

# Behind Pink Floyd's Wall

The bizarre events and alienated personalities that pushed one of the most successful and original rock bands beyond psychodrama

By MICK BROWN and KURT LODER

## Come in Number 51, your time is up

ROGER WATERS FLIPPED OUT ONE FALL NIGHT at Montreal's Olympic Stadium. The dour bassist and his band, Pink Floyd, were performing the final concert of their 1977 North American tour, and Waters—wound down and depressed at the end of a grueling, stadiums-only slog across the continent—stood tensely onstage as Pink Floyd's music roared around him. Out there in the arena, the usual horde of hyped-up kids yowled and swooned in the typhoon of electronic sound. But the only thing Waters could think about, the only thing he could see, was this one kid: this obnoxious little bug down by the front of the stage, who was yapping and shrieking and beating the air with his arms in a transport of crazed fandom. Through the loud parts, through the soft, whispery parts—it was too much.

Somewhere in Waters' tour-sizzled brain, something snapped. *Insect! Witless maggot!* Waters began toying with the insensitive worm, beckoning him closer, closer. Awestruck, the kid fumbled to the fore. Waters was coiled, ready. As the kid approached, Waters leaned out—and spat on him. *Phooey!*

That was it. Roger Waters—a private, ingrown individual, a man who, despite Pink Floyd's zonked-out image, actually disdains drugs—had publicly and completely freaked out. No one knew it at the time, but it was to be the last tour ever by one of Britain's most original bands in its most famous formation.

## Set the controls

THE SPITTING INCIDENT WAS, WATERS now admits, "a very fascistic thing to do. It frightened me. But I'd known for a while during that tour—which I hated—that there was something very wrong. I didn't feel in contact with the audience. They were no longer people; they had become it—a beast. I felt this enormous barrier between them and what I was trying to do. And it had become almost impossible to clamber over it."

This "wall" between artist and audience—and, as an extended metaphor, between people everywhere in the numbed-out postwar period—became a subject that consumed Waters for the next five years. Its first incarnation appeared late in 1979, when Pink Floyd released a double album called *The Wall*—a four-sided scream of alienation so disturbing it made John Lennon's primal *Plastic Ono Band* album seem like a Saturday night sing-along at some provincial pub. Waters' grim misanthropy was not new to Floyd followers: on the group's 1977 LP, *Animals*, he had consigned most of humanity to the level of dogs, pigs and sheep. But with *The Wall*, he took interpersonal pessimism and cultural despair—and a morbid preoccupation with madness that has haunted Pink Floyd for

nearly fifteen years—to astonishing extremes. Here, a lost father, killed in World War II (like Waters' own father, who died at Anzio), symbolized the homely horrors of transient mortality. The widowed mother, a particularly grotesque figure, stood only for psychosexual oppression. Schools were depicted as torture clinics for the hapless young. Women were portrayed as cheating wives and brazen groupies.

*The Wall* was a brutal and unprecedented pop vision, and using it as a wedge, Waters pried open new possibilities for Pink Floyd. The album, which has sold an estimated 12.5 million copies, had been conceived as a theatrical project, and in the spring of 1980, a stage version of *The Wall* was mounted for seven performances in Los Angeles and for seven on Long Island, New York. Later, it was presented, just as briefly, in London. This spectacular production—which involved a state-of-the-art sound system, gigantic and brilliant animations and puppet monsters created by British caricaturist Gerald Scarfe, scores of intricate stage cues, expertly deployed lighting effects, elevator platforms and explosives, and the precisely timed construction, brick by brick, of a sixty-foot-tall wall across the stage—was the most ambitious presentation of live music in the history of rock. For the decidedly unflamboyant Waters, the show was also a perfect mask: "To actually wall yourself off from people is a very belligerent, aggressive idea. But I liked doing *The Wall* live; I felt I was making more contact, because I was expressing all these ideas about what I feel about it."



His use of the first person is appropriate, for by this point *The Wall* had come to represent Waters' complete domination of Pink Floyd. Although guitarist David Gilmour continued to have musical input, *The Wall* was clearly Waters' psychodrama. As for the other two members of the group, keyboardist Richard Wright and drummer Nick Mason, their names hadn't been mentioned anywhere on the album,

nor had they been formally credited as band members since the release of *The Dark Side of the Moon* nine years ago.

"We no longer pretend to one another," Waters said one day last November, at his home in a London suburb. He is a tall, anonymous-looking man, unfailingly polite, agreeably candid in conversation, and yet remote, ultimately unreachable. The house, which he shares with his second, common-law wife and his two children, is large and comfortable, but reflects more the unaffected nature of its owner than his rosy financial status: the only real luxuries in sight were a fully equipped, twenty-four-track recording studio, where he was polishing new music for the movie version of *The Wall*, and an adjacent billiards room, where he liked to knock off a few games between sessions. His sessions.

