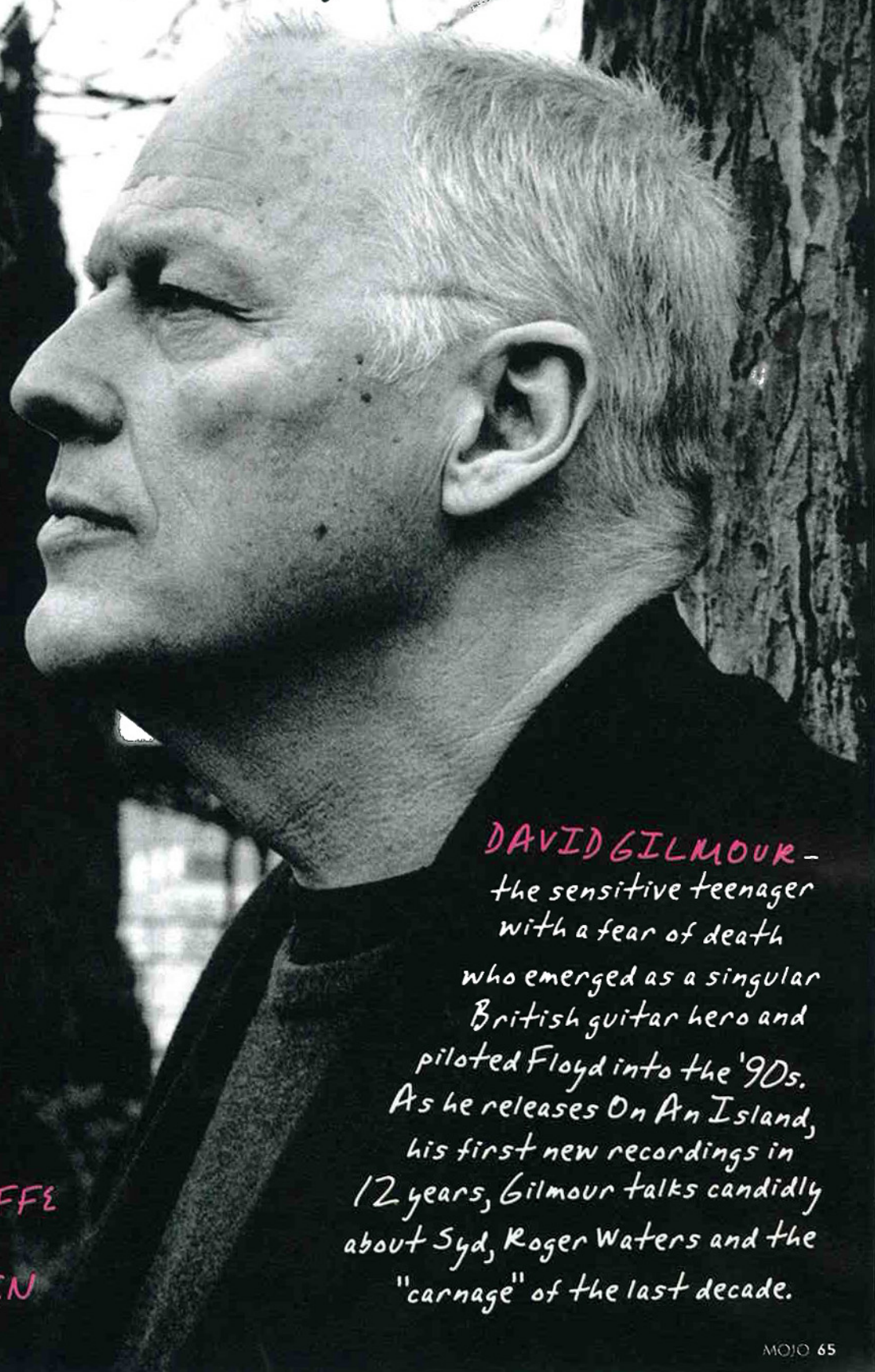


And This Is Me...

PINK FLOYD - psychedelic adventurers who lost their leader to LSD only to emerge reborn as an inscrutable '70s rock monolith split asunder by warring egos...



DAVID GILMOUR - the sensitive teenager with a fear of death who emerged as a singular British guitar hero and piloted Floyd into the '90s. As he releases *On An Island*, his first new recordings in 12 years, Gilmour talks candidly about Syd, Roger Waters and the "carnage" of the last decade.

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"Mortality has been on my mind since



TRINGS SHIMMER, A BOWED DOUBLE-bass growls, a saxophone sighs. Heads bowed before the sound desk, David Gilmour and his two engineers listen. Again and again and again. Red Sky At Night, a short instrumental from his just completed solo album, *On An Island*, is his recording debut on sax and the bloke who does the mastering reckons there's something off about it. Not Gilmour, perish the thought, it's the orchestra that's flat, he says. They run it again...

"I can't hear anything wrong," Gilmour decides. "Time to print the fucker."

He turns and joins MOJO on an upholstered bench at the rear of the control room, which is also the stern of the good ship Astoria, the Thames houseboat studio that Gilmour has owned for 20 years. Although it's never moved since impresario Fred Karno bought it in 1908, it's a handsome vessel, sumptuous with dark wood panelling and panoramic views of the river.

