Inside the Who: Reveries and Regrets

By Pete Townshend

Randy Newman: Snubs and God

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THE PUNK

Meets the Godmother

By Pete Townshend

Pete Townshend, as some of you may remember, is the high-stepping guitarist and songwriter of the Who. This is the third piece he has written for ROLLING STONE. (One of the earlier pieces was about the Who, the other about Meher Baba; this one’s about both.)

Pete originally proposed the piece late last October, saying he would like to write about “what happened to the Who back in ’75 during the recording of The Who by Numbers, the traumatic events that led to and went on in the studio, my own absurd needless crackup, Keith’s deepening alcoholism and estrangement from the Who, my visit to San Francisco for a Sufi ‘cure,’ my decision to let Roger win and the subsequent miraculous growth in the internal relationships of the Who members to one another.”

London, April 1977

It took a bit of courage to start this article, as I have said precisely nothing in the press (other than through lyrics) for close to two years. Today, reading it through, there is much I am tempted to add or expand on. There is a strong temptation to bring everything up to date, but then the success of the Who’s last tour did that. The future, of course, is an open book.

The sections in italics are merely pieces of my writing from about November 1973 to November 1975, when the months were covered in the article. I often sit at a typewriter and knock out stream-of-consciousness stuff. It not only helps clear the head but often brings forth ideas for songs. These were written on scraps of paper, at dead of night, at the luncheon table with the kid on my lap, in hotel rooms while filming or performing. They were never meant to be published, so they are somewhat obscure, but they are not totally edited and therefore revelatory of my state of mind and degree of introspective desperation.

I have always been talkative with the rock press and have missed my contact with writers. Silence, however, is habit-forming, and I am glad to be able to look back objectively to such an emotional period of my life with the band and try to set it right. What I never expected was such sympathy and understanding from writers who I continually put off when they asked for interviews or even just a chat. I have lost contact with many journalist friends because I have been scarf ed to speak. This article helps bring things up-to-date. Perhaps in the future I can get used to working jampacked, instead of my fingers-nervous that would be better occupied playing guitar or tickling children.

February 1977. Today I received a letter from a neighbor. She says I must forgive her for ignoring me, but it’s because of her religion. She knows I have a crush on her. I’m not sure who she is, but I might well have a crush on her if I did; she wrote a letter to my wife saying the same thing. Irritating.

It’s now 2:30 in the morning, and I can’t get to sleep. My crush on my neighbor has become so strong that it will only be satisfied when I have thrilled to the delight of actually crushing her. I sometimes wonder where this piece of my destiny was forged: anyone can sum me up at a glance, my life is on sale. All I know is that it sometimes hurts to be exposed, and to be unable to retaliate without feeding the haggling customers.

Yesterday was Meher Baba’s Amartithi. Followers of this great Master (to whom I remain committed) celebrate the anniversary of his passing in 1969. In the afternoon, I saw a film of his entombment and fell a most powerful feeling of his presence throughout the day. It is incredible to me—as I’m sure it is to many witnesses of my day-to-day behavior—that I still feel so moved by Meher Baba’s words, photographs and films. After following him for nearly nine years, I have fallen deeply into the rhythm of focusing all my reflections on life through a lens formed of experiences I have had under his spiritual umbrella.

This letter and the film: as extremes, they seem to indicate the incredible paradoxes and conflicts that surround me. The most amazing thing of all is that my head has surfaced, some distance from the shoreline of past paranoia, in an ocean of immeasurable possibilities. I feel strong and secure and, for the first time, able to talk about the Who (or at least the Who through my eyes) back in ’74.

If I try to imagine where my head was two years ago, it’s a strange vision. Paranoia does not adequately describe my feelings, though I suppose all of the Who were to a degree paranoid toward one another. But my trouble was also manifestly spiritual. I felt I had let myself down morally and artistically, I felt quite genuinely to be a hypocrite. I complained a lot about things that I felt I was doing from the goodness of my heart but wasn’t receiving enough attention for: to pick only one example from many, helping Eric Clapton. I spent a tremendous amount of time with him during his heroin cure, and earned his love as a result. What originally happened was that I’d been going down to see him, because I figured that if people started to go and see him, he might come out of his habit. I knew him well from the Hendrix days, of course, and I enjoyed his company.

