Keith Moon’s Split Personality
Genesis
Free
Lou Reed

Michael Brown/Ian Lloyd
Sutherland Brothers & Quiver

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A pair of BVD's hangs limply from the dense chaparral encircling the house. It's the first sight greeting a visitor to this modest two-story adobe clinging to a hillside north of Hollywood. The broken doorbell is suspended by a single wire emerging from the stucco but a loud rap on the mammoth wooden double door brings a response. The door jerks open abruptly, and standing there, resplendent in a gold lame long-sleeve shirt splashed with green glass stars, is Keith Moon.

His reception of a visitor is impeccably courteous, but a person aware of Keith's reputation as the rock world's most incorrigible madman still feels it necessary to exercise caution upon entry. His penchant for antics which would land other people in institutions is surpassed only by his fame as the dynamic and demonic drummer of the Who.

"There's so many even I forget them all," comments Keith from the sofa of his blue-carpeted living room. "It's just... after the show you come off stage with so much adrenaline, you're so up after doing a performance, everything else is secondary. It's sort of 'bogger them all! What's a car, what's a hotel room?'

The sofa and a coffee table littered with books, magazines, and record albums are the only pieces of furniture in the spacious room. Keith moves an ashtray to a more convenient location, lights a Kent and discusses the nature of his craziness.

"If anybody could define crazy," he exclaims, "Maybe I'm eccentric, but crazy, insane...well, at times. Isn't everybody at times? The difference is in my case it gets exaggerated and, mainly, gets talked about. If somebody else does the same thing, it doesn't get in the papers. Or if they get arrested for it someone bails them out and keeps it quiet."

Keith is well aware of what it's like to be incarcerated for his peculiarities, as he was following an incident in a Montreal hotel. "We had a big party there and one of the rooms got slightly bent. If you get maybe a hundred people crammed in a hotel suite, it gets wild!" He laughs at the recollection.

"Most of the time you can just pay for the damage and that's it. It's just all over and forgotten. But in Montreal, unfortunately, the manager was an asshole and called the police. They threw the lot of us in jail. Maybe 30 of us. The whole band. In fact, John wrote that song, "Cell Number Seven." Should play that one!"

He bounds to his feet, strides across the room and puts Entwistle's Mad Dog on the turntable. Turning up the volume, the decibels blast through two gargantuan speakers in numbers sufficient to cause even a deaf person to cover his ears.

Keith, of course, is oblivious. He dances merrily about the room, looking much like a child with his first record player as his flailing arms beat imaginary drums.

Despite his free form lifestyle, Keith occasionally reveals a practical side. When asked to provide some self-descriptive adjectives he laughs heartily, falling back against the couch and nearly upsetting the coffee table. But he takes his time in replying.

"Well, hesitant," he confides. "I'm very conscious of my position. I don't like to labor under too many illusions. I know today I can be at the top and tomorrow forgotten. So, I work at the fact I don't intend that to happen. There are other phases, like movies, theater,
I'd usually get the sack, because if I had a job on Friday I wouldn't bother to go in to work.

"But when I joined the Who I realized then -- when I met the other fellows and they were pissed off with the way everything is too, with the alternatives -- I knew then the Who would make it. Because of the sheer power of the personalities involved in the Who and the way we worked together, it really smelt successful."

Keith's dalmation puppy, Bonzo, clammers suddenly onto the sofa and begins chewing playfully on my left hand, apparently preferring it to the rawhide doggy chews that sit on the carpet.

"Bonzo, sit!" commands Keith sternly. "Bonzo, sit up!"

The dog cocks its head to one side, wags its tail and looks toward its master quizzically.

"Obey, isn't she?" Keith comments. Taking another drink of champagne and orange juice, Keith then reveals he is a former Scout. It was in it for a couple of years," he admits. "The Boy Scouts in England really aren't like the scouts here. I was in the Sea Cadets. It was like a cadet force...most of the guys in it went into the Navy. But I joined the Band and we didn't have to go out on parade. I used to play the bugle which led to the trumpet.

When I was 15 or 16 my dad bought me my first drums. They were 590 and it was a really old, old kit. I just bashed about in the garage. Then I started playing with a jazz band and then I joined a small rock 'n' roll band called the Beachcombers.

"We just played surf music around where I lived in Wembley, on the outskirts of London. That's where I met the Who. They did the same circuit as us. And they were better than we were. I found out their drummer was leaving, so I just went along to one of their concerts and sat in."

