



## RICK WRIGHT REMEMBERED

**Veteran Floyd fan and collector Mick Popper pays a personal tribute:** I felt compelled to write concerning the sad death of Pink Floyd's great keyboard player Rick Wright. Over the years the politics of the group and the sad demise of Syd has meant the limelight has usually fallen on Waters, Gilmour and Barrett. All these three have been great musicians/leaders in their own right and Nick Mason's drumming has been perfect.

But especially for those of us who have been into The Floyd from their early days, post Syd it was Rick's haunting keyboard sound that often led the group's music. And I was particularly happy to see the great ovations Rick got during Dave Gilmour's 2006 solo shows, showing that he was well loved and appreciated.

There has been a stream of obituaries, but none really touching on his real importance within the group as one of the great experimental keyboard players of the rock era. The Floyd were masters at starting quietly and building to a climax. Some of their most beautiful moments were when Rick brought the music back in from that tranquility for the final reprise, especially on *Atom Heart Mother*, *Echoes* and *Saucerful Of Secrets*. Also in those pre-*Dark Side* years, where each group member did his own thing, it was arguably Wright's *Summer 68*, *Sisyphus*, *Remember A Day* and *See Saw* that stood out amongst the solo written material. And without doubt one of Pink Floyd's real forgotten pearls, *Cirrus Minor*, though penned by Waters, revels in Rick's beautiful sounds.

Pink Floyd at their best married Waters' lyrics and aggression with Gilmour and Wright's instrumental/musical side. From *Animals* onwards Waters' input became increasingly the centrepiece and it was generally at the expense of Wright. Whether this was down to Wright's own lack of input or Waters stifling him creatively is a difficult question. The result was that the following albums were still impressive but in a totally different way. *The Wall*, *The Final Cut* and *The Pros And Cons Of Hitchhiking* (a Waters solo project that could have been a Floyd one in place of *The Wall*) struggled on musical content alone but when seen live they were still strong.

Much has been written about Rick Wright's 'demise' at this point, with Waters forcing him out as a permanent band member during the making of *The Wall*. Gilmour and Mason had big misgivings about this, but due to the whole Norton-Warburg affair the band was in serious debt, and Waters forced their hand with a 'Wright Out' or 'Wall Out' choice. The upcoming double LP would solve all their financial problems.

I was glad to see Wright return from the wilderness in Gilmour/Mason's 1987 *Momentary Lapse* Floyd resurgence and by 1994's *Division Bell* he was a fully contributing full group member again (both Rick and Nick Mason had suffered a crisis of musical confidence during the later years of Waters' control). And it almost seemed like a circle had been completed when the group reformed with Waters in 2005 for Live 8.

Aside from Rick's Floyd work I also greatly enjoyed his two solo albums; *Wet Dream* in 1978 and *Broken China* in 1996, drawing on his own early musical leanings of pop, jazz and classical. This solo work was very underrated due to a lack of commercial push and promotion. Dave Gilmour made his first two solo albums in 1978 and 1984 and took them on the road in his *About Face* 1984 tour. Group and fans alike really enjoyed the shows and the tour helped Gilmour's confidence as the front man of a group. Had Rick done a similar tour after *Broken China* in 1996 I think he would have been surprised at the positive reaction he would have got.

Unlike many of his peers Rick appeared a fairly humble and egoless person, and I am sure that this was one of the reasons he probably felt that there would not have been great interest in a solo tour; a great shame.

This brings me back to the present day and I am really pleased that I made it to the Syd Barrett tribute gig at the Barbican last year when three of The Floyd played *Arnold Layne* as the last number that night. Rick's final stage appearance was last October, at the Leicester Square premiere of Dave Gilmour's Solo Tour DVD. Dave Gilmour's kind words this week said a lot, especially his remark that Rick could be found behind most of the great moments when Pink Floyd were in 'full flow' . . . a great epitaph from another top musician. I would like to thank him for some really great music and memories over the past 40 years. RIP Rick. **Mick Popper**