

# Point Me Down the Right Line

## What Acts Influenced Pink Floyd?

Like all musicians, the members of Pink Floyd have their favorite artists from the pop, rock, and jazz fields. Some of those artists—Jeff Beck, Aretha Franklin, the Who, Kate Bush, Herbie Goins—have little or no relation to PF music, but the Floyd do have plenty of musical forbears.

As Pink Floyd became more successful, and more sure-footed (some would say overly entrenched), they stopped sounding quite so much like others, and other bands in turn began to sound more like them, although The Division Bell's "Take It Back" featured a riff that sounded familiar to anyone who'd heard Marillion's "The Realese."

### Chuck Berry

All British rockers who reached maturity in the 1960s revere guitarist/singer/urban poet Chuck Berry. They love his conversational lyrics, which provided inspiration for both Bob Dylan and his acolytes, and Berry's matchless understanding of the classic rock and roll form.

In his early 1960s days playing with Geoff Mott and the Mottoes, Syd Barrett was a devotee of Berry and other fifties rock and roll, as well as of progressive jazz and American acoustic and electric blues. Gilmour, as well, was a Berry fan, recording "Beautiful Delilah" on a 1965 demo disc with his Cambridge band Jokers Wild.

In its infancy, Pink Floyd played lots of Berry-style early rock and rhythm and blues, with Nick Mason recalling that "Motorvatin" was a particular favorite (there is no such song; he is probably referring to the epochal 1955 recording "Maybellene"). Barrett's cocksure persona on early Pink Floyd material was surely influenced by the bluesmen he was listening to, but also by the exuberant and enthusiastic Berry.

In spite of this early influence, however, by the end of 1966 the group had shed its old-time rock and roll and R&B numbers in favor of more of Barrett's original and progressive material.

### Miles Davis

Rick Wright—Pink Floyd's de facto musical director at least through 1973—painted with a wide palette of colors. He loved the classics and lost himself in jazz, particularly the work of Miles Davis.

Davis, one of the most important musicians of the second half of the twentieth century, helped create modern jazz as we know it. He helped bring the music from the post-bop of the late forties through the hard bop and cool phases of the 1950s, the Latin, boogaloo, and African rhythms of the early and mid-1960s, the experimental ambient sound of the late 1960s, and the rock and funk of the 1970s. Davis's horn playing was crystal clear, and his taste in assembling bands and his confidence in their ability to improvise led to a stack of incalculably influential records.

Wright noted years later that one of his favorite pieces ever was Davis's take on Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*, and that the essential 1959 *Kind of Blue* album—which is on the top ten list of many a rock musician—was a key spark to the writing of the chord sequence that eventually became "Us and Them" on *Dark Side* after beginning its life as a piece written for *Zabriskie Point*.

Davis's pianist on *Kind of Blue* was Bill Evans, about whom Miles said in his autobiography, "The sound he got was like crystal notes or sparkling water cascading down from some clear waterfall." This approach describes the best of Wright's work with the Pink Floyd, where instead of aggressively forcing his way forward, he hung back and played with the space between the notes as much as he played the notes themselves.

### Bob Dylan

The Great White Wonder's impact in England was as great as it was in America; in fact, "The Times They Are a-Changin'" was a hit single in the U.K. before Dylan cracked the U.S. charts.

An entire generation of British musicians, including Syd Barrett, David Gilmour, and Roger Waters, grew up believing in Dylan's example: that you could write from the heart and do it with a belief in classic folk-oriented song

structure that owed much to the British folk tradition.

Barrett's Dylan inspiration was less directly stylistic than an impulsion to find his own muse as a songwriter, growing from his early folk style into the electric psychedelic guitarist he became with the Floyd. Syd worked easily in the Dylanesque stream-of-consciousness style, especially in his later solo work where the distance between the merely quaint and the totally unhinged was sharply compressed.

Gilmour and Waters, as more conventional and certainly more dependable talents, internalized Dylan's style musically (Gilmour) and lyrically (Waters). The folk picking of both players in the more pastoral Floyd songs was certainly inspired by Dylan's adoption of classic roots forms.

