

Review

Chamber rock and roll

Pop

David Gilmour
FESTIVAL HALL

HE has never been the most prolific of musicians – the last album by his group Pink Floyd was released eight years ago – but now, at the age of 55, David Gilmour seems to have invented a whole new genre. Best described as chamber rock, it's a form of music that uses predominantly acoustic instruments and vocal harmonies to create a sound that is warm, richly textured and genuinely different.

Gilmour first presented the concept at last year's Festival Hall Meltdown season, curated by Robert Wyatt; now he has reprised it with three shows at the same venue, of which this was the first. And the experience is best summed up in a single word: tingly.

The dramatic peaks achieved by some of Floyd's finest moments may not have been matched, but this was a show that was about delicacy and understatement rather than bombast and flashbombs.

Indeed, it began with Gilmour attempting – and pulling off – a wholly implausible feat: a solo acoustic version of *Shine on You Crazy Diamond*. How could that epic four-note motif possibly come across as anything other than utterly feeble on an acoustic guitar? And yet what came through was not so much the motif as the song, stripped down to its essence and laid bare.

Next, and rather less

radically, came *Fat Old Sun* from the great *Atom Heart Mother* album (inexplicably ignored on the recent *Echoes – the Best of Pink Floyd* compilation), on which he was joined by the rest of the band: double bass, drums, acoustic guitar, piano, cello, and a nine-strong vocal ensemble (later, Gilmour also introduced fellow Floydist Rick Wright on keyboards). The song's aura of dreamy torpor was perfectly suited to the arrangement.

Among the highlights of what followed were a gorgeous arrangement of *Je crois entendre encore* from Bizet's *The Pearl Fishers*, and an exquisite *Comfortably Numb*, with vocal contributions from Wyatt.

A couple of times when Gilmour strapped on an electric guitar there were cheers from sections of the crowd who seemed to be anticipating some kind of rock-out, but they were missing the point: his Gibson was mostly just another instrument, another element in the delicately woven tapestry of sound.

Having said that, he did deliver a piercing solo in *A Great Day for Freedom*, but overwhelmingly this was ensemble music of the highest order. And I suspect that it is something that Gilmour, an endearingly diffident performer who has never looked truly comfortable in an arena-rock setting, has wanted to do for a very long time.

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David Cheal