(More than a few of the biggest 60s bands have observed their tenth anniversaries in the last few months, not the least of which is The Who, one of the very few of those groups to negotiate successfully the transition into the 70s. Amidst constant stories about solo tours for individual members, they recently released Odds & Sods, a collection of mostly-good songs stretching across their entire career that never before saw the light of day. Pete Townshend is widely recognized as the spokesman of the Who, and an articulate bloke he is. But Roger Daltrey is no slouch, either, and in this interview he takes us all the way back to the earliest days of the Who and brings us right up to yesterday — shedding much light on the band's relationships to its audience, as well as on relationships within the band. — Ed.)

What was the relationship of the Who to the Mods?

Uh... We were too old to be Mods. In England, we had the Teddy Boys, which was the late 50s, who started wearing Edwardian clothes, really long draped jackets, really stovepipe trousers and big suede boots. And the Mod thing was the first big cult thing to follow after that. And that was just like a general identity for kids, from the age of 15 to 18. The Who at the time were all 19 or 20. (Laughs.) We were never Mods. But the Mods had a feeling about them, a very aggressive but very... how can I put it?... not antisocial... what can I say?... they weren't anarchistic. They were prepared to really change things in their way and use what they could do, you know. It's very hard to explain. I mean, Carnaby St. came from the Mods. That's what happened from the Mods. I mean, instead of destroying anything, they created their own things, which completely took over England.

But the Who became the group which the Mods really identified with. We tried to be as Moddy as we could. We were too old... (Laughs.) I mean only by a year. That was old in those days. We set a few fashions as far as they were concerned. We played the music they liked. They were all pillheads - we used to call them Purple Hearts in those days. We were all pillheads. There was a great communication on that sort of level. And we were their group, and it was as simple as that. We were probably the most aggressive group that's ever happened in England. Like I say about them, they were aggressive in a creative way, exactly the same way as the Who were. And it was that sort of identity... (Laughs)... I might be talking in riddles... It's so hard to explain that sort of feeling.

It was a very strange era. You could have a guy working in a bank, a young kid of 19, and the bank manager would look at him and think, there's something strange about him. And it was that sort of thing. I mean, the guy could look more or less normal, but there again, you think, there's something strange about him. And he'd have a very strange haircut. Not outrageously different, but very subtle, like a French crewcut. And a suit with really... really well-made suits, really classy. And when he left work, he'd go out and he'd put like an ice cream jacket on, jeans and T-shirts, and really strange things they used to wear. That was the Mod thing, you know. Nobody could really finger it. It was very strange. It was like the hippie movement in San Francisco here in 1966-67, when Haight-Ashbury was starting up. That's what it was like in England for the Mods in 1962. Exactly the same feeling, and how can you explain that? It was a feeling of belonging.

How did the Who first get into the Mod thing?

It was hype. I mean, we were a long-haired rock and roll blues band from London, and the Mods were about certain areas of London. There was perhaps about 500 of them. Very strange, really out and out kids who were rebelling against... You see, we had the Beatle era, in which everyone went about wearing Cuban heel boots and round-necked jackets. And then the Stones came out and everybody grew their hair long. And it was that sort of scene in England. It was in such a state of flux that the Mods just said, "Fuck it. We're going to do our own thing." And it was nothing to do with the...
music. It had nothing to do with any sort of music at all. They took on American Motown – that was part of it. And they liked a thing called bluebeat, which today they call reggae. And that was their musical influences. And the Who, from playing sort of Chicago blues —

You actually played Chicago blues, like Muddy Waters and such?

That’s what we were doing. But because all the numbers were the same, they changed an awful lot. That’s where we got our sound (Laughing.) I mean, every song...I’m not trying to put Chicago blues down because I really love it. I really do. But you’ve gotta own up, there are a lot of songs which are exactly the same, with perhaps a few different words. And because of that, if you’re playing for two hours, there’s so much left for your imagination. I mean, you’d start off the song, and it’s the same as the one you played before. So you think, oh, what should we do. Then Pete decided to do this with his guitar, and I decided to smash microphones. And that’s where the Who thing grew. Because it was just out of frustration that everything was the same. And they associated with that. It was an extension of them. It was this rebellion against what was laid down before.

At first you were pushed as the band from Shepherd’s Bush like the Beatles were the band from Liverpool, right?

Yeah.

What kind of an area is Shepherd’s Bush?

How could you put it? It’s like the East Side of New York, I suppose, or the West Side of New York. It’s very strange. In London, you’ve got the East End and you’ve got the West End. Shepherd’s Bush is the West End. That’s going out...I mean, if you divide London down the middle, you’ve got the central part, which they call the West End. That’s a lot of bullshit. As far as we were concerned, the West End was Shepherd’s Park, Notting Hill and all them sort of places. Then you’ve got the East End. They’re both really working class areas. But there’s something strange about it. When you get East End people and West End people together...they’re all Londoners, they all talk more or less the same, but you can spot the difference like night and day. It’s a very strange thing.

