

Roger Waters releases new versions of antiwar tracks on *The Lockdown Sessions* EP

Kevin Reed
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Roger Waters has released an extended play (EP) record entitled *The Lockdown Sessions* that contains remakes of six popular tracks from his five decades of songwriting, studio recording and live performances.

Waters was a founding member and the primary creative force behind the internationally acclaimed rock music group Pink Floyd and, since leaving the band in 1985, has established a global following as a solo artist.

Released through multiple music streaming services on December 9, five of the recordings were made in Waters' home studio during the first year of the coronavirus pandemic. The black-and-white music videos shared on YouTube—dated between May 2020 and April 2021—show members of the band performing separately from one another and presumably also in their home studios.

Since the original 2020 start of his “This is Not a Drill” world tour was postponed by the COVID-19 crisis, Waters decided to record some of the tracks with the band that had previously been performed as encore numbers at the end of previous live shows.

In a brief statement about the EP, Waters explained that he had considered making a studio record of these encore songs. He said, “I started thinking, ‘It could make an interesting album, all those encores ... The Encores.’ Yeah, has a nice ring to it!” Waters said the pandemic brought everything to an abrupt halt on March 13, 2020, including for the moment the concept that would eventually become *The Lockdown Sessions*.

The tracks selected for the EP bring together some of Waters' most powerful antiwar creations. There is no doubt that the reinterpretations are recorded with an eye to contemporary events. At that time, there were ongoing illegal imperialist military operations—including drone assassination strikes and other secret killing campaigns by the US

government—in the Middle East and Africa, as well as a growing threat of nuclear world war between the US and either Russia or China.

The US-NATO instigated war against Russia in Ukraine that began in February 2022 certainly also played a role in the decision by Waters to release the EP, investing the themes with an even higher level of urgency.

Some of the songs are very close recreations of the originals, while others dramatically depart from the sounds, rhythms and keys of the music from three or four decades ago. The collaborating musicians on the record are the members of his touring band: Dave Kilminster and Jonathan Wilson on guitars, Joey Waronker on drums, Lucius-Jess Wolfe and Holly Laessig on backing vocals, Gus Seyffert on bass, Jon Carin on piano and keys, Bo Koster on Hammond and Ian Ritchie on sax.

The EP starts with “Mother” from the 1979 Pink Floyd album *The Wall*, which has the iconic opening line, “Mother, do you think they’ll drop the bomb?” The song transitions from a light vocal melody with acoustic guitar accompaniment—performed by Waters—into a heavier rock and roll anthem by the band, including a grinding electric guitar solo, and then back again.

The second and fourth tracks, “Two Suns in the Sunset” and “The Gunner’s Dream” are from the 1983 Pink Floyd album *The Final Cut*, one of the most powerful antiwar rock music albums ever produced. The first of these contemplates the end of the world with a sunset in the west while another fire ball is illuminating the sky in the east, as Waters sings, “Two suns in the sunset / Could be the human race is run.”

The second of these two numbers has Waters playing piano and telling the story of the thoughts of a World

War II airman gunner as he is falling to his death after having been shot down. Like Martin Luther King Jr., the gunner repeats “I had a dream, I had a dream,” and then he offers a vision of the possible future of society:

*A place to stay, enough to eat
Somewhere, old heroes shuffle safely down the street
Where you can speak out loud about your doubts and fears
And what’s more, no one ever disappears
You never hear their standard issue kicking in your door
You can relax on both sides of the tracks
And maniacs don’t blow holes in bandmen by remote control
And everyone has recourse to the law
And no one kills the children anymore
No one kills the children anymore*

Writing about the original recording on the 30th anniversary of *The Final Cut*’s release in 2013, Rachel Mann of *The Quietus* commented that “The Gunner’s Dream” was the “centrepiece of the album.” Mann observed that the track “tenderly imagines the lost hopes and expectations of a bomber gunner shot down and falling to his death over Berlin” and that “Waters’ voice is beautifully matched to words whose understatement adds to the power.” This “beautiful match” is even more pronounced on the new version.

The third track is “Vera” from *The Wall*, which is a reference to Vera Lynn, an English singer who was very popular during World War II, especially among the British soldiers, and who sang the legendary “We’ll Meet Again.” Waters asks, “Vera, Vera, what has become of you?” and then goes into the chorus—with Wolfe and Laessig singing along—to repeat, “Bring the boys back home,” and adding to the new version, “Don’t leave the children on their own, no, no.”

Waters wraps up the five tracks with “The Bravery of Being Out of Range” from his 1992 solo album *Amused to Death*. It addresses the use of laser guided missiles to launch strikes on the enemies of US imperialism “from 3,000 miles away.”

The music video begins with a portion of the farewell presidential speech by Ronald Reagan in January 1989. Waters says in the liner notes that the first verse of the song is about Reagan who “is still revered by many, even though he is a mass war criminal who, among his many other crimes, knowingly supported the genocide

of the Mayan people of Guatemala when he was president of the United States.”

Waters slows down the tempo and adds a new verse to the three-decade-old song:

*Thirty years later it’s the same old tune
No closer to peace than the man in the moon
The president’s still just as crazy as a loon
Still picking fights in some foreign saloon
Bombs still falling out of the sky
The band’s still playing Miss American Pie
The Gunner still sleeps in some foreign field
And the boys are still coming home on a shield
But nothing is real*

The last track is a remake of the hugely popular “Comfortably Numb” from *The Wall*. It was not recorded during the lockdowns, but in studios across North America during the world tour in 2022 and is intended as a warning about the catastrophic consequences of a world war with nuclear weapons.

As Waters explains in the notes included with the music video, “Before lockdown I had been working on a demo of a new version of ‘Comfortably Numb’ as an opener to our new show ‘This Is Not A Drill.’ I pitched it a whole step down, in A Minor, to make it darker and arranged it with no solos, except over the outro, where there is a heartrendingly beautiful vocal solo from one of our new sisters Shanay Johnson. It’s intended as a wakeup call, and a bridge towards a kinder future with more talking to strangers, either in ‘The Bar’ or just ‘Passing in the Street’ and less slaughter ‘In Some Foreign Field.’”

Longtime listeners and fans of Pink Floyd and Waters will welcome these new interpretations, and those who are just now becoming familiar with the important artist will have an opportunity to learn about his principled stance against imperialism and war. The second leg of Waters’ “This is Not a Drill” concert tour resumes in March with dates across Europe and the UK.



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