A WORKING CLASS HERO IS SOMETHING TO BE. John Lennon never made it clear whether he meant heroes of the working class, heroes who are working class or both. Cream is talking to all three sorts in a series of interviews with and articles on THE WORKING CLASS HEROES. Not just rock heroes, but heroes in politics, sport and anything else that springs to mind will be featured in an attempt to dig a little deeper and find out what makes them tick and how they got where they are.

To kick off Mitch Howard talked to Pete Townshend, the son of a professional sax player, who now lives in a fine house on the bank of the Thames, opposite Eel Pie Island, the place where the Stones and the Yardbirds started out from. Before the Who, rock stars had always played down their working class origins (if any) once they had made it. Instead of going respectable the Who, and Pete Townshend especially, affected an aggressively working-class image tailor-made to hook the Mods. Hook them it did and seven years later Pete Townshend remains a Working Class Hero.

TO start at the beginning, when you were the High Numbers you weren't managed by Kit Lambert.

No, we were with a guy called Peter Meadon who I met again the other day. Peter Meadon was our first real creative manager and it was Peter who actually brought Kit Lambert in. Peter came up with the whole mod idea with which I identified incredibly strongly. It was an artificial situation. I was at art college and the rest of the guys were at work and we were more rockers, really. Trying to be like the Stones, long hair and Beatle jackets. Peter came up with the idea of really identifying with the mods in order to get them to identify back, cutting our hair short, wearing the latest fashions, even writing moddy type things into the lyrics. He had worked with Andrew Oldham on the early days of the Stones, so I think he knew what he was doing.

SO THE mod thing was something that you grafted on to the group?

It really knocked me off my feet, I couldn't believe it. At art college and in the group I led a very split existence, playing one off against the other. In the group, art school was my mystery, that was where I laid all the chicks and smoked all the dope. And at art college, the mystery was that I'm in this group that could potentially be very big. And of course nothing was really happening in either camp.

When I dressed mod I actually looked like a mod, I was able to get away with it, and I actually felt fantastic. I read something once where a skinhead said something about 'There we all were marching along with our boots and our crew cuts and it was incredible', and I found myself thinking 'What a ridiculous thing to say'. But I remember feeling exactly the same feeling. On Brighton beach one day there was an incredible number of kids and it was the fact that I could melt into them and be a mod, not be working class or middle class or a musician or an art student, just be one of them.

I suppose it was a very fascist sort of thing but there were so many subtle things around the mod movement, which a lot of people have never really been able to pick up. That guy Gary Herman who wrote the book about The Who never picked up on the real essence of the mods which was the fact that, like Magritte the painter, who, to be a true observer of society, dresses like a city gent but is, in fact, a very surreal painter, the mod, in order to be able to be fashionable and hip and obscure and different, almost had to adopt a sense of fashion that was acceptable to their mums and dads and their employers. You could be a bank clerk and a mod, but another mod would be able to tell if you were up to the minute or not. You had to have a job to buy the clothes.

BUT it wasn't just about fashion?

There was a lot of thuggery as well because it was a ready-made army in our area for people like Georgie Harding and other people who, for all I know now, are probably happily
married men but in those days were very heavy. Roger Daltrey used to identify very strongly with that group of people, so luckily most of the time we were on the right side of them.

Not many of them used to go up to the West End. It seemed to be the faces, as they were called, who used to go to the Scene Club and learn the dances or invent the dances and then come out to places like the Goldhawk or Watford Trade or the East End, which I know little about. That was more faces territory.

Those people, the faces, were not so involved in leading physically. They would invent a dance at the Scene one night and a few people would watch them and they have the satisfaction of knowing that everybody in London was doing it and they made it up on the spur of the moment.

In local areas, like always, there were gangs and gang leaders and this was where the violence came from. I saw people being kicked around. I had a row once with a guy who was accusing me of not being into the thing because I didn’t steam in and kick people.

AND there was the whole pill thing going as well. Is it true that your guitar smashing started off from just being bombed out on the weekend like everyone else? It has been said that the theory of auto-destruction came first.

No, the theory never ever came first. I was spouting the theory at a time when I decided that auto-destruction was a fascinating thing intellectually and I always thought The Who were an auto-destructive group, but time has proved me wrong. I thought that the group were going to smash up so much equipment that in the end they would just not be able to afford to work and would end up paupers. Which to me was an incredibly glamorous situation, I thought that was nearly as glamorous as dying in a plane crash.

