The intro to Pinball Wizard, of course. Last month, The Who released a 4-CD career retrospective, 30 Years Of Maximum R&B, garlanded with five stars in Q and hailed as the “best box set ever”. As they’d played no part in its compilation – it was produced by long-time fan and writer Chris Charlesworth – we thought it only fitting for The Who themselves to have the last word. So Pete Townshend, Roger Daltrey and John Entwistle were invited to comment on tracks they thought had particular significance in their history. A Who by numbers, if you will. Interviews by John Bauldie.
The mighty/loved, gifted, talented/Rand considerable B in their early '70s pomp.
I'm The Face
Single released by The High Numbers, July 3, 1964.)
ROGER DALTREY: We'd been playing for a while as The Detours when Pete Meadow came upon us. He obviously recognised that within this music, basically American blues derivative, but which had this Shepherd's Bush anger and frustration running through it, was something that had a particular potential. In addition to that, here were four of the most odd-looking guys that you could ever come across, who looked pretty much like the kids on the street.

He also recognised that there was this mass of young people with, for the first time, real amounts of money in their pockets and real freedom to be mobile. Brighton and back in a day wasn't a sore arse on a push-bike anymore, you know? But Pete also saw that these kids were clutching on to things they really didn't know anything about. Mods music was very diverse. They liked Motown, blue beat, James Brown, the blues—all black music; they didn't like anything English. There was a huge hole there to be filled, so Pete Meadow took us over. With our long hair and scruffy clothes, our beantalk, Rolling Stones-type look, no-one would bat an eyelid when they saw us together. But Pete was an image-maker. He dragged us into the barber's, then put us into white jeans and Ivy league stuff and the effects were immediate. People started to stare at us like we were off another planet. So he was totally right.

Then, having been re-christened The High Numbers, we went in to the studio to make a single. We were going to record a blues song, 'cos that's what we did. Songs about sex and women and feeling down and frustration, but when we heard it, Meadow said, 'Hang on, we can't sing these lyrics—they won't mean anything to a kid on the street in England. So he wrote his own lyrics. But the only trouble was that we found that we couldn't sing his bloody lyrics either. They were just diabolical!

We were confused. But that's always the way when someone's honing someone's talent. And the idea of music specifically tailored for a certain audience of young British Mods, played by people who looked and sounded just like them, was, as it turned out, spot-on.

I Can't Explain
ROGER DALTREY: We already knew Pete (Townshend) could write songs, but it never seemed a necessity in those days to have your own stuff because there was that wealth of untapped music that we could get hold of from America. But then bands like The Kinks started to make it, and they were probably the biggest influence on us—we were certainly a huge influence on Pete, and he wrote I Can't Explain, not as a direct copy, but certainly it's very derivative of Kinks music.

I felt a bit uncomfortable when I had to sing it, because it wasn't like anything we'd ever done before—that kind of rhythm. But I was malleable—hahaha! And I think later on that that added a lot of strength to Pete's writing. It became far easier for him to write for this... well, in some ways, almost a fictitious character, someone who was and wasn't him. It's a bigger canvas to paint on when you're writing for someone else. By writing for a third person, having the words come out of someone else's mouth, even though he was writing personal songs, Pete could be that much more honest in what he was saying.

Call Me Lightning
(Recorded February 26, 1968, Goldstar Studios, Los Angeles. Released as the B-side of Dogs, June 1968.)
PETE TOWNSHEND: Call Me Lightning is the oldest song in the collection. It was among the batch of songs that I submitted for The Who's first single. It tries to be a slightly surly, Jan & Dean kind of song to satisfy Keith Moon's and John Entwistle's then interest in surf music, which I thought was going to be a real problem. Being a trumped-up Mod band was bad enough for us to handle but trying to be a trumped-up Mod band playing R&B, but with surf overtones, was almost impossible. Anyway, I was trying to write this song which was all things to all men, with an accent on the men, and I came up with this kind of Shadow Morton
They were an ungrateful lot of slobs.
They still are an ungrateful lot of slobs.
They seriously are an ungrateful lot of slobs.

