

'THEY OFFERED US 150 MILLION DOLLAR FOR A WORLD TOUR. BUT I'M NOT IN THE MOOD'

WHERE ARE THEY NOW... ROGER WATERS (PINK FLOYD)

On 2 July, during Live8 in London, Pink Floyd was on stage for the first time after a quarter century quarrel. I stood in Hyde park that memorable day, literally on row one, and saw how Roger Waters hurried to the microphone after each song to thank the public on behalf of the complete group, and how Nick Mason looked at him each time ('o god, Roger needs to say something'). Also backstage the new peace was very moving: as if Osama Bin Laden and George Bush had suddenly decided there was a higher aim than Allah or God, although they didn't publicly admit it. But the music sounded more majestic then ever: the Floyd even beat U2 as best live act of the day.

Pink Floyd has sold more than hundred millions records, and their influence rings through the top bands of each generation: The Orb, Suede, Radiohead, and all good lounge... During the top days of punk and grunge it was not done to like the Pink Floyd dinosaur, but Johnny Rotten of the Sex Pistols, who posed in a I Hate Pink Floyd t-shirt, later confessed to be a fan and also Kurt Cobain had a copy of Dark Side or the Moon at home.

Thirteen years after 'Amused to Death ' you would expect that Roger Waters would make a pop record, but his new double cd 'Ca Ira' is an opera about the French revolution - première: 17 November in Rome. Just before my departure the message comes that Waters exclusively wants to talk about the opera and not about Pink Floyd. It is as interviewing Winston Churchill and asking about his hobbies, I remark but the management is obstinate.

Fortunately I have a secret weapon: a couple of years ago I met a pensioned English major who fought at Anzio (1944) where the father of Roger Waters went 'missing, presumed killed in action '. The disappeared father is Waters' lament: he revives him in several therapeutic songs, such as ' Another Brick in the Wall ' (' Leaving just a memory, a snapshot in the family album ') and 'When the Tigers Broke Free ' (' The Anzio beachhead was held for the price or a few hundred ordinary lives, and that's how the high Command took my daddy from me'). I show Waters a mail from the major concerning the battle at Anzio, and the ice breaks.

ROGER WATERS Thank you, that is very attentive. I will certainly take contact with that man. (long silence) War fascinates me, and not only because my father was killed there. Fighting in the sepulchres is the most

intense experience that exists, and at the same time also the less human. In 'On the run ' (on the new cd) I put a quote that refers to my father: Forward!, he cried from the rear, and the front rank died... Who wants to be gun fodder when the army leaders play with pawns at safe distance.

(Note from Felix: isn't that a quote from DSOTM?)

The strange thing is... My father, Eric Waters, was in the 8th battalion of the Royal Fusiliers. In ' Amused to Death ' I have put echoes of real veterans: Bill Hubbard and Alf Risell. I asked my assistant to look up their exact rank because I wanted to dedicate my cd to them. Hubbard had served in the same battalion as my father, only he didn't die in 1917. I do not believe in spirits, or in signs from over the grave... but also not in coincidence.

HUMO Initially librettist Roda-Gil planned to recycle some Pink Floyd-songs. It is a riddle to me how he was going to insert those into an opera about the French revolution.

WATERS To me also. If you look far enough one can say that 'On the run' is the royal family on the run, Comfortably Numb is the apathetic French people before the revolution... Perhaps this was the way he meant it. But I have immediately stopped it, it seemed me too far-fetched and at the same time too easy. But as an inside joke I have hidden a bit from 'The Pros And Cons of Hitchhiking'. For those who want to look for it: happy hunting!

HUMO Make a game out of it on your Internet site. Although probably you'll attract those nerds who look too far - like the one who claimed that 'The Dark Side of the Moon' coincides with the soundtrack of The Wizard of Oz.

WATERS Yeah, that's fuckin ridiculous. That's for people with too much free time. In every movie there are a couple of scenes that could use 'Moon' as a soundtrack. It simply is a cosmic, movie like record. My sympathy goes to the people who recently voted for 'Dark Side of the Moon' as the best record to have sex on. That's a good evolution - in former days we always won in the category 'best record to smoke a joint at '. It has always irritated me that we were considered as a psychedelic group: when we made our best music, we were always sober.

No education

HUMO If you take the Eurostar to London, you see the Battersea Power station. I always think of the cover of ' Animals '. I have also listened to

Pink Floyd on my iPod when that enormous electricity central appears at the horizon, and the impact is amazing.

WATERS Did you see how the cameraman zoomed in on Battersea Power station during our set at Live8 (in straight line only a kilometre from Hyde Park, Humo)? Splendid moment.

