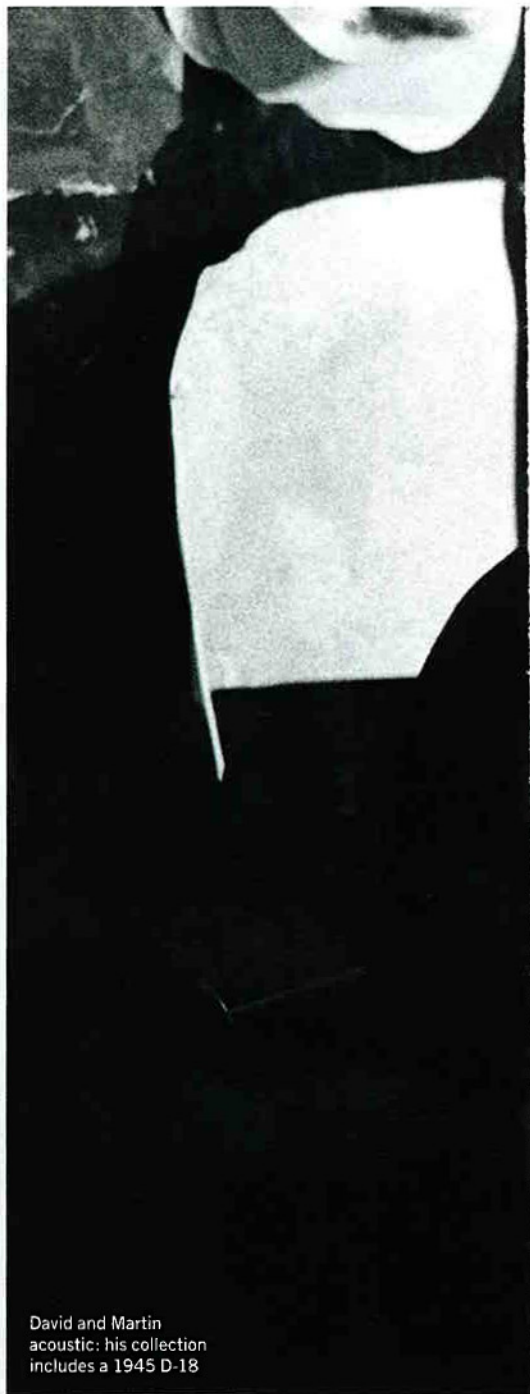


Gilmour with his black Fender Strat used for "Comfortably Numb"



David and Martin acoustic: his collection includes a 1945 D-18

Passing through an ancient vaulted tunnel, the visitor to Astoria emerges into an impeccably kept garden that slopes gently downward to the Thames. David Gilmour's houseboat studio rides at anchor by the river bank, just beyond a leafy grove of bamboo and willows. The boat, too, is named Astoria. It's not a large craft; there's barely space for a well-stocked control room, dominated by a huge Neve mixing console, and a small elegant parlour that doubles as a tracking room. A narrow passageway panelled in dark wood connects the two spaces, also giving access to a few tiny side chambers along the way. The boat was built in 1912 by English showbiz entrepreneur Fred Karno. "He was the guy who discovered Charlie Chaplin and Stan Laurel," Gilmour explains. "He wanted to have his own private home place, knocking shop, whatever... It was never built to sail. It's strictly a houseboat. If you want to move it, you get a tug and tow it. My idea was to make it as good in here as we can reasonably get it, soundwise, without fucking with the space too much."

This boat is where Gilmour recorded much of Pink Floyd's final two albums, *A Momentary Lapse Of Reason* (1987) and *The Division Bell* (1994), and it was also the main site of sessions for Gilmour's new solo album, *On An Island*. The record is very much a reflection of the place where it was made – serene, unhurried. Gauzy layers of shimmering sound unfold at a stately pace, providing a lavish backdrop for Gilmour's soaring guitar and that ethereally expressive vocal style well-known and loved from Pink Floyd's catalogue of classics. There are occasional excursions into the blues and other slightly rougher terrains, but mostly this is a record for gazing peacefully at the river. "I was just letting it all flow out as naturally as I can," reflects Gilmour. "There are quite a lot of those melancholy major seventh chords and 3/4 waltz tempos. That must be the mood I'm in."