Townshend

--

"It was probably highly illegal to deface the flag, but look what it did. Before, you never saw a Union Jack anywhere except up a bloody flagpole." The Who raise the standard in 1969 and 1972.
words, the idea for the character to start came from Kit Lambert, who, with Chris Stamp, had taken over our management from Pete Meardon. He heard it first.

At the same time, I'd started to throw the microphone around. I can't remember when I first did it. I used to think, What can I do that's new? And one day I just threw the microphone. And it came back! I thought, Oh, this is interesting. I'll see if I can throw it further. Hahaha! In the end I got quite proficient with it. I never used to practise though. I only used to do it on stage. It has to be in with the music. There's a timing that goes with it.

While I was doing that, Pete was windmilling. I remember the first time he did that. We were playing before The Rolling Stones at Queen Mary's Hall in Putney. Keith Richards was backstage before they went on, stretching his right arm high above his head. He never did that on the stage, although he did play with these little wrists windmills sometimes, but he was just stretching his arm, and we were all standing there, watching, and the next night, there's fucking Townsend, going whooo! Hahaha! So thank you, Keith.

Then came the smashed guitar. That was down at The Railway Hotel at Harrow & Wealdstone. Pete broke the head of his Rickenbacker on the ceiling, accidentally. He was so frustrated that he started jumping up and down on it and finally smashed it to smithereens. The audience went absolutely apeshit, and Kit Lambert came rushing back and went, Ohhh! We're gonna do this every night! Hahaha! Of course, there was then the question of cost, but fortunately Keith seemed to know every seam in the book. He'd sell us to Vox as a group who had a record contract but who needed sponsorship, so they'd give us amplifiers, little knowing that we'd want six sets of amps a week so we could smash them up every night. Kit and Chris Stamp were the pop equivalent of the Kray twins. They'd get stuff for us, we'd smash it up, and then be gone before the bill arrived.

**SUBSTITUTE**


**John Entwistle:** After Keith Moon joined, it all came together. We became incredibly arrogant 'cos we all knew how good we were. We realised we were way...
“However delicately I wrote, however poignant ly, however direct, however right, however honest and true, I had to hand it to this fucking war machine and it would be churned out like Wall’s pork sausages.”

Townshend

BORIS THE SPIDER

(Recorded at IBC Studios, London, November 1966. From The Who’s Second LP, A Quick One.)

JOHN ENTWISTLE: Financially, things were difficult at first. So when our second album was due, the deal was that if we all wrote two songs for it, they’d give us an advance of £500, so we all set to work. I’d already written Whisky Man, my first song, and we’d rehearsed that, and Pete asked me if I’d written my second song, which I hadn’t, but not wishing to sound lazy, I said, “Yeah, I have.” He pushed me further and said, “What’s it about, then?” Well, I’d been out drinking with Bill and Charlie from the Stones a few days earlier and we’d got a little drunk and we’d started making up stupid names for animals, and I’d come up with this name for a spider, Boris, as in Boris Karloff, and that was the first thing that came into my head, so I said to Pete, “It’s about a spider.” He said, “What’s it called?” I said, “Oh, er, Boris The Spider.” He said, “How does it go?” And I kind of panicked, and made it up as I went along. Then I rushed home and demoed it. It was the fastest song I’ve written in my life. Hahaha!

TATTOO

(Recorded at IBC Studios, October 12, 1967. From The Who Sell Out LP.)

PETE TOWNSHEND: Tattoo was written as an album track. I wrote it when we were on the road with Herman’s Hermits in 1967. Jimi Hendrix was already in our lives. We’d played with him at the Monterey Pop Festival and done lots of shows with him in London, and I was feeling very eclipsed by him as a guitar player. So was Eric Clapton. He was eclipsed by Hendrix’s ability to create magic. I was intimidated by him because he took all my ideas and flung them back at me with knobs on. So I decided to write a different kind of song, which is why I started to write story songs, cameos, essays of human experience, and Tattoo was one of those songs, concerning not only what it’s like to be young, but trying to look at the generation divide and what made men men.