Sometimes the Floyd found real inspiration in Dylan's work, reaching back to their own folk traditions on songs like "Cirrus Minor," "Wish You Were Here," and "Goodbye Blue Sky." Certainly Waters' closing lyrics to "Sheep" ("Get out of the road if you want to grow old") owe much to "The Times They Are a'-Changin'."

On occasion, the influence only reached as far as aping Dylan's sometimes droning, tuneless vocals and haranguing manner, as Waters did on *The Wall*'s "In the Flesh."

## The Beatles

The Floyd never tried to *be* the Beatles or, as proper southerners, even *sound* like the Beatles, but the Fab Four's palette is unavoidably spattered over much of the Floyd's greatest work.

*Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, the bible of summer 1967, gobsmacked musicians all over the English-speaking world, and the Floyd were no exception. Syd Barrett quotes musically from the album's title song in his subsequent single "Apples and Oranges," while Waters twice invoked "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds": lyrically in "Let There Be More Light" and musically in "Point Me at the Sky."

Finally, the universal appeal and acceptance of the brain-melting "A Day in the Life" surely dovetailed with the Floyd's already strongly developed sense of *musique concrète* as expressed on the contemporary "Interstellar Overdrive."

Syd Barrett's replacement, David Gilmour, took much of his guitar sound in later years from the Alan Parsons/Geoff Emerick/George Harrison sonic palette of *The Beatles* (the "White Album") and *Abbey Road*, using the arpeggios of "Dear Prudence" and "You Never Give Me Your Money" as jumping-off points for his own playing, especially on *Dark Side* pieces "Any Colour You Like" and "Eclipse." Gilmour also stated that he enjoyed the picking on Cream's "Badge," which was actually played by Harrison.

Roger Waters, as befits an artist with a bent toward "meaningful" lyrics, was a Lennon man, finding the classic "Across the Universe" compelling enough to use the lyrical pattern for 1971's groundbreaking "Echoes" and later playing "Universe" in his solo career. It would be fair to say that Waters also garnered inspiration and solace from the confessional songwriting style of Lennon's 1970 Plastic Ono Band.

## Love

Arthur Lee, one of the first black hippies (if not the first, as he later claimed), headed this extremely important Los Angeles group. Moving from the folk-punk of their self-titled 1966 debut to the psychedelic chamber rock of 1967's *Da Capo* to the orchestral majesty of early 1968's *Forever Changes*, Love produced a startling trilogy of albums rarely equaled in their melodic invention and majesty by any group.

British musicians took to the group immediately; Led Zeppelin's Robert Plant was a huge fan of Lee, while the Move covered *Da Capo*'s standout opener "Stephanie Knows Who." In fact, Love was much more popular per capita in England than in the States. Syd Barrett stated that Love was one of his favorite American groups, along with the Fugs and Frank Zappa and the Mothers.

Barrett was turned on to Arthur Lee's aggregation through the good offices of Peter Jenner, who mentioned that a certain Love track (a cover of Burt Bacharach's "My Little Red Book") had an especially cool descending guitar and bass line that Syd ought to pinch.

Getting the tune a bit wrong, Jenner instead helped inspire the riff to "Interstellar Overdrive," which sounds very little like Love but turned into a launching point for one of the Floyd's greatest live numbers.

(Some, including Roger Waters, claim that the theme from British TV comedy *Steptoe and Son* is really the basis for "Interstellar Overdrive." While the first few notes are identical, and Syd was certainly aware of the song, the banjo-led music-hall/folk theme is a completely different animal, and itself sounds like Bobby Helms's late 1950s American hit "Jingle Bell Rock.")

## The Kinks

The Kinks, a very British pop group singing in native accents about British things, were a major influence on Syd Barrett's writing. "Arnold Layne" is a character study as good as any of Ray Davies' work, while "Bike," "Apples and Oranges," and "Jugband Blues" also bear the mark of classic Kinks compositions like "A Well Respected Man," "Dedicated Follower of Fashion," and "Rosy Won't You Please Come Home."

Even after Barrett's departure, Pink Floyd retained some of the Kinks' sardonic humor in the "Mr. Pleasant"-styled "Corporal Clegg," and engaged in Davies' trademarked music-hall trompiness in later numbers like "St. Tropez" and "Free Four" before ditching it entirely.