Also, Alice, the woman he was living with, and I really hit it off. Then David Harlech, her father, spoke to me. He said that Eric wanted to do a concert if I would run it. I felt I had no choice but to agree, and it was instrumental in getting him to John and Mrs. Paterson, whose acupunture cure did eventually rid Eric of his addiction. But my wife measured it all against time spent with her, fairly minimal at the best of times, and very minimal during this period (around November 1973). There is no point pretending that it is possible to help bring a man off heroin while you’re doing a nine-to-five office job. "Tea and meet the wife," don’t mix with three a.m. phone calls and Rainbow reunion rehearsals that actually start at six in the morning.

At the same time, a confrontation with Roger Daltrey was building. While working with Eric, I was also writing and recording Quadrophenia. Kit Lambert had helped a certain amount while I was writing, and had promised to produce the album. He didn’t make out very well and argued with Daltrey. I felt let down and took over, despite the fact that I had more than enough on my plate.

When the album was completed, it took only a few days for Roger to express his disgust at the result. I had spent my summer vacation mixing it, and he had popped in once or twice and made a couple of negative comments about the sound but seemed quite keen to let me "have my head," as it were, in production. Fundamentally, I had taken on too much, as always, and couldn’t handle the strain when things went wrong and people blamed me. I felt I was perfectly entitled to gamble and lose, as no one else seemed prepared to either with Quadrophenia or even the Who’s career.

So, I felt angry at Roger for not realizing how much work I had done on the album—apart from writing it—and angry that he dismissed my production as garbage. It’s hard to explain, because I don’t feel these things anymore. I genuinely feel I was the one who was in the wrong. But it contributed a lot to what happened later.
gazed at an ocean scene, thinking to myself, "I am dreaming, I control my movements through my sleeping adventure."

In a dream within a dream, I awakèd for a minute. I looked around the room. Everything was as it should be: the chair in its usual place, with my previous day's clothing strewn over the back. The red television glowed at me quietly; the window blind was pulled tight down, the bathroom light still on, towels on the floor damp and tangled.

I closed my eyes and became aware of a strange feeling. Not of an impending nightmare or even the experience of sadness, though the whole scene seemed set for troubling visions. On the contrary, a sense of elation came over me. I struggled my weary head into my pillow like a child and smiled at the strong buzz of contentment that flooded my mind.

At that moment, I heard something distant that seemed to reflect my almost orgastic feelings of pleasure. Years before, I had experimented with a tape recording of dozens of piano performances, sweeping and glittering over the entire chromatic scale. I then mixed them all together in one and the result was an almost unidentifiable sound, but of great brains and mystery. A sound like waves crashing, or distant wind over a mountain, but musical. In fact, an occasion a glimpse of detail within the deluge manifested, and piano could be clearly heard.

The new, remote sound I heard in my dream had similarities to my experimental work. It sounded like a breath being softly played, but the listener's ear seemed inside the mouth of a lion. Listen to your own breath. Breath is a quiet place and hear the beauty and complexity of the sound. The slightest change in the shape of your mouth chamber, the tiniest movement of your lips, and the breath becomes a song or a word. A thousand harmonies are thrown up like glittering reflections on the surface of a surfy sea. In the mystic's "Ow" is contained every sound, and every sound within a sound. Every ingredient that contributes to the source of the primordial desire to even make a sound is contained in that one word.

So this is the trance of thought I was taking in my dream. I was still aware that I was asleep, but it seemed important. The new sound grew louder, began to come closer. Then the music connected itself. The beauty of the sound became transcendentally glorious, its superficial simplicity only disguised a secret ingredient that I felt, must in itself contain all the things.

This roiling, swirling, cascading sound threw me into an ecstasy that almost defied description. But while swooning under its impact and unparalleled attractiveness, I still had the presence of mind—perhaps because I am a musician—to try to analyze and discover what this incredible music was. If I could only break down the sound I could remake it for the whole world to hear. I could make a reality of this outer limit of my unleashed and unfettered musical imagination; glorious, celestial music of only dreams.