I was really into that thing of The Who destroying themselves and chopping away at their own legs and all that and just ending up nowhere and perhaps even blowing themselves to bits one day, which nearly happened once on the Smothers Brothers thing. They set off a charge in a drum and it went a bit wrong and it fuckin’ nearly killed me and Keith. It knocked me over in a somersault three times on live television. It was amazing, it made the Who.

That was the thing I was into then but actually what happened at the beginning was that I broke the guitar which was a Rickenbacker and they’re not very strong, by accident. I was embarrassed so I thought I’ll finish it off. So I smashed it up and thought nothing of it. I thought ‘That’s two hundred quid but rather than get laughed at I’ll make it look as if I did business and then after a while I really started to get into it.

SOMETIMES you switched guitars, I presume, before you smashed them up?

I’ve never ever ... I mean on principle I just wouldn’t do that. People have said this to me before.

PEOPLE can’t accept the idea that someone is just going to wilfully smash up a Gibson.

It would be absurd for me to wilfully destroy anything that wasn’t a Gibson. Don’t you, or they, or whoever thinks this see that? I mean, what pleasure or anything am I going to get out of smashing up a ... see, the thing was that naturally something like that was read as a gimmick. I used to go out on American tours and go round the pawn shops and spend all day maybe buying Fender Stratocasters. If I couldn’t get a Stratocaster I used to buy something more expensive and smash it. It had to be the guitar I was using, otherwise I wouldn’t want to smash it.
There have been occasions when I've been on stage and thought 'Christ!' it was a different guitar every night — 'I love this guitar and I can't smash it'. This happened to me in Detroit once so I put the guitar down and I grabbed another one and smashed that up and some kid in the front said to me 'Aah! It's a dummy! It's a dummy! Smash the other one!' So I did. Over his hands, actually.

Sometimes I've used crappy guitars all night but that was usually because I thought I might be able to get into a cheaper guitar and it might save me some money in the long run. There was a time when the band was paying for my guitars. Not during the first three years, but after a while it became part of the act, and I demanded that the band pay for them or else I was going to stop. Then I had to be a bit more careful, I had to make guitars last a bit longer.

I started using Stratocasters which take about an hour to break, and I used to repair them and stick them together again. We used to occasionally refret guitars and sometimes I'd break the same guitar three or four times before it would become unplayable. And then I would break it and give the bits away. But we've still got this reflex action of when I break a guitar someone rushes out and collects the bits because usually they're repairable.

And often, cant that I am, I repair them and give them away to people, because often though they're not strong enough for stage use they're perfectly good instruments for other people to use. My brother's got one, Roger's got one, a dozen people that have written me letters I sent bits, and they've managed to get decent guitars out of them.

FOR PEOPLE in the audience, sitting at home playing their fifteen quid Hofners, it was fascinating and at the same time really galloping to see you smash guitars up. Did you ever get any resentful reactions to it?

Obviously you get letters on the back page of Melody Maker saying 'I've been struggling for such and such a number of years', and my attitude on this point is probably more callous than any other.

My first guitar I stole. My second guitar I got on HP with a phoney guarantor. My third guitar I stole. My fourth guitar I got on another phoney HP deal. If I was a guitarist I certainly wouldn't mind chancing a letter to Pete Townshend to see if he'll give me a guitar; I have given away about 25 guitars, brand new, to people I thought came on with the strongest line. But one way not to get a guitar from Pete Townshend is to write a letter and say 'Listen, I've been saving up and you smashed fifty, gimme one'. I just write back 'Fuck off' on the letter. There was a lot of incredible struggle went into the first few and what people can't understand is that, even today, to me they're still bits of wood. They're not guitars. I still don't feel that much of a guitarist, I feel like a rock musician. I'm not really interested in how much gear there is on the stage or how much it's worth or how much the guitar's worth or if my boiler suit cost fifty bob at Millet's.

I have people come up to me, in America in particular, and say 'How can a pop star like you go on in a fifty bob boiler suit?' People get incredible preconceptions about what should happen and I think the guitar smashing thing was read as pure flush by a lot of people. And people who probably weren't too much into The Who would come and see it and be repulsed by it and so we've got rid of a lot of people on the fringes that we've got no use for. Fans that we've got no use for.