Barrett's solo material also bore the stamp of a Kinks fan. "Here I Go" and "Gigolo Aunt" have that crunchy "Sunny Afternoon"/"Autumn Almanac" feel to them, and "Effervescing Elephant" has wordplay certainly worthy of Davies.

Gilmour, however, claimed not to be thinking of the Kinks' "Lazy Old Sun" when he composed and recorded (and played every instrument on) "Fat Old Sun" from *Atom Heart Mother*.

## Cream

Guitarist Eric Clapton, bassist/blues harpist Jack Bruce, and drummer Ginger Baker were perceived in 1966—by the music press and by themselves—as Britain's finest in their fields. The formation of this group marked one of the moments at which rock and roll became "rock"—when players were organized by other parties, when grown men with little in common and few personal connections grouped together to play rock music as a career move.

That said, Cream was indeed revolutionary and groundbreaking, especially live, where they wed a blues-based, power approach to improvisational techniques previously only found in jazz. And the members of the Pink Floyd loved the band's work.

Barrett told French music paper *Les Rockers* in 1967 that Cream and the Beatles were his favorites, and Nick Mason was especially impressed by Cream's live show. He found inspiration in Baker's African-inspired, jazzy, nonlinear but powerful playing and soon went to Baker's doublebass-drum approach.

But just as importantly, Mason felt motivated by Cream to do his own thing as a musician: "That night was the moment that I knew I wanted to do this properly. I loved the power of it all. No need to dress in Beatle jackets and tab-collar shirts, and no need to have a good-looking singer... the drummer wasn't at the back on a horrid little platform... he was up at the front," he wrote in *Inside Out*.

It must have been a thrill to the Floyd to play only their second show after officially turning professional in support of Cream on February 3, 1967 in Yorkshire. The all-night gig, the second of a nearly three-week tour away from London, included go-go dancers and a barbecue, an example of the old ways brushing against the new.

Cream, of course, only lasted through late 1968, a collection of large egos running rampant without any personal connection to get the players through tough times. But all three members of the band remained important musical figures in their solo careers, Clapton especially.

Following his decision to leave the Floyd, Roger Waters snared ol' Slowhand to play guitar on his 1984 *Pros and Cons of Hitch Hiking* album and subsequent tour, although Clapton apparently wearied of Waters' need for structure and quit the tour halfway through.

## Jimi Hendrix

The influence of Hendrix on the British musicians of the late 1960s and beyond is nearly incalculable. While Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck, Davy Graham, Bert Jansch, and Pete Townshend had emerged as the land's most important homegrown guitarists, Hendrix—an American in London—showed up and topped them all.

What Hendrix had that more staid Brits didn't—or couldn't—provide was the thrill of the chase, the desire to entertain, and the raw nerve to do something like play "Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" live after hearing an acetate of the song once or twice, just days after its release. Or play guitar with his teeth, or behind his back, or stop his band (while on Lulu's live TV show) in the middle of one song and immediately start another.

David Gilmour loved Hendrix, going over full-bore to the Fender Stratocaster in tribute. Gilmour's tone also owed something to fellow Strat user Clapton, but the playing on full-on rock tracks like "The Nile Song," "Fat Old Sun," and "The Gold It's in the..." certainly echoes that of Hendrix.

While Pink Floyd was never going to be a full-tilt, rockin' ensemble, Gilmour's best work with the group echoed Hendrix in its surfeit of mystery and passion, two traits that Hendrix helped bring to modern rock guitar.

## Fleetwood Mac

Peter Green's Fleetwood Mac was one of the finest-ever British blues combos. From the release of their first record in

1967, the Mac were loved for the fastidious musicianship, rejection of pop stardom, and dual-guitar interplay between Green and Jeremy Spencer.

(This Mac was very different from the version that hit big a decade later; while John McVie and Mick Fleetwood, the rock-steady rhythm section, gave the group its name, Christine McVie didn't join until the early seventies, and Stevie Nicks and Lindsey Buckingham well after that.)

