

Pink Floyd are one of the biggest bands in rock history. They are also regarded as dour and grumpy. David Gilmour wants to put the record straight. By **Alexis Petridis**

**'WE HAD VAST AMOUNTS OF FUN. NO ONE SEEMED TO SPOT THAT'**



Gilmour...  
Britain's 466th  
richest man

**A**s often been pointed out, at 58, David Gilmour does not look like one of the most successful rock stars in history. Nor, it has to be said, does he sound like one. While not plummy in the Brian Sewell sense, he is certainly posher than your average guitarist. He loathes being called Dave. He uses the word "backside". He says "one" a lot. When the subject of selling his London home and donating the £4m proceeds to homeless charity Crisis arises, he says: "One does get to the point when one realises one has more than one needs."

The Pink Floyd guitarist's Sussex pile is not the tasteless rock-star mansion of legend, awash with platinum discs and leopardskin furniture. It is a beautiful farmhouse, albeit one with an advanced case of elephantitis. It manages to look simultaneously lived-in and enormous. Across the courtyard there are stables full of horses. In one corner of a kitchen larger than your average London flat sits Gilmour's wife, novelist Polly Samson. A vision of Nigella-esque loveliness, she cradles a baby, Gilmour's eighth child. Frankly, if you had his money - estimated earlier this year at £75m, making him the 465th richest man in Britain - you would live like this as well.

The means by which Gilmour came to this end are intriguing and unique. Plenty

of rock stars have become rich and famous, but - at least until Radiohead, to whom Gilmour chucklingly refers as "poor old Radiohead" - only Pink Floyd have become rich and famous by selling alienation, madness, misery and death.

At the end of the 1960s, Pink Floyd were a jobbing progressive-rock band, who had some lofty ideas involving quadrophonic sound systems, collaborations with orchestras and choirs and playing live in ruined amphitheatres. More often than not, the ideas fell flat, as on 1970's symphonic Atom Heart Mother, an album Gilmour succinctly described as "shit". Their genius leader Syd Barrett had long since left not just the band but the planet, thanks to his prodigious appetite for LSD.

One theory suggests that Barrett's breakdown lent Pink Floyd a melancholy and a gimlet-eyed ambition lacking in their more idealistic hippy contemporaries. Gilmour is less sure. "Maybe we're confusing two things here. I don't think hippy idealism is the same thing as taking loads and loads of LSD and partying. We were all ambitious as musicians. I suppose the hippy movement seemed rather anti-ambition, anti-material gain. I certainly don't think I'm motivated by rampant materialism. I can't say that I've ever objected to earning a few quid, but it's not my primary motivation."

Whatever the reason,

melancholy and gimlet-eyed ambition were much in evidence on 1973's Dark Side of the Moon. State-of-the-art production and Gilmour's note-perfect playing collided with bassist Roger Waters's grim lyrical vision, which fretted about materialism and age creeping up on you. A lot of people were clearly fretting about the same things: Dark Side of the Moon spent 14 years on the US album chart, making Pink Floyd one of the biggest rock bands in history and simultaneously characterising them as hopelessly dour.

The band did little to refute the latter charge. The more successful they became, the grumpier their records got: 1979's The Wall complained about virtually every aspect of being in a rock band, went platinum 23 times over and spawned concerts during which a polystyrene wall was constructed between band and audience. Life in Pink Floyd never looked like a barrel of laughs.

"Well, you know, you're right," says Gilmour. "There were fights, but we did have really good times. We were

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if it was all Roger, why hasn't he done better since? But I wouldn't say that. I will not allow myself to get drawn in."

While Waters tours arenas billed as the Creative Genius Behind Pink Floyd, Gilmour has released a DVD of his charming solo show at the Royal Festival Hall last year, devoid of flying pigs, with Pink Floyd songs performed largely on acoustic guitar. The show was big on intimacy, in stark contrast to Pink Floyd's reputation as one of rock's more remote bands.

"That is the perception," Gilmour nods. "A lot of the material reaches right into the hearts and souls of people: Wish You Were Here, Shine On You Crazy Diamond. But I suppose as Pink Floyd grew in stature and popularity, the venues became so vast and that created a sense of distance."

Building a polystyrene wall between you and the audience probably didn't help. "Well, the intention of that was to point out the possible remoteness and get rid of it. The wall that separated us from our audience or separated people from people, I could see it, but I didn't feel it applied to me."

Aloof or not, Pink Floyd's influence on music seems to roll on endlessly. They survived the Sex Pistols (who wore T-shirts reading "I Hate Pink Floyd") and today, everyone from Marilyn Manson to Noel Gallagher pays homage.

"Do I keep up with current trends?" Gilmour chuckles. "No." He thinks for a minute, and comes up with something unexpected. "I like that fellow Mike Skinner, the Streets. Being of an incredibly advanced age, I don't understand these labels, industrial garage or whatever, but that track Let's Push Things Forward appealed to me. Why? It's rhythmically and musically interesting, and philosophically interesting as well."

Given the acrimonious nature of Floyd's music, there was something inevitable about the acrimony of their split. Waters left after 1983's The Final Cut ("We should have called it The Final Straw," sighs Gilmour), and sued to dissolve the band. He failed, the others carried on, making two more hit albums and big-grossing tours with Gilmour as leader. Since then the rancour between the two has descended into farce (Waters claimed to have patented the inflatable flying pig that forms part of Pink Floyd's extravagant stage show, forcing the remaining members to build another inflatable flying pig, with a pair of enormous testicles added) and shows few signs of abating. "I want people around me who are creative, lively, interested and interesting," Waters said recently. "Dave is none of those things."

"One gets defensive," says Gilmour, "but I don't analyse too much who was the heart, who was the brains, who was the soul. All I can say is it was a pop group and it had a sound and the bass player doesn't usually create the whole sound, does he? One could say,

David Gilmour's Live in Concert DVD is out now.



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