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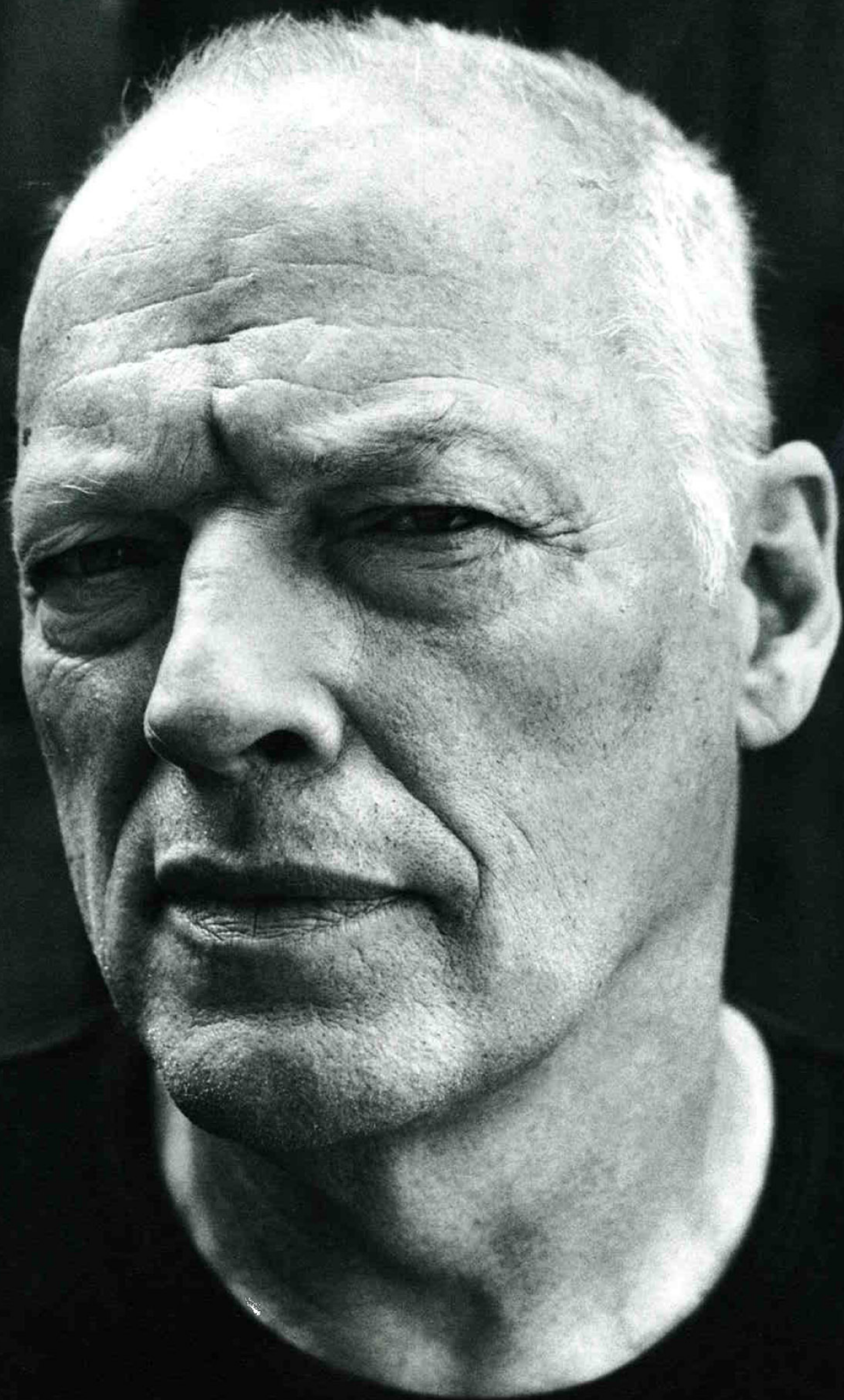
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He's a "pig-headed" socialist who replaced Syd Barrett and refused to kowtow to Roger Waters. So will Pink Floyd's guitar genius ever revive the band he fought for? It would be "fakery", says David Gilmour.

