



THE WHO

MAGIC IN MY EYES

In 1968, Pete Townshend sat down for an epic interview about everything from the mods he loved to the nose he hated to the future of rock & roll

BY JANN S. WENNER

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THE WHO ARE THE BEST KNOWN AND MOST BRILLIANT EXPRESSION OF THE most influential “youth movement” ever to take Great Britain, the mods. Their career began in Shepherd’s Bush, a lower-class suburb of London, and took them through such places as Brighton, scene of the great mod-rocker battles several years ago. The Who’s first recording was “My Generation.” Peter Townshend is the well-known guitarist in the group, but he is also the band’s main driving force, the author of most of the material, the composer of most of the music and the impetus behind the Who’s stylistic stance. It is he, for example, who is credited with initiating the Union Jack style in clothes, something he did by draping Keith Moon in them. The Who’s generation has gotten older, and the change is seen in their records: From “The Kids Are Alright” to “Happy Jack,” and from “Happy Jack” to girls and boys with perspiration, pimple and bad-breath problems. And, as can be seen from the interview, the changes continue. Townshend is the group’s spokesman and, by extension, the spokesman for whatever has become of the mods. Whatever they have become, they are at least the most substantial part of the rock & roll army, a “movement” that is as much American as it was English. Apart from the significance of what he says in relation to the Who as one of the best, most creative and influential rock & roll groups in England,

**ANYWAY,
ANYHOW,
ANYWHERE**
Townshend
photographed in
London, 1968





Townshend, perhaps more than any other single figure in music – and because of the Who's unique relationship to the accompanying social movement – understands and articulates the “meaning of it all.”

This interview began at 2 a.m., after the Who's recent appearance at the Fillmore in San Francisco. Nobody quite remembers exactly under what circumstances the interview was concluded.



The end of your act goes to “My Generation,” like you usually do, and that's where you usually smash your guitar. You didn't tonight – why not?

Well, there is a reason, not really anything that's really worth talking about. But I'll explain the pattern of thought which went into it. I've obviously broken a lot of guitars, and I've brought eight or nine of that particular guitar I was using tonight, and I could very easily have broken it and have plenty more for the future. But I just suddenly decided before I went on, that if there was anywhere in the world I should be able to walk off the stage without breaking a guitar if I didn't want to, it would be the Fillmore.

I decided in advance that I didn't want to smash the guitar, so I didn't, not because I liked it or because I've decided I'm going to stop doing it or anything. I just kind of decided about the actual situation; it forced me to see if I could have gotten away with it in advance. And I think that's why “My Generation” was such a down number at the end. I didn't really want to play it, you know, at all. I didn't even want people to expect it to happen, because I just wasn't going to do it.

But Keith still dumped over his drum kit like he usually does.

Yeah, but it was an incredible personal thing with me. I've often gone on the stage with a guitar and said, “Tonight I'm not going to smash a guitar and don't give a shit” – you know what the pressure is on me – whether I feel like doing it musically or whatever, I'm just not going to do it. And I've gone on, and every time I've done it. The actual performance has always been bigger than my own patterns of thought.

Tonight, for some reason, I went on and I said, “I'm not going to break it,” and I didn't. And I don't know how. I don't really know why I didn't. But I didn't, you know, and it's the first time. I mean, I've said it millions of times before and nothing has happened.

I imagine it gets to be a drag talking about why you smash your guitar.

No, it doesn't get to be a drag to talk about it. Sometimes it gets to be a drag to do it. I can explain it, I can justify it, and I can enhance it, and I can do a lot of things – dramatize it and literalize it. Basically, it's a gesture which happens in the spur of the moment. I think, with guitar smashing, just like performance itself, it's a performance, it's an act, it's an instant, and it really is meaningless.

When did you start smashing guitars?

It happened by complete accident the first time. We were just kicking around in a club, which we played every Tuesday, and I was playing the guitar and it hit the ceiling. It broke, and it kind of shocked me 'cause I wasn't ready for it to go. I didn't particularly want it to go, but it went.

And I was expecting an incredible thing – it being so precious to me – and I was expecting everybody to go, “Wow, he's broken his guitar,” but nobody did anything, which made me kind of angry in a way and determined to get this precious event noticed by the audience. I proceeded to make a big thing of breaking the guitar. I pounced all over the stage with it, and I threw the bits on the stage, and I picked up my spare guitar and carried on as though I really meant to do it.

Were you happy about it?

Deep inside, I was very unhappy because the thing had got broken. It got around, and the next week the people came and they came up to me and they said, “Oh, we heard all about it, man. It's 'bout time someone gave it to a guitar,” and all this kind of stuff. It kind of grew from there. We'd go to another town, and people would say, “Oh, yeah, we heard that you smashed a guitar.” It built and built and built and built and built and built until one day a very important daily newspaper came to see us and said, “Oh, we hear you're the group that smashes their guitars up. Well, we hope you're going to do it tonight because we're from the *Daily Mail*. If you do, you'll probably make the front pages.”

This was only going to be, like, the second guitar I'd ever broken, seriously. I went to my manager, Kit Lambert, and I said, you know, “Can we afford it? Can we afford it? It's for publicity.” He said, “Yes, we can afford it, if we can get in the *Daily Mail*.” I did it, and of course the *Daily Mail* didn't buy the photograph and didn't want to know about the story. After that, I was into it up to my neck and have been doing it since.

Was it inevitable that you were going to start smashing guitars?

