

COINCIDING WITH HIS ON AN ISLAND ALBUM DEBUTING AT NUMBER ONE WITHIN DAYS OF HIS 60TH BIRTHDAY, THE "VOICE AND GUITAR OF PINK FLOYD" HAS EMBARKED ON HIS FIRST FULL TOUR IN 12 YEARS.

MARK CUNNINGHAM REPORTS FROM AMSTERDAM...

david gilmour

With the surprise and awe of last summer's Pink Floyd reunion at *Live 8* still a spine-tingling memory in many quarters, David Gilmour's new solo album, *On An Island*, captures a man who is clearly very happy with his lot. Released on his 60th birthday in March, the collection — his first complete studio project since Floyd's *The Division Bell* in 1994 — is a beautifully mellow showcase for his unmistakable guitar sound and articulate vocal style. So tranquil, in fact, that one can almost feel the warmth of the Mediterranean sunset that inspired Gilmour and his lyricist wife, Polly Samson.

It was once very accurately said that while Roger Waters made Floyd fans think, Gilmour made them listen. And nothing could be further than the truth on the guitarist's current European tour production which confidently marries a performance of the entire *On An Island* album with a second set consisting of Pink Floyd classics ('Shine On', 'Time', 'Wish You Were Here', 'Comfortably Numb'), rarities ('Fat Old Sun', 'Wot's... Uh The Deal') and a true epic that Gilmour has hardly ever played live since the 1970s, 'Echoes'. With the bonus of Floyd co-founder Richard Wright in the lineup, it's an irresistible, must-see package.

Accepting an invitation to the second of two dates at Amsterdam's Heineken Music Hall in March proved

fortunate, for not only is this venue purpose-built for live music, with all facilities thoughtfully designed to cope with the practical requirements of incoming productions, but on a personal note, Gilmour's show provided an intimate audio experience unrivalled by pretty much anything to date. A bold statement, perhaps, but from the heart.

Although Gilmour ventured out in a minor way during 2001 and 2002 with a handful of acoustic shows, it's been 12 years since he's needed a full-scale touring machine around him. Therefore, Phil Taylor, his production director and guitar technician since 1974, needed to assemble a crack team in time for initial rehearsals at Genesis's one-time hideout, Chiddingfold Social Club in Surrey, then at Black Island Studios in Acton for the final production rehearsals before warm-ups at London's Mermaid Theatre for a BBC radio broadcast and Porchester Hall on the guitarist's birthday.

Familiar faces Colin Norfield (FOH engineer), backstage tech Huw 'Sid' Pryce and LD Marc Brickman of *The Wall* fame have been joined by Macca's monitor mixer John Roden and keyboard tech 'DJ' Howes, and erstwhile Cliff & The Shadows production manager Roger Searle, while Britannia Row continues its Floyd

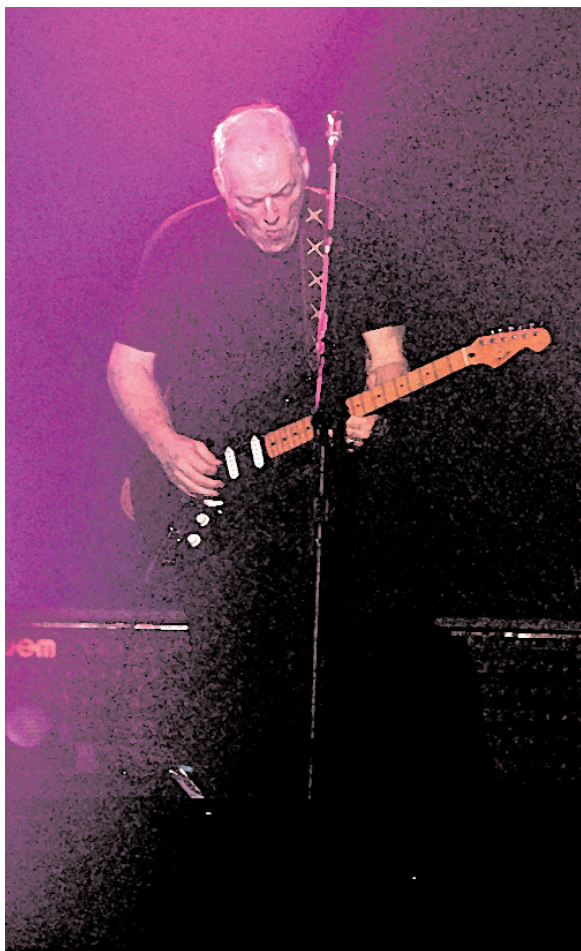
association as audio provider with Mike Lowe in office.