I began to listen more carefully, trying to ignore the hyperbole sweetness of the sound—almost like a starving man trying to eat a piece of cheese and at the same time compose a thesis on the relative distinction between, say, double Gloucester and cheddar.

Bucklessly, I plunged deeply into the music. As I became submerged, it became slightly mellower; it was, indeed, like diving into the sea. The feeling of the sharp, cool water is always a shock when one has spent an hour gazing languidly at the stormy surface of the waves. I could still hear the rippling and starting of the incomparable sigh, and I was torn in it, of it. I divined even more deeply into the secret. What was the essential ingredient of this music? What was its fundamental element?

For a few minutes, I was lost in my search. I forgot to listen to intensely and began turning over in my mind the various possibilities and alternatives. Was it a million pianos? Perhaps the sound of a heavenly choir?

That was it! The heart of this sound was the human voice; there could be no question. I plunged headlong, further into the choir of this incorporeal symphony. As I thrust inward, it was apparently amplifying.

Then, in a second, the whole world seemed to turn inside out. My skin crawled as I recognized the main elements of this superhumanly wonderful noise. I could not believe what I heard. As

**PSYCHEDELIC** punk Pete at a late-Sixties Jimi Hendrix concert in London's Saville Theatre
I tore myself away, I felt I was leaving sections of my self behind, caught up in the cacophenous din. I tried to make myself, but only succeeded in breaking through a superficial level—no longer a dream within a dream, merely a nightmare. A game, a ghostly trick perpetrated on me by my own mind. A situation deconstructed by my own misgiving to the verge of my sanity, the very essence, I realized, my only reality.

For the sound that I was hearing was the Niagra roar of a billion human screaming.

Now I really woke. Ironically, the room looked just as it had in the dream. Nothing had changed. My body was soaking wet, sweat steaming from ever pore. Fever lay under the surface of the skin like a disease. I clung from my bed, clutching a small head on a string that I knew had been touched by my Master, and prayed for protection. I felt enough comfort to clear my head and allow me to draw a conclusion. I now knew that all things on earth, nothing is as inherently evil, as contemptuous, so vile, so terrifying, so worthless...as my own imagination.

Quadrophenia (the Who's last major album, with a contemporary theme, released in 1973) tried to describe the utopian secrets of the eternal youth of each Who member. We got our life extensions from our audience. However far down we go as individuals, there will always be some to pay, so always an audience. When there's an audience, there's salvation. Mixed up in Quadrophenia was a study of the divine desperation that is at the root of every punk's scream for blood and vengeance.

I can elaborate. It is really fantastic conceit on the part of the Establishment to imagine that any particular fragment of society is ever the true subject of a rock & roll song. Even in the famous, folk-oriented, political complaining songs of the very early Sixties, a thread of upward grappling for truth came through strongly. The definition of rock & roll lies here for me. If it screams for truth rather than help, if it commits itself with a courage it can't be sure of, it really has, if it stands up and admires something is wrong but doesn't insist on blood, then it's rock & roll.

We shed our own blood. We don't need to shed anyone else's.

I spent the last three days of March talking about punk rock with Chris Stamp. I'm sure I invested at, and yet it's left me behind. A game, a ghostly trick perpetrated on me by my own mind. A situation deconstructed by my own misgiving to the verge of my sanity, the very essence, I realized, my only reality.

Chris told me the punk crowds banged their heads through college, swore at one another, and if a fight broke out (though 'breaking out' is hardly the term to use in this context), one became the aggressor over the victim. The crowd was one, the fighters placed out. Damage, damage. Damage. It's a great way to shake society's value system. It makes mothers mourn their children. It makes schoolteachers shake.

High-rise blocks are built in Glasgow—no one needs to have lived in them to know the facts. I see the faces staring up at me as I destroy my '5000' guitar. Why should they? Poor bastards, do that? They can't destroy the structure because they despise phonies; their envy is the reason so many called it a musical instrument. It is so far beyond their reach and sight as well not exist.

The crucifixion is what these people stand for. They humiliate themselves and their peers, and care nothing for any accolade. These stars are true stars, they are part of an audience of stars.

And on the dance floor broken glass. The bloody face down in the twisted man's in empty room; It all belongs to me; you know.

Where am I in space that I should care so much about the lonely souls in two square bedrooms; a hundred feet up in air in cities all over the world?