Apart from when the speakers thunder, it's quiet, it's decorous and as well-mannered as its proprietor. Nothing to proclaim the enormity of Pink Floyd – massive artistic weight and overreaching aspiration matched, remarkably, by huge commercial success almost everywhere for four decades. Nothing to reflect the fierce, often emotionally savage sundering with which the band members tormented themselves for the last 20 years until last summer's reunion at Live 8 which saw David and sparring partner Roger Waters on the same stage together with Nick Mason and Richard Wright for the first time since their final performance of *The Wall* on June 17, 1981 at Earl's Court.

David Gilmour (guitar, vocals) grins at MOJO. MOJO (tape recorder, questions) grins back. Halfway through a five-hour interview in two locations and still, off-duty, English awkwardness and restraint prevails. On both sides. It's not that Gilmour's manner is forbidding. Far from it. Small talk is not easy. Interviewing is rather easier. Gilmour appears focused and, during our conversation, his commitment to doing the best he can proves remarkable – almost touching from a man of such innate public reticence that, in another MOJO interview 11 years ago he told me, "It's not that I don't want to talk. Maybe I'm not that verbal. My best form of expression is playing the guitar and singing."

TODAY GILMOUR LOOKS PLAIN-TO-SLOPPY IN JEANS and sweater, appearing fit and well. While his face has settled into sculpted middle-age – he's 60 on March 6, the date of the album's release – his receding grey hair conducts a last-ditch youth rebellion, sticking out at unkempt angles in punkish tufts. He leans well forward, deliberate concentration combating a natural reserve. Then, his accent lightly posh, his speech full of those diffident hesitations patented by the royal males, he starts to explain 12 years of silence since the Pink Floyd Division Bell tour ended in 1994. His absence, it transpires, is primarily down to domestic bliss; his second marriage, to fiction writer Polly Samson, and, in short order, four children adding to the four he had with his first wife, Ginger. So Gilmour has been parenting young children for 30 years (his youngest, and mobile phone screensaver, Romany, is not yet four). "The first time around I was an ambitious rock musician," he says. "The

consequence is you're often not there. I vowed that wasn't going to happen again."

Willingly, he took to early rising and the school-run routine. He picked up the saxophone, which he'd long fancied, to competitively encourage his son Charlie, now 16. Together they went to a village hall near his Sussex home to pass their Grade 4s before an examiner who had no idea who Gilmour was, or at least never let on.

And he got out more too – into the countryside. Becoming part of the scenery so that deer, kingfishers and herons ignored him and paraded for his pleasure. "A bit of me feels like an old... you know," he says, with a nod to his former hippyish self. He exercised his proclivity for "chainsaw carpentry" by building a treehouse and a boat-house beside the lake he owns. Yet music

still did have a kind of amiably visceral hold on him: "Sometimes I'd lie awake at night with a tune going round in my head and somehow your brain knows that if you go to sleep you'll forget it so it won't let you go to sleep until you get up and pop it onto a tape machine."

It was Robert Wyatt who first got him going again, with an invitation to play Meltdown at the Royal Festival Hall, London, in 2001. Gilmour got a top band of friends together for it, then much the same combo played a few gigs the following year with guest turns by Kate Bush and Bob Geldof. Finally, he decided to take a serious look at the mini-discs he'd been storing ideas on throughout his years of domestic retreat. He found he had starting points for 150 songs. He didn't know where to begin. In May, 2004, he called in his neighbour, Roxy Music guitarist Phil Manzanera, to lend a hand – just "on Mondays in term-time" at first. By last spring he was still dithering, in his wife's opinion: "She thought I'd go on waffling about it forever. She said, 'You've got to decide on 10 or 12 songs and finish them.'"

So he did. With help from the missus, making *On An Island* a remarkably personal statement from one of the few rock stars who doesn't just do 'Look at me!' As we are about to find out...

Let's start with the songwriting on the new album. Your wife Polly has written or co-written most of the lyrics...

This is the new partnership. Newish. She wrote some words for *The Division Bell*. She's so much better at expressing things than I am. What she wants to do is write something that's relevant for me... whereas, erm, I don't think that was really the case with Roger [Waters]. So this is more me than it would ever have been with Roger.

You couldn't have got more personal than a song like This Heaven, where you're singing, "When we walk these fields/And I reach out and touch your face/This heaven is enough for me". Did you think twice about admitting such contentment in a song?

Um, you know, that is my life. Down the years, along with everyone else, I have despised songs about happiness. But, to me, this works. There's emotional depth within an essential feeling of contentment.

And yet this album is also full of intimations of mortality.

There's a few scattered around. It's always been there in my songs.

The booklet illustration for the last track, Where We Start, has you and Polly walking into the sunset, and the first two, Castellorizon and On An Island, are reflections on good times with friends who have since died, namely orchestrator Michael Kamen and Tony Howard (who worked in agency and management for Pink Floyd for 30 years).

Yes, well Tony was older than me and Michael was in his middle fifties... It's been carnage the last 10 years for me. My sister died. My mother died a couple of years ago. An awful lot of friends and family have... popped their clogs. It's affected me and Polly deeply. One of the songs, The Blue, with Polly's lyrics, is a sort of dust to dust, ashes to ashes. Only it's not dust, it's the sea, it's merging with the sea. We'll all end up there one day, some of us much quicker than others, and it's as real and valid a possible conclusion as... I don't want to go there really.