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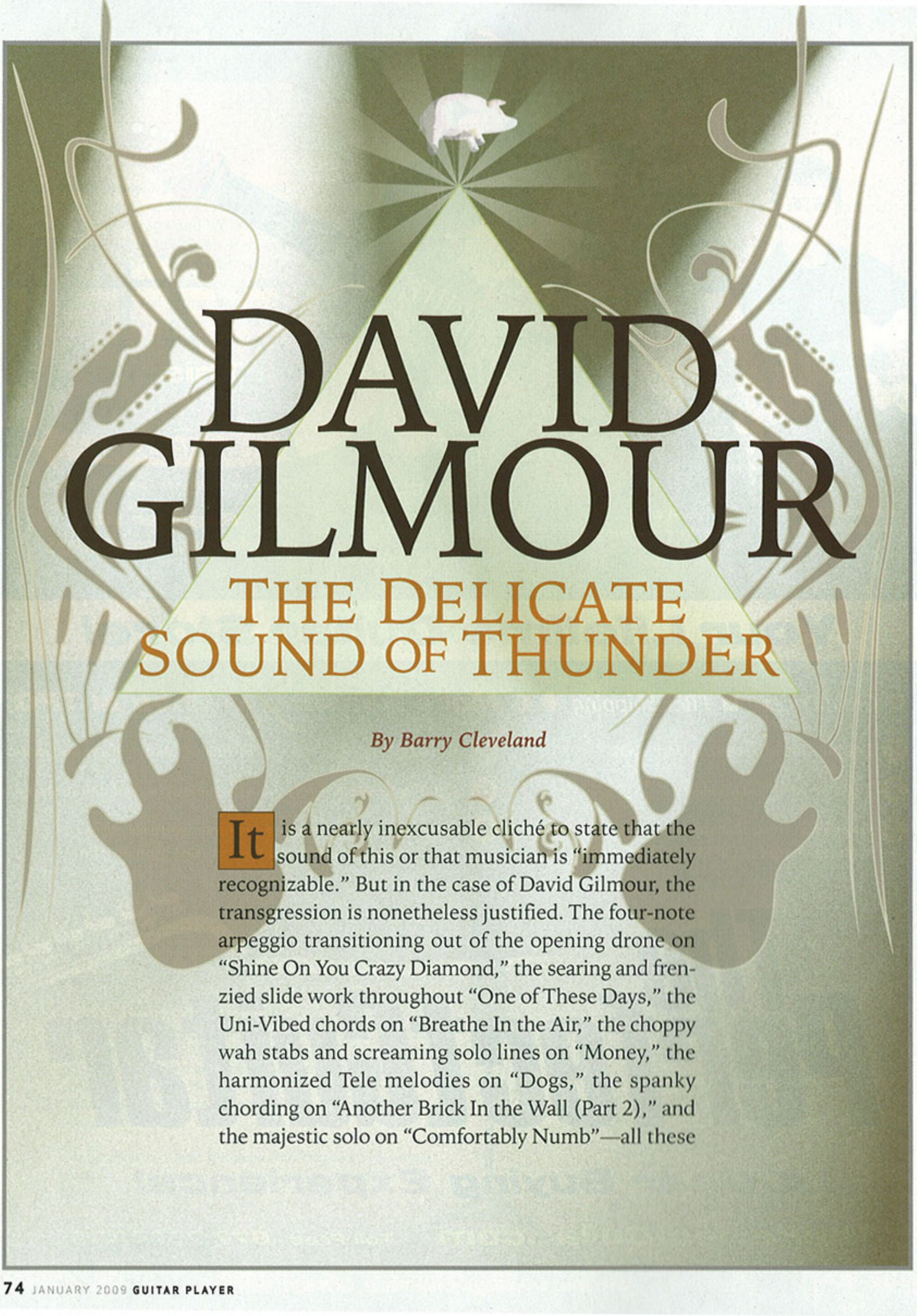
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DAVID GILMOUR

THE DELICATE SOUND OF THUNDER

By Barry Cleveland

It is a nearly inexcusable cliché to state that the sound of this or that musician is “immediately recognizable.” But in the case of David Gilmour, the transgression is nonetheless justified. The four-note arpeggio transitioning out of the opening drone on “Shine On You Crazy Diamond,” the searing and frenzied slide work throughout “One of These Days,” the Uni-Vibed chords on “Breathe In the Air,” the choppy wah stabs and screaming solo lines on “Money,” the harmonized Tele melodies on “Dogs,” the spanky chording on “Another Brick In the Wall (Part 2),” and the majestic solo on “Comfortably Numb”—all these



iconic notes and tones evidence Gilmour's singular touch faster than you can say "Ummagumma."

