

The joy of hidden gems

POP

AMADOU & MARIAM/
DAVID GILMOUR

UNION CHAPEL, LONDON N1

WHAT'S so special about charity gigs? Not very much, is the usual answer: they're just gigs, with a bit of charity branding, raising money for good causes, yes, but with little lasting impact.

This one was different. First, it was part of a series of small concerts promoted by the homeless charity Crisis, with a clever twist: the stars were announced in advance, but the venue would be a secret until 24 hours before the event. It's a way of reminding people, says Crisis, that there are many people who don't know where, or whether, they will find a bed tonight.

Second, it was a unique musical event, a one-off collaboration between Amadou & Mariam, the blind husband-and-wife duo from Mali, and David Gilmour, the quiet guitar hero who has been a long-standing supporter of the organisation: in 2003 he sold his London home and gave Crisis the proceeds.

It would have been easy enough for Gilmour to have turned up and busked and noodled. But he really knew the Malian couple's repertoire, and on songs such as

Welcome to Mali and *Ce n'est pas bon*, his guitar playing dovetailed perfectly with the pulsing rhythms of the band, and with the grittier-sounding guitar-work of Amadou Bagayoko. Gilmour wasn't there to steal the limelight: he was there as a band member, and he fitted in perfectly.

Though he was a little hesitant to begin with, his playing warmed up, thanks in part to the encouragement of the percussionist Boubacar Dembele, who roamed the stage, urging his bandmates on to greater heights.

Most of the material was drawn from Amadou & Mariam's *Welcome to Mali* and *Dimanche à Bamako* albums, although they did return the compliment with a Gilmour song, *No Way* (from his 1978 *David Gilmour* album). The respect and admiration between the players was palpable, and visible in the big smiles of Amadou & Mariam, centre stage in their shiny robes. Pure joy.

For details of Crisis hidden gigs, go to www.crisis.org.uk/hidden

ⓈRATING ★★★★★