The highly respected Searle maintains a happy ship upon which an air of polite Englishness resides. As they say, the vibe always comes from the top, and it's a cosy family affair with Mrs. G documenting the tour photographically, guitarist Phil Manzanera's wife Claire Singers looking after publicity, and Wright's son-in-law Guy Pratt on bass.

"I've known Phil Taylor for many years and because he needs to focus on David's stage requirements, it made sense to bring in a production manager to take the strain. I was delighted to get Phil's call," said Searle.

"In my area of work, you move from one act to another, and although the names change the basic rules still apply. There are some people here who have been with David a long time, but no one is so rigid that they're not happy to do things slightly differently, and everyone's been getting on famously — maybe all the time off in between shows helps!"

Damon Iddins, a talented young engineer from Gilmour's Astoria studio, is recording each show on a compact Pro Tools system from the side of the stage, presumably with a view to a future live album. "It's a far cry from the days when you had to meticulously plan



for live albums, and organise the parking space for a 40ft studio truck," laughed Searle, who next year celebrates his 40th anniversary in the industry.

It was partly Searle's experience on the last Shadows tour of the recently-launched Turbosound Aspect system that influenced its choice for the Gilmour tour and, ultimately, the extraordinary sound quality. Phil Taylor had already been discussing its merits, having decided that a line array was not suitable.

Explained Searle: "I mentioned the great results we achieved on The Shadows with Aspect. Given that David and Hank Marvin share certain melodic sensibilities as guitarists, and that this tour was mostly visiting theatre-type venues, in my mind the Aspect system was perfectly suited. So Colin Norfield, our FOH engineer, and Andy Jackson [DG's studio engineer] A-B tested it against the tried and tested Turbo Flashlight/Floodlight system, and decided it would work."

Norfield, who shared FOH mixing duties with Jackson on *The Division Bell* tour as well as Gilmour's more recent acoustic shows, was immediately impressed with Aspect. He said: "When I first heard the Flash/Flood combination, it was a great moment for me because I started to hear 1" drivers — the high end became cleaner and crisper, and it was something I couldn't achieve with 2" drivers. Generally, systems have improved although nothing really gripped me. But I was very interested in hearing Aspect because apart from wedges, nothing has been new from Turbosound for years.

"The brief for this tour was that the system had to be clear and very hi-fi, and it was lovely to hear in the A-B test that Aspect was an even further improvement on Flash/Floodlight, as well as being easier to control. I like to make a mix sound transparent, so that it's almost like the PA isn't there, and then your focus is on the stage which is what I hope we've achieved."

Currently in its second version of development, the Aspect system for the tour consists of 18 890H mid-highs, 24 890L lows, and four TQ440 full range infills. "It's easy to set up," declared Dominic Harter, Turbo's European Sales Manager. "As soon as the points were in, the flown stuff was up in 15 minutes per side, and as soon as we had enough local crew, the rest was up in half an hour. There's someone from Turbo on every gig as a crew member, and it's been a two-way street of support between us and Brit Row. There's very little in the way of processing or measuring going on at all. We time-align the PA using clicks and pink noise, and then Colin EQs



it to his taste."

Searle added: "We've had great sound reviews not only in the mainstream press but also the fan sites [such as www.davidgilmour.com and www.brain-damage.co.uk], which I've grown to take notice of because they are the consumers and their opinions are extremely valid."

Did Norfield consider the line array route? "Not really. Phil told me he'd discussed this with David and they didn't really like any that they had heard and thought that they'd be unsuitable for the venues. I've used line arrays often with some of the German acts I work for, but ultimately whatever you use, you have to be able to EQ the PA properly if you're going to achieve any kind of a result. But being a point source system, this is about as ideal as you'll get for this kind of tour. Not only is the high end very good, but also the mids are very clean. It doesn't take your head off when you raise the levels; it remains pretty smooth all the way through and nicely balanced."

Norfield said that the "analogue style" of the music, aided by well-maintained period Floydian devices such as a Farfisa organ, Binson Echorec and WEM guitar



Top row: Colin Norfield and John Roden at their respective DiGiCo D5 consoles. **Above:** Production manager Roger Searle; Lighting operator Mark 'Sparky' Risk and LD Marc Brickman; Gilmour and Floyd colleague Rick Wright in rehearsals at Chiddingfold Social Club.

cabinets, originally influenced his choice of a Midas Heritage 3000 at FOH. "But," he said, "David was coming in every day with another idea that raised the input count. When 'Time' was added to the set, requiring another four channels for the rototoms, we then switched to a DiGiCo D5 Live and I've been playing catch up ever since — which is why I still have the outboard racks!"