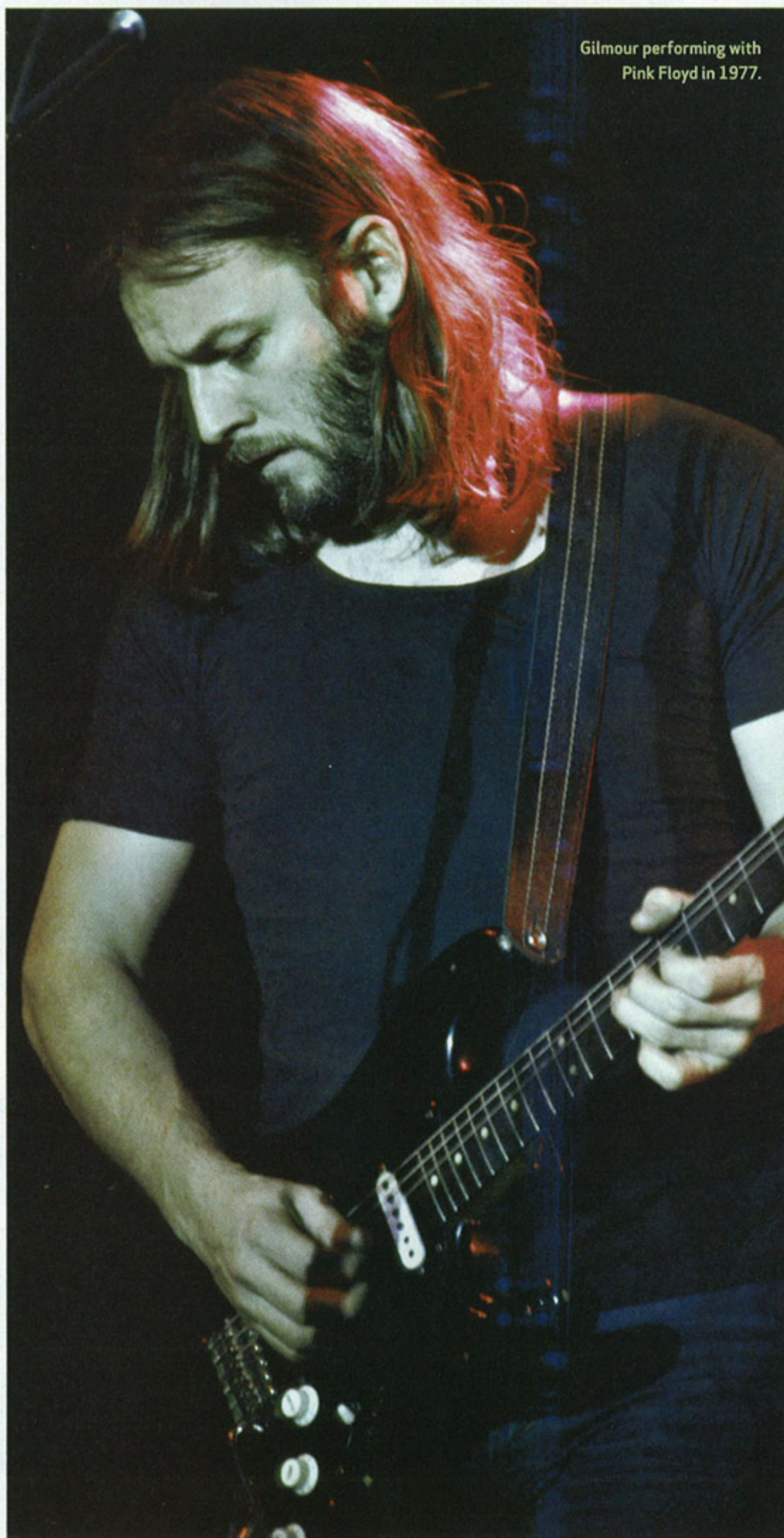
Since joining Pink Floyd at age 21 in 1967, Gilmour has continually avoided even the proverbial path less traveled, opting instead to craft a style that reaches for the galactic core while remaining rooted in the earthiest blues. Whether it be sitting amidst the empty ruins of Pompeii coaxing clusters of cosmic sound from a handful of pedals and a Binson Echorec in 1971, or standing in front of an elaborate assemblage of amps and effects processors playing "A Great Day for Freedom" to an audience of 50,000 in the Gdansk shipyards in 2006, Gilmour has remained true to his original trajectory.

Gilmour's latest release, *Live in Gdansk* [Columbia], spotlights material from his most recent solo album, *On an Island*, supported by the Baltic Philharmonic Orchestra. Also included are live versions of Pink Floyd classics such as "Astronomy Domine," "Shine On You Crazy Diamond," "Comfortably Numb," and "Echoes." Formats range from a 2-CD set to a 3-CD/2-DVD Deluxe Box to a 5-LP Box.

Recent months have also seen the introduction of two Fender David Gilmour Signature Series Stratocasters, an updated version of Phil Taylor's *Pink Floyd: The Black Strat*, *A History of David Gilmour's Black Fender Stratocaster*, and two sets of GHS David Gilmour Signature strings.

You are generally thought of as a "Strat guy," but you play quite a few different guitars—even in the live show. Can you describe a few of your favorites, and what it is about those particular instruments that you like?

The Stratocaster obviously has to take first place. That was the guitar I always wanted when I was a kid—mostly because Hank Marvin had one. I just loved the Strat, but I couldn't afford one, so I played other guitars. The one I played most often while I was in bands in my hometown was a Hofner Club 60, which was a very nice little guitar. Then, when I was 21, my parents—who lived in New York at the time—bought me a Telecaster, which was the first actual Fender I owned. It was lovely, but I still lusted after a