Repeating some thoughts and leaving others dangling in mid-sentence are Moon's conversational trademarks. His ideas come in flurries, much like the punches he once threw as a youthful pugilist. But he frequently stops them short of their target, or diverts them to another.

Any tangible things you enjoy being able to do with your money?

"Tangible? A Rolls-Royce is tangible! It's tangible evidence of money anyway. Oh, we do universities, a few guest appearances at football matches and collect money and do charity shows. I suppose that's as far as my social conscience goes. If you're talking about giving money to any sort of foundation, like science or like George with the Hare Krishna, then, no I don't.

"I really...I mean, I overspend enormously, it doesn't really make much difference how much I have. I always owe. My bills are always more than I earn.

And the taxes...that's why I'm here. It's an absurd situation. I get taxed 98 per cent in England and I can't afford to live there. In fact, I was talking to other people recently, other English people in English bands, other well known English musicians, and they all say really, there's no choice but to leave England. They just can't afford to live there, can't afford to work.

"I love England, but I can't live there. There's certain women I love but I can't marry them, for one reason or another.

"Since I've been with the Who I've spent probably more time...I've spent nine months out of the country and three in England, so I consider I can live anywhere."

Keith departs for the bathroom, returning a few minutes later with a Saunders 'Falcon II' hunting sling, a large metal-framed slingshot with built-in with trigger. Running through the pile of records and boxes decorating the southwest corner of the room, he finds a suitable container and sends a volley of half inch metal pellets toward it. He spits a better target, a Marantz packing carton, and removes the styrofoam protective lining, setting it atop the cardboard. Then he blasts away at it with another noisy barrage of pellets.


"I'm going to put up a picture with a target of a squirrel on it," he replies, blissfully continuing to blast away at the styrofoam. The distraction affects his aim, and a pellet ricochets off the ceiling-height cabinet covering the east wall of the room.

"Nah, no!" he exclaims. He casts an eye toward the
backyard, envisioning furry creatures darting through the underbrush, but reluctantly places the sling on the crowded coffee table, next to a copy of the book, "Know Your Great Dane." Lighting another cigarette, Keith turns his attention to some of his favorite artists. "People like Gene Krupa, Jo Jones, Buddy Rich, the big band drummers, they were...to me they were the best. I'd see a big band with a double bass drum set-up, twirling the sticks, all the theaters. They're the people I really dug growing up." His brown eyes sparkle and grow large at the recollection.

"I like theater, theatrical music. I've always liked bands and people who have been extroverted the way they perform. So rock 'n' roll then was a natural, with gold lame and all the flash." Keith smiles broadly as he rubs the shirt hiding his Andy Cappummy.

"A lot of American artists, too. Jan and Dean, the Beach Boys. And of course the Beatles, who are my classic. Liberace as well, I think he's terrific. Lawrence Welk to me is the epitome of showmanship. I like Bowie very much. And Elton John. I like theater.

"David phoned up the house when I was in England and asked if I'd come down and do some work on, probably, Pinups. But I couldn't do that, we were doing Tommy at the time. I'd like to work with him, with Bowie..."}

"I mean, David's been around for a hell of a long time. David had a band about ten years ago in England. He's a great guy. He has a very good head for business. He knows his audience." "Have you heard my album?" Keith suddenly, as he launches a search through the incredible assortment of records and tapes occupying the shelves, the floor and the bar, no less than four deep in most places. The Very Best of Dionne Warwick, falls to the floor, but he continues to search until he finds his own contribution to vinyl posterity, Two Sides of the Moon.

As Keith prepares to place the needle on the disc, Annette covers her ears in anticipation of the forthcoming auditory onslaught and flees to the relative quiet of the upstairs bedroom. Not wishing to disappoint her, Keith turns up the sound just loud enough to vibrate the walls. He begins dancing about the room, occasionally windmilling his arms a la Townshend. Grabbing the inner sleeve of the album, he proudly calls attention to the musicians aiding him in its recording. He is reminiscent of a youngster proudly displaying his treasured baseball card collection as he points to the names of Ringo Starr, Klaus Voorman and JoeWalsh.

When I notice Dick Dale's name, Moon smiles, eyes wide and emphatically nods his head, obviously pleased at the recognition of one of his surf music all-stars. "Solid Gold," a song by Fanny's Nicky Barclay, is reminiscent of the Kinks' "Top of the Pops." Mentioning that to Keith when the music stops ignites him again.

