

THE WHO

The College of Marin

Week Eight

Essential Listening:

1. *The Who By Numbers* (Universal, 1975). The first Who album since their 1965 debut not to feature some strong completed or aborted conceptual element, *The Who By Numbers* tends to be overshadowed in the Who canon. Though there's not even an obscure theme linking the songs, it has a greater sense of wistfulness and melancholy than their other LPs, perhaps because the Who were starting to become more reflective and less manic as they entered their early thirties. It did include some straightforward rockers more or less in the Who's typical guitar-based sound ("Slip Kid," "Dreaming from the Waist"), as well as a novelty hit of sorts with "Squeeze Box." Songs like "Imagine a Man," "How Many Friends," and "They Are All in Love" were more subdued and imbued with a sense of loss than almost anything they'd done before, while John Entwistle's "Success Story" took a typically blackly humorous look at the band's wealth and fame. The 1996 CD reissue has a mere three extra tracks, all of them live versions of songs from the album.

2. *Who Are You* (Universal, 1978). The last Who album on which Keith Moon played was also their last reasonably interesting album of new material. Only one of these songs would become a classic rock perennial, that being the lengthy title track, which retained some of the band's trademark anthemic quality. Elsewhere their incorporation of slicker late-'70s production values weakened their trademark strengths, especially when synthesizers and strings subsumed the arrangements. It's been reported that Keith Moon's playing had notably deteriorated on these sessions, though this isn't too obvious to the listener. The album's next-most-well-known tune was "Music Must Change," which like some other tracks (such as "Sister Disco") acknowledged trends in then-contemporary music without sounding especially influenced by them. John Entwistle wrote three of the nine songs, "Trick of the Light" being the one that got the most attention. The 1996 CD reissue adds a few different mixes and two previously unreleased songs, one of which, "Empty Glass," would become the title track of Pete Townshend's 1980 solo album.

Recommended additional recordings by the Who, 1975-78:

1. Pete Townshend & Ronnie Lane, *Rough Mix* (Hip-O, 1977). Sometimes this sounds more like a mixture of Townshend and Lane solo tracks than a collaboration, but it allowed Townshend to present and sing some songs that were on the lighter side of what he wrote for the Who. The tracks sung and written by Lane have a folkier, more rural ambience. The highlight is the orchestrated cinematic mini-epic "Street in the City," which shows that Townshend had not abandoned his conceptual ambitions, though here they're condensed into a six-minute composition. The CD reissue on Hip-O adds three bonus tracks not on the original LP.

2. By the mid-to-late 1970s, the Who were no longer as active, or as bent on throwing around B-sides and outtakes on releases that came out both at the time and on subsequent archival compilations. All of the members other than Townshend put out solo albums, though these weren't distinctive. Indeed, Keith Moon's sole solo album (1975's *Two Sides of the Moon*, on which he sings but does not even drum on most of the tracks) was dreadful. Some oddities of more note crop up on the third Meher Baba tribute album to feature Pete Townshend on some tracks, *With Love* (1976). Two of the three songs on which he was the featured artist, "Lantern Cabin" and "Sleeping Dog," are worthy and were among the bonus tracks added to Rykodisc's CD reissue of *Who Came First*. His other contributions to the LP weren't as notable.

3. **Tommy soundtrack** (Universal, 1975). In no way to be confused with the original 1969 Who album, this has entirely different music, which was used on the soundtrack to Ken Russell's adaptation of the work into a 1975 film. Although all members of the Who did make musical contributions, so did a gaggle of other musicians, from well-known friends like Nicky Hopkins, Chris Stainton, and Faces (and future Who) drummer Kenney Jones to relatively anonymous session players. Although Roger Daltrey did a bit of the lead vocals, these were spread out among the numerous actors who had parts of the film, including Elton John, Eric Clapton, Tina Turner, Ann-Margret, and, more astonishingly, unmusical film stars Oliver Reed and Jack Nicholson. As gaudily overblown as the movie it soundtracked, there is absolutely no reason to get this when the Who's original has remained easily available since its day of release.

4. **The Quadrophenia soundtrack** (Polydor, 1979). Again, it has to be emphasized: the soundtrack to the *Quadrophenia* film is *not* the same as the original *Quadrophenia* album, though it's much closer to the original than the *Tommy* soundtrack. Although the majority of the tracks from the original LP are also on the soundtrack album, some are missing. More crucially, the ones that do appear were subjected to some remixing by John Entwistle and, more unhappily, overdubs, Entwistle even re-recording his bass parts on eight tracks. Though the differences aren't radical, the effect was not to strengthen the material, but to dilute it, if only slightly. The soundtrack also includes three Who songs recorded after Keith Moon's death that were written for the *Quadrophenia* album, but not used; these are, alas, far weaker than the ones that made the cut for the original release. In its slight favor, the soundtrack (a double LP) does include the High Numbers' 1964 single "I'm the Face" and its rare B-side "Zoot Suit," as well as some classic early-'60s rock and soul (to represent the kind of music mods would have listened and danced to in the mid-'60s).

