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DAVID GILMOUR

Pink Floyd's commander-in-chief on the blues, guitar solos and remaining Comfortably Numb



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AFTER A PERIOD OF SOLO WORK THAT'S BROUGHT HIM RIGHT BACK INTO THE SPOTLIGHT, DAVID GILMOUR REFLECTS ON GUITAR SOLOS, MUSICAL INFLUENCES AND THE PRICE OF FAME. PLUS: EXCLUSIVE EXCERPTS FROM PINK FLOYD KEYBOARD PLAYER RICK WRIGHT'S LAST-EVER INTERVIEW



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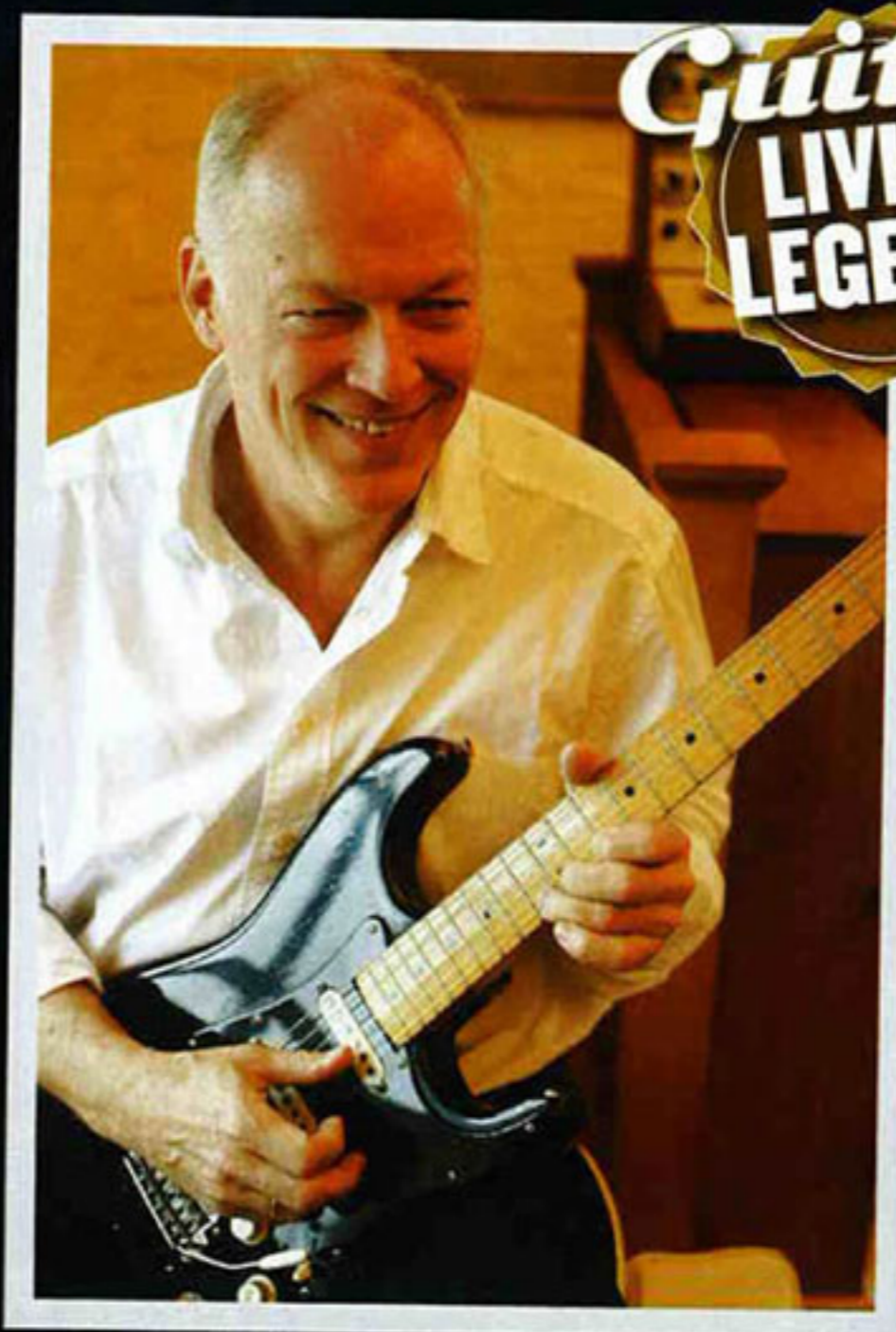
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MAN ON AN ISLAND

AFTER A FLURRY OF ACTIVITY – A WELL-RECEIVED SOLO LP, A STUNNING SERIES OF CONCERTS, THE LIVE AT GDANSK AND REMEMBER THAT NIGHT DVDS – DAVID GILMOUR TAKES STOCK OF FOUR YEARS OF WORK. INTERVIEW: EDWIN AMMERLAAN/IFA