Interview by MARK BLAKE • Portrait by MATTIA ZOPPELLARO

THE NORWEGIAN LAVVU IS NOT TO BE confused with a tipi or yurt, as David Gilmour is keen to explain. The lavvu was a present from his wife and co-writer Polly Samson, and the large, conical tent, ideal for sleepovers and cookouts, stands in the vast grounds of the 62-year-old guitarist's Sussex farmhouse. Alongside it is a converted barn studio, in which Gilmour created most of his last solo album, 2006's Number 1 *On An Island*, and in which he is now sat, barefoot and supping from a mug of builder's tea.

A rack of guitars fills one corner of the room. Under the window stands a battered pedal steel covered with rehearsal notes from a recent performance of *Atom Heart Mother*. "I did enjoy it... but I think it's a pretty flawed track and album," he says.

Gilmour is here to talk up the release of *Live In Gdansk*, an album of a concert to celebrate the 26th anniversary of the founding of the Polish Solidarity trade union movement. In the album's accompanying DVD, the Gilmours dine with former Solidarity leader and ex-President Lech Walesa, who reveals through his translator that, like Gilmour, he has eight children, but that "all I can do now, as far as male things go, is shave".

In recent years, for Gilmour, being a father and husband has taken precedence over music. The *On An Island* tour was a relaxed, family affair ("and people wonder why I don't want to go back to Pink Floyd"). He once compared his old band to a "lumbering behemoth", but things also move at a glacial pace in Gilmour's world. There were six years between his first two solo albums and 22 between the second and third. A fourth

may take a while yet. Being a Gilmour-watcher is akin to being a 'twitcher' huddled in a dug-out – or Norwegian lavvu, perhaps – waiting for a rare species to show itself. Today, though, the lesser-spotted Gilmour is on good form and raring to go...

How did you end up playing in Gdansk?

We were invited to play Poland, and it sounded like a great idea, to be celebrating that first move towards democracy. Being the last night of the tour, it was emotional. It felt rather strange to be in this shipyard, which is now practically derelict, and about to be sold to a property developer.

What did you make of Lech Walesa?

Very upfront and blunt, the qualities that got him where he is today. It was an enjoyable meeting, but they gave us this very strong drink – like schnapps – and immediately afterwards I had to go into a press conference. After being forced to knock back two or three of these, I was being asked about Roger Waters.

We're not WORTHY

"He's a natural," says Pete Townshend.



"Among players, particularly British players, he's incredibly highly rated. Adored, I'd say. He has a way of putting incredible feeling into everything he does.

Technically, yes, he's very good, but that's not the important thing. It's the way that he plays. He's had real influence, and I think he's influenced me. There's a gracefulness, a naturalness, to the way he writes and plays."

In August 1980 when Walesa led the striking shipyard workers, Pink Floyd had just played *The Wall* at Earls Court. How much did events in Poland impinge on you all at the time?

Very much so. It was a fascinating moment in history, which started all that rumbling of discontent that led to the Berlin Wall coming down. One doesn't want to be anti-socialist, but I think of that whole eastern European movement as being against oppression and promoting personal freedom more than anything else.

Both your parents were teachers in Cambridge. How politically active were they?

It was all around us at the time. My parents were on the left of centre; proper Manchester Guard- ➤

◀ ian readers and they were both committed to voting for the Labour Party. I still consider myself to be more a socialist than anything else, even if I can't quite stick with party politics.

For years, you shared Pink Floyd with a musician who seemed to have a much louder political voice...

Roger [Waters] has a loud political voice, but I don't know how much he actually uses it. He would say that he uses it within his music.

Waters' opposition to the Falklands War was the theme behind much of Pink Floyd's *The Final Cut* in 1983. How comfortable were you sharing those views?

Roger and I had disagreements, but we were from the same side. I am completely against war if it can possibly be avoided, and I was not in favour of Thatcher going in to the Falklands, but my view was that it was our job to support that territory, and that in one way or another there should have been some longer term agreement mapped out. It seemed obvious that there was a rather deliberate breakdown of communications between the diplomatic channels of the Argentine and the UK, in order to create a scrap... That mass murder on the General Belgrano was just appalling.

Could you ever see yourself combining music and politics?