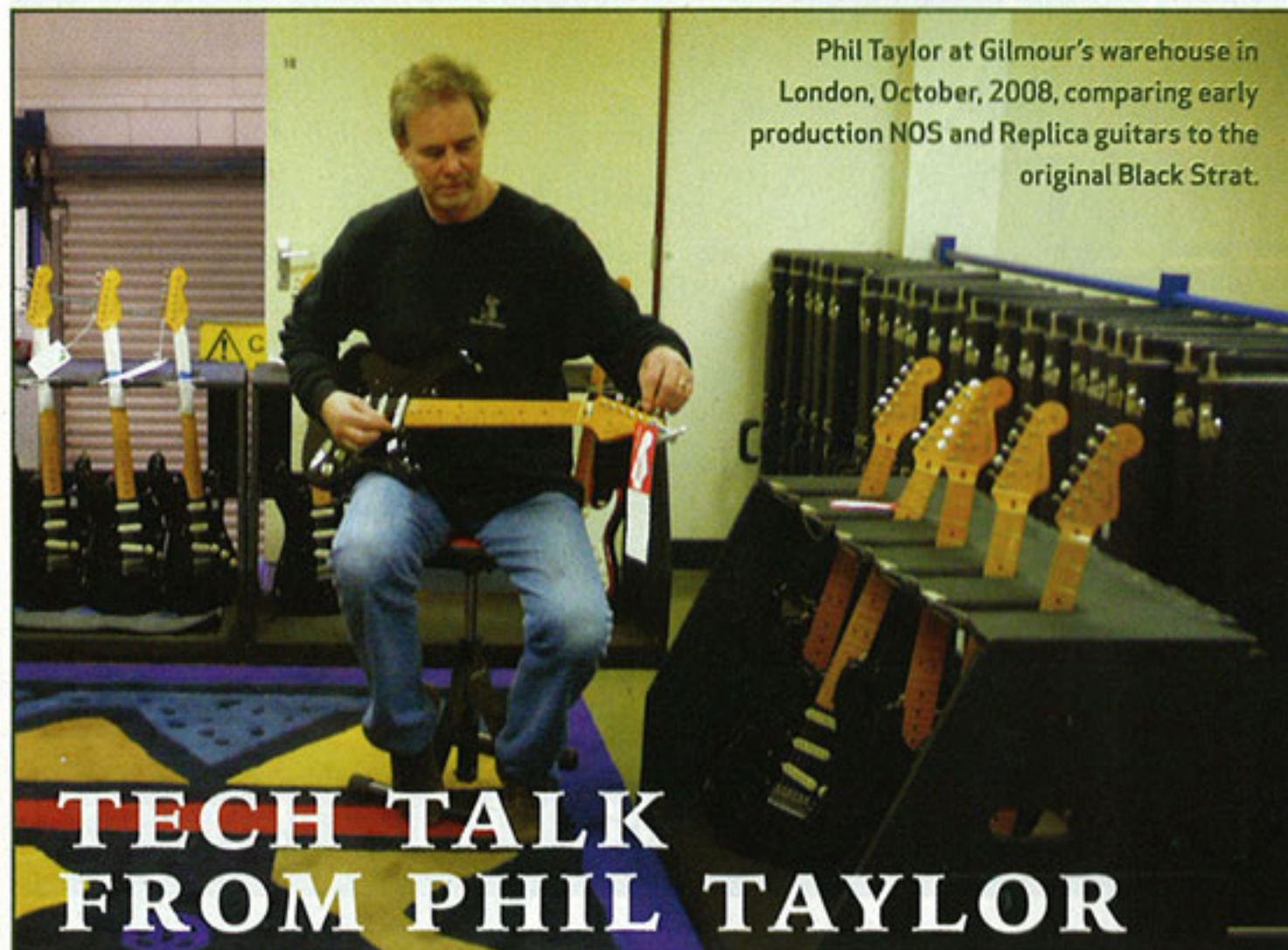


Gilmour performing with Pink Floyd in 1977.

Strat, so I got one as soon as I could afford it. The Stratocaster is the most versatile guitar ever made, and it has this funny way of making you sound like yourself. In my view,

you can recognize guitar players who play a Strat more readily than you can those who play Gibsons, and that's an opinion I've held for some time. Having said that, it's very

Phil Taylor at Gilmour's warehouse in London, October, 2008, comparing early production NOS and Replica guitars to the original Black Strat.



TECH TALK FROM PHIL TAYLOR

Phil Taylor has been David Gilmour's guitar tech since 1974. During that time, he has overseen the evolution and maintenance of both Gilmour and Pink Floyd's live and recording rigs. Taylor played a significant role in facilitating the development of the David Gilmour Signature Series Stratocasters, modeled on the latest incarnation of Gilmour's legendary Black Strat, and his book, *Pink Floyd: The Black Strat, A History of David Gilmour's Black Fender Stratocaster*, details the long and surprisingly complex history of that instrument. — BC

There is an amazing amount of documentation in the book going back decades. Did you consciously compile all of the material, knowing that, at some point, you would use it, or was it more a matter of doing research and working backward?

When we decided to make the signature guitars, Todd Krause and Mike Eldred came over from the Fender Custom Shop, and Mike asked me about the history of the Black Strat. I knew quite a lot already, but I felt I should find out more. I started doing some research—mostly by sorting through paperwork and other factual information I have in files dating back to when I began working with Pink Floyd and David. Originally, there were no plans for a book, but a friend of mine who is a book designer offered to lay everything out and turn it into a book. I agreed, thinking I already had most of the information. Once I began documenting everything—including finding photographs that showed all the changes to the guitar over time—it turned into an incredible amount of work. For one thing, there were the four years David owned the guitar before I was working with the band, during which time a lot of things happened to it. David's memory is a little sketchy on some of it, and many of the photographs from that period were mislabeled, so it was a bit of a minefield. Then, I discovered there had actually been three "Black Strats"—which he hadn't told me! It took many months of working very long hours to sort everything out.

The book's second edition is updated and expanded. Besides adding material about what has happened since the first edition was published in 2007, what does the expansion consist of?

There are an additional 36 pages of photos and information, and about two-thirds of the original pages have been altered, with some photographs and layouts being changed. Corrections were also made in light of new information. Also, David continues to use the guitar, and I am actively taking notes regarding things that could be incorporated into a future edition.

SIDEBAR CONTINUES ON PAGE 81

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 79

Has David read it?

I don't know. I've given it to him. He thought it was a daft idea. But a lot has happened to this guitar over quite a long period, and it has been used on some incredibly iconic recordings and live shows. There are probably not that many guitars that you could write an entire book about.

Is it true that you may write a comprehensive book about Pink Floyd's gear?

There have been requests for such a book, but it's just an idea at this time. I'm the only person who has worked with the band for so many years, and, therefore, my records and knowledge are pretty much second to none. But knowing how much work was involved with the Black Strat book, I have to decide if I can make the commitment.

What was your role in the Fender Custom Shop's replication of the Black Strat?

Harassing Fender to make as authentic and precise a replica as possible [laughs]. Todd and Mike came to England, and we took the guitar apart and measured and photographed it. Much later, I took it to the Custom Shop in Corona for critical comparisons before the final prototypes were made. They had sent David and me several prototypes in between trips—along with a specially modified guitar that let us easily swap and try out different pickups. David's main criteria were that the replica should have the same feel and setup as the original—including the tremolo setup—and that the pickups should sound the same.

You experimented with numerous pickup configurations over the years. Are the current pickups in the guitar stock, or were any specially wound or otherwise customized?

Seymour Duncan sent us three or four batches of pickups in the mid to late '70s that he custom wound for David, and we experimented with them—particularly in the bridge position. One of the Duncan bridge pickups is still there. David preferred it to a DiMarzio he had been using, which, in turn, had replaced a Fender. Fender created new pickups for the neck and middle positions on the replica to match the originals, and David actually chose a neck pickup that is very close, but that he thinks sounds slightly better than the original. He may even swap it out on the Black Strat.

What do you think of this business of replica guitars?

