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Shine on you Crazy Diamond Parts I – IX, Wish You Were Here, EMI 1975

A Musical Analysis

Introduction

I admire Syd Barrett. If it weren't for Syd, Pink Floyd would not exist. He was a free spirit with a huge creative drive and real sense of musical integrity. He sowed the seed and watered Pink Floyd through their psychedelic infancy, he wrote Pink Floyd's first hit single "Arnold Lane", and he also led the others in a unique direction that eventually would cause record companies and TV stations (in both the UK and USA) to pay attention. But he was fired from Pink Floyd due to his erratic behaviour and his constant refusal to abide by commercial confides.

It's hardly surprising that after writing Dark Side of the Moon (their most commercial album to date) and benefitting from all of the trappings of international stardom, their next project would have such an introspective theme. Writing a song dedicated to the man they all had such ambivalent feelings towards could be a way of letting bygones be bygones and laying some demons to rest! When Roger Waters wrote the lyrics for Shine on you Crazy Diamond he was paying homage to his friend, saying sorry, regretting Syd's mental health and admiring his creative genius. I also believe that there was commercial reasoning behind the tracks release. Syd Barrett at this time was starting to become an iconic figure, an underground hero and Waters seemed happy to exploit Syd's legacy. I would like to examine both the lyrics and music of Shine on you Crazy Diamond and explore some of the subtle meanings in this musical "eulogy".

Shine on you Crazy Diamond is Pink Floyd's longest single track at over 26 minutes and is split into 2 halves, then again into 9 sections. The 1st half opens the album "Wish You Were Here", EMI 1975, the 2nd half is played at the end. There have been other releases of Shine on (as it was referred to on tour prior to the studio recording in 1975) on two Pink Floyd compilation albums, namely "A collection of Great Dance Songs", and "Echoes: The Best of Pink Floyd". These versions however are heavily edited and should be ignored for the purposes of this essay.

Steel Breeze (Lyrics)

Roger Waters wrote all of the lyrics for Shine on you Crazy Diamond. They contain a succinct message built into only three short verses. He also wrote the title, which is commonly believed to be an acronym for Syd (**S**hine on **Y**ou crazy **D**iamond). Most of the ideas described in the lyrics are easy to understand.

"Remember when you were young, you shone like the sun" refers to Syd as he was growing up in Cambridge, a "bouncy" like character, full of passion.

"Now there's a look in your eyes, like black holes in the sky", is an obvious reference to Syd's state of mind during his mental decline. David Gilmour described it best in the "Syd Barrett Story" as a lack of his usual sparkle, the Syd he knew had gone. "You were caught in the cross fire of childhood and stardom" exposed Syd Barrett's vulnerability on an emotional level as well as emphasizing the attack and intrusion that sudden fame had caused him.

"You reached for the secret too soon", a reference to Syd's LSD drug use and its perceived (at the time) ability to help users reach a higher state of consciousness and spiritual understanding.

"You wore out your welcome with random precision". This is a fantastic oxymoron that sums up Syd's alienation from Pink Floyd. "Random

precision” seems a very fitting phrase to describe Syd Barrett’s personality, a very focused oddball perhaps!

I am however unsure about the meaning of the lyrics “steel breeze”. These occur in every verse. As the phrases are sung, the rhythm section stops playing time for that moment, as if to deliberately heighten the importance of these words. The phrase is preceded in each verse by “blown on”, “rode on” and “sail on” respectively. Perhaps this signifies Syd’s state of mind. “Blown on” suggests a complete lack of control, where “sail on” would imply that he has harnessed this “steel breeze” for his own benefit. I would suggest that “steel breeze” is in fact the essence of the Pink Floyd sound. When Roger sings “and we’ll bask in the shadow of yesterdays triumph and sail on the steel breeze”, perhaps he is implying a potential future reconciliation and friendship?

