

Rick Wright

Founder member of Pink Floyd who wrote on *The Dark Side of the Moon*
Register, page 60



Founder of Pink Floyd dies aged 65

Ben Quinn

Richard Wright, a founder member of Pink Floyd, the iconic British rock band, died of cancer yesterday at the age of 65.

David Gilmour, Pink Floyd's guitarist, used his online blog yesterday to pay tribute to Wright, telling fans: "I really don't know what to say other than that he was such a lovely, gentle, genuine man and will be missed terribly by so many who loved him. And that's a lot of people. Did he not get the loudest, longest round of applause at the end of every show in 2006?"

He added later: "No one can replace Richard. He was my musical partner and my friend. I have never played with anyone quite like him.

"In my view all the greatest PF moments are the ones where he is in full flow. After all, without *Us and Them* and *The Great Gig in the Sky*, both of which he wrote, what would *The Dark Side of the Moon* have been? Without his quiet touch the album *Wish You Were Here* would not quite have worked. I loved him and will miss him enormously."

A flood of tributes from fans, who were unaware of his illness, also appeared on the web. "He is by far one of the most underrated musicians in rock and his keyboard work will never be forgotten," wrote Howard Bayliss.

Obituary, page 60

Rick Wright

Highly distinctive keyboard player with Pink Floyd, the band which introduced 1960s youth to psychedelia and progressive rock

CHRIS WALTER / GETTY

Richard Wright's keyboard playing was a vital ingredient of the sound that made Pink Floyd one of the biggest-selling acts in the history of rock music. A founder member of the band, he also sang lead on several tracks on the group's early albums and co-wrote music for several of their best-selling albums, including *The Dark Side of the Moon* and *Wish You Were Here*.

He later fell out with the band's Roger Waters, who fired him from the group during the recording of *The Wall*. Wright continued to work with the group as a hired musician, but was reinstated to full membership after Waters left the group in the 1980s.

Richard William Wright was born in 1943 in Pinner, Middlesex. His father was chief biochemist at Unigate Dairies, and he was brought up in a large and comfortable house in nearby Hatch End with his two sisters. Educated at Haberdashers' Aske's school, he played piano, trumpet and trombone as a boy, adding the guitar to his repertoire at the age of 10. His first musical passion was jazz and by the time he was in his mid-teens he was hanging out at London clubs watching Humphrey Lyttelton and Kenny Ball.

In 1962 he enrolled at the Regent Street Polytechnic to study architecture and the following year joined a band called Sigma 6, which included his future Pink Floyd colleagues Roger Waters and Nick Mason. In 1964 the band became the Abdabs (sometimes the Screaming Abdabs) and with Wright's girlfriend, Juliette Gale, sometimes singing with them. By the summer of 1964 the couple had married. Wright dropped out of his course and went travelling around Greece before returning in 1964 to enrol at the London College of Music.

With Syd Barrett (obituary, July 12, 2006) now added to the line-up and with Wright restored alongside Waters and Mason in a group now known as the Tea Set, they played R&B songs in a style similar to the early Rolling Stones. By late 1965 they had begun experimenting with hallucinogenic drugs, and the experience was reflected in a more experimental style musically, a proto-psychedelic sound based around extended improvisation between Wright's keyboards and Barrett's guitar. There was also another change of name, to the Pink Floyd Sound, named after two American blues musicians, Pink Anderson and Floyd Council, and then trimmed simply to Pink Floyd.

The band's timing was perfect. The London "underground" scene was just emerging and Pink Floyd became its house band. With Barrett starting to write his own songs, Pink Floyd became a fixture at such counterculture venues as the UFO club and at benefits for such radical causes as the London Free School. They also began to accompany their performances with a light show and at the end of 1966 they recorded two tracks for Peter Whitehead's film *Tonite Let's All Make Love In London*, although they failed to appear in the film.

