

Mark Baynes, 17b Walter Street, Takapuna, Auckland

An essay discussing The Development of Pink Floyd's music.

Introduction

The purpose of this essay is to explore the development of the music of Pink Floyd during their "Middle Years". This is the time when Roger Waters led Pink Floyd, it's also the time Pink Floyd started developing what the band considered to be their 'real' sound. This essay will examine the essence of that sound by comparing three albums written during that period, namely Meddle, Wish You Were Here and The Final Cut. My aim is to analyse aspects of these albums outlining composition and performance elements, place them in historical context, and draw conclusions as to what makes Pink Floyd's sound during this period so successful.

History

Syd Barrett ceased his involvement with Pink Floyd in 1968. This left the remaining band members with important artistic decisions to make. Who would fill Syd's dominant presence within the band? After all he was the primary songwriter, singer and lead guitarist. Pink Floyd hired David Gilmour to fill the guitarists chair, vocals were split initially between Roger Waters and Rick Wright but it is apparent when listening to Pink Floyd's subsequent album releases that radical compositional changes had taken place. A Saucerful of Secrets (EMI, 1968) is the bands second album and is the only non-compilation album containing elements from all five members of the band, Barrett's song-writing skills can be heard on just one track, "Jugband Blues". I consider this album to be really just an exercise in disaster recovery, Pink Floyd were recording an album as Syd was fired and they had a commercial obligation to their record company.

Ummagumma (EMI, 1969) and Atom Heart Mother (EMI, 1970) were Pink Floyd's subsequent studio releases. Both of these albums contain a full band feature on one half of the album, followed by individual compositions on the other. The problem with recording this way is that an album is never going to become greater than the sum of its individual parts, and both these albums contain too many contrasting styles to be considered as conceptual, a label that would soon be used to describe Pink Floyd.

Meddle was released in 1971 and although it doesn't contain as strong an underlying theme as concept album Dark Side of the Moon (EMI, 1975), it does mark the beginning of a Pink Floyd sound that the band were beginning to become proud of.

Meddle (EMI 1971)

"Meddle is amongst my favourites. I mean that, to me, is the start of the path forward for Pink Floyd, really." - David Gilmour, February 1988, on Australian Radio

"Meddle was the first real Pink Floyd album. It set a tempo, a feel and a style that we liked, and it introduced the idea of the theme that can be returned to. It sounds a bit ham-fisted now, but the concept thing I like." - Nick Mason, 1994

"Meddle is really the album where all four of us were finding our feet - the way we wanted Pink Floyd to be, although our two previous albums, Ummagumma and Atom Heart Mother had some pointers to where we would finally go, they just aren't as important." – Dave Gilmour

"We did loads of bits of demos which we then pieced together, and for the first time, it worked. This album was a clear forerunner for Dark Side Of The Moon, the point when we first got our focus." – Dave Gilmour

Meddle isn't just appreciated by the band. It is considered by Pink Floyd fans to be the first truly great album recorded without Syd Barrett. It is the first album in which Roger Waters wrote all of the lyrics, and it also contains Nick Mason's vocal debut in *One Of These Days*. Elements of what is known now as the Pink Floyd mature sound are apparent in several tracks and, while it can be argued that there is a strong Beatles influence, overall the album contains enough Floyd to be significant. Whilst initially being recorded at Abbey Road studios, more complex sections were recorded using a 16-track facility.

This can be appreciated when you listen to the opening track, *One Of These Days*. It contains many layers of sound, double tracked bass parts, several keyboard parts, reverse cymbals, vocals with effects and acts as an excellent opening track. The band used conventional rock instrumentation but with the studio acting as a kind of fifth member, augmenting the sound.

A Pillow of Winds is an extremely significant composition. It has the flavour of a folk song but with several Floyd trademarks. It starts with a wind sound-effect continued from the previous track. This effect will be used later on the album *Wish You Were Here*, but in *Meddle* it helps create the idea of a reoccurring theme, even if that hasn't quite been achieved yet. Also evident is the use of softly sung multi-tracked vocals, another Floyd compositional trademark. Familiar Floyd instrumentation such as an acoustic guitar, an electric guitar, a slide guitar, and a keyboard pad are combined in this song. This instrumentation can be found in later tracks such as *Shine On You Crazy Diamond* (*Wish You Were Here*, EMI 1975) and is a seminal part of the Pink Floyd mature sound. However, the intro does have the flavour of the Beatles song "Dear Prudence" and I would suggest that its simple harmonic structure doesn't represent Pink Floyd at their best.

Fearless is a track with an ambiguous message. The first half of the lyrics are about defiance, facing fear head on and standing tall in the presence of danger. In the second half an opposite message is implied as the subject is branded an idiot by a merciless magistrate. I can't help but think of the rock opera "The Wall", where during the final scenes a giant magistrate is passing judgement on the character "Pink". This track could be the first reference to the subject matter later used in The Wall, namely an amalgamation of the Syd Barrett story, and Roger Water's own autobiography. A clever sample of the Liverpool football chant "You'll never walk alone" is played at the beginning and end of the track and helps accentuate a lugubrious and slightly sinister message.