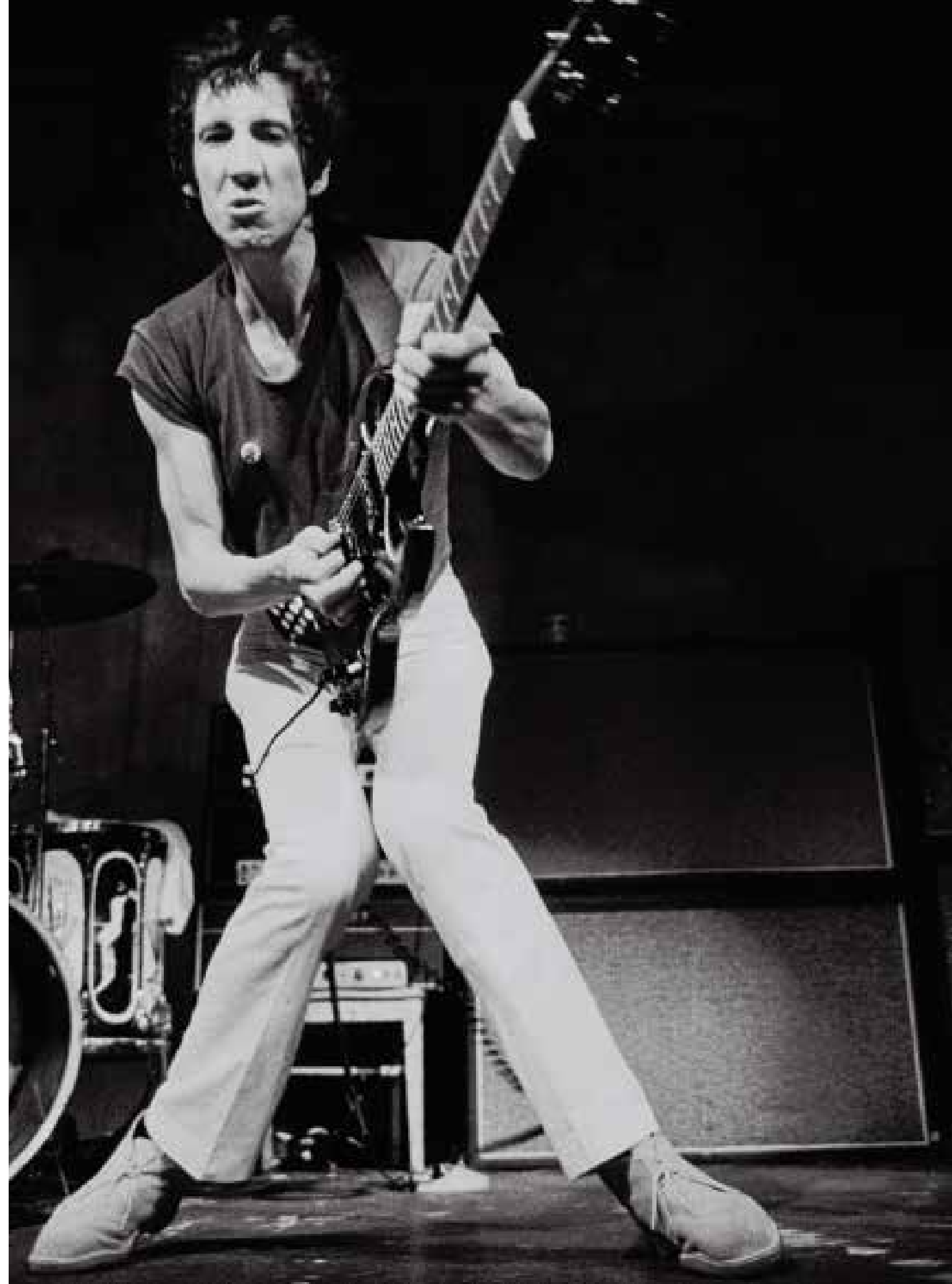
It was due to happen because I was getting to the point where I'd play and I'd play and, I mean, I still can't play how I'd like to play. Then it was worse. I couldn't play the guitar. I'd listen to great music. I'd listen to all the people I dug, time and time again. When the Who first started, we were playing blues, and I dug the blues, and I knew what I was supposed to be playing, but I couldn't play it. I couldn't get it out. I could hear the notes in my head, but I couldn't get them out on the guitar. I knew the music, and I knew the feeling of the thing and the drive and the direction and everything.

It used to frustrate me incredibly. I used to try and make up visually for what I couldn't play as a musician. I used to get into very incredible visual things, where in order just to make one chord more lethal, I'd make it a really lethal-looking thing, whereas, really, it's just going to be picked normally. I'd hold my arm up in the air and bring it down so it really looked lethal, even if it didn't sound too lethal. Anyway, this got bigger



I'M A BOY

Townshend (left), age 10, and his friend Graham Beard on a milk truck on the Isle of Man. Right: Townshend in 1968.





and bigger and bigger and bigger until eventually I was setting myself incredible tasks.

How did this affect your guitar playing?

Instead, I said, "All right, you're not capable of doing it musically – you've got to do it visually." I became a huge, visual thing. In fact, I forgot all about the guitar because my visual thing was more my music than the actual guitar. I got to jump about, and the guitar became unimportant. I banged it, and I let it feed back, and scraped it and rubbed it up against the microphone, did anything – it wasn't part of my act, even. It didn't deserve any credit or any respect. I used to bang it and hit it against walls and throw it on the floor at the end of the act.

And one day it broke. It just wasn't part of my thing, and since then, I've never really regarded myself as a guitarist. When people come up and say, "Who's your favorite guitarist?" I say, "I know who my favorite guitarist is, but asking me, as a guitarist, forget it, because I don't make guitar-type comments. I don't talk guitar-talk. I just throw the thing around." Today, still I'm learning. If I play a solo, it's a game to me because I can't play what I want to play. That's the thing: I can't get it out because I don't practice. When I should be practicing, I'm writing songs, and when I'm writing songs, I should be practicing.

Do you find it funny that people regard you as an excellent guitarist?

I find it astounding, and I find it hard to believe if anyone ever says that they rate me as a guitarist at all. Although I dig

fact that I did a lot of work on arrangements and stuff like that doesn't really count. I think that unless the actual song itself is good, you know, you can do all kinds of incredible things to it, but you're never gonna get it, not unless the meat and potatoes are there. Although I do fuck around in home studios and things like that, I think it's of no importance. I don't think it's really got anything to do with what makes the Who the Who.

Does what you write in your home studio ever come out on records?

Most of it gets out, but the recordings I make myself in my own studio don't. They might in the future, but they would only come out if they had the Who on them. To put out a record of me banging away on guitar or bass drums collectively and generally being a one-man band wouldn't be a very good idea. I'd like to use my studio to record the group because interesting things happen in small environmental-sound recording situations like Sony tape recorders, for example, which don't happen in studios. It's a well-known fact.

When you work out an arrangement and figure out the bass line and the various voices, is that just directly translated onto a record that would be released?

More or less, but then we don't really take it that grimly. What happens is I will suggest the bass riff on the demonstrations record, John [Entwistle] takes up and goes from there. But the bass [line] I would suggest on the demo, as I said earlier, would be very simple. It would be economical, tasteful

"I TRIED TO MAKE UP VISUALLY FOR WHAT I COULDN'T PLAY. I'D MAKE A NORMAL CHORD LOOK REALLY LETHAL."

my guitar playing, I think it's kind of an obvious situation: I play what I want to play within my own restrictions. I like to play like [Steve] Cropper. I like to play simply and tastefully, and when I make records at home, you know, I play simply and tastefully and I don't play like I do on the stage. I don't play big chords, and I don't smash the guitar around. I just do the things which I feel are well within my capabilities as a rhythmic musician.

With the compliment, I immediately think of the people I dig. Someone compliments me, and I think I must move the compliment around to somebody that I really dig like Hendrix and would say I'm nowhere near someone like that as a guitarist, and so the compliment feels out of place. I think, "Well, OK, the guy's not saying you're a good guitarist – he's saying what you play you put over well," or "What you want to put over comes out." If I look like a good guitar player, it's because that's my whole thing, to look like I'm playing the guitar, but really I'm not.

