



## David Gilmour Does an 'About Face'

### With Floyd Void, a Full-fledged Solo Career Commences

by Parke Puterbaugh

First, there's the shoes—casual walking shoes colored a screaming rock & roll red. To that, add a pair of hideous green socks, adorned with eighth notes. Moving upward, basic blue jeans; a subdued, short-sleeve, cotton print shirt; and a face that beams a beatific smile. David Gilmour looks ridiculously content, almost as if there's some inner joke that's making him grin. It's hard to believe he was one of the architects behind *The Wall*, that unmitigated bray of postado-

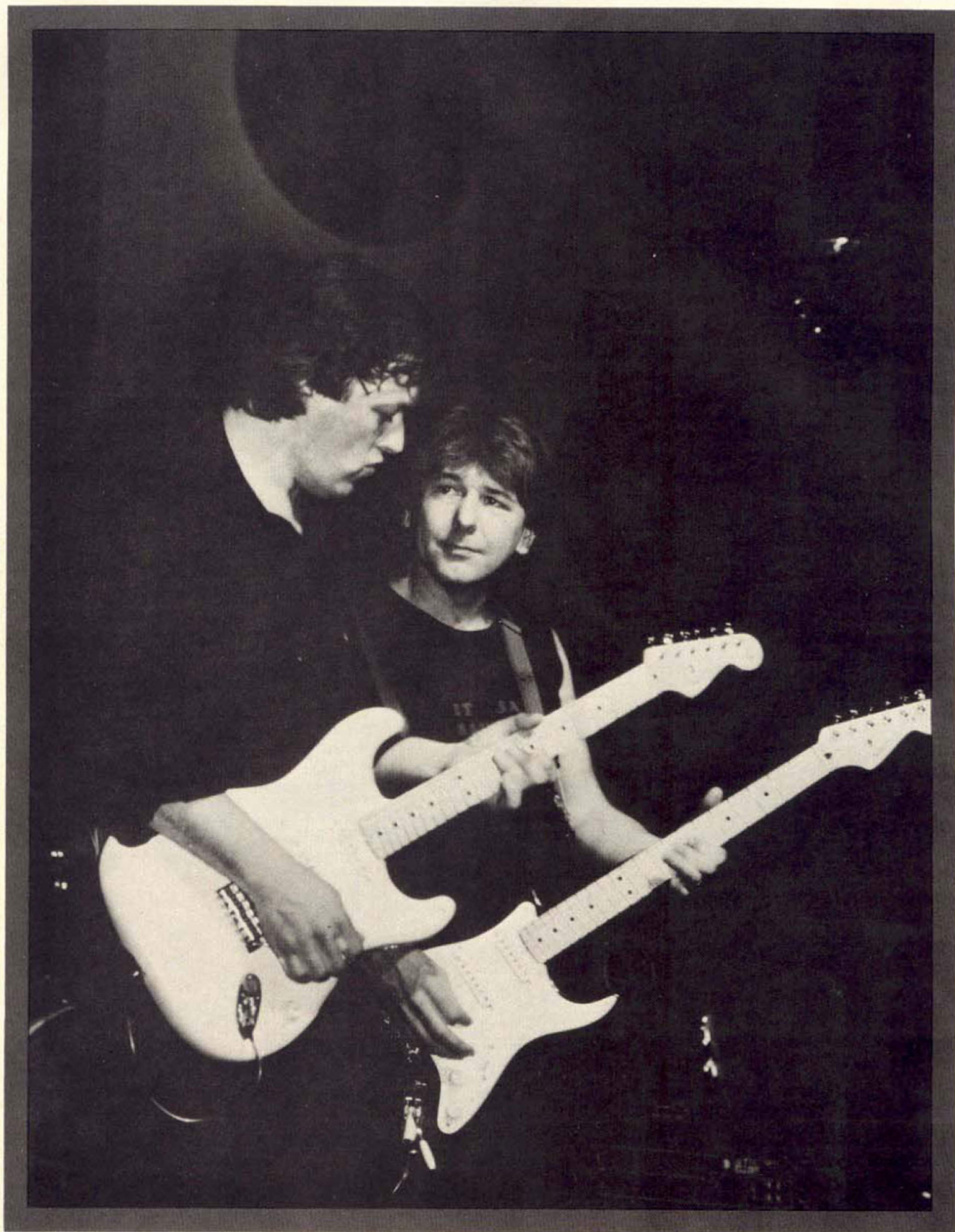
lescent aggrievement, or any of those other Orwellian howls of pain that Pink Floyd sent up in their florid middle age.

