

Nick Mason: 21 May 2006 TagesSpiegel (Germany)

Source: [Tagesspiegel Germany](#)

They started as students and ended as super rock stars.
Nick Mason remembers it all as a difficult relationship between friends.

Interview: Kai Müller

-Nick Mason is the drummer of Pink Floyd and also a passionate lover of racing with cars. The legendary band stopped playing in 1995, no longer being friends.
Ten years after the end of Pink Floyd, a reunion took place for the Live 8 concert in London. Nick Mason has recently published his book "Inside out".

-Mr. Mason, you are the drummer of one of the most famous bands in the world, but at your office there is not even one golden record to be found.

That's right, but at the office there are many pictures at the walls of racing cars. And a real formula 1 car is there to be admired too.

-What item would you try to save if there were a fire at the office?

These things don't mean that much to me. I would probably try to save some books, if there enough time. And, my computer. It contains all my memories.

-When you formed the band, 40 years ago, together with Roger, Rick and some others, you were all friends then.

Yes we did, although friendship then had a completely different meaning for us, as it does now.
We all were at the school for Polytechnics in London, learning architecture.

-You were really trying to become an architect?

Yes, but just in the beginning. We changed our minds when the band became successful.

-You have become a rock star because of your friends?

If you wish to say it that way.

I really don't think that there would be somebody else who could try to talk my education out of my head. I wanted to become an architect. Music seemed to be interesting, but I was convinced that it would not be a proper way to earn my livings. But Roger was the bad guy who managed to change my view.

-What do you mean?

My parents were hoping that I was joining the best students from school. The truth was that I was hanging around with this guy who had no good attitude towards studying. He wasn't lazy don't get me wrong.

you managed to create your own sound. Was it a tough job for Syd to convince the rest of the band to change it's sound?

Not at all. We knew how important it was to have your own songs and we were very happy to have found not only a guitar player but also a songwriter as well.

-A line of the lyrics of 'Astronomy Domine' goes like this: "Blinding signs flap, / Flicker, flicker, flicker blam. Pow, pow." Did you have a clue what was meant by this?

For a pop song it may be a bit strange, but it was exactly the same what Roy Lichtenstein was putting into his paintings. I believe Syd's inspiration was coming from it. He was quoting "Batman comic language" in which those words were used to represent the noises of the scene. On top of that, Syd's idea of how a guitar solo should sound was revealing. He was interested in sounds, not in music notes.

-Could you follow Syd's spiritual way of thinking?

I didn't want to. People see Pink Floyd as an important part of the psychedelic revolution, but only Syd was. We, the other band members weren't. We wanted to be a rock group; those cosmic sounds were just a way to achieve this goal. It was a good idea to write more of these songs. Even Syd was not different for that matter. Songs like "The Gnome" and "Bike" are very melancholy and they refer to lost friendships, which he was mourning about.

-Barrett was a LSD consumer. At what point did you realise that the LSD addiction was killing his inspiration?

Up 'till today, we don't really know for sure if the LSD was causing the problems. It seems to be obvious, but we aren't certain about that. It has been going on for a long time and we were all busy with denying the increasing dropouts of Syd. We told each other, well it will pass and then Syd will become the guy he used to be. During the summer of 1967 it became clear to us that Syd had **serious problem**.

-He was the genius of the band.

We were more focused on the commercial aspects of being a rock band, instead of deepening our spiritual minds.

-When it became clear that Syd was no longer able to perform on stage, some people held the rest of the band responsible for Syd's behaviour. According to them you were all trying too hard to become successful. Do you agree with them?

Back then we didn't see it that way, but nowadays it is clear that we were part of Syd's problem. Then we were convinced that if we became successful, Syd's problems would disappear.

-You had no remorse in replacing your friend, without telling him the truth. Friends can be very brutal. Is this what you have learned from Rock and Roll?

You are completely right about that. Remember, you are talking here about very well motivated people who had to deal with large amounts of money and had to cope with strict business deals. We were **very annoyed by Syd's behaviour. It seemed to us that he was trying to destroy everything we tried to build up**. His drug scene and the demands frustrated us, and we never could predict what his next

-Was a bad conscious the main drive for ex front man, Roger, creating the album "Wish You Were Here"?

We had no bad feelings. It was more like that Syd suddenly appeared in the Apple studio while we were finishing "Wish You Were Here". We were completely stunned by his visit. Nobody knew about his whereabouts for the last few years. But there he was. I didn't recognize him. David Gilmour had to tell me who he was, since Syd changed a lot since the last time I saw him. He managed to put a magic spell on us. I don't think there would have been a band like Pink Floyd, without the existence of Syd. In the beginning it was Syd who taught us how to use the many ideas we had. He did his job to perfect. We succeeded to go on without him. Sounds paradoxical, doesn't it?

