by Roy Carr

"Can you see the Real Me, can you?"

Old traditions die hard. So too, it seems, interviewing techniques.

During the part of the 60's that allegedly

 Existing like the proverbial dog's hind leg,

Along with eccentricities concerning personal

 Tastes in fast cars, fast food and fast women,

An artist was inevitably asked,

How long could he remain to do his

 Present role as a (successful) pop star?

The open range of 30 being the

 Absolute maximum suggested by most

 interviewers.

Almost 10 years on, you believe that

 This very same long-bearded question

 Has been dragged out of retirement by a dandy

 Head foreign newspaper and put to Pete

 Townsend, just five days before the

 Guitarist celebrates his 34th birthday.

"I shall do so," replies Townsend, looking

 At a tortured brow, "that the very limit is 26!"

 The predicted duty summons this inva

 Table revelation in paper.

 It's four o'clock on a Sunday afternoon.

 The Who are partying freely

 Amanda the champagne and the cameras,

 The stage, the atmosphere, and the attentive at an

 Informal Euro press party being hosted on the

 Patio of the picturesque Villa Les

 Charmettes, at the outskirts of Cannes.

 Acknowledged for never ever selling

 Themselves, less than on their own terms,

 The Who have swept away any speculation

 Concerning their future by currently being the

 Center of more action and attention than at any other juncture in their

 Existence.

 With two triumphant concerts staged

 Beneath a Mediterranean moon in the

 Ruins of the Roman amphitheatre at Arles

 And a triumph in premier of the Who's Are

 Alright entitled scrapbook in their hip

 Pocket, the Who are passing the time of

 Day with the press until eight o'clock when

 They play their last matinee — the

 First official screening of the truly remark

 able movie account of the seminal Mod

 Movement, Quadrophenia.

 Townsend, lights up a cigarette, surveys

 The beautiful French countryside, and,

 He exhales, remarks that it was just 20

 Miles from this location where he first

 Disclosed the synopsis for the Quadro

 Phenix album.

 At the time of inception, Townsend

 Was apparently unoccupied with the

 Lifestyles of that most legendary Who chatter

 Fan, Irish Jack. "One of the original Mods,"

 Admits Townsend, "who'd felt behind

 And when I discovered was in pretty bad

 Shape, and so I sat down and wrote about

 Three days a few miles.

 Unfortunately, before Townsend has

 The opportunity to elaborate further, his

 Reflective muse is interrupted as the gang

 Bang cross-examination begins. Attempting

 Cold beer, hot bodies and loud music merge to exquisitely testify to the true national pastime:

 painting moon rocks.
to supply everyone with suitable copy causes lapse in continuity, due to the fact that there are (recurring) instances when relevant lines of interrogation are usurped by irrelevance. Nevertheless, to his credit (and the amusement of the British contingent), Townsend fields the barrage of questions, promptly throwing them back into play with the degree of skill associated with Peter Shilton.

If you had the opportunity to re-live just one day in your life, which one would it be? Pete: “Dunno...but it would have to be a day when something very physical happened.”

What is your favorite rock movie? Pete: “Stanley Kubrick’s 2001.”

What is the one question you’re continually asked the most? Pete: “(Sigh)...It’s usually, a long time ago you wrote a song with the line, ‘I hope I die before I grow old’ and you didn’t?...Well, I tell ‘em, I’m still working on it!”

Roger Daltrey who, by his own admission, pushed the hardest and the longest to coax the Who back on the boards, underlines the band’s determination to continue indefinitely, by joking, “When Pete dies, I’ll immediately go around there with a shovel diggin’ him up.”

And, as with taxes, it’s inevitable that the subject of death, not so much Townsend’s, but that of Keith Moon, should be broached.

