



Pink Floyd: (from left) Nick Mason, David Gilmour, Richard Wright and Roger Waters. "We lived and breathed the band," says Gilmour.

## to do with Roger's gentle teasing."

boards, LP and CD racks and loads of stringed instruments. On the sofa, the only non-musical furnishing, he starts plucking at an odd-looking Rickenbacker steel he calls "the frying pan", and then a chumbush, a 12-string Turkish banjo that looks like a saucepan. We pick up where we left off at the Astoria.

Autumn, 1967. Beaten and embarrassed, pushing the van off that ferry, he told his bandmates he wasn't going back to Cambridge – "That would have been one defeatist stage too far." Trying his luck in London, he avoided starving by not joining another band. To make ends meet, he drove a van for Ossie Clarke, couturier du jour to Mick Jagger and Elizabeth Taylor. And checked out old friends...

**When you got back to London after your French sojourn did you start going to Pink Floyd gigs again?**

Yes, but by the end of '67 their live gigs weren't awfully good. Syd was such a mess. Then when I saw them at the Royal College Of Art that December, Nick came up and asked, "What would you say if we thought of asking you to join?" I said I'd say, "Yes."

**Had you been angling to join?**

No, no.

**How did they treat you as the new boy?**

It was fine. Although I did leave the band after my first few days. Probably to do with Roger's jolly, gentle teasing. At a guess. I can't remember how badly I had to beg to get back in (*laughs*).

**Here's a contemporary recollection of yours about one of your first Pink Floyd studio sessions: "Nick and Roger drew out *A Saucerful Of Secrets* as an architectural diagram, in dynamic forms rather than in any sort of musical form, with peaks and troughs. That's what it was about. It wasn't music for beauty's sake, or for emotion's sake."**

Yes, I didn't really understand it, but I was happy to go along with it and see what happened. They explained it in terms of moods and "powers". Uh. I'd hate to get it wrong (*smiles*).

**Presumably it was like nothing else you'd ever attempted on guitar.**

Yes. It's not normal guitar playing, it's making noises. Trying to organise noise into an emotive, musical experience is something I see as a very bold,

good thing to attempt. I think *A Saucerful Of Secrets* is fantastic.

**So how did it go with both you and Syd in the band at first?**

It's strange, but I don't think he ever came to the studio sessions I was involved in and I don't remember being on-stage with him at all – it was only four or five gigs we did together. Nick's got a bit of film he shot in the dressing-room at Weston-super-Mare. Syd's tapdancing. It looks very jolly.

**Again, you're quoted as having said that when you joined Floyd you thought you could "knock them into some sort of shape".**

That sounds like the youthful arrogance of the day.

**Is the legend of Syd's departure correct – you all just decided not to pick him up for a gig one day?**

We were driving up Ladbroke Grove and someone said, "Shall we go and pick up Syd?" And someone else, probably Roger, said, "Naaah, let's not." And we didn't and we drove off down to Southampton.

**How did you feel about that?**

Ahm. He wasn't capable or willing to do what was needed and when you're young and ambitious you're also pretty callous and we just got on with it.

**That's your personal take on it, that you were callous?**

Yeah, I think we all were. One's desire for survival in that field outweighs other considerations. Obviously we were wracked with guilt about it later on. I mean, Roger and myself did work on producing a solo album for Syd [*The Madcap Laughs*, released January 1970] and then Rick and I worked on producing the next one [*Barrett*, November 1970] so we clearly did feel that we owed him something.

**How was it, working on those two albums?**

Very difficult. Roger and I volunteered to rescue *The Madcap Laughs* when it ran over budget and EMI decided to shelve it. They gave us three days at *Abbey Road*. We sat Syd down with a guitar and got him to sing and play. But he was falling over, knocking mikes over... we put it out as best we could.

**Had you thought you might be able to "save" him?**

I think we were trying to save some semblance of his career rather than saving *him*. Perhaps our energies would have been better used trying to get him seen by specialists in schizophrenia. Syd didn't need to be surrounded by the temptations of a pop group, he needed help.