A true legend he may be, but Pink Floyd guitarist David Gilmour is a modest, quiet Englishman who's rarely in the mood for the kind of navel-gazing required when the press come a-calling. Past glories mean little to him: this is one musician who prefers to stand behind his black Stratocaster and let his music do the talking. ➤

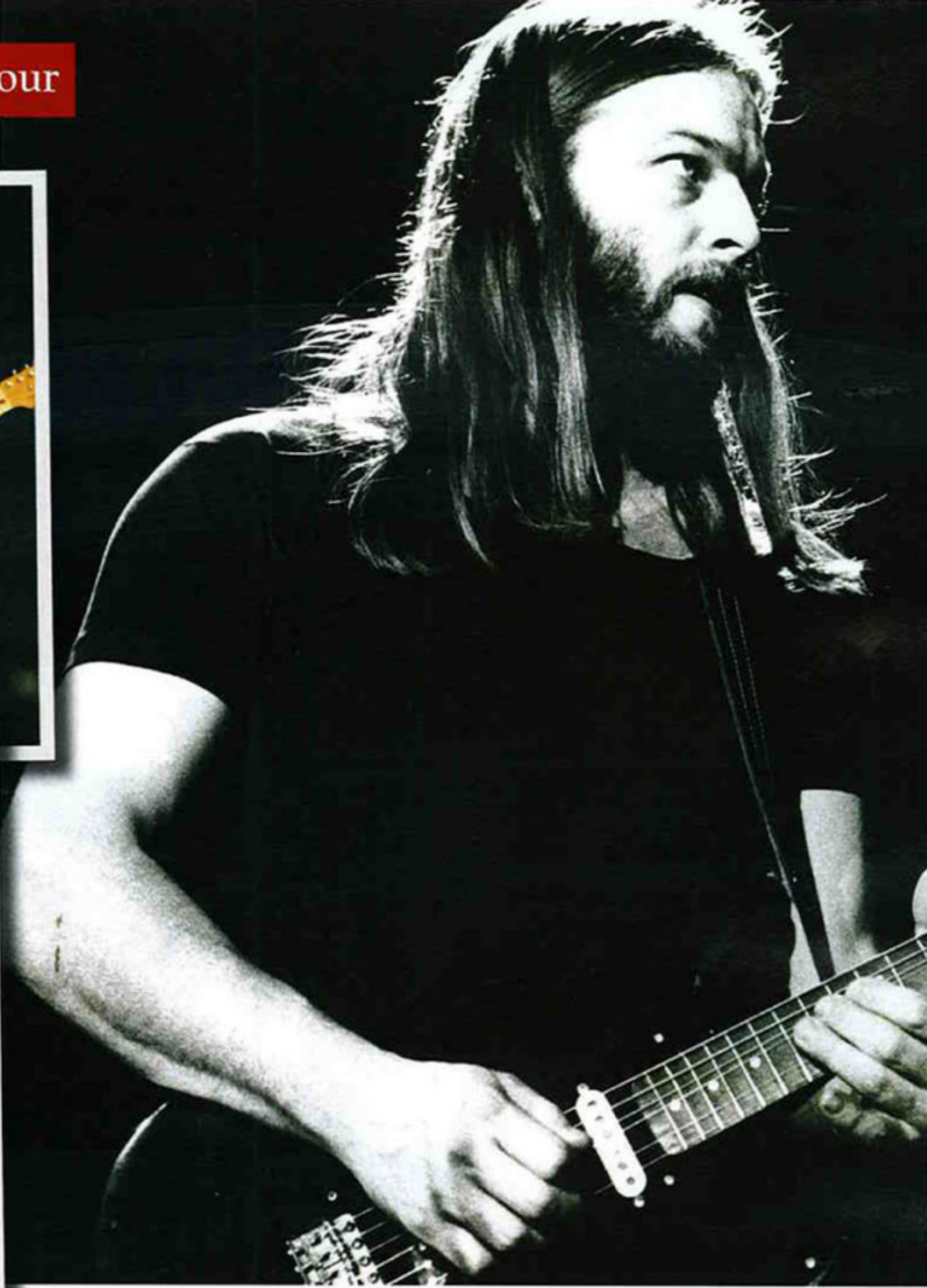
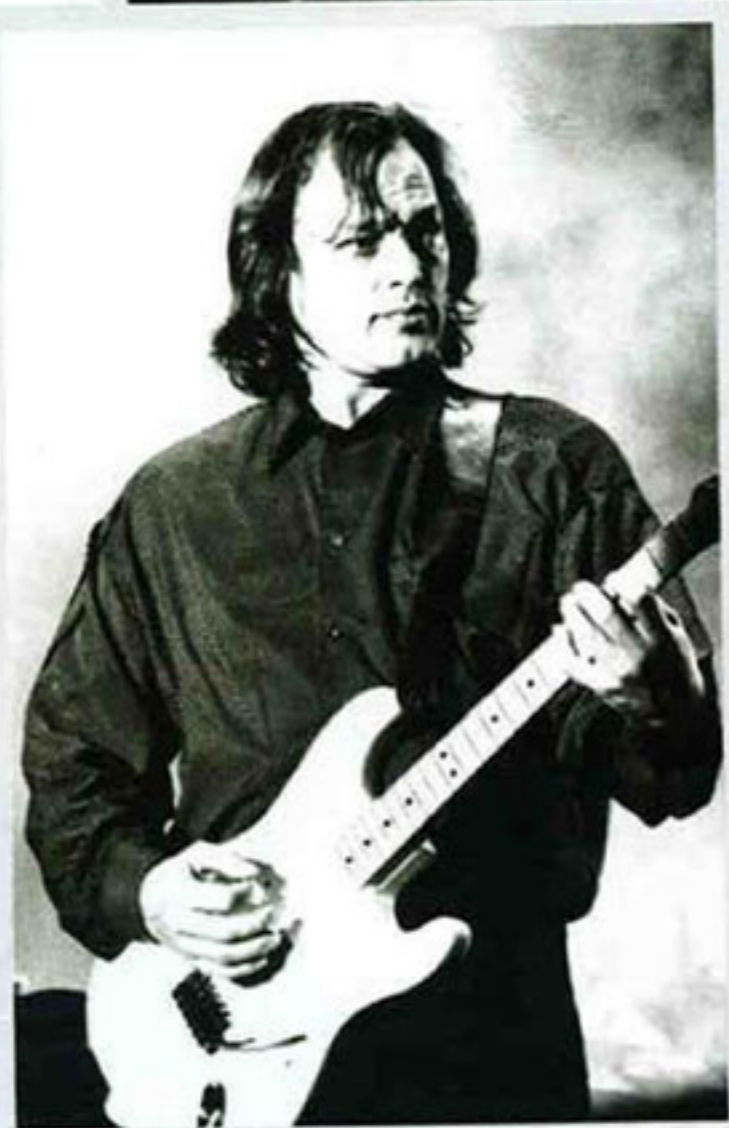
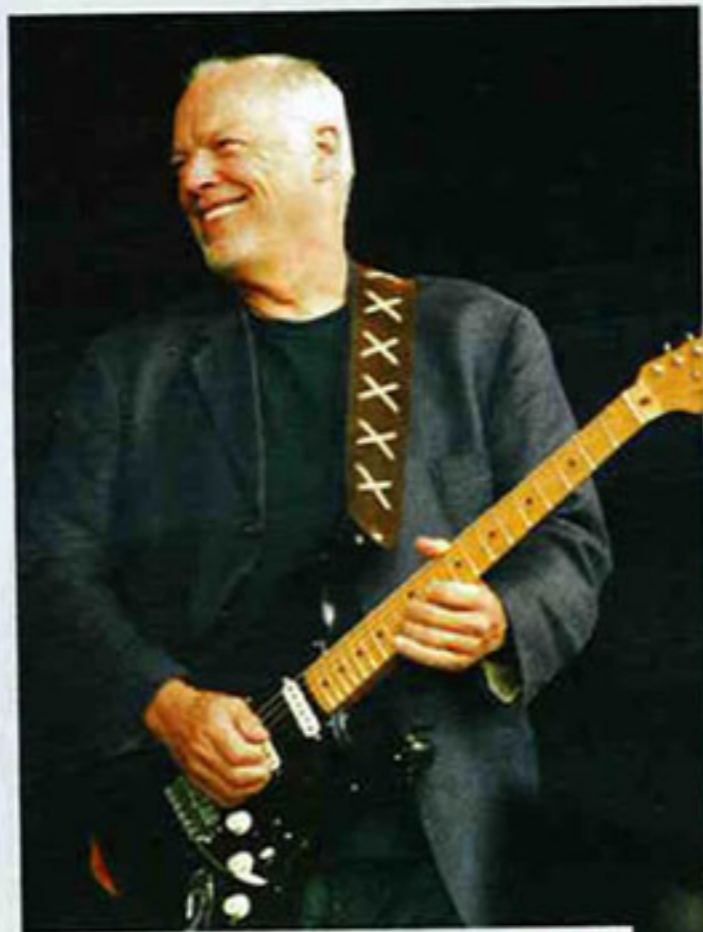