You said you spend most of your time writing songs in your basement.

A lot of writing I do on tour. I do a lot on airplanes. At home, I write a lot, obviously. When I write a song, what I usually do is work the lyric out first from some basic idea I had and then I get an acoustic guitar and I sit by the tape recorder and I try to bang it out as it comes. Try to let the music come with the lyrics. If I dig it, I want to add things to it, like I'll add bass guitar or drums or another voice. This is really for my own amusement.

The reason "I Can See for Miles" came out good was because I sat down and made it good from the beginning. The

and just a vehicle for the song... Instead of me hacking my songs around to billions of publishers trying to get them to dig them, what I've got to do is get the rest of the band to dig my number... That's why I make my own recordings, so when they first hear it, it's not me stoned out of my mind plunking away on a guitar trying to get my latest number across.

What approach do you use in the studio?

The only way I can describe it is to go through it: We walk in, we set up our equipment, and through the talk-back will come, "Can we hear the bass guitar, please?" And then for a quarter of an hour, it's clang, clang, where the bass guitar microphone is corrected and so on. Then "Can we hear the bass drum, please?" and clang, clang, another quarter of an hour, and "Can we hear the top kit?" and Keith plays the top kit, and "Can we hear the guitar," the guitar's always good.

But by this time, of course, you're pissed off at the whole proceedings. All you want to do is go out for a drink so that's usually what happens. We all go out for a drink and come back in, and we seem to have screwed up the balance a bit. So "Just a quick check on the bass guitar" and a "quick check" on bass rhythm, and you go through the whole proceedings again. "OK, we're ready to go!" Then you find that the number's only half-routine, that you've forgotten something, and so by the time you've worked the routine out, the balance is lost again and you have to start all over again.

And this is the way the Who record.

How would you do it?

The way I would do it is set up the amplifiers and the drums in a kind of a fairly separated manner, but as they

UNION JACKS

Moon, Entwistle, Daltrey and Townshend in Manchester, England, 1966





would normally appear on the stage, in the same stereo picture. I'd set up one stereo microphone up in the air above the lot, and I'd record a backing track. That's the way I'd record the Who's backing track, and on top of that, I'd add voice or whatever went with it.

That's what you want: You want that action – walk in, set up, play. That's what you build music on, that instant thing of, like, having a lyric and just seeing it, and being given some words and having to play guitar to them in front of a tape recorder. This is a recording, and it's going to be used, and it's gonna be our next album. The music has got to be good, and it's got to be immediate, and it's got to be exciting – it's got to be now.

What's happened when you've tried spontaneous recording so far?

We've made tapes of a backing track for a song called "Now I'm a Farmer," which is a song I wrote. We were going to release it as a single in England, instead of this one we've just released called "Dogs." We made one backing track mono the first time. And it sounded OK. It was exciting, but what it needed was voices. Only it didn't stand out much as a backing track. And then we recorded it segment by segment as I recorded it on the demo disk: Guitar first, then drums, then bass, then tambourine or whatever it is we wanted on it. Of course, the one we did separately fell apart. It was gonna need someone to say, "Set one of those metronomes by it," in order for everyone to keep together. It wasn't music, it wasn't a happening, it wasn't an event, it wasn't a musical situation, it wasn't a beginning and it wasn't an end. It was just roughly parallel musical statements. There was none of the constriction of thought or anything – it was all analytical. And if a thought

went along a song, it came in A and went out Z. With grooving or jamming or whatever you want to call it, you just pick up your guitar and – OK, you might have a very complicated lyric in front of it – you just play the lyric out. The music becomes far more realistic. In today's time sequence, you've got to make something which adds up like the present. Albums are only going to be played once or twice.

What other ideas in this field do you have?

Well, the album concept in general is complex. I don't know if I can explain it in my condition, at the moment. But it's derived as a result of quite a few things. We've been talking about doing an opera; we've been talking about a whole lot of things, and what has basically happened is that we've condensed all of these ideas, all this energy and all these gimmicks into one juicy package. The package I hope is going to be called *Deaf, Dumb and Blind Boy*. It's a story about a kid that's born deaf, dumb and blind and what happens to him throughout his life. The deaf, dumb and blind boy is played by the Who, the musical entity. He's represented musically, represented by a theme which we play, which starts off the opera itself, and then there's a song describing the deaf, dumb and blind boy. But what it's really all about is the fact that because the boy is D, D and B, he's seeing things, basically, as vibrations, which we translate as music. That's really what we want to do: create this feeling that when you listen to the music, you can actually become aware of the boy and aware of what he is all about, because we are creating him as we play.

And the whole album is about his experience?

Yes, it's a pretty far-out thing, actually. But it's very, very endearing to me because the thing is... inside, the boy sees things musically and in dreams, and nothing has got any weight at all. He is touched from the outside, and he feels his mother's touch, he feels his father's touch, but he just interprets them as music. His father gets pretty upset that his kid is deaf, dumb and blind. He wants a kid that will play football and God knows what.

One night, he comes in and he's drunk, and he sits over the kid's bed and looks at him, and he starts to talk to him, and the kid just smiles up, and his father is trying to get through to him, telling him about how the other dads have a kid that they can take to football and they can teach them to play football and all this kind of crap, and he starts to say, "Can you hear me?" The kid, of course, can't hear him. He's groovin' in this musical thing, this incredible musical thing – he'll be out of his mind. Then there's his father outside, outside of his body, and this song is going to be written by John. I hope John will write this song about the father who is really uptight now.

The kid won't respond, he just smiles. The father starts to hit him, and at this moment, the whole thing becomes incredibly realistic. On one side, you have the dreamy music of the boy wasting through his nothing life. And on the other, you have the reality of the father outside, uptight, but now you've got blows, you've got communication. The father is hitting the kid; musically, then I want the thing to break out, hand it over to Keith – "This is your scene, man, take it from here."

And the kid doesn't catch the violence. He just knows that some sensation is happening. He doesn't feel the pain, he doesn't associate it with anything. He just accepts it.

A similar situation happens later on in the opera, where the father starts

to get the mother to take the kid away from home to an uncle. The uncle is a bit of a perv, you know. He plays with the kid's body while the kid is out. And at this particular time, the child has heard his own name – his mother called him. And he managed to hear these words: "Tommy." He's really got this big thing about his name, whatever his name is going to be, you know, "Tommy." And he gets really hung up on his own name. He decides that this is the king and this is the goal. Tommy is the thing, man.

