

# New Who disc reflects progress; enduring group's future unsure

By JIM CLARDY  
Staff Writer

One last album, one last tour. That's the word from Pete Townshend, songwriter for and guiding force behind the Who, one of rock's most enduring bands. The group will not be forgotten. The rise of heavy metal and punk would have been inconceivable without the Who.

The Who drew their influences from such diverse sources as Eddie Cochran and James Brown. They were billed as "Maximum R&B" by Kit Lambert, their first manager. Early singles such as "I Can't Explain" and "The Kids Are Alright" borrowed vocal harmonies from the Beatles and Beach Boys. But unlike the Stones' single-minded devotion to rhythm and blues, the Who sprang more from a direct context.

The first two singles, "Anyway, Anyhow, Anywhere" and "I Can't Explain," introduced the ringing chords and use of feedback which were to become staples of the Who's sound. Yet it was their third single, "My Generation," from their first album of the same name, that firmly entrenched their place in rock history.

"My Generation" is three minutes of organized chaos: Keith Moon's hell-bent drumming, John Entwistle's thundering bass, Townshend's accelerated chords, and the tough bray of Roger Daltrey's "hope I die before I get old" (American Decca originally returned the pressing — thinking the feedback was a recording error).

The recording was crude, the playing primitive, but this only augmented the power. Nothing as archaic would be heard again until the punks surfaced 10 years later. Even more so than the Stones' "Satisfaction," "My Generation" defined the rebellion and discontent of the era, summing up the anger of the '60s. "My Generation," along with another single, "The Kids Are Alright" from the first album, became anthems for the Mods in England, and gave the Who their first identity.

"Happy Jack," the title track of their second album, garnered the Who their first American hit. It also contained "A Quick One While He's Away," which Townshend would sardonically refer to later as a "mini-opera." "A Quick One" was actually four three-minute songs loosely connected by a common story line. The ideas and themes would resurface two years later as the rock-opera, *Tommy*.

*The Who Sell Out* was a concept album released six months after the Beatles' more widely publicized *Sgt. Pepper*. Songs were interspersed between obnoxious radio commercials in an effort to both recreate and parody British radio. Side One ends with "I Can See For Miles," one of the Who's most powerful singles and their biggest hit of all time, reaching No. 9 on the American charts.

At this point, the Who were still widely unknown to the United States. A cross-country tour would change that, as the Who unveiled their destructive and violent stage show to the

American audience for the first time. The climax came at the 1967 Monterey Pop Festival. Townshend, playing his Gibson guitar like a crazed windmill, would smash his guitar, producing a wall of shrieking feedback. Moon drummed like a madman, destroying his kit in the process. Daltrey strutted, stuttered, and swung his microphone like a lariat. The audience had never seen anything like it. Only Jimi Hendrix would top the Who that night, and he had to burn his guitar to do it.

In 1969 Townshend released *Tommy* to an unsuspecting public. Townshend acknowledged this as his masterpiece, and for the first time the Who gained a substantial American following, where the album rose to No. 4 on the charts. The idea of a rock-opera, however, bordered between sheer genius and trite pretentiousness, and raised questions as to how seriously a rock band could take itself.

*Live at Leeds* came next, a crunching document of the energy the Who was capable of producing in concert. The band had never sounded tighter, more disciplined than on cuts like "Substitute" and "Summertime Blues."

Townshend was now obsessed with coming up with a sequel to *Tommy*. A project titled *Lifhouse* was aborted midway. Out of this material came *Who's Next*, a remarkable album, which for the first time captured the power of the Who's live music in a studio production. Some of Townshend's best songs are here — "Going Mobile," "Behind Blue Eyes" and "Baba O'Riley." But the real triumph belongs to Keith Moon. Moon took the drums out of a purely percussion role and made them as much a part of the band's sound as Townshend's guitar or Daltrey's vocals.

*Quadrophenia*, released in 1973, was another album in the rock opera vein and was the real sequel to *Tommy*. The album chronicles the life of an archetypal Mod named Jimmy, a pill-gobbling Who freak, and was Townshend's most autobiographical album to date. *Quadrophenia* was unified more by theme rather than a story line, although Townshend was quick to point out "... it's not a story — more a series of impressions and memories."