Guitar
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*'I have moments when I think
"That's brilliant!" I wish I
could make a record where every
single moment did that to me'*

Photo: Polly Samson



'I wasn't trying to make a political message. My personal message comes out best when I'm playing my guitar and singing'

Our interview took place a short while before Pink Floyd keyboard player Rick Wright's sad passing (see *Wright Man For The Job* sidebar). Even before this, however, the odds were heavily against a Pink Floyd reunion. Their Live 8 appearance in 2005, complete with Roger Waters, fuelled much hope, and rumours flew about the stupendous sums of money supposedly being offered to the band to tour. However, Gilmour has always been lukewarm at best regarding the whole idea of waltzing down memory lane - although in June 2008 he did make a glorious contribution to an *Atom Heart Mother* spectacular that included a complete rendition of the album (despite the fact that he once described parts of the 1970 album as 'absolute crap').

Gilmour's main focus for the past few years has been his solo work, including the chart-topping album *On An Island*, as well as the recently released *Live In Gdansk*, documenting the last concert of the *On An Island* tour, backed by the Polish Baltic Philharmonic Orchestra. As

well as being a Gilmour tour de force, the show at the shipyard celebrated Poland's 1980 Solidarity political revolution (the DVD also features a meeting between Gilmour and Solidarity union leader Lech Walesa). And it's the subject of that Gdansk concert that kicks off proceedings as, with a fine cup of tea within reach, Gilmour gets himself comfortable aboard his Astoria houseboat/recording studio moored on a tranquil stretch of the River Thames.

Right at the beginning of the *Live In Gdansk* documentary you say: 'This is the memorial to the 16 men who were shot', and then... nothing. How did you find a balance between the political and the personal?

I wasn't really trying to make a political message of out any of this stuff. I think my personal message comes out best when I'm playing my guitar and singing. You feel funny when you take part in something like that. It's got nothing to do with me. I was thrilled to be there. They invited me to come and play in Gdansk and go to the memorial. I have a great deal of respect for it all, but it's not really my story. I wasn't one of the people that it made a huge difference to, and I certainly don't want to jump on someone else's bandwagon for gain.

Maybe that's why the meeting with Lech Walesa seemed to be a bit uncomfortable? They were celebrating and I was asked to be a



David Gilmour live in Holland with Pink Floyd, late '70s

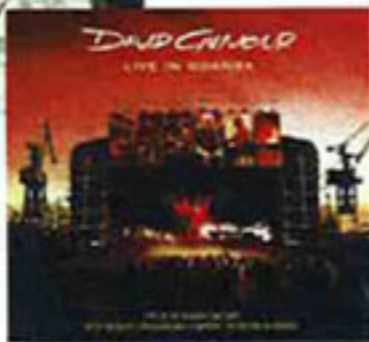
Photo: Sunshine/Retna

Wright Man For The Job

Paul Simon IFA



The latest reminder of Rick Wright's immense contribution to the sound of Pink Floyd arrived in the world seven days after he departed it. David Gilmour's CD and DVD package *Live In Gdansk* was not intended to be a tribute, but the touring band - of which Wright was an intrinsic part - provide the canvas for Gilmour's vivid brush strokes on Floyd classics and newer songs alike, and it stands as an elegant memorial.



If Gilmour has long been the anti-star at the helm of this timeless catalogue, his profile is positively sky-high by comparison to that of the softly-spoken keyboard player. Wright was the glue that held Floyd's inner structure together, the jazz in their rock and, very often, the twinkle in their eye.

When this correspondent met Rick Wright at his London home in what turned out to be his last press interview, he was enjoying his renewed role as a support player... but he also enjoyed the kind of anonymity that most multi-platinum artists would regard as wrong.

'Even today,' he said, 'I really appreciate that I can walk around the streets of London, or anywhere, and people come up and say "Thank you for your music". Not "Can I have your autograph?" It's really nice.'

Nevertheless, on that Gdansk shipyard stage, and on scores of others around the world on Gilmour's last tour, Wright positively shimmered from first note to last. Able to inject jazzy and sometimes classical colours into the band's paintbox, he was in his element.

'I think David said it was probably the happiest tour he'd ever done, and it was the same for me, too,' he said. 'We were playing in small theatres. I don't like playing in huge stadiums. It's a money-making thing. You need to make money, I'm not putting it down... but David went out and did an intimate kind of tour, and it was wonderful. I think we performed some of the Floyd stuff better than we'd ever done.'

Gilmour described the relationship between himself and Wright as 'musical telepathy.' Just as the volubility of the crowd response to Charlie Watts at a Rolling Stones show always seems to embarrass him, Wright would look sheepish at the deafening reaction every time the guitarist introduced him. 'It's a mark of his modesty,' says Gilmour, 'that those standing ovations on my tour in 2006 came as a huge surprise to him, though not to the rest of us.'

Guy Pratt, who not only took Waters' bass part in the touring Floyd but was also Wright's son-in-law, watched the

phenomenon first hand. 'David would pretend to forget to introduce him, and then when he did the crowd would go bananas,' says Pratt. 'It had us on the verge of tears every night.'

Gilmour had the emotional task of leading the band on the BBC series *Later With Jools Holland* just eight days after Wright's untimely death at the age of 65. But he was always quick to shine a spotlight on Wright's crucial contribution to Pink Floyd's songwriting canon.