He's going through this, and the uncle comes in and starts to go through a scene with the kid's body, you know, and the boy experiences sexual vibrations, you know, sexual experience, and again it's just basic music – it's interpreted as music, and it is nothing more than music. It's got no association with sleaziness or with undercover or with any of the things normally associated with sex. None of the romance, none of the visual stimulus, none of the sound stimulus. Just basic touch. It's meaningless. Or not meaningless – you just don't react, you know. Slowly but surely, the kid starts to get it together, out of this simplicity, this incredible simplicity in his mind. He starts to realize that he can see, and he can hear, and he can speak; they are there and they are happening all the time. And that all the time, he has been able to hear and see. All the time, it's been there in front of him, for him to see.

This is the difficult jump. It's going to be extremely difficult, but we want to try to do it musically. At this point, the theme, which has been the boy, starts to change. You start to realize that he is coming to the point where he is going to get over

“WE’VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT DOING AN OPERA. THE PACKAGE I HOPE IS GOING TO BE CALLED ‘DEAF, DUMB AND BLIND BOY.’”



the top, he's going to get over his hang-ups. You're gonna stop monkeying around with songs about people being tinkered with, with Father's getting uptight, with Mother's getting precious and things, and you're gonna get down to the fact of what is going to happen to the kid.

The music has got to explain what happens, that the boy elevates, and finds something which is incredible. To us, it's nothing to be able to see and hear and speak, but to him, it's absolutely incredible and overwhelming; this is what we want to do musically. Lyrically, it's quite easy to do it – in fact, I've written it out several times. It makes great poetry, but so much depends on the music, so much. I'm hoping that we can do it. The lyrics are going to be OK, but every pitfall of what we're trying to say lies in the music, lies in the way we play the music, the way we interpret it, the way things are going during the opera.

The main characters are going to be the boy and his musical things; he's also got a mother and a father and an uncle. There is a doctor involved who tries to do some psychiatric treatment on the kid, which is only partly successful. The first two big events are when he hears his mother calling him and hears the word "Tommy," and he devotes a whole part of his life to this one word. The second important event is when he sees himself in a mirror, suddenly seeing himself for the first time: He takes an immediate back step, bases his whole life around his own image. The whole thing then becomes incredibly introverted. The music and the lyrics become introverted, and he starts to talk about himself, starts to talk about his beauty. Not knowing, of course, that what he saw was him, but still regarding it as

SOARING

Germany, 1967. "The Who on tour is a difficult trip," Townshend said. "So it's best to keep this on the humorous side."

something which belonged to him, and, of course, it did all of the time anyway.

It's a very complex thing, and I don't know if I'm getting it across.

You are.

Because I don't feel at all together.

I know you don't look it, but you're coming on very together.

Good.

This theme, not so dramatically, seems to be repeated in so many songs that you've written and the Who have performed – a young cat, our age, becoming an outcast from a very ordinary sort of circumstances. Not a "Desolation Row" scene, but a very common set of middle-class situations. Why does this repeat itself?

I don't know. I never really thought about that.

There's a boy with pimple problems and a chick with perspiration troubles and so on.

Most of those things just come from me. Like, this idea I'm talking about right now comes from me. These things are my ideas – it's probably why they all come out the same. They've all got the same fuck-ups, I'm sure.

I can't get my family together, you see. My family were musicians. They were essentially middle class, and I spent a lot of time with them when other kids' parents were at work, and I spent a lot of time away from them when other kids had parents. That was the way it came together. They were always out for long periods. But they were always home for long periods, too. They were always very respectable – nobody ever stopped



making me play the guitar, and nobody ever stopped me from smoking pot, although they advised me against it.

They didn't stop me from doing anything that I wanted to do. I had my first fuck in the drawing room of my mother's house. The whole incredible thing about my parents is that I just can't place their effect on me, and yet I know that it's there. When people find out my parents are musicians, they ask how it affected me. Fucked if I know; musically, I can't place it, and I can't place it in any other way. But I don't even feel myself aware of a class structure, or an age structure, and yet I perpetually write about age structures and class structures. On the surface, I feel much more concerned with racial problems and politics. Inside, I'm much more into basic stuff.

You must have thought about where it comes from. If it's not your parents, was it the scene around you?

One of the things which has impressed me most in life was the mod movement in England. It was a movement of young people, much bigger than the hippie thing, the underground and all these things. It was an army, a powerful, aggressive army of teenagers with transport. Man, with these scooters and with their own way of dressing. It was acceptable - this was important. Their way of dressing was hip, it was fashionable, it was clean, and it was groovy. You could be a bank clerk, man, it was acceptable. You got them on your own ground. They thought, "Well, there's a smart young lad." And also you were hip, you didn't get people uptight. That was the good thing about it. To be a mod, you had to have short hair, money enough to buy a real smart suit, good shoes, good shirts; you had to be able to dance like a madman. You had to be in possession of plenty of pills all the time and always be pilled up. You had to have a scooter covered in lamps. You had to have an army anorak to wear on the scooter. And that was being a mod, and that was the end of the story.

The groups that you liked when you were a mod were the Who. That's the story of why I dig the mods, man, because we were mods and that's how we happened. That's my generation, that's how the song "My Generation" happened, because of the mods. The mods could appreciate the Beatles' taste. They could appreciate their haircuts, their peculiar kinky things that they had going at the time.

What is the role of rock & roll in this youth movement?

Music was as much a fashion as the fashion it created. It was an incredibly flippant fashion. It was as flippant as the girls in the group drinking Liebfraumilch in the 1920s. Music was just a feather. You went from record to record and you went from group to group, but you always dug the Who, because they were always down at the local dance. They were mods, and we're mods, and we dig them. We used to make sure that if there was a riot, a mod-rocker riot, we would be playing in the area. That was a place called Brighton.

By the sea?

Yes. That's where they used to assemble. We'd always be playing there. We got associated with the whole thing, and we got into the spirit of the whole thing. And, of course, rock & roll, the words wouldn't even be mentioned; the fact that music would have any part of the movement was terrible. The music would have come from the drive of the youth combination itself.

You see, as individuals these people were nothing.... Not only were they young, they were lower-class young. They had

SMASHING!
At London's Marquee Club, 1967. Townshend would usually destroy his guitar during "My Generation."

to submit to the middle class's way of dressing and way of speaking and way of acting to get the jobs which kept them alive. They had to do everything in terms of what existed already around them. That made their



way of getting something across that much more latently effective, the fact that they were hip and yet still, as far as Grandad was concerned, exactly the same. As a force, they were unbelievable. That was the Bulge, that was England's Bulge; all the war babies, all the soldiers coming back from war and screwing until they were blue in the face – this was the result. Thousands and thousands of kids, too many kids, not enough teachers, not enough parents, not enough pills to go around. Everybody just grooving on being a mod.