I have nothing against any musician wanting to use their voice as a musician expounding their philosophical or political views. Bob Dylan's early, very hardcore, political songs are what I grew up with. But I admit I'm not really vocal enough and clear enough. I'm afraid, I live my life in shades of grey.

Any regrets now about playing Live 8?

Not at all. But there are still stories about things that were agreed in conference that still haven't been lived up to by various countries.

You donated the £3.6 million proceeds of a house sale to [homeless charity] Crisis. How does it feel to give away that much money?

Let's not get blasé about this, but (pauses) I am quite a rich person. I have written cheques for some pretty big sums of money, but perhaps not that big before. A house was being sold and I was going to put the money into a charitable trust that Polly and I administer, but Polly, who is much better at these sort of things, said, "No. Bang! Just do it all and it will generate loads of publicity for the charity." And she was right.

Do you remember your first paying gig?

I doubt if I played for money before the age of 17. The first band I was in was The Newcomers, we were pretty crap. Before that, I did an audition and a day with a band whose name I can't remember. We played a gig at a village college in Cambridgeshire. It was only when I started a covers band, Jokers Wild [in 1964], with this idea of doing big, harmony vocals, that I felt I was doing anything worthwhile.

Were you offered a solo deal?

Someone might have said something along the lines of, "We could offer you something but you'd have to lose your band," but I was scared.

You met Brian Epstein back then?

Yes. He never offered me anything specific. We also saw Jonathan King, Lionel Bart... (smiling)

You were a fresh-faced lad...

That was the thing. All these people were gay, and I wasn't. Epstein seemed nice, but I don't think my perception of what was going on was entirely accurate as to what was *really* going on.

Andrew Loog Oldham also came across you around this time.

We auditioned for Andrew Loog Oldham. But I also did something with two other musicians

that I worked on at those auditions, Wally Waller and John Povey, who went on to join The Pretty Things.

When did you start trying to write songs?

With Jokers Wild it was about getting people dancing. That became restrictive, so I tried to write when the band [a later version of Jokers Wild, known as both Bullitt and Flowers] were living in France [1966 and 1967]. I have a memory of one song which I am not going to divulge. I'm that ashamed. I don't think I could have ever seen myself as a solo act. Maybe it was laziness, but that pithy, political stance taken by Dylan was never going to be my forte.

Around this time you saw Hendrix. How much of an influence was he?

A major influence, in terms of playing, but it's hard to tell how the people you admire affect you when you start writing. It's that thing about how music sounds in your head compared to how it comes out. The music I heard in my head came first from Leadbelly and then The Beatles and Eric [Clapton] and Hendrix. What it distilled itself into is another matter.

When the covers band came back from France, the rest of them returned to Cambridge, but you stayed in London, determined to start another band. Is this the first indication of that stubborn streak?

I'd been living in London before we went to France and my parents were in America. So I didn't have a family home in Cambridge to go back to. My parents had gone off for six months when I was five and put me in a boarding school. Then they went off again for a year when I was 15. My parents definitely instilled independence in us.

So they didn't object to you being in a band?