"The Kinks! Oh, the Kinks were one of the cornerstones of the rock scene. The Kinks and the Who were like the, uh...Pete, when Pete wrote "Can't Explain," there's a lot of Kinks' style in the Who. You've got 'dun, dahn,' the chords. We used to nick a lot of things from the Who around, and when Pete wrote that song there was a lot of Ray Davies in there. I love the Kinks; they're one of my all-time favorite English bands.

"We were all there, back then. The Who, the Yardbirds, we all did the same circuits then. And the same television shows -- Top of the Pops, Ready Steady Go. That's where we sort of got to know each other originally.

"There was a lot more competition then. It was sort of 'ello, 'ow are ya?' It wasn't very friendly and there was a lot of rivalry. But since then all that's disappeared and the important thing is the music."

"About your own songwriting efforts...

"This'll be a short one! One song in ten years.

"Cowboys and Strange," "I Need You," "Tommy's Holiday Camp." That's three. (Not to mention "Wasp Man" and several co-authorships -- Ed.)

"Three! I didn't realize I was that prolific! I can't sit still long enough. I don't enjoy it. I've never really tried to write. I might in the future, but I don't really plan to. With John and Pete in the band, both really good writers -- great writers -- I much prefer the action. I like more action than sitting down with pen and paper and thinking up a song. He looks toward the ceiling and rubs the stubble on his chin, as if seeking heavenly inspiration.

You seem to have found plenty of action in films. Do you foresee any problems fitting your personality into the movie world?

"No. The discipline involved in any kind of theater is pretty strict. I know exactly how much to drink before I go on stage. So I don't go on stage smashed, so out of it I don't know what I'm doing. It's self discipline. I can take direction.

"Early on, the early days, there was a lot of, you realize that it's...I consider myself a professional in this business and being a professional has got certain responsibilities. Being in a condition to do an interview, to do a photo session, to be on time for a radio show, you have these responsibilities. There's nobody can force you to do it. And my manager -- I don't have a manager, but if I did he wouldn't come round here and grab me by the...by the collar and drag me down there. There wouldn't be any point of us forget that. We're all aware of it. The Who is as much a part of me as it is any of the others. No one person in the Who dictates what the Who does. So we all are the Who.

"A lot of people presume that Pete, because he's the writer, dictates Who policy, which is absurd. The four of us dictate Who policy, because Who policy is the four of us. Anything the Who does is not done unless all four are in agreement.

"I've heard Daltrey once punched Townshend in the nose because of your taste for surf music.

"Oh, they say -- oh, that's not true!" Keith sputters, reigning outrage. After yet another drink of champagne, continued on page 16
and orange juice he continues. "As I said earlier, the personalities within the band are very strong and we were going through a period of smashing bottles and going at each other's throats. And we all just said, 'If we carry on like this, there's no more who, and something's got to change.' That's the first time we realized the who was... that no one person could tell the others what to do. We ain't gonna take it!

"People have been saying the Who have been breaking up for the last 10 years. They'll be saying the same thing 10 years from now. There are always the doubters, those who said rock 'n' roll wouldn't last."

You mentioned audiences. Notice any difference in their response to you compared with ten years ago?

"I think the audiences aren't as crazy now as they were. In fact, I rip my clothes more often than any body else."

"When we were doing Stardust there was a scene where we dressed up and I had a suit originally made for George Harrison. There's a scene in the movie like '65, and they invited all these kids down and we set up the whole show the way the Beatles used to set up theirs. The crowd just went crazy.

"We had a huge sound system -- we got the Who's sound system -- around the theater. We played live, David Essex and myself. So they went crazy. We had to run just to get in these limousines. They jumped on top of the cars and bashed the windows in, which hadn't happened to me in a long time.

"Now the audiences are coming mainly to see you and listen to the music, and they're not into smashing up the cars and getting on stage."

Keith squirms like a schoolboy in his seat, fidgeting nervously. After sitting patiently for some time he is no longer able to suppress his boundless energy. I say goodbye and head for my Opal. He responds in his characteristically courteous manner.

As I prepare to depart, a ranchero chugs slowly up the steep driveway. A balding, middle-aged delivery man gets out of the vehicle hesitantly, his gaze divided between me and the SUV's now flogging in the evening breeze.

"Are you Moon?" he inquires, fingering the address label of a brown wrapped package.

"No, Mr. Moon is inside."

He heads cautiously for the door, returning at a considerably quicker pace moments later. Giving the shorts one final glance, he shakes his head and fades away down the incline.

A decade removed from "My Generation," Keith Moon is still causing a big sensation.