

Syllabus for The Who

Fromm Institute

7 Tuesdays, 1pm-2:40pm

January 7-February 25

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Week One: The Who In the Beginning

I. The Roots of the Who

A. Close together in age, Roger Daltrey, Pete Townshend, and John Entwistle meet in the late 1950s and early 1960s in the London neighborhood of Shepherd's Bush. With various other musicians they informally rehearse, play, and develop their enthusiasm for rock'n'roll, blues, and R&B, principally of the American sort.

B. Using various names and playing in different lineups, Daltrey, Townsend, and Entwistle play local venues on a semi-professional basis in the early 1960s. With the start of the British Invasion, they get more serious, Daltrey switching from guitars to lead vocal duties exclusively; Townshend becoming lead guitarist; and Entwistle bassist. With drummer Doug Sandom, they play as the Detours.

C. In the first half of 1964, the Detours go through many important changes. They change their name to the Who; replace Doug Sandom with teenage drummer Keith Moon; and run through a few managers, including Pete Meaden. Meaden encourages their affiliation with the burgeoning London "mod" culture, as part of which he changes their name to the High Numbers. The High Numbers do a single that flops, though their London popularity continues to grow.

Other themes discussed: the effect of post-World War II austerity on the Who's childhood and adolescence; the influence of early British rock band Johnny Kidd & the Pirates on the Who's "power trio" instrumental lineup; the beginnings of the British youth mod cult.

II. Rise to Stardom in the United Kingdom

A. Aspiring filmmakers Kit Lambert and Chris Stamp discover the High Numbers and, easing out Pete Meaden, take over their management, changing their name back to the Who. A long-running residency at London's famous Marquee Club builds their following outside of Shepherd's Bush. London-based American producer Shel Talmy, who's already had hits with the Kinks, signs the Who to a production deal.

B. The Who have British hits in early and mid-1965 with "I Can't Explain" and "Anyway, Anyhow, Anywhere." They become adopted as spokespeople by mod followers. Their flamboyant stage act, especially Pete Townshend's smashing of his guitar, also quickly spreads their reputation, even though their first album doesn't come

out until late 1965. Friction within the band, which will be constant for the next 15 years or so, almost breaks up the Who around this time.

C. In late 1965, the “My Generation” British hit solidifies the Who’s position in the front line of UK bands. So does their first album, *The Who Sing My Generation*. Other themes: The Who’s identification with mod culture and fashion reaches its peak; the influence of Pete Townshend’s art school background on his “autodestruct” stage act; mod culture also affects other British bands, like the Small Faces.

Week Two: The Who in Transition from Mods to Rock Opera

I. Rise to International Stardom

A. The Who decide to break with Shel Talmy for their next hit, “Substitute” (early 1966), which instigates legal action between Talmy and the Who that prevents them recording for much of 1966. With Kit Lambert as producer, they return with a big hit, “I’m a Boy,” in late 1966. But they remain nearly unknown in the US, where they have yet to have a high-charting 45.

B. At the end of 1966, the Who’s second album introduces John Entwistle as a quality songwriter with “Boris the Spider.” Its concluding track, “A Quick One While He’s Away,” is a mini-opera or suite of numerous different songs telling a story, a first in rock history.

C. In early 1967, “Happy Jack” finally gives the Who a modest hit in the US. They play their first shows in the US shortly afterward; make a big impression at the Monterey Pop Festival; and start touring the US fairly often.

Other themes: Decca Records’ difficulty in breaking the Who in the US; dispute between Jimi Hendrix and the Who over to go on first/last at the Monterey Pop Festival; the Who’s departure from identification as a “mod” band as they aspire to reach a broader audience.

II. *The Who Sell Out* and the Genesis of a Rock Opera

A. In late 1967, “I Can See for Miles” gives the Who a US Top Ten hit, although it’s not one of their biggest UK singles. Around the same time, their third album, *The Who Sell Out*, is a quasi-concept LP built around the theme of being a simulation of a UK pirate radio program. Although the concept doesn’t hold for the entire record, it contains some of their strongest ‘60s material, and another quasi-rock-opera with the final song, “Rael,” even if that isn’t as long as “A Quick One.”