I am with them. I want nothing more than to go with them to their desperate hell, because that loneliness they suffer is soon to be over. Deep inside, they know.

I prayed for it, and yet it's too late for me to truly participate. I feel like an engineer. Just let me...watch.

THE AGING daddy of punk rock at home last summer. In the background mural Pete's avatar, Meher Baba, twirls his mustache.

When I sit and listen to "The Punk Meets the Godfather" on Quadrophenia, I came closer to defining my state three years ago. I was the Godfather. (When I met two of the Sex Pistols recently, I was in an appropriately raging, explosive mood, but I recognized their anger, triumphant expressions and began to preach.)

In '73 and '74, I was the aging daddy of punk rock. I was hearing a standard I could barely hold up anymore. My choices were stunted, not with canvas wool in the Brand-Mastro image, but with the scores of aperus I had taken with a sneer and talked to swallow.

On the Who's tour of the U.S. and Canada in the fall of '76 a lot of things came to a "glorious" head in Toronto, the last show of the tour. The road crew threw a party for us, and it was the first party I had been to for at least five years which meant anything to me. I don't go to a lot of parties, but I'm glad that I made this one. I suddenly realized that behind every Who show are people who care as much as, or more than, we do. Talking to the individuals who help get the show together enabled me to remember that audiences care, too.

When I sit in an audience, one of the things that makes it enjoyable is the energy I spend willing it to be the best thing I have ever seen. I get to see some great concerts that way. Ask any Who fan if they care how well we are playing on any single date. The Who don't count as much as people might imagine, but as performers their response to the audience's energy is vital.

So two years ago when I felt down, when I felt empty, tired and defeated, the audience of Who freaks carried on regardless. At the time I was very bitter about this. I remember our concerts at Madison Square Garden, having come out of total seclusion in my studio after preparing mind-bending and complex tracks for the Tommy film. When my drunken legs gave way under me, as I tried to do a basic cliché leap and shuffle, a few loving fans got up a chant, "Jump! Jump! Jump!" Brings tears to your eyes, doesn't it? It did mine anyway. Such loyalty!
This man had consumed time in a way that only God Himself could ever hold a candle to, but had he learned anything? He
belonged to God, as we all do. Duty that He is, then, God’s folly
and what do you do? You praise God Himself.

That argument is for cry babies, no, this was God’s work.

The devil is, after all, only a figment of God’s imagination. And
to this remarkable feat believed himself to be a figment of
A dream within a dream. He believed he had an
imagination that could not be shaken by the actual imagination
that brought forth his very own being;

Such indiscipline.

Such unthinking humor.

Life could easily continue the positions of sidekicks in this
one’s circuit. Perhaps his earlier dream could be shattered the
time.

Maybe this man’s time had really come.

The general rule of the day in show business was, “What in or out of trouble—drink.”

So I drank some more. Drinking around
the Who is the greatest thing gutter-level
life can offer. The naivety of the humor,
the sheer decadence of the amount put
away, the incredible emotional release of
violent outbursts against innocent hotel-
room sofas; all these could get a body
through a lot of trouble. But at the end of the orgi, the real
cancer still lies untackled deep in the
heart.

When the Who were recording The Who by Numbers, Keith’s courageous attempts to head off his alcoholism
moved me to stop drinking too. I stopped overnight. The
results were interesting. My hair started to fall out. An
other remarkable side effect was that I carried on drinking
without my knowledge. This story can only carry credence
if we are to believe the observations of the people around
us when we were recording; they were probably twice as
drunken as I. Apparently, at the end of one session which I
had gotten through by pulling incessantly at a total of
about twenty cans of Coke, I wished everyone good night,
walked up to a makeshift bar and drank a bottle of vodka. I
don’t remember doing that.

I got very scared by memory blackouts, as scared as I
had ever been on bad LSD trips eight years before. Once
in July 1974—just after the own Tommy filming—I sort of
“came to” in the back of my own car. Keith and John were
with me (we were probably going to a club), but although I
knew who they were, I didn’t recognize either my car or my
driver, who had been working for me for about two
months. The shock that hit me as the pieces fell into place
was even more frightening than the black holes in my head
as the memory lapses began. Eight drug-free years and still
this mental demise.