We've got a wider audience now, probably because of Tommy, but it's still I don't know if I can chance to say this without sounding like a colonel ... but it's a very loyal one.

There is a kind of a Who freak, particularly in America, and there are others ... we just leave people cold. A lot of old Who fans in America would pay double if they knew we were going to smash the equipment up and we still do it today occasionally if we feel like it.

THAT put the band in financial trouble at one time?

It wasn't just financial trouble, what actually happened was that we got so into debt, because we weren't making big money in America like most other bands. When we went to the States, thinking we were going to make our fortune, we actually came back, I think, close to 600,000 dollars in debt. The funny thing is that two and a half years ago, when Tommy had just come out, and people really started to hit me with 'capitalist bastard', I was in debt and nobody would believe it. Now the royalties are coming in and Tommy's done its million dollars worth of sales and we're all rich, as can be seen quite obviously from suddenly the group all buy houses and suddenly Keith Moon's got ten cars. If he could have twenty he would. Give him that much and it's gone in a week. The band is somehow aloof to money particularly in the region of gear and possibly the star roadies. Because we just couldn't do without them. We are in the long term considering putting certain members of the road crew on a percentage of the group because if they split we wouldn't really know what we were going to do. Bob Pridden, for example, is so much part of our sound now he sits on the side of the stage and when he isn't there there's a big hole. It's almost as if you took Keith Moon away.

YOU are in a position not to have to worry about money now. But you're saying you never have done, you just charged onwards?

I've never had a money problem, personally, because of the writing. The

We went to the States thinking we were going to make our fortune. We came back close to 600,000 dollars in debt.
group as a whole has been in debt but I always justified the guitar smashing thing because 'I write all the songs so I suppose that'll cover me.' It never really did. You don't make that much as a writer or a group unless you sell fabulous amounts of records. Until Tommy, we just didn't sell that many records. The Who Sell Out did about 15,000. My new album's done more than that in a week. It's incredible what happens. A band like Thunderclap Newman who had a number one record end up 400 quid in debt each, and they still get begging letters.

**DIDN'T** you make money on the hit singles? Were the early ones genuine hits or was it a touch of buying your way up the charts initially?

I don't think that ever happened to us, no. I don't think we ever had enough money to do that. All I know is that it was important for us to have singles because otherwise we wouldn't get as much money on the road. We had to get for £100 or £150 a night in those days or else we couldn't go on. After 'Happy Jack' and 'Pictures of Lily', which reached a wider audience, our money went up to about £300 a night, which in those days was amazing. And this was to audiences of about 800 people so they were paying a lot of money to get in.

**DO YOU** take much into consideration about what audiences have to pay to see you these days? Presumably you're now in a position that if you do a gig like the Rainbow you can more or less demand what you like.

We can't do that so much because

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**Until 'Tommy' we didn't sell that many records. You don't make that much unless you sell a fabulous amount of records.**

Nowadays we tend to want to co-promote the gig. If the ticket prices are high, it's often because the profit being expected of certain gigs is too much.

But often prices are high because you can't get enough people in. Like the Rainbow, which big as it is and great as it is, is not big enough for big groups to play. It was OK for David Bowie when he was on his way up, or for Stone The Crowes, someone that's likely to peak the joint but not have incredibly high overheads and not have a million bloody people around them making percentages of this and that.

When we played the Rainbow we were getting 1200 or 1400 quid for the three days, so it's not fantastic money. I'm not really sure of the figures, but I know it was piss all. But it was obvious why we did it, we were opening the place, it was an incredible honour. Like, when we played at the Fillmore we used to play for far less than anywhere else and you'd still have Bill Graham complaining, in the same way that John Morris of the Rainbow complained.

**GROUPS** do tend to charge a lot more now so ticket prices tend to be a quid a go.

The first band I ever heard about charging amazingly high prices in this country were Jethro Tull and I think it was perhaps something to do with their manager feeling that what the group cost would somehow reflect in prestige, which, for a while, it did with Jethro Tull. But that caught on because all of a sudden Jethro Tull were getting work. And so a lot of people turned round and said if they can get that much we should get that much.

