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The Pink Floyd and Syd Barrett Story

United American // Unrated // \$16.98 // January 4, 2005

Review by Preston Jones | posted February 1, 2005 | E-mail the Author | Start a Discussion

The Movie

The story of Pink Floyd and Syd Barrett is one of rock legend, but also a profoundly sad and human one. In the John Edginton-directed BBC documentary, The Pink Floyd and Syd Barrett Story, all of the major players in this all too brief period of rock history recount their experiences with the now-reclusive musical madman.

In 1964, just as The Beatles were conquering America, another big Brit act was in its formative stages: Pink Floyd. Roger Waters, Nick Mason and Richard Wright formed the core of what would become Pink Floyd in 1964, when all three were attending the Regent Street School of Polytechnics in London. After a handful of personnel and name changes, the trio picked up fellow art student Syd Barrett, whose keen lyrical voice and razor-sharp pop sensibility helped propel Pink Floyd to the forefront of the mod London art scene of the late Sixties.

The group's first album, 1967's "Piper at the Gates of Dawn," remains a forceful work of psychedelic art rock that was actually recorded just down the hall from The Beatles' "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band." Tragically, it was soon after the release of "Dawn" that Barrett, burned out from too much LSD and increasingly unreliable, was semi-replaced by eventual member David Gilmour.

Pink Floyd had to deal with their unpleasant situation before it consumed the band and ended any hope of a career; in firing Barrett, nearly all of the members were emotionally affected, to the point that it showed up in future works (most notably "Shine On You Crazy Diamond," "Wish You Were Here" and Waters alludes to parts of "The Wall" in this doc). Edginton also traces Barrett's life post-Floyd, speaking with friends, associates and the members of the post-Barrett Floyd; Barrett put out a couple of albums that went on to achieve cult status, retreating to a life of seclusion in his childhood home.

There's no clean way to easily sum up the conflicting feelings and simmering ugliness that Barrett's descent into acid-fueled



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madness stirred up within Pink Floyd; however, one anecdote about this chapter in the band's existence never fails to put all of the group's unease into perspective: the chilling, nearly overwhelming story that has almost passed into myth about the Floyd recording "Shine On." One by one, Waters, Mason, Gilmour and Wright arrived at Abbey Road only to discover an entirely shaved, overweight and mute Barrett hiding out at the back of the studio during the "Shine On" session – no one had invited him and no one, to this day, knows how he got there or how he came to be there during the recording of that particular song. It's a tale that never fails to induce goose bumps and although Edginton tends to lean a little heavily on the wistfulness of it all, **The Pink Floyd and Syd Barrett Story** nevertheless remains a potent and quick (clocking in at 50 minutes) look at one of rock's unsung heroes who flew far too close to the sun.

### **The DVD**

#### **The Video:**

Offered in a 1.78:1 non-anamorphic widescreen transfer, **The Pink Floyd and Syd Barrett Story** is pretty soft throughout and the interviews, apparently shot on digital video, look stable but often lack the snap of film. The archival footage looks decent enough and blends in with recently shot video well. Nothing reference quality here, but tolerable for the duration of the feature.

#### **The Audio:**

DTS 5.1, Dolby Digital 5.1 and Dolby 2.0 stereo are available on the disc; while most of the music showcased in the documentary was recorded in mono, some of the later Floyd tracks ("Shine On You Crazy Diamond," various tracks from "The Wall") burst to life in the surrounds. DTS edges out Dolby Digital in terms of warmth and clarity; the bulk of the film is talking head interviews but there are few acoustic moments sprinkled throughout that are well represented.

#### **The Extras:**

A handful of extras that don't necessarily flesh out the film but are enjoyable nonetheless are onboard; more interview footage (without the interviewer edited out, as in the film) with Waters and Gilmour is available as is some acoustic performance footage from Graham Coxon and Robyn Hitchcock, two musicians interviewed in the doc. These four segments can be viewed separately or all together, with an aggregate running time of 21 minutes.

#### **Final Thoughts:**

**The Pink Floyd and Syd Barrett Story** is a solid introduction for the uninitiated into the early world of Floyd, pre-"Dark Side of the Moon" and "The Wall." Heartbreaking, psychedelic and handsomely mounted, this BBC documentary will engage fans of the band (although only diehard Floyd fans will get much more of anything out of this DVD upon a second pass) and perhaps create new ones.

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