It depends on why you create them, and for whom they are designed. There had been a lot of requests over the years for a David Gilmour model—both from fans and from Fender—but David only agreed to it on the condition they could not make a limited-edition run of very expensive, elitist

replicas that would only be available to rich collectors. He wanted the guitars to be very good quality, true replicas that musicians or fans could hope to afford. [Retail prices are \$3,999 for the NOS, and \$4,799 for the Relic.] Another interesting thing is that once the replica process neared completion, David thought it would be really nice to see one as a new guitar, so I asked Todd to make one with identical non-distressed parts—an NOS model. David really liked it, and he started using it. We asked Fender to make this NOS guitar available as a second model, and to release them at the same time, in order to give people a choice. The two models are identical in terms of playability and sound. But the NOS feels and looks brand new out of the box, whereas the Relic feels like a guitar that has been played a while.



nice to play something else occasionally, like my goldtop Les Paul with those old single-coil P-90s.

Does it have Les Paul's original trapeze bridge

or a stop tailpiece?

It has a stop tailpiece. For the last album, I wanted one with a Bigsby vibrato, but I didn't want to change the old one I'd used



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to play, for example, the solo on "Another Brick In the Wall Part 2," so I found another one. I suppose you could say that they are a little raunchier than Fenders.

You also play a Gretsch?

I've got an old black Duo Jet I've had for a very long time. I actually used it on a couple of tracks on my first solo album in 1978. It's quite hard to play, but it's a real beauty, and it's a beautiful-sounding instrument that fits perfectly for some things. I played it on "Where We Start."

You've played Telecasters on a lot of songs, too, like the solo on "Dogs."

Yes, that's right. I think it was done using the neck pickup, which I changed to a Strat pickup, because the Tele neck pickups never seem to be quite up to the job. I did use a Tele on the new album, as well. It was the main

guitar on "Take a Breath."

How about the banjo-like guitar?

That's a Turkish cümbüş, which is basically a fretless 12-string banjo. It's a pretty weird instrument that I bought in Turkey years ago. It is tuned very much like a guitar, and mine is actually tuned *exactly* like a guitar. I like to be able to pick up any instrument and coax something out of it.

Is there anything about your current live rig that's particularly interesting?

My tech, Phil Taylor, is always making improvements, trying to make the amps sound better by putting in higher quality this and that, using cryogenically frozen guitar cords—all these sorts of things I hope make it sound better. The rig sounds great to me, but I can just plug in and go with almost anything. I used to be much more

GILMOUR'S 2006 TOURING RIG

Electric Guitars '69 Fender Stratocaster (The Black Strat), red '84 Fender '57 re-issue Stratocaster with EMG's, Gibson '56 Les Paul goldtop with Bigsby, '58 Gretsch Duo Jet with Bigsby, '06 Fender Custom Shop '58 Relic Esquire, '74 Jedson lap-steel with EMG, '60s Fender Deluxe lap-steel.

Acoustic Guitars '58 Gibson Country Western with Baggs M1A, Taylor NS74 nylon, '30s Weissenborn Style 1 steel with Baggs M1A.

Amps & Cabinets (2) '74 Hiwatt Custom DR103 heads, '06 Alessandro custom Redbone Special head, (3) '70s WEM 4x12 cabinets with Fane Crescendo and Celestion speakers.

Signal Processors Various custom signal routing units, Pete Cornish tube-buffered pedalboard with modified pedals: Demeter Compulator compressor; (2) Electro-Harmonix Big Muff; (2) BK Butler Tube Drivers; DigiTech

"All of the Pink Floyd guitar systems we had were large and complex in order to accommodate playing songs from the back catalog. In 1998, I suggested to David the idea of having a valve pedalboard built. My thought was that we needed a small high-quality board, with a minimum of pedals, to use for both recording and small gigs. I wanted to retain as many of the sonic qualities that one gets by plugging a passive guitar with a good cable straight into an amp as possible. To achieve this, valves were used on the input and outputs for buffering—an interesting idea that we had not tried previously. Many discussions with Pete Cornish ensued regarding feasibility and reliability. There were problems to be solved with transformer size, heat, fragility, and microphonics of the valves, while still limiting it to a small size. Pete tends to make things large, with plenty of room for servicing, which is fair enough, but this had to be small. Hats off to Pete, who managed with few compromises to shoehorn everything into the minimal space available. In 2005, I realized we would soon be touring, and that while the valve board sounded great in the studio, it would be too small and inflexible to use as a main live board. I asked Pete to build another one, this time larger to incorporate more effects and facilities. That board is shown in the photograph." —Phil Taylor



