Pink Floyd Essay, Research Paper

Pink Floyd

In March of 1994, Pink Floyd released another album after a seven-year break from the music business. The Division Bell set off a US and European tour that according to Forbes will bring in an estimated 62 million dollars for the band. This is six million more than The Delicate Sound of Thunder tour from 1988 and far more than the band’s earlier tours. For David Gilmour, Nick Mason, and Richard Wright the profit has increased, but for the fans the quality has dwindled. Pink Floyd’s current music continues to fall short of their earlier albums because their attempts at self-imitation lack the concepts and musical nuances that made their music popular for its uniqueness.

When Pink Floyd, who were now without the services of Roger Waters, began work on what was to become A Momentary Lapse of Reason, they faced many who felt that the new Pink Floyd could not produce an album worthy of the Floyd label. Gilmour could have ignored these skeptics and produced an original album; instead he decided to imitate the Pink Floyd of years past by hiring additional writers. Gilmour hired these writers to write lyrics and music — to make the music more as the fans expected. The result was an album that looked much like any other Floyd album, but was in truth much less.

The album begins with an instrumental like so many other Floyd albums from the seventies. It then continues with nine songs that either contain good lyrics or good music, but rarely contain both. Finding several minutes that are comparable to any of the better songs from previous albums is difficult. In ‘Dogs,’ from Animals, there is a definite rhythm to the music, but a guitar solo or a new drum cadence distinguishes that specific verse from the rest of the verses. Additionally, in ‘Shine on You Crazy Diamond,’ the first song in Wish You Were Here, there is the long synthesizer chords followed by a melodic guitar that introduces a simple, yet eloquent four beat guitar riff. This emotional four beat riff would become more tiresome than skillful if it continued, but after beginning the piece it does not reoccur — a guitarless, saxophone solo finishes the piece. All throughout A Momentary Lapse of Reason Gilmour establishes a specific rhythm and then continues it throughout the piece without any break or change.

Along with this lack of nuances in their music, Pink Floyd also moved away from the continuous, concept album. This is a break from their normal routine and would be an original addition to the album except that it, along with their pop music approach to ‘Learning to Fly’ only make this album that much more like other rock albums of the time. Pink Floyd was the first band to release a continuos rock album in 1973 when they released Dark Side of the Moon. This continuity brought all the songs together despite their separate topics. It was a breakthrough for them and the music industry since it induced people to think of this and their future albums as bodies of work instead of just one or two good songs…it was all or nothing. In their next album, Wish You Were Here, and their subsequent albums they created albums composed entirely of related songs. Once again the idea was to get their audience to listen and understand the entire album. A Momentary Lapse of Reason is not a concept album; rather, it is a collection of unrelated, noncontinuous songs.

During even the more memorable songs from this album there is something missing. The songs contain only basic rhythms with none of the normal sound effects of samples found in earlier albums. In The Wall there were the small television bits, the neo-nazis in ‘Waiting for the Worms,’ or even the backwards messages put there for fun that helped to clarify the meanings of the songs or just acted as another interesting piece of the music. Perhaps what is missing from A Momentary Lapse of Reason is effort. The spaces where these samples or effects added color or meaning to a song or album where not filled, leaving the listener with a sense of emptiness.

One area of writing, where Pink Floyd was original during the seventies, that the new Pink Floyd attempted to continue was their use of continued songs. In Animals, ‘Pigs on the Wings’ I and II act as a frame for the album and storyline. In The Wall, ‘Another Brick in the Wall’ parts I, II, and III helped to show the passage of time as well as to emphasize the analogy of a wall being built. ‘A New Machine’ parts I and II occur late in A Momentary Lapse of Reason while surrounding a completely separate instrumental. The lyrics in the two parts are almost identical and this separation serves no purpose — no time has passed since these songs aren’t time related, they aren’t framing anything since the instrumental they surround isn’t related, and they have no analogy or aphorism to emphasize since the songs are basically just depressed observations about life.

With the release of The Division Bell, Pink Floyd goes away from the disjointed songs of A Momentary Lapse of Reason and returns to the concept album. The Division Bell deals with division as the title suggest, but when listening to the album one finds that of the nine songs with lyrics, four deal with the band’s breakup. This topic becomes tiresome since one or two songs would have expressed the topic sufficiently and less directly. In addition to returning to producing a concept album, Pink Floyd has also come much closer to duplicating their sound from the seventies. Many of the songs on this album again contain the nuances that make their music interesting, but other parts seem to rely entirely on their successes from their glory years.

The Division Bell begins with the sound of the earth’s crust moving, the earth’s heart, which relates to the heartbeat that begins Dark Side of the Moon. This leaning on the past continues in the ‘Poles apart’ when there is a break in the song filled with disjointed sounds and notes, reminiscent of ‘Atom Heart Mother’ and ‘Echoes.’ Then in ‘Take it Back’ and ‘Keep Talking’ there is the slide guitar from ‘One of These Days.’ ‘Keep Talking,’ the first released single from this album, was released first because the band felt that it was most like the old Floyd. The reason it is most like the old Floyd becomes clear as the song continues; the bass line from The Wall soon becomes evident as well as the long awaited return of the guitar echo effect from ‘Pigs (Three Different Ones).’ The song sounds like the old Floyd because ideas from the past fill the entire piece. The Division Bell leans much more heavily on Pink Floyd’s past successes, but is an improvement over A Momentary Lapse of Reason because of several things such as Stephen Hawking’s electronic voice that begins ‘Keep Talking’ or the boxing match that appears in the middle of ‘Lost for Words.’

When bandmember and lead songwriter Roger Waters left, Pink Floyd changed. By keeping the name, the remaining members decided to attempt to live up to the Pink Floyd label. Finding themselves unable to do so, they have hired writers, worked with collaborators from the past, hired their previous album cover designer, and finally have sampled and imitated their music from their glory years. In this imitation they guarantee that they will never be able to produce an album that is musically or conceptually as good as the ones from their years with Waters.