Pink Floyd Essay, Research Paper

Music in the 20th century is something that has evolved from early days of jazz and blues music, to Rap, R&B, alternative, and rock & roll. It has become evident that some bands stand apart from others. The influences of Pink Anderson and Floyd Council have helped one of the greatest rock bands of all time emerge, Pink Floyd. The use of synthesizers, guitar and solid vocals has made them a musical force to be reckoned with. The band s name was arrived at after blues musicians Floyd Council and Pink Anderson. However, this was not the first of the names given to the band. Sigma6 was the first on a list of many names to come for the band. The band had many names at different times such as, The Screaming Abdabs, T-Set, The Meggadeaths, and The Architectural Abdabs, until Syd came up with the name The Pink Floyd Sound, inspired by two jazz artists Pink Anderson, and Floyd Council (pinkfloyd.com). The band had roots in the early 1960 s in Cambridge, England where future rock legends Syd Barrett and David Gilmour grew up. The band would generally gather at Barrett s house to play in his lavish home, using makeshift instruments to play the tunes of current rock stars; that is up until member Roger Waters blew his college grant money on his first guitar (Povey 8). Now as to the use of the name Pink Floyd, there is much to wonder. Contrary to popular belief, the name did not come from a hallucination Syd Barrett had while using LSD. In his record collection he possessed two records, one by Pink Anderson, master of ragtime, blues and folk, and the other by bluesman Floyd Council, through which he simply combined first and last names to come up with a band name. Other options came up such as Anderson Council, but the group opted for another name (Povey 14). Pink Floyd was born. Getting back to the origin of the groups members is a lengthy issue. Each member had been in other bands before coming together, each gaining knowledge and experience in a different aspect of the music. The initial, most important gathering was in the early 60 s when Richard Wright, Nick Mason, and Roger Waters joined a band called Sigma6, along with other talents, then becoming the Architectural Abdabs due to their involvement in college (Povey 13). Eventually, a band called The Spectrum Five was formed, including Richard Wright, Nick Mason, Roger Waters, Bob Close, and founder Syd Barrett (Povey 19). Like a supernova, Roger “Syd” Barrett burned briefly and brightly, leaving an indelible mark upon psychedelic and progressive rock as the founder and original singer, songwriter, and lead guitarist of Pink Floyd (allmusic.com). It was not until the beginning of 1965 that the band took on the name The Pink Floyd, after being called The Pink Floyd Blues Band, and The Tea Set (Povey 19). With all of these names and changes, one would wonder what kind of people stand behind the band s name. They go as follows: Syd Barrett was born on January 6, 1946 in Cambridge, England, and was musically inclined from a young age. He was the foremost important member of the band, largely because he was responsible for the majority of their first album, The Piper at the Gates of Dawn. Soon after the release of this album, Barrett was released from the band due in part to his uncontrolled mental health from the use of psychedelic drugs (allmusic.com). His mental stability created a whole other aspect for the band to deal with, something that would eventually shape the way they would play forever. Roger Waters, born in Bookham, Cambridge, England on September 6, 1944, also played a large role in the bands development. He wrote the majority of the lyrics on Dark Side of the Moon, as well as singing a great number of songs from The Wall. As bassist for Pink Floyd he did indeed take over a leadership role when Barrett was no longer part of the group (allmusic.com). However, as a leader he eventually became sickened with the band, and no longer wanted to pursue a career as Pink Floyd. He put in a court order to have the bands name dropped, so that no other member could use it at any time. Nevertheless, the name was used in the 1980 s and on, though with a different style, keeping the Pink Floyd legend alive. Native to London, England, Richard Wright was also a founding member of Pink Floyd. Born on January 28, 1943, he was the keyboardist for the band, up until controversy arose within the group (Povey 248). In 1980 he left Pink Floyd, but rejoined seven years later (Contemporary Musicians 193). Nick Mason, while not much of a controversial person, did supply the band with solid drumming, backing up their already remarkable vocals and guitar. Adding to the incredible sound was guitarist David Gilmour, born on March 6, 1946 in Cambridgeshire, England. He was brought in by Waters as a replacement for the absent Syd Barrett. Pink Floyd has become known for its problems within the band, most knowing that they are no longer together. Problems started back in the beginning with Syd Barrett. While he was a great musician and brought a new style to the band, he clearly had a problem. While facing pressure as the bands leader, he increased the use of LSD and further enhanced his stage fright (Povey 18). In one incident Syd s problems occurred on stage; Syd just stood there, his arms hanging down. Suddenly he put his hands on the guitar and we thought he s actually going to do it, but he just stood there, tripping out of his mind (Povey 29). As a result of this incident, and many more to come, Barrett was removed from the band. While a loss for the band, it also served as a gain. A friend of Barrett s, David Gilmour was brought in and quickly became a part of the band. While the band did perform with all five members at one point, this lasted only a short time. Fellow members complained about his actions on stage saying, Sometimes Syd sang a bit and sometimes he didn t (Povey 50). At that point, for future gigs the band simply forgot to pick up Syd. He became distant from everyone due to his drug involvement, slid into isolation, and was not heard from very often. As Roger Waters later stated in 1975, I m very sad about Syd. I wasn t for years. For year I suppose he was a threat because of all that