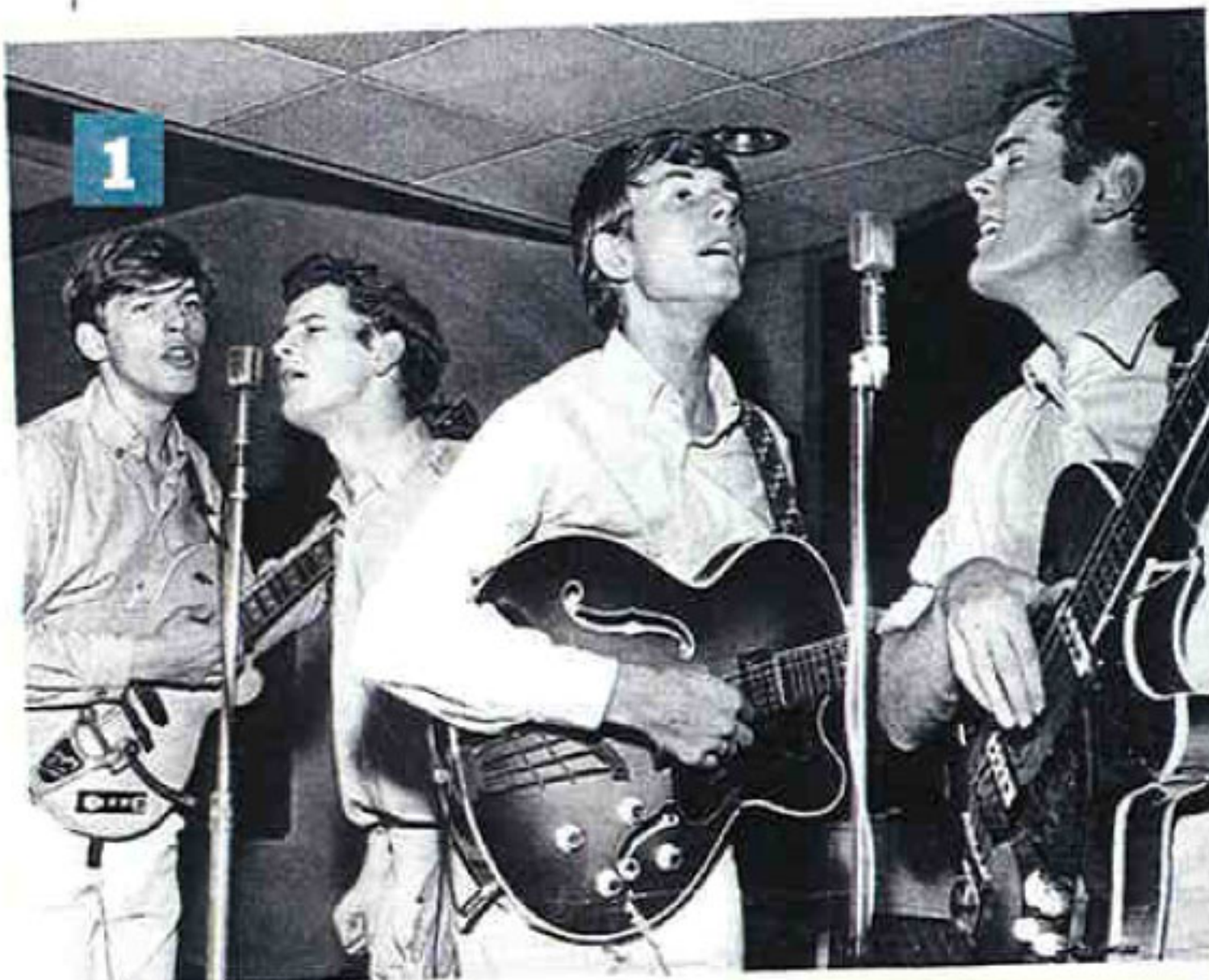
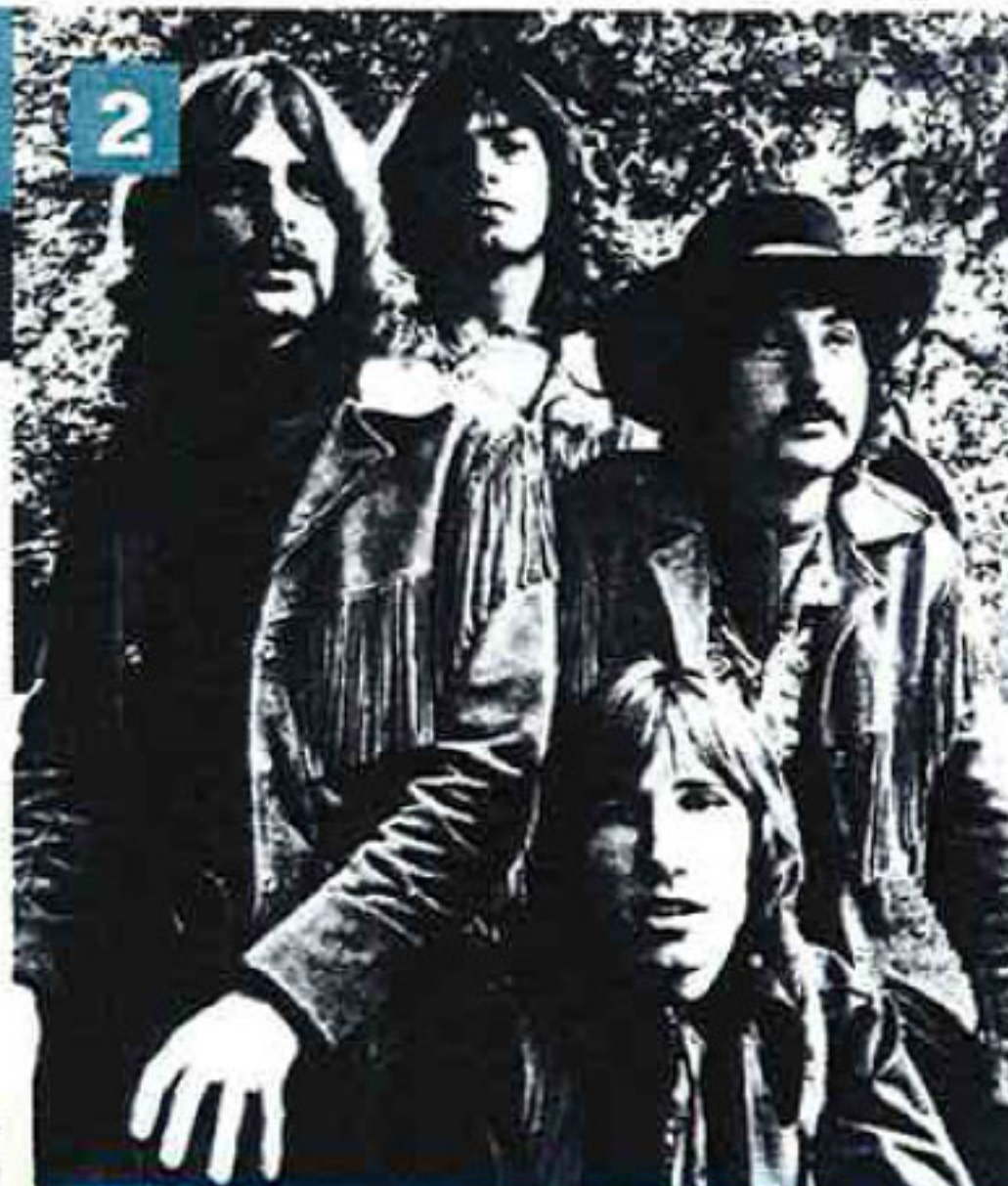
No, but they didn't have much choice. I hadn't completed my A-Levels, so going to university