"Back in the early Seventies," he continued, "we used to pretend that we were a group. We used to pretend that we all do this and we all do that, which of course wasn't true. And at one point I started to get very resentful, because I was doing a lot more and yet we were all pretending that we were doing it."

And now? "Well," he said, "we don't pretend anymore. I could work with another drummer and keyboard player very easily, and it's likely that at some point I will."

And the future of the group?

"Depends very much on me."

## Obscured by clouds

SINCE ONLY A QUARTER-MILLION PEOPLE HAD been able to see *The Wall* onstage, a film version was obviously called for. Waters and Scarfe began plotting a movie scenario and were soon joined by Alan Parker, the English director noted, with varying degrees of critical enthusiasm, for such kinetic entertainments as *Midnight Express* and *Fame*, and for the recent, less frenetic *Shoot the Moon*. Parker was a Floyd fan and had been captivated by *The Wall* on first hearing. Initially, he was only going to advise Waters and Scarfe, but the more he became involved, the more he wanted to direct.

The collaboration between Waters and Parker was incredibly fractious, riven by rows and walkouts from beginning to end. Given Waters' personal identification with the project, and the fact that Pink Floyd was financing the film to the tune of \$10 million, a tempestuous transit was probably unavoidable. Parker, after all, had his own very definite ideas about what the movie should be. It was he who decided that the film would have no dialogue and that the members of Pink Floyd would not appear as narrators, or in any other capacity; and, since Parker wanted to sever any connection between the film and the stage show, he also decided to drop Scarfe's puppets. Friction was inevitable.

"Roger went on holiday for six weeks," Parker explained in his director's bungalow at Pinewood Studios last April. "In that period, I was allowed to develop my vision, and I really made the film with a completely free hand. I had to have that. I couldn't be second-guessed by Roger, and he appreciated that. The difficulty came when I'd finished. I'd been shooting for sixty days, fourteen hours a day—that film had become *mine*. And then Roger came back to it, and I had to go through the very difficult reality of having it put over to me that it actually was a collaborative effort."





**P**ink Floyd now functions as a mask behind which Roger Waters (above) works his sociomusical stratagems; back in 1967, however, the band (opposite page, from left: Waters, Wright, Mason and Barrett) had a real face.

PHOTOGRAPH BY NIGEL DICKSON

ROLLING STONE, SEPTEMBER 16, 1982 : 15



Waters acknowledged that the filming of *The Wall* had been "the most unnerving, neurotic period of my life, with the possible exception of my divorce in 1975. Parker is used to sitting at the top of his pyramid, and I'm used to sitting at the top of mine. We're both pretty much used to getting our own way. If I'd have directed it—which I'd never have done—it would have been much *quieter* than it is. But that's one of the reasons I liked the idea of Parker doing it. He paints in fairly bold strokes; he is very worried about boring his audience. It suits us very well, because we did want a lot of this to be a punch in the face. I wanted to make comparisons between rock&roll concerts and war. People at those big things seem to like being treated very badly, to have it so loud and distorted that it really hurts. But there is very little of that left in the film. For a long time, the script had this image of a rock & roll audience being blown up—bombed—and, as they were being blown to pieces, applauding, loving every minute. As an idea, it is quite pleasing, but it would look silly to actually do it on film. It would be hard for it not to be comic."

## Careful with that ax, Eugene

IN THE MIDST OF WRECKING A HOTEL ROOM ONE DAY LAST November, Bob Geldof shredded his hands on a Venetian blind. Despite his bloody injuries, however, he refused to quit trashing the place until Alan Parker had nailed the shot. Everyone on the set at Pinewood was in awe.

Geldof, who is best known as the lead singer for the Boomtown Rats, is the star—if that's the right word—of *The Wall*. His character is called Pink, a name apparently derived from an anecdotal lyric on Floyd's 1975 album, *Wish You Were Here*, in which a cigar-chomping music-biz hustler asks the band, "Oh, by the way, which one's Pink?" In the movie, young Pink, a musician with a sensitive soul, is battered by society at every turn and ultimately retreats into a catatonic state, incapable of love or communication, even as he attains the peaks of pop stardom. Interspersed throughout this grueling chronicle are evocations of England's tacky post-war prosperity and nightmarish scenes of war. At the end, there is a "trial," at which all of Pink's lifelong antagonists make a final appearance.

Since Pink utters not a word in the film and is required to disport himself in a rather bizarre manner throughout, Geldof's performance was fueled largely by his faith in Parker. "Alan keeps saying, 'It's an experiment. Trust me, trust me.' It could be a gigantic cock-up for all anybody knows. I haven't a fuckin' clue if I've been any use."