On another occasion, at the “thank you” concert we
gave in Portsmouth, England, for the extras in the Tommy
film, I signed several managerial and recording contracts
in a complete fog. The only event I remember is grudging
scratching for help deep inside, as I asked John Entwistle if
it had ever happened to him. (The fact that I’d signed the
contracts didn’t come home to me until we were actually in
the middle of a legal tangle some months later.)

Tommy has become rock’s “Pirates of Penzance” in
only ten years of exposure to the public, through the Who’s
performances onstage, their original album, Lou Reiter’s
album with the London Symphony Orchestra, Ken Rus-
sell’s film, the ballet of the Royal Canadian Ballet and
dozens of minor exploitations such as “Electric Tommy,”
the music played on synthesizers, and “Marching Tommy,”
the music scored for college brass bands.

The above, in a simple way, illustrates how as a rock
composer and performer I was dragged into the world of
light entertainment and into the world of high finance. The
Who’s original Tommy album sold very well indeed in
comparison to their entire record sales, and as a result the
band was bailed out of terrific debt and given a new lease on
life in many ways. As for the reference to light entertain-
ment: Tommy was never ever really meant to be as “heavy”
as, say, “My Generation.” We joked as a group about
“Tommy” being true opera, which it isn’t, but, the Who’s
audience, and many of the rock press took it very seriously
indeed. It was this seriousness that turned Tommy into light
entertainment.

Many Who fans feel the Tommy film is not what the
Who is about, or even what Tommy is about. In truth, it is
exactly what it is about. It is the prime example of rock &
roll throwing off its three-choir musical structure, discar-
ding its attachment to the three-minute single, openly
taking on the unfashionable questions about spirituality
and religion and yet hanging grimly on to the old ways at
the same time.

I enjoyed doing the Tommy film. I liked the opportuni-
ity to work with the music, and bring it up to date
showwise, and I genuinely admired and respected Ken
Russell, who is stimulating company but an obsessive
worker. Being sympathetic to that strange condition, I
suppose I allowed myself to work beyond my capabilities.

We spent about six weeks preparing the tracks before
shooting began in April 1974. During the second week of
the actual filming, I declared to Bill Coralby, our new
manager, that I would never work on the road with the
Who again. I think I might even have said that I felt the
Who was finished.

I was mixed up by my two professions: as writer and
musical director on the film, and as performer with the
Who. I think I perhaps blamed the Who’s live work for
bringing me to such an emotional abyss. In retrospect, I
know that it is only from the Who’s live concerts that I get
energy freely for doing practically nothing. I play guitar, I
jump and dance, and come off stronger than when I went
on. Walking offstage after a Who concert, we each feel
like superhumans. It’s easy to maintain this very genuine
and natural energy high for innate stamina of some God-
given talent for an endless cascade supply.

After my total downward spiral during the filming of
Tommy, and after living with the desperate fear of further
humiliation of the Madison Square Garden variety, I did a
few interviews with the London-based rock press. My final
undoing was to see among them a face I knew and to
imagine that it belonged to someone who cared about me
more as a person than as a rock performer. I should never
have expected that.

Blaming the group, I blamed out my fears, my depres-
sions and woe to a couple of writers whose sympathies

THE WHO before Moon (from left to right):
Pete, Roger Daltrey, drummer Doug Sanden
and John Entwistle, Putney, 1964

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY PETER TOWNSHEND
were, to put it mildly, a little to the left wing of rock journalism. Then when they appeared in print, the results were catastrophic. Roger was understandably outraged, and retaliated to my absurdity in his own interviews published a few weeks later. "I knocked Townsend out with one punch." I think I was already dead before it connected.

I feel as though we were both, to an extent, manipulated by a skilled and opportunistic reporting chain, that the derision handed out to me by Roger for my weakness and indulgence did me a lot of good. It hurt me at the time, but when you're so far down, so the saying goes, the gutter looks up. I had, after all, been derisive of Roger in print many times.

Roger went to work on another Ken Russell film, Lizstomania, which I managed to avoid. I got my head down to try to write a bit for the coming album (The Who by Numbers) and came up with some reality tinged with bitterness. It was hard for me to admit what I knew as I was composing: that what was happening to me was an exorcism. Suicide notes tend to flush out the trouble felt by the potential ledge jugglers. But once the truth is out, there's no need to leap.