A life in PICTURES

Gilmour the merrier: eight ages of Dave

- 1** At the hop: Jokers Wild, with Gilmour (far left), Cambridge, circa 1965.
- 2** Life after Syd: new model Pink Floyd, circa 1969, with Gilmour at the rear.
- 3** Going it alone: for second solo LP *About Face*, 1984.
- 4** Family affair: a happy Gilmour with wife and co-writer Polly Samson.

- 5** No animals here: the solo artist, May 1978.
- 6** Straight from the atom heart: Gilmour and Roger Waters, Paris, December 1971.
- 7** The great gig in the smoke: Gilmour at London's Albert Hall, 2006.
- 8** Towards the dark side: backstage at The Dome, Brighton, January 20, 1972.



was long past. They loved the idea of me being in a band, and used to help lug the gear, even when I was in Pink Floyd.

Back in London, what was the plan?

Form another band and do original material. But I had no firm idea of whom I should be forming a band with. I'd only been back in London for two or three months, when the offer came from Pink Floyd. They were the local boys made good and we'd done two or three gigs together when I was in Jokers Wild.

There's a video of Floyd miming to See Emily Play on Belgian TV in 1968. You're looking pretty embarrassed. What was going through your mind?

I was still trying to get used to it. It was very odd those first couple of years, stepping into Syd's shoes, working out what we were going to do. I remember it being different in the studio, though, where I was loud and bolshie, letting them know that I was there and taking part.

When did you start writing on your own?

I don't think there was anything before Fat Old Sun [on 1970's *Atom Heart Mother*] was there?

You get a sole writing credit for The Narrow Way on Ummagumma [in 1969].