Other themes: the explosion of the concert/ballroom circuit for psychedelic/adult rock in the US helps the Who gain an American foothold; Pete Townshend becomes a disciple of guru Meher Baba; vaguely conceptual works start to catch on in the pop scene, like Keith

West's "Excerpt from a Teenage Opera," *Sgt. Pepper*, and the Mothers of Invention's *Sgt. Pepper* satire *We're Only In It for the Money*.

Week Three: *Tommy*

I. *Tommy*: Its Creation

A. B. In early 1968, the Who are becoming a big US concert attraction, but lack the huge hit records needed to erase their large debts (many caused by their destruction of equipment, consumption of clothes, and smashing of hotel rooms). They put out some singles with only middling success while they struggle to come up with a major hit album that will develop the concept/opera ideas toward which Townshend has been working.

B. With much encouragement from Kit Lambert, Pete Townshend develops a full-length rock opera based around the story of Tommy, a child who goes deaf, dumb, and blind after witnessing a trauma in childhood. The group spend much of late 1968 and early 1969 writing and recording the double album. To their displeasure, their American label throws together a haphazard compilation album, *Magic Bus*, to keep the market supplied.

II. *Tommy*: The Album

A. Preceded by one song from the record ("Pinball Wizard") as a hit single, *Tommy* is released in mid-1969. It is immediately hailed as a major rock milestone, and is the huge international hit they need to get out of debt and keep going, becoming their first big US hit LP.

Other themes: the possible influence of a 1968 rock opera, the Pretty Things' *S.F. Sorrow*; contributions of John Entwistle to *Tommy*; the importance of discussion with rock critics to Townshend's composition of *Tommy*.

Week Four: *Tommy*: The Aftermath

I. *Tommy* Makes the Who Superstars

A. Immediately upon *Tommy*'s release, the Who become not just a bigger concert attraction, but one of the biggest in the world. They perform much (though not all) of *Tommy* in their concerts in 1969 and 1970, including at Woodstock, where they're filmed for one of the Woodstock movie's most popular segments.

B. *Tommy* also receives praise in mainstream media as a major innovation in popular music, and the Who perform in bigger and more prestigious venues. At the same time, its success starts to overwhelm the band, who feel that people introduced to the group through *Tommy* are more familiar with the album than the musicians themselves. They also now face the challenge of coming up with a follow-up LP that's just as creative, whether or not it's a rock opera.

Other themes: the imminent breakup of the Beatles, and the less frequent presence on tour of the Rolling Stones, helps vault the Who to the top league of British rock groups in popularity as well as creativity/influence; double LPs by the Beatles, Jimi Hendrix, the Mothers of Invention, Cream, and Bob Dylan pave the way for albums of *Tommy*'s length; Track Records, the label run by the Who's managers.

II. *Live at Leeds* and 1970 Projects

A. As the Who ponder how to follow up *Tommy*, they fill the gap between studio releases with their first concert album, *Live at Leeds*. This captures their increasingly heavy onstage hard rock, though it doesn't feature newly written material.

B. The Who record about an album's worth of tracks in the studio over the course of the year, but these don't add up to a concept LP, or rate among their strongest work. Some are released as singles (most prominently "The Seeker"), but most are relegated to B-sides or later archival compilations.

Other themes: the Who's various attempts to do a concert album in the two years preceding *Live at Leeds*; the Who, and particularly Pete Townshend's, chummy relationship with the rock press, which saw them (and especially Townshend) seemingly give more interviews than any other major rock act; Townshend contributes tracks to a limited-edition album for the Meher Baba-affiliated Universal Spiritual League.