I also felt curiously mixed up inside my own mind. "Skip Kid" came across as a warning to young kids getting into music that it would hurt them—it was almost paternal in its assumed wisdom. "Blue, Red, and Grey" was a whole different story with John Entwistle adding brass band to the misty middle distance. It was about nothing at all; it reminded me of an old Smiley Smile Beach Boys number. "A Hand or a Face" was cynical and tried to cut down the growing dependency I had on hypnotic and psychic phenomena. All the songs were different, some more aggressive than others, but they were all somehow negative in direction. I felt empty.

Recording the album seemed to take me nowhere. Roger was angry with the world at the time. Keith seemed as inscrutable as ever, on the wagon one minute, off it the next. John was obviously gathering strength throughout the whole period; the great thing about it was that he seemed to know we were going to need him more than ever before in the coming year.

Glyn Johns, who was producing the album, was going through the most fantastic traumas at home with his marriage. I felt partly responsible because the Who recording schedule had, as usual, dragged on and on, sweeping all individuals and their needs aside. Glyn worked harder on The Who by Numbers than I've ever seen him live. It had to be, not because the tracks were weak or the music poor (though I'll admit it's not a definitive Who album), but because the group was so useless. We played cricket between takes or went to the pub. I personally had never done that before. I felt detached from my own songs, from the whole record; although I'd discovered some terrific sportsmen in our road crew.

After we finished recording in August 1975, we had a month off. I decided to try to get some spiritual energy from friends in the U.S.A. For a few years, I had toyed with the idea of opening a London house dedicated to Meher Baba. In the eight years I had followed him, I had donated only copies of foundations set up around the world to carry out the Master's wishes and decided it was about time I put myself on the line. The Who had set up a strong charitable trust of its own which appeared, to an extent, the feeling I had that Meher Baba would rather have seen me give to the poor than to the establishment of yet another so-called 'spiritual center.'

My family (particularly of course my wife, who as a matter of personal policy tries to avoid the aspects of the musical world that I still find exciting) had suffered a lot. I had decided to lift the load. The lead was given to drink beautiful wines, slightly chilled. It cost nothing; these were the wines on the menu that cost $750—but he suggests it's simple fare.

When it is delivered, the warmth of perfection that accompanied such an event is unanswerable. The way the cloth clings to her body, revealing not only the perfection of her form, but also the eccentrics; the faults (if it is possible to call them that).

We eat, the food is superb; why is everything so right? Is Paris really a dream? In our room, the blinds are drawn down, the sparkling white sheets revealed in a triangle.

How does this fit in? I remember being in a dance hall, jive and chop suey. I was once a stage stravaganza from Paradise. I tarry into the future. Nothing that I have ever dreamed has failed me. So I stare knowing that what we see will be. It's clear enough to see what we see to be. I know that once my luck must inevitably run out.

What am I doing with this superb woman? What am I doing?

In early August, before I left England, I had written Roger a note, telling him that I felt there had been a lot of real misunderstanding between us, and that I hoped I could earn and be reformsed. From New York on the 2nd leg of our trip to Carolina, I wrote to his home again (he was on the road promoting his new album, Ride a Rock Horse). I told him I would support him in whatever he did. I felt it was a strange thing to say.

I had always been the henchman of the Who, Roger, and Keith and our management as well. Always had plenty to say in the group's affairs. But because I wrote the majority of songs, they were inexcusably tied up in my feelings, emotions and directions. I took the band over when they were in the mood to play. I had to try to pass the Decca audition, and used them as a mouthpiece, hating out any one who tried to have a say in what the group said (mainly Roger) and then grumbling when they didn't appreciate my dictatorship. Roger often sang songs I'd written that he didn't care for, and I had done my best to give them to the group, created by the fans' new identification with Roger as front man, rather than with me as its mouthpiece.

John and Keith are probably chew my photo right now I know what always iritates them most is when a journalist describes them as "Pete Townshend's puppet." If the Who has been a tyranny in the past, it's been ruled by a runaway horse. Roger has always seen the group in a more objective light than I; as things stand today, the
balance within the group as a result of his more active role in its creative direction has brought me closer than ever to Roger and Keith and John as well.

