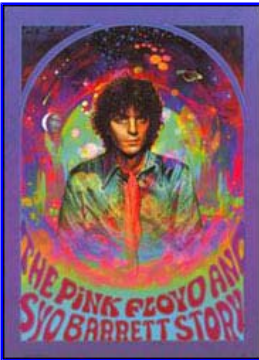
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[Doc of the Day: "The Pink Floyd and Syd Barrett Story"](#)
 Posted on 11.06.07 by Will Harris @ 8:47 pm

I can still remember when I was first introduced to the music of Syd Barrett. I was hanging out with my buddy Bobby Fulford – he and I had been comrades in arms behind the grill at McDonald’s – and it wasn’t long after he’d begun to teach me the wonders of Robyn Hitchcock and the Egyptians when he said, “Well, if you like Robyn Hitchcock, you ought to love this guy, because he’s where Hitchcock got his sound from.” I’d never really been a big Pink Floyd fan (given how little album rock I’d listened to at the time, I probably didn’t know much more than “Another Brick in the Wall, Pt. 2”), but, still, I was surprised at the sounds I heard when Bob spun me efforts from Barrett’s pair of solo efforts, *The Madcap Laughs* and *Barrett*. The first album I ever got by Syd, however, was *Opel*, a collection of outtakes and alternate versions of songs from those two albums; in theory, it shouldn’t have been the best indoctrination to the man’s work, given its disjointed nature and the rawness of some of the tracks, but all I know is that I fell love with it in a big, big way...like, to the point where I actually had a poster for it adorning the wall of my college dorm room.

Hmmm...now that I think about it, this could be why no-one ever believed me when I told them I’d never done drugs.

In the wake of Syd Barrett’s death in 2006, there proved to be a considerable renaissance of interest in his work, both in the Floyd and as a solo artist, but he’d always maintained a consistent cult following. DVD efforts like “Syd Barrett: Up Close and Personal” and “Syd Barrett: Under Review” tried and failed to serve as definitive efforts of his life, times, and musical legacy; with “The Pink Floyd and Syd Barrett Story,” however, we come pretty darned close...or, at least, far closer than we’ve ever come before. In addition to new interviews with the four other members of Pink Floyd – Roger Waters, David Gilmour, Rick Wright, and Nick Mason – we also receive insight from former Humble Pie drummer Jerry Shirley, who sat behind the kit for Barrett’s solo albums, and we get a tour of Barrett’s old apartment from former roommate Duggie Fields. (Fields has lived there for years; in fact, it’s the very same apartment where the cover shot for *The Madcap Laughs* was taken.)



Bill Hicks once observed that “the musicians that made all that great music that’s enhanced your lives throughout the years were rreal fucking high on drugs,” and while the documentary takes us on a trip from Barrett’s birth through his musical career to his final years, it ultimately serves as a cautionary tale of the effects of L.S.D. on the human brain. But since Barrett’s abuse led to him offering up some of the most creative, inspired



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music of the 1960s, I sometime find myself of mixed emotions when listening to it. Given how much I love his work, does that mean that I'm secretly glad that he fried his brain? That's a road best not traveled, I suspect.

If you're a longtime Floyd and Barrett fan, you'll have heard many of these stories before, but it doesn't make them any less fascinating, amusing, or depressing, such as when Roger Waters tells the tale of Barrett's maddening "composition" that changed every time Barrett tried to teach it to him. (Its title: "Have You Got It Yet?") We about the damage the drugs did on Barrett's mood and how it affected his actions, about the excruciating appearance the band made on Pat Boone's show, where Syd just sat there and stared at Pat, and, most importantly, about the day that the other members of Pink Floyd made the group decision to kick Syd out of the band by, uh, just not going to pick him up for their next show. As ever, though, the most disconcerting story comes when the band discusses how, while they were in the midst of recording a song which had been inspired by Syd ("Wish You Were Here"), they turned to discover that the man himself was at the back of the studio; it was the first time any of them had seen him in years, and he'd gained weight and shaved both his head and his eyebrows.

It proved to be the last time most of them ever saw him.

In addition to the documentary proper, there are extended versions of interviews with Waters and Gilmour. In particular, there's a brilliant moment where Gilmour is discussing "Wish You Were Here," then looks around the room and mutters something like, "If I could find the guitar, I'd play it for you." But it's obvious that he's not looking terribly hard for it, and you can all but hear the twitch in the interviewer's voice as he sits there, trying to say outright, "Um...if you want to look for it, I can wait!" (Thankfully, Gilmour does succeed in finding the guitar and playing a bit of the song.) Also included amongst the special features are a trio of highly enjoyable acoustic performances of Barrett compositions from Robyn Hitchcock and Graham Coxon; Hitchcock's takes on "Dominoes" and "It Is Obvious" only serve to emphasize how much of his sound was borrowed from Syd in the first place, but Coxon's "Love You" proves downright revelatory, bringing to light how much Blur's "Parklife" actually sounded like an early Pink Floyd track.

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If you're a fan of Pink Floyd's album rock standards, like *The Wall* and *Dark Side of the Moon*, but you're not familiar with how the band got their start, you owe it to yourself to get an education via "The Pink Floyd and Syd Barrett Story." You might not enjoy the music from the Syd Barrett era as much as the stuff that's gotten played ad nauseum for all these years, but it might surprise you how much the band's changed since their original songwriter "retired." (If you do enjoy it, however, you might want to hunt down the extended version of this film, which contains far more extended interviews.)

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