

Reviews

Pink Floyd minus the inflatable pigs ●

Pop

David Gilmour

Royal Festival Hall, London

★★★★☆

Last week, it was reported David Gilmour had sold his London mansion, donating the £4m proceeds to the homeless charity Shelter. This news confirmed the suspicion that Gilmour is the nicest member of Pink Floyd. Of course, being the nicest member of Pink Floyd is a bit like being the most skilful football team in Antarctica — you're not exactly overburdened by competition.

Plenty of rock bands have been snooty and aloof, but only Pink Floyd built a wall between themselves and their fans. Their music made grand moral pronouncements: war is bad, greed is bad. The grandiose solemnity of their presentation suggested Pink Floyd thought they were the first people in history to work out these gleaming philosophical nuggets. Their success proved anything sounds profound if you dress it up with enough special effects.

In context, Gilmour's decision to perform two stripped-down, largely acoustic shows is startling. The term "stripped-down" is used relatively here: Gilmour performs with a backing band, a nine-piece choir and special guests including Floyd keyboardist Richard Wright. But there are no flashy lights, films or inflatable pigs hovering overhead.

By Floyd standards, it's a skiffle gig in a school hall. It's also more challenging and intriguing than anything Pink Floyd have done in decades. Gilmour performs Shine On You Crazy Diamond solo on acoustic guitar. Condensed, stripped of its self-consciously epic synthesized noodling, it is gently affecting in a way Pink Floyd never were: a sad smile rather than a furrowed brow.

Rendered in similarly stark fashion, Atom Heart Mother's Fat Old Sun is revealed as a fantastic song, rich with melody.

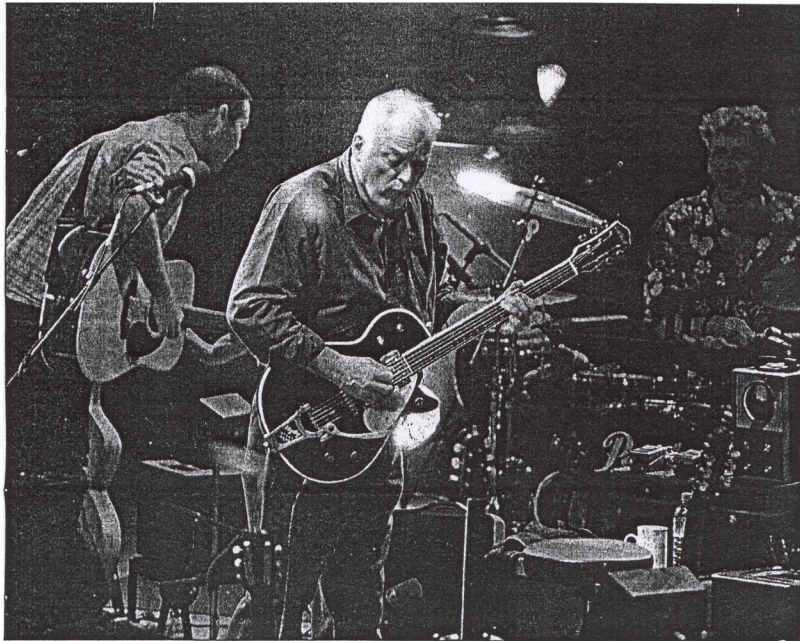
Guest Robert Wyatt, whose voice could make a Chinese takeaway menu sound heart-breakingly sad, works his magic on the torrid, scolding lyrics of Comfortably Numb. A version of Syd Barrett's idiosyncratic Dominance captures the song's curiously languid menace. A balding man with a paunch, more like an affable chartered surveyor than one of the richest rock stars in the world, Gilmour is self-effacing and charming — not adjectives usually associated with Pink Floyd.

He occasionally fluffs notes, to the delight of the many balding, paunchy men in the audience. They go as wild as the sodate environs permit. Every time Gilmour launches into a solo, lusty male voices shout "Gowaaaaaan Dave!" as if he's

about to beat the keeper at Old Trafford.

Roger Waters still carries the banner for Pink Floyd's pomposity. Adverts for his forthcoming London Arena dates modestly describe him as "Roger Waters, creative genius". Meanwhile, Gilmour's unpretentious live show has done something quite remarkable: uncovered a warmth and humanity in the music of rock's least lovable megastars.

Alexis Petridis



"Gowaaaaaan Dave!"... David Gilmour at the Royal Festival Hall. Photograph: Angela Lubrano