What would happen is that the phenomena of the Who could invoke action – the sheer fact that four mods could actually form themselves into a group, which sounded quite good, considering that most mods were lower-class garbagemen, you know, with enough money to buy himself Sunday best. Nowadays, there are quite a few mod groups. But mods aren't the kind of people that could play the guitar, and it was just groovy for them to have a group. Our music at the time was representative of what the mods dug, and it was meaningless rubbish.

We used to play, for example, "Heat Wave," a very long version of "Smokestack Lightning," and that song we sang tonight, "Young Man Blues," fairly inconsequential kind of music, which they could identify with and was perhaps something where you banged your feet on the third beat or clapped your hands on the fifth beat, something so that you get the thing to go by. Mods used to like all kinds of things.

It seemed to find its highest form of transcendence in music.

I don't think that's so. I think it found its highest form of transcendence in the actual event of being a mod. It's difficult for you to know because you weren't one. I know where I'm at now, I know what it's like to be a member of a successful group.... But I also know the feeling of what it's like to be a mod among 2 million mods, and it's incredible. It's like suddenly you're the only white man in the Apollo. Someone comes up and touches you, and you become black. It's like that moment, that incredible feeling of being part of something which is really much bigger than race and much bigger than – it was impetus. It covered everybody. Everybody looked the same, everybody acted the same and everybody wanted to be the same.

It was the first move that I have ever seen in the history of youth toward unity, toward unity of thought, unity of drive and unity of motive. Youth has always got some leader or other, some head man. The head man was Mr. Mod. It could be anyone. Any kid, you know, however ugly or however fucked up, if he had the right haircut and the right clothes and the right motorbike, he was a mod. There was no big Fred Mod or something.... It really affected me in an incredible way because it teases me all the time because whenever I think, "Oh, you know, youth today is just never gonna make it." I just think of that fucking gesture that happened in England. It was the closest to patriotism that I've ever felt.

How do you think that compares with what's called today the American hippie scene?

I think it compares. I think the hippie thing compares favorably, but it's a different motivation. There are beloved figures. There is pot, there is acid, there is the Maharishi, there is the Beatles, there is being anti-the-U.S.A., there are a whole lot of red herrings, which aren't what it's all about. What it is all about is the hippies, you know – that's what it's all about. The

AMONG THE WRECKAGE

Townshend displaying some of his onstage handiwork in 1966

people, the actions, not the events, not the tripping-out or the latest fad or the latest record or the latest trip or the latest thing to groove to. The thing is people.

This is what they seem to overlook. You see, this is the thing about the media barrage: You become aware only of the prod-

ucts around you because they're glorified, and so that when somebody gets stoned, what they do is, they don't groove to themselves really, they just sit around and they dig everything that's around them. They perhaps dig other people. They dig the way the room looks, the way the flowers look, the way the music sounds, the way that the group performs, how good the Beatles are. "How nice that is"; they never say, "How fantastic am I." This is the whole thing: They're far too abject in outlook, they're far too concerned with what is feeding into them and not so much with what they are. This is the difference between the mod thing in England and the hippie thing over here. The hippies are waiting for information, because information is perpetually coming in, and they sit there and wait for it....

To get stoned in England is an entirely different trip. I'm not saying that you get stoned and you dig yourself or anything. What you would do is you would get stoned, perhaps you'd walk out and look at a tree or a matchstick or something, and come back and have a cup of tea and then go to bed, man. But over here, you just carry on regardless. You go to Orange Julius, and you have an Orange Julius, and you watch TV, and then you listen to some records, played very, very loud, and, you know, it's a whole different pattern, a whole different way.

The acceptance of what one already has is the thing. Whereas the mod thing was the rejection of everything one already had. You didn't want to know about the fucking TV. You didn't want to know about the politicians, you didn't want to know about the war. If there had been a draft, man, they would have just disappeared. If there had been a draft, there wouldn't have been mods, because something like that – the thing was that it was a sterile situation, it was perfect. It was almost too perfect.

Over here, it's imperfect. It's not a sterile situation. The group themselves can't become powerful because they can be weakened at so many points – by their education, by their spirituality, by their intelligence, by the sheer fact that Americans are more highly educated. The average Englishmen I'm talking about are people that probably left school when they were 14 or 15. Some of them can't even read or write. But yet there were mods, they were like... you see something nearer, I suppose, in what it's like to be a Hells Angel, but not as much flash, not as much gimmicking, much less part of a huge machine.

What do you think are the implications of the so-called rock & roll revival – the songs, like, on the Stones' new album? Are people fed up with the bullshit pretentious phenomena of the past year? Are they getting back to the values of rock & roll?

Let's hope so. To me, what is really happening is that rock & roll is being completely mischanneled. The whole effect of pop music was being followed, though. What pop was doing to people was something incredibly big, and so all the musicians that were creating rock & roll are saying, "Wow, it's doing something incredibly big. We're gonna follow this through." And they were incapable of following through anything as big as rock & roll. You can't create something as huge as rock & roll and then come along and say, "Well, I'm going to do the follow-up now, which is going to be spirituality." You can't do it – rock & roll is enormous. It's one of the biggest musical events in history. It's equal to classical music. It's equal, and it's transcending slowly but surely because of the impetus, the weight of the feeling.

It's like saying, "Get all the pop music, put it into a cartridge, put the cap on it and fire the gun." You don't care whether those 10 or 15 numbers sound roughly the same. You don't care what periods they were written in, what they mean, what they're all about. It's the bloody explosion that they create when you let the gun off. It's the event. That's what rock & roll is. That is why rock & roll is powerful. It is a single force. It is a single impetus, and it's a single force which threatens a lot of the crap



which is around at the moment in the middle class and in the middle-aged politics or philosophy.

It blasts it, out of its sheer brashness, its sheer realisticness. It's like suddenly everybody getting hung up on a bum trip: Mother has just fallen down the stairs, Dad's lost all his money at the dog track, the baby's got TB. In comes the kid, man, with his transistor radio, grooving to Chuck Berry. He doesn't give a shit about Mom falling down the stairs. He's with rock & roll.

That's what rock & roll says to life: It says, "You know, I'm hip, I'm happy, forget your troubles and just enjoy!" And, of course, this is the biggest single thing it has to offer. At the same time, it can have content if, if one desires content in something as incredible as it is already. The rock & roll songs I like are songs like "Summertime Blues" – man, that's beautiful. It says everything: Don't have the blues, it's summertime; summertime, you don't get the blues in summertime! There is no such thing. That's why there's no cure for them.

Can you pin down some of the elements that make rock & roll what it is, starting with basic elements...like it's got the beat.

MAXIMUM R&B

Onstage in 1966. "Rock & roll music has got to undulate," Townshend said.