Week Five: *Lifhouse* and *Who's Next*

I. *Lifhouse*

A. Pete Townshend comes up with a concept album/rock opera, *Lifhouse*. It has an even more complicated story than *Tommy*, based around a future where rebellion to an authoritarian government takes the form of a rock concert. Townshend demos songs for the album, and also envisions the work as the basis of future Who concerts, with an eye toward making a movie based on *Lifhouse* and/or the concerts.

B. No one outside of Townshend fully grasps the story behind *Lifhouse*, or what he's trying to accomplish. The Who do try to develop the material in concert in London in early 1971, with the intention of audience participation helping to shape the story. But the concerts aren't successful at all in that regard, and not too successful in advancing the project in general. By spring 1971, the *Lifhouse* project is abandoned, although its most commercial songs will be used for the Who's next studio release, *Who's Next*.

Other themes: the influence of Townshend's film aspirations on *Lifhouse*; the attitude of the other members of the Who and their managers toward *Lifhouse*; the influence of mystical philosophy on *Lifhouse*.

II. *Who's Next*

A. After the *Lifehouse* project collapses, the Who construct *Who's Next*, which is mostly devoted to songs from *Lifehouse*, but is not connected by a thematic thread. They do so with the help of producer Glyn Johns, who engineered their early hit recordings.

B. *Who's Next* is another huge hit with both audiences and critics. In the second half of 1971, the Who tour internationally to enormous acclaim, although the failure of *Lifehouse* to get completed will gnaw at Townshend for the rest of his life.

Other themes: the increasing use of synthesizer in Who recordings, played and pioneered by Pete Townshend; the failure of *Lifehouse* to get made into a movie as well as a record; the influence of minimalist composer Terry Riley on the synthesizer riffs in songs like "Baba O'Riley" and "Won't Get Fooled Again."

Week Six: *Who Came First* and 1972 Who recordings

I. Early Solo Careers

A. Although he's already made solo recordings outside of the group for limited-edition Meher Baba-affiliated releases, Townshend makes his official solo debut with the *Who Came First* album. It's critically acclaimed, and gives him an outlet for more spiritual and gentler material than he writes for the Who, but doesn't sell in great numbers. Meanwhile John Entwistle starts a less impressive solo career as well.

II. 1972 Who solo recordings

A. In 1972, the Who make false starts toward a follow-up studio album to *Who's Next*, much as they'd made false starts toward a similar album in 1970 when trying to follow up *Tommy*. Some of the tracks end up on moderate hit singles, and others show up later on archival releases. Meanwhile Townshend starts thinking about the idea that will blossom into the Who's second and final rock opera, *Quadrophenia*.

B. As the Who's attempt to gather material for a non-thematic 1972 album flags, Pete Townshend gathers inspiration for a full-blown rock opera/concept album based around the Who's origins in the mid-1960s British mod movement. Titled *Quadrophenia*, it will be based around a character with four different sides of his personality, each of which will reflect a different member of the Who.

Other themes: Meher Baba's influence on Townshend's songwriting; other extracurricular projects, like Keith Moon's acting career and the theatrical production of *Tommy*.

Week Seven: *Quadrophenia* and scattered mid-1970s solo/group projects

I. *Quadrophenia*

A. In 1973, the Who record *Quadrophenia*, a double album based around the story of a young mid-‘60s mod named Jimmy, in which the Who themselves play a part. Although the recording goes through some hurdles, especially as they’re doing it in the new studio they’ve constructed for themselves, it’s completed pretty efficiently, unlike *Lifhouse*.

Other themes: Townshend continues to pioneer use of the synthesizer as a melodic rock instrument on *Quadrophenia*; John Entwistle’s contributions to *Quadrophenia* on horns; the multimedia components of *Quadrophenia*’s packaging, including a large booklet and short story.

II. *Quadrophenia* onstage, the *Tommy* film, and more solo projects

A. The Who plan to tour *Quadrophenia* as extensively as they toured *Tommy*, but though the album is a best-seller, it doesn’t go as well. There are only relatively short tours based around *Quadrophenia*, mostly in the US and UK, before they abandon doing so in early 1974, never to do so again with Keith Moon. This is due to technical problems in presenting it onstage, and a less enthusiastic response to the material (in concert and on record) than *Tommy* generated.