There were times when even a casual observer might have questioned whether Parker had a clue, either. The director had laid out the film "on the backs of my eyeballs," he said. And there wasn't much of a formal script—a fact that was vividly apparent when cast and crew gathered one day last November to shoot a sequence that was baldly described on the day's schedule as "swimming-pool scene." The set was the hotel room previously demolished by Geldof: a garbage pit of Jack Daniel's bottles, junked room-service orders, stage clothes, cigarette butts, roaches and tossed towels.

"No, no, no," said Roger Waters, picking his way through the debris. "This isn't my room at all," he said fussily. "Dave Gilmour, perhaps, but not me. I'm much tidier."

Waters glanced at his watch. He was already late for a golfing date. Through the patio door, a turquoise pool was visible. The lights of an ersatz Los Angeles blinked in the hills beyond. Bob Geldof floated silently on his back in the pool, eddying the water gently with his hands and feet to hold his position. From two speakers set up beside the pool, the strains of "The Thin Ice," a song from *The Wall*, suddenly gathered volume in the oppressive heat. Geldof's body began to jerk convulsively in the water, arms and legs thrashing wildly as a cascade of prop blood—an on-the-spot improvisation by Parker—rained down from above. Wave after crimson wave coated his body, turning the gem-blue pool a dark, foaming red.

"It's all right, Bob," promised Parker. "It's perfectly edible."

"That's what all the girls say," Geldof spluttered. He clambered out of the pool as prop men gently stirred the

reddened pool back to blue. He might have hoped for an opinion from Waters, but the real Pink had already left for the golf course.

Later, Geldof mused about the nature of Pink's anguish. "A lot of what happens to Pink is his own fault," he said. "I think he brings it upon himself. People who try to achieve something—and then, once they've achieved it, can't handle it—are essentially weak people. You shouldn't strive for something if you don't know what you want it for."

## Comfortably numb

ALTHOUGH PINK FLOYD NOW FUNCTIONS AS A MASK BEHIND which Roger Waters works his sociomusical stratagems, the group once had a real face. His name was Roger Barrett, but he came to be called Syd, and he was the composer of brilliant, fractured pop songs, strangely wrought melodies and wild, flailing guitar excursions. Syd's voice suggested Jonathan Richman on acid, and that pretty well describes the image still cherished by the cult that has grown around Barrett's abbreviated body of work.

Barrett was born in Cambridge in 1946. David Gilmour was one of his boyhood friends, and the two of them often played guitar together. When Gilmour entered Cambridge Technical College to study languages, Barrett, an aspiring painter, enrolled in the school's art program. Later, he moved to London to attend another art school, and there met architecture student Roger Waters. Waters and two classmates, Nick Mason and Richard Wright, had formed a band that worked under such names as Sigma 6, the T-Set and the Screaming Abdabs. Waters played lead guitar. They were not successful. The Abdabs broke up, and the core trio regrouped; this time, Waters brought in two new guitarists, one of them Syd Barrett. It was Barrett who named the new group after two grizzled bluesmen, Pink Anderson and Floyd Council. Barrett also exerted an unusual musical influence. The other guitarist soon left.

Pink Floyd began building a following at the London Marquee in the winter of 1966. In October of that year, armed with a customized light show, they played to 2000 people at a benefit for the alternative newspaper *International Times*, held in London's Roundhouse. By December, they had become the house band at the UFO Club, a key slot in London's heady new underground scene. In January 1967, the band's first single, Barrett's weird but wonderful "Arnold Layne," became a Top Thirty record. In the spring, Pink Floyd presented a full-length solo show in London called "Games for May." A Barrett composition called "See Emily Play" went to Number Five on the British charts. Barrett titled the first Floyd album *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn*. Almost entirely written by Barrett, it was released in August. In October, the band paid its first visit to the U.S., playing both Fillmores. They sounded like no other group.

But this first, brilliant version of Pink Floyd was doomed, according to legend, by Barrett's insatiable use of LSD, which turned him into a vegetable. David Gilmour, however, remembers it differently:

"I wouldn't put it down to drugs or LSD, necessarily. I suspect that it would have happened anyway, and maybe that stuff acted as a catalyst. He certainly couldn't handle success and all the things that go with it. As in *The Wall* story, really. And he started going mad after the first hints of success."

"Toward the end of 1967, he was in a condition where he wouldn't play with the band at all. He would just stand onstage with his amp and guitar turned full up, his left arm hanging down by his side and just sort of smashing the guitar with his right hand, making a fearful racket all night long. No one would book the band back for return dates. Their career was diving downhill as fast as it could go."

Just after Christmas of 1967, Gilmour was asked to join the band. Initially, it was put about that Syd would remain a member. But that, says Gilmour, "was just a political way of dealing with the situation. There was, at one point, an intention for Syd to stay home and write wonderful songs, become the mystery Brian Wilson figure behind the group. But there was no point in him coming with us."