TO SEE WHERE *On An Island* was made to understand why Gilmour had to be almost forcibly pried from the studio to take part in Floyd's reunion at Live8 last summer. Nobody thought David Gilmour would ever get on a stage again

with Roger Waters after the pair's many quarrels. They did just that, however. Waters has since made noises about rejoining the band but Gilmour isn't interested. The guitarist seems quite content just being David Gilmour and has nothing left to prove. He's a household name among the classic rock crowd, and for a lot of younger guitar fans he's the only seventies guitarist that matters. For many he's the missing link between Hendrix and Van Halen...

"I'm thrilled if that's the case," he laughs. "It's taken me a long time to achieve that. I didn't start figuring in guitar playing polls for a lot of years. I think one thing about the fingers and the brain that I have been given is that the fingers make a distinctive sound. The fingers aren't very fast, but I think I am instantly recognisable. I can hear myself and just know that it's me. And other people do too. The way I play melodies is connected to things like Hank Marvin and The Shadows – that style of guitar playing where people can recognise a melody with some beef to it."

On An Island is only Gilmour's third solo album. The prior two were recorded during troubled



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“ALL MY GUITAR PLAYING IS ROOTED IN THE BLUES. THE SOLO AT THE END OF ON AN ISLAND IS STEEPED IN BLUES INFLUENCE TOO”

periods in Pink Floyd's career; David Gilmour (1978) was a way of blowing off steam after the difficult recording of *Animals*, and *About Face* (1984) was a full scale effort on Gilmour's part to launch himself as a star in his own right after Waters left Pink Floyd and the band all but fell apart following the release of *The Final Cut*. *On An Island* comes from a very different place. Life is good for David Gilmour right now...

WHAT MOTIVATES YOU these days? Your place in rock history is assured, you're very comfortably off. What drives you to make an album?

"That's what I do. I'm a musician. I make music. It's in my blood. The difference is that these days I'm not driven to do it all the time. Honestly, music isn't my first priority any more. My family is. Now, I could see where someone could think that, when

a person says music isn't his first priority any more, the quality of the music might therefore suffer. But once I get going I do get rather perfectionist. And I think that the work I'm doing now is as good as anything I've ever done. I think *On An Island* is a really good album. I'm very proud of it."

WAS YOUR NEW album a bigger priority for you than doing *Live8*? You declined initially...

"I did, yes. And I declined because I was in the middle of making this album. Also I thought – correctly as it turned out – that it would open a can of worms: Pink Floyd reformation stories. I selfishly didn't want to be inconvenienced by all the things I knew this would throw up. So Bob Geldof tried quite hard to persuade me. It's not that I didn't support what he was trying to do. I just thought he'd do just as well without us. But

then Bob got Roger involved and he persuaded Roger to call me and ask me."

WAS IT SURPRISING when Roger called?

"Yes, very. And after Roger called I thought about it; I really probably would kick myself afterwards if I didn't do *Live8*. There were many good reasons for doing it. The proper, and best, reason was what the event hopefully did achieve. And it put some of the bad blood between Roger and myself behind us."

HOW MUCH REHEARSAL went into *Live8*?

"We did three days of rehearsing together. But I did over two weeks on my own. I made a CD of the set and had it at my home studio. I'd blast it out through speakers, play guitar and sing along to it three or four times a day every day for a good couple of weeks. I wanted to be very 'on it' →

→ I knew it would be a nerve-racking experience and I wanted to be able to do it like falling off a log. I didn't want to be nervous and tense about not being 100 per cent certain that I knew exactly what I was doing every second."

WHEN YOU DID the first guitar solo in Money at Live8, it was pretty much a note-for-note duplication of the solo on the album. Do you feel you owe it to the people to give them a signature solo like that note-for-note? How does that balance against spontaneity?

"Well I think it is a balance. When I go to hear other bands and they launch into a big pop hit of theirs, if the guitar player goes off in a completely different direction I'm pissed off, frankly. I'm

thinking; that ain't the way it is, that's not how it's supposed to go! And so my tendency is to start off pretty much like the record and then see how I'm feeling. If I move off it and it feels good, inspired and original, then I'll stay off the beaten track. But sometimes I realise I'm off the beaten track but it's just dull. Then I'll go back into the safety net of pretty much the original solo because I know that will turn a lot of people on more. So yeah, it is a balance."

CAN YOU ALWAYS get back to the recorded version, though?