Lately, Gilmour would appear to be going through a second childhood. His hair is short and styled, making him look almost unrecognizably modern and years younger. More to the point, his solo career is starting to kick into gear. His new album, *About Face*, is surprising in its deft, unexpected pop touches and stylistic range, and it's selling. His U.S.

tour has gone so well it's been extended by several weeks. Possibly, he feels relief at not having to make records on the epic scale of Pink Floyd. Certainly, it's been left to leader Roger Waters to carry that weight—which he does, like a ball and chain, on his new album, the stupefyingly strange *The Pros and Cons of Hitch Hiking*.

Not that Gilmour has become a Moonie or anything. *About Face* does its share of dancing on the dark side, with songs about missiles





*Gilmour on stage with former Mott the Hoople/Bad Company guitarist Mick Ralphs. "He's a great rhythm guitar player," says Gilmour. "He covers all sorts of areas, and that takes a lot of weight off me."*

Photo by Ebet Roberts



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(“Cruise”), malice (“You Know I’m Right”) and murder (“Murder”). And “Near the End” contains some of the most cheerless lines this side of Leonard Cohen: “I’m feeling the cold/ Thinking we’re getting older and wiser/ When we’re just getting old.” Of that gloomy prognosis, Gilmour simply says, “One of my boring preoccupations is death and getting older and all that sort of stuff. I’m always feeling mortal. Terminally mortal.”

But, you see, he’s smiling. Therein lies the difference: his world-weariness is at least grounded in some sort of empathy for the human condition, not the nasty misanthropy toward which later Pink Floyd records had been inclining. On some level, there is a great deal of personal pain in Gilmour’s music; he is, scandalous as it may sound, basically a blues musician. His blues may come from outer space, and he may be more into the fine points of high-tech than, say, Stevie Ray Vaughan. But the piercing, sustained howl he gets from his guitar is like a cry of human anguish, and his solos are eloquently expressive.

The basic band for *About Face*, Gilmour’s second solo album, consisted of him on guitar and vocals, with Toto’s Jeff Porcaro (“my favorite rock & roll drummer”), bassist Pino Palladino and keyboardist Ian Kewley (the latter two from singer Paul Young’s band). There were cameos from loads of other players, including Steve Winwood, and Pete Townshend contributed lyrics to two tracks.

The sessions were a bit of a departure for Gilmour in that the basic tracks were cut live, with all four core musicians playing at the same time. Afterward, however, he overdubbed extensively. It’s a musician’s album, and Gilmour isn’t afraid to come right out and say so. “My intentions throughout this project were a bit, if you like, old-fashioned: real musicians who can actually play, playing real music, which is a little bit unfashionable these days. It’s coming back into fashion in England a bit, I’m glad to see.”

**G**ilmour is as demanding of his instruments as he is of his musicians. Recently, he tried out an entire warehouse of new Fender Stratocasters before finding a couple he liked enough to buy. “You would think these days with the sort of quality control they have that they’d be consistent,” he says, “but they’re very inconsistent. I played through a lot of guitars and picked the best two. And the best two are great!”

On the back of *About Face*, he’s pictured

with a vintage, battered Telecaster that’s dear to his heart. “I’ve had it about ten years. The damage that was done to it was done before my time,” he says, laughing. “I wrote ‘Run Like Hell’ on it. It’s one of those guitars that things come out of. It’s paid for itself.”

Gilmour’s personal collection of guitars numbers about 100. He’s left them all at

home (“They tend to get stolen or damaged on tour”), choosing to take those two brand-new stock Vintage series Strats he’d found at Fender’s London warehouse. For the tour, he assembled a talented, six-member band that includes some surprises: former Manfred Mann drummer Chris Slade; sax player/keyboardist Raphael Ravenscroft (best known

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## Classic Tracks

### Gilmour’s Gear

**D**avid Gilmour initially blanched at the idea of recalling the instruments he played on particular tracks, some of which are now more than 10 years old. “I have a hard job remembering,” he said, whistling through his teeth. “I never set things up quite the same.” As it turned out, he remembered quite well.