I experienced abject terror when it was suggested we all write a song each: "Right, then, you've got a 10-minute slot to yourself." What? We were at a loose end with *Ummagumma*. We didn't know what the fuck else to do. Roger was developing himself as a lyricist, and my own paranoia – and laziness – combined with his ascendance created this situation where I did largely the music and he did lyrics.

Were you ever jealous of Roger's abilities?

There's no one else's talent I would have swapped with my own. There are moments when one is jealous, but it's usually irrational.

You had huge success with *The Dark Side Of The Moon* and *Wish You Were Here*, and then there's [1977's] *Animals*, by which time it's claimed Roger was dominating the band.

Roger's thing is to dominate, but I am happy to stand up for myself, which is what I did on *Animals*. I didn't feel remotely squeezed out of that album. Ninety per cent of the song Dogs was mine. That song was almost the whole of one side, so that's half of *Animals*.

“Roger's dominance did become an issue... but he was just being himself.”

Six months after the *Animals* tour, you went off and made the *David Gilmour* solo album.

I was persuaded to do it by Rick [Wills, bass] and Willie [Wilson, drums], the guys I'd played with in France before I joined Floyd. It was three weeks. Job done. There's No Way Out Of Here is lovely. I am excruciatingly embarrassed by some of the others.

Did you ever consider then, that there might not be another Pink Floyd album?

No, never. That first solo album came out of my frustration at how drawn out things were

becoming in Pink Floyd before heading back into another Floyd album that took even longer (laughing)... *The Wall*.

By which point there was disgruntlement?

Yes, but the rows were always all about the music. I can also remember me and Roger sitting in the studio, going, "Wow, this is fantastic, what we've just done." But Roger's dominance did become an issue. I don't think he consciously wanted to do people down, he was just being himself.

Your second solo album, *About Face*, arrived in 1984, by which time Pink Floyd was in disarray.

I was frustrated that the whole Floyd thing was falling down, and just wanted to go and have another bash on my own, but get some of the top guys in the world [including Steve Winwood], to have a bash with. I had this fantastic little team of players and went off to Paris and knocked out some tracks.

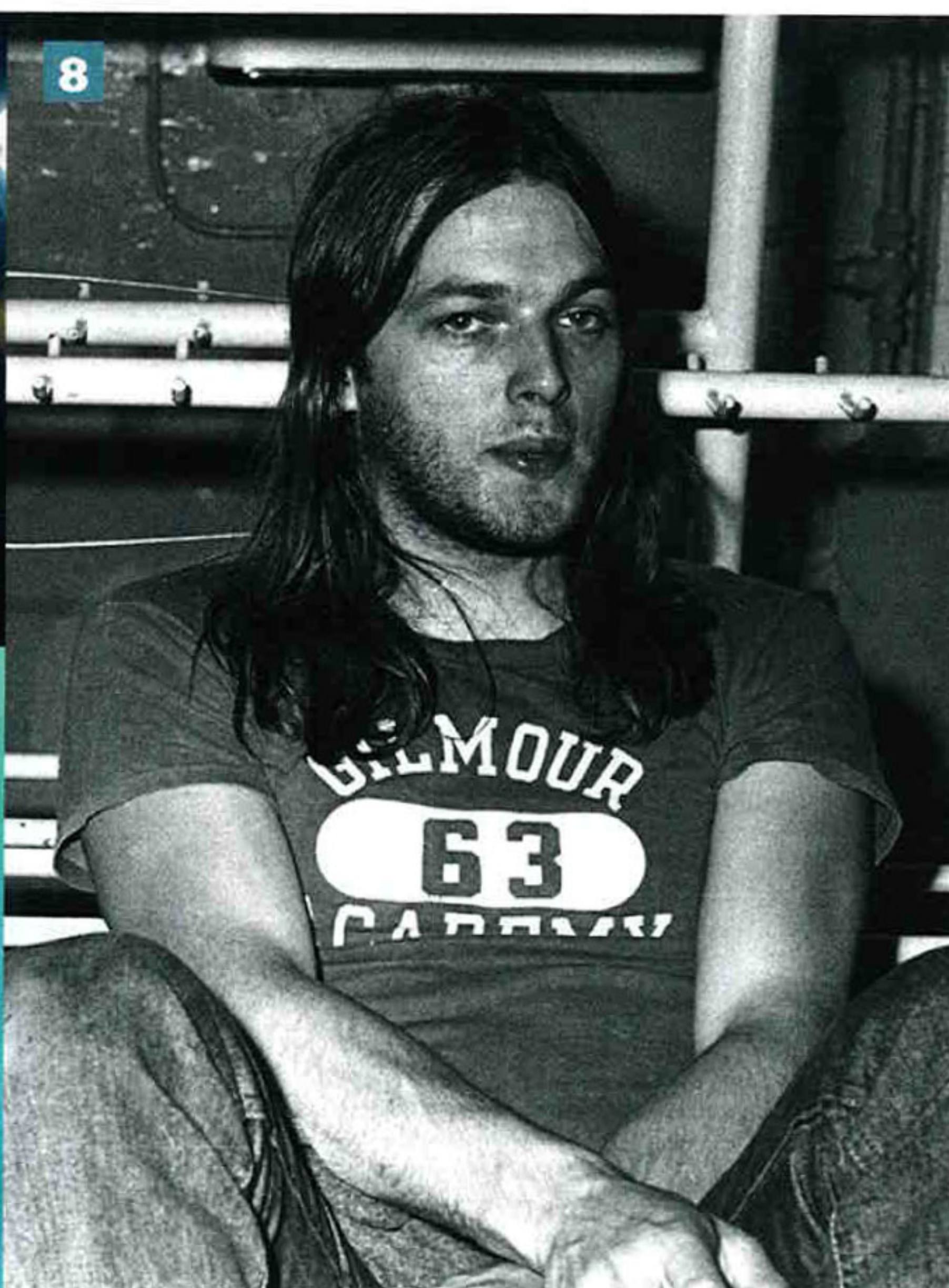
You co-wrote two songs with Pete Townshend.