Syd continued writing, despite his increasingly acute

illness. His later songs survive on two entrancing and essentially out-of-control albums, *The Madcap Laughs* and *Barrett*. "I've got a few other songs at home on cassette," says Gilmour. "But Syd was...the long and the short of it was that he was quite severely mentally ill. Every psychiatrist who's seen him says he's incurable, and he's still the same. He can't look after himself now. His mother has to look after him, and I expect at some point he'll have to be institutionalized."

"I don't know whether he writes anything at all these days, but his romantic madcap image is entirely false. There's nothing romantic about it. He's not a happy person.... He's just on a completely other level."

## Empty spaces

IT IS A HOT AUGUST AFTERNOON IN NEW YORK CITY, BUT in Gilmour's hotel suite high above Fifth Avenue, the air is cool and calm. The stolid, heavy-lidded guitarist is in town to attend the premiere of *The Wall*. So is Waters. Neither Wright nor Mason will be on hand, though. Wright, Gilmour explains, has left Pink Floyd and probably won't be replaced. Was it a personality conflict?

"Well, you know, none of us has ever been the best of friends," Gilmour says softly. "I have never been a close personal friend of anyone else in the band, and neither was Rick, really. Roger and Nick have at times been fairly close. We don't *not* get along, but we're working partners."

It took awhile for that working partnership to develop, for the period immediately after Syd Barrett's departure from Pink Floyd was not a happy one. The band floundered for an identity, since Barrett had taken the group's creative charisma with him. *Atom Heart Mother*, *Ummagumma*—Gilmour can't believe that people actually liked those albums.

Waters began finding his own voice around the time of *Meddle*, in 1971, and he was fairly firmly in charge two years later on *The Dark Side of the Moon*, an album that has remained among the top-selling 200 LPs in the U.S. for nearly a decade. With *The Wall*, Pink Floyd has become utterly his instrument, the teller of his tale—or is it? "Roger doesn't want to get it confused with too many other people," Gilmour says, "but obviously there are aspects of Syd in there as well."

## Outside the wall

THESE DAYS, ROGER WATERS THINKS HE FINALLY HAS A handle on life. "I spent an awful lot of my life—until I was about twenty-eight—waiting for my life to start. I thought that at some point I would turn from a chrysalis into a butterfly, that my *real* life would begin. So if I had that bit of my life to live again, I would rather live the years between eighteen and twenty-eight knowing that that was it, that nothing was suddenly going to happen—that it was happening all the time. Time passes, and you are what you are, you do what you do."

Now he has his movie to point to—and in November, there'll be a reworked soundtrack from the film, including some new songs. Love it or loathe it, *The Wall* is not a "dismissible" movie, he says. "It does say quite loudly that it is bad for us when we're isolated from one another and frightened of one another. And the film gets criticized for that—either by people who say it's not true, or by people who think it's self-evident and therefore not worth saying. I believe that it is true and it is worth saying."

Outside the wall, where he finds himself now, Waters no longer agonizes over the lost father, the perverted teachers, the predatory women, the enormous mother (who he says isn't based on his real mother anyway). "You make your own decisions, your own life," he says. "What 'they' do clearly impinges on your life, but in the end, the responsibility for what you do and how you feel about yourself is yours. You are an individual. You're alone, but that's all right."

## Shine on, you crazy diamond

DURING THE RECORDING OF "WISH YOU WERE HERE," IN 1975, a fat, bald, silent man showed up at Abbey Road Studios. It was Syd Barrett. No one recognized him. No one has seen him since.



The Memories.  
The Madness.  
The Music...  
The Movie.


*Movie Gemma Hart House*  
AN ALAN PARKER FILM

# PINK FLOYD THE WALL


BY ROGER WATERS

DESIGNED BY GERALD SCARFE

WITH BOB GELDOF AS PINK  
FILM MUSIC PRODUCED BY ROGER WATERS DAVID GILMOUR AND JONAS GORDON  
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER STEVE O'ROURKE  
PRODUCED BY ALAN MARSHALL  
ANIMATION DIRECTED BY GERALD SCARFE  
SCREENPLAY BY ROGER WATERS  
DIRECTED BY ALAN PARKER

PRESENTED IN  
70MM  DOLBY STEREO

 MUSIC AVAILABLE ON  
COLUMBIA RECORDS & TAPES

 RESTRICTED  
UNDER 17 REQUIRES ACCOMPANYING  
PARENT OR ADULT GUARDIAN

© 1982 MGM/UA Entertainment Co.

DISTRIBUTED BY  
MGM/UA  
ENTERTAINMENT CO.

Special Premiere Engagements Begin in August.