B. Much of Pete Townshend’s energies in 1974 are devoted to working on the *Tommy* film, particularly the score. Starring Roger Daltrey as Tommy, it’s an excessive and unsuccessful interpretation, directed by Ken Russell. Meanwhile Daltrey has started a solo career with the hit “Giving It All Away,” and along with Moon is trying to build an acting career. Entwistle continues issuing middling solo albums, and Moon starts a yet less successful and popular solo recording career.

Other themes: numerous celebrities appear in the *Tommy* movie, some musical, some not; Keith Moon moves to California, his distance and increasing instability affecting the stability of the group; Kit Lambert and Chris Stamp’s management of the Who ends.

Week Eight: The End of the Keith Moon Era and the Who’s Legacy

I. *The Who By Numbers* and *Who Are You*

A. After a protected period of inactivity, the Who regroup to record the 1975 album *The Who By Numbers*. A non-concept album, it has some songs about unusually mature (for rock) subjects like aging, as well as a fairly big hit with “Squeeze Box.” In the mid-‘70s, though, the Who’s collective energy diffuses as Daltrey continues to pursue a movie career; Townshend teams up with Ronnie Lane for the album *Rough Mix*; and Moon continues to deteriorate mentally and physically.

B. The Who’s final album with Keith Moon, *Who Are You*, is issued in 1978. More slickly produced than any prior Who LP, it’s uneven, in part because Moon’s playing had gone downhill. It was still a pretty big hit, and the title song was a hit single. But the Who’s classic phase comes to an end when Moon dies shortly after its release.

Other themes: the Who's final tours with Moon; more Meher Baba-specific recordings by Townshend; Daltrey's mixed film career, including starring in Ken Russell's *Lisztomania*.

II. The Who Post-Moon, the *Quadrophenia* film, and the Who's Legacy

A. The Who carry on with new drummer Kenney Jones, who had been in the Small Faces and the Faces. They tour and record with him for the next few years, but their albums become blander and more conventional rock. Their image is tarnished by deaths when fans get trampled when entering a concert in Cincinnati. Townshend continues his solo career, Daltrey continues his acting career, and the group break up at the end of 1982.

B. In the late 1970s, *The Kids Are Alright* is the first major rockumentary retrospective of a major group. Soon after that, *Quadrophenia* is—unlike *Tommy*—successfully adapted into a major film that is true to the spirit of the original album, and enjoys a huge cult following to this day. The Who have periodically reunited and toured over the last 30 years, but seldom recorded new material. Pete Townshend has done some conceptual works without approaching the magnificence of *Tommy* or *Quadrophenia*, and recently issued one of the most high-profile rock memoirs of recent times, *Who Am I*.

Other themes: the Who's influence on post-1970s rock; the late-'70s mod revival in the UK, triggered by *Quadrophenia*; the huge series of Who archival reissues.

THE WHO

Suggested Reading List

There are dozens of Who books, with more likely on the way. Here's an opinionated, selective guide to the best of them, which covers the very most essential volumes written about the band, as well as the best starting points for those wanting to find out about the group. More specialized books about particular eras and aspects of the Who's life and times are listed and described in the seven syllabuses for each of the course's weekly meetings.

Anyway, Anyhow, Anywhere: The Complete Chronicle of the Who 1958-1978, by Andy Neill and Matt Kent (Sterling, 2002). A “day-by-day” guide to the Who's professional activities covering concerts, recording sessions, interviews, media appearances, and other noteworthy developments, stopping with Keith Moon's death. Filled with numerous gorgeous photos and illustrations. It's available in a coffee table size and a much smaller (in page size, not text or number of illustrations) edition, though the graphics are impressive enough to make the coffee table version the far superior one.

Before I Get Old: The Story of the Who, by Dave Marsh (Plexus, 1983). Still the best Who book, and quite a lengthy one at 500-odd pages, though it does not cover their post-early-1980s reunions.