At the Amsterdam soundcheck, 'Coming Back To Life' [from *The Division Bell*] was knocked into shape by the band, providing Norfield with the chance to store the mix as a snapshot for future recall. "The set's been changing from gig to gig, and we don't get much notice about a new set list, so having everything stored on the D5 is an advantage."

The main microphone choice was made by Andy Jackson who favoured using Neumann KMS105 cardioid condensers for all the vocals. Said Norfield: "So we called Sennheiser and they kindly lent us a whole load of mics, including some for the drum kit

which now uses a combination of Sennheisers and Shures. I have no problem with the Neumanns — I mean, who's going to turn down a loan of those, they sound beautiful! I'm not having any problems with backline spill into David's centre mic, which is a bonus. The other mic worth mentioning is the Audix OM7 for drum vocal, which I started using with [German rock star] Peter Maffay's drummer because it has excellent rejection for cymbals."

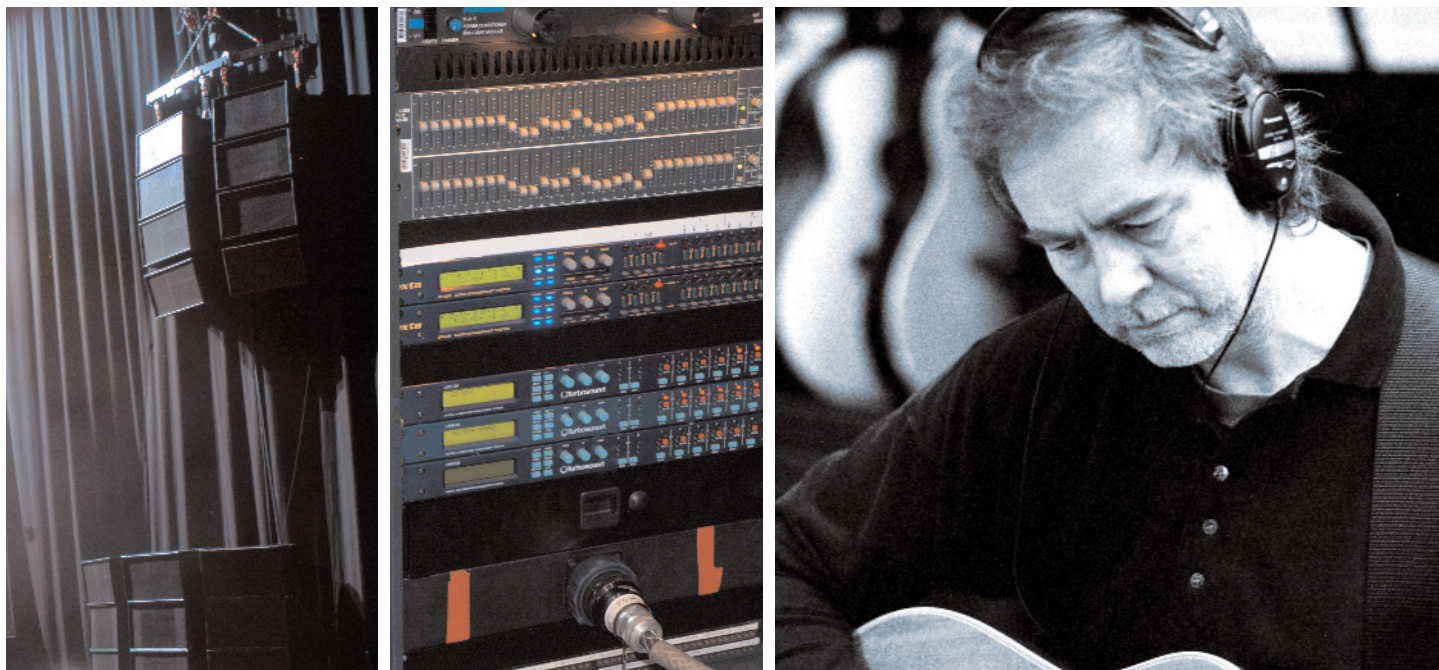
TOYS FOR THE BOYS

FOH outboard includes a t.c. electronic 6000 for a very short 480L reverb on vocals, and Norfield emulates Gilmour's studio vocal double tracking with the dual pitch harmoniser mode on a Yamaha SPX 990. dBX 160a compressors, BSS compressors, Drawmer gates and a TC D2 delay also feature. "To be honest," he said, "even though the D5 has a fantastic range of onboard processing, I think I'd probably still want some of these extra toys. It's what you get used

to."

