

# **Pink Floyd FAQ**

**Everything Left to Know . . .  
and More!**

Stuart Shea



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# Preface

## Tell Me More

One Sunday evening early in 2007, not long before I began this book project, I was listening to the radio while making dinner. (A *real* radio, not a satellite channel or the Internet.) A local rock station was starting a three-hour special on Pink Floyd.

*Great!* I thought. People still buy Floyd music and are interested in their story. Maybe this special will help me gain some perspective on their career and get some new viewpoints on their music.

This three-hour program began with a *very* brief history of how the band came together at university in London. Forty-five seconds in, the host was already playing the Floyd's second single, 1967's "See Emily Play." After that 2:45 gem, Mr. Silver-Tongued Radio Host blazed through Syd Barrett's departure, and the next five years of Pink Floyd's history, in less than *one minute* before going straight to 1973's *Dark Side of the Moon*.

That's why I needed to write this book.

The host didn't play "Arnold Layne," or a single song from the first album (*The Piper at the Gates of Dawn*), or anything off *A Saucerful of Secrets*, or 1968's "Careful with That Axe, Eugene," or the double album *Ummagumma*.

No mention was made of PF's music from three films (*Zabriskie Point*, *More*, and *Obscured by Clouds*) or of the band's own film shot in the ruins of Pompeii. This program featured nothing from 1970's *Atom Heart Mother* or the 1971 *Meddle*, which includes the key tracks "Echoes" and "One of These Days," or either of Syd Barrett's solo discs.

Nearly all of a three-hour special, then, was spent on the seven *last* Pink Floyd albums. Their *first* seven albums were papered over entirely, with Pink Floyd presented as nothing more than a purveyor of classic-rock "anthems."

*That's* why I needed to write this book.

This essay and this book are not meant to denigrate those last seven Pink Floyd albums, although I'll certainly not be mistaken for an overly

enthusiastic fan of the last few. Rather, *Pink Floyd FAQ* is meant to examine the story of this most enigmatic of bands by putting its story into appropriate context, closely examining the musicians, their environment, and their time.

Pink Floyd's career started with black-and-white television and ended in the Internet age. A blues-influenced beat group at the start, they changed styles and vehicles many times, experimenting with electronics, recording film soundtracks, incorporating found sound and ethnic music, singing pure pop, creating "concept" albums and art-rock suites, and even including shreds of opera.

Fearless, daring, and sometimes overreaching, Pink Floyd's catalog has both jagged points and perfectly fitting pieces, fusing elements that are easy to love with some that are difficult to understand.

Examining the band's music (that from 1966–72 as well as its more famous period) as well as a nearly incessant touring schedule, intra-band power struggles, and the individual story of each member, sheds light on why Pink Floyd made a "sudden" leap with *Dark Side*, a breakthrough that in actuality was far from sudden.

*That's* why I needed to write this book.

Pink Floyd were known as *the* Pink Floyd through 1967, and for the early years of their career I will refer to them this way. In addition, I'll call the aggregation "the Floyd" or "PF" throughout the proceedings.

The band was a huge underground attraction in America, and had topped the British charts, years before Roger Waters dreamed up the concept behind *Dark Side of the Moon*. Yet these days, *most* Pink Floyd history seems to begin with 1973 and end in 1980. But not everyone agrees that this is their best or most important period.

A few insist on the 1966–67 Barrett era as the Floyd's be-all and end-all. Some devotees of electronic and chill-out music hold up their ambient, spacey 1969–72 output as their most influential and lasting. Others say Roger Waters' *The Final Cut* (1983) is one of the band's peaks, while a few—very few—claim that post-Waters opuses *A Momentary Lapse of Reason* (1986) and *The Division Bell* (1994) are up to the band's early standard.

Which, if any, of these arguments hold water? Is their 1973–83 music the best because it *sold* the most? If so, why aren't their earlier albums, which also sold well, played more often? Is it simply that a certain rock generation grew up with the four "key" albums (*Dark Side* through *The*

*Wall*) and won't let go? Did a "perfect storm" create the mid-seventies Pink Floyd media explosion?

What does it mean to be a Pink Floyd fan today, with the band splintered and various members still feuding twenty-five years after a bitter—and very typically Floyd—falling-out, in which nobody came through looking good and everyone involved suffered financial and personal heartache?

What stimuli helped create their music? How did the five members of Pink Floyd find their way? How did these musicians who strove for anonymity become such huge stars? Which artists influenced the Floyd or have been influenced by them? What bit players have added to their story? And which of Pink Floyd's songs and albums have stood the test of time?

These questions should be addressed, but not by the record company flacks, agents, and marketing consultants responsible for the decline of FM radio (and for mediocre specials promoting the same old Pink Floyd albums) attempting to rewrite history for their own ends.

Perhaps by exploring these questions in greater detail, we, the record buyers, can all better understand the breadth and depth of Pink Floyd and why its legend has not only endured, but even grown in the nearly thirty years since the band's last full concert.

And *that's* why I needed to write this book!

Everyone comes from an individual perspective on music. My perspective on Floyd is informed by my interest in pop, punk, R&B, and the avant-garde. I won't pretend that I'm as enamored of *The Final Cut* as of *Meddle*, or that I enjoy *Wish You Were Here* as much as *Piper at the Gates of Dawn*. And I *do* think "Fearless" is a better song than "Run Like Hell."

But I did my best to analyze every curve of their winding road and relate important points even concerning work I don't consider the band's best. Each step of the Pink Floyd's arc is interesting, with every success and mistake part of its very individual journey.

I hope that these essays spark honest responses and interesting discussions. The conversation is what it's all about; all we need to do is make sure we keep talking.