'Without *Us And Them* and *The Great Gig In The Sky*, both of which he wrote, what would *Dark Side Of The Moon* have been? And without his touch, *Wish You Were Here* wouldn't quite have worked.'

At the very centre of Wright's musical make-up was an early love of jazz and a lifelong belief that less is more, inspired by some of his heroes of the genre. 'My first passion was jazz,' he said. 'Miles Davis, John Coltrane, the bebop jazz musicians, not necessarily pianists. I always remember Miles Davis said "Notes aren't important, it's the spaces in between". I've always believed that.'

'There was all this classical stuff as well, coming from Roger and me, and Syd [Barrett] was just on another planet, coming up with these extraordinary ideas. There was a big change when David came in. He was a great guitarist.'

It may be true that Richard Wright was happiest in a world far away from rock'n'roll, messing about on his beloved boat, but as he sat quietly surveying his life and times a subtle satisfaction with what he had been part of showed just above the surface. 'Some musicians want to be the fastest and cleverest, but for me that's not the point,' he mused. 'It's all about feeling and emotion. You need technique, and I'm always trying to develop that. But in the end, it's not what the hands do. It's what the head is telling the hands to do.'

part of that celebration, which I was happy and honoured to do. The world is still changing. It was very nice and thrilling to meet this man who was so moved and angry by the lack of freedom. He could voice it so well and he could get all these people moving. He forced changes against the will of the entire Soviet Eastern bloc. What can I say to a man who has changed the world? 'Congratulations, you done good, boy'? I'm out of my depth, to be honest.

Did political implications ever withhold you from playing somewhere?

Well, we never played in South Africa when it was a racially segregated country. It has to be said that most of the places that would be involved in that sort of discussion were so far away and on their own that they wouldn't be financially viable. I've never been keen on wasting a lot of money to go somewhere to make some political point.

Have you ever used your status as a famous artist for political reasons?

There are certain charitable political things [see www.davidgilmour.com/important.htm for a ▶

list of the causes Gilmour supports]. I'm quite happy to state my political preferences and biases.

But you're no Bono...

No, I'm not gifted with that conviction that one thing is right and another thing is completely wrong. I don't have the gift that Geldof and Bono seem to have. If they do any good, all power to them. I have no objection to people stating their politics within their music, and they can do that as subtly or as unsubtly as they want. Sometimes, when it's not so subtle, it loses its effect and its power. But we are at liberty to do whatever the fuck we want with the gift that we are given.

You've never wanted to surround yourself with the mystique of being a rock star.

I just walk through life my way. And 'my way' is to be naturally fairly private -but not ridiculously so. I want to be able to be a part of the real world. I want to be able to go to the supermarket and buy my food and do all the sort of things that any other person would do. There comes a point within stardom where that starts to become very difficult, but I figure if you just keep doing it you'll be all right and it won't matter very much. But surely for Paul McCartney it will be much harder than it is for me.

As a well-known musician, being part of many people's ordinary lives, can be humbling experience as well.

It's a fine line that one walks. Obviously, I would like to be seen as being marvellously talented! At the same time I want to appear to be one of the so-called 'people'. I'm in a rarified atmosphere, but I try to keep that down as far as I can.

Is this down-to-earth approach part of the British heritage?

[Laughs] Oh, there are plenty of British people who don't act like that.