It's a bigger thing than that. The reason it's got to have a beat is the fact that rock & roll music has got to have that bounce, it's got to have that thing to make you swing, it's got to swing in an old-fashioned sense. In other words, it's got to undulate. It's got to have a rhythm which undulates. It can't be a rhythm which you count down in a long drone, like classical music. It doesn't have to be physical because when you think of a lot of Beatles music, it's very nonphysical. Like, *Sgt. Pepper's* is an incredibly nonphysical album. If I hear something like the Electric Flag album, I jump up and dance, and I hardly get to hear the music because I'm so busy jumping up, dancing.

But when I hear something like "Summertime Blues," then I do both, then I'm into rock & roll, then I'm into a way of life, into that thing about being that age and being this age and grooving to that thing that he's talking about, which is, like, summertime, and, like, not being able to get off work early and not being able to get out in the sunshine and not being able to borrow the car because Dad's in a foul mood. All those frustrations of summer so wonderfully and so sim-

ply, so poetically, put in this incredible package, the package being rock & roll.

There's the package, there's the vehicle. Not only is it about some incredible poignant experiences, but it's also a gas. The whole thing about rock & roll dynamism is the fact that if it does slow down, if it does start to review itself, if it takes any sort of perspective on life at all, it falls. As soon as someone makes any comment, for example, musically on something they've done before, they collapse.

Is it because you start to take yourself seriously?

Obviously, this is what happens; it is what we desperately try to prevent all the time. One way to stop taking life seriously is to go out on the road. A prime example is people like Paul Revere and the Raiders, resulting in complete insanity. And every group that you can name, man – the Beach Boys are a completely insane group. The Beatles, they stopped going out on the road – they're sober as shit; they've got it together. The Rolling Stones are just going out on the road again; it's taken them 10 years to get over the hang-ups they got from being on the road last time.

You said you write best when you are on tour.

What I was going to get into when I was saying that sentence was that I write a lot of songs on airplanes, but they sound just like songs written in airplanes.

Like which ones?

When we did the Herman's Hermits tour in an old charter plane, I wrote so many songs about plane crashes, it was incredible. I did a song called "Glow Girl," which was about – you see, again, it became spiritual, what you were talking about earlier, unconsciously spiritual tune this was. I wrote it because we were taking off in a plane, which I seriously thought was going to crash, and as I was going up, I was writing a list. I thought that if I was a chick and I was in a plane that was diving for the ground and I had my boyfriend next to me and we were on our honeymoon or we were about to get married, I know what I'd think of. I'd think about him, and I'd think about what I am going to be missing... I just went through a big list of what was in this chick's purse – cigarettes, Tampax, a whole lyrical list – and then holding his hand and what he felt and what he was gonna say to her. And he is a romanticist. The man, he's trying to have some romantic and soaring last thoughts. Eventually, they crash and are reincarnated at a very instant, musically. What I wanted was the list getting frantier and frantier, she's going through her handbag – ballpoint pen, cigarettes, book matches, lipstick and Excedrin – and he's going, "We will be this, and we will do this, and we will be together in heaven, and don't worry, little one, you're safe with me," and all this bullshit. The Who do an incredible destruction as the plane hits the ground, explosions... then this little tune comes out, which goes, "It's a girl, Mrs. Walker. It's a girl." You suss out that they've been reincarnated as this girl.

You've talked about maturing and settling down. How has this affected you?

It gives me a far more logical time aspect on the group. I'm not as frantically working as I used to. I always used to work with the thought in my mind that the Who were gonna last precisely another two minutes. If the taxman didn't get us, then our own personality clashes would. I never would have believed

that the Who would still be together today, and, of course, I'm delighted and love it...

As an individual, it's given me an incredible freedom. I know that I don't have to do things like I used to. Our manager will create artificial pressures to try and get me to operate, but I know they are artificial, so they don't work like they used to. "My Generation" was written under pressure. Someone came to me and said, "Make a statement, make a statement, make a statement, make a statement, make a statement," and I'm going "Oh, OK," and I get "My Generation" together very quickly, like, in a night – it feels like that. It's a very blustering kind of blurring thing. A lot of our early records were. "I Can't Explain" was a bluster and a bluster, and "Anyway, Anyhow, Anywhere," our second record, was just a brag, nothing more. "Substitute" was a takeoff on Mick Jagger or something equally banal.

The whole structure of our early songs was very, very simple. Now, with less pressure, I have to create the pressures for myself. I have to excite myself by myself.

What groups do you enjoy the most?

It's difficult to say. I always forget the groups that I really dig. I like to watch a band with a punch, with drive, who know what they're doing, with a tight sound. I used to like to watch

Jimi Hendrix; sometimes he worries me now because he often gets amplifier hang-ups and stuff – I can't stand that, it kills me. I used to like to watch Cream until they got sad and fucked up. I still dig to watch a group like the Young Rascals, who just walk on with their incredibly perfect sound and their lovely organ, and they're so easy, the way their numbers flow out – just to watch a group stand and go through their thing so beautifully. I dig that. I dig a guy like Otis Redding, and Aretha Franklin. She's been standing still and singing the blues all night, and then when she's really into it, she'll do a tiny little dance and just get her little feet going, very slightly, just a little jog, and in terms of what she's doing with her voice, it's an incredible gesture and really goes mad. I dig Mick Jagger, who I think is an incredible show, and Arthur Brown I think is an incredible show, too.

The performers that you mentioned and that we have touched on from time to time all have tremendous sensuality: Aretha Franklin, Otis Redding, Mick Jagger, Jimi Hendrix, the Who. All of them are tremendously physical, tremendously sensual, tremendously involved with very sexual things. Does this characterize rock & roll?

It must! I mean, it does. It embodies it, it's part of its life. Life revolves, if not around it, within it; if not within it, without it, but definitely along with it. Something about rock & roll has to do with sex and everything to do with sex, like becoming together and the parting and this kind of thing... The whole process of sex is embodied in just the rock & roll rhythm – like gospel music or like native chants or something. Just banging the table is, like, it's the demand and it's also the satiation as well. You bang on the table and in the same process you masturbate, you know. At the end of the show, you're finished – you know, you've had it. You've come your lot, and the show's over.

"Rock me, baby, until my back ain't got no bone." That is the line. Man, it's such a funny line. I can never believe it. I imagine some very skinny, wizened, old Negro blues singer singing

“MY GENERATION WAS WRITTEN UNDER PRESSURE. SOMEONE CAME TO ME AND SAID, ‘MAKE A STATEMENT, MAKE A STATEMENT.’ I SAID, ‘OH, OK.’”



that in a very frail, old voice: "Rock me, baby, till my back ain't got no bone."

Did you read the thing in "Rolling Stone" with Booker T. & the MG's?

