

Q&A: Pink Floyd's Rick Wright hears "Piper"

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By Paul Sexton

LONDON (Billboard) - Some 13 years after Pink Floyd's name last appeared on a new studio album, the group's legacy still has a powerful echo.

The widely influential British band's first album, "The Piper at the Gates of Dawn," most of which was written by the late Syd Barrett, will be reissued August 27 in Europe by EMI and September 3 in the United States to mark the 40th anniversary of its initial release.

A deluxe three-CD edition will contain stereo and mono mixes, plus other rare and unreleased material from the era. Packaging for the set has been designed by longtime Floyd collaborator Storm Thorgerson.

Keyboard player and founding member Rick Wright, who has maintained a low profile throughout the band's history, spoke with Billboard about the anniversary, Floyd's enduring impact and his own recent work.

Q: What are your impressions after hearing the first Floyd album again?

A: "It was very interesting. There's this big difference between how we played live at the time and how we made the record. The most amazing thing was to be at Abbey Road making it and have the Beatles next door recording 'Sgt. Pepper.' I now know why 'Piper' had an influence on so many bands. I can hear punk stuff going on in there. The way Syd wrote was a huge influence on so many people."

Q: Does this album represent Syd Barrett at the height of his powers?

A: "('Piper') was his creative period, although I have to say there's some pretty amazing stuff on his two solo albums. He had an incredible way of looking at things. I remember sitting down with him one day and he wrote a song in 10 minutes. As an aspiring songwriter, I couldn't believe it. The chords weren't in time, because he was thinking only of the rhythm of the words and the melody. They were not in 4/4 time or 3/4 -- they were all over the place."

Q: What was it like reviving Barrett's songs when you played in David Gilmour's band on his 2006 tour?

A: "I sang 'Arnold Layne' live for the first time ever since it was written, and it was fantastic to do. But we never actually performed it live at the time, and I don't believe we ever performed 'See Emily Play' live. When David Bowie came and guested when I was playing with David, he said when he (first) heard Syd, he realized he could sing in an English accent."

Q: The cult of Pink Floyd shows no sign of diminishing. What's your take on it?

A: "Oh, God, I don't understand it. All you writers need to talk about that. I know we've made some great songs and great music, but I can't tell you why we're so popular. There are some dedicated Syd fans who think Floyd

finished when he left the band."

Q: Did the Pink Floyd reunion at Live 8 give you any new perspective on the band and its legacy?

A: "Many people are dreaming of the band getting back together again because we did Live 8. Because of all the arguments and issues that Roger (Waters has) had with me, (and) with David, it was wonderful that we actually got up there and did it together. But we did learn something. It would be very hard for the four of us to go and do a world tour, simply because our ideas are so different musically."

Q: Are you working on any solo projects?

A: "I've got various ideas. I'm going to do an instrumental album, based on the piano, and I've (got) loads of stuff recorded. It depends how I treat the piano, and whether I need other musicians to play on it. I've got the compositions down. But it's not imminent -- hopefully next year."

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