Were it not for the recently resolved legal dispute between the Who and its old management team—Kit Lambert and Chris Stamp—I would probably ramble on about all at great length. Let it just be said, perhaps because I am a Taurus, perhaps because I am sentimental, that I had resisted Roger for many years in his justifiable resolve to change the band. When Roger and his management, who had never helped our relationship one iota. (Incidentally, the group's subsequent split with Pete Rudge's New York-based Sire Productions was an amicable one, but again Rudge and I found time to cry in our beer over lost partnerships. We had often shared a cell after the frequent Who hotel brawls.) As for Kit and Chris, my feelings now can be summed up concisely. I miss them.

Against this backdrop of good intentions, I set off in August 1975 to Myrtle Beach. As our party (my wife, my two little daughters and a few friends who traveled with us) crossed the threshold onto Meher Baba's home ground, we were all staggered by the impact of the love that literally filled the air.

Despite the strength I felt growing within me, I think I can speak for our whole party when I say I felt exhausted by Myrtle Beach. God's endlessly present love isn't to be taken lightly. It's great to be forgiven, but it hurts to admit you were wrong in the first place. I realized that I would not be reaping such fantastic emotional and mental rewards had I not been in pretty bad shape, a condition for which I had no one to blame but myself.

When you hold out an empty cup to God and demand that He fill it with wine, He fills it faster than you can ever drink. Then you know that the fault is your own incapacity to receive His infinite love, rather than His capacity to give it. I loosely quote Hafiz here, of course, but this is what I felt was happening. Even my youngest daughter, Aminita, three years old, became starry-eyed with the atmosphere that poured from the trees. I wouldn't say that the warm reception given us by the residents of the Myrtle Beach retreat was not enjoyed and appreciated, but it paled in significance compared to the welcome we felt in the buzzing dragonflies, the sound of the ocean and the massaging humidity of the warm afternoon.

We spent an unbelievable ten days. I talked to the older devotees of Meher Baba about my plans for a new place in London and they were naturally encouraging. The sun shine, the children enjoyed themselves, we relaxed and relished rejuvenation at the Master's command. The tears I had that I wouldn't be strong enough to see through the imminent testing rehearsals and tour with the Who.

We traveled then to California.

"I look out through your bloodshot eyes and I ask you, does this really matter? I am here, and I want constantly as your hair fall over the rectangular key.

I don't want to die.

Death is not at all what I expect. I want surrender, surely that is simple enough.

I am suffocating in your love... help me somebody! I am drowning!

They say that to drown in the depths of love is to ascend.

Beloved God, why do you sometimes bring me close to tears?

Because I am your own heart, you might very well be bored with me. I am you. And you know, and loved, and died with you... for a billion years.

In California, we were well looked after, taken into the bosom of the Sufi family there, provided with a furnished house, groceries, swimming pool, outings to state parks, camping trips to the Sierras and all kinds of straight-laced relaxation.

You are probably as mystified as I am as to where the spiritually beneficial work was being done in this kind of program, but spirit was what was needed, and spirit was what I got, even if it didn't fit preconceived notions.

Mushaida Duce is a remarkable woman. She heads a group of about 300 initiates, all committed to total honesty and respect for her authority. She has Meher Baba's sanction as the legitimate Murshid along with "in line" decree from her own deceased Murshid, Mushaida Martin. Mushaida Martin herself took over under the instructions of the famous Inayat Khan, a spiritual teacher and master musician whose books on Sufism present a poetic system for modern life.

"Sufism Reoriented" today focuses its initiates on developing their devotion to Meher Baba. Meher Baba gave an explicit charter to Mushaida Duce and it is under the imitations of this charter that she works today. I am not a Sufi initiate, but her spontaneous help in my life has always touched me. I felt it extraordinary that she was clearly comfortable with me. She is a rather grand lady in later years, accustomed in her youth to formal dinners and cocktail parties for her husband's work as an oil man in the forties and fifties. In fact, she is not so easily pigeonholed.