**So how did Syd treat you? Did he give you a hard time?**





"It's easy to think there was no companionship. But we had good times."



Roger Waters and Gilmour after a show at the Fillmore East, New York, September 27, 1970: (inset) a rare group hug moment.

◀ No, but he was very hard to communicate with. He rarely took any notice of what was said and rarely said whether he felt things were going well or badly. Although there was a point I remember clearly when I drove him back to his flat in Earl's Court Square, took him up to the door and he did just turn to me and say, (very quietly) "Thank you." That was the only moment that... anything like that had happened. So I presume he wasn't displeased with the whole thing.

**Well, by then you'd already been in the band for a couple of years, was there a breakthrough moment for you as Pink Floyd's guitarist?**

Not a breakthrough. It was gradual. On *A Saucerful Of Secrets* I was still trying to be partly like Syd, partly like Hendrix – in Paris, because I spoke some French, his management had actually employed me to look after him for an evening and I thought he was absolutely brilliant. But sounding like me, all those influences entirely dropping away from your conscious efforts... There are moments on *More* (1969), *Fat Old Sun* (*Atom Heart Mother*, 1970) if you like, certainly on *Echoes* (*Meddle*, 1971) when I am giving something properly of myself. Being of greater value, you could say. I dunno. I can't explain that very well.

**How did your first solo songwriting effort go on *Ummagumma* (1969)?**

We were floundering round. I don't think we knew what we were doing, we were lost. So we recorded a live album, then someone – probably Roger – suggested that we should each do a solo 10 minutes and make a double of it. I remember my alarm. Oh God, No! I rang Roger to ask him, beg him, to write me some words and he just said, (snarl) "No, do it yourself!" and put the phone down (laughs), which was his way of helping me find my feet.

**Did it work?**

I wrote something. *The Narrow Way*. I haven't listened to it for 30 years. Don't know if it meant anything.

(Reading from *The Narrow Way's* lyrics) "Following the path as it leads toward/The darkness in the north/Weary strangers' faces show their sympathy."

Mm. Sort of makes me cringe (he does, he's wriggling).

**Thinking of your development as a songwriter, you once told MOJO you felt you weren't at your best on *The Dark Side Of The Moon* (1973) – you've just got co-credits on four tracks.**



I'd done some good stuff on *Meddle*, but I didn't contribute to the writing of *The Dark Side Of The Moon* as I would have liked. Leaf back through the credits and it tells me that (laughing). But no self-recriminations about the work I did in the studio.

**Thinking of performance then, as a singer what were you reaching for?**

Ach... I don't know how one puts this. I don't know if I could say.

**OK, look at a really personal song, even though it's Roger's lyrics again, *Shine On You Crazy Diamond* from *Wish You Were Here* (1975).**

Roger's paean to Syd. I've always loved this song. I love the words.

**Are you thinking of Syd, your friend, when you play it?**

(Suddenly almost strident) I am. Absolutely. You can't sing, "Now there's a look in your eyes like black holes in the sky" without thinking about Syd. Or, "Come on you stranger, you legend, you martyr and shine"... "you wore out your welcome with random precision"... "you seer of visions, come on you painter, you piper, you prisoner". All these images are very precise. I think of Syd. Can't help it. It is important when you sing somebody else's words to pay your respects to the writer and to the subject of the song. When artists sing other people's words and they're just words coming out of their mouths you can always tell; they drop away from a phrase before they've quite finished it. They're not really thinking and meaning what the words mean. It is... my responsibility as the singer to try and give the meaning and, uh, the resonance of meaning the writer intended.

**The old story about Syd's coming to the studio as you were finishing that track and the album seems too strangely perfect.**

The facts I'm certain of are that we were making that album at Abbey Road and Syd did turn up – anything else, I wouldn't count on its reliability. I don't know what song we were recording. I have no memory of him saying what he's quoted as saying: "You've played it once already, why do it again?" or "Shall I do my solo now?" And it wasn't the day of my first wedding – that was later, in July – and Syd didn't come to it.