CONTINUES ON PAGE 84

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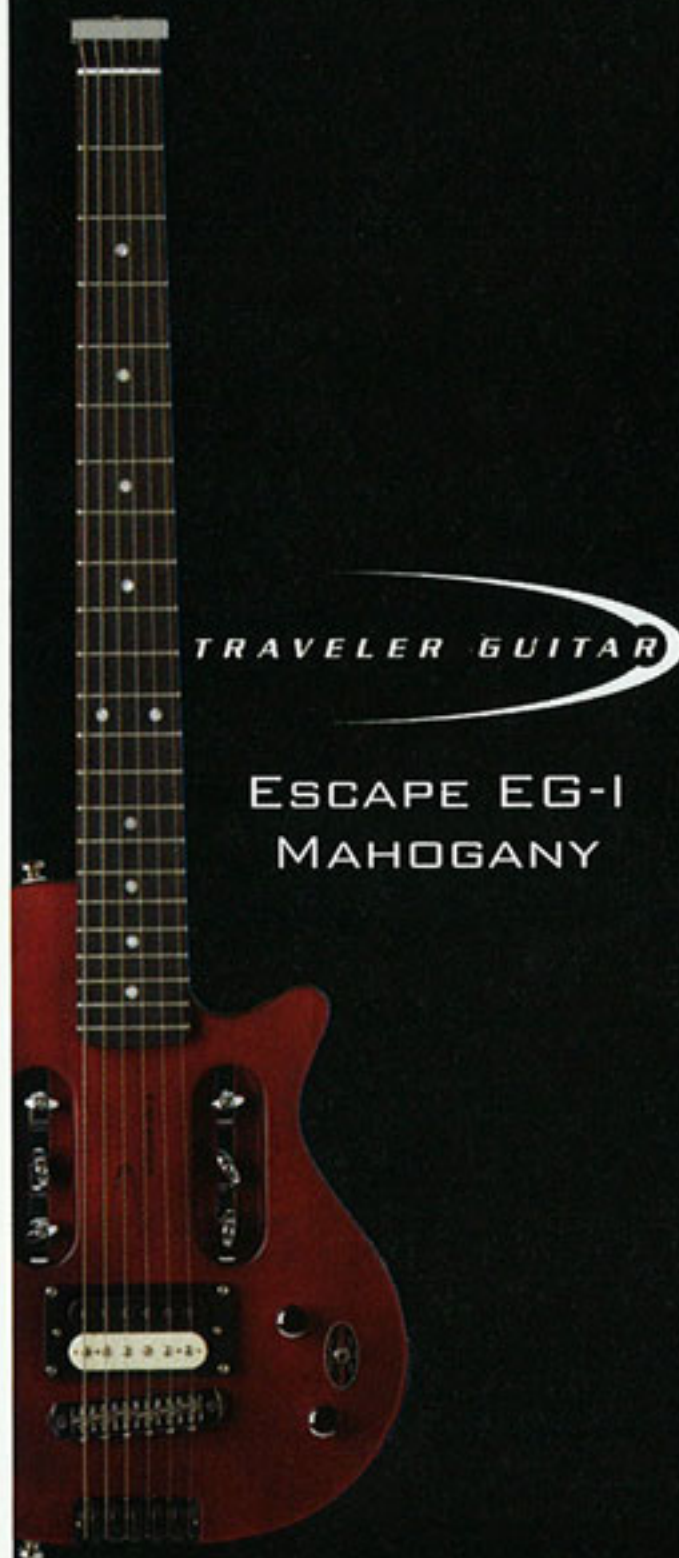
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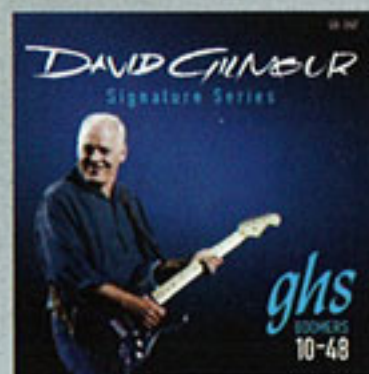
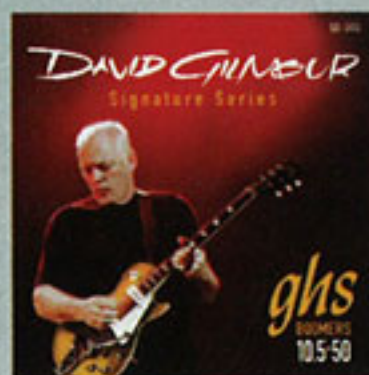
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Whammy; Boss CE-2 Chorus; Boss GE-7 Graphic Equalizer; Dunlop CryBaby wah; Uni-Vibe, MXR Model II delay; Roland SDE-3000 delay; Boss delay; T-Rex Replica delay; Ernie Ball volume pedals; Peterson R450 tuner; (3) Avalon U5 DI boxes.

Cables Evidence Audio Melody (guitars), Lyric HG (line), and Siren (speaker).

Strings GHS David Gilmour Signature—Blue Set (on Stratocasters) .010, .012, .016, .028, .038, .048; GHS David Gilmour Signature—Red Set (on Les Pauls) .0105, .013, .017, .030, .040, .050. Acoustic strings include GHS S325 and VNL Vintage Bronze, D'Addario EJ16, and Martin SP MSP4100.

"I introduced David to the Electro-Harmonix Big Muff Pi in 1974. He liked it, and he has continued to use one ever since. David has tried many of the different incarnations and models over the years, but his original has often been preferred for most things. Finding another that sounds the same is not easy. I have even placed six in a row that externally appeared to be identical to his original, and they all sounded different. Often, when you look inside, some components and values are different. Also, David doesn't necessarily use anything exactly as it is, or as you would expect. There are times when he has run a Big Muff into various things such as a Boogie head or a BK Butler Tube Driver, or added a graphic equalizer, etc. That's the thing with David. He'll have a certain sound in his head, and he'll tweak his gear to find it. He just has this ability, and he always knows." —Phil Taylor



Electric guitar picks used with the Black Strat from the '70s to the present.

fanatical about it when I was younger. I built all of my first pedalboards myself. It was my idea to have all the pedals on all the time, with each of them on a bypass switch, so

that the signal didn't go through the electronics of any pedals that weren't being used. Then, when Pete Cornish began building boards for me, I asked him to follow that

general design. But all the stuff has been way out of my hands for years. If I hear an amp that sounds particularly good, it's usually one that Phil has brought to me and said, "Try this out."

Having used everything from a Fuzz Face into a Hiwatt, to a Boss Heavy Metal pedal into a Boogie into a Fender, you still wind up sounding like yourself.

Well, this is what I've found, too [laughs].

How do you account for that?

The sound you wind up with is the sound that is as close to the sound you hear in your head as you can get. And then it is the notes you choose to play, and how you play them, and that is entirely down to your own personal taste. One is constantly striving to get closer to this magical, perfect sound that is in one's head.

The Binson Echorec was once a huge part of your sound. Do you still have any of these, and if so, do you ever use them?

I don't use them very much anymore, although there are some things that only a Binson will do. I used to be expert with Binsons. I was able to dismantle them, put them

back together, and change the head positioning. In fact, there was a time when Pink Floyd's original road manager, Peter Watts,

"You can recognize guitar players who play Strats more readily than you can those who play Gibsons."

and I were the only two people who could actually maintain a Binson. But they are so noisy, and I guess all the ones we've got are so old that it is impossible to keep them noise free. I have managed to nearly replicate what a Binson will do using a combination of modern digital units.

To get the multi-head sounds?

The multi-head sounds, as well as the Swell setting—which is what I use on the beginning of "Time," for example.

Which combination of delay settings do you use to replicate the Swell effect?

