



Pink Floyd

The Dark Side of the Moon

03/1973

Harvest

On *The Dark Side of the Moon* or: Around and Through Beyond

Sam Rasnake

"There's someone in my head, but it's not me."

– "Brain Damage"

Music dates us. Yes. That's something we can't escape. There is a music – a part of its time – that's in us all. Like the famous paradox: does life imitate art, or is it the opposite? – music does define us, but the belief that "we define the music" carries its own truth as well. That truth has its own season. We live our lives anchored in a time, and that time sings its own songs, plays its music, dances its dance. Pink Floyd's *The Dark Side of the Moon* is of my world, my time, my breathing – and I do listen. I don't stop.

Some bursts of light are so extraordinary they blind us for a while. We can't see it all. This is equally true for the music that fills us. There's more each time we take it all in. If Heraclitus had lived in London, March of '73, he would have said – with his headphones on, no doubt – "You can't listen to same *Dark Side* twice." Every time, the first time. Something new. Some swirling note from a synth, some bend of the string, some voice underneath. And isn't that at least part of the greatness of any recording?

Although I'd heard a few bits of Pink Floyd's early work, nothing prepared me for listening to *Dark Side* the first time – and that was through headphones. Surrounding, immediate. Everything closed off but the music. An incredible moment. David Gilmour wishes he could have heard / experienced *Dark Side* first through headphones. "That would have been something." An impossibility though. Hearing it *first* isn't the same as creating it – from nothing to everything.

This was my first full taste of their music.

The lyrics by Roger Waters? ...Simple; complex. Easy to know; impossible to define. Clichéd; alive. This clashing, a vital part of the greatness. I don't know if the music changed me, but I do know this recording opened my head completely. And I listened more.

In the layers of music, something began to emerge. A shadow moving? Someone lost maybe? Something missing? I listened deep, trying to understand, determine, know – and this continued for years. Then, *boom*. It was Syd Barret. His eyes lurking in the dark, burning toward some fracture, some greedy maw, toward some peace, some silence. The former front man, guitarist, vocalist, writer. Now I hear him in all the music, and not just the *Dark Side* sessions.

A relentless specter, Barret ghosts their world while the Floyd tries for years & songs & separate lives to carve a world around him/through him/beyond him – but they can't do it. Song after song, the recordings, the tours – he remains:

"You lock the door and throw away the key"
– "Brain Damage," *The Dark Side of the Moon*

"Come on you painter, you piper, you prisoner, and shine"
– "Shine on You Crazy Diamond," *Wish You Were Here*

"So have a good drown, as you go down all alone
Dragged down by the stone"
– "Dogs," *Animals*

"I've got wild staring eyes and I've got a strong urge to fly"
– "Nobody Home," *The Wall*

"And in my dreams I meet the ghosts"
– "High Hopes," *The Division Bell*

So Pink Floyd embraced that loss – their loss. But for me it's not just Syd. He's not the loss to me. It's something more. Maybe a symbol for something gone in me, something missing, and that's why I hold the music like a thread to follow ... why others find connection ... and keep finding. 932 weeks on the billboard charts. 45 million units sold – so far. Phenomenal.

Fragments of a Listen

From the heartbeat – actually, Nick Mason on kick – that opens and returns at the end, after "Eclipse" and all points in between, the music is such a flip book of imagery, such a phantasmagoria of dream, life and death in a melody – I can't just hear it. I must be the music.

"Dig that hole, forget the sun"

The song "Breathe" comes to me like Dōgen Zenji's words, "One must be deeply aware of the impermanence of the world." All things slipping away. Gilmour sings, "And all you touch, and all you see is all your life will ever be." Nothing lasts. This is true. And we all race like outlaws toward the grave. And this is the opening. Your life is what you make, and then it's gone. I hear this even when it's not playing. A constant truth.

"And I'm not frightened of dying
Any time will do, I don't mind"

Late into the night – dim lights from my player system the only glow – "The Great Gig in the Sky" unfolds its wonder. Clare Tory's voice, primal and beautiful, as magnificent as any instrument could be, fits perfectly when Richard Wright's piano gives way to Hammond, and the song builds. Her presence on this track somehow becomes a pivot for the entire album. Tory, who sings without singing, lets me know full well how much can be said without saying anything. The unsaid. There's no real way to describe it; it must be heard.

I remember thinking: *we are afraid*. That hasn't changed, at least not for me.

I want this voice in my body, this howling, so I can close my eyes against the unnamable empty – and know it.

I define myself by those things I hold close – things both sacred and impossible to live without. All the *must haves* I would save from the dreaded fires... My love, my children, my Dad's books, my Mother's voice, two photographs, the words of Bishop & Gilbert & Stafford, *Kind of Blue*, Bergman's *Persona*, my walking stick ... This song is one of them.

"only ordinary"

And here's the contradiction – I don't know myself anymore, or maybe it's the ground I walk that I don't know. Television and news apps that yell. The endless threat. The faces. Words on a page. Bird on the sill. It's all "which is which and who is who". All moments, ordinary in their making – moments that connect the ordinary days folded into years, and the motion that defines, then suddenly – though it's never sudden – puts on its suit of aching, and the pains blur to hush.

"The time is gone, the song is over
Thought I'd something more to say"

1. My life was nothing but edges then. Edges everywhere. Everything I did. I was an immortal – so it seemed.
2. I was never *all*.
3. The world inside my head was a nesting gift – and I'm certain it was the keyboard.
4. Desperation became mantra to whisper into the wind.
5. Like the man in overalls – he never wore a shirt in winter – on the bench outside the college library – the body of a guitar resting on his thigh, its neck pointing deep into clouds – me asking if I could play – his eyes burning through my skull. That was a no.
6. A hole is a hole is a hole – my description. Music as Möbius – if melody were rectangle, or words were thread.
7. There's no one to explain the why. Mad is mad.
8. I listen for the word *choose* – then remember I'm no believer.
9. Nothing like it – before or since. I'm stealing Bradbury now – and turtles, surely, all the way down: When I die, *The Dark Side* is dead.