I also do that, associate landscapes, spots and buildings with my music. I played for a while with the idea to perform The Wall at the millennium. I had already done it in 1980, and 1990, and such a ten-year event seemed to fit me. Wall Street seemed a suitable setting for me. Can you imagine? The umbilical point of the financial world, slowly cleaved in half by a wall... And then I would have thrown in Money as well. But it was such a logistical nightmare that we would never have obtained the deadline. And since 11 September 2001 you can't do those wild plans anymore in New York. Too bad, because it would have been the right place and the right time....

HUMO You had, with Pink Floyd and on your solo records, always a craze for sound effects. I have listened to all your records on headphones and then those subtle details improve a lot. On 'ca ira ' there also are some. Especially the guillotine really sounds frightening: the first time I heard it my hairs stood on end.

WATERS Thanks for the compliment, because it is no real guillotine. What you hear is a cocktail of a dozen sounds: a door which is slammed, a blade drawn from its case, a butcher's knife falling on a piece of wood, etc.. On the sound meters of the computer you can see very nicely how all those sounds evenly rise. For the demo I had recorded the sound of the sliding glass door of my office: you would have sworn that it was a cleaving axe. Other sounds, such as those galloping horses that storm from the left to the right channel, simply come from a sound library. We have, however, dubbed them all and enhanced with ProTools.

HUMO Have you ever been on sound expeditions? With a microphone in the hand walking through a forest at night or so?

WATERS For 'The Wall' I have recorded the helicopter's blades myself. And with Hugo Zefirelli I have recorded cars and bird sounds.

HUMO On 'The Wall' there was already a children's choir and on 'Ca ira' again. It is striking how enthusiast these children sing: 'I want to be King!', a saucerful of potential dictators in the make...

WATERS Yeah. If you want to know how obvious people find it that they are better than the others, you just have to put a child in a dominant position.

HUMO I always wondered, did your children get many remarks from their teachers concerning 'We don't need no education... we don't need no thought control', two phrases you can hear all the time in 'Another Brick in the Wall'?

WATERS O yes, very boring. Jack and Harry cursed me many times (grins), although most of these observations were meant positively. The past twenty years hundreds of schools have asked me authorisation to stage a production of 'The Wall ', and to schools I never refuse anything. 'The Wall ' boosted a lot of discussions concerning education and lessons and thinking behaviour. I am prouder for that than for my hits or my golden records. Those two sentences have undermined my parental authority a bit, but it was worth it.

Sawing on stage

HUMO Did you discuss about the set list on the rehearsals for Live8? None of your solo songs were performed although I expected you would demand that?

WATERS Ah, in a certain way they are all my solo songs. I wrote Money and Comfortably Numb (!?!?!?!?, note from Felix) And on such an event you are morally obliged to play your greatest hits, so that even the largest Pink Floyd hater doesn't feel robbed for his money. They just asked me for a large benefit for the victims of the hurricane Katrina, in New York: I know that Perfect Sense would be ideal textually and emotionally, but thousand times people more know Money, therefore...

Look, the beautiful thing about Pink Floyd was exactly that one firstly associated us with music, and afterwards with the settings and the special effects, and only after that our heads. We all underestimated the power of the trademark. I do not want to be reminded as 'the firm where the shareholders sue each other all the time'.

(He looks up irritated. In this 18th century ballroom, where we sit, a man comes in carrying a bucket of water and a violin).

WATERS Just a scene from a piece of Beckett...

HUMO During a concert in Antwerp you and three other musicians stayed on the scene during the break to play a game of cards. You must have the guts.

WATERS O, it wasn't: let's see if we get away with this.' It was theatre and it was part of Dogs. I have always put theatrical elements in our concerts, from the early beginning. (irritated) All those sets and the visuals and the special effects of Pink Floyd were me, not the other guys.

HUMO And Storm Thorgerson, the designer who was, or seemed, responsible for the flying pig, the pyramids, the prism, the crashing plane, the covers of...

WATERS (impatient) Yeah yeah, but always because I asked it, and embroidering on my vivid imagination. The flying pig was entirely my idea. Recently a movie has emerged of a Pink Floyd-show in 1968, at the Royal Festival Hall. You see me building a table. Literally: while the others play on, I get to work with hammer and saw. After I have finished our road manager, Alan Styles, theatrically puts a tray with tea on the shaky table. Then the others come to drink tea, and I put a small world receiver in front of a microphone, so that the public can hear to what the people in Bratislava are currently listening to. I completely forgot that act.

HUMO At every gig of their recent tour Jonny Greenwood of Radiohead experimented with a world receiver...