**“Money” (from *The Dark Side of the Moon*, 1973)**—“I think I was using a Stratocaster with a Hiwatt amplifier. There are several guitar tracks, and I’m certainly using a Fender Twin Reverb for some and a Hiwatt for some, and probably a Fuzzface fuzz-box and a Binson DDL unit-type tape-loop thing that I used all the time in those days. Just the usual sort of thing, before I had any proper pedalboards.”

**“Another Brick in the Wall (Part 2)” (from *The Wall*, 1979)**—“The rhythm guitar is probably a Strat or a Telly again. I know the solo was done on a 1959 Gibson gold-top with PAFs on the thing. We direct-injected it through the desk and onto the tape. But I didn’t think it was meaty enough, so I ran the sound off the tape out into the studio and back into an amplifier, then miked it and recorded it again and put the two together.”

**“A Saucerful of Secrets” (from *A Saucerful of Secrets*, 1968)**—“Back in those days, we used to cut a track a day. This one took two or three days. The sound in the beginning is actually two regular cymbals played with mallets, with the mike right on the edge of the cymbal. The guitar sound in

the second part—the sort of wild, screaming guitar—is actually a Telecaster being played with a mike-stand leg.”

**“One of These Days” (from *Meddle*, 1971)**—“That race-car sound is probably a Fender Telecaster through a fuzz-box of some kind, probably a Fuzzface and a DDL, tuned to an open minor chord and played with a slide. The basic track is a bass guitar going through a tape loop, and it’s both myself and Roger playing two basses live at the same time. I’d just gotten a new amplifier, an H.H. amp with built-in vibrato. I played the middle section on the bass through that amplifier, and we edited it onto the track afterward. The basic organ stabs are done twice: once forward and once backward, with cymbals that go backward and forward as well. At the end, that’s Nick Mason’s voice slowed down.”

**“Shine On You Crazy Diamond, Part One” (from *Wish You Were Here*, 1975)**—“Completely by accident, I started playing that in the rehearsal room, and it sounded nice—just four little notes. I thought, ‘There’s something here,’ but I didn’t know what it was. And Roger got it too. He said, ‘What’s that, what’s that?’ It certainly triggered him off into writing some of that. It used to sound great on stage, but the recording never quite worked. I couldn’t get it quite right; I don’t know why. That was a strange time, making this album. In a lot of ways, I prefer it to *The Dark Side of the Moon*.”





Photo by Ebet Roberts

Gilmour with one of his new stock Vintage series Strats. His guitar collection numbers about 100.

## Gilmour Band Equipment

David Gilmour plays two Vintage series Fender Stratocasters and a Washburn acoustic on stage. The guitars are run through a Boss computerized effects unit that includes an MXR digital delay and other plug-in effects. He has a Conn strobe tuner on stage throughout the whole show, as does everyone else in the band.

Mick Ralphs plays two Stratocasters, one old and one new, and an Ovation acoustic. He uses a Boss CE-1 chorus pedal with a custom-built pedal and a rack of effects.

Bassist Mickey Feat plays two Wals, one fretless and one fretted, a Cobra Music Man and a remodeled Fender Precision.

Keyboardist Greg Dechert plays a CP80 baby grand, a Korg CX-3 organ, a minimoog, a Juno 60, a Korg Poly-800 and a Prophet 5.

Drummer Chris Slade plays a Ludwig kit made up of two separate kits. There are four rack toms (12", 13", 13", 14"), a 16" floor tom, a 22" bass drum and one timbale. He has a 6½"-deep Ludwig Black Beauty snare and seven Paiste cymbals.

Raphael Ravenscroft plays Yamaha saxes through a pitch-to-voltage. On stage, he occasionally plays either a Yamaha DX7 or a Juno 60 keyboard.

Percussionist Jodi Linscott plays two congas and "a lot of toys."

for his classic sax obligato on Gerry Rafferty's "Baker Street"); and Mick Ralphs, former guitarist for Mott the Hoople and Bad Company.