Fantastic. It was in such a relaxing and realistic manner. It was very nice. Being such a huge fan of Steve Cropper, I expected the first article about him I ever saw to be incredible: "It's going to be incredible; here he's been all your life, folks, on your Otis Redding albums, on your Booker T. specials. Here he's been, hiding from you, the most incredible guitarist in history..." And of course it goes, "When I first played the guitar, I used quite heavy strings," and it's kind of a very basic interview about how they got the ideas together for "Knock on Wood."

This is how they were when I met them. They were straight, and they were beautiful. I went up to Booker T. - I'd really like to see this in print - I went up to Booker T., who was my absolute idol, my absolute. He was my top man; no music gives me as much pleasure as listening to Booker T. Like, "Green Onions" is my ultimate record of all time practically, and the guitar work is so tasteful. It's everything that I want to do. I went up to Booker T., and I said, "Hey, I'm a big fan of yours, it's really good to meet you," and he said, "Oh, thank you. What is your name?" and I said, "Pete Townshend," and he said, "Pete Townshend," and he put his finger in a kind of a slanted position and made a very thoughtful face and said, "I must remember that," and just walked off.

And I thought, "He will remember my name." I laughed like a little teeny-bopper. I couldn't believe it, and I suddenly figured later on that I was running 'round that guy like a child and he just treated me like the way I treat a teeny-bopper fan, and yet I heard at a later date that they just never, never, never got that kind of treatment. They never had anyone run up to them and freak out in front of them, let alone a 22-year-old man come up and start frothing all over them.

I forget if I read this, or whether it is something Glyn Johns told me: You and the group came out of this rough, tough area, were very restless, and had this thing - you were going to show everybody. You were a kid with a big nose and you were going to make all these people love it, love your big nose.

That was probably a mixture of what Glyn told you and an article I wrote. Glyn was exactly the kind of person I wanted to show. He used to be one of the people who, right when I walked in, he'd be on the stage singing. I'd often go to see his group, and he would announce through the microphone, "Look at that bloke in the audience with that huge nose," and, of course, the whole audience would turn around and look at me, and that would be acknowledgement from Glyn.

When I was in school, the geezers that were snappy dressers and got chicks, like, years before I ever even thought they existed, would always like to talk about my nose. This seemed to be the biggest thing in my life: my fucking nose, man. Whenever my dad got drunk, he'd come up to me and say, "Look, son, you know looks aren't everything," and shit like this. He's getting drunk, and he's ashamed of me because I've got a huge nose, and he's trying to make me feel good.

It was huge. At that time, it was the reason I did everything. It's the reason I played the guitar - because of my nose. The reason I wrote songs was because of my nose, everything, so much. I eventually admitted something in an article where I summed it up far more logically in terms of what I do today. I said that what I wanted to do was distract attention from my nose to my body and make people look at my body, instead of at my face - turn my body into a machine. But by the time I was into visual things like that anyway, I'd forgotten all about my nose and a big ego trip, and I thought, "Well, if I've got a big nose, it's a

groove, and it's the greatest thing that can happen because, I don't know, it's like a lighthouse or something." The whole trip had changed by then anyway.

What is interesting is the fact that it was me versus society, until I could convince them that there was more to me than what they thought.

What is your life like today?

Mainly laughs, actually. The Who on tour is a very difficult trip; it's delicate and could be dangerous. So it's best to keep this on the humorous side. If we take this situation seriously, we tend to feed back. Like, one person gets a slight down and the rest of us get a slight down, and so we have to keep spirits up, even if it's false, even if it's jokes that aren't funny, just in order to get someone to laugh. This is what it's all about to me now.

This is not that the whole life is a false joke, but life is fun and it's fun because we make it fun. Playing is enjoyable because we make it enjoyable. We're experienced at enjoying life as it is for us now.... Some people say that to be a performer, what you got to do is to go on the stage and be able to have that technique of being able to forget all your troubles and go up there and smile. It's a privilege, man, to be able to do that - when you're down, to be able to go on the stage and forget and elevate yourself back to what it's all about, to basic simple communication. To not get hung up in your own pathetic little scenes that you're hung up in, but rather into a very pure thing, which at the time is real and pure and very simple and uncomplicated. And it is an honor for someone who is on a fucked-up trip to be able to get on a stage and do something simple and basic and honest and good.

How is it to be a rock & roll star and people coming on all the time, people that want to lay their trip on you?

It can be a big drag, man. One of the hang-ups is that people won't be normal, and if they won't be normal, they won't be themselves. You can sense professional groupies because they're at ease. Me, personally, I don't want to know about them. They're always very relaxed, a professional groupie is, because they know that you want them to be relaxed.

It's the kids mostly and the inexperienced people that have preconceptions about you, that have read articles by you or seen what you've said or what you've written and put weight on your words that isn't there or which is there, maybe. But they expect it followed up when they meet you, and things like this....

I had an incredible conversation once with Paul McCartney. The difference between the way Lennon and McCartney behave with the people that are around them is incredible. What Lennon does is he sits down, immediately acknowledges the fact that he's John Lennon and that everything for the rest of the night is going to revolve around him. He completely relaxes and lets everybody feel at ease and just speaks dribble little jokes, little rubbish like he's got, *In His Own Write* and little things. He'll start to dribble on and get stoned and do silly things and generally have a good time. Of course, everybody gets into his thing and also has a generally good time.

But Paul McCartney worries. He wants a genuine conversation, a genuine relationship, starting off from square one: "We've got to get it straight that we both know where we're both at before we begin." One of them is fucking Paul McCartney, a Beatle, the other one is me, a huge monumental Beatle fan who still gets a kick out of sitting and talking to Paul McCartney. And he's starting to tell me that he digs me and that we're on an even par so that we can begin the conversation, which completely makes me even a bigger fan. That's all it serves to do. The conversation comes to no purpose, and all he serves to do is to confuse him-

TWO TIMES THE FUN

Townshend rocking a double-necked guitar and psychedelic threads in 1967





self. He's trying to say, "Oh, you know where you're at. I know where I'm at - we're both really just us and let's talk." So what do you say? "I'm a fantastic fan of yours." He really tries to get it together often, and you've got to relax, you've got to take people...

What kind of people do you like?

The breed of people that I like the most around me, in music, are the ones from whom I get what I would call a "positive assistance vibration," as though you were getting some kind of positive buzz from somebody. It's the difference between someone having a role in what you're doing and being there as an ornament or as an object of the performance or as a result of an engagement or something. In pop, the purpose is the whole thing - the whole thing with the people, people in the industry and everything unified and working together in one form toward one direction. It's got to eliminate all the shit. What I'm trying to avoid saying is the fact that the whole problem with the groupies is that they're supposed to be playing a part in the role of pop music. But they're not. It's not just the group they're riding along with - they're riding along with pop itself.

