America's Only Rock 'n' Roll Magazine

BEACH BOYS
Hang Ten Or Twenty

AEROSMITH
Takes Off

PINK FLOYD
To The Ozone And Back

The Krauts Are Koming!

KRAFTWERK
Meets Lester Bangs

JEFFERSON STARSHIP:
Grace Slick Gives It Away

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Hollywood Babylon

Exclusive Interview:
Pete Townshend

Zaps
Jagger, Page, Beck, And... The Who!

SPECIAL PHOTOS FEATURES!
GETTING DRESSED WITH:
The Stones
And Labelle
Pete Townshend didn't die before he got old. Yet death isn't his problem; it's the passing of the years and his current position in what he feels is a younger man's occupation.

"If you're in a group," he begins, "you can behave like a kid—and not only get away with it, but be encouraged."

The name Keith Moon somehow springs to mind.

"If you're a rock musician," Townshend continues, "you don't have to put on any airs and pretend to be all grown up...pretend to be 'normal' or even be asked to behave like you're a mature and highly responsible person. These are just the trappings that society puts on most people—with the result that most kids are burdened down with responsibilities far too early in their life.

"You know the deal: as soon as you leave school you've got to find a secure job and hang onto it. I wrote 'My Generation' when I was 22 or 23, yet that song breathes of 17-year-old adolescence. But then I did have a somewhat late adolescence."

So what are you trying to tell us?

"Personally, I feel that the funniest thing—and also the saddest thing—about the current state of rock 'n roll is that it's the pretenders that are suffering the most. Those people who, for a number of years, have been pretending to be rock stars and have adopted false poses. It's the difference between someone who has made rock an integral part of their lifestyle and therefore doesn't feel like they're growing old.

"You want to know something? I really hate feeling too old to be doing what I'm doing."

"I recently went to do a BBC-TV..."
interview and when I arrived at the studios there were all these young kids waiting outside for the Bay City Rollers. As I passed by them, one of the kids recognized me and said, 'Ooo look, it's Pete Townshend' and a couple of them chirped 'Ello Pete'. And that was it. Yet the first time the Who appeared at those same studios on Top Of The Pops, a gang of little girls smashed in the plate glass front door on the building.

"Anyway, as I entered the building, the doorman turned to me and smirked. "Ere, what's it feel like to walk past 'em now and 'ave nothin' happen, eh?"

"I told him that, to be quite honest, it brings a tear to my eye. Look, I don't want them to mob me because the Who have never been a Rollers-type band, what I'm scared of is hypocrisy." Hypocrisy! In what way?

"Well, nowadays it's considered very passe to admit that you've got a burning ambition to stand on stage and be screamed at by 15-year-old girls. But when we started out that was something to be very proud of. If it didn't happen there was something wrong with you.

"Though I haven't all that much experience as to what is happening contemporarily in music, I do feel that the 'world-owes-me-a-living' attitude still prevails, not only in rock, but in every walk of life. So now everyone's gotta look like they really mean business and every bloody singer I see on The Old Grey Whistle Test looks a n-g-r-y. He breaks off the conversation to pull relevant grimaces. "When I see this I go into hysterical fits of laughter."

"Sure, I know that I look angry when I play but usually there's no reason for it. I suppose it's an adopted aggressive thing, which is in turn a subconscious layover from those days when I was angry. I don't quite know what I was angry at, but I was angry, frustrated, bitter, cynical—and it came through in the music I wrote."

"C'mon Pete, you're either evading the moment of truth or approaching it in a very roundabout manner. What's brought on this manic obsession about being too pooped to pop, too old to stroll?"

"It's just that when I'm standing up there on stage playing rock 'n' roll, I often feel that I'm too old for it."

"No kidding. "When Roger speaks out about 'we'll all be rockin' in our wheelchairs' he might be but you won't catch me rockin' in no wheelchair. I don't think it's possible. I might be making music in a wheelchair—maybe even with the Who, but I feel that the Who have got to realize that the things we're gonna be writing and singing about are rapidly changing.

