

## The love letters that expose the romantic side of a young Syd Barrett

A new exhibition shows the softer qualities of the Pink Floyd wildboy

By Paul Bignell

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Lost love letters written by Syd Barrett – Pink Floyd's Crazy Diamond – reveal for the first time a romantic and fun-loving young man who was nothing like the erratic drug casualty he was to become.

The missives, seen exclusively by *The Independent on Sunday*, are to go on display at a new exhibition about his life in London next month. Written between the ages of 15 and 18 to Libby Chisden, his girlfriend at the time, they show a tender side to the star, who died five years ago, aged 60, from pancreatic cancer.

Speaking from her home in West Sussex this weekend, Ms Chisden, 65, recalled the time she first met Barrett, whose real name was Roger, when they were both 15.

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"We met outside a swimming pool in Cambridge. I was with Dave Gilmour [also of Pink Floyd] and some friends. I was in the Girl Guides at the time and he became my first boyfriend. He was very handsome.

"If I close my eyes and imagine Syd Barrett before all his trials and tribulations, I see him doubled up laughing because he found everything funny," she said.

The image is at odds with the public's perception of him. Despite forming Pink Floyd, he recorded only two albums with the group in the late 1960s. The band later ousted him because of his increasingly unpredictable, madcap behaviour.

Pink Floyd would later become one of the most famous bands on the planet, selling more than 200 million albums worldwide. Their seminal 1973 album, *The Dark Side of the Moon*, remained in the US Billboard Charts for an unprecedented 741 weeks. Such success was not shared with Barrett because mental illness had forced him into obscurity.

But the love letters to Ms Chisden show a funny side, a glimpse into Barrett's life before illness took hold. One of them, written on a school trip, begins: "This morning I engraved your name in my leg, as I went crazy for you – a mad craving lust which did me no good as I tripped over a guy and fell flat on my face."

Another reads: "Before I met you, darling, I didn't realise just how nice a girl can be, but now every other girl can go to hell because you're the cutest, most gorgeous, most attractive girl ever made."



BBC

*Syd Barrett in 1970 after leaving Pink Floyd. His love letters to Libby Chisden, plus paintings he gave her will go on show in London next month*

Ms Chisden said she kept the letters in a black bin liner before she was told they were highly valuable. The collection of more than 60 letters is said to worth somewhere in the region of £100,000.

"Strangely enough, I haven't read a lot of the letters, because unless he was writing 'I love you' I wasn't interested. I used to skip over them – 'Oh what's he writing about a boat for?', I would think to myself."

Ms Chisden described the dramatic effect the powerful psychedelic drugs of the late-1960s rock scene had on Barrett. "There was a thing between us – I think because we both laughed and found everything very funny and loved the same sort of films. But then the drugs started. He loved them. He did enjoy it. It wasn't like he went into a depression and started taking drugs. He adored a joint and LSD. He did have a nice time with them."

After a series of modestly successful solo post-Pink Floyd albums in the early 1970s, Barrett spent the remainder of his life living in obscurity with his mother in Cambridge.

He is said to have suffered from mental health problems – although exactly what was wrong is still unknown. Many believe it was schizophrenia, others say a bipolar disorder. He spent his days gardening and painting. But his legacy and myth endured. Fans and journalists from all over the world would often try to sneak into his back garden to steal memorabilia.

"By the time I had got married to someone else in 1970, he was already very strange," Ms Chisden said.

"He was very druggy. He was... different. By the time I met him in the early 1980s, he knew who I was still. I do believe it was the drugs that affected his mental health. If you'd known him beforehand, he was just a lovely guy who was full of life."

*'Syd Barrett: Art and Letters' runs from 18 March-10 April at Idea Generation Gallery, Bethnal Green, London*

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