Pink Floyd’s keyboard player Rick Wright, who died of cancer last week, gave his last-ever interview to Paul Sexton, in which he spoke about the band’s glory years and their conflicted Live8 reunion.

The rock revolution of the Sixties and Seventies produced some of the biggest stars and best-selling records in history. However, not every member of a multi-platinum band had to spend their lives wondering what the tabloids would say about them or wear a disguise every time they left the house. The life of Rick Wright, which ended last Monday when he died of cancer at 65 was one of happy anonymity.

“All these people that complain, ‘Oh, we can’t go out because we’ll get recognised or be hassled.’ It’s this celebrity thing,” he told me. “You’re asking for it. I don’t want to prove anything. I don’t need to go out and advertise myself.”

Few bands have inspired such devotion among millions of fans worldwide as Pink Floyd but their keyboard player confessed to being mystified about such obsessiveness. His job, as he saw it, was simply to show up and contribute his creativity, whether as a keyboard player, co-writer of such Floyd classics as The Great Gig In The Sky and Us And Them, or occasionally as an atmospheric lead vocalist.

“I don’t know what makes Pink Floyd what they are,” he said, continuing with one of the greater understatements you’re likely to hear. “Dark Side Of The Moon touched a nerve in lots of people, musically and lyrically. It was a fine album. When you put it on, whoever listened to it needed to listen to the whole thing.”

In July of last year, I did what turned out to be the last interview with one of rock music’s most softly-spoken figures. His death after a relatively short, nine-month fight with cancer deprives us of someone who always wanted his music to do his talking for him.

The man I met, slight of build and long since grey of hair, may have had lines on his face that hinted at a rock ’n’ roll past. He exuded a quiet contentment, though, tempered only by a slight unease at being in the rare spotlight of a retrospective interview.

Wright, the epitome of the jobbing musician, was the war baby from Pinner, Middlesex who played piano, trumpet, trombone and guitar as an adolescent and let his love of music rule his head.

“My first passion was jazz,” he said. “Miles Davis, John Coltrane, the be-bop jazz musicians, not necessarily pianists. And there was an eastern influence. I always remember Miles Davis said, ‘Notes aren’t important, it’s the spaces in between.’”

That perceptive enthusiasm was Wright’s compass even when his career seemed headed elsewhere.

“I was in architecture school but I was determined to be a musician. When I was at polytechnic, I had private lessons in composition then went to the London School of Music. Thank God I went there, because that’s where I met Roger Waters and Nick Mason.”

When Syd Barrett, a friend of Waters, arrived the equation changed dramatically. “We weren’t regarded as a pop band,” said Wright. “We were playing long, experimental pieces. When it came to the first album [1967’s Piper At The Gates Of Dawn], Syd just came up with all these wonderful songs very quickly.”

A S FLOYD grew into one of the first bands of the stadium rock era with more ambitious live shows, Wright was an integral part of their sound. He helped shape historic albums such as Dark Side which went on to log an astonishing 741 weeks on Billboard’s US album chart and Wish You Were Here. However, by the late Seventies the battle for artistic control of the band between Waters and guitarist David Gilmour left Wright as the injured passenger. His role was downgraded by Waters, who eventually ousted him altogether before himself leaving in poisonous acrimony in 1983. “The Wall is a brilliant record but I wasn’t on The Final Cut, that’s when they all came to blows. Then David, myself and Nick decided to carry on Pink Floyd.”

Wright told me that as much as he enjoyed the quartet’s memorable reunion of 2005 at Live8, it proved to him that they could never tour again. “Our ideas are so different musically,” he said with great tact.

Still, his music continued to speak for him, eloquently. Not just on the timeless Floyd albums but also in recent happy times. One of Wright’s last performances is released tomorrow in the form of Gilmour’s CD and DVD package Live In Gdansk.

“I think David said it was probably the happiest tour he’d ever done and it was for me. We were playing in small theatres. I do not like playing in huge stadiums. It’s a money-making thing and you need to make money, I’m not putting it down. If the Floyd were to go out today, they’d have to play in stadiums to recoup the costs of huge light shows and so on, because that’s what people expect.”

“David went out and did an intimate tour and it was wonderful. I think we performed some of the Floyd stuff better than we’d ever done.”

As a final memory of Rick Wright, it’s a happy one. “Some musicians want to be the fastest and cleverest but for me that’s not the point about music,” he said. “For me it’s all about feeling and emotion.”

‘For me, it’s all about emotion’

David Gilmour’s Live In Gdansk CD and DVD, featuring Rick Wright, is released tomorrow by EMI.
INFLUENTIAL: Rick Wright went from quiet London suburbia to global acclaim with Pink Floyd