Taking into account that Townsend has often been quoted as saying (and he repeats the statement later in the day): “The Who have always made a special point of being insensitive to the feelings of the other members of the band, and I don’t see why we should stop now,” nobody avoids the question. However, it’s obvious that it’s a subject that the band doesn’t wish to dwell on at length. If anything, they prefer to either adopt a lighthearted stance, says Townsend; “Even when he died, you have to admit that Moon still had a great sense of timing,” or, as in the case of drummer Kenny Jones, use it as an excuse to discuss another aspect of the Who’s career—the part to which he now contributes. Having established that Keith Moon is a hard act to follow, Jones clarifies his approach to playing in the band: “When I see the film, all that I wish is that Moon was still around doing it.”

“Whereas, Keith had a more theatrical way of playing, I just give it to ‘em right between the eyes and that’s that.”

Contrary to speculation, neither the Who nor Kenny Jones had to compromise themselves to establish a common groove on which to operate. As it transpires, Jones wasn’t even requested to audition for the role. “If someone wants me to audition,” he argues, “then they don’t know what I play like and therefore don’t really want me in the first place.”

Much of the Who’s chemistry was a result of the interaction between guitar and drums, and it was an approach Jones had long been familiar with. “Unlike most drummers, I never play with just the bass, I play with everyone. I suppose that comes from playing with Steve Marriott in the Small Faces, who both sang and played at the same time. Whenever Steve felt like doing something spontaneous, I’d just accentuate it. And, the same thing happens with Pete.”
Who," was his comment that evening, even though he himself has seen the hundreds of Who logo-stenciled parkas on parade and the Pop-Art bull-eye t-shirts. "It's all to do with the Jam," he insisted, "it's Paul Weller's thing."

Townshend has yet to reach a satisfactory conclusion on the topic, but it isn't causing him to lose any sleep. "Maybe," he suggests, "these kids think that life when the Who were 16 and 17 was better than life today. I'm only guessing... but it could be nothing more than just a bit of romantic nostalgia.

"It's strange," he continues, "how a lot of fashions that immediately followed the British punk movement were backward-looking. After the safety-pins and the slashed clothes, it went to the point where, the last time I saw Johnny Rotten and one of the guys out of the Clash, they both looked like 50's rockers: black leather jackets, rocker shoes and Teds clothes. Could be that all the kids who don't fancy living with all of that prefer the old smart Mod outfits."

"Though Quadrophenia doesn't always press home the fact that, in its purest form, mod—to quote the late Peter Meaden—was an aphorism for clean living under difficult circumstances, the fact remains in the light of present events, that the last thing Mods would have been involved in was anything that remotely smacked of revivalism.

Mods led, where others followed. After having wagged an accusing finger for what he regards as a media overkill of the punk movement, Daltrey intimates that he hopes the present wave of Modrophenia won't suffer as a direct result of press intervention. However, like Townshend, Daltrey is aware that the premise currently favored by the establishment is to neutralize/commercialize the unacceptable and, as can be ascertained from such things as the Lee Cooper punk-parody TV commercials, quickly absorb it into the general mainstream and render it harmless, chic and comical.
“Nevertheless,” Daltrey argues, “it’s a shame that these kids who currently call themselves Mods can’t find their own thing; at least that’s one thing the punks had going for themselves. The good thing about the original 60’s Mod movement,” he continues, “is that not only didn’t the media catch onto it when it first began, but they didn’t get around to exploiting it until it was almost over.”

With fashions currently being rendered almost obsolete before they’ve been duplicated and stocked along the High Street and displayed in Vogue, the one thing that impresses anyone who sees The Kids Are Alright is that at any given juncture in their trend setting career, the Who never appear bickercated. Daltrey reckons that it was just a case of always keeping their feet on the ground. “Whatever we did,” says he, “we did for real...we weren’t pretending. No matter what, we kept our credibility and that’s the most important thing for any band.”

Townshend sees it from a slightly different angle. “We never properly fitted the mood of the time. I know for sure, that when we were claiming to be Mods we were really just a little bit too old and not really quite right.”