And Tattoo again is me examining that divide between me and Roger and his idea of what made a man a man and my idea. I thought it was going to be one of those songs where Roger would turn round and say to me, “No, you sing this. I don’t need to question whether I’m a man or not.” But he did sing it, and he sang it really well. And I realised then, “Hey, he doesn’t know.He doesn’t know if he’s a man or not. He’s got the same insecurities as I have.”
narrative, which is more than Quadrophenia had, hahaha!

In fact, the Tommy album was not a particularly big success. It got into the charts and then it quite rapidly disappeared again. It was only after us flogging it on the road for three years, doing Woodstock and things like that, that it got back in the charts. Then it stayed there for a year, and took on a life of its own. We were flat broke and basted before Tommy, and for the three years afterwards until it caught on. But when it did, it totally made our fortunes.

HEAVEN AND HELL
(Recorded at IBC Studios, London, May 1970, Released as the B-side of Summertime Blues, July 10, 1970.)

JOHN ENTWISTLE: I got the idea from listening to Tubby the Tuba, and somehow the Tubby tune ended up as the beginning of Heaven And Hell. It was one of those songs that was more popular on stage; it never got on to an LP. I remember bringing along the demo I'd made of the song and the band particularly liked the chord sequence. It was probably the first time that that chord sequence had been played in rock, and it was great in jam too. It was a good song to tune up to as well, a lot of open strings which is why we always started the act with it. A lot of Who fans will remember that as the opening song of our set. Well, that's partly why we used to play it first, to tune up.

WON'T GET FooLED AGAIN
(Recorded at Stargroves, Berkshire, March 16, 1971. From the LP Who's Next. Released (edited) as a single June 25, 1971.)

JOHN ENTWISTLE: I guess the time that this song was recorded was the time we were happy. We'd sorted out most of our problems by then and we were still being very creative. Won't Get Fooled Again was recorded at Stargroves, Miek Jagger's house. We used his hall as the studio floor and used the Stones' mobile outside. There were further overdubs at Olympic Studios. It's always been one of my favourite songs of The Who, mainly because I got a chance to mess around in the middle of it while the synthesizer's playing.

THE REAL ME
(Version on box set recorded at Ramport Studios, London, January 1970. Originally from Quadrophenia LP.)

PETE TOWNSHEND: Quadrophenia was actually a simple idea made complicated. What it was was my re-addressing of the original Who audience. Having written I Can't Explain, which was a love song of frustration, I was informed by various members of the Goldhawk Club audience, being informed by them, these uneducated, unfamililar kids, that what it actually was was a song about their inability to communicate their inability to communicate. Now that's a pretty high concept. They got it, and I didn't. When they came to me with that idea, telling me, "You have to write more songs like that!" sort of nailing the nail into my skull for me to get it — "What? Songs about the fact that you can't explain what you want to explain?" — little they're idiots, and they're going, "Yes, that's what we mean. We want you, because you're articulate and you can speak and you can write songs ..." So I was charged with this job.

And I felt that when I came to Quadrophenia, I had to get back on track, go back to the original brief, that the continuum of The Who had been that we had carried a group of people with us, they'd grown with us and we'd grown with them, and that somehow in the American experience that accompanied Tommy and the subsequent growth of the band on the road with electric theatre, like the Fillmore and the Chicago Factory, that we'd actually lost our English roots.

Quadrophenia was a story about a day, or a couple of days, in the life of a boy who has been abandoned by everybody — his parents, his girlfriend, his hero and his favourite pop band. It's a simple story about a Mod and his relationship to his group, who go off into celestial territory, and yet take with them the four mirrors, if you like, of his character, they take with them his very soul, they steal him, and leave him with an empty husk.

