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📷 Pink Floyd in March 1967. Left to right: Roger Waters, Nick Mason, Syd Barrett and Rick Wright. Photograph: Cyrus Andrews/Michael Ochs Archives/Getty Images Photograph: Michael Ochs Archives/Getty Images

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📷 Pink Floyd in March 1967. Left to right: Roger Waters, Nick Mason, Syd Barrett and Rick Wright. Photograph: Cyrus Andrews/Michael Ochs Archives/Getty Images Photograph: Michael Ochs Archives/Getty Images

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Syd Barrett: producer Joe Boyd remembers Pink Floyd's legendary leader

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[Jon Dennis](#)

Joe Boyd, who discovered Pink Floyd in 1966, talks to Jon Dennis about his memories of Syd Barrett

- [Audio: Listen to Joe Boyd talking about Syd Barrett on our podcast](#)

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It's a grossly overused phrase, but Syd Barrett was a true rock legend, mostly because he hasn't performed live or recorded, or even been seen for more than 30 years. Barrett, whose death was [confirmed](#) today, was the first "acid casualty", and few actually remember the man who led the most important group of Britain's counterculture in 1966 and 1967.

One man who does remember is [Joe Boyd](#). He discovered Pink Floyd in the summer of 1966, and promoted them at the legendary UFO club on London's Tottenham Court Road, where Syd Barrett's Pink Floyd made their name. Boyd also produced Pink Floyd's first single Arnold Layne, and writes about his experiences with the group in the excellent book *White Bicycles*.

I've just interviewed Boyd for Guardian Unlimited's daily news [podcast](#), Newsdesk. You can listen to the results in tomorrow's programme, but in the meantime, here's a transcript of the best bits.

Boyd: Floyd were the official group of the underground. The bible of the underground was the International Times, the meeting point of the underground became the UFO club, and the Floyd were the resident attraction.

When they started to get so popular that they were too expensive for us, it forced us to go and try and find other groups to take their place that would satisfy the demands of the audience, but it was a very, very difficult slot to fill. One of the things that was so different from other groups, was that they kind of hid in amongst the light bubbles on stage. There was this light show, these pulsing, oil-based inks that were floating in a kind of projection of light, and so the four members of the group never really shone. They didn't

really step forward, you didn't get the feeling of a personality because it was just the music.

But if there was a personality initially, I think it was Syd, because first of all he was incredibly good looking: he had these dark eyes, and this curly black hair, and he was very, very appealing, girls loved him. He was a wonderful sexy lead singer.

But the Floyd ethos was such that he didn't perform the way that a pop lead singer would normally perform in 1967. He didn't dance around or show off, or talk at all between the songs. Nobody talked. It was very self-effacing, the whole presentation of the group.

But the glint in Syd's eye shone amongst all of that, and I think he was certainly the focal point. **Me:** What do you remember of the Arnold Layne session?

Boyd: We did it very efficiently and very quickly. The recording and the mixing of the A and B sides took a couple of nights in February 1967. It was a pleasure, I enjoyed working with them and I was very disappointed not to produce the album, not just obviously because of the success it would have had, but also because it was a good working relationship, I really got along with them. Syd was very diffident, Roger Waters was much more of a forceful personality in the studio. Syd had his opinions, but he didn't take as much of a leadership role in the studio as Roger.

Me: Were you surprised when [Syd Barrett](#) parted company with the band?

Boyd: Well, in the end not, because when the Floyd left UFO, and after they'd signed with EMI, a few months went by when I didn't really see much of them at all.

But we reached an agreement that no matter what happened, no matter how big they were, they agreed that they would come back in June 67 and play the UFO club. And sure enough, by June they were huge. There were queues around the block and crowds outside the club and everything. And there was no stage entrance, so the group had to come in through the crowd to perform. So I saw them up close as they came by, and I kind of greeted them as they came in. I said hello to everybody, and Syd was the last one in.

And Syd, I would have to say, was a very, very different person that night in June from when I had seen him previously. He was very vacant-eyed, didn't really say anything.

But he had always been very witty, made under-his-breath little sarcastic comments and funny little comments here and there. But none of that, that night. And when he went on stage, he just stood there, for long stretches, while the rest of the band played. It was very awkward and very disturbing to see.

I then kept in touch with the group's management, with Peter Jenner and Andrew King. They told me how they were going to have to bring in Dave Gilmour, who was an old friend of the group's from Cambridge, to play with Syd, so when he would stop playing there would be another guitar player who could carry on. So it became a five-man group.

But it was clearly very difficult.

And I think that at the time it was a phenomenon that we weren't really familiar but I think as soon as the concept of "acid casualty" became part of the parlance of the day, Syd was identified as the first one that we knew.

Not that any of us had any information as to what was the cause of his disturbing behaviour, but it was assumed that it was from taking too much acid.

You can listen to the [Newsdesk](#) podcast featuring this interview with Joe Boyd [here](#).

Joe Boyd's [book](#), [White Bicycles: Making Music In The 1960s](#) is published by [Serpents Tail](#), and a [CD](#) of the same name, featuring Boyd's many great productions including [Arnold Layne](#), is on [Fledgling records](#).

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