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YOU'RE MISSING: Syd Barrett

- Article by: Justin Guinn
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"You reached for the secret too soon, you cried for the moon. Shine on you crazy diamond." -- *"Shine On You Crazy Diamond," Pink Floyd*

The lyrics above, along with countless other profound and peculiar Pink Floyd lines, owe the majority of their existence to Roger "[Syd](#)" [Barrett](#). Not only did he write the majority of the lyrics during his time in the band, but his fall from grace inspired many Pink Floyd efforts to come. In fact, it was Barrett who coined the name "Pink Floyd." Before Pink Floyd, the band played as The Tea Set. That is, until one night at a gig when another "Tea Set" had been booked. Barrett's solution was to combine the first names of two U.S. bluesmen, Pink Anderson and Floyd Council, and, as they say, the rest is history.

Barrett was born January 6, 1946, in Cambridge, England. His parents encouraged him to pursue music and in 1953, won a piano duet competition with his sister, Rosemary. Before moving to London for college, Barrett had established himself in the Cambridge music scene, playing with a handful of bands and, of course, [David Gilmour](#).

Not long after Barrett moved to London, the cosmos aligned with the outer gates of the realm; our star emitted an energy unprecedented; four musicians started a band. The original line-up (for The Tea Set and early Floyd) was Roger Waters, Nick Mason, Rick Wright, and Syd Barrett. The four-piece toured extensively, in both the U.K. and U.S., and supported acts like [Big Brother and the Holding Company](#), Richie Havens, and even Jimi Hendrix. They had their first album *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn* released on August 5, 1967. The band had made it. All would have been well except Barrett began a battle with hallucinogens. This would be the beginning of his departure from Pink Floyd.

In the Pink Floyd biography, *Inside Out: A Personal History of Pink Floyd*, author Nick Mason writes:

“...our front man, guitarist and songwriter was being unraveled in a serious way. We weren’t oblivious to the fact, but from our point of view Syd was having good days (as seen in this [rare and early interview](#) with Hans Keller), and bad days, and the bad days seemed to be increasing in number. Blinkered by our desire to be a successful band, we were determined to convince ourselves that he’d grow out of this phase. Other people around us had a clearer view. June Child was matter-of-fact about it: ‘Syd took a lot of acid. Lots of people can take some acid and cope with it in their lives, but if you take three or four trips a days, and you do that every day...’”

The band decided to call on Barrett’s friend, guitarist David Gilmour, to join Floyd and hopefully take some pressure off Barrett. Pink Floyd didn’t work well as a five-piece, and, after some dreadful shows, the band decided not to pick up Barrett on the way to a Southampton University show. Four months later in April of 1968, Barrett officially departed from Pink Floyd.

He went on to put out two solo albums with help from Gilmour, Waters, and Wright. The first, *The Madcap Laughs* did very well in both sells and reviews. The second album, *Barrett*, was released in November of 1970, marking the last official Syd Barrett release.



During this time, Barrett sparsely played live shows. After a short-lived band called Stars and an attempt at another album in 1974, Barrett retreated from the music scene entirely. That is, except for on June 5, 1975 when Barrett, unannounced and uninvited, made his way into Abbey Road Studio where Floyd was recording tracks for *Wish You Were Here*. Nick Mason writes:

“To have met Syd in the Street would have been disconcerting, but coming across him without warning in the studio environment was particularly alarming. The fact that it wasn’t just any studio, but Studio Three at Abbey Road, the site of most of his greatest work, and at one time his territory as much as anyone else’s, added to the poignancy.”

Barrett was unrecognizable when he showed up at the studio. He had gained “six stone” and shaved his once curly black hair. His usual Thea Porter shirt had been replaced by a plain khaki one. Recovery had not served him well, for his conversations with the band during this strangest of visits were disturbing.

Thirty-one years later, on July 7, 2006, at the age of 60, Roger “Syd” Barrett died from pancreatic cancer. His influence is vast, including first and foremost, Pink Floyd. Other artists who’ve acknowledged Barrett as a source of inspiration include David Bowie, the Flaming Lips, Pearl Jam, Phish, Placebo, R.E.M., the Smashing Pumpkins, and Soundgarden, just to name a few.

Syd’s legacy will forever live on in the hearts, minds, and ears of all those who’ve heard his music, as well as those future generations yet to discover it, for Syd and the rest of Pink Floyd made timeless masterpieces that will surely outlast our time.

-  [YOU'RE MISSING: Syd Barrett](#)
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Pink Floyd - "UFO Club, 1967 w/ Syd Barrett"

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