WATERS (supercilious) So what. We did that already in 1968! And even before that, I remember that, when Syd Barrett was still with us, we experimented with live quadraphonic at the Queen Elizabeth Hall.

We had those toy cars you had to wind up, you know, you have to move them a couple of times backwards, and then you let the thing go and it hurls away. I ran after them with a microphone to produce a quadraphonic sound. Live on stage. (laughs) It must have been quite daft. But we were however the firsts, and at least we supported that type of experiments.

Man, we got away with murder in those days.

Overload

HUMO On Live8 you said during the intro of ' Wish You Were': we play this number for everyone who cannot be here today, but of course in the first place for Syd.' Much has been said and speculated about him but I have actually never understood if he is simply an eccentric hermit or really a psychiatric patient.

WATERS Syd IS schizophrenic and has had several depressions. You must consider him as an electricity board that has been overloaded.

He lives isolated now. He comes nothing too short, because he still gets copyrights of the first Pink Floyd-records. But he has to lead a calm, stress less life. Each time that someone utters the words 'pink Floyd' he becomes restless - he still does.

We have played with the idea of asking him for Live8, but that did not appear feasible. There is also all kind of reproaches... His family has looked for a scapegoat for what has happened to him - understandably - and in their eyes we are the ones.

I hear that Syd calls himself Roger again (his real first name, Humo). There are also obstinate fans that visit him that is something they prove no service to him.

HUMO Now that you are speaking about 1968: for centuries there has been the rumour in Antwerp that Pink Floyd did a gig in the legendary hippie-bar Het Pannenhuis. Of course half of the crusty old dinosaurs nowadays pretend they have attended that gig. But is that tale correct?

WATERS I don't remember it. But seen our consumption of mind-expanding and mind narrowing substances in that era that doesn't mean that it never happened (grins). What I recall of Belgium from that time was a gig in Leuven (Louvain), I believe at the university. There have been some language riots then, if I am not mistaking myself. (You're not!, Felix) Halfway our act I suddenly saw a shower of beer-glasses flying from left to right, and vice-versa. The others thought I had staged it (laughs).

HUMO Nowadays Pink Floyd tours the world with sixteen freight-trailers and seventy men. Give us an example illustrating how drastically different it was during the first years.

WATERS I remember our first foreign tour: a handful of gigs in pubs and youth clubs in the Netherlands, set up by a sleazy businessman who, if I remember well, was named Cyriel van den Hemel. One day he asked us if we wanted to earn some extra money by doing an afternoon gig. He gave us an address: it appeared to be a school. We played in the sport room, for eight - to twelve year olds, who first put their fingers in their ears and then started to cry. A couple of minutes later Cyriel came on the 'stage' and whispered in my ears: 'Wie ave ze money, go now!' (laughs).

HUMO On my way to here I listened to ' Four Minutes ', a beautiful, quiet

song. Outside I heard howling sirens and hooting cars, so that it seemed for a minute as if you had composed a soundscape for the city. Mood is your strong point: So it astonishes me that you haven't composed more soundtracks.

WATERS I certainly had that ambition. But first I am lazy... no, that's not true: I work hard, but I also want to live. Fishing. Golfing. Hunting. Not to neglect my family - this job has already cost me a marriage. And secondly: I have already got Hollywood offers, but each time it went this way: Mr Waters, we gladly want you make the soundtrack for film X. You get X dollars, but you have to cede X per cent of the copyrights to us. That's fuckin gangsterism! And then I refuse, and they search for someone else who likes to get screwed.

Recently I watched the splendid Spanish film 'Spirit or the Beehive', about the dream world of children during the Spanish civil war. I was frustrated that they had not asked me for the soundtrack. Crazy enough I can't recall who has written the music. I must have suppressed it.

John & Paul

HUMO When David Gilmour, Nick Mason and Rick Wright went on tour without you but as Pink Floyd they had to pay you copyrights. So you were getting paid for doing nothing.

WATERS (ironic) You can also state that they went on tour with mainly my songs. If Ringo Starr would've toured as The Beatles, John Lennon would've objected as well, isn't it?

HUMO And you are the John Lennon of Pink Floyd?

WATERS Well yes. Groups that loose their visionary leader always perform less. See also Crosby, Stills & Nash without Neil Young, or Genesis without Peter Gabriel. If Dave sings Shine on You crazy diamond, it is a cover, because I have written and sung the original version. At the time of 'Moon' I even gave Nick some credits for 'Speak to me', whereas in fact he had contributed nothing to that number. I regret that generosity now and I am punished twice for: not only it costs me money, but also Nick claims now that he has really deserved the credit. And...