By 1975 Townshend, approaching 30, was experiencing a mid-life crisis, haunted by his own anthem "hope I die before I get old." Despite the turmoil, the music flourished. *The Who By Numbers* is a sparse and powerful album, confronting the problem of aging. Townshend treads between celebration and condemnation of the rock star lifestyle.

*Who Are You*, released after a three-year gap, picks up where *Numbers* left off, but Moon's death just weeks after its release made it seem more like a last gasp, the beginning of the end. *Face Dances* puts these problems into context. The energy is forced, the poses contrived. Townshend's pledge to disband the Who after this tour leaves the future open to question.

Jim Clardy is a staff writer for The Daily Tar Heel.



## New 'Who' tunes lack charisma

By DEAN FOUST  
Staff Writer

*Four minutes to midnight on a sunny day  
Maybe if we smile the clock'll fade away  
Maybe we can force the hands to just reverse  
Maybe is a word, maybe maybe is just a curse  
Nobody knows why we fell so flat*

— from "Why Did I Fall For That"

If rock fans have an unnerving fable, it's their undying and undiscerning loyalty to their idols. Oblivious of the true quality of the music, they will cuss and swear at anyone in their path who says their group's latest album isn't manna from heaven. And when they first concede that an album is mediocre, they immediately assuage each other that it will grow on them eventually.

Very few critics gave approval to the Grateful Dead's *Go To Heaven*, yet Deadheads pack the concert halls screaming for "Feel Like A Stranger" or "Alabama Getaway" as if their existence depended on it. Ditto for Rolling Stones fans who eventually convinced themselves that *Emotional Rescue*, *Tattoo You* and *Still Life* were

incomparable (listenable would have been an achievement), while in truth they all were found wanting.

And so it will be with the new Who album, *It's Hard*. Who fans will tell themselves how wonderful, how creative, how unique it is. And if they try hard enough, they'll believe it.

*It's Hard*, which Who leader Pete Townshend has hinted might be their last album (followed by their last tour), is, at best, a mediocre finale for such a prolific group.

"Athena," the first song to gain FM radio airplay, is among the best of the album, thanks largely to John Entwistle's horn section. It doesn't get much better, folks.

In fact, Entwistle gives one of the group's better performances, with the usual clever bass lines and penmanship that is as good as he's done in years. "It's Your Turn," "Dangerous" and "One At a Time," all by Entwistle, round out the listenable tracks along with a Pete Townshend number, "Eminence Front."

Roger Daltrey's vocals are weak. Noticeably absent is the strong, gravelly scream that trademarked the Who's sound for many years. With several songs on *It's Hard*, you're left wondering what Daltrey could have done, say, 10 years ago. And Daltrey's few notable efforts are buried beneath a bad mix that overemphasizes the

keyboards, bass and rhythm. But that's good for Kenny Jones, who here avenges his poor performance on *Face Dances*.

As for Pete Townshend, the patron saint of Thinking (and Drinking) Man's rock 'n' roll, it may be that his biggest fear has been realized — his fear of growing too old to rock the masses.

The magic just isn't there anymore. Sure, there were signs of stagnancy and aging on *Face Dances*, but we all thought the Who would go out with a bang, right? Surely, Townshend hadn't been forecasting his fate, and even wrote about it into the lyrics in a song on *It's Hard*.

Townshend was the Pied Piper for rock fans everywhere who followed his every move of his guitar pick and pen.

But this is one dyed-in-the-wood Who fan (35 albums, solos and bootlegs testify) who has grown tired of compromising and rationalizing about what the Who was.

But it may not all matter. *It's Hard* will hit the album charts with a bang and the songs will flood the FM airwaves.