Parts I – IX (Music)

The music of Shine on you Crazy Diamond includes compositional elements from both lead instrumentalists, namely Dave Gilmour (Guitar) and Rick Wright (keys). Gilmour wrote the famous 4 note motif (Bb – F – G – E) that enters 4 minutes into the song whereas Wright was responsible for some of the more complex harmonic structure, his signature “7#9” sound found on Breathe (Dark Side of the Moon), and several solos and funk grooves. One of the most musically interesting points is the use of a “Tierce de Picardie” ending, as the minor home key of G minor changes to the key of G major during the final few bars of the track.

Part I

Wright starts this journey with just a simple G minor chord played on a string sound and analogue pad; a mini moog is used to play spacious atmospheric noodling. This section lays the ambient foundation for the whole track.

Part II

At 2m 14s Gilmour enters the mix with similarly spacious guitar but this time the harmony changes between Gm, Dm and Cm. The placement of these chords implies that the accompaniment is following the guitar line using "colla voce", a kind of rubato meaning literally "with voice".

Part III - IV

Gilmour plays a 4 note cell that is comprised of Bb – F - G (below Bb) - E that enters at 3m 59s. This phrase is repeated throughout the track and is later named the Syd Barrett theme. This cell is repeated 4 times before Nick Mason enters on drums, the feel is lazy 12/8 time and the chord played is C major, different to the C minor that was used in parts I-II. The E note of the cell is sustained spelling the 3rd of C major, interestingly when the phrase is played under the solo form (which is basically a minor blues), the same E becomes the 6th of the Gm6 chord. This means that the Syd Barrett lick could be freely used across almost the whole of the solo section. It is only adapted to fit the harmony during the last bars (Eb7 – D7), where the E changes to Eb. This happens during Gilmour's 1st solo.

Part V

The vocals enter at 8m 48s with verse 1. There is a sense of antiphony between the vocal line and the guitar lead. To me it is like a conversation between two singers where the guitar part is Syd!

“Remember when you were young, (laughter)”, Roger says and I can feel Syd’s response as something like “do you have to bring that up again?” or “yes, well that was a very long time ago”. Church organ and gospel singers support the vocals especially when the lyric “Shine on you Crazy Diamond” is sung, raising the dynamic considerably. Dick Parry plays 2 choruses of sax improvisation, one at the original tempo and the second one where the feel changes to a 4/4 shuffle using metric modulation giving the impression that the track is speeding up. This concludes the first half of Shine on as the sax solo fades over the tonic chord.

Part VI - VIII

Verse 3 is sung 5 minutes into the second half of the track after vamps based on straight 8th and shuffle grooves. At 6m 05s the metre changes again to a slow 4, this time with a disco feel! It’s just a Gm vamp but the orchestration includes the use of clavichord (a sound made popular by funk music) and electric piano. Layered on top of this vamp is a pentatonic-based 4 bar synth riff that uses sweeping glissandi creating quite a haunting sound.

Part IX

A drum fill with a reversed effect plays a pickup into the part IX. At 9m 09 this is really the final anthem, the piece of music with a closing statement. We return to a slow 4 metre and a new sequence of chords with a more advanced flavour. The chord sequence is Gm – Bbm – Fm – Fm/Eb – Cm – Am7b5 – D7 and this is repeated 3 times before arriving at the “Tierce de Picardie” ending of G major. This last chord is significant as it leaves the listener with an optimistic feeling, a complete contrast to the rest of the track, which is essentially minor. The Steinway grand piano, organ, synths, and strings complement each other gloriously and coupled with the slow tempo, I get a great sense of procession and indeed, finality.

Conclusion

Shine on you Crazy Diamond is a work of art and an extremely well considered piece of music. The lyrics, the chord sequences, the changes in metre, the solo's (where I feel the presence of Barrett in both Gilmour and Wright's playing), the unhurried true depiction of a story, the behind the beat drumming, the changes in timbre all seem to help tell the tale of Syd Barrett. I enjoy the seemingly unrelated but complimentary sections of Shine on and feel it is extremely ironic that out of all the recording sessions done by Pink Floyd, that Syd chose the recording of this track on the 5th June 1975 to make his surprise appearance!

References

Shine on you Crazy Diamond Wikipedia Source

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

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

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