The first time we ever had a big row about money was at the Isle of Wight, where I agreed to do it with Ricky Farr, who promoted us when we were nowhere years back, and so I always owed him a favour and probably always will owe him a favour. On that occasion we agreed to switch a gig that we were doing at this local hall to the Festival and we were getting £250 for that and we turn up the contracts prior to the Isle of Wight and we see that the money is the same. So, no hassle.

Then we start hearing these incredible sums that everyone else is getting and we're supposed to be topping the bill on the day we're on. So we just upped the money, not that
we really cared. Everyone got so much mileage out of something like the Isle of Wight, even Dylan, that you don’t really do it for the money, but somehow the money seems to be part of the prestige. There is no denying that in this capitalist society that trick is probably the highest manifestation of gross, flamboyant, capitalism. In other words, it’s not the secret underground capitalism that goes on in Wall Street and EC4, it’s the fact that everyone’s told about it. It’s almost a boast that Grand Funk Railroad can fill the Shea Stadium sixty times a week at something dollars a head and gross this amount of money.

Let’s face it, they give you gold records and in America they don’t say for selling a million records, they say for selling a million dollars. So it’s a tricky situation to wake up one morning and pretend that money’s got nothing to do with it, because it has. Although I agree that in many cases ticket prices have gone right out of hand, now, after two years of the pound ticket, audiences are in the state of mind that if somebody charges less than a pound they start looking for the catch.

old Beatles tour one-night stands?

What I think went wrong in this country was that groups haven’t really lasted long enough to get fully involved in the business. They’ve gone in, done something and then split. The Beatles formed Apple which was originally supposed to cause some feedback to help people coming up, but it was an artificial situation. What you’ve got to have is not musicians, everybody who’s in the business, not just doing their own bloody thing. Which is what most people think. ‘Just let me play me music man and that’s all I’m interested in’.

They should get involved in the running of gigs and festivals or setting up organisations that can sustain clubs through difficult periods, or opening clubs or backing clubs and events, things like this. It’s like the financial situation in this country in general. Everyone’s doing this sort of ‘I’ve done my bit, so I just want my weekly wage so I can go home and I’m not really interested in the running of the factory.’

I don’t think a business like music will ever work in a city like London on a small scale like clubs, unless the people at the top are trying to make going to manage six bands. That would be exploiting their talent, I suppose, but it would be better than what they’re doing now, which is sitting home wondering how they’re going to get a break.

I was talking to Muff Winwood on tour with The Who, Traffic, Joe Cocker, The Herd and the Tremeloes. The Herd, who are probably the only doubtful name on that bill in today’s terms, and the Tremeloes I suppose, both had number one records. And the Marmalade, forchistake had a number eight and they were on it, too. That bill went out, made a lot of money though it didn’t always fill the halls, everyone had a good time playing their twenty minutes or whatever it was. There wasn’t a band in that that didn’t immediately do something quite remarkable.

That would seem to be the kind of vehicle it might be worth going back to and this is why, at the moment, that Jagger and ourselves and the Faces and a few bands that are working alone everywhere are thinking of ways of setting up structures that will incorporate lots of other bands in lots of other categories. Like this road circus thing, something that can handle the amount of people that are interested in rock today but at the same time be moveable and be able to look after a lot of people and get the spirit of the old variety sort of thing. And give people a chance to stretch out a bit.

Obviously, you couldn’t give a band like The Who or the Stones or the Faces a twenty minute spot, but they could get away with a 45 minute spot. And at the same time bands could be doing their thing in another area if it was a circus type of environment.

THIS IS something you are actually thinking of doing?

Yeah, we are thinking of doing it. The only problem is the money to set it up. I am incredibly keen and Jagger is incredibly keen but I’ve got the feeling that the only way we’ll ever raise the money is by making a great big thing of it and getting a film company to put up the money.

SO THE whole thing gets bigger all the time.

But the thing is that it’s self sustaining. In the process, several groups are going to immediately go from being nowhere to somewhere.
And even if the Stones and The Who and the film company and everybody make a loss, that's a way of feeding back.

A lot of musicians don't like to admit they're in business. If you're in business and you're making a lot of money you have to decide where your tax losses are going to be. Your accountant comes up and says why lose the money now, rather than give it to the government, by spending it on something that'll directly benefit you. Why not spend it on a £10,000 publicity contract or open up a factory in an area where there's unemployment and that'll grace the name of ICI or whoever it is.