To be honest, I don't really know—or care—that much about these things, and I'm not exactly certain what I do use some of the time. I've said it before, but I'll repeat it: I could go into any music shop in any city, get exactly what I need, turn it on, and it would be great. I think it's a pity if people rely on the individual units too much. I do know that I don't use the Big Muff or the Fuzz Face as much anymore. I currently have two BK Butler Tube Drivers on my pedalboard, and I just use one or the other. If I need a little something more, I'll stomp a compressor with a bit of drive onto the beginning of it, and that will turn things up another whole gear.

Do you recall how you got the lead tone on the live version of "Echoes"?

That probably is a Big Muff. I've got a pedalboard that switches to a north track or a south track, and there are Big Muff-type distortions and Tube Driver distortions. It's a



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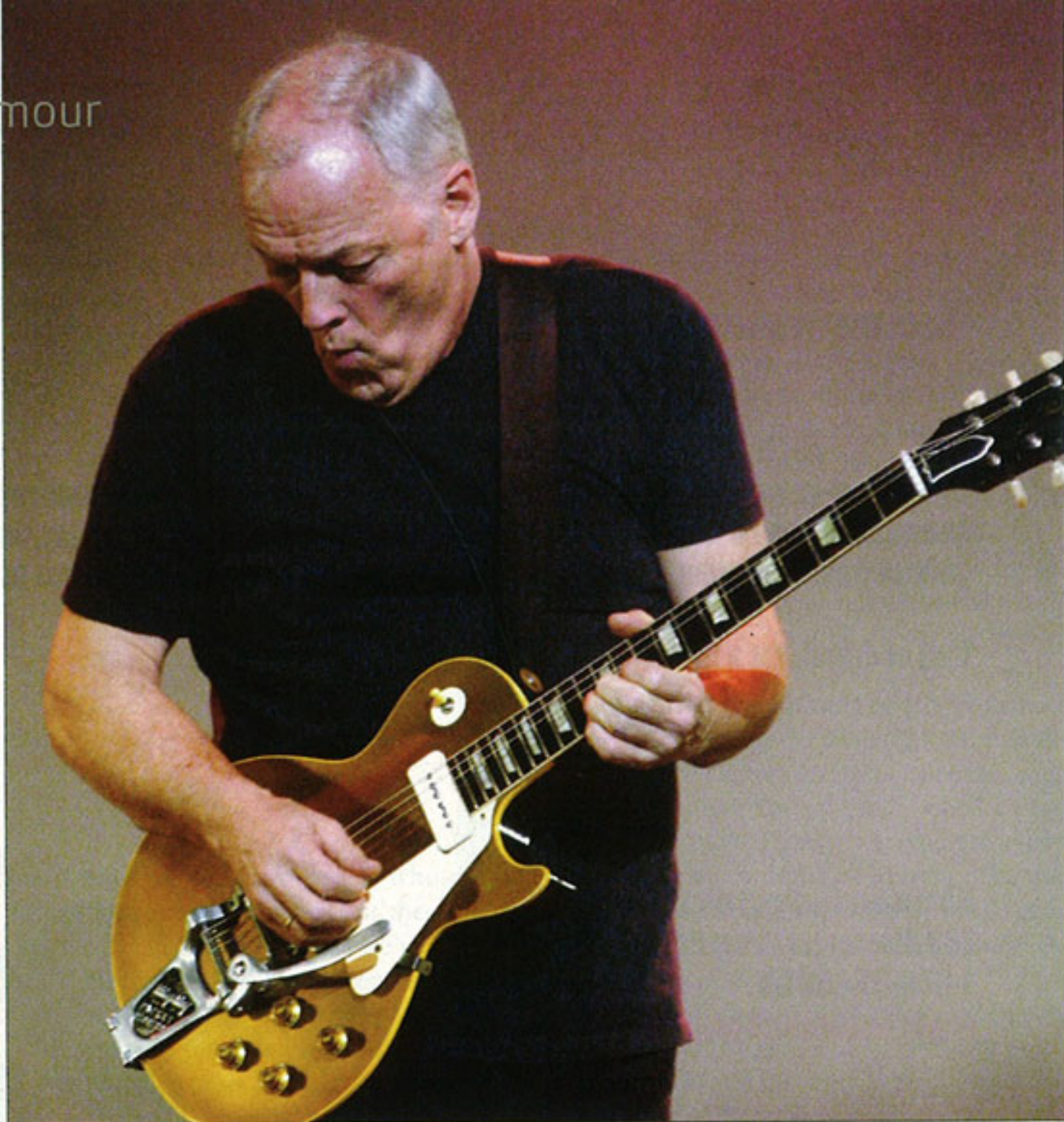
David Gilmour

Gilmour performing with his Bigsby-equipped '56 Les Paul goldtop at Radio City Music Hall in New York, April 4, 2006.

very simple, but effective way of getting more stuff onto a board. Sometimes, I'll stomp one unit in, and it won't sound quite right, so, in the middle, I'll stomp over to the other one to see if that suits the room better.

How about the bird-like wailing sounds on "Echoes"?

That is an oscillation created by having a wah pedal plugged in the wrong way around, and it has nothing to do with the strings. The noise it makes is unbelievably loud and horrible, so you have to have a volume pedal after it, and then a delay, and you have to turn the volume pedal way down. You put your heel all the way down on the wah, and then those noises come out when you manipulate the volume and tone controls on the