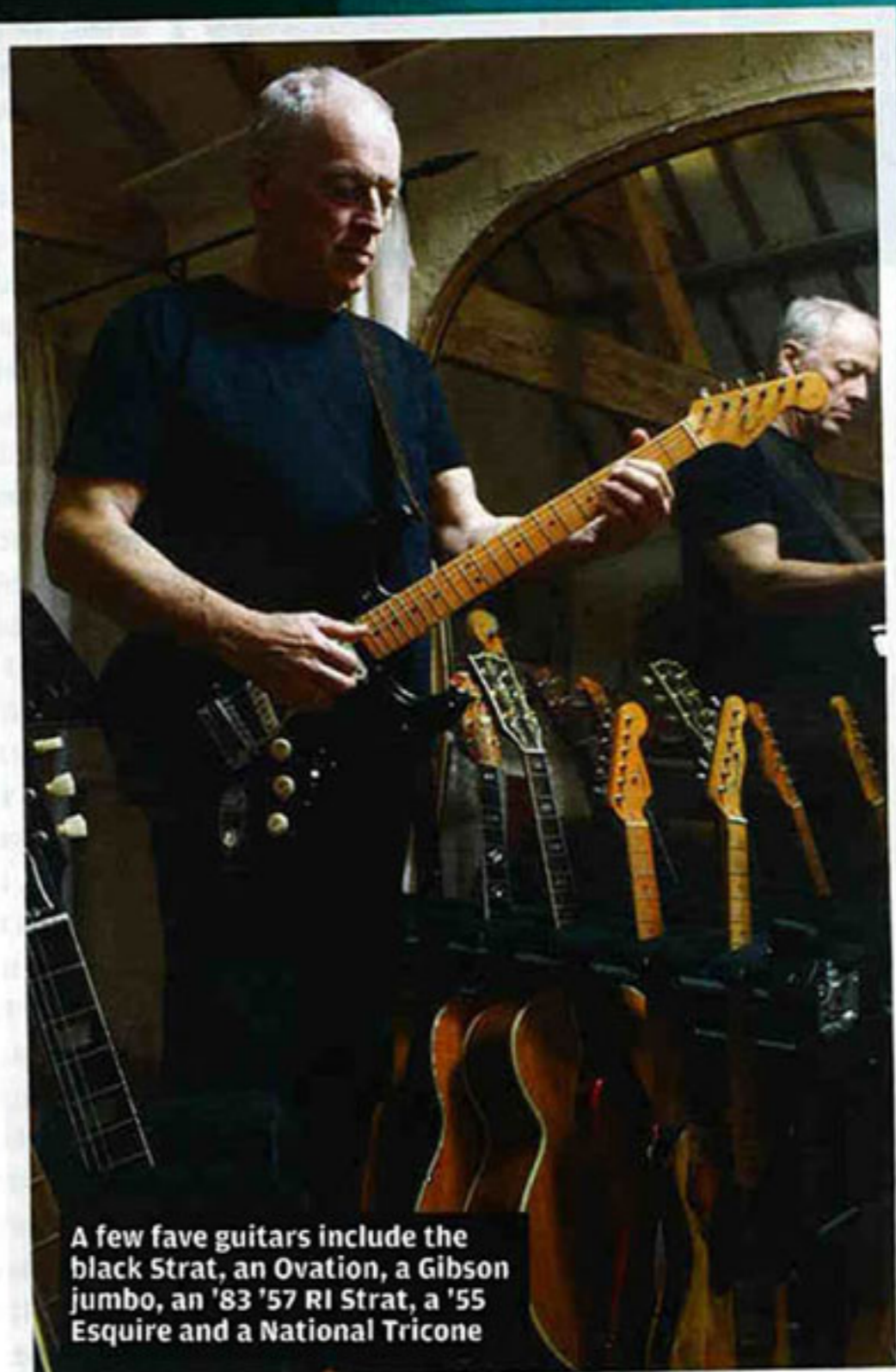
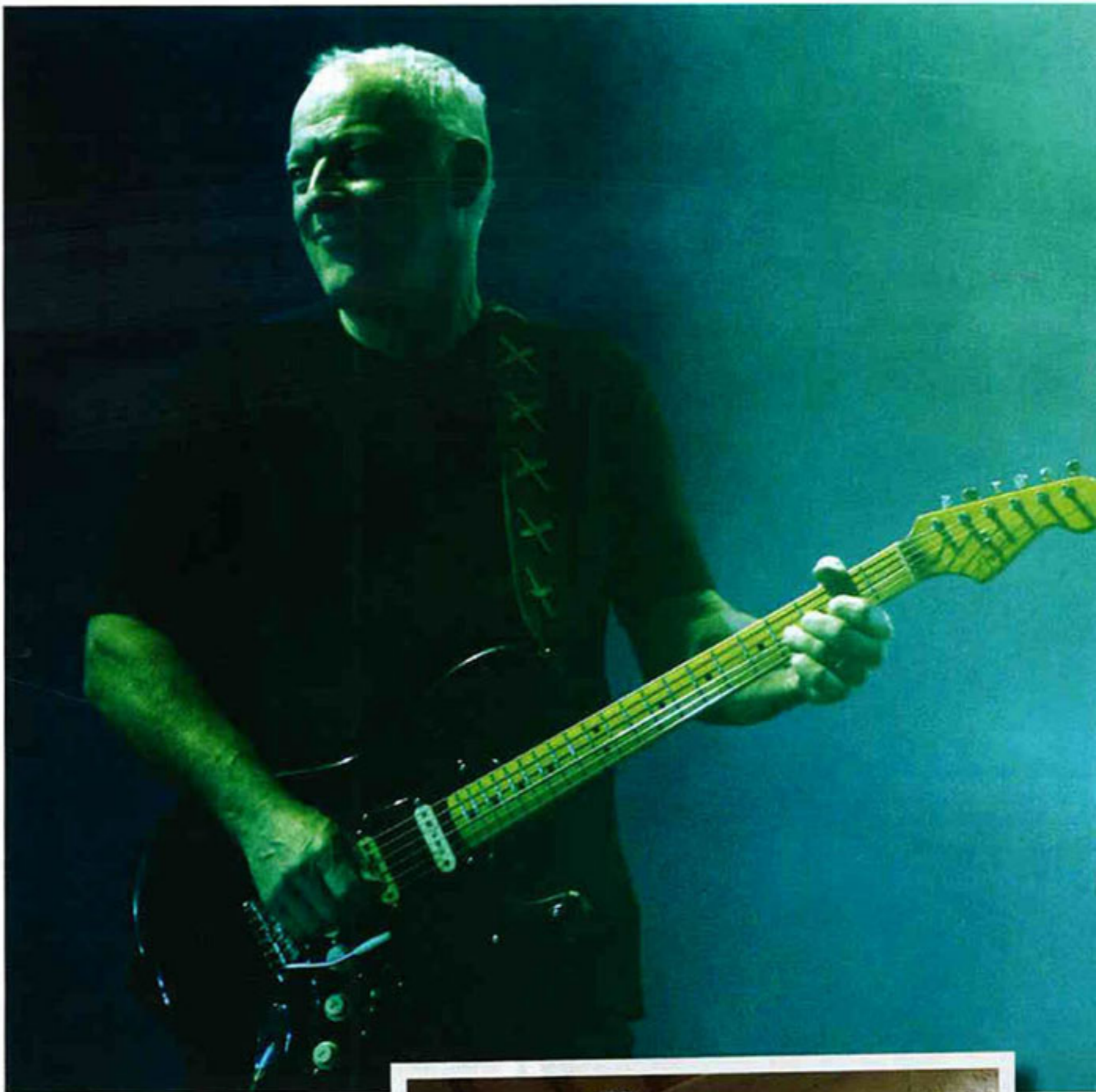
More down to your own particular upbringing, perhaps?

