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ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS : AN INTERVIEW WITH ROGER WATERS

By Mark Brown, Rocky Mountain News | April 25, 2008

It's a happy accident that Pink Floyd co-founder Roger Waters is playing the Pepsi Center. Waters had no touring plan for the U.S. but agreed to a May benefit in Argentina. Playing the Coachella Festival in California seemed like a good warm-up, and that meant time for a few shows in Colorado and Texas. Then the Argentina benefit was canceled. So Waters finds himself on a mini-tour he never intended. The upside, he told Rocky pop music writer Mark Brown with a laugh during a rare interview, is that he'll get to sing the anti-George W. Bush song *Leaving Beirut* in his home state.

You were booed early on for *Leaving Beirut*, but a lot of America has come around to your way of thinking. Your thoughts?

I remember the first gig we did on the first bit of the tour (in 2006) was in Camden, N.J. There were lots of military bases around there. I was getting the finger, and there was a certain measure of unrest. In the intervening years that unrest has become a quieter and quieter voice. People have embraced the idea that just because you're an Arab or a Muslim doesn't mean you're one of the "evildoers." We're all people, and we need to understand one another better.

Does revisiting *Dark Side of the Moon* in its entirety (in concert) bring any new meaning?

It's how strange that the politics of the thing seem to be up to date now. What impresses me most about it is the attachment of an increasingly young audience to the ideas in it and songs like *Us and Them*, which develop the ideas that you and I have been speaking about here. None of this stuff has gone away, ever.

Some music from your classic era sounds timeless, like *Dark Side* or John Fogerty's anti-war songs. But some music from that era sounds dated and silly. You managed to avoid that with *Dark Side* and *The Wall*. Why is that?

It's because they're truthful and they spring from a passionate attachment to political and philosophical ideals that are based in the experience of others. If you were to name something that you now consider silly . . . not that I want to knock other artists, but you'd probably find the subject matter is fey in some way.

I'm thinking music like Emerson, Lake & Palmer.

Well, that wasn't about anything . . . it was a construct in order to sell records. It didn't have its roots in somebody's passionate belief in human life. It had its roots in wanting to be successful in pop music in the 1970s.

Is it difficult to stage *Dark Side* and find musicians who can handle the parts?

No. One has to always take one's hat off to Dave (Gilmour) and Rick (Wright), who created the original parts. But I treat it as a classical piece. There are lots of musicians around who are capable of learning the parts as if it was a piece of classical music. The guitar player who plays most of the Gilmour stuff, Dave Kilminster, does it beautifully. He brings his own something to it, but basically they're the notes in Dave's solos. I make no bones about staying very close to the original parts because I think they're beautiful.

I read you're recording an album called *Heartland*. Any truth to that?

That might well be. It might be called *Heartland*, or it might be called something else. I have a ton of songs I've written. I keep meaning to get around to going in the studio.

Is it more enjoyable to record with today's technology?

I was reminding myself that back in those days when we were doing a mix of something, all of us would sit down at the mixing board. We'd start the 24-track tape. Everybody would have three or four faders that were their responsibility and pan pots and equalizers and effects and things. You'd run it from the top to the bottom, and it would be a performance. That would be mix one. Then you'd go, "I didn't get this move quite right," and you'd do it again. You'd listen to those

mixes and make a value judgment about which one moved you more. Now, of course, it's all digital and it remembers everything you do and you can change minutiae without having to do the whole thing again. It has removed the idea of performance from the mixing of the song.

Some musicians get paralyzed by too many choices.

I always think it's a bit of a handicap, in terms of writing, if you're a virtuoso guitar player or keyboard player or anything else, really. There's a temptation to sort of noodle. However brilliant it may be, it's not writing. I've always thought the fact that I can't play instruments really well has been something of an advantage. It means I have to think about things - what is the effect I'm trying to create here?

Because you're such a crappy musician.

Exactly! (laughs) It's funny you should say that. Just because you're not a virtuoso guitar player doesn't mean that you're not a good musician. It's a sort of fallacy that has been picked upon by my enemies from time to time. Music is actually about communicating feelings to human beings. If you do that within the genre, it doesn't matter if you can't play Chopin preludes on the piano. You're still a musician.

Pink Floyd's one-off reunion at Live 8 has been analyzed to death. But are you yourself a fan of reunions?

I don't think you can generalize about it. It's hard for bands; often half of them are dead. I'm not really keen on the reunion when there's only one bloke left standing. However, if everybody's alive and enthusiastic about doing it, I think they're great. The Live 8 thing was quite extraordinary. Even at our advanced years, we all still seemed to be able to play a bit and sing. I thought those songs we did sounded great. It was very moving for me personally to hear those four musical voices joined together again onstage. And equally very moving to experience the enormous waves of love that were coming off the field at us. It was just fantastic. I loved it.

Will you consider releasing Floyd music from the vaults, like the 1973 BBC broadcast?

It's all out there on bootlegs. I'm not that interested in it.