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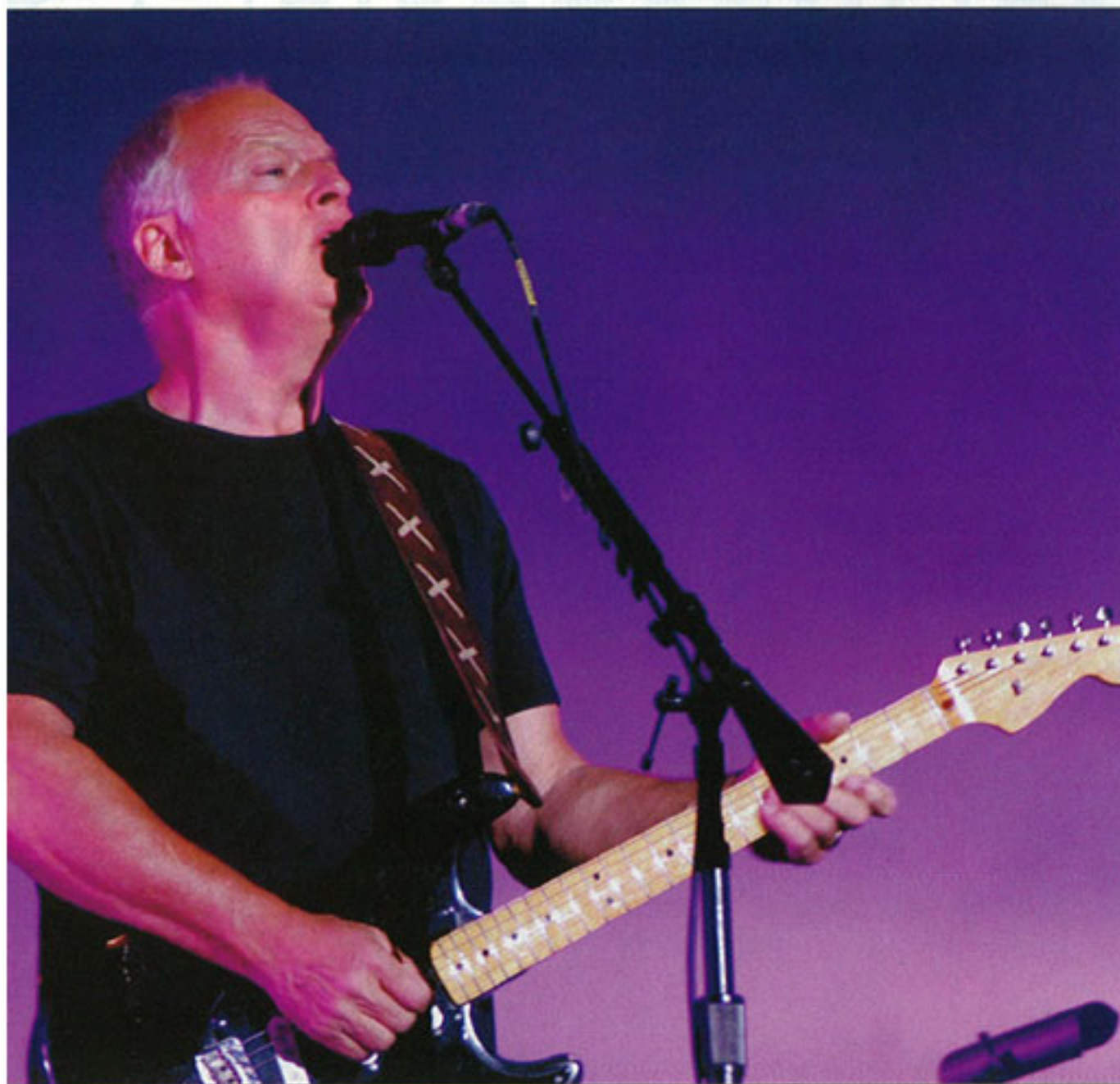
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—Hans Christian Andersen



guitar. We discovered it as the result of a serendipitous accident that happened in about 1969 or 1970, when a roadie had plugged the wah in the wrong way, and I stomped into it and got this incredible screaming noise. But, you know what they say—waste not, want not.

You use a Whammy pedal in an unusual way on “The Blue.”

I have it set to cover an octave, and I’m basically just whizzing up and down nice and gently in a way that has a sort of watery feel to it. I’m also using the whammy bar a little bit, but the Whammy pedal is doing most of the work. I first discovered that sound while recording “Marooned” on *The Division Bell*.

Some of your lead tones over the years have been right on the edge of feedback. To what extent do you think of feedback as part of your expressive aesthetic?

It makes life easier. Maybe there’s a reckless side to my nature that likes to be only half in control of what’s going on, and I like being dragged along by the feedback, rather than

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FEATURE David Gilmour

really having to push the notes out all the time. I try to find the exact right spot on the stage, and the exact right level, and the exact right amount of whammy bar and finger vibrato to sort of tempt those notes to come on out. I've enjoyed that enormously over the years.

A lot of your soloing is based on minor pentatonic and blues scales. Do you feel a particular affinity for blues?

The blues is a part of my musical vocabulary. I received a wide and varied musical education in terms of what was being played on the radio in England when I was a kid. It could be John Lee Hooker, who would just do a big open E chord—boom—and that would be as expressive to me as something from the *Threepenny Opera* by Kurt Weill, or the sorts of scales that Leonard Bernstein used in *West Side Story*, or the melodic guitar playing of Hank Marvin and the Shadows. Those things all combine to give me the palette I use—part of the paint that one has to slosh about with—and the blues are very much a part of that. But you couldn't get much farther away from being a blues purist than me.

Do you think in terms of scales and conventional harmony, or are you playing more intuitively?

I have no idea about scales. I didn't really know what scales I use, or even that I was using anything unusual, until I started playing the saxophone. I would be playing for my sax teacher, and he'd say, "Oh, you're playing in Slombonian and Lilliputian," and I'd have no idea what he meant. He would play me that scale, and I would say, "Yeah, I guess that sounds like the choice of notes that seems to be right for me at that particular moment." He was quite surprised at the variety of different scales that are a part of my normal working palette. I'm not trying to sound like an idiot savant—I know my stuff—but I don't know all the names of the different scales.

How long have you been playing the saxophone?

I've been playing for five or six years now. I started learning it with my son Charlie, who is studying sax at school. I got his teacher to come over to my house and give me lessons, too.

Has learning to play the sax had any effect on your guitar playing, or vice versa?

I think my guitar playing has definitely affected my sax playing—at least in my choice

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FEATURE

David Gilmour

of notes. The sax sound in my head that I'm trying to get is an unusual one, and it's not the one that my sax teacher gets and thinks is the *right* one. I have a particular sound, and I can't really describe what that is, but it is influenced by my guitar playing.

Are the Fender David Gilmour Signature Series Stratocasters replicas of the current version of your Black Strat?

They are pretty much the way the guitar is now. I have some final prototypes of the two different versions, and they are brilliant. In my opinion, they are just as good as my Black Strat, if not better, and I would have no hesitation about using them on a gig. In fact, I used the NOS model when I did an *Atom Heart Mother* show recently.

