



## Richard Wright

RICHARD WRIGHT, THE PINK FLOYD keyboardist who died of cancer at age 65, didn't play many solos or sing lead on anything you're likely to remember. He had just two moments to himself in the songwriting sun: the echo-heavy ballad *Us and Them* and the wordless *The Great Gig in the Sky* from Pink Floyd's sad epic *Dark Side of the Moon*. Shy, gentle and very private,

Wright was proof that not every rock star feels the need to act like one. "In the welter of arguments about who or what was Pink Floyd, Rick's enormous input was frequently forgotten," said Wright's bandmate David Gilmour in a release. "But his soulful voice and playing were vital, magical components."

Wright taught himself how to play piano (and several other instruments) as a jazz-mad child growing up in London, and brought a sense of improvisation to the R&B group he formed with school friends Roger Waters and Nick Mason. When Syd Barrett joined in 1965, the band was renamed and redirected, matching Barrett's weirdness and whimsy with orchestral swells

**Hey, you Wright,** center, with Pink Floyd bandmates

and experimentalism. After Barrett left the group because of mental instability and was replaced by Gilmour, the cohesiveness at the core was never quite the same. Waters seized creative control and reportedly threatened not to release 1979's *The Wall* unless Wright quit; he did, although he eventually came back to the band he loved. Even though Wright was happiest at the side of the stage, it offended his principles that Waters demanded the center. At one point, the two went 14 years without speaking.

Wright's relationship with Gilmour was far more affectionate. The two remained friends and collaborators until the end. "Whenever

Dave wants me," said Wright, "I'm really happy to play with him."

—BY JOSH TYRANGIEL

