



Roger Waters

IS THIS THE LIFE WE REALLY WANT?

SONY

In the last decade, Roger Waters' live extravaganzas have seen him enter the record books as the highest grossing solo act of all time. He's been trading on former Pink Floyd glories, of course, and you wonder if he's sold himself short in some respect. Here's the remarkable thing about his first new rock album in 25 years (2005's opera *Ça Ira* doesn't count) – vast swathes of this new album could stand shoulder-to-shoulder with his best work in the Floyd, and don't seem in the slightest bit out of place.

Callbacks to his old band abound, and this fired-up, politically charged album, heralded as "an unflinching commentary on the modern world and uncertain times", is right up there with his best work.

David Gilmour may bill himself as the 'voice and guitar' of Pink Floyd, but this LP makes one thing abundantly clear: Waters was very much the architect of the overall sound of the band. Quite apart from his lyrical input into Floyd, the structural feel of the arrangements here is clearly reminiscent of parts of *The Dark Side Of The Moon*, *Wish You Were Here*, *Animals* and *The Wall*.

"Our parents made us what we are, or was it God?/Who gives a fuck, it's never really over," spits Waters on the spoken-word intro to opener *When We Were Young* that gradually coalesces into focus and brings to mind the famous heartbeats that open *Dark Side...'*s *Speak To Me*.

Déjà Vu sees Waters in philosophical mode: "If I had been God, I believe I could have done a better job," and there's a knowing little chuckle buried deep in the mix to suggest this may be somewhat tongue-in-cheek. *Picture That* ups the Floyd ante with some very *Wish You Were Here*-era keyboard washes and finds Waters angrily railing against a "leader with no fucking brains".

Waters' band, which includes serial collaborator-with-the-stars Jonathan Wilson on guitar and super session drummer Joey Waronker, don't shy away from sounding like Floyd, although soloing is kept to a minimum. Producer Nigel Godrich's fingerprints are all over the title track, a graceful and chiming mid-tempo song featuring stabbing string-section interjections with a distinctly Radiohead flavour. It's a damning indictment of small-minded

Brexiters and little Englanders: "Fear drives the mills of modern men/Fear keeps us all in line/Fear of all those foreigners, fear of all their crimes/Is this the life we really want?"

Smell The Roses once again ladles on the reference points to his former band, both instrumentally and tonally, but is none the worse for that. It's Waters at his poetic best, with even a hint of an understated guitar solo. After the storm, comes the calm. A trio of interwoven piano and acoustic-led ballads draw things to a close – a reflective ending to the previous hour of well-aimed anger and frustration.

Floyd fans rejoice – this is the album you've been waiting for since *The Wall*. The wishy-washy *The Endless River* be damned.

Steve Harnell

VERDICT

9/10