We'd done some recording for *The Final Cut* at [Townshend's] Eel Pie Studios, and Pete had told me he had really liked my first album. I was dumbstruck, but he

said he was having difficulty writing music, but had loads of words. I sent over two or three tracks and he came back with lyrics for Love On The Air, All Lovers Are Deranged, and a third one, White City Fighting, which ended up on his next album.

Were you seriously considering a solo career at this point?

I suppose I must have been. I toured *About Face* on a thin-wallet level and it made a profit. The fact is I was facing the possibility that a solo career might now become a necessity. Roger had not actually left Pink Floyd, but we were ➤



Going to the lavvu:
Gilmour shows off
his Nord-tent.



all at each other's throats. It was actually in December '85 that Roger sent off his letter to EMI and he was out of the whole thing. It meant we could carry on. There was never a point after that where I thought perhaps we wouldn't carry on as Pink Floyd.

Another point at which your stubborn streak reappeared?

Yes, I am pig-headed, but often your best characteristics can also be your worst. There have been times when those characteristics have been enormously helpful and other times when it's been destructive. My refusal to kowtow to what was going down with Roger was destructive to Pink Floyd staying together.

What would the next Pink Floyd album have sounded like if you'd made it with Roger Waters?

God knows! By *The Final Cut*, I'd grown too weary of fighting to assert my musical judgement.

By 1986 you're in charge of Pink Floyd, bringing in Nick Mason and Rick Wright [the latter had quit in 1981]. Did you miss Roger Waters as a co-writer or in the studio?

If I did, I wouldn't remember it.

A September 1988 article in *Penthouse* featured Roger Waters claiming that after hearing some of the new Floyd material in progress, CBS Records executive Stephen Ralbovsky suggested you should start again...

A tissue of lies. I never stopped and started again. We have had a long history of saying, "Fuck off, we will deliver our record when we are ready to, with the cover, and you can sell it." Steve Ralbovsky did come down and wanted to hear a few things. He was a mate. It's entirely possible he wasn't impressed with it. We'd only been at it for three weeks, and there was a track that I'd played him a year before that I'd done at home with [drummer] Simon Phillips. It was a ripping track, but it wasn't going to fit with anything. Steve said, "What happened to that one?" I said it wasn't going to make it. Whatever his thoughts were, he kept them to himself, and wasn't invited to do anything else. We carried on, and by Christmas, we had upped a gear, and we were on our way forward.