5. **The Kids Are Alright soundtrack** (MCA, 1979). Yet another strange not-quite-what-it-seems soundtrack release offers a double album of live performances spanning the mid-1960s to the late 1970s, although the sources were not annotated on the original double LP. None of the songs were especially rare (unless you include a dismal bit of "Roadrunner" inserted into a 1975 medley), but they included historically important performances from *Woodstock*, *The Smothers Brothers*, and *Ready Steady Go*, along with the May 1978 version of "Won't Get Fooled Again" filmed for the movie's finale.

Notable unreleased Who material, 1975-78:

1. There are Pete Townshend solo demos of some songs (though not the majority by any means) from *The Who By Numbers* and *Who Are You*, as well as some scattered ones of less memorable tunes that probably date from the mid-to-late 1970s. A few, though not many, such demos from this era appear on his three official *Scoop* demo collections.

Recommended DVD/videos:

The Passing Show: The Life & Music of Ronnie Lane (Eagle Vision, 2006). Fine hour-and-a-half documentary of the musician who collaborated with Pete Townshend on *Rough Mix*, covering his days in the Small Faces and Faces, as well as his subsequent solo career. Includes interviews with Townshend; Ian McLagan and Kenney Jones of the Faces; engineer/producer Glyn Johns; and archive interviews with Lane himself, along with some vintage performance footage.

Tommy (Sony, 1975). Major British film director Ken Russell (most esteemed for his movies *Women in Love*, *The Devils*, and *Altered States*) took on the near-impossible task of adapting *Tommy* into a movie. That goal had been discussed ever since the original album was issued in 1969, but only realized about five years later, by which time both rock and society were much changed. Opinions widely vary on the result – some find it impressive, or at least loads of fun. Others found it an abomination, and certainly comically over-the-top in its exaggerated, sensationalistic interpretation, with songs taking the place of dialogue. Although Roger Daltrey stars in the title role and other members of the Who have minor roles (including Keith Moon as wicked Uncle Ernie), the other parts went to a basket case of guest stars, including Ann-Margret, Oliver Reed, Jack Nicholson, Tina Turner, Elton John, Eric Clapton, and even a blast-from-the-past return of Arthur Brown. Those guest stars, and not Daltrey, took most of the lead vocals, on top of musical tracks that were specifically recorded for the film by the Who with numerous other musicians, and entirely different from those used on the original album. Whatever one thinks of this messy, frivolous film, it certainly was not all that faithful to the far more serious spirit of the original LP. When the best you can say about it is that it's most notable for including some Pete Townshend synthesizer work that did not make it onto any of the albums he did with the Who or as a solo artist, that's hardly a ringing recommendation. Daltrey would also have the lead role in Russell's next and even more notorious film, *Lisztomania* (also from 1975), based on the life of classical composer Franz Liszt.

The Who at Kilburn 1977 (Image Entertainment, 2008). The Who's second-to-last show with Keith Moon, in London on December 15, 1977, was filmed for possible use in *The Kids Are Alright*. Here's the whole concert, featuring a cross-section of material from the group's entire career with Moon. They come off fairly well, though Townshend seems displeased with how the gig's going, at one point commenting that it's a waste of film. Daltrey and Townshend look in better shape than Entwistle and Moon, who contributes an abysmal lead vocal on "Tommy's Holiday Camp." A bonus DVD features footage

from the Who's performance at the London Coliseum on December 14, 1969, focusing on *Tommy* material.

The Who Live in Texas '75 (Eagle Vision, 2012). Straightforward two-hour film of the Who in concert in Houston on November 20, 1975, the camera focusing exclusively on the four onstage musicians. The set has what was becoming their usual mixture of hits and favorites from throughout their career, including an extended excerpt of *Tommy* songs and just three from their then-current album, *The Who By Numbers*. Some of the more unusual items here include "Boris the Spider" and "Squeeze Box."

Notable People:

Rod Argent: Keyboardist and one of the two main songwriters for the Zombies in the 1960s; leader of the popular progressive rock band Argent in the 1970s. Played some synthesizer and piano on *Who Are You*.

Jon Astley: Co-producer of *Who Are You*, and Pete Townshend's brother-in-law.

Ted Astley: British composer, and Pete Townshend's father-in-law who did string arrangements for *Who Are You*.

Rabbit Bundrick: Keyboardist who plays on Pete Townshend and Ronnie Lane's *Rough Mix*, and toured and recorded with the Who from 1979-1981.

Andy Fairweather-Low: Sings backing vocals on *Who Are You*. Formerly a British pop star in the late 1960s with Amen Corner, after which he started a solo career.

Glyn Johns: After leaving the Who's employ for most of *Quadrophenia*, returned to produce *The Who By Numbers* and co-produce *Who Are You*.

Kenney Jones: Drummer in the Small Faces and the Faces; replaced Keith Moon in the Who after Moon's death, playing with them until 1982.

John Lennon, Ringo Starr, & Harry Nilsson: Dissolute rock stars with whom Keith Moon hung out while he was living in Los Angeles in the mid-1970s, sinking (like the others) into decadence and drug abuse.