So it's also about the same thing that underlies Man, Psychoderelic, Tommy — what happens in the world of rock celebrity as opposed to any other kind of celebrity. A celebrity in rock is charged by the audience with a function, like, "You stand there and we will know ourselves; not "You stand there and we will give you loads of money to keep us entertained while we eat other food. It's a much more profound thing, but it's also much more functional. It's also, "When we're finished with you, you can go and we'll replace you with somebody else."

What's interesting about the song The Real Me is again the spiritual nature of the song is tied up with anthemic power. This song exemplifies it. You have the big, big, big bass of John Entwistle, the big, big drums of Keith Moon, the power chords, the huge voice of Roger Daltrey, and what they're actually saying is "I am a pathetic cripple". I was able to offer essentially real material to this incredibly powerful elemental machine and I had to allow for that in my writing. I had to know that however delicately I wrote, however poignant I put the thing together, however direct, however right, however honest and true it was, I then had to hand it to this fucking war machine and it would be churned out like Wall's pork sausages. Every single track on Quadrophenia sounds like a bunch of Rwandans trying to terrorism the natives, doesn't it? Helpless Dancer — the very title, it's supposed to be something that's helpless, but Roger sings it like it's a war cry. I'm not saying that I didn't want it to be that way at the time, but I was very good at acceptance and I had to accept the tools I'd been given to do the job. No wonder it stopped working. No wonder I couldn't do it in the end.

We failed with Quadrophenia. It wasn't just the failure of the album, which in fact did quite well in the UK at least, but it was the failure of the relationship. Roger blamed me for its failure. He said that I'd taken much control, that I'd done
it all single-handedly and that I’d mixed him down in the mix and it didn’t sound right and it didn’t work and I was so hurt by that that I hit him, and he hit back and knocked me out. It’s the only time I ever hit him but I just felt, “Oh fuck, it’s just pointless trying to do anything for this band. They’re just an ungrateful lot of slobs really.” And they were an ungrateful lot of slobs. They still are an ungrateful lot of slobs. They seriously are an ungrateful lot of slobs. One of them killed himself. Ungrateful cunt.

WHO ARE YOU (Recorded at Ramport Studios, London and Goring Studios, Berkshire, October 1977, From Who Are You LP, Released as a single, July 14, 1978.)

PETE TOWNSHEND: The abyss that I fell into after Quadrophenia wasn’t a suicidal, apathetic abyss, it was actually quite a venomous one. It was a very violent, cynical mood. Who Are You is one of my favourite Who albums, probably because it’s the most honest Who album. It shows how out of step we were with the music of the time and also kind of antipathies, or welcomes, punk, which proved to be a further distraction for Keith, who was killing himself in front of everybody’s eyes. Post-Tommy film, I was also drinking a lot, huge amounts by this time, and my drinking was affecting my personal behaviour. I was doing things that either I didn’t remember or greatly regretted after I’d done them. And yet my writing was getting better and better.

The song Who Are You was the product of one particular day on which two things happened: I met the Sex Pistols and I was stitched against the wall by a guy called Allen Klein, who had a piece of The Beatles and has a piece of the Stones and who had always wanted a piece of The Who. I went to this meeting and discovered that somehow he’d managed to buy into my publishing company. And I hated him, I hated him still, I can’t bear him. I can’t bear the fact that he’s a part of my life.

It was an 11, 13, 14, 15-hour meeting in this Polish street office and we only got out about 10 o’clock at night. I was with Chris Stamp, and he said, “C’mom, Pete. Fucking relax. Let’s go see some punk bands. Draw a line. Let’s go forward, forward, Modernism!” So I said OK, and we went to look for some punk bands and we couldn’t find any. So we went to the Speakeasy, and lo and behold, two of the Sex Pistols were there, and I fell on them like a hungry wolf and what they got was my anger and frustration at having been fucked up the arse by this guy that I hated, and he’d managed to get hold of one of my testicles, and I was just saying to them, “It isn’t fucking worth it. If you want it, you can fucking take it, I don’t want it.” Rocc’n’roll is something good. If you can make something good of it, take it, but I have been degraded, humiliated, and ultimately tortured and tossed aside like a rag by this industry.” And their response was, “Oh, what a shame. We really like The ‘Oo.” And it just made me so angry! I ran out in the street and at 2:30 or 3:30 in the morning I was in Oxford Street, asleep in a doorway with a piece of paper in my hand, and a policeman woke me up.