So, in the same way, if a group's got money it's going to pay off on tax or has got money it doesn't know what to do with, rather than spend it on insane press receptions or just sit on it or farsees like Apple Corps, they could put their money into say a place like the Rainbow.

What's going to happen in the end is that the big balloon's going to get bigger and bigger and bigger and there's going to be nothing there to support it. And it's going to blow up and suddenly there's going to be one little band left underground and people will say 'Blimey they were there all the time, they're going to be the new Beatles'. Might not be a band. Whatever it is, that'll be the next phenomenon. The smoke'll clear and it's be there.

Like it did before when the Larry Parnes's of this world just took pop musicians and exploited and exploited and exploited and put nothing back into the business at all, taking money from rock and putting it into variety, into another industry altogether. Eventually they milked rock stupid.

Roger is friendly with Adam Faith who does production of groups now, because they both lived in the same block of flats once or something. He was telling us some fantastic stories about those days, about the people and the way they worked. And how people like John Barry used to write pop purely for money. No interest in the music at all. That's why I hate the word 'pop' because to me it's that area. It was being born and bred on that period of music, on Cliff Richard and The Shadows, Billy Fury, Adam Faith, Bobby Vee, Elvis Presley and all those people and suddenly waking up one morning and realising they were all being milked rotten, and that the whole industry was sniggering behind their hands.

Your Norrie Paramor's I've got the greatest respect for when they stick to their own boogaloo. But when it comes to pop it was 'Let's give the kids what they want'. Rubbish.

AND that sort of thing still carries on.

Well, just look at the charts. In this country you don't mature an audience, you give them what they want. As soon as there's any doubt about what's going to be the next big rave, give 'em some crap. Don't try and do anything new, just give up, because after all you've got to keep your Rolls-Royce running.

YOU'VE said The Who were always a singles band. Do you still regard yourselves like that because your recent singles haven't done as well?

I meant that in a broader sense. Even Tommy, or the thing we're working on at the moment which has an overall concept, we still think in terms of singles. Albums are just a collection of singles. The Beatles used to put out 'album' albums, like Tamla Motown with bleedin' 'Misster Postman' and all that stuff on it. Just crap that they knocked off in half an hour. But the Stones didn't. There were a few albums where they did 'You'd Better Move On' but they used to cover everyone else's numbers anyway in the first place. But they were the first to do albums that were like a load of singles. Aftermath or the one before it I think. They were the first band that looked at what were five or six potential hit singles and said 'Right, let's put these in an album'. Which in this country was very daring because albums only used to sell about 15,000 copies.

So that's the way people make albums, to a degree. You have to put a few quiet ones in so the whole thing can be listened to but it's still much nearer singles philosophy than symphony philosophy. That's what I meant anyway. I've been really pleased with what happened to 'Let's See Action', 'Won't Get Fooled Again' and 'Join Together'. I was pleased anything happened with them at all, particularly 'Won't Get Fooled Again'. If people dig it and buy it that's an affirmation of my taste, 'cause that's the kind of sound I like at the moment. You can get that from other people's records, like Roxy Music. That's a very obscure sound, but I liked it and it was good when other people liked it. And suddenly you get hit by the fact that a lot of people are buying Donny Osmond or whatever his name is. Is that his name?

YES.

Yeah. Which to me affirms that there must be a couple of separate audiences. It's interesting to look back at the charts. A couple of months ago there was a high point when most of the stuff was good in some way or another so there was room for Donny Osmond and Dave Cassidy. It's when it's people like that get from records one to ten that it gets worrying, because you feel that the business is going back into the hands of the big-time arrangers, back into the hands of the factory. They won't put anything back, they'll just milk talent. At least in rock, talent does seem to get paid. I wonder what Donny Osmond's on a week. We're investing your money for you Donny so when you're 28 you'll be a rich man! As of now ...' Maybe not. Maybe he's got a very clever mother.

DO YOU see yourselves and other people carrying on infinitely? Do you think there'll be 45 and 50 year old rock and rollers up on stage?