The Aspect is driven by Turbosound-badged MC2 switch mode amplifiers which boast a positive power/low weight ratio. "We use T45s with T25s on the high end," said Brit Row's crew chief, Aron Ross. "I didn't know they had orange LEDs on them until the other day because they are very efficient and draw very little current for a really loud show. I was grateful for them at the Paris Olympia because things were so tight, we had to stack the five amp racks."

System processing is handled at FOH by the XTA DP428 four input/eight output audio management system. "XTA can't have them back — I'm keeping them!," said a satisfied Ross. "The 428 has a 28-band graphic in it for each input and on the computer interface it's really easy to use. The EQ for this system is just a BSS 901 31-band graphic over left and right, EQ-ing every zone. After that I have eight bands of parametric on each output, plus eight bands on each input and a graphic, so I have EQ for days!"



Above: One side of the Turbosound Aspect system; BSS graphics and XTA processing in evidence; the ever-present Phil Taylor heads the crew.

Unknowingly, Norfield 'warmed up' for this tour by hitting the road recently with top tribute band The Australian Pink Floyd Show. "The Aussie Floyd are a fantastic band, and it's worked to my advantage, because they play 'Echoes'. When David wanted to include that song for this tour, hardly anyone had played it before and it's a complex number to get right, but I was well prepared!"

Norfield is quick to admit that despite his enviable mixing skills, he has little regard for new technologies, and as he says, "I'm too old now to get interested in all the new gear; I quickly get blinded by science, so I leave it to the kids and just get on with my job!". His down-to-earth, meat 'n' two veg character is made even more endearing by his ability to harness the very best from the Aspect system and deliver sound reinforcement in the purest sense of the phrase.

Five numbers into the set, the quality of what I was hearing suddenly hit me. The jazzy blues lollipop of 'This Heaven' was so incredibly intimate and clear, it sounded as though someone had just turned the stereo up in front of me. It was *that* hi-fi. Similarly effective was the jaw-dropping reworking of 'Shine On You Crazy Diamond' whose sensitivity gave extra meaning to this ode to dear old Syd Barrett.

As for the rest of the show, it was possible to enjoy every instrument, voice and effect, either as separate entities or as the glistening whole, seemingly without any colouration. The combination of Gilmour's band, the venue's friendly acoustics, and Norfield piloting an Aspect system from a D5 is one that will be hard to beat.

AND OVER AT STAGE LEFT...

Like Norfield, monitor engineer John Roden would normally have chosen a large format analogue console for this genre of artist, like the Midas Heritage 3000 he used on McCartney last year.

However, Roden's main reason for also choosing a DiGiCo D5 Live was, he explained, "because we're mainly playing small venues with little space at monitor position, a small footprint desk that could cope with the input count was really the only answer, and I knew that the D5 would provide the solution and allow me to operate without being surrounded by racks of outboard gear. I mean, where would I put it all? There's enough space being eaten up at stage right by David's guitar shop!"

Roden runs all EQs, reverbs, delays and general processing directly from within the desk, and commented that the D5 was, in many ways, made for this kind of show. He's become quite the fan: "It is a great console; it's ergonomic, easy to use and sound quality wise, it's fine — much better than a lot of other digital boards, and some of the top analogue ones, too. Plus you get superb support from the DiGiCo guys — they really know how to look after engineers."

How does this tour differ from recent projects like McCartney's tour? "Mixing monitors is mixing monitors. The requirements are pretty much the same from the musicians and they can change from day to day, but the difference here is that I'm exhausted at the end of one of these shows because the second half, with the Floyd material, gets very intense.

"I could 'cheat' and use the D5's snapshot facilities but it's proper, organic music, and I like to mirror that in the way I work. I like to know I've done something, and see instant evidence. Although I'm aware that the D5 will do what it's told, the evidence is buried in some 'page' somewhere in the console, and it's hard for me to comfortably trust it. I'd be double checking everything anyway, so I might as well go the analogue route. I have run snapshots in the past, but I feel more a part of the performance by working manually."

By choice, Roden is clearly not gaining the most from the D5's wide palette of digital benefits, however, there are still some major advantages. "I can pull anything up instantly, and also do things like change dynamic aspects of three mixes at once. I'm fully aware that I could make my job a lot easier with this desk, it's just that I prefer it this way!"