bollocks written about him and us. Of course he was very important and the band would never have started without him, but on the other hand it couldn t have gone on with him (Povey 142). While most think the bands 1975 hit Shine on you Crazy Diamond makes allusions to Barrett, it does not. In fact, says Waters, Syd is a symbol of the extremes of absence, not of the previously mentioned song (Povey 143). It is necessary to study the lyrics from the song to understand it. Remember when you were young, you shone like the sun. Shine on you crazy diamond. Now there’s a look in your eyes, like black holes in the sky. Shine on you crazy diamond. You were caught on the crossfire of childhood and stardom, blown on the steel breeze. It is up to the mind whether or not these lyrics make references to Syd Barrett. While Pink Floyd was an excellent band, it had some following that were not incredibly good for their image. Once such instance points to a Los Angeles show in 1977, in which over 500 people were arrested for the use or possession of marijuana. The chief of Police called the event an illegal pot fest, something that did nothing for the bands likeness (Povey 140). The band developed its style with the help of front man Syd Barrett. He took the band down a different path, away from simply jazz or blues. He created a style of his own which has been evident in the music he helped write and sing. He turned the bands music from an origin of blues oriented, to a more psychedelic sound, with full support from the other band members (Contemporary Musicians192-3). After signing with EMI records in 1967, they released their first single entitled Arnold Layne, which quickly became a controversial song. This was due in part to the fact that it dealt with a transvestite, and even an underground radio station in London would not play the material (Contemporary Musicians 193). On the contrary, this single did get them the exposure that would be crucial to their survival in the sometimes-harsh music business. The Piper at the Gates of Dawn, their first and critically acclaimed album did not gain much success in the United States, but it was popular in Europe (Contemporary Musicians 193). Later they did work on Saucerful of Secrets and Ummagumma, both after Barrett s departure. It was clear that Gilmour was doing a fine job as the replacement lead guitarist. Pink Floyd caught one of its luckiest breaks on April 14th, 1969 as they performed at the Royal Festival Hall in London, which showcased the bands ability to combine all aspects of music, Performance, stage and theatrics (Povey 58). Barrett once made references to musical performance, pointing out that a theatrical display may become important to a bands survival. Modern day Pink Floyd was essentially born when Syd left the band however. During the years after Barrett, the band created some of their best works, including Wish You Were Here, The Wall, Dark Side of the Moon, and The Final Cut. Perhaps one of their most influential albums is Dark Side of the Moon. While the band did not think it was a superb piece, they at least thought it was good. But not as good as it turned out to be, here explained by guitarist David Gilmour; Dark Side s success has Always baffled me, still baffles me. I mean, when we made it, we knew it was the best we d done. But we hadn t even gone gold before then (Contemporary Musicians 193). Amazingly, the record remained on billboards charts for an unheard of fourteen years. It has become a record that will most likely never be broken (pinkfloyd.com). Along with the great success of this album also created an icon that would stand for Pink Floyd in a sense. The cover of Dark Side of the Moon includes a triangle with a beam of light passing through it, and this has become synonymous with the band. The albums lyrics have been called a collection of epics steeped in Roger Waters’ lyrics of paranoia, alienation and schizophrenia (pinkfloyd.com). An interesting facet to this album is the Pink Floyd/Wizard of Oz Phenomenon. Amazingly, when the album is started at a certain point before the movie begins, the music will be exactly lined up with certain parts in the movie. For instance, when you hear the lyrics “Smiles you’ll give and tears you’ll cry, the Lion and the Tin Man are smiling and the Scarecrow is crying (Rayman 11). The Wall quickly became a success when it was introduced, and also faced much controversy; something the band was somewhat familiar with. While this album did not have the chance to spend 14 years on the charts, it did however spend a good 15 weeks in 1980, an album displaying the thoughts and emotional sickness of the character Pink Floyd (pinkfloyd.com). Issues arose from within the albums lyrical content however. Songs like Another Brick in the Wall made references such as We don t need no education. We don t need no thought control. Many saw this as a bad influence on younger generations, but the themes contained in The Wall have made it one of the most successful Floyd albums in history. In addition to the album, a highly successful movie was created, sharing the same name as the album, showing the life of Pink in a psychedelic, yet disturbing manner. All of the ideas contained within the album and movie were thoughts initiated by Roger Waters (Is There Anybody Out There? 5). Both are still currently in production. As stated, the influences of Pink Anderson and Floyd Council certainly helped Pink Floyd emerge. They were a musical force to be reckoned with, a band unlike any other and still yet to be matched. The band underwent trials and tribulations that most could not overcome for the length of time that they did. They created their own style, and created offspring from the different musical variations, lending sound to shape the over-dubbed synthesizers in Dark Side of the Moon, and the enormous amount of vocals used in The Wall. As expressed on Dark Side of the Moon, all that you touch and all that you see is all your life will ever be. This is a very important quote because of its placement in life. Whether it is directed at Syd Barrett, or humans in general, Wish You Were Here said it best with Shine on you crazy diamond.

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