With the mainstream music industry waking up to the commercial potential of the new psychedelic



Wright, right, with Roger Waters, Syd Barrett and Nick Mason, the founders of Pink Floyd, to whose sound he contributed his wild keyboard playing

sound, the group signed to EMI and made the Top 20 with its first two Barrett-written singles, *Arnold Layne* and *See Emily Play*, both released in 1967.

Their debut album, *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn*, followed later that summer and was a landmark in the development of British psychedelic music, combining the whimsy of Barrett's songs with a free-form sound in which Wright's keyboards featured prominently, the avant-garde quality enhanced by the use of stereo panning and other studio techniques which are old hat today but at the time were groundbreaking. Wright also sang lead on a number of tracks, including *Astronomy Domine* and *Matilda Mother*.

By the time of the release of their second album, *A Saucerful of Secrets* (1968), however, Barrett had become one of rock music's first acid casualties and was replaced by the guitarist David Gilmour. If they missed Barrett's songs they did not miss his LSD-induced unreliability, and the increasingly complex structures of their compositions helped to define the new notion of "progressive rock" far removed from the three-chord, three-minute-single format of pop music.

The band's next major release,

Ummagumma (1969), featured all four members on extended, solo compositions, Wright's contribution being a four-part, 13-minute avant-garde instrumental suite called *Sisyphus*.

Atom Heart Mother (1970) found the band recording with an orchestra for the first time on the title piece, a 23-minute long "rock-orchestral" suite, while side two of the album included Wright's nostalgic *Summer '68*. It was the band's first No 1 and was followed by *Meddle* (1971), which, minus the orchestra, cemented

His jazz background had a deep influence on *The Dark Side of the Moon*

epic, post-psychedelic Pink Floyd sound that was to make their next album, *The Dark Side of the Moon* (1973), one of the biggest-selling and most influential albums of all time.

Although the concept for the album belonged to Waters, Wright's jazz background exerted a strong influence in various ways, including the prominent use of a saxophone and his singing with Gilmour on *Time*, one of the album's most famous tracks.

Wish You Were Here (1975) was almost equally successful and includ-

ed a nine-part suite *Shine on You Crazy Diamond* as a tribute to Barrett. Part of it was sung by Wright but it was to be his last lead vocal until 1992, when the group re-formed without the dominant presence of Waters.

On both *Animals* (1977) and *The Wall* (1979), Wright's influence was much diminished, and he was fired during the recording of the latter by Waters, who was now calling all the shots as de facto leader.

By then Wright had a heavy cocaine addiction and when he refused to return early from his summer holiday to finish the album, it was the final straw. Waters claimed there was no alternative but to dismiss him from the group, although Gilmour and Mason later claimed they had opposed his sacking. Wright finished the album and continued to perform live with the band as a hired hand on a fixed wage.

By the time of the 1983 studio album, *The Final Cut*, Michael Kamen and Andy Bown were employed to produce the keyboards rather than Wright. It was the only Floyd album on which he did not appear. Two years later in 1985 Waters announced his own departure and effectively declared the band dead. Gilmour and Mason, however, asserted their right to the name and after a bitter legal bat-

tle released the 1987 album *A Momentary Lapse of Reason* under the Pink Floyd name without Waters but with Wright back on keyboards, initially as an employee but restored soon to full status as a band member. When the band recorded material for the 1992 classic-car racing film *La Carrera Panamericana*, it featured the first Floyd material co-written by Wright since 1975.

Another studio album, *The Division Bell*, followed in 1994, with Wright playing a full role, and it topped both the British and American charts.

After that band members concentrated on solo projects, until 2005 when Wright, Mason and Gilmour reunited with Waters for a one-off performance at the London Live 8 concert — the first time all four had shared a stage together in 24 years.

Away from the Floyd, Wright released the solo albums *Wet Dream* (1978) and *Broken China* (1996), and the album *Identity* (1984) as half the duo Zee with Dave Harris.

Wright was married three times and is survived by his wife, Millie, and three children, two of them from his first marriage.

Rick Wright, rock musician, was born on July 28, 1943. He died of cancer on September 15, 2008, aged 65