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# **Russell Reising (ed.), *“Speak to Me”: The Legacy of Pink Floyd’s. The Dark Side of the Moon***

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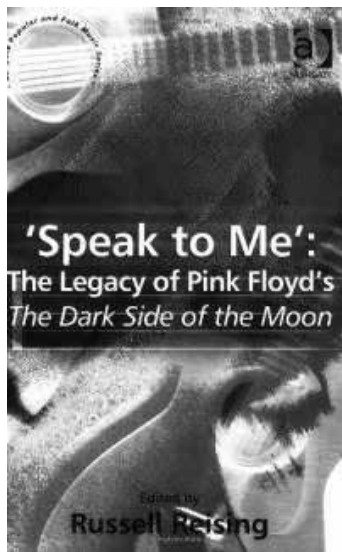
### **Référence électronique**

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Russell Reising (ed.), « *Speak to Me* » : *The Legacy of Pink Floyd's The Dark Side of the Moon*, Farnham & Burlington, Ashgate, coll. « Popular and Folk Music Series », 2005.



By dedicating their book "to Pink Floyd / For bringing such stimulation and immense joy to our lives", the authors of *Speak to Me* acknowledge up front that they make no pretense of scholarly detachment. In the same spirit of full disclosure, I hereby attest that a) at present, I find *The Dark Side of the Moon* (hereafter DSOTM) turgid and pompous, the unfortunate beginning of Pink Floyd's most overwrought and self-important period; and b) there was a time when I listened to the album over and over again and found its somber messages profound and alluring. In *Speak to Me*, I found my current feelings validated by an unlikely source: Clare Torry, whose impassioned, wordless singing

dominates DSOTM's "The Great Gig in the Sky." In an interview with Sheila Whiteley, Torry recalls that when the band first described to her the album's themes—"birth, living and all its bibs and bobs and aggros, and death"—"I have to be honest, I thought it was rather a lot of pretentious rubbish" (150).

Of course, DSOTM is eminently worthy of scholarly study regardless of either my aversion or the authors' veneration. As editor Russell Reising points out in his introduction, DSOTM regularly figures on rock critics' best-albums-of-all-time lists, continues to sell "hundreds of thousands of copies per year", and maintains a fanatical following who are moved to post meticulous song-by-song commentaries on the internet (5-9). *Speak to Me's* international group of contributors respond to DSOTM's unquestionable cultural importance from multiple angles in a well-organized book divided into four sections: "general discussions", "musical and structural discussions", "theoretical discussions", and "the influence of *The Dark Side of the Moon*." Under these broad headings, the book encompasses fifteen essays (and a useful annotated bibliography) dealing with everything from the album's harmonic complexities to its relationship to the ethical philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas to the urban myth claiming that DSOTM was secretly intended as a soundtrack to *The Wizard of Oz*. Such wide-ranging analysis seems appropriate for an album that has meant so many different things to so many people.

At times, the contributors' love of DSOTM leads them to write in enthusiastic superlatives. In his foreword, radio producer Craig Bailey calls the album "the meaning of life. On a half-shell" (xiv). Reising proclaims grandly that the female singers in a 1994 concert film of DSOTM "hold the keys to the infinite reaches of the cosmos as well as to the fluid fields and tidal forces out of which human life emerged" (22). More prosaically, various contributors refer to DSOTM as "a tapestry that the Beatles approached but never quite equaled, at least at the level of coherence" (211), "one of, if not the, greatest accomplishments in popular music" (10), a "masterpiece" (11), and "a late 20<sup>th</sup>-century masterwork" (87). I found myself asking what audience the authors intended to address with such remarks. Presumably, readers who pick up the book because they're already enamored with DSOTM don't require repeated reinforcement of their devotion. The authors' canonizing language suggests, rather, a defense of DSOTM's importance directed at academic music scholars, who often remain unduly biased toward the Western "classical" tradition and its "masterworks". But do we really want to reinscribe the worship of a canon into popular music studies? Rather than shout "look—we have masterpieces too!" in reaction to the uncaring judgment of "serious" musicology, might we seize the opportunity to reinvent the ways in which we think about mastery, accomplishment, and even "works" themselves? This is not to say that the book's contributors fail to make sophisticated use of tools designed for the study of European concert music. Music theorist Shaugn O'Donnell, for example, provides a thorough Schenkerian analysis demonstrating that "a tonal and motivic coherence

unifies the musical structure of this modern song cycle" (87). Although I wonder whether a search for "coherence" is the most productive approach to an album that, as fellow contributor Peter Mills demonstrates, highlights "social chaos" and "central dichotomies of madness and creativity, disorder and clarity", O'Donnell's careful investigation provides a useful guide to close listening for DSOTM (163, 166).

