

THE WHO

The College of Marin

Week Six

Essential Listening:

1. **Pete Townshend's debut solo album, *Who Came First*** (1972, Rykodisc), was kind of a jumble of *Lifehouse* extras, tracks from the Meher Baba tribute compilations *Happy Birthday* and *I Am*, and other odds and ends. But though it probably wasn't the strongest collection of non-Who songs he could have assembled, it had a humble, earthy charm more low-key and singer-songwriter-oriented than anything the Who would have been likely to release in the early 1970s. The Rykodisc CD reissue is recommended as it adds six good bonus tracks, some taken from the *Happy Birthday* LP.

In 2018, a two-CD *45th Anniversary Expanded Edition* added some more previously unreleased bonus material, though none of this was as good as the previously available extras. It was also marred by the absence of the moody piano instrumental "Lantern Cabin," which has appeared on previous *Who Came First* expanded editions.

John Entwistle issued his first two solo albums (1971's *Smash Your Head Against the Wall* and 1972's *Whistle Rymes*) during this time, by the way. But they're not recommended owing to their mediocre quality, though the first of these has his solo version of the 1970 Who B-side "Heaven and Hell."

Recommended additional recordings by the Who, 1972:

1. Several 1971-72 singles have tracks that might have been remnants from *Lifehouse* or intended for a non-concept follow-up LP to *Who's Next*. None of them were huge hits, but the A-sides of these – "Join Together," "Let's See Action," and "Relay" – have shown up on several compilations. Less interesting, and harder to find though all have also shown up on anthologies, are a clutch of 1971-72 B-sides: "I Don't Even Know Myself," the John Entwistle-penned "When I Was a Boy," a live version of "Baby Don't You Do It," and the weird, rudimentary instrumental "Wasp Man." Don't get cocky and think you've got it all once you've found all these non-LP singles, as *Odds & Sods* has 1971-72 outtakes of "Pure and Easy," "Too Much of Anything," "Put the Money Down," and "Long Live Rock."

2. A limited-edition Meher Baba tribute compilation LP (like 1970's *Happy Birthday*) issued by the Universal Spiritual League, *I Am*, had just two Pete Townshend tracks: a ten-minute instrumental version of "Baba O'Riley" that puts the focus more on his Riley-inspired overlapping synthesizer riffs, and his musical adaptation of Baba's poem "Parvardigar" (which also appears on *Who Came First*). Otherwise the LP includes goofy poems and songs by other Baba followers, and is interesting to hear for the context it reveals about Townshend's beliefs/crowd, despite limited Townshend input.

Notable People:

Ronnie Lane: Bassist, occasional singer, and frequent songwriter for the Small Faces and the Faces, Lane was like Pete Townshend a Meher Baba devotee. He wrote and sang one of the tracks on Townshend's *Who Came First*, even though that record was supposedly a Townshend solo album. He would embark on a more significant collaborative recording project with Townshend later in the 1970s. The Who used his mobile studio during recording sessions for *Quadrophenia*. Lane died of multiple sclerosis in 1997.

Billy Nicholls: British singer-songwriter who started recording in the late 1960s. Though he never got much recognition, he was another Baba follower who became a friend of Townshend's. Nicholls, with *Tommy* cover designer Mike McInnerney, co-wrote a song on Townshend's *Who Came First*, "Forever's No Time At All." In the late 1980s and mid-1990s, he would tour with the Who as a backup singer.

Jim Reeves: Huge American country star who died in a 1964 plane crash. So what's that got to do with the Who, you're snorting? Well, his maudlin hit "There's a Heartache Following Me" was a favorite of Meher Baba. Which is why Pete Townshend unexpectedly did a version on *Who Came First*.

Lou Reizner: Producer of a 1972 classically-oriented orchestral version of *Tommy*, recorded by the London Symphony Orchestra and English Chamber Choir, with Townshend as narrator, Daltrey as Tommy (naturally), and Entwistle as Cousin Kevin (ditto). Most known as a head of Mercury Records, and for producing Rod Stewart's first two albums.

Notable Landmarks:

Arangaon, India: Pete Townshend traveled here in early 1972 as a pilgrimage to pay homage to Meher Baba's family and disciples. In late 1971, while on tour with the Who, he'd visited the largest Baba center in the world in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.

Stargroves: Studio in Mick Jagger's English country home where the Who also did some recording in the early 1970s, up to pre-production sessions for *Quadrophenia*.

Tara: Keith Moon's estate, notorious for the wild parties he'd throw there for friends and press.

Albums by Artists Who Were Influential on and/or influenced by the Who in 1972:

Jethro Tull, *Thick As a Brick* (Parlophone, 1972). Impenetrable concept album by popular British progressive rock band that made *Tommy*'s story seem straightforward, consisting of one 43-minute song (divided into one part for each LP side).

London Symphony Orchestra, *Tommy As Performed By the London Symphony Orchestra & Chamber Choir* (Repertoire, 1972). Just what it says it is, this “orchestral” version of *Tommy* features not only an orchestra and choir, but some guitar by Pete Townshend and vocals by Townshend, Roger Daltrey, Rod Stewart, Stevie Nicks, Richie Havens, Ringo Starr, and some lesser-known figures like the great British folk-rock singer Sandy Denny, Maggie Bell, and Merry Clayton. Bloated and unnecessary, it was naturally a big seller, getting to #5 in the US. Though it was a distraction from Townshend’s primary work with the Who, it was indicative of his desire to see *Tommy* manifest itself in various media, eventually to also include film and Broadway.

The Rolling Stones, *Exile on Main Street* (Universal, 1972). “Sprawling” is a word often used to describe this double LP (now a single CD), in part because it was so long, in part because it was put together from so many piecemeal sessions, many in Keith Richards’s villa in the south of France. The blues-rock base they’d been working on since 1968’s *Beggars Banquet* is still evident, but so is brassy soul and hard rock. There was a lack of the three or four instantly classic songs that had been on their prior three albums, although “Tumbling Dice” and “Happy” were hits. There was also a rather lethargic and murky cast to some of the production, perhaps due to increasing drug use (certainly on Richards’s part, anyway) and the humid, haphazard conditions in which much of the material was recorded in his house. Though it wasn’t their most popular album, over the years its critical esteem has risen, some championing it as their finest work, or at least certainly most complex. 2010 deluxe edition added a bonus CD of outtakes and alternate takes (one of them a brief instrumental from 1967), its integrity comprised by new overdubs, including numerous vocals by Mick Jagger.