The sight of the cherubic Ralphs, bopping merrily on rhythm at stage right, is especially welcome after his long absence. Gilmour and Ralphs are not, however, two guitarists you'd instantly think to team up. In fact, they met at a pub in their neighborhood. As for the logic behind their playing together, Gilmour explains: "He's a great guitar player. He covers all sorts of areas of rhythm guitar that lots of other people wouldn't do with his flair and panache, and that takes a lot of weight off me." One more thing: "The main reason for him being here is that he asked me if he could come, and I said yes."

Bad Company, one of the most popular rock bands of the '70s, had been dormant—dead, in fact—for a few years. So, for that matter, had Pink Floyd, and the popular assumption is that the Floyd have breathed their last.

Gilmour, however, refuses to nail the coffin shut on the band, though he doesn't project a reunion any time soon, either. And so he gives the answer he's given so many times before as to the fate of Pink Floyd: "I have no idea."

It was their prophetically titled LP *The Final Cut* that splintered the band into its present state of limbo. Work on that record commenced on the heels of their involvement in the movie version of *The Wall*. Floyd, without keyboardist Richard Wright, had gone into the studio believing that they were contractually obligated to cut a soundtrack album for the movie. When they learned there was no such obligation, they began straight away to make an album of all-new material. At this juncture, Gilmour and Waters started butting heads.

"I wanted to stop and take a month off to prepare demos because I didn't think we had enough material," says Gilmour. "Roger was unwilling to do that; he wanted to carry on straight into it. One way or another, we disagreed on things. Roger wanted to put tracks on it that we had rejected for *The Wall*. I still think the quality of those things wasn't good enough.

"Our production discussions and arguments became rather heated and counter-productive, and Roger just wanted to get on with making it. He didn't want me as a producer on it anymore, and I eventually agreed not to."

*The Final Cut*, then, really was Roger Waters's first solo record, though it bore the group's name. Gilmour rather bluntly dismisses it, saying, "I don't really like it as an

album." And a sly smile crosses his face when he admits he hasn't yet listened to Waters's *The Pros and Cons of Hitch Hiking*.

If this is indeed the end for Pink Floyd, then it will mean the dissolution of a band that's changed rock history. Pink Floyd's grandest milestone is 1973's *The Dark Side of the Moon*, which recently surpassed the 10-year mark on the *Billboard* charts. It is the longest-charting LP in pop-music history. "I listened to it a couple of weeks ago for the first time in years, and it still sounds pretty modern," Gilmour says proudly.

*Dark Side* did push the barriers of pop ahead a bit. Thereafter, barrier-pushing—in one form or another—almost became a Pink Floyd obsession. Their biggest gambit in the game of "Can we top this?" was the double album *The Wall* and its accompanying tour, which was so massive that it severely limited its mobility: It was only staged, for a week at a time, in New York, Los Angeles, London and Germany. According to Gilmour, there were 37 performances in all.

*The Wall* was not a rock concert, it was a grandiose rock-theater event, one that involved split-second cues, different and precise equalization for every song, astonishing visual projections, plus the marvel of the wall itself, which was erected as the band-members played, and which crumbled around them at show's end. "I had a whale of a time doing *The Wall* shows," Gilmour recalls.

The guitarist's solo tour is practically spartan, by contrast. But he enjoys it both ways, he says. "An outdoor stadium is a buzz because of the energy that's coming out of that amount of people. In some ways, for them it's not such great value for money, but I think they get something out of it."

Gilmour's solo tour has been booked into medium-size venues of 3,000 to 10,000 seats, "depending on how confident the promoters are," he says with a laugh. And although he was at first nervous and ill at ease in the role of frontman, he's loosened up considerably on stage and now insists he's "having a great time."

He's glad, too, to have complete artistic say over a record, for a change. But there's just enough of a qualification in his voice to suggest that the book isn't closed on Pink Floyd yet.

"It's very pleasant to work without having to argue to get your way, and end up not getting your way," says Gilmour. "But, you know, there's pros and cons... like in hitchhiking, I guess."

And he flashes that enigmatic grin one more time. □