The best essays in *Speak to Me* are those that simply assume, rather than assert, the worth of DSOTM and focus unapologetically on the album's cultural significance. Perhaps my favorite is Matthew Bannister's nuanced and well-written "Dark side of the men: Pink Floyd, classic rock and white masculinities", which argues that Floyd rejected a macho, "cock rock" stage presence only to invoke a more elitist notion of masculinity based in "rationalization, industrialization and technological knowledge" (44, 49). Kimi Kärki provides a similarly subtle evaluation of the band's famously elaborate stage shows, which he argues represent "a paradoxical vision of Pink Floyd as both critics of modern culture, and commercially led spectacle" (28). Peter Mills, in an essay on Floyd's "self-mythologization", makes the related point that while "much has been made of [Roger] Waters's fierce and iconoclastic rejection of the star system... we need also to remind ourselves that he was responsible for arguably the most radical, biggest production-value stage show in rock history" (160, 167). Nicola Spelman places DSOTM's dark visions of the human psyche in historical context with a detailed discussion of the anti-psychiatry movement of the 1960s-70s, which asked whether "madness could possibly constitute a heightened state of awareness" (124). Each of these essays takes a refreshingly

evenhanded approach to shed new light on DSOTM as a cultural phenomenon.

Even with its occasional moments of uncritical adulation, this is a thought-provoking collection of essays that provides a welcome example of interdisciplinary conversation on popular music.

It will certainly encourage readers, regardless of their opinion of the album, to think in new ways about *The Dark Side of the Moon* and to give it yet another listen.

Patrick BURKE

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**Kevin Fellezs, *Birds of Fire : Jazz, Rock, Funk and the Creation of Fusion*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2011.**

Is there a musical field as maligned, scorned or critically underwritten as jazz-rock or "fusion"? I don't say "genre" because as Kevin Fellezs frequently observes in this eye-opening volume most of the music that falls into these categories does so by deliberately, perhaps even defiantly, avoiding the generic form. Indeed he sees the featured musicians of this study as being amongst those who struck a blow against the generic by refusing to allow their music to settle into a genre, even when discussing fusion itself – in fact especially then, as he talks about the "not-quite-genre" of fusion. He takes this unwillingness to coalesce into a single recognisable musical vocabulary as a sign of rude creative health and in the book overall makes a sound case for doing so.

The book falls into two distinct parts; the first three chapters explore the roots of the cultural practice which came to be called "fusion" or "jazz-rock". Clearly the former term is more fluid in its sensibilities and meanings, able to accommodate many musical tributaries in a shared flow – so we hear of country bands mixing with r'n'b, and how pop and soul came together to

make the fat rich sounds of bands like Blood Sweat and Tears, how Stan Getz matched Joao Gilberto's Bossa Nova rhythms to his own lean jazz stylings and so on. Thus the book's frame of reference is wider than one might expect from the basic premise.

This especially informs latter sections which encompasses four "case studies" of acts whose arc of creativity harmonises with both the musical field of "fusion" as widely understood but also demonstrate an unwillingness to be categorised at all. They are Tony Williams, Herbie Hancock, John McLaughlin – so far so Mahavishnu – but then a curveball, in the shape of a chapter on Joni Mitchell's late 1970s work. These names crop up throughout the book too, as do a host of others from a crowd of apparently distinct genres.

The very nature of genre is something which exercises Fellezs, and he spends the first chapter considering where our assumptions about what sounds belong where, and to whom. This is done initially by reiterating the received wisdoms of cultural studies surrounding genre, and it does this well, but the real action starts when