The audience out there, on the other hand, are playing a part. And we're playing a part because we're the fucking group and you're playing a part because you're writing an article about it. But they seem to have no role at all, and I can never understand it. How can anyone be content to just act as the parasites of the glory, parasites of the booze, parasites of the grass, parasites of the lust... They're just total parasites, and I couldn't dig it. They're a breed apart from me. Once a fucking group-

THE KIDS ARE ALRIGHT
Sharing a quiet moment, 1967.

ie does something constructive, then I'm back with 'em again.

What is going to happen to rock & roll?

I'm looking to a couple of people. I've heard some of the Rolling Stones' tracks, and although I dig

them, I don't think they're anything more than what they are, which is incredible, delicious and wonderful rock & roll and well overdue from them. The Rolling Stones should always be a nonprogressive group. I don't think that the Rolling Stones should be concerned with what they're doing in pop. That's what I dig about them.

Dylan, for example, could create a new thing. I think if he made his next record with Big Pink that could be interesting. That might create some new things in rock & roll. Dylan's thing about writing the lyric and then picking the guitar up and just pumping out the song as it comes out is a direct guide to what will happen in music.

People are going to want music to be more realistic, more honest and more of a gift from the heart rather than a gift from the lungs, as it were. Instead of wanting to go and watch Ginger Baker run six miles before your very eyes, you'd rather dig what he's doing. I think this is what's happening.

It's going to be the case that the Stones are going to groove along. A lot of other groups are going to groove along and make good music, in a transitional period, but they're going to be part of the transition and the transition is going to be very delicate. It's going to be, believe it or not, a kind of a broad, unified thing. Rock & roll is going to embody itself.

Explain that.

It's so hard to explain... It might be that new artists come along; anything can happen. But it's going to be something noticeable, something big. It's going to be something which comes within the terms of pop now.

In the past, things have changed. There has got to be a landmark, a milestone before one could get anything together. Something will emerge out of what already exists in music. In other words, instead of having to say, "Well, we're going to have to completely scrap what we've got and get a completely new bag together," rock & roll gives us the ingredients for the next major musical crisis, to encounter the next musical crisis or musical starvation or whatever is happening.

Rock & roll is going to be the answer to the musical situation that exists, and this is apart from any kind of clever lyricism or any kind of clever stage presentation or anything like that. Music is going to swing, is going to be simple, is going to be impulsive. People are far more concerned now with honesty, with quite simply someone playing what they dig and with playing impulsively and realistically than with people's hang-ups and people's image, with people's so-called talent or genius. So, OK, poor Eric is going to be a god again.

But he was born to be a god, and he always will be, and he plays like one, but his thing is on the way out. That thing of worshipping Elvis Presley, worshipping Eric Clapton - it's gonna go.

What's going to happen is it's going to be "pick up the guitar, Sally, and play a rock & roll song." Rock & roll is going to

What's going to happen now is that while all this bullshit is going on, they're going to turn around and they're going to say, "Hey, man, have you heard Buck Owens?"

"Oh, you're an incredible significant group."

"Yeah, he just plays the guitar, and he just plunks away."

"Oh, he's a gas, oh, yeah. Most significant group I've ever heard, since, you know."

In the meantime, they're going to be listening to country & western records or whatever. But they're going to be listening to Chuck Berry or something.

What are the modern classics? What are the classic rock & roll songs since the Beatles?

"Wild Thing," "I Got You Babe," "Satisfaction," "My Generation." There's lots more, lots more. I'm just trying to think. "Eleanor Rigby," "Reach Out I'll Be There" I thought was incredible. It's difficult to say, because everything is so fucking good. There are a lot of classics, and there is a lot of good rock & roll, and it is one of the reasons it's going to have enough impetus to carry it through to the next transition.

Why did so much great rock & roll happen in England?

Europe is a piss place for music, and it's a complete fluke that England ever got it together. England has got all the bad points of Nazi Germany, all the pompous pride of France, all the old-fashioned patriotism of the old Order of the Empire. It's got everything that's got nothing to do with music. All the European qualities which should enhance, which should come out in music, England should be able to benefit by, but it doesn't.

And just all of a sudden, *bang! wack! zap-swock!* out of no-

"THE BEATLES. INCREDIBLE. HOW DID THEY EVER APPEAR THEN ON THIS POXY LITTLE SHIT-STAINED ISLAND?"

become down-home, it's gonna become realistic. It's going to become the answer to the day's problems. It's going to become part of everybody's life from now on. You can't switch it off, you can't change what it is so far. You can't change the old classics, you can't stop the classics being born.

You can say the way you're going to receive the new stuff. You say, "This is how I want my music from now on - I don't want any bullshit about you being a god, and I won't want any bullshit about you being a genius, and I don't want any bullshit about 'opera,' Townshend, or any of that bullshit or spirituality. I don't want to be preached to - I've got my own bag. I'm a Methodist and go every Sunday. I don't want to be told about my sex life. I don't want to be glittered at. I don't want a guitar smashed over my fingers. I don't want any of that shit. What I want is music, and you're going to give it to me. If you don't give it me, then fuck off."

This is what everybody is beginning to demand. You're amazed by the amount of absurdity that groups can start with: gimmick after gimmick after gimmick after gimmick. By gimmick, I don't mean what most people mean by gimmick: I don't mean a plastic nose or guitar smashing. I mean ideas, an impetus, power and enthusiasm. How could all these groups all be so enthusiastic? How can they all be so hung up in their own bags? This is what people are getting fed up with, fed up with having to acknowledge everyone that comes along and says, "Oh, yeah, you've got a new thing, too, and you're more significant than they are." It's getting, like, a catalogue.

where. There it is: the Beatles. Incredible. How did they ever appear then on this poxy little shit-stained island? Out of the Germans, you can accept Wagner; out of the French, you can accept Debussy; and even out of the Russians, you can accept Tchaikovsky. All these incredible people. Who's England got? Purcell? He's a gas, but he's one of the only guys we've got, and Benjamin Britten today who copies Purcell... And all of a sudden, there's the Beatles, with their little funny "we write our own songs." "Don't you have ghostwriters?"

It's difficult to talk about rock & roll. It's difficult because it essentially embodies something which transcends the category. The category itself becomes meaningless. The words "rock & roll" don't begin to conjure up any form of conversation in my mind because they are so puny compared to what they are applied to. But "rock & roll" is by far the better expression than "pop." It means nothing.

It's a good thing that you've got a machine, a radio that puts out good rock & roll songs and it makes you groove through the day. That's the game, of course: When you are listening to a rock & roll song the way you listen to "Jumpin' Jack Flash," or something similar, that's the way you should really spend your whole life. That's how you should be all the time: just grooving to something simple, something basically good, something effective and something not too big. That's what life is.

Rock & roll is one of the keys, one of the many, many keys to a very complex life. Don't get fucked up with all the many keys. Groove to rock & roll, and then you'll probably find one of the best keys of all.