Since you’re the only one from Shepherd’s Bush, why did the band call itself a Shepherd’s Bush band?

The thing about Shepherd’s Bush was it was like a demilitarized zone, if you like. Or a militarized zone between...You’ve got...the West End of London, you’ve got Bayswater, then you’ve got Notting Hill. They’ve all got tourist influxes and all that sort of scene. Shepherd’s Bush was like a belt around it. And then outside of Shepherd’s Bush you had sort of suburbia, middle class. And it was like a barrier in the middle. And the fight for survival then amongst kids was like a tremendous sort of scene. Kids were really getting together...You’ve got it over here in the Bronx and all them sort of scenes...Very cliquey, very tough, very, very tough. Very hard, but very close-knit. And it was like a little land of its own.

And you grew up in a working-class family?

Yeah...Oh, we all did. But it was just...they had trees in their street. (laughs.)

So it began with the Shepherd’s Bush hype?

No...it wasn’t really a hype in that much...I mean, it was a hype to say that we all came from there. But it wasn’t a hype that’s where we made it...If you played in Acton, you could play in Acton all your life and you’d never get anywhere. We played in Shepherd’s Bush. We gave the kids what they wanted, and they gave us what we wanted. And because they were the sort of kids they are and because they were in that belt, and it was that sort of way of living, we used them and they used us. And that’s where it mushroomed. If we’d played in Acton or Wembley, where Keith came from, we could have played there forever and it wouldn’t have made a dent on them.
Were you all serious musicians at that time?

We were serious that we wanted to make it, yeah. (Loud laugh.)

Were you all working other jobs, too?

Oh yeah, Pete was in art school. John was in the tax office. Keith was selling plaster. I was working in a factory — sheet metal work. I used to get up at 8 o’clock, work in the factory until 6 o’clock at night, and then the group from 7 ‘til midnight. It was that every day of the week.

And when you saw this Mod thing happening...

No, it didn’t happen like that. Nobody just started anything. It just happened, you know. I mean, it was never conceived that. It just happened. All of a sudden... you like, you notice your audience changing. You notice what sort of audience you’re getting. You became aware of it. And then some guy said, look, you know, there’s a million groups looking like the Rolling Stones. Cut your hair, get their (Mods) gear, be what they want, be how they are. And that’s what we did. I mean, that’s the only hype there was, really.

We didn’t change our music. We just changed the way we looked so that all of a sudden, they were looking at a group that looked like them. And then there was a great communication.

At that point had you already developed the violent, aggressive stage performance?

Oh yeah, that had already come, yeah.

And the pop art thing was just another thing thought up by your manager Kit Lambert?

It was the law of the jungle where I came from; that’s how it used to be, and that’s how I was.

Well, it was thought up by Kit. I mean, what happened was, it was a frustration... I mean, then clothes were the big thing. I mean, if you could buy it... if you had the top clothes, you were... This was ‘63. People were sick of buying what the Beatles were wearing — in London, you know. They were literally going out and buying long white surgeon’s coats and things like this, you know. Very strange sorts of things they were wearing. And, uh, I was buying plain jackets, plain sort of jumpers and getting sort of stuff and sticking it on. And that’s where Kit got the idea, ‘Let’s start something like that, sort of pop art thing.’ Then Kit got the idea of doing the Union Jack jacket, which was amazing. We used the Union Jack on all the gigs. It was just an involvement of ideas.

When was the period when you hated each other?

That was in ’65, ’64. Lot of clashes... There was a lot of musical clashes in those days. I mean, one of the problems was that Keith then was into Beach Boys songs. I was into Muddy Waters and Chicago blues and Motown. And Keith was the baby of the group, and it was a period when, what can I say, drummers were the love of all the kids. Like Ringo, Dave Clark. And he wanted to play Beach Boys, and I couldn’t believe it. John got behind him, and Pete got behind him, and I thought, well, fuck this. I don’t want to be in a fucking group that’s copying the bleeding Beach Boys. We used to copy the Beatles three years ago. And it led to a lot of arguments. It led to me, that I was going to leave the group. Maybe I should have. (Hearty laugh.) I’m glad I didn’t. (Another laugh.)

When was this?

In ’65. Pre-“Generation.”

What solved the problem?

Well, I mean, they slung me out. What they said was, “We’ll release another single, ‘My Generation.’ We’ll wait until it’s a big hit, then I’ll leave.” But then I decided, all right, if they want to play Beach Boys, let them play it, and let them see how wrong they are. I was a very vicious, aggressive... I was a bastard, I was a real cunt. I really was. That was it. I mean, it was the law of the jungle where I came from: that’s how it used to be, and that’s how I was. But there again, I sat down and thought, well, the biggest thing in my life is the group. And I literally changed. Anything they ever did from then on never bothered me. I let them play their Beach Boys. It went down OK, but it didn’t last five minutes. And the group still progressed, and I still stayed in the group, and everything worked out fine. It was as simple as that.