On arrival in California, I went for a walk with her, to gossip, to bring her up-to-date on events at home, to ask her advice about the color of the walls at the newly planned Baba house in London. Instead, to my amazement, I sat and poured out my very soul. I couldn't for a second have anticipated this happening. She sat and listened as I told her every gory detail, the paranoia, the drunken orgies, the financial chaos, the indulgent self-analysis (continued herein, I'm afraid) and, of course, the dreamy hopes for the future.

Without batting an eyelid she listened to stuff that was making me recall myself, then went on to talk a little about her own youth, her life with her husband, the trouble some of her students were having at the time. In short, she got me right in perspective.

At the end of this month with her, we packed our bags, said our farewells and headed home, my wife and the kids.

PETE'S WIFE

Karenn and Mushaida Duce with Pete in 1975 (below). Pete smashes his guitar during first U.S. tour (opposite).

I raised my eyes to the heavens, my future Meher Baba house blooming up as a great potential encroachment on my time with band, and asked the old man: "What conclusions do I draw from all this, Baba? Where do I put this love you've given me?"

The answer came out of the sky, in a voice that, to me, was audible in a fantastic sense: "Keep playing the guitar with the Who and further notice."

Where am I and what am I? I knelt at the foot of a picture of my Master, I prayed for forgiveness, but in dreams I gloat. The superb and beautiful creatures that have lain at my feet. Where am I? I look in the mirror and don't see me. Am I a purely a freak? Fall in, you cynics, but how about your own advisers? The people I shiver at my feet, but why? I don't know. The ego clings to me like the creeper clings to a branch. But the feeling is not bad, they love me for what I could be, not for what I am.

When I screamed for God to smash me down, I didn't expect for a minute that he really would.

June 20th, 1977

The editors have asked what I feel precipitated this crisis, and to what extent? Is it possible? I have read that stars and people take themselves too seriously. I am both star and punk, therefore I take myself so seriously that I actually believe I matter to the world. I rant firstly to my family, then to the group and its jams, then to the few who have the conviction that Meher Baba is the True Avatar. In that order, I get serious when Pete Townshend disrupts this scheme of preachment as an individual; when he composed and published the break up the matter-offact interpretation of the scheme's direction.

Keith Moon once sat in a hotel bed in Boston after dying on the stage in front of 10,000 or so, and said, said, quite simply, "I've let you down." "Not," I've let the Who down," "Not let the people down," he'd let us down.

My crisis was caused by no one and nothing. It cost me nothing; it gives me everything. It was never precipitated because, generally speaking, I am a slow process. Rock & roll is fast. There was no waiting for time to take its course, or for me to weigh up whether I was doing right or wrong. Rock & roll tries to do right. Rock & roll always aims high and offers itself up as the underdog to the fire that will burn away the crap in this world. Rock & roll was up people's noses, and taken, even gerne, like Baba in a roaring fire. The fire burns brightly even when the face in the mirror is that of a man there is always someone ready to give everything in a last-ditch attempt to gain fame. I'm right that it is true, the wrong is that it often fails.

My crisis was simple, if I felt I was failing rock & roll. And for me this was a crime. For in doing this, I was failing friends and family, history, the peace and, most important of all, I was failing God. No one less could have invented this nonsense.

Editor's note

Pete Townshend has just completed an album with Ronnie Lane, formerly bass player with the Faces. Rough Mix is the closest Pete feels he will get to a solo album for many years, as he is now working on new material for the next Who album. Rough Mix was recently released by RCA.

Townshend has also appeared on and supervised a limited-edition album produced by Meher Baba Oceanics, the English Baba group he refers to in the article. With Love contains three tracks by Pete of a distinctly unusual approach and others by Lane, Billy Nicholls, Medicine Head and Pete Banks. It is available (price $8.96), as is any information about Avatar Meher Baba or the English Meher Baba group, from: Meher Baba Oceanics, c/o 28th Kew Road, Twickenham, Surrey, England.

Contact the U.S.A. Baba Information Box, 101 Berkeley, California.

For details of Mushaida Duce's book, How a Master Works (price $1.79), contact Sufism Reoriented, 110 Boulevard Way, Walnut Creek, California 94595.

You can write to Pete or the Who at Trident Ltd, 112 Wardour Street, London, W1, England.