A Decade Of The Who: An Authorized History In Music, Paintings, Words And Photographs, by Pete Townshend (Music Sales 1977). One of the less recommended items on this list, this long out-of-print book is more like a slim scrapbook than a proper history. It does have the advantage of being compiled by Pete Townshend himself, and is most interesting for some personal detailed comments on some of the songs for which sheet music is presented.

Eyewitness The Who, by Johnny Black (Carlton, 2001). Subtitled “the day-by-day story told through eyewitness accounts by friends, family and fellow musicians,” this chronologically arranged volume relies mostly on compilations of quotes from second-hand sources, though these are for the most part interesting.

Moon: The Life and Death of a Rock Legend, by Tony Fletcher (It Books, 2000). Originally published as *Dear Boy: The Life of Keith Moon* in the UK, this very entertaining and lengthy biography of the Who's colorful drummer inevitably has quite a bit of material on the Who themselves.

Pretend You're in a War: The Who & The Sixties, by Mark Blake (Aurum Press, 2014). Very in-depth and entertaining history of the Who through the beginning of 1970. This inevitably covers some of the same territory as a few of the other books listed here, but does dig up some fresh first-hand information that sometimes questions or fills out myths that have surrounded the band.

A Tribute to Keith Moon (There Is No Substitute), by Ian Snowball & the Estate of Keith Moon (Omnibus Press, 2016). A few dozen chapters, mostly just a page or two in length, in which many associates, drummers, and Moon fans give their thoughts on the Who madman. It's a rather frivolous book, and there are quite a few sections in which musicians from bands who didn't start until after Moon's death pay tribute to him, which are of limited interest. On the other hand, there are some good stories by people who knew and worked with him, and plenty of fine pictures, some of them rarely seen.

Thanks a Lot, Mr. Kibblewhite: My Story, by Roger Daltrey (Henry Holt). Although Daltrey's memoir is only half the length of Pete Townshend's *Who I Am*, there are a lot of good stories here that aren't all familiar to Who fanatics. He's straightforward and no-nonsense, where Townshend tends to be reflective and at times meandering. He also displays more humor, if in a subtle way, than you might expect, making his pride in the Who obvious without getting overblown or pretentious.

The Who Concert File, by Joe McMichael and “Irish” Jack Lyons (Omnibus, 2004). Thorough listing and descriptions of all known Who concerts through 2002. There's some overlap with the more interesting *Anyway, Anyhow, Anywhere: The Complete Chronicle of the Who* (see listing above), but this has more complete details of their live shows for the completist.

The Who FAQ: All That's Left to Know About Fifty Years of Maximum R&B, by Mike Segretto (Backbeat, 2014). Nearly 400-page overview/guide to the Who's career that can

serve as an intro to people getting into the band, and a source of some pretty interesting, occasionally even arcane information about them that doesn't make it into too many other books, like lists of rare mixes, unrecorded songs, and lost tapes.

Who I Am, by Pete Townshend (Harper, 2012). Lengthy memoir by the Who's guitarist and main songwriter doesn't cover everything of note in its 500 pages. But it has a lot of inside information about the band's career and his songwriting, as well as sometimes laceratingly painful recollections about his personal life.

The Who: Maximum R&B, by Richard Barnes (St. Martin's Press, 1982). Well-illustrated career overview by a longtime friend of the band's, particularly of Townshend's. A good book, but not quite as good as either the best band-related biographies or the best visually-oriented Who volume (*Anywhere, Anyhow, Anywhere: The Complete Chronicle of the Who*). If you're lucky, you'll find a copy that still has the bound-in flexidisc with Townshend demos of "My Generation" and "Pinball Wizard."

The Who on Record: A Critical History, 1963-1998, by John Atkins (McFarland, 2000). Rigorous but quite readable study of the Who's records.

The Who: Ten Great Years (Straight Arrow Publishers, 1975). Slim, hard-but-not-impossible to find compilation of *Rolling Stone* articles/interviews published about the Who through the mid-1970s.