KEN Russell has patented Pete Townshend's musical masterpiece "Tommy" and turned it into a compelling and moving film. Many devotees of the rock opera were disturbed that the treatment it would receive at his hands might destroy it, but that treatment turns out to be sympathetic and understanding.

There is no doubt that Roger Daltrey is the star of this film, even though he says nothing for half of it. He is Tommy and brilliantly so. He plays a deaf, dumb and blind person which is exceptionally difficult, yet he does it so well and his interpretation rouses a constant stream of emotion: pity, sympathy, anger, frustration and, above all, horror at his total helplessness.

When Tommy is "free" you rejoice with him, when he is being tortured by cousin Kevin, you feel it, too. Roger puts everything into the part so obviously sparing himself nothing in an effort to make Tommy real. He succeeds so well, it's very hard to believe he's never acted before, aside performance.

Oliver Reed is very good as Frank: he manages to look so ugly, as befits a basically unpleasant character. Paul Nicholas, as cousin Kevin, is so nasty one has the innate desire to avenge Tommy personally; while Keith Moon as Uncle Ernie is hilarious. A special mention must go to the vanquished pinball wizard, played in larger-than-life style by Elton John.

There is, of course, no dialogue: and no need of it when the music says it all. As we said last week, the standard of musical performance in the film is very high. The filming is also excellent with flashes of the sort of screenplay one has come to expect of Russell. The most notable comes when Nora is taken over by the tv commercial—it's so surreal. And after seeing her rolling in them, I don't think I'll ever be able to touch another baked bean.

That scene is a minor incident. "Tommy" is not a funny film. Daltrey has said that it's "an experience" and I am with him all the way. He also said it's shattering. I was emotionally moved by so much of it myself and close to tears more than once. It's the sort of film that draws you inside the action and leaves you at the end feeling drained.

Go and see this film. It is not only excellent but a major breakthrough. Until now, rock music and films have not been the most compatible of bedfellows but they certainly have a very happy marriage in "Tommy".

Rosemary Horide