Live previews

David Gilmour

Royal Festival Hall Wed 16 to Fri 18

Pink Floyd is dead. Or at least heavily sedated. ‘When’s the next Pink Floyd album, David?’ a fan cried out at Gilmour’s gig at the Meltdown festival last summer. The Floyd king, grey-haired and soft-voiced, paused a second before replying: ‘Who gives a fuck?’

Suffering fools gladly may not be one of his greatest skills, but there’s always the singing and guitar-playing to fall back on. And the intimate nature of these gigs – well, the venue has a roof on it – offers a rare chance to really listen to both, freed from the distraction of an inflatable pig hovering overhead, or the guy in the seat behind spilling his pail of Hauslager down your back.

Some of the set list won’t be too far from the last Pink Floyd tour seven years ago – ‘Wish You Were Here’, ‘High Hopes’, ‘Shine On You Crazy Diamond’. But the Meltdown gig also boasted songs by Richard Thompson and Syd Barrett; the electric guitar was hardly touched all night; and the acoustic band and backing choir trod softly, caressing where Floyd’s superamplified approach would bludgeon. Not that there’s anything wrong with a bit of mutually consenting bludgeoning, of course. Some times stripping back the arrangements feels wrong, almost like rewriting the words. But mostly the new acoustic Gilmour is a chance to hear some wonderful songs without too much big-budget bogosity. Highlights last time: Robert Wyatt singing the verses on ‘Comfortably Numb’ (he’ll be doing it again on Wednesday), ‘Hushabye Mountain’ from ‘Chitty Chitty Bang Bang’, and best of all, a beautiful reading of Bizet’s ‘Je Crois Entendre Encore’. No, it’s not very rock ‘n’ roll. But who gives a fuck?

Dominic Maxwell