-Roger Waters took over the command.

Syd wrote our songs, was the front man and our greatest talent. After he left, we followed Syd's approach for quite some time. It took a while before Roger started to write some songs. Up until "Dark Side Of The Moon" we were a democratic band despite the fact that Roger did most of the labour. After five years he was ready to create a concept album.

-You are telling us about the role of a drummer in a band has some kind of a different kind rule set towards other members. You say you had never doubts about your position in the band.

Since I never created any song, I had a very comfortably place. It was easy for me to adapt to the changes in the band. I just followed the strange creative influence of the band. Up 'til today I'm more interested in the production process as in being a drummer. The idea of drumming with somebody else never occurred to me, not even with Syd.

-During the seventies, Pink Floyd became a mega band. The size of the shows, the technical parts, the number of visitors, all those aspects. It must have caused great stress.

On the contrary, it becomes easier. We signed a contract with a record company and therefore we could spend a lot of time in the studio. I recall this time period as an extreme relaxing part of my life. Also because it was all so well organized. Those mega shows came later. For a long period of time, we travelled the country with our Ford Transit. Together with two roadies who were responsible for the instruments. In 1975 we started playing in those huge arenas and we had to adapt to the expectations of 80.000 visitors.

-Strange that you never became a pop star.

That was on purpose. We never pushed ourselves into the frontline. As pop star you never become that what you hope to achieve. We fantasize about a luxury live and that money will solve all of our problems. We live in a never-ending spiral. No matter how many people are visiting our gigs, and no matter how many sold out concerts there were, it will never be enough. You still feel depressed and not accepted.

-Has this success changed the way you all were dealing with each other?

Just a minor part. We were getting older. What in the passed seemed to be a great way to spend your time became hard labour in the present. Besides being together as friends, each of us had a personal live too. **We started a family, kids were born, and they became more important to us then the life we** need to live as students. We no longer could chat about all the things we used to chat about in the

I never succeeded in building a bridge between Roger on the one side and David and Rick on the other side, but I tried to approach the differences between them in a positive way. For this, I still see them all as good friends of mine. Despite the fact that we always were clear about who did what on each song, we all were aware the annoyance on the outcome was larger than the sum of all parts.

-Roger Waters was more and more following his personal political views. In "The wall" and also in "The Final Cut" he was dealing with the Second World War and with the war for the Falkland Islands. Did you understand his peace missions?

Roger and I were born in a left wing family. His mother was member of the communist party, the same communist party were my father became member of. They wanted to fight the fascisms. Roger was already protesting against weapons during his pre student live.

I agreed on many of his thoughts about the matter. His way of dealing with Thatcher and her government in "The Final Cut", were in the same line of how I was thinking of Thatcher.

-You didn't succeed in avoiding Pink Floyd becoming a one-man-show?

We were simply weak. David felt that Roger was taking advantage of that weakness. David needed a fair amount of time to write a song, Roger didn't. Roger was more proactive than we, the rest, were. He pushed us to become more productive. David didn't see a reason why to rush things. Roger was convinced that David would need years to finish his parts. Don't you see, we didn't manage to get to the next step. It is impossible to judge who was right and who was wrong. Roger was seriously heading towards a solo career but he didn't dare to make the final cut.

-The layers came in. The meaning of the word friendship must have seem to be lost towards you.

The connection to Roger was lost when he tried to prohibit the use of the name "Pink Floyd". He didn't want to let the band continue after he left it. That was the reason for his battle. We, the rest of the band members, didn't feel that way. We failed to see how someone could leave the band and take its name with him. For a long period of time we refused to speak to each other. When we occasionally ran into each other on a Caribbean Island and started talking to each other again, it was a big step forward for me.

-Was the reunion at the Live8 concert a logical follow up of that encounter?

No, you're wrong. I was excited about the fact that we managed to join David, Roger and Rick again, but we had to deal with enormous difficulties. It was a great thing to achieve.

-They prepared the reunion inside a hotel?

Correct. Neutral grounds. We don't own an office with large meeting rooms. And the problem with a restaurant is that one is too much focussed on the meal.

-Do you often regret that your friendship is signed by means of a contract?

No. That has nothing to do with friendship. To have a friend is a special thing in life. I have had many shortly friendships and I have some everlasting friendships. The latter are in no way less fatiguing as those other ones. I remind you that a marriage is also a signed deal.