

“Any squabbles the band have had in the past are so petty in this context ... if re-forming for this concert will help focus attention, then it's got to be worthwhile”

Mark Honigsbaum

Unlike Bob Geldof, Bono or even Elton John — one of the few British rock millionaires with a fortune larger than his own — David Gilmour has never shouted about his contribution to charity.

On the contrary, the legendary Pink Floyd guitarist gives the impression that he would go to almost any lengths to avoid being in the public eye. Even when he sold his London home to Earl Spencer for £3.6m two years ago and handed the cash straight to Crisis, the charity for the homeless, the reticent Gilmour refused to make a fuss about it.

“I have a bugbear that there's a lot of conscience-salving [that] goes on with putting on charitable events as vanity projects,” he said at the time. “Why can't they just write out a cheque?”

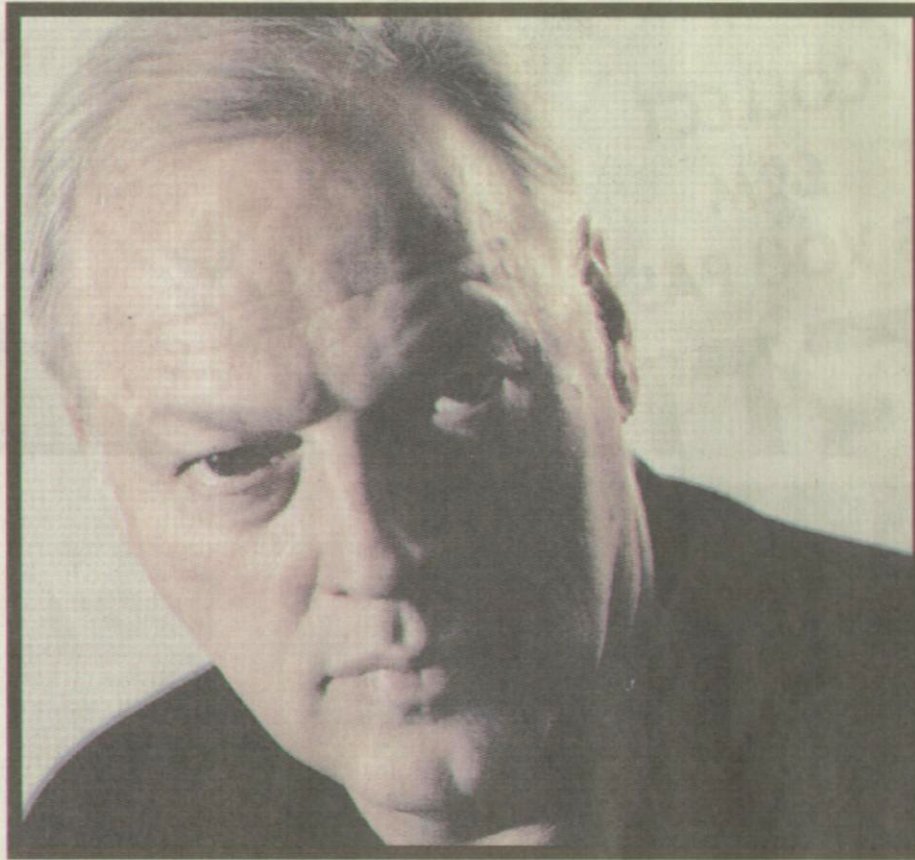
Given such sentiments, it is all the more surprising then that this week Gilmour agreed to set aside his long-standing feud with Roger Waters, Pink Floyd's bass player and the lyrical force behind *The Wall* and other bestselling albums, so that the band could reform to play Live 8, a gig considered by some critics to epitomise conscience-salving on an epic scale.

Gilmour and Waters have hardly spoken since Waters famously quit the band in 1983 in a row over songwriting credits and then sued his former colleagues for continuing to tour as Pink Floyd. Ever since, the four band members — Waters, Gilmour, drummer Nick Mason and keyboard player Rick Wright — have conducted business via lawyers and faxes, only meeting when it is absolutely necessary.

Indeed, diehard Floyd fans thought there was more chance of one of the band's inflatable pigs sprouting wings than of Gilmour and Waters ever burying the hatchet. That they have done so speaks volumes for Geldof's powers of persuasion, and possibly the importance of Live 8 to sales of the band's back catalogue (“The cynics will scoff,” acknowledged Waters on Tuesday. “Screw 'em!”)

But it also demonstrates what friends of Gilmour, presumably Geldof included, have long known: namely that for all that the 59-year-old rock millionaire doth protest, it doesn't take much to prick his conscience.

“He's passionate about the homeless, but you wouldn't know it to meet him,”



PHOTOGRAPH BY CAROLINA

The Guardian profile

David Gilmour

Pink Floyd's guitarist has a history of generous, understated philanthropy. Now the man who sold his £3.6m house to fund a project for the homeless has gone one further: ending a bitter 22-year feud to perform at Live 8

says Shaks Ghosh, the chief executive of Crisis. “He's a very modest and shy man.”

According to Ghosh, Gilmour had contributed to Crisis for years, making substantial donations without anyone in the organisation really registering who he was. Then Ghosh spotted an article naming Gilmour as the 465th richest person in Britain and wrote to tell him about Crisis's plans for an urban village, modelled on a scheme in New York, that aims to provide rooms for up to 400 homeless people and low-paid key workers in the heart of London.