Maybe, yeah. I come from a family of people who took left-leaning newspapers and who were in education.

My parents both met at Cambridge University. Both were interested in art. I'm sure my upbringing had some influence on me. I look more like my father. He was more closed down than I am and I can see that I have the possibility to be a little closed-in as well. Seeing him to be like that helped me to be less like that.

Can anything still boost your ego?

The best thing for one's ego is doing a great show and having the audience clapping and cheering at the end. There's more that I want to do, but there's no specific target that I can pin down. I still think I've got more to prove. One's security in all these things is never absolute. I want people to listen to the music that I make. I want them to get a tenth of the pleasure I've had out of making it and putting it all together. ➤



A few fave guitars include the black Strat, an Ovation, a Gibson jumbo, an '83 '57 RI Strat, a '55 Esquire and a National Tricone

'I want people to get a tenth of the pleasure I get from making music and putting it together'

Photo: David Atlas/Retna

There are moments when you make a record, you come across notes or find a piece of music that comes out of the air, and you get it to sound really nice in the studio and you've done everything right, and you go and think: 'That's so fucking brilliant!' And you'll say 'thank you' to whatever higher being has guided it towards you. I want to feel that the public, the other people in this world who are capable of feeling those same emotion, would get a bit of that emotion by listening to the music that I make.

And the other way around, is there still any music that brings tears to your eyes?

Not very much these days. Only my own, recently. But then I don't listen to an awful lot of music any more. Life is too busy. When I was a teenager and in my 20s I had very little to do except listen to music. My children are obsessed with music in the way I that I was when I was that age. Sometimes I think I'm jaded, that nothing is going to turn me on any more... and then I go and see Leonard Cohen in London and realise, no, I'm still capable of being moved. But most of the time, it just happens when I'm listening to my own stuff. When I'm at home, listening with [wife] Polly to it on a good speaker system. Listening to *The Blue* from my last album, for example; although I don't want to brag, I really have moments thinking: 'That's just brilliant!' I wish I could make a record where every single moment of every single song did that to me.

There's a theory among Prince fans that the way he plays the guitar solo in *Purple Rain* will show whether or not it's going to be a special night. Can people can get similar indicators from your performances?