St Tropez is a track that contains the largest Beatles influence. It has the flavour of a cheesy track entitled Maxwell's Silver Hammer (Abbey Road, EMI 1969) especially at 42s where the lyric "Home" is sung using melisma (a passage of several notes sung to one syllable of text). The Beatles' original uses this effect at the end of nearly every phrase and both tracks share similar musical accompaniment. At 28s, I can hear stylistic similarities to the bridge of I'm Only Sleeping (Revolver, EMI 1966). The melody is very similar to the lyrics "Please don't spoil my day I'm miles away" on the Beatles track at 21s.

The track Echoes begins what sounds like a blip of an underwater radar system. It is in fact a high B played on a grand piano passed through a Leslie speaker cabinet played by Rick Wright. This was a serendipitous event on Wrights part, as he was just noodling on a piano at the time when other members found his sound intriguing. This track has a 3-minute introduction before the vocals enter, this slow introduction is also a trademark of later Pink Floyd tracks. At 3m 31s the minor tonic key of C# minor briefly changes to C# major, an effect used at the end of Shine on you Crazy Diamond.

Echoes is one of Pink Floyd's most epic tracks, and at over 23 minutes is one of their longest recorded studio tracks. It is a conceptual piece that has an aquatic theme, the instruments often play a part in supporting this theme, for example the guitar line at 12m40s subtly changes to represent birds flying over an ocean. The funk based groove fades gradually at 11m22s to leave the reoccurring wind sound heard earlier in the album. A marvellous soundscape is now presented to the listener using actual bird samples and guitar 'bird' calls. It is devoid of harmony until 14m45s when the string pad and the radar sound reappear, marking the several themes that follow before the 2nd verse enters at 19m12s. This radar sound feels like it represents human contact. After such a long passage without harmony or rhythm you can kind of get lost in the inner world of the sea, the ping reminds you that you could be travelling in a submarine and that you don't have to be lost, it saves you from the ocean and takes you back to the safety of dry land.

Wish You Were Here (EMI 1975)

"For me, 'Wish You Were Here' was very satisfying. I'd rather listen to it than Dark Side Of The Moon. I think we achieved a better balance of music and lyrics. 'Dark Side' went a bit too far the other way -- too much importance was placed on the lyrics. And sometimes the tunes were neglected." - David Gilmour

"The whole album sprang from that one four-note guitar phrase of Dave's in Shine On. We heard it, and went, 'That's a really nice phrase.' The wine came out, and that led to what I think is our best album, the most colourful, the most feelingful." - Roger Waters

"I think as an album it flows really well. It's like a descendant of Meddle in terms of the use of repeating themes, and the pacing." - Nick Mason

"It's hard to say but it just happens to be the album for me that from the moment it starts 'til it finishes, it flows, the songs flow into each other and it just has a wonderful feeling in it" - Richard Wright, March 1994,

Wish You Were Here was the fastest selling Floyd album to date, it sold 10 million copies worldwide. Just like its predecessor it is a concept album with an underlying theme apparent throughout the work. As in Meddle, Roger Waters wrote all the lyrics. Interesting things to note are that "Have a Cigar" was sung by Roy Harper, Stephane Grappelli can be heard (just) at the end of Wish You Were Here, Syd Barrett made an appearance during the recording of Shine on you Crazy Diamond, and Rick Wright quotes See Emily Play during the last few seconds of the same track.

After the success of Dark Side of the Moon it is hardly surprising that Pink Floyd would continue to use similar musical concepts in Wish You Were Here. Welcome to the Machine and Have a Cigar both make reference to the uglier side of the recording industry, and just like on earlier albums, sound effects are used to acoustically exemplify the lyrics. One example is at the end of Have a Cigar, the music is fed through a compressor that makes the sound appear to come from a cheap radio, helping to make reference to the theme of the track. Industrial noises in Welcome to the Machine are very evident, you feel like you are walking through the device as footsteps can be heard at the beginning and end of the track. This cyclical device can be heard on both previous albums and is very typical of Pink Floyd's compositional style.

References are made to Syd Barrett, namely a 27 minute track written about the ex front man. The album focuses on Pink Floyd's past in much more depth than the previous two albums and deals with suppressed feelings on a more obvious level. The track Time (Dark Side of the Moon, EMI 1973) contains poignant lyrics reflected by Waters,

"Hanging on in quiet desperation is the English way". I definitely get the impression that it was the Pink Floyd way, interviews with the band on several documentaries suggest that there were subcutaneous issues that went unvoiced between band members, this was probably a contributing factor to the bands demise several years later. Interestingly enough Waters later used the phrase "quiet desperation" in the song Southampton Dock (The Final Cut, EMI 1983), a poignant lyric that has a very contemplative nuance.

Wish You Were Here is a very good album. It feels acoustic enough to be human, but contains an appropriate amount of Floyd electronica to remain true to their sound. It is slightly surprising to discover that it was a hard album to record, it seems that there was a general sense apathy and procrastination in the studio. Roger is quoted in Saucerful of Secrets (Schaffner, 1991, p.198) that "our bodies were there, but at times the group was only there physically". He is also joked that "Wish You Were Here" should be changed to "Wish We Were Here"! It does represent Floyd at their best however, a collaboration of Water's angry lyrics, Gilmour's blues and folk influence, and the often neglected harmonic / texture input of Rick Wright.