Raves FROM DAVE

Gilmour goes it alone. Your guide: Mark Blake.

THE TIME-OUT RECORD

David Gilmour

★★★★

EMI/Harvest, 1978



Gilmour takes a cigarette break from Floyd on his debut solo album, recorded in France's Super Bear Studios. Overall, it's closer to the sleepy, stoned-sounding *Meddle* than the spiky unrest of *Animals*. There's No Way Out Of Here – composed by Ken Baker of Gilmour's pet project Unicorn – is the high point, with the Roy Harper co-write Short And Sweet running a close second.

THE CAREER CRISIS

About Face

★★★★

EMI/Harvest, 1984



With Floyd in limbo Gilmour rounded up *The Wall*'s co-producer Bob Ezrin for a second solo outing. The lyrics to You Know I'm Right take a swipe at Roger Waters, but the Townshend co-writes, including Love On The Air, are superior, even if the whole album suffers from an overload of mid-'80s technology.

THE CAREER COMEBACK

On An Island

★★★★★

EMI, 2006



Dedicated to departed friends – Pink Floyd's agent and sometime tour manager Tony Howard and arranger and composer Michael Kamen – there's a reflective, melancholy Englishness to Gilmour's strongest solo album thus far. The special guests, including Robert Wyatt, Graham Nash, David Crosby and even Pink Floyd's ex-ex-guitarist 'Bob' Rado Klose, add subtle flourishes.

What do you think of *A Momentary Lapse Of Reason*?

There are some lovely moments on it – Sorrow, On The Turning Away, Learning To Fly. But, like most people, we got trapped in this '80s thing. We were a bit too thrilled with all the technology that was being thrown at us, and Rick and Nick were both pretty ineffective. The thing is, within a month of us starting the *Lapse* tour, Nick and Rick were back, but, of course, I'd got these other guys on board as well [extra percussionist Gary Wallis and second keyboard player Jon Carin]. Yes, Jon is brilliant, but Jon is not Rick.

You reconvened Pink Floyd for 1994's *The Division Bell* and found your co-writer in Polly Samson, whom you married in July that year...

I cannot talk about anything past *The Division Bell* without crediting Polly with her help. But, we still have to deal with criticism. The Great Yoko Ono factor, I guess... We made some of the Pink Floyd classics in our later incarnation. High Hopes from *The Division Bell*, which I wrote with Polly, certainly falls into that category.

Rick Wright has said that the *On An Island* tour was the easiest he'd ever been on.

During that early '80s moment it was easy to forget Rick's abilities because he forgot them himself. But he has come back out of his shell. Of course, Rick has always been a bit grumpy about things. He still says things like, "Well, that's not quite the musical direction I thought we should be going in." He's said that about every record we've ever made. That's just Rick.

In 2006, Rick Wright and Nick Mason joined you to perform as Pink Floyd at a Syd Barrett tribute concert at London's Barbican. Roger Waters also performed, but not with Floyd.

I wasn't going to play the show. In fact, I was in a doctor's waiting room here in Sussex at 3pm that day, and I was grumbling about it, and Polly said, "Look, just call them up and stop fucking moaning." So I did. We rehearsed Arnold Layne in the dressing room, and we did say to Roger, "Can you do it?" and he said, "I can't. I have to go and pick someone up from the airport. I'm sorry." We knew people would make a lot of fuss and read something into that.

Have you been asked to participate in *The City Wakes*, a week-long tribute to Syd in Cambridge in October?

Yes. But I did my tributes to Syd on our last tour [where Gilmour played *Dominoes*] and I suspect that's where I'd rather leave it.

Is the 5.1 Surround Sound version of *Wish You Were Here* ever going to come out?

Yes. But when I last listened to it, there were still problems which need sorting out before we release it.

What are the chances of another David Gilmour album?

I undoubtedly will make another record. I'm not ready to retire. There's tons of stuff left over from *On An Island*. I just write and jot down ideas and one of these days I'll sit down again and have a listen.

And Pink Floyd?

I [can] see how important this Pink Floyd business gets for other people. But it isn't for me. I had some of the best times of my life and we created some wonderful music, but to do it again, it would be fakery. At my age, I am entirely selfish and want to please myself. I shan't do another Pink Floyd tour.

M