

Richard Wright, Whose Keyboards Helped Define Pink Floyd, Dies at 65

By JON PARELES

Richard Wright, the keyboardist whose somber, monumental sounds were at the core of Pink Floyd's art-rock that has sold millions and millions of albums, died Monday in London, where he had lived. He was 65.

The cause was cancer, said his publicist, Claire Singers.

Mr. Wright was a founding member of Pink Floyd, and his spacious, somber, enveloping keyboards, backing vocals and eerie effects were an essential part of its musical identity.

Though Syd Barrett and then Roger Waters wrote most of Pink Floyd's songs, Mr. Wright shares credit on the improvisatory psychedelic studio works the band composed collectively, and he sang a few lead vocals, including on "Astronomy Domine" from the band's debut album, "The Piper at the Gates of Dawn."

Mr. Wright was the sole songwriter on "The Great Gig in the Sky," a hymnlike track with a soaring, wordless female vocal at the center of "The Dark Side of the Moon," the blockbuster 1973 Pink Floyd album that has sold some 40 million copies.

David Gilmour, Pink Floyd's guitarist and singer, said in a statement on Monday: "In the welter of arguments about who or what was Pink Floyd, Rick's enormous input was frequently forgotten. He was gentle, unassuming and private but his soulful voice and playing were vital, magical components of our most recognized Pink Floyd sound."

Mr. Wright was born in London in 1943 and taught himself to play keyboards, developing an early interest in jazz. He attended a school for haberdashers then studied architecture at the Regent Street Polytechnic College.

With fellow students at Regent Street — Mr. Waters on guitar or bass and Nick Mason on drums — he started a group, at first playing American rhythm-and-blues songs. Mr. Barrett joined them in 1965, reshaping the music and naming the band The Pink Floyd Sound, after the American bluesmen Pink Anderson and Floyd Council.

Mr. Barrett's whimsical, asymmetrical songs and the band's fondness for experimental sounds placed it at the center of London's underground psychedelic movement in the mid-1960s. "Music was our drug," Mr. Wright once told an interviewer.

"The Piper at the Gates of Dawn" was released in 1967 and yielded pop hits in England, but LSD use and mental illness made Mr. Barrett so unstable that he left Pink Floyd in 1968. He recorded two solo albums; Mr. Wright and Mr. Gilmour produced the second one, "Barrett," in 1970. Mr. Barrett died in 2006



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Pink Floyd's original lineup, shown in 1967, included, from left, Roger Waters, Nick Mason, Syd Barrett and Richard Wright.



MJ KIM/GETTY IMAGES, 2005

Mr. Wright performing with Pink Floyd at Live 8 London.

at the age of 60.

Pink Floyd's late-1960s and early-'70s albums mingled pop songs with extended pieces, like the 23-minute "Echoes," which begins with single notes from Mr. Wright's keyboard, on 1971's "Meddle."

With "The Dark Side of the Moon," Pink Floyd reined in its improvisation, came up with a concept album about workaday pressures and insanity and established itself as an arena-rock staple. The album stayed in the Billboard Top 200 album chart for 741 weeks. Pink Floyd continued to thrive through the 1970s, and Mr. Wright released his first solo project "Wet Dream" in 1978

Pink Floyd's 1979 album, "The Wall," eventually sold 23 million copies in the United States.

But there were conflicts within the band. Mr. Waters, who had increasingly taken control of Pink Floyd, reportedly threatened not to release "The Wall" unless Mr. Wright resigned his full membership in the band. Mr. Wright quit, only to tour with Pink Floyd in 1980-81 as a salaried sideman. He does not appear on the band's 1983 album, "The Final Cut."

After that album, Mr. Waters left Pink Floyd for a solo career, declaring the band a "spent force creatively." Amid lawsuits, Mr. Gilmour and Mr. Mason regrouped under the Pink Floyd name; Mr. Wright rejoined them for the 1987 album "A Momentary Lapse of Reason" and "The Division Bell" in 1994.

He made another solo album, "Broken China," in 1996, with Sinéad O'Connor among the guest performers.

Mr. Wright, who was married three times, is survived by three children, Benjamin, Gala and Jamie; and one grandchild.

In interviews in 1996, Mr. Wright said he had not spoken to Mr. Waters for 14 years. Mr. Wright played keyboards on Mr. Gilmour's 2006 album, "On an Island," and went on tour with Mr. Gilmour's band.

Pink Floyd's 1970s lineup reunited briefly at the Live 8 London concert in Hyde Park on July 2, 2005, performing four songs before sharing a hug.