

## IN THE FLESH

He was Pink Floyd's bass player, slave driver and, for most of the 1980s and '90s, a thorn in his ex-bandmates' sides. So has he mellowed and will he ever work with them again? Roger Waters speaks...

If the low public profiles usually kept by David Gilmour, Rick Wright and Nick Mason suggest something of a quiet retreat, their one-time chief colleague currently looks little short of hyperactive. Among Roger Waters' current projects are a Broadway version of *The Wall*; *Ca Ira*, an opera centred on the French Revolution, and two songs which, at the time of writing, were about to be nudged into the public domain via the internet. *To Kill The Child* and *Leaving Beirut* are firmly rooted in the troubles that have beset the world since 9/11, but also founded on Waters' own history: the latter song is based on his experience of hitch-hiking from the Lebanon to London as a 19-year-old, and being taken in by an Arab family.

"I thought, given that it was American election year, I should get them out," he says now. "I'm quite specific about how I feel about George W Bush and Tony Blair."

When discussing both his ongoing work and the time he spent with Pink Floyd, Waters brims with a mixture of self-assurance, candour, cynicism and pride. He's also willing to depart from the rules of rock diplomacy and talk about some subjects in a vocabulary best described as "blunt".

"If you're looking back over the last 30 years," he says, towards the interview's end, "I don't think there should necessarily be a separation from the records I made with Pink Floyd and the work I've done since. Certainly, it's almost more of a piece of it than *A Momentary Lapse Of Reason*. That's the voice that ran through those years, and that voice continued."

He has a point, though today's task is inescapably Floyd-centric. First, however, we crash-land in one of the more troubled corners of the *Here And Now*...

### **You've recently become involved in protests against Israel's so-called Peace Wall...**

I've got involved with a guy who's been working with Israeli refuseniks: Israeli youths who've refused to join the army. Because of the work that I've done over the last 30 years or so, there are people looking for different options from the obvious ones – the military, nationalistic, self-interested, economically defined options that you tend to hear from Bush and Blair and Sharon. There are people who are trying to see through that fog; to find out whether there are any possibilities to move beyond all that using other tools. And those people tend, sometimes, to gravitate towards me... I guess because those kind of feelings provide a central part of my own development. So if I can be a meeting point for anybody who's got any idea as to what to do, I'm very happy to do that.

### **Going way back, what exactly did a Communist upbringing involve?**

Both my parents were Communists – my mother lasted until 1956, when the Russians invaded Hungary. I don't remember that myself, but I became aware of it later on. That was a breaking point for a lot of people. But she was very hostile towards

America. Not Americans themselves – she spent time in the USA when she was young and said that she had a tremendous amount of empathy with the people she met – but America’s economic system and their role in the world.

Q: Your working lives at that time seem really schizophrenic: playing at places like UFO, and then venturing out on the provincial ballroom circuit...

RW: Well, we’d go anywhere. You’d get in the van and look forward to the 50 quid. And it was hard work. I remember a run of gigs that started in Douglas, on the Isle of Man, and then went on to Norfolk, and the next day we were playing in Elgin in Scotland. They could be vicious gigs too, with balconies that overlooked the stage, and people dropping pints of beer on us. And, of course, they’d all want to hear See Emily Play. We often refused to play it. [Laughs]

Q: When Syd started to become ill, what was your understanding of what was happening to him?

RW: Syd was schizophrenic. It was clear to me that that was what was the matter with him. But not everybody would accept that. I had ties with Syd’s family, and I can remember telephoning his brother and telling him he had to come and get Syd, because he was in a terrible mess. And the three of us sat there and, in effect, Syd did a fairly convincing impression of sanity. And his brother said, Well, Roger says Syd’s ill, but that’s not the way it seems to me.

I drove him round to [radical British psychiatrist] RD Laing’s place once to see if he could give Syd any help, but Syd wouldn’t get out of the car. Ad I’m not sure that was necessarily a bad thing, Laing was a mad old c\*\*\* by then. Actually, “c\*\*\*” is a bit strong. But he was drinking a lot. And he was one of those people who seemed to be claiming that insanity might be a very subjective idea, that perhaps madness might give people some kind of greater insight. That seemed to be barking up the wrong tree. I never liked that kind of thinking.

Q: There’s a huge contrast between Syd’s whimsy and the lyrical approach you took from Echoes onwards. At the time you were playing them, how did you feel about songs like Bike and The Gnome?

RW: [Emphatically] Oh, I liked them a lot. They had a great deal of charm. And they were very clever. A great deal of Syd’s work was obviously brilliant. And even after his time in Pink Floyd... I mean, something like Dark Globe is a very, very accomplished piece of work.

Q: When it came to your artistic life without Syd, did you feel much trepidation?

RW: No. I’d been trying to write songs for a while, and a couple of them were pretty good. I mean, Corporal Clegg is a good piece of work. There were things I wrote very early on, like a song called Walk With Me Sidney, which I wrote about Syd. Juliette Wright, who was then Rick Wright’s girlfriend, sang some of it. It exists on tape somewhere, it might eventually come out. The other thing was, once you were in

a rock'n'roll band, you weren't going to stop. That would have meant going back to architecture.

"First of all, if I'm honest, I have to accept that at that point I became a capitalist. You can call yourself what the fuck you like, but if you suddenly get a lot of money the impression is that you're a capitalist. You can't get pretend... you can still espouse humanitarian ideas, which I still do, but things are that little bit more complicated. Did that trouble me? Only to the point that I had to decide whether to give it away to poor people or invest it. I decided to give some of it away to poor people and invest the rest. I was faced with that dilemma, coming from the background I did. I could no longer pretend I was a true socialist, but 25 per cent of my money went into a charitable trust fund that I've run ever since. And 35 per cent goes to the government in tax, so I keep 40 per cent of whatever it is. I'm glad I give some of it away. I don't make a song and dance about it. One of the good things about being a capitalist is that you become a philanthropist, to a certain extent."