But well, I don't want to discuss that any longer. On Live8 I have felt much love for the other group members - as long as we were playing. I want to hold that feeling.

HUMO It strikes me there is a parallel between you and Paul McCartney. For

the past 20 years Macca has tried to rewrite in a subtle but obstinate way the Beatles' history, in particular the stereotype picture of 'Lennon was an adventurous genius and Macca only the sentimental balladeer'. You have, with 'The Wall in Berlin' and solo tours on which you play at least ten Pink Floyd-songs, tried to make it known to the world that you and you alone is Mr Floyd. It is however remarkable that people who have already proved so much want to have the last word anyway.

WATERS Do you have to swallow If you see how others rewrite history? Do you have to lie down and say: kick me once again... I will not lie down. I've rolled over for Live8, but I won't roll over forever.

The press is also to blame, because it wants a juicy tale. Syd was a juicy tale, and that is why his influence seems to be much bigger than it was in reality: he barely was a year in the band, and we have made our best work later, so without him.

That I wanted to dissolve the band also was a juicy tale. But I was also the one who immediately promised to play on Live8 - Dave had first said no to Bob Geldof. I am very very political aware. It has always irritated Dave that I wrote intelligent, engaged texts concerning morality, ethics, and politics... He hated 'The Final Cut', because I had put too many references to Margaret Thatcher.

Anyway, Live8 was once again the proof that our music does a lot to people. Weren't you moved by it?

HUMO I had tears in my eyes and I am not ashamed for that.

WATERS So what are you complaining about? I will get loads of critic all over me because I had the pretence to write an opera., but so what? I want to make music that brings people closer to each other.

HUMO For ' Dark Side or the Moon ' you have put several kinds of people before the microphone - the legendary one-liner ' I don't know if I was really drunk at the time' was born this way. You have also recorded Paul McCartney: why were his quotes never used? It would have been nice to put a Beatle on your record?

WATERS We were searching for random quotes of random passengers. We asked them questions as: 'Do you often think of death?' or ' When was the last time you used violence?' Henry McCullough - the guitarist of Wings, who were then recording at the same studio - said on that last question: ' yesterday.' I asked: 'Be honest: were you wrong? And he: I don't know. I was really drunk at the time (laughs). That's the way it happened. Paul and his wife Linda were too calculated, they never showed the back of

their tongues. That is why we didn't use their quotes.

Money

HUMO You toured with Eric Clapton, and on your live-ceedees Jeff Beck and Andy Fairweather-Low play guitar solos that I can only define as David Gilmourish. Is that your way to make it clear to Gilmour that he wasn't indispensable?

WATERS Of course he is not indispensable (grins), but no, that guitar sound just fits well with the music. Eric is a friend. We recorded a very beautiful acoustic version of 'Wish You Were' together that I would like to bring out someday.

You know, we didn't only have musical disagreements within Floyd; we have also simply grown out from each other. About politics, about philosophy... (sigh) About everything I think drastically different than those guys. We have now received an offer for a world tour: one hundred and fifty millions dollar - gross, of course... But I am not in the mood.

HUMO It must be pleasant to have so much money that you can reject such an offer. I'll go in your place instead...

WATERS (laughs) Send me a post-card. It is not about the money. What count is: do we still have something to say or not. I am not a nostalgic. I don't collect anything. I belief that at home I just have one sketch from 'The Wall' left, a drawing from a room with a wall standing halfway. That's it. But we have drifted far away from Ca ira.

HUMO On 'Meddle' there was already a song called Echoes and the echoes from Pink Floyd are everywhere nowadays. Did you never feel the urge to flee away from the band? Because let's be fair, just as no one is waiting for another Mick Jagger solo record, Pink Floyd will always overshadow every sidestep from one of its members...

WATERS (irritated) I have absolutely no need to flee from my own oeuvre. I wouldn't succeed anyway. A friend of mine went to the Andes: he wanted to kick off of the 'civilised' world. He chopped his way through the jungle, in search of the most untouched place. Eventually he found a distant mountain village: he assumed that the aboriginals would have never seen an English man, but just when he was sipping from his first glass of gutrot, he heard coming from inside a hut 'WE DON'T NEED NO EEE-DUCAATIONNNH!' (laughs). And Pat Leonard (producer of among others Madonna, Humo) once wrote me a letter from a distant settlement in the Far East: Fantastic, no traffic, no

media, no pollution, no crime, and no vandalism. Well, almost no vandalism: look at this photograph... With his letter was a photograph of a rock on which some autochthon had chalked Radio K.A.O.S.

Conclusion: how far you go, you can't escape from Pink Floyd.

Serge Simonart, Humo 3396, 4th of October 2005, pages 180 - 183.