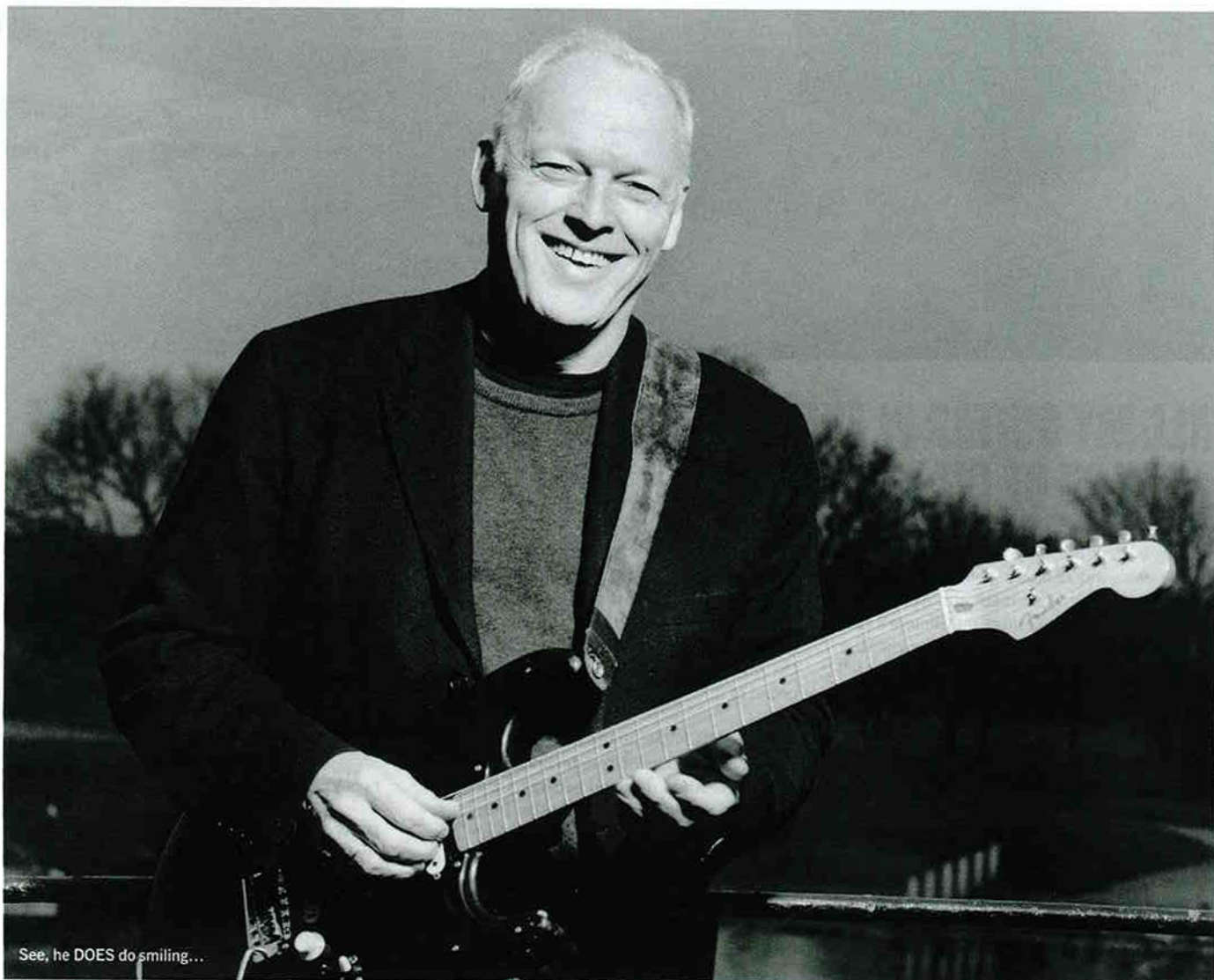
"I can't always. But in the beginning of the end solo of Comfortably Numb, there's that note on the seventh fret of the G string – a big harmonic.

I always try to start that solo with that sound and play that first line. It seems daft not to."

WHICH OF YOUR many Strats is that black one you played at Live8?

"I've been using that one since about 1970, it's the one on Comfortably Numb. I bought it at Manny's in New York. I've always used it as a testing ground for trying all sorts of things out. It's had a few different necks on; the original had that bullet [neckplate] and a larger headstock. And it has different pickups. Years ago, I met up with Seymour Duncan and we picked three really nice sounding pickups he had. We rewound those three and they've stayed on it ever since. But I've always considered that to be my bodge-up guitar →

"VERY OFTEN THE FIRST TAKE IS THE BEST TAKE – EXCEPT WHEN YOU TRY TO PLAN IT THAT WAY. THEN YOU'RE STILL STRUGGLING WITH THE SAME DAMN SOLO THREE DAYS LATER"



See, he DOES do smiling...