People keep asking me this. It's tricky for The Who because The Who are a physical band. There's a lot of athletics involved. I just really don't know. Thirty is a sort of psychological bridge into middle age. John Lennon was really upset, went away to South America or something on his thirtieth birthday. He just couldn't live with it.

HAVE you got there yet?

No. I'm still 27. You can be athletic. Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley and Jerry Lee Lewis are still in good shape. I don't know if you've ever tried fucking duck walking but it's fucking difficult. You've really got to be strong to do it. I can manage about four yards but Chuck Berry does it all night. What he's doing in celebrating his own image, he's reviving his own past each time he comes on stage, and I don't mind doing that now. And we'll do it as long as the band wants to.

GETTING back to the question of violence, you used to say that it was better for people to get rid of their aggression by watching groups smash up equipment. How does that relate to your Meher Baba beliefs?

Hmm. I suppose that's a really weird thing to try and justify in...
retrospect. It's like the thing with TV violence. Does it get it out of your system or does it subconsciously make it less likely that you'll feel strongly about stopping it happen in day-to-day life? The funny thing was that at Who concerts, after the guitars got smashed the audience used to go completely quiet. There was never any standing ovation, there was never any clapping or cheering. It was very weird.

Today, if I do it, kids jump up and all that but that's because we're The Who. But in those days people couldn't believe that we did it. There was no doubt that it was being done because amplifiers used to get chopped to bits before their eyes and Keith used to literally destroy his drums. There was this sheer numbness in the audience. I used to feel we had numbed them, but maybe it was just shocking them. There was no chance of an encore!

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ALICE Cooper says he is trying to present people with the violent side of their character so when they come out of the theatre they'll think 'Christ what were we going mad about in there?' Did you have that sort of idea behind what you were doing?

No, no. That particular side of Alice Cooper's stage act has always confused me a lot. The first time we ever saw them in Detroit they went on before us then. This was years ago, long before they were famous. They used to have a live chicken on stage. They never used to do anything to it, they just threw it to the audience and the audience used to pull the fucking thing apart. There'd be blood over everybody and they'd all be laughing. It was incredible that it used to happen but it did. John Entwistle went up to Alice Cooper and really had a go at him about it and Alice Cooper said 'Listen, man, I didn't touch it. It was them who did it'.

IT WOULD be hard to get people to go completely quiet now because people have got so used to violence.

I think you could still do it today. We came pretty close to doing it a couple of places in Europe this year, just by stopping dead and looking straight at the audience. It is very difficult to do it today and I don't know if I'd want to do it.

YOU JUST go out to entertain now?

It is incredible when you get middle of a number, standing ovations say for 'See Me Feel Me'. It really does make you feel like Frank Sinatra, somebody with a history. Every time we start the first few notes of that, or 'Summertime Blues', or 'My Generation' we get this incredible ovation. Sometimes that kind of recognition is more important than anything else because it does show that people are listening to the first few notes of every song.

A lot of people used to sit quietly through the show, just waiting to see the equipment being smashed then they'd turn round and go home. A lot of them came again and again just to see that, and still not get off on the group musically.

It's an incredibly long story. It was basically an idea I had that was going to follow up Tommy directly. It was to do with the way I was thinking at the time — I did go partly round the bend last year, apart from anything else.

I started to hear this weird music in my head which, to cut a long story short, I thought was celestial music. I think now I was just hallucinating or something. And I was trying to recreate it — that's where I got into that 'Baba O'Reilly' noise. I started saying things that I suppose people like John Cage say — just start listening to the door creaking and it's much better than a symphony. Then I started getting obsessed by it.

I got into synthesizers very strongly, bought a lot of synthesizers. Then I started to write this film script, which I think somebody might publish soon. Basically, it was trying to put these ideas about music reflecting life — that, if you like, there is One Note which is universal and that everything else is reflections of that note, and that everything has a note. Some of these facts in high energy physics are recognised by science; that the human body has a resonant frequency and that wood has a resonant frequency. The old spiritual, mystical people talk about it in slightly different ways but the two are very much aligned. And what I thought was that everybody had a piece of music and that if you put them all together you'd come up with one note. Like getting all the colours of a rainbow and putting them together and getting white.

I started doing some experiments. For instance, if you get 20 people playing the piano together it's a cacophony but if you get 2,000 people playing the piano together it makes an Amazing noise. It's just 'a noise', but it's not a noise. It's hard to explain.

