

Reinvented rock god shines on as 21st-century folk hero

John Bungey forgives David Gilmour his faults in an uneven show at Festival Hall

FOR fans of Pink Floyd a chance to see David Gilmour in the relatively intimate setting of the Festival Hall is a thrilling one.

This, after all, is the frontman whom many have only glimpsed as an ant-sized figure from row 2,001 at Wembley Arena, or separated by several acres of teeming humanity on the fields of Knebworth.

A blizzard of underpowered flashbulbs greets his appearance to sing a solo acoustic *Shine on You Crazy Dia-*

mond. During *Comfortably Numb* the audience applaud before he starts his celebrated guitar solo as well as afterwards. Gilmour beams happily. A solid figure in blue shirt and sensible slacks, he looks less like a rock god than some one who has wandered out of a DIY advertisement.

The guitarist is presenting the first of three shows on the South Bank in which the psychedelic grandeur of stadium Floyd has been reinvented as 21st-century folk. It's a semi-acoustic affair with cello,

string bass and a nine-strong choir. There are famous Floyd songs (*Wish You Were Here*, *Coming Back to Life*), a less famous Floyd song (*Fat Old Sun*) plus Syd Barrett's *Dominoes*.

One unlikely triumph is an aria from Bizet's *The Pearl Fishers*, *Je crois entendre encore*, in which Gilmour's tenor is buoyed to unexpected

heights by the cello of Caroline Dale. The choir's close harmonies are gorgeous. After *High Hopes*, Gilmour gets them to reprise their parts "without all this racket going on".

Other aspects of the show are less well-drilled. Richard Wright, the Floyd's keyboardist, appears to sing a track from his *Broken China* album (cue a further volley from the

amateur paparazzi) but he forgets the words and Gilmour takes over. When a sax solo fails to appear, Gilmour turns to see that Dick Parry has wandered off the stage. We laugh as they restart but at £45 for a good seat we're not here for an open rehearsal.

There are many moments of low-key beauty, but two thirds of the way through, the show drags a little. Without the traditional distractions of flying pigs and exploding light shows you appreciate just how many mid-tempo songs of a

vaguely melancholic air the Floyd wrote in four-four time. (Drumming with the band was rarely a high-octane gig, which is probably why Nick Mason took to racing cars.)

But then we get the sublime *Comfortably Numb*, with Robert Wyatt singing the verses, and an electric reprise of *Crazy Diamond*, and much is forgiven. The night closes gently with a lullaby, *Hush-abye Mountain*. So farewell David, see you again. But just make sure Richard learns his lines next time.