I can’t remember exactly what was said, but it was like this. He said, “Sir? If you can prove to me that you can get up and walk away, you can sleep in your own bed tonight.” So I went, “Ooh fuck, you’re not going to have me!” He said, “I’m from the Police Constable So-and-so, and I know who you are — otherwise I wouldn’t be making you this offer in the first place.” So I stumbled away, with this lyric in front of me, a few verses about this, and the other that was starting to kind of emerge, about being in this meeting — “I hours in the tin can, there’s gotta be another way” — and I just quickly scribbled out, “Who the fuck are you?” wrote the verse about the policeman: “Woke up in a Soho doorway, policeman knew my name... said you can get up and walk away.”

So there was the song, a song about the humiliation of that whole day, the degradation, the absolute end that it represented. And the end, in an interesting way, was again distorted by the fact that when The Who went into the studio and played it, it sounded like an anthem. So resonant, and pathetic, and apathy turned again to empowerment and anger and defiance.

YOU BETTER YOU BET (Recorded at Odyssey Studio, November 4, 1989. From the LP Face Dances. Released as a single, February 27, 1981.)

JOHN ENTWISTLE: You Better You Bet is a good stage number. But to tell the truth, the last two Who albums are a kind of blank. By the time we were recording them, personalities were crashing. There were different ideas of music policy. General backbiting. People not agreeing with each other. Roger and Pete had differing opinions about everything, but myself and Keith would make our minds up and usually, things went in the way that myself and Keith wanted, so we never got into four-piece arguments, luckily. After Keith died, those were the hardest times. The 1989 reunion tour was good though. It was the first tour we’d done that made any kind of money. In the past we’d go out for three weeks and come out of it with a couple of hundred thousand each and then take a couple of years off to spend it and go out again for another three weeks. None of us were becoming millionaires. But on the final tour we made so much money we really didn’t know what to do with it.

I’m A MAN (Previously unreleased version recorded live at Radio City Music Hall, New York, June 27, 1989. Studio version appeared on The Who’s first UK LP.)

PETE TOWNSHEND: The 1989 reunion tour was a piece of cake. I played the acoustic guitar, strummed along while another guitarist over there played all the hard solos and I would just smile at the crowd. I had to do my hair before the show, of course, and jump in the chartered aeroplane afterwards. Huh!” It was fantastic, such fun and such luxury. It was like, This is the way to live. It was brief, but I loved it. I felt like I was doing my best work every day.

I’m A Man was the song we were playing when I scraped myself on my Stratocaster, going, “I’m a man... Wham! Wham! Whop!” and the fucking whammy bar went right through my finger and out the other side. I went into deep shock and immediately became a little baby, going, “Ooh mummy, mummy!” But it was particularly wonderful playing that song on that tour. It wasn’t a Who song but we’d played it from the very beginning. It was probably one of the first R&B songs that Roger allowed us to perform, because of his machismo. He was at that time so insecure about his masculinity that he needed to be macho macho macho. He used to love the songs of Howlin’ Wolf ‘cos Howlin’ Wolf used to sing in this deep, deep voice. Johnny Cash’s voice too he used to like. I’m A Man was not a song I ever could have written, because I would never have been certain enough sitting on my own, but together we represented this extraordinarily powerful presence, and it was the pinnacle really, especially this version from Radio City, New York, a fucking great version.

I just love the fact that we were able to say it, and somehow it felt right. It really was suddenly just a simple statement of fact. Roger and I would go to the front of the stage and we’d arrive, we were barefaced, we could look at each other, we were men, and nobody out there would ever argue. It was tremendously dignifying.