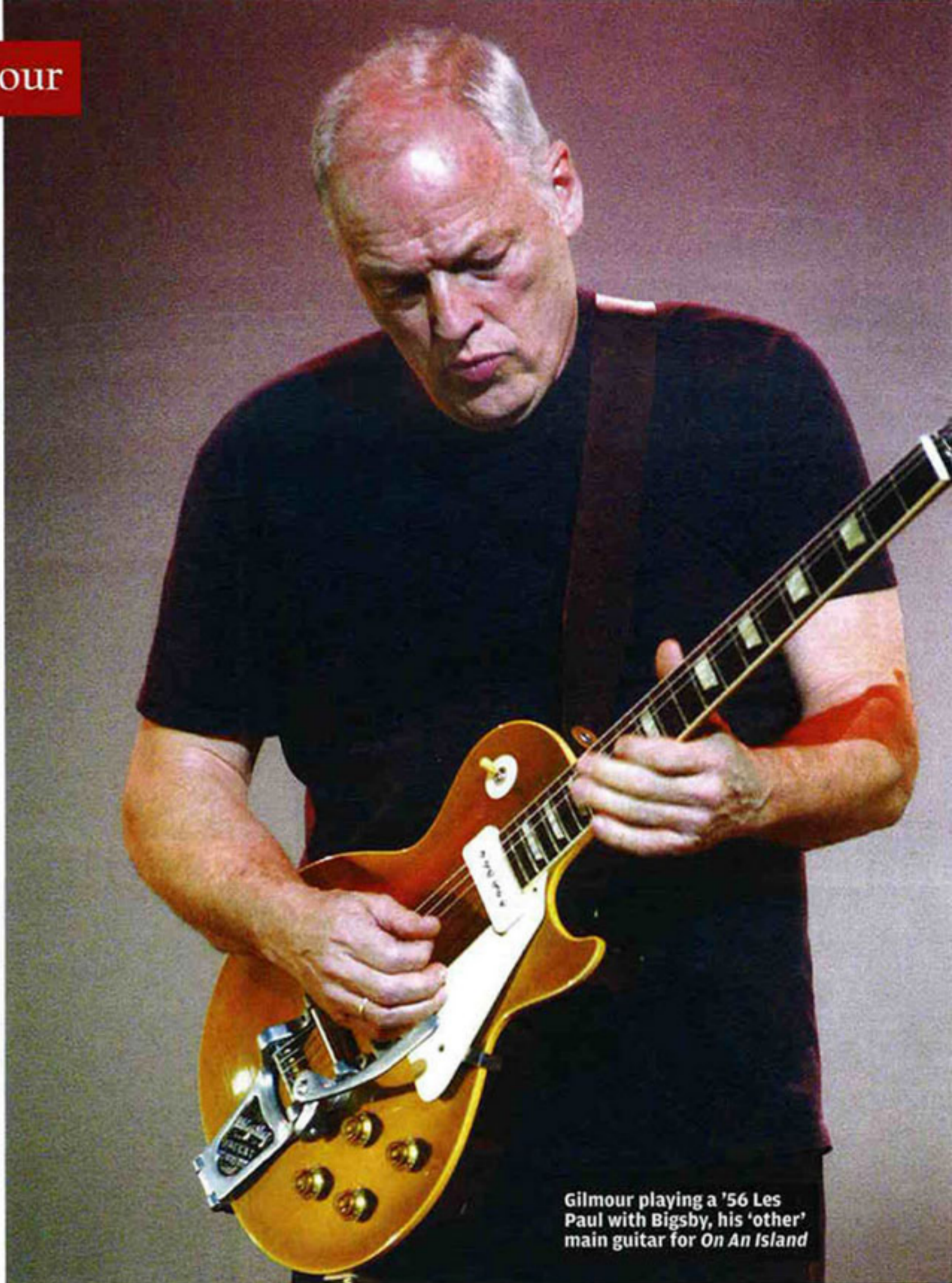
Yes. For me, I know that when I'm feeling my most inspired on stage, I'll go a long way away from the solo that's on the record. If I'm not feeling inspired, I'll go safer and safer and closer to the way I played it on the record. So if you hear me play a solo that's the same as on the record, I'm not feeling that inspired.

What happens at moments like that? Does your mind wander off?

I'm very professional. I try to keep my mind on what I'm doing. It's actually quite easy not to do that, to be playing a song and to be thinking about washing the car, but I've trained myself to try and get back in focus. Those people haven't paid all that money for me to be thinking about tomorrow's groceries.

The solo in *Comfortably Numb* is regarded as one of your best, but on the live album, the solos in *Castellorizon* and *The Blue* are easily up there with your finest.

Maybe I've done the solo in *Comfortably Numb* too many times. It's hard not to feel jaded when you play that solo. Still, you're always trying to be brave, to break out and do something different with it.



Gilmour playing a '56 Les Paul with Bigsby, his 'other' main guitar for *On An Island*

'Blues is black American folk. I'm just a poor white boy from England trying to express myself the best way I can'

How come you didn't choose to play any songs from your first two solo albums during the last tour?

I've tried some out, but they just didn't feel right for some reason.

Most people think of you as a progressive rock hero, but there's always been a blues aspect to your guitar playing as well.

Well, I had a lot of blues records when I was young. Blues is a distinct and large part of my influence, yes, but all sorts of other things are as well. My last album *On An Island* is a blues album - my sort of blues. The blues is really black American folk. I'm a poor white boy from England. Well, not so poor... but at least trying to express myself the best way I can. And that's

what the blues is about. I don't want to restrict myself to a 12-bar form or anything like that.

Finally, any plans for a new solo album?

It's not in the system... yet. These projects come into the public's consciousness for a very limited period of time. The album came out in March 2006; six months later I did the last concert in Gdansk, and then it's a wrap. Then I disappear for I while, the DVD comes out... but in general it was four years of solid work. In all the bits you don't see, there's a lot of work going on. Now, I just like to take it easy. Bring my children up. Spend some time at home. There's quite a lot of stuff that's on route for a possible new solo album, but I don't feel the need to work all the time.