It’s Townshend’s opinion that, when viewing both The Kids Are Alright and Quadrophenia, “it’s as if he were flicking through an old family snapshot album and evoking nostalgic memories. As to whether he felt that his involvement with these projects placed him in the role of the ultimate Who fan—obsessed with the band’s history to the extent, taking into account the circumstances of the time, he could have been preparing a grandiose epitaph—he replies in the affirmative.

“We didn’t think about that early in the day; that problem only crossed our minds as the films actually came to fruition and took on some semblance of form, and that’s one of the reasons why we all felt that we had to perform again...particularly when Moon had died, that was the last straw. We agreed that we must continue to play, otherwise we’d continually be drawing on that same thing, going through the same old box of tapes trying to pull something else from it.”

Entwistle seconds that emotion. “If the Who hadn’t played again, it would no longer exist. As far as I’m concerned, playing on stage is much more important than making records— which can be boring and unrewarding. You get more out of just one hour on stage than a dozen in the studio.”

Director Franc Roddam may have possessed sufficient references to undertake the Quadrophenia project, but what did director Jeff Stein offer in the way of credentials to persuade the Who to allow him to correlate their celluloid backpages?

“Absolutely nothing whatsoever,” claims Townshend, “other than he was a great Who fan!”

So the story goes, when Stein first approached Townshend and the Who’s manager (Bill Curbishley) and asked whether he could make the movie, he sat and cried for two hours when the proposal was rejected. “I said to Bill,” recollects Townshend, “anyone who cries for two hours can never make a film about the Who. But Bill said, think about it the other way...” Stein got his wish. Townshend may claim the images available were limited. “What would have been amazing,” he says, “was if we’d have been filmed like every other day or week, so you could compare when we were up and when we were down.” Nevertheless, unlike any previous movie made about an internationally famous rock band, the Who are unique in having access to a backlog of seminal film stock that dates right back to their period as The High Numbers at The Railway Tavern, Harrow and Wealdstone.

Even that early in the game, they showed style and purpose. There’s one moment in The Kids Are Alright when Townshend stares into the lens and insists, “I may be an old fart, but I’m certainly not boring!” So he can be unpredictable. Conceived as a replacement for Tommy, the Quadrophenia magnum opus was subsequently dropped from the Who’s repertoire after just one introductory tour. Says Townshend, “Unfortunately, it didn’t work because, amongst other things, the Who have set themselves strange standards on stage.” The situation was further aggravated by a violent disagreement between Roger and Pete and the entire project was shelved until now because it had become a touchy subject. Re-worked, excerpts from Quadrophenia now constitute an integral part of the Who’s refurbished repertoire.

Without wishing to re-open old wounds, on one much-publicized occasion, when Townshend was going through an intense period of self-re-evaluation, he informed this writer that he felt that he was too old to be running around the stage like a kid playing guitar. Thankfully, since those dark days, Townshend has altered his opinions. “Somehow, during the depths of a really bad day I really would like to crawl off and die, but I realize that there’s something very magical about being on stage and part of a band that’s working together. It’s very fulfilling,” he insists, “because it’s always been kinda dangerous and risky and that’s what rock has always thrived on—risk.”

Still excited by the events of the last three years, Townshend opines that it’s important for bands like the Who to share the experience. “Not in a patronizing way,” he points out. “Because new bands hate to hear you say, ‘Watch out for this or that, because we’ve been through it.’ But nevertheless, I feel that having existed for 30 years, rock should have its Godfathers.” However, Townshend doesn’t wish such remarks to be misconstrued as a complacent attitude, or that the Who are feeding off their past glories.

“To some extent,” he confesses, “even though the Who are established, very solid, the older they get the more dangerous it becomes for them to claim that they’re a rock band. So, in a sense, it’s gone full circle. We’re back to feeling it quite exciting and quite dangerous just hanging on. The thing is,” he concludes, “I no longer give a shit about whether or not anyone likes what we’re doing or not. I just do what I do to the best of my ability and leave it to others to assess that. Rock’s not meant to be analyzed, it should make you completely forget anything else—the time it really works is when the band, the audience, the road crew, everybody is completely lost, and that’s how I’ve been on these last few gigs.”

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