"There's one very important thing that's got to be settled. He pauses again. "The group as a whole have got to realize that the Who are not the same group as they used to be. They never ever will be and as such...it's very easy to knock somebody by saying someone used to be a great runner and can still run but he's Not What He Used To Be." Townshend pauses yet again. "Everybody has a hump and you have to admit that you've got to go over that hump."

"Yes we have...no we haven't—Townshend won't commit himself either way as to whether the Who are over the hill, but he intimates in no uncertain manner that the group is beset with acute problems.

"You've got to remember that there was a time when suddenly Chuck Berry couldn't write any more. He just went out and performed his greatest hits and I've always wondered what that was all down to?"

"Jagger told me at his birthday party that he was having difficulty in writing new material for the Stones, which is unfortunate because nowadays so much importance is placed upon writing songs. To a degree, you could call it front-man paranoia—and even Roger gets it from time to time. Let's face it, Jagger carries a tremendous amount of responsibility apart from being the Stones front-man.

"Forget about that tired old myth that rock 'n' roll is just making records, pullin' birds, gettin' pissed and having a good time. That's not what it's all about. And I don't think Roger really believes it either. I think that what he'd
really like to believe rock 'n' roll was all about.

"Steve Marriott has chosen to live it like that, and, as far as I can see, he's having a good time. Fair enough—but in my opinion Marriott's music falls short of his potential, which is a bloody shame because everyone knows what he's really capable of...there's all those old incredible Small Faces records piled up. For me, Ogden's Nut Gone Flake is one of the classic albums of the sixties and, if it's the difference between that music and having a good time, I prefer that Steve Marriott suffer, because I want the music.

"Believe me, I don't want to sound too cruel and vitriolic, but I do think that you have to face up to the undeniable fact that there's no point in your life when you can stop working. You can't suddenly turn round and say, we're on the crest of a wave so now it's time to sit back and boogie. Deep down inside, everyone wants to do this but it's tantamount to retiring altogether. And personally, I can't do it.

"It's not necessarily to do with standards," Townshend continues, before I have time fire another question. "The Who's Odds & Sods collection would have been released even if it hadn't been all that interesting, but it's all been put down in the past for being substandard.

Apparently the reason for its release was to make null and void the increasing amount of Who bootlegs currently being circulated, and once a second volume has been prepared and issued, there will be no need to backtrack. "If," says Townshend, "The Who were gonna wave their banner for standards, Odds & Sods would still have remained unreleased. Standards have got absolutely nothing to do with it. I feel that it's the pressure at the front of your mind that...not necessarily your fans...but then, maybe your fans really are the most important people...are actually sitting twiddling their thumbs waiting for your next album.

"Every time they wait, they become more and more impatient. What Jagger said in that interview that he did with CREEM is that between the albums they are eagerly waiting for, he'd like to chuck out an R&B set to keep 'em happy. Fair enough, if he thinks it'll make any difference—but of course it won't.

"It's just like making a 'live' album. The fans will say, 'Thank you very much, but what we're really waiting for is the next studio album, so get on with it.'"

New subject: Townshend was once quoted as stating that the eventual outcome of any Who recording depended entirely upon whether or not he could keep Moon away from the brandy and

tracks for my next solo album. Invariably what will happen is that once we all get into the studio, I'll think 'Oh fuck it,' and I'll play Roger, John and Keith the tracks I've been keeping for my own album and they'll pick the best. So long as the Who exists, I'll never get the pick of my own material...and that's what I dream of. But if the Who ever broke up because the material was sub-standard then I'd really kick myself.

But the way you're going on, Peter, old Meter, it sounds like the Who is on its last legs?

"However much of a bastard it is to get everyone together in a recording studio, things eventually turn out right. You see, though it has never been important in the past, we do have this problem that everyone has been engaged on their own project, so that the separate social existence that we lead has become even more acute.

"I mean, if I just couldn't live without Moonie and if I could go over to the States and spend a couple of months with him we'd probably be a lot closer. But as it happens, I haven't seen Keith since last August. I may have seen a lot more of John but as yet I haven't seen his new group or listened properly to his album because, apart from working on Tommy, I've been putting together new material. And the same thing applies to Roger; as soon as someone decides to do something outside of the area of the Who the pressure suddenly ceases, because they are the people who put the pressures on me.