YOU actually did this?

I did a thousand million billion fucking things. You'll never know what I went through. Anyway, I finished this script. And the story was about a guy living in the future, and he's living in a world which is fairly badly polluted, naturally, and where most people are living canned, test-tube lives. They get their lives down tubes, all the experiences they'd get anyway. They imagine that they are actually being lived by a series of actors who go through certain experiences on their behalf. And everybody gets a similar life.

What everybody needs has been gradually brought down, bit by bit, to roughly the same thing. So in the end everybody has started living the same life and there's only one actor left doing the work. Then he, being the only person left actually alive, decides he's going to liberate everybody from their bodies. He discovers some old rock 'n' roll records and thinks that rock 'n' roll was an ancient religion, as it probably is. He decides he's going to recreate rock 'n' roll for the masses.

He gets this theatre and starts to hold a six-month rock 'n' roll concert in which a lot of people are actually brought in, and rock 'n' roll fed out to the masses. This concert proves to be an incredible success and at the finale everybody just disappears. What I wanted the group to do — and here comes the crunch — was that I wanted them to do, the six month concert.

THE Grateful Dead have got nothing on you.

I think I was probably taking the thing a bit too far, but I wanted it to actually happen. I wanted that bit of the film to be real, to be Woodstock where a thousand people just lived rock 'n' roll, nothing but, for at least six weeks at the end of it there's an incredible finale. Everybody dances and then some incredibly traumatic effect happens, like I thought maybe I could commit suicide in front of everybody. I started going completely berserk anyway.
Take the cover. At first glance it's the coy fairy-tale characters cavorting in the dream-like setting we've all become used to. Of course, it isn't. The executive-bespectacled owl is in fact enticing our fair heroine to her love nest with a handful of crisp onions; a stoned tortoise locks on; Mother Hedgehog is being strangled with her own apron strings; a mole is exposing himself to a couple of hens; and so on. All of which events, it should be said, are taken from the songs (though there the actors are all human).

From all this it might be assumed that we are back in the black, but nevertheless familiar, world of John Entwistle. Arch-creepie and spine-tingler since way back when and Cousin Kevin.

So we might think. But the record plays the same trick as the cover. Some of the tunes bounce along so nicely, sound so cheerful that it takes some time for the lyrics, let alone the subject matter, to register.

But when it does reveal itself, the album proves to be peopled with a decidedly seamy bunch of characters. But more of that later.

Of the musicians helping out on the album perhaps Peter Frampton is most noticeable for his excellent and unobtrusive work on lead guitar and John Entwistle himself for his frequent excursions off his Who-ish bass onto some very good piano, trumpet and synthesizer. He is occasionally let down by his voice, though only when he asks too much of it, and all too often the melody line lacks strength and direction.

But these are quibbles, really. What the album is about, and this is interesting from someone who is so resolutely reticent in his major professional activity, is what it says. In other words it's the thoughts behind the songs, not their execution, that counts.

OK. So what is Entwistle saying, if anything? The album parades before us a collection of strange, unhappy people. They are, in brief, an ineffectual son (husband?) tied to mother's (wife's) apron strings; a wronged and bitter husband; a wronged and suicidal husband; a self-righteous dropout; a peeping tom, etc.

They are, of course, all amazingly neurotic. At times laughably so. The suicide in 'Thinkin' It Over' becomes so worried about the effects of his intended action that in the end he decides not to bother anyway.

The central theme of the album is only really revealed in the last two songs where the cover concept -- of things not being what they are -- is dropped completely.
ODE RECORDS
presents
THE LOU REIZNER PRODUCTION
of

TONNY

Written by
PETE TOWNSHEND and THE WHO
as performed by
THE LONDON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
and
THE ENGLISH CHAMBER CHOIR
conducted and directed by
DAVID MEASHAM
with
GUEST SOLOISTS
(in order of appearance)
PETE TOWNSHEND
SANDY Denny
GRAHAM BELL
STEVE WINWOOD
MAGGIE BELL
RICHIE HAVENS
MERRY CLAYTON
ROGER DALTREY
JOHN ENTWISTLE
RINGO STARR
ROD STEWART
RICHARD HARRIS
Arranged and orchestrated by
WIL MALONE
and
JIM SULLIVAN