

Q Review BOOKS

SYD BARRETT: A VERY IRREGULAR HEAD

AUTHOR **ROB CHAPMAN** PUBLISHER **FABER** PRICE **£14.99**

★★★★

Intellectually elevated unravelling of the doomed Pink Floyd man.

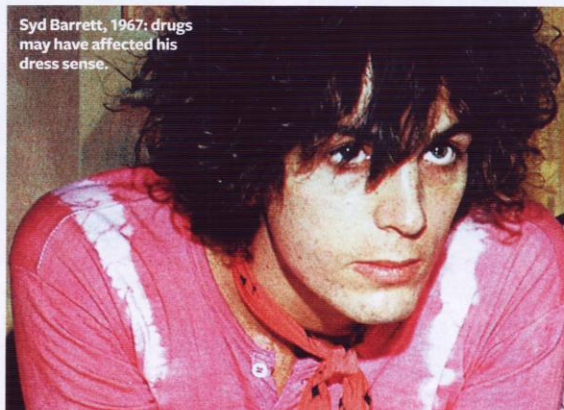


As all discerning rock fans know, there are two Pink Floyds – one the soft rock behemoth that made *The Dark Side Of The Moon* and *The*

Wall; the other, the group's first incarnation of 1965-'67, helmed by charismatic singer-songwriter Roger "Syd" Barrett, who died in 2006.

Famously, Barrett ingested ludicrous amounts of LSD and lost his mind around the time of Floyd's trippy 1967 debut album, *The Piper At The Gates Of Dawn*, before re-emerging in the early '70s with two brilliantly barmy solo albums, *The Madcap Laughs* and *Barrett*. Thereafter he became a recluse, and by the mid-'70s had inspired a feverish cult around him as Brit psychedelia's lost genius and romantically doomed posh loony.

In subsequent years, the truth



Syd Barrett, 1967: drugs may have affected his dress sense.

and myths surrounding his life and works became impossibly tangled. He is variously said to have fed LSD to his cat; been bolted in a closet for his own safety; and, career over, trudged barefoot home from London to his native Cambridge.

Rob Chapman's new bio is by far the most diligent yet at disengaging reality from sensationalism. Barrett's early years, in particular, receive a forensic going over, with new insights from sister Rosemary (including his poor O-Level results) and a

fascinating evocation of the libertine environment of early-'60s Cambridge that seemingly fed into Barrett's later acid-fuelled abandonment of rationality, itself linked, the author reiterates, to a deep distrust of hangers-on and the music business.

Detailed analysis of Barrett's literary and musical sources dominates the later narrative, exposing the singer's rich intellectual inner-life and gifts as a poet. Secretly, perhaps some would have wished for a few more salty indulgences relating to his nuttiest days in the late '60s and long, sad decline, but you can't help being impressed by the author's understanding of his subject. For a start, he reveals that Barrett's barefoot slog from London to Cambridge (yes, he actually did it) was apparently an homage to a similar journey made by 19th-century poet and Barrett inspiration John Clare in 1841. Mad – or what? **PAT GILBERT**