This version of the group was Chicago blues-derived to the core, although Spencer idolized Buddy Holly and Green could write good, commercial rock songs. Much of the group's dual-guitar early output, especially their 1969 instrumental hit "Albatross" (a lovely, mournful instrumental echoing both classic blues and Santo and Johnny's 1959 "Sleep Walk"), would influence David Gilmour's evocative guitar lines in years to come, notably on "Echoes" and "Dogs."

Fleetwood Mac opened for Pink Floyd in summer 1968 at Steve Paul's "The Scene" in New York City. One would assume that the two bands propped up the open bar quite efficiently.

## Chic

Most entrenched British rock musicians of the 1970s—who had grown up in the 1960s with James Brown, Sly Stone, and Motown as their idea of black pop—had a hard time with disco, which they felt was mechanized, soulless, and lyrically vapid. Much disco was surely that, but the best of the genre has aged far better than much of the British AOR of the seventies.

Chic—bassist Bernard Edwards, guitarist Nile Rodgers, drummer Tony Thompson, and singers Norma Jean Wright, Luci Martin, and Alfa Anderson—was enormously successful in the late seventies and early eighties and especially influential for a new generation of British musicians in both their stylish production and their ability to weave a danceable beat to strong rock-oriented arrangements.

Chic's hit records, such as "Le Freak," "Dance, Dance, Dance," and "Good Times," were funk rather than disco, because of a lack of overbearing string arrangements and the band's technique of keeping the tempo just slow enough not to be manic and silly.

When Bob Ezrin came on board with PF for *The Wall*, he saw it as a challenge to make this most album-oriented of bands a hit on the singles charts. He found a surprisingly receptive audience in the Floyd, who—although they didn't like disco—had no problems incorporating a more funky one-hundred-beats-per-minute backing to several of their songs (just as Queen did with "Another One Bites the Dust" a year or so later).

As a result, "Another Brick in the Wall" Part II, "Run Like Hell," and "Young Lust" all featured a strong disco/funk backbeat that owed much to Chic. The enduring nature of the New York band's work is part of why the best of the up-tempo music on *The Wall* hasn't dated.

## Ten Classic Floyd Homages/Parodies

### **Kevin Ayers, "Singing a Song in the Morning"**

The former Soft Machine bassist/guitarist recorded this Floyd-reminiscent piece in 1970 with Barrett playing lead guitar, but the track was unusable and Ayers had to do the guitar himself in Syd's style.

### **Kevin Ayers, "Oh! Wot a Dream"**

This jaunty, charming 1972 single combines an almost "Pow R. Toc H." sound-collage opening with Rick Wright-style vocals.

### **Elvis Costello, "You Little Fool"**

Costello provides harpsichord (forward and backward), Barrett-like electric guitar picking, and a careful arrangement to this charming '67-style pop song.

### **The Dukes of Stratosphear, "Bike Ride to the Moon"**

XTC's side project plumbed the depths of great American and British psych, with Barrett's influence perhaps greatest here.

### **The Dukes of Stratosphear, "Have You Seen Jackie?"**

John Leckie, PF engineer and Dukes of Stratosphear producer, says, "No specific [Dukes] track is intentionally Floydian but, yes, I guess the solo in 'Bike Ride to Moon' is a bit Piper/Saucerful with slide guitar and 'Jackie' has an 'Arnold Layne' lyrical homage."

**Robyn Hitchcock, “Balloon Man”**

His hands blew up like two balloons.

**Robyn Hitchcock, “The Man Who Invented Himself”**

This British singer/songwriter invented himself as a possibly saner Syd Barrett who sang about seafood.

**Queensryche, “Waiting for 22”**

This progressive metal band, Floyd fans all, covered “Welcome to the Machine” in 2007. This instrumental lays bare their debt to Dave Gilmour’s epic style.

**Television Personalities, “I Know Where Syd Barrett Lives”**

This appealing 1981 single made the band’s debt to PF clear, but when bandleader Daniel Treacy gave out Syd’s home address from the stage, David Gilmour kicked the TVPs off his 1984 tour.

**Zerfas, “I Need It Higher”**

This utterly obscure Indiana quartet recorded a spectacular album in 1973; a standout track, “I Need It Higher” gets the downside of British psychedelia just right.