

## MUSIC

# David Gilmour rattles the lock



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**The Pink Floyd guitarist, who turns 70 tomorrow, recently released *Rattle That Lock*, his latest album that is eerily prophetic of our times**

The David Gilmour I remember is the long-haired, handsome rock star from *The Dark Side of the Moon* days. That memory of the man and that iconic album is what defines Pink Floyd for me, so I was a bit surprised to see recent pictures from his new album, *Rattle That Lock*.

The David Gilmour of 2016 is a weathered, grizzled septuagenarian with white hair and a white beard, who could easily be mistaken for a prophet or seer from medieval times. *Rattle That Lock* is a concept album loosely based on “thoughts and feelings that all of us have in the course of a single day”, and in vintage Floyd tradition, it’s an album that one has to listen to, in its entirety, in one sitting.

I had gone up to the terrace of my house to do just that, but was disturbed by the TV blaring from the neighbouring flat. It was the usual 9 p.m. cacophony of people screaming at the top of their voices, what we have come to call the news. On the other side was the husky, voice of Gilmour singing:

*“Whatever it takes to break gotta do it, From the burning lake or the eastern gate, You’ll get through it...No discord, chance or rumour Is going to interrupt this place...Rattle that lock, Lose those chains”*

It was ironic that the news anchor and David Gilmour were talking about the very same thing – governments clamping down on dissent. The song is about making a noise and hoping that people lose the chains that they find themselves bound in.

In song-writing, there’s a fine balance between lyrics and music, and David Gilmour’s soaring guitar and the spaced-out lyrics of Roger Waters was what gave Pink Floyd its unique sound. Ever since Waters left the band, that lyrical edge that Pink Floyd albums of yesteryears had, disappeared, and the subsequent Gilmour and Floyd albums were to me musically rich, but lyrically depleted. Pink Floyd’s last album, *The Endless River*, consisted almost solely of instrumental music with a few vocals thrown in.

*Rattle That Lock* is, in many ways, a return to the days of *“No dark sarcasm in the classroom, Teachers leave them kids alone...”* – a heady cocktail of classic rock and message in the lyrics – without the special effects of whirring helicopters, ringing cash registers, alarm clocks and dogs barking.

‘A Boat Lies Waiting’, with backing vocals by legends Graham Nash and David Crosby, is a requiem for Floyd keyboardist Richard Wright, who was an avid sailor. The song opens with an earlier recording of Wright talking about death – *“It’s like going into the sea/There’s nothing...”*

Then there’s a song about military drones and the people controlling them wreaking havoc and killing innocent people whom they’ve no enmity with.

Starting March 24, Gilmour is embarking on a tour of the U.S. and Canada to promote his new album. To me, this album is perhaps his best work ever, partly because of the music, but mainly due to the lyrics and its context in today’s world.

On the times we are living in and the increased fear mongering, Gilmour says, “It’s a strange time. I can see that security in all our countries has to be quite high on the list, but I don’t think that crippling students for protesting should be allowed.” Ironically, he said this many months before the incidents here, and he wasn’t specifically referring to any particular government or country. Even in the so-called ‘free world’, there have been numerous instances of musicians paying the price for taking a stance against the powers that be.

The frontman of the rap-metal band Rage Against the Machine was arrested for ‘civil disobedience’ when protesting against the use of sweatshop labour by a designer brand in Santa Monica. During the McCarthy years, when there was a witch hunt of left-leaning artistes and musicians in the U.S., a case of ‘contempt of court’ was foisted on iconic folk singer Pete Seeger and he was imprisoned for a year.

More recently, the Russian girl band Pussy Riot was imprisoned for 21 months without bail, on trumped-up charges of “hooliganism inspired by religious hatred” for protesting against Putin’s ‘anti-gay and anti-democratic laws’. The band’s singer Nadezhda Tolokonnikova says, “When the whole country sees innocent people being jailed, and that this can happen to absolutely anyone, that of course is going to make a lot of people become more silent.”

Across the world, everyday people – cartoonists, folk singers, writers, student leaders and teachers are being jailed on charges of ‘activities’ against the state.

Gilmour, in an interview, says, “ *Rattle That Lock* is about shaking free of the constraints against us in the modern world, where protest is being stamped on rather harshly by our governments. I guess it’s an exhortation for people to rebel against the constraints that are being laid on us. People who go out and protest in a perfectly reasonable way about things they are upset about get stamped on rather hard these days. It feels like it’s moving more toward a government-inspired police state.”

David Gilmour turns 70 tomorrow. He’s neither a prophet nor a seer, but in today’s world, his words may seem eerily prophetic.

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