"Let me make this clear. I don't put pressures on them. I don't say 'we've got to get into the studio this very min-
ute because I've got these songs that I've just gotta get off my chest. It's always the other way around. They always rush up to me and insist that we've got to cut a new album and get back on the road."

So it's quite obvious that the pressures are back on and Townsend is feeling the strain.

"In a sense, rock is an athletic process. I don't mean running about on stage, but as a communicative process it's completely exhausting. It's not necessarily being a part of things," insists Townsend.

"Like I said, when I wrote 'My Generation' I was already in my early twenties, so I was by no means a frustrated teenager. And that's what a lot of people often tend to forget."

"But you were an integral part of that generation?"

"Right," he retorts, "but we're also part of the Generation that we play to on stage today. Let me clarify that statement."

"Yes."

"What I don't feel part of is not the Generation of age, but the Generation of type. I mean, who the hell were all those people at the Tommy premiere? Whoever they were, I'm certainly not in their gang! Yet funny enough, whatever the age group, I feel much more at ease before a rock audience."

So why this current fixation about being old too old to cut the Moutard?

"Because to some extent the Who have become a golden oldies band and that's the bloody problem. And it's the problem that faces all successful rock groups at one time or another—the process of growing old."

"A group like the Kinks don't have that problem because, theoretically, Ray Davies has always been an old man. He writes like an old man who is forever looking back on his life and, thank heavens, old Ray won't have to contend with such problems. But with a group like the Rolling Stones, there's this terrible danger...now I could be wrong...but there's no question in my mind that it's bound to happen...Mick Jagger will eventually become the Chuck Berry of the sixties, constantly parading himself on stage. And, this is the inherent danger that the Who are so desperately trying to avoid."

"I can tell you that when we were gigging in this country at the early part of last year I was thoroughly depressed. I honestly felt that the Who were going on stage every night and, for the sake of the die-hard fans, copying what the Who used to be."

"Believe me, there have been times in the Who's career when I would have gladly relinquished the responsibilities of coming up with our next single or album to another writer. There've been a lot of people who said they would have a go but somehow it never quite worked out."

"Why?"

"Like a lot of things connected with the Who, I really dunno. Maybe it's because we've got such an archetypal style that's geared to the way that I write."

"But by his own admission, Pete Townsend has always considered his forte to be writing. The fact that he also happens to be a guitarist is, in his opinion, quite irrelevant. Yet even now, Townsend is astounded when other guitarists compliment him upon his instrumental prowess. He isn't bowing to false modesty when he insists that, after all these years, he still can't play guitar as he would really like to."

In his formative years with the Who, he compensated for his acute frustrations by concentrating his energies on the visual aspects of attacking the instrument. Every time he went on stage, Townsend insists he bluffed his way through a set by utilizing noise and sound effects which eventually led to the destruction of many a valuable weapon.

"It's still true even today," he confesses without embarrassment. "I may be a better guitarist now than I was when the Who first started but I'm far from being as technically proficient as I would really like to be."

"What I like about the way that I play," he explains, "is what I think everyone else likes. I get a particular sound that nobody else quite gets and I play rhythm like nobody else plays—it's a very cutting rhythm style. Sorta Captain Power chords! I do like to have a bash every now and then and at a wailing guitar solo but halfway through I usually fall off the end of the fretboard. I might have a go, but I've resigned myself to the fact that I haven't got what it takes to be a guitar hero."

"Yet funny enough I don't really respect that kind of guitar playing. I've got no great shakes for Jeff Beck or Jimmy Page. Sure, I love what they do, but it always seems to me that they're like the Yehudi Menuhin of the rock business. They're extremely good at what they do, but I'm sure they'd give their right arm to be writers—though not necessarily in my shoes."

"I don't really feel the showmanship side of my contribution to the Who's stage show is fundamentally a part of my personality. It's something that automatically happens. Basically, it stems from the very early days when we had to learn to sell ourselves to the public—otherwise nobody would have taken a blind bit of notice of us; and, like many things, it's been carried on through until today. Yet I have no doubt that, if we wanted to, we could walk on any stage and stand there without doing all those visual things and still go down well with an audience."