The Final Cut (EMI 1983)

"Back in the seventies, we used to pretend that we were a group, I started to get very resentful because I was doing a lot more and yet we were all pretending that WE were doing it. Well we don't pretend anymore. I could work with another drummer and keyboard player very easily, and it's likely that at some point I will. The future of Pink Floyd depends very much on me." - Roger

"It was really Roger's solo album. The rest of us just sort of drifted into it."
- Nick

"It reached the point that I just had to say 'If you need a guitar player, give me a call and I'll come and do it.'" - David

With regards to The Final Cut, I am highly critical of Roger Waters approach to the album for several important reasons. First, he sacked Rick Wright so this album is the only one that doesn't include Wright on the credit list. Second, Water's musical arrogance continues from The Wall, he wrote both the music and the lyrics leaving the band with very little to contribute. This indeed shows as from a harmonic standpoint, there is very little going on. Occasionally we can find an interesting progression such the use of a III7 chord on the chorus of The Post War Dream creating an supportive 'heroic' feeling, and the use of CESH during the verse of The Gunner' Dream. There is also a subtle time signature change during The Hero's Return just like in the track Money (Dark Side of the Moon, EMI 1975).

In terms of production, The Final Cut is slightly more interesting than The Wall. The wind from Meddle, the footsteps, clocks, and laughs from Dark Side of the Moon, and the radio sounds from Wish You Were Here were all recycled and used in this album. In addition to this Pink Floyd used holophonics to record it, this was a state of the art method very similar to 'surround sound' used today. This further exemplifies the bands willingness to embrace new technology, especially if this technology can be used to strengthen sound effects used to support the meaning of the song.

Mainly however the music takes a very obvious second place to Waters morose and overindulgent lyrics. Both The Wall and The Final Cut represent Roger Water's desire to move away from Pink Floyd at their best, choosing instead to create a very long-winded monologue, a painful insight into some of Water's own gripes and personal demons.

Conclusion

This essay can only really deal with the bare minimum and only serves as the 'tip of the iceberg' as we 'dip our toes' into the Pink Floyd sound. What made the sound so interesting and alluring during the early – mid seventies?

I believe that it was a collection of things, provided by many, combined together to form something greater than the sum of its individual parts.

Although Roger Waters eventually became too self-obsessed and dictatorial in the later years, his lyric writing and ability to see the bigger picture is beautifully represented in Meddle, Dark Side of the Moon and Wish You Were Here. On listening to The Final Cut it is obvious that there is something important missing, namely the musical essence of two major contributors, Rick Wright and David Gilmour. In fact David Gilmour is only heard singing on 'Not Now John' even though he was acknowledged as the stronger singer.

The Final Cut contains no elongated musical sections, no soundscapes or chances for the band to shine. Importantly, when this was allowed happen during songs such as Echoes and Shine on You Crazy Diamond, there was always a sense of musicality and togetherness in the sound. David Gilmour took many solos but I sense that his aim was to try and make the overall sound better, not just satisfy his own ego. David Gilmour's playing is lyrical and his musicality very apparent.

Rick Wright's interest in harmony and his ability to fit unobtrusively with his colleagues made him an extremely valuable member of Pink Floyd. Although he has less song writing credits to his name than Waters or Gilmour, his playing added a critical dimension to the overall sound. I also believe that his interest in analogue synthesizers helped form tracks

such as *On the Run* (*Dark Side of the Moon*, EMI 1975) and without him the Pink Floyd sound would have been significantly poorer.

So what is the fully developed sound of Pink Floyd during those years? We hear the ambiguous lyrics of Waters and the carefully considered creativity of Gilmour and Wright. We then hear the use of electronica to add meaning to each song, which is painstakingly created using tape splicing and looping, a very time consuming method indeed. We hear music that is not only backing for lyrics, but focuses on the overall sound and tells a story by painting musical pictures.

Added to this are multitracked vocals, layered guitars and keyboards, cyclical sound effects, epic intros and solos sections, the use of sax and backing singers. But most importantly, it was the time in Pink Floyd's history when every member could work together, compromising where necessary to produce a mature Pink Floyd that we know and love.

References

Schaffner, N. (1991). *Saucerful of Secrets, the Pink Floyd Odyssey*

DVD - *Syd Barrett Story* (2003), Director John Edginton.

DVD - *Classic Albums: The Making of The Dark Side of the Moon* (1997), Director Matthew Longfellow.

http://pinkfloyd-co.com/disco/meddle/meddle_album.html

http://pinkfloyd-co.com/disco/wish/wish_album.html

http://pinkfloyd-co.com/disco/tfc/tfc_album.html

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pink_floyd

Pink Floyd. (1971). *Meddle*. Harvest, Capitol, EMI

Pink Floyd. (1975). *Wish You Were Here*. Harvest, Capitol, EMI

Pink Floyd. (1983). *The Final Cut*. Harvest, Capitol, EMI