On stage it's very dynamic, changing from "pretty loud" (115dbA) on 'Take A Breath' to pindrop quiet on 'A Pocketful Of Stones'. It's a 56-input show and Roden generates 13 stage mixes including effects. With one exception, everything is sent to Crown-amplified Turbosound TFM-450 or 420 wedges. "I run one in-ear mix to our drummer, Steve DiStanislaio, for his backing vocals and a count-in. He's singing out of his natural range and needs that extra monitoring support. He has five mixes, going to a left and right wedge, a thumper, a TQ-425 sub-bass and the IEM."

Playing saxophone live (on 'Red Sky At Night') has been a new experience for Gilmour, especially from the stage monitoring perspective. "It's been problem-free," assured Roden. "David is such a dream to work

for and very undemanding as long as you give him a good foundation. His wedges are essentially for his vocals, acoustic guitar, sax and a couple of cues; he finds himself a sweet spot and then listens to the stage, and he's happy."

He added: "It's a real privilege to have been asked to tour with David. I have Sid Pryce to thank for that — it was Sid who recommended me to Phil, having spent years on the road with him on McCartney, AC/DC, Sabbath and Ozzy."

COMPELLING LIGHTS

Marc Brickman's association with the Floyd camp stretches back to 1980 with the first performances of *The Wall*, and in recent years he has earned further notoriety with Genesis, Paul McCartney, Nine Inch Nails, Pet Shop Boys and as production designer for the outrageous Blue Man Group.

Brought back into the fold for Gilmour's tour, and going out on the road for the first time in 12 years, Brickman squeezed his relatively small lighting rig to the max. Scenes ranged from the dark and moody blue washes for the many soporific moments of the new album, to full throttle strobing and fast rotating gobo dynamics on 'Echoes'.

Interestingly, Brickman avoided importing any form of video or LED lighting into his design, and it was a delight to note just how compelling a relatively standard rig can be in the right creative hands. It was a refreshing change for one's eyes to focus on the stage action, rather than be seduced by side screens and extraneous visual paraphernalia. For many acts, it works; for Gilmour, it would have been wholly unnecessary, said Brickman.

Maybe the only other layer worth adding would have been subtle animated projections of birds and imagery associated with the new album, but as Searle pointed out, rigging points at most venues would have made this impractical.

With PRG Europe's Mickey Curbishley handling the lighting account, Brickman's work was programmed at Black Island by Mark 'Sparky' Risk, using the Virtuoso console he is operating on tour. Mostly consisting of Vari*Lite intelligent fixtures, the spec includes 10 old VLM moving mirrors that were "dusted off" to provide a similar effect to Brickman's beloved Telescans of years past. Allegedly, these are the only 10 remaining in Europe!



There's a fair amount of floor lighting, including a no-holds-barred 20 Atomic 3000 strobes with scrollers and 10 VL2500 washes. On side towers for cross washes are the new VL500s which are run from the dimmers. "The 500s are a bit brighter and change colour more quickly than the 2500, and we really like them," said Risk. "And up in the centre truss we have four 1kW Syncrolite MX1000 compact automated searchlights. It's hardly a big system, but as with everything here, we couldn't really go any bigger because of the sizes of the venues."

Brickman said: "The reality was that we were absolutely governed by the small scale of the production, and that was really the only brief that I received. Being a fairly short and exclusive tour anyway, it was kind of cool to just design everything around three straight trusses."

In Amsterdam, Brickman was being pressured to make final decisions about upgrading the rig for May's Royal Albert Hall dates which will be filmed for a forthcoming DVD release. "When we get back from the American leg, we're hoping to set up at the Rehearsal Arena at LiteStructures [supplier of the stage risers] to prepare for the Albert Hall, and I can imagine we'll add a few extras while we're there. Maybe lasers. We'll see."

Has there been any temptation to inject a few visual references from past tours into the Floyd section of the show? "No," insisted Brickman. "This was never going to be like a scaled-down Pink Floyd show and we definitely weren't going to use the old, round back screen — I wanted to create something fresh and a new look for David, and it's been fun."

Curious then, that the classic, back-lit silhouette of Gilmour during his 'Comfortably Numb' solo — an effect straight from the *Wall* tour — was very much in evidence!

There was a gleeful irony about Rick Wright taking Roger Waters' vocal part in 'Comfortably Numb', particularly as Wright had been fired from the band at Waters' behest during the recording of *The Wall* in 1979. Maybe this is a further sign of the healing process that began at *Live 8*?

Whatever the intention, the faultless delivery of this Floyd gem as the finale in Amsterdam reignited my passion for the greatest rock guitar solo of all-time — it was the crescendo of a rare evening spent submerged in aural pleasure.

TPI

Photography by Phil Dent & Polly Samson

Silhouette image from *On An Island* — design by Steve Knee

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