So why this depressing down-the-mouth attitude? Could it stem, I ask Townsend, from the fact that a critic once bemoaned that, in his opinion, the Who, once the true essence of rock 'n' roll, now just go through the motions?

"Well, that statement was true—but on the other hand if it's unqualified
makes Aerosmith attractive. Coming after a brief era when rock 'n' roll fans in their adolescence were bombarded with the exaggerated sexual ambiguity of Alice, Bowie and Reed, it must be reassuring to have a band that knows everything we’ve wanted to know about sex all along: that it’s dirty. 🎶

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then it might as well be ditched. But you've put the question to me and now I've got to try and qualify that other journalist's statement.

"To me, the success of any truly great rock song is related to the fact that people who couldn't really communicate in normal ways can quite easily communicate through the mutual enjoyment of rock music. And that was simply because, for them, it was infinitely more charismatic than anything else around at that time.

"For example, you're aware that there's this great wall around adolescents and that they can't talk freely about their problems because it's far too embarrassing. Personally, I feel that adolescence lasts much longer than most people realize. What happens is, that people find ways of getting round it and putting on a better show in public. And as they get older they become more confident and find their niche.

"Now why I think that journalist said the Who now only play rock 'n' roll is because on most levels rock has become a spectator sport. It's not so important as a method of expression as it once was. Today something else could quite easily replace it."

Townshend goes on to concede that rock doesn’t hold as much genuine mystique as it did with previous generations to the extent that the stigma of the social outlaw has almost been eradicated. Those who have tried to become outlaws have failed miserably, hence the last-ditch shock tactics of Alice Cooper and David Bowie.

"For many kids, rock 'n' roll means absolutely nothing." He compares it to switching on a television set, going to the movies or a football match. It's just another form of entertainment. If what the kids do listen to consists entirely of the Bay City Rollers and the Top 10 then it must mean even less than most other similar forms of mass media entertainment because they're not really listening.

"The real truth as I see it is that rock music as it was is not really contemporary to these times. It's really the music of yesteryear. The only things that continue to keep abreast of the times are those songs that stand out due to their simplicity."

An example?
"'My Generation.' A lot of people don't understand that there's a big difference between what kids want on stage in relationship to what they actually go out and buy on record. Perhaps the reason why so many young kids can still get into the Who in concert is simply because it's a very zesty, athletic performance. However, if we just restricted our gigs to performing songs we'd just written yesterday and ignored all the old material then I'm positive that we'd really narrow down our audience tremendously.

"I dunno what's happening sometimes," he bemoans. "All I know is that when we last played Madison Square Garden I felt acute shades of nostalgia. All the Who freaks had crowded around the front of the stage and when I gazed out into the audience all I could see were those same sad faces that I'd seen at every New York Who gig. There was about a thousand of 'em and they turned up for every bloody show at the Garden, as if it were some Big Event—the Who triumph over New York. It was like some bi-centennial celebration and they were there to share in the glory of it all.

"They hadn't come to watch the Who, but to let everyone know that they were the original Who fans. They had followed us from the very beginning of it. It was their night."

"It was dreadful." Townshend recounts in disgust. "They were telling us what to play. Every time I tried to make an announcement they all yelled out 'Shhhrrrrrupp Townshend and let Em-"wistle play 'Boris The Spider,'" and, if that wasn't bad enough, during the other songs they'd all start chanting 'jump...jump...jump...jump...jump.'"

"I was so brought down by it all! I mean, is this what it had all degenerated into?

"To be honest, the highest I've been on stage last year was when we used to play 'Drowned.' That was only because there was some nice guitar work in it...Roger liked singing it and both John and Keith played together so superbly. Really, that was the only time I felt that I could take off and fly."

(This is an interview in two parts. Next week Townshend takes on Wakeman, the Beatles, ELP, to name a few, and reveals more of the why and where of the Who.)

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star for over a decade—"I like to see that group or that person entertain me. Show me something different. That's