

## David Gilmour

On an Island

★★★★☆



(EMI) £12.99

In the 40 years since Pink Floyd burst on to the London scene, initially as part of a vibrant underground that included folk, jazz and experimental musicians, its members and ex-members have released solo albums. These have ranged from Syd Barrett's psychedelic songwriting to Roger Waters' misanthropic wails, via Nick Mason's odd, but musically interesting Fictitious Sports, basically Carla Bley's 1970s band with a different drummer. On an Island is Gilmour's third album, and the first since About Face, released in 1984, a time before blogs and MP3s.

Gilmour has long been the "acceptable face of Floyd", the nice bloke who sold his house and gave the proceeds to the homeless; who gave Kate Bush her big break; whose guitar solo is the only bright spot in the turgid misery of Another Brick in the Wall. As you might expect, On an Island is full of such potentially iconic solos, pitted against chugging strings for Take a Breath, making a dramatic late entry over the atmospheric of Pocketful of Stone.

Tempos are slow; the mood is relaxed; all the sounds are spacious and beautifully recorded (by engineer Andy Jackson); drums have that puddingy, "Ringo" feel, courtesy of veteran Sly

Stone/Pink Floyd drummer Andy Newmark. Gilmour doesn't want us to dance to the music; this is a warm sonic bath for ordinary Daves and their wives, from Krakow to Sao Paulo, to nod and smile to while sipping wine in candlelit rooms. Despite their hippie roots, Floyd have always had the common touch.

The title track sums up both the album's appeal and its limitations: a slow, anthemic waltz with modest lead vocals, sweetly sung harmonies (courtesy of David Crosby and Graham Nash), lashings of overdubbed guitars, sweeping orchestrations and a big solo at the end. Other star guests include Robert Wyatt (cornet) and steel guitarist BJ Cole. Gilmour even plays saxophone



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for Red Sky At Night – not a delight. (Hire Andy Sheppard next time.)

Those of us who thought Polish film composer Zbigniew Preisner might bring a darker, more European edge with his orchestral arrangements might feel a little disappointed: On an Island's sound remains on-message and utterly English. Preisner's influence is most telling on Pocketful of Stone, which also features regular Preisner collaborator Leszek Mozdzier on piano, and Alasdair Malloy on eerie glass harmonica.

This Heaven is possibly the best track, an atypical, slow loping triple-time groove driven by a prominent acoustic guitar riff and Georgie Fame's tasty Hammond. Gilmour sings with husky urgency over Newmark's clattering beats; like Clapton, he's come to terms with being the front man, but you feel he can't wait to stop singing and let rip with another guitar solo.

**John L Walters**

\* *Download: On an Island; This Heaven; Pocketful of Stone*