Terry O'Neill: Photographer who took the cover picture of *Who Are You*, infamously depicting Keith Moon sitting in a chair labeled "not to be taken away." Moon died just a few weeks after the LP's release.

Franz Roddam: Director of the 1979 film adaptation of *Quadrophenia*.

Ken Russell: Director of the film version of *Tommy* and (also starring Roger Daltrey) *Lisztomania*.

The Sex Pistols: It was after getting drunk in the company of Sex Pistols guitarist Steve Jones and Sex Pistols drummer Paul Cook that Pete Townshend passed out in a doorway in the Central London neighborhood of Soho. The incident inspired part of the song "Who Are You."

Jeff Stein: Director of the documentary *The Kids Are Alright*.

Annette Walter-Lax: Swedish model who was Moon's girlfriend the last few years of his life, and discovered his body when he died in his rented London flat on September 7, 1978.

Notable Landmarks:

9 Curzon Square: Central London flat at which Keith Moon died from complications of excessive pill and alcohol intake on September 7, 1978. The flat was rented from Harry Nilsson; Cass Elliott of the Mamas and the Papas had died of a heart attack while staying there four years earlier.

Riverfront Coliseum: Cincinnati stadium where eleven fans were trampled to death entering a Who concert on December 3, 1979.

Shepperton Studios: Site of sessions for *The Who By Numbers*, and for the Who's final performance with Keith Moon, in Middlesex, England, on May 25, 1978. This was staged specifically to film inserts that could be used in *The Kids Are Alright*.

The Speakeasy: London club where Pete Townshend met Steve Jones and Paul Cook of the Sex Pistols and got drunk, waking up in a nearby doorway, inspiring part of the song "Who Are You."

Albums by Artists Who Were Influential on and/or influenced by the Who in the second half of the 1970s:

The Clash, *The Essential Clash* (Epic, 2003). In the late 1970s, the Who found themselves in the unusual position of being more of an influence on new, trendy rock than they'd been since the 1960s. The uncomfortable difference is that the influence – as heard on a new generation of much younger British punk bands -- was not from their contemporary work, but from their earliest era as mid-'60s mod icons, particularly in their brash guitar attack. This is a double CD of the British band that best matched punk's brittle energy with righteous politics and enough pop melody and eclecticism to cross over to the mainstream, if in a limited fashion. These 40 songs include many of punk's most famous, like "White Riot," "I'm So Bored with the U.S.A.," and "London Calling," as well as more soul-oriented ones that got them some commercial success in the early 1980s ("Train in Vain," "Should I Stay or Should I Go").

The Jam, *Compact Snap!* (Universal, 1983). Drawing comparisons to the early Who with their power-chord driven sound and visual image, the Jam had a stripped-down

jumpiness, at least in their early work, that made them part of the punk-new wave transition. Unlike the Who, however, they never did eventually break through in the United States on more than a cult level, though they remain legends in the UK.

The Sex Pistols, *Never Mind the Bollocks – Here's the Sex Pistols* (Virgin, 1977). Though they only lasted for one album, the Sex Pistols remain both the most famous and the most infamous punk band of all time, both for their uncompromisingly blunt and disturbing music, and for their notoriously rowdy anti-authoritarian behavior. The songs that caused the most fuss ("Anarchy in the U.K.," "God Save the Queen," "Pretty Vacant," and "Holiday in the Sun") are all here. The Sex Pistols, and perhaps some other UK punk bands, had a slight influence on the Who by helping to spark the composition of "Who Are You" after Townshend got drunk in the company of a couple members. Other songs on the *Who Are You* album like "New Song" and "Music Must Change" might have been lyrically influenced by punk with their assertions that rock music had to change, though the songs themselves didn't seem to bear the influence of punk at all.

Various Artists, *Anarchy in the UK: UK Punk I (1976-77)* (Rhino, 1993). The first explosion of British punk, ably represented by the biggest names on this sampler, including the Damned, the Jam, Buzzcocks, Generation X, and groups with more specialized followings like X-Ray Spex and the Adverts. But note that there's nothing by the Clash, and the versions of the Sex Pistols' "Anarchy in the U.K." and "God Save the Queen" are demos, not the familiar hit ones.

Various Artists, *The Modern World: UK Punk II (1977-78)* (Rhino, 1993). Picking up where Rhino's first UK punk volume left off, with more of the same names (the Jam, Buzzcocks, Generation X) and some new ones (Siouxsie & the Banshees, 999, Stiff Little Fingers).

Various Artists, *Starry Eyes: UK Pop II (1978-1979)* (Rhino, 1993). Like the first volume, the more conventional side of British new wave, from Buzzcocks, XTC, and Squeeze to Joe Jackson. Includes one of the best one-shots of the whole genre, the Modettes' ska-cum-girl group "White Mice."

Various Artists, *Teenage Kicks: UK Pop I (1976-79)* (Rhino, 1993). Pop that operated on the mainstream side of the UK punk and new wave scenes, from the likes of Nick Lowe, Squeeze, Wreckless Eric, the Undertones, and XTC.