Brilliant illuminations and shining guest stars

David Gilmour
ALBERT HALL

“LIKE sleeping with your ex-wife” was how David Gilmour dismissively described Pink Floyd’s reunion for Live 8. Given that Gilmour has since insisted that his solo activities will, from now on, be his main priority, this show at the Albert Hall was an intermittently brilliant puzzle.

With him on stage at 7.30 sharp was not just a prominent bit of ex—the Floyd’s silver-haired guitarist, Rick Wright—but three members of their old extended family: Guy Pratt, the bass player drafted in to replace Roger Waters, Jon Carin, an American keyboard wizard who stood in for Wright after his departure in the 1980s, and Dick Parry, the saxophonist featured on many of their classic cuts from the 1970s.

With two originals and three long-term associates in the mix, all of this under the Jade album name that was as much Pink Floyd as any of the bands who have recorded and toured under that name since the notorious split in 1984.

Even more surprisingly, the material they performed was mainly as yet unreleased. Although Gilmour’s new solo album, On An Island, got played in its tasteful but uneven entirety in the first half, the remaining two hours of a marathon concert comprised items from the Floyd catalogue.

Some of these, such as the opening Breathe and the pre-encore finale Echoes, were accompanied by a frenetic 360-degree light show that re-created the entire auditorium with lasers, pulsing floodlights and forests of spots—substantially alleviating fears that “David Gilmour” might be code for “Floyd minus lights with longer guitar solos.” Others were obscurities, delivered with a bizarre lack of flair.

In general, the burnished fluency of Gilmour’s virtuoso fagework could be relied on to supply a lift, but the pace flagged noticeably in the second half and while he and his six-man band soldiered, pub-rockishly, through Wet’s... or the Dead from the Obscured by Clouds soundtrack, followed by three tracks from the Floyd’s unreleased last album, The Division Bell.

All of that was forgotten once the clock passed ten. The son-et-lumière of Echoes gave way to the evening’s most touching acoustic lament, Wish You Were Here, and the first big surprise of the night, Gilmour singing an a cappella version of Pink the Cost of Living with his two guest backing vocalist, David Crosby and Graham Nash.

Then came a show-stopper that instantly brought the whole hall to its feet. A grey-suited David Bowie strolled on to supply a beautifully apt monkey lead on the Floyd’s first single, Arnold Layne. As the lights went mental, and Bowie and Gilmour duetted on Comfortably Numb, a patchy show miraculously clicked Pink Floyd for drama in the end.