"The other bands that we tend to be lumped in together with have never been people I've wanted to listen to."

You've had the mini-toggle, which adds in the neck pickup, for 25 years. Is that sound a staple part of what you do, and would we recognize it on a lot of songs?

No. I'm not sure I've ever used it [laughs]. The neck pickup along with the bridge pickup has that particular in-between sound, and you can also get all three pickups on at once if you want to. It basically lets you get a Jazzmaster tone out of a Stratocaster. I play with it, but I don't remember when I've used it on a record.

Which pickup settings do you use most frequently?

I use the neck pickup for the bluesier-type things, and the bridge pickup for the rockier-type things. And I use the position between the bridge and the middle pickup quite a bit on rhythm things.

Is the shortened tremolo arm set up so that you can reach it more easily with your pinky?

Yeah. A lot of guitar players have the arm going through their fingers, and when they

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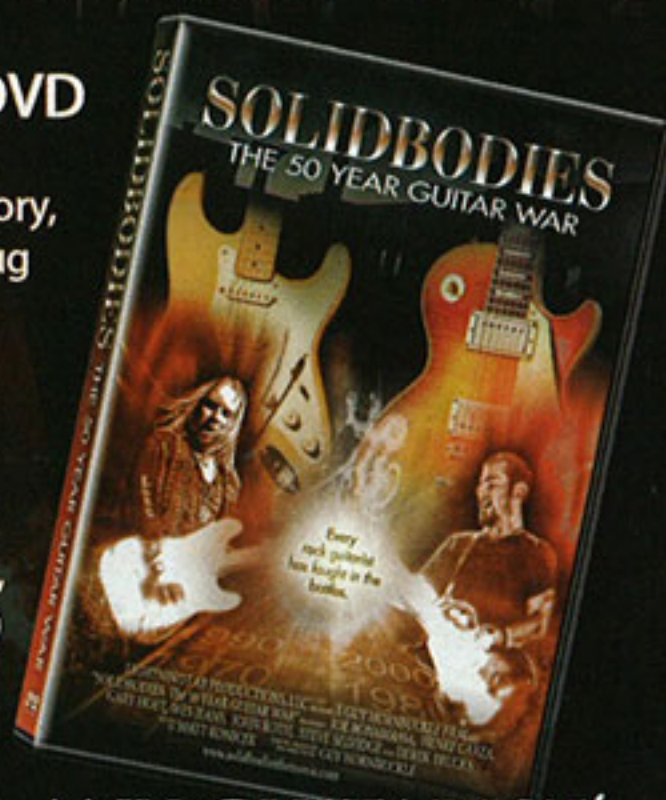
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FEATURE

David Gilmour

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want to wiggle it, they have to move their hand up three or four inches. At one point in my career I found that irritating, so I just cut one off with a hacksaw to see what would happen. It's not like you need that extra length to get the proper amount of leverage if your tremolo system is set up correctly. Also, I like the tremolo arm to be stiff in its hole, so that when you let go, it doesn't drop down and hang vertically. If I want to get rid of it, I can push it out of the way.

Because the leverage is different with that modification, did you also change the number of springs or other setup details?

These days, I typically use three springs. I like to let the bridge plate sit onto the body completely, and then I tighten up the six bridge screws until they sit perfectly on the top of that, without actually pressing down on it. Then, I tighten the strings up to get the right tension on them, and then I sometimes screw the screws that hold the springs at the back deeper into the body until it gets exactly right. You can have those screws slightly looser and add a fourth spring, or you can remove another spring and tighten them up a little bit. Obviously, if I used heavier-gauged strings, I would maybe add another spring.

What are some of the altered or open tunings you have used?

I've used a lot of different tunings in my time. I do the dropped-D for a number of things, such as "Run Like Hell" and "Short and Sweet." On "Poles Apart" on *The Division Bell*, I used DADGAD tuning—which I thought I had discovered all by myself. On "Pillow of Winds" from *Meddle*, I used a tuning that I made up, which has the 1, 2, and 3 notes of the scale in it. I also use at least three different tunings on slide and lap-steel guitars: G, B, D, G, B, E [low to high]; E, B, E, G, B, E [low to high]; and E, B, E, G#, B, E [low to high]. I don't know where these things came from. They're just sort of my own personal adaptations for what I need.

When recording solos, do you still record several solos and then comp them together?

Pretty much. Often, the first take is the best, so it becomes the template, and I just try to tidy it up by redoing certain bits. There is no hard and fast rule, however. Sometimes, I'll spend all day without getting anything that seems right, and then suddenly the part will just come. I have a penchant for melody, and sometimes melodies will just burst

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straight out. I have also resorted to singing a solo first, and then learning it on the guitar.

What do you record to?

I'm working mostly in Pro Tools these days, recording at 96kHz.

Do you find that Pro Tools further enables your track-compiling tendencies?

Editing in Pro Tools is certainly easier than it ever was with tape, so there is the temptation to get too many damn tracks down, and then have to organize them by drawing out charts with little ticks for every three- or four-bar moment, marking them one-through-ten, and then trying to join the best bits all together. But often that doesn't actually result in a cohesive part.


Do you then sometimes go, "Screw this," and just go back and try to play one straight through?
Yeah.

Pink Floyd's music has often been categorized as "progressive rock." Were you a progressive rock fan back in the day, and do you feel any affinity

with that movement?

To be honest, I don't. The general genre that people describe as progressive rock is not really my thing. The other bands that we tend to be lumped in together with have never been people I've wanted to listen to, and I personally don't feel our music fits into that category, or that we were ever on quite the same wavelength.

Are you an Eddie Van Halen fan?

I've met him a couple of times, and he always seemed to be a very nice guy. I have to confess that I don't listen to an awful lot of Van Halen, but Eddie is fantastic. His moments of sheer, unbridled, joyful playing—as he did on the Michael Jackson track—can't help but make you want to jump around on a dance floor. He was a major influence on a lot of people, wasn't he? He changed rock music, and he made a lot of very average players think they were a lot better than they actually were! 

David Gilmour **FEATURE**

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