

Artist Statement -

Off Hand Co Presents Acid Casualty: The True Story of Syd Barrett

Acid Casualty is the story of Syd Barrett, founder of Pink Floyd and iconic pop culture figure. Syd encounters the dark side of sixties London counterculture which leads to a break from reality. The story of Syd Barrett is a staple of the mythos of rock and roll but it is also a universally recognizable tragedy. *Acid Casualty* takes elements of history and imbues them with just enough fiction to tell a powerful story of a man, his illness, his failing relationships, and his downfall at the hands of the cultural movement he helped create.

The story begins when Syd rents a room in a house occupied by a group heavily involved with psychedelic culture. The man who owns the house is a drug dealer and the girls who rent some of the other rooms are very into drugs. When they meet Syd, they begin to drug his tea every morning with LSD without his knowledge in hopes that this will lead to him creating better art. Eventually, this constant use of LSD in dangerously high doses leads to a psychotic break in Syd.

Syd is also the founding member of a newly successful psychedelic rock band Pink Floyd. He started as a bright, charismatic figure and wrote all the songs and lyrics for the band. As he begins to break down, the band members are caught between their friend and their futures. Their own careers are dependent on a stability that he no longer possesses. They are eventually forced to kick him out of the band.

All of these story elements are drawn from things that actually happened. The fractured nature of the script and nonlinear progression of time become a metaphor for Syd's continuously deteriorating mental state.

When we are young we feel immortal and unstoppable. We regard serious problems without sympathy or empathy. Syd Barrett had to confront a terrifying mental illness and was met by his friends' blank stares and dismissal. Not only did his friends not understand, they did not take the time to try.

As we grow up, we inevitably face hardships and it can feel like the rest of the world is passing us by. In the story, Syd gets left behind by his friends. They continue with their exciting lives and Syd is left in the dust. Anyone who dealt with a tragedy when they were young can relate to the loneliness and isolation that come along with it.

Another element of *Acid Casualty* is the phenomenon of counterculture. We tend to think of the sixties and think of bright colors, peace and love. We as a culture view this part of our past through rose colored glasses. Back in the mid sixties when the Beatles began to experiment with drugs, no one realized how dangerous they were. When psychedelic drugs like mushrooms and LSD were first beginning to be used recreationally on a large scale they thought of using these drugs as a mind enhancing, beautiful experience with no negative side effects.

They soon learned that taking drugs too much, or too often lead to serious consequences. While many were able to pick themselves up and walk away unscathed, there were unlucky individuals who fell into this culture never to return. They lost their minds or their lives to drugs and were forgotten. The idea of an acid casualty - someone who took too much acid and never recovered - is in stark contrast to the joy we associate with sixties psychedelic art and culture.

Acid Casualty also tackles the pitfalls of maintaining relationships when dealing with mental illness. Mental illnesses, specifically psychotic illnesses like schizophrenia, are frequently misrepresented and misunderstood. Because of this it can be near impossible for the person with the illness to communicate their experiences to those close to them. This is evident in Syd's disconnect with those around him and his feelings of frustration and loneliness. Whereas many films portray people suffering from schizophrenia as dangerous or violent that is far from the truth of most people's experiences. It is my hope that telling stories about mentally ill people from a more honest perspective can change these perceptions.

Rhyming words and disorganized speech is a telltale sign of psychosis. Syd exhibits these symptoms in the script, and they worsen as time wears on. Another less common but wholly terrifying symptom of psychosis is something called derealization. This is when someone begins to believe that the world around them does not exist, or that they themselves do not exist. This is evident in Syd's line "I don't seem to exist at all". *Acid Casualty* deals with this illness sympathetically without romanticising it.

I wrote this story not from a deep-seated interest in the early years of Pink Floyd but because Syd's story is compelling and human. As a creative person, I find Syd to be a kindred spirit.

Syd experienced synesthesia; when two or more senses become linked to one another. A common way this manifests is seeing colors when you look at different letters, or seeing colors and patterns when you listen to music. Syd reportedly saw his songs as paintings, and wrote the music as if he was painting. I also experience synesthesia and this is one of the many reasons I was drawn to Syd's story.

I believe that *Acid Casualty* has the potential to be a potent and meaningful story on all levels. I believe that the film will function successfully as a coming of age truth, an examination of counterculture and a sympathetic tale of a young man with a mental illness. My collaborators and I have all found something in this story that we can relate to, and I believe that our viewers will as well. Thank you so much for your time and consideration.

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