

Sinclair meets the thoroughly chilled David Gilmour

If you were looking for the sort of place where members of the rock aristocracy hang about, an ex-service-men's social club in a village hall near Godalming, Surrey, is not where you would start. Even deep into January, tinsel Christmas decorations are still hanging wearily from the ceiling above a line of dingy old tables and chairs. A dinner lady labours away in a tiny steam-filled kitchen, where a big pan of chili con carne bubbles merrily.

But this resolutely unpretentious setting is where David Gilmour, guitarist, singer and leader of Pink Floyd, has opted to rehearse for his forthcoming solo shows at the Festival Hall. When I arrive the musicians are noodling along fitfully to a recording of a song written by Rick Wright, the Floyd's keyboard player. Gilmour is hoping to persuade Wright to join him on stage to play and sing the song himself. But so far, the notoriously retiring Wright has not even shown up for rehearsals.

With less than a week to go before the shows, the 55-year-old Gilmour is suffering from a throat infection and cold for which he is taking various medications. Yet still an air of unhurried calm pervades the hall.

"Well, we've done this show before," Gilmour says, referring to the set he played at Robert Wyatt's Meltdown festival last sum-

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mer. "And if you rehearse a song more than a couple of times a day you don't get anywhere really. We just need a few days to get back into the groove of it."

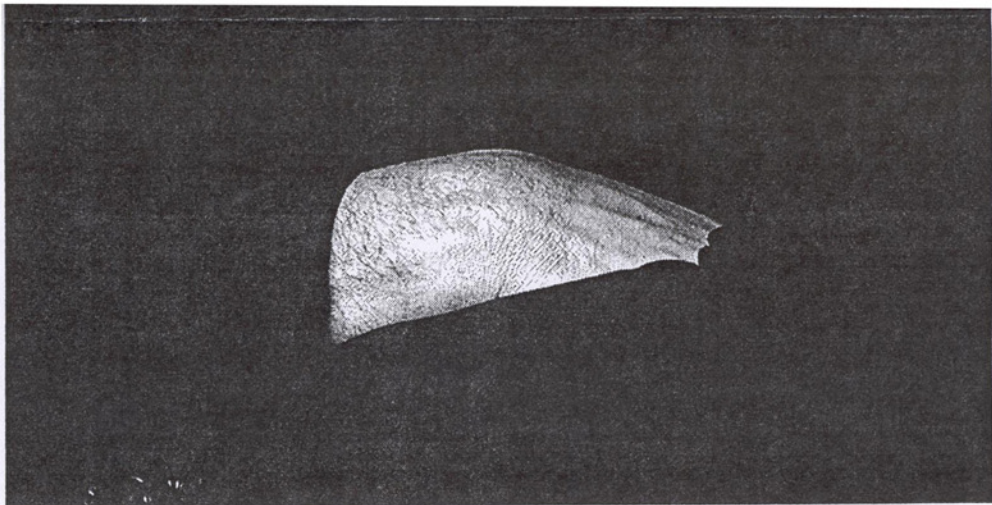
If there is any angst or tension involved in the process, Gilmour keeps it well hidden. With his easy smile and bright, piercing eyes, he radiates an avuncular cool. Certainly, the battles which he fought with Roger Waters ("Chairman Rog" as he calls him) over the custody of the Pink Floyd name and the financial gamble he and drummer Nick Mason took when they first mounted a Floyd tour without Waters are now a long way behind him. Even so, it is difficult to reconcile Gilmour's genial, self-deprecating manner with membership of such a remote and imposing group as Pink Floyd.

Known for the pomp and splendour of their vast stadium shows and the fastidious production values of their recordings, the Floyd have maintained a monolithic presence on the rock landscape while carefully keeping their distance from the celebrity limelight. With virtually no promotional activity from the group themselves, their TV-advertised compilation, *Echoes*, has been a Christmas bestseller in both Britain and America. The cash registers which sound out at the beginning of their song *Money* have not stopped ringing since Gilmour first sang the line "Money, it's a gas, grab that cash with both hands and make a stash" nearly 30 years ago.

Gilmour's stash is now estimated at £60 million, a figure he neither confirms nor challenges.

"If they say so. I don't know how they work it out. I'm not being obtuse. I really don't know. Obviously I do very well."

Well enough, at any rate, to be able to donate the proceeds of the recent sale of his house in Maida Vale, North London, for £3.6 million to the housing charity Crisis,



David Gilmour, a serial dad who is happier at home. "I'm not too good on the work ethic," he says

one of various good causes that Gilmour has long supported through his own charitable trust. Does he feel guilty about his wealth?

"Yes. I imagine I do. I feel very unjustifiably lucky. No one's expecting the world to be a fair place. But people who have been as lucky as I have should, in my view, be a little more generous with it. I would like to motivate other people in a similar position to start thinking about the excess of good fortune that they have.

"There's a lot of charity events and charity singles that come out. But I hope they don't make the people who make them feel sufficiently self-satisfied that they don't just dig into their pockets. Some of the people involved in events that I've been to and participated in could have made a much greater difference with a mere flourish of a pen at the end of a cheque than by bothering to put these damn things together in the first place."

If Gilmour's output as a musician has not been prolific in recent years, the same could not be said of his activities as a parent. His wife, the journalist and author Polly Sampson, is expecting a baby girl in April.

This will be Gilmour's eighth child — his fourth with Sampson, to add to the four from his previ-

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ous marriage. Gilmour jokingly describes the reasons for this symmetry as "political" (he will even manage to end up with four, boys and four girls).

He has put on weight since he stopped touring with Pink Floyd, but insists this is not the result of inactivity. "I do try and do a little bit of fitness stuff," he says without much conviction. "I live on a farm and we go for long walks."

He recently made a boathouse by himself ("three months of hard work") and is currently taking saxophone lessons along with one of his sons — both of them have just passed Grade 2. Not a day goes by when he doesn't sit down and play either the piano or an acoustic guitar, and he has no shortage of new material and ideas stored for fu-

ture use. But he is not bothered in the slightest whether any of this music ever sees the light of day and has no plans to record anything new in the immediate future.

So, as he tentatively picks up the threads of a solo career which lapsed after the release of his underrated album *About Face* in 1984, he occupies an unusual niche as neither a celebrity showman in the Jagger/McCartney mould nor a wandering troubadour of the Van Morrison/Richard Thompson variety.

"I'm more of a dilettante trying to fit music into all the other things that go on in my life of domestic bliss," he says with a wry smile.

"I'm not too good on the work ethic, I suppose. I sometimes feel as if I'm reaching a point of perfectly reasonable redundancy."

So is it all over for Pink Floyd?

"I suspect so. The market's still there, obviously. But I can't see myself wanting to do it again. It's a weighty old thing. And I think I've managed to get any sort of prickly ego trips out of my system by now. It's an awful lot of effort putting all that stuff together at my highly advanced age. I feel like living a slightly simpler life."

● David Gilmour plays at the Festival Hall, January 16, 17 and 18 (020-7960 4242)