“I didn't hear anything back from him at first,” says Ghosh. “Then the next thing I knew he had sold his house and was on the phone saying that he'd seen what was achieved in New York and that he wanted to help. I sometimes wonder if he really knows what he did.”

With characteristic self-deprecation, Gilmour — then worth about £60m (today it's closer to £75m) — played down his donation, pointing out that he still had four other properties, including a farmhouse in Sussex and a villa in Greece, and that he and his wife, the journalist and author Polly Samson, planned to by a smaller London mews house instead.

However, that was not the end of his involvement. Gilmour became a vice-president of Crisis, a capacity in which he has continued to quietly collect donations from his celebrity chums.

It is not the only cause to which Gilmour has quietly pledged himself. In 1991, he joined a protest outside the Israeli embassy on behalf of Mordechai Vanunu, the Israeli technician jailed for revealing nuclear secrets to the Sunday Times. Gilmour stood in a recreation of Vanunu's tiny cell and launched into a specially written song. But though Gilmour was soon a regular at Free Mordechai Vanunu events, campaign coordinator Ernest Rodker says that he was reluctant to become too involved.

“This is not by any means a criticism, but he was reticent,” says Rodker. “Having said that, he was always very willing to do what we asked and never played the star.”

Gilmour's caution may partly be a reflection of his natural temperament and partly a result of the world-weariness which comes with international acclaim. One in four British households is said to own a copy of the Floyd's 1973 masterpiece *The Dark Side of the Moon*. Indeed, one reason Geldof worked so hard to

persuade the band to re-form is that he needed a big TV audience for Live 8 in the US, where *Dark Side* spent a record 1,300 weeks on the charts.

But for all that Gilmour is now feted, he only made it into Pink Floyd as a replacement for its founder, Syd Barrett, his friend who was forced out of the band after one acid trip to many.

Gilmour got to know Barrett when they were students at Cambridge College of Arts and Technology in the early 1960s. But when Barrett moved to London, Gilmour stayed behind. In 1967, Barrett invited Gilmour to London to see Floyd record their second single, *See Emily Play*. The following year, with Barrett's health deteriorating, Mason invited Gilmour to replace him.

In a 1994 interview, Gilmour admitted: “I feel a debt to Syd ... His bad luck was good luck for me. Of course, one can not possibly know what would have happened. Luckily, I don't have to ponder that too deeply.”

But according to Mark Paytress of *Mojo* magazine, ponder it he does. Paytress has twice interviewed Gilmour at the farmhouse he shares with Samson and their eight children and on both occasions has been struck by how

Life in short

Born March 6, 1946

Education Perse school for boys; Cambridge College of Arts & Technology

Career guitarist, musician and singer with Pink Floyd since 1968. Albums with the band include: *A Saucerful Of Secrets* (1968); *Ummagumma* (1969); *Atom Heart Mother* (1970); *Zabriskie Point* (film soundtrack, 1971); *Meddle* (1971); *Relics* (1971); *The Dark Side of the Moon* (1973); *Wish You Were Here* (1975); *Animals* (1977); *The Wall* (1979); *The Final Cut* (1983); *A Momentary Lapse of Reason* (1987); *The Division Bell* (1994); *Pulse* (1995). Solo albums: *David Gilmour* (1978); *About Face* (1984)

Gilmour on feuding with Roger Waters “I'm not very good at holding grudges for very long, but he's done some terrible things”

On Live 8 “Any squabbles Roger and the band have had in the past are so petty in this context ... and to be given the opportunity to put the band back together, even if it's only for a few numbers, is a big bonus”

eager Gilmour has been to talk about Barrett. “He's a great evangelist for Barrett, bearing in mind that some fans have never forgiven him for replacing him,” he says. According to Paytress, Gilmour also makes sure Barrett still gets regular royalty cheques.

Although Gilmour has subsequently proved his songwriting ability many times over, he never quite escaped the label of being the fifth member of Floyd. And when his differences with Waters became public, after the band's success with 1979's *The Wall*, Gilmour found the media spotlight unsettling.

The group's differences revolved around Waters' insistence that he was Floyd's creative force and Gilmour's equally stony insistence that he was the superior musician. The dispute ended very badly. Waters called Floyd's first album without him “a despicable forgery”. Gilmour responded that Waters was “extremely arrogant”.

The Guardian's rock critic, Alexis Petridis, describes it as a “very English feud”. When he interviewed Gilmour in 2002, the guitarist studiously avoided saying anything that could be interpreted as controversial. Once the tape-recorder was switched off, however, the vitriol emerged. “When he lets the mask of English politesse slip, you can see there's a cold, quiet acrimony there,” says Petridis.

After the split, instead of “hanging on in quiet desperation”, as Waters put it in the lyrics to *Time*, Gilmour got on with his life. He released a solo album and played alongside Bryan Ferry at 1985's *Live Aid* — the only member of the Floyd to appear.

But the event which really transformed his life was his marriage to Samson. They met before the release of *Division Bell* in 1994, and she has been at his side ever since. Not only did she help him with the lyrics to that album, but she has helped develop his social conscience. Significantly, it was Samson who argued that their London home was a “bloody great mausoleum” and encouraged Gilmour to sell it and give away the money.

But not even she could have healed the rift with Waters. It took Geldof, playing *Cupid*, to do that.

“Any squabbles Roger and the band have had in the past are so petty in this context,” he said earlier this week. “If re-forming for this concert will help focus attention, then it's got to be worthwhile.”