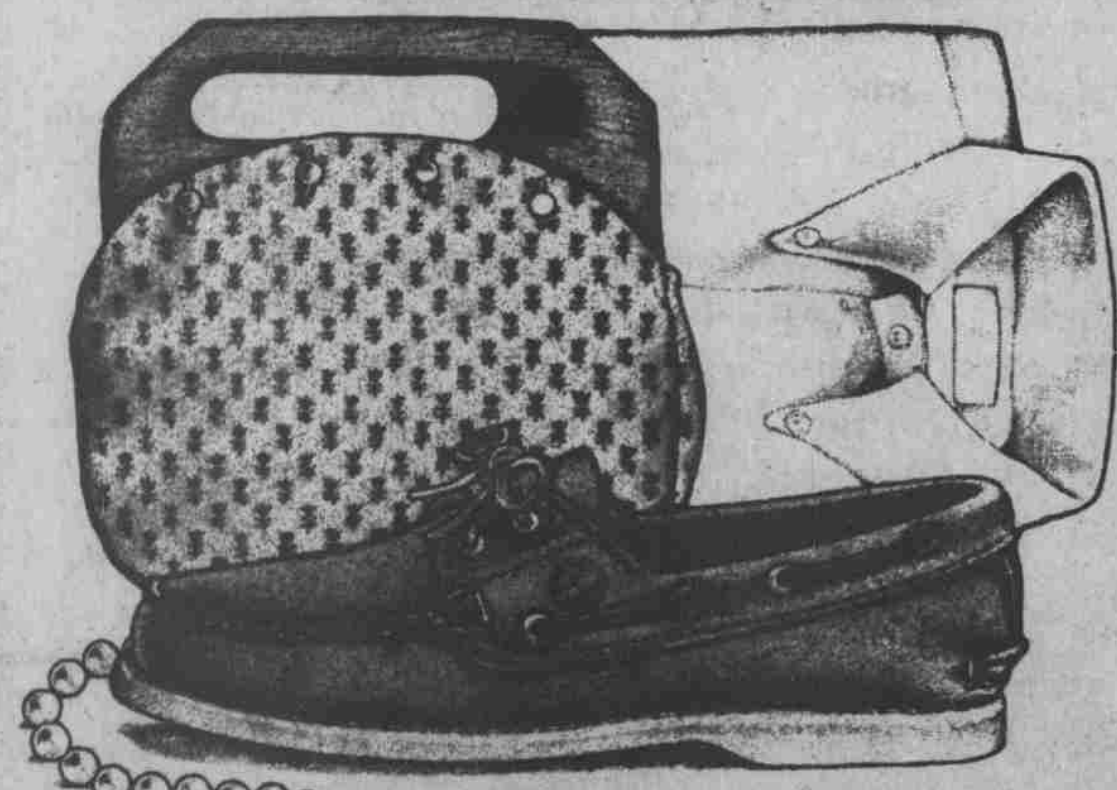
And then it may follow the fate of the four most recent Who albums, languishing in the bargain bins.

It shouldn't end this way for such an outstanding group.

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## 'Das Boot' not just another war movie

By DAVID McHUGH  
Staff Writer

If you think you ought to like German cinema, but have been frightened away by things like *Aguirre, the Wrath of God*, then your time has come.

*Das Boot* (The Boat), a tense, subtitled German picture about a World War II submarine and its depth-charged crew, should appeal to the average American who thumps down four bucks for a movie.

*Das Boot* has a straightforward plot and a tight script, and falls easily into that most familiar of genres, the war picture. It's got some of the old war movie clichés, like sailors on the bridge sternly gritting their teeth into buckets of studio tap water.

It also bears humane and moving

witness to the destructiveness and futility of the war.

The story concerns a young German war correspondent who ships out on a U-boat as an observer at the height of the Atlantic war.

Instead of cheerful blond war heroes and hot propaganda material, the young officer finds a cramped bunk, one toilet for 50 men (no baths) and a crushing boredom broken only by the sweaty nightmare of depth-charge attacks from pursuing destroyers.

The depth-charge attacks and other underwater accidents generate much excitement. Lightbulbs pop, the hull groans, valves burst and spray water all over, control panels burst into flames and sailors are thrown against bulkheads.



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**Review**

All the narrow escapes build toward an ending whose irony, though faithful to the film's grim vision, is just too heavy.

But for the first 90 minutes, the tension is genuine, and this is still a very good film in its entirety. The characters are all written and played with affection, especially the unbelievably self-possessed captain (Jurgen Prochnow) and his waggish 2nd lieutenant (Martin Semmelrogge). The correspondent (Herbert Gronemeyer) has an unfortunate case of trembling lower lip.

The outdoor scenes are nicely shot, with sunlight glistening on the ocean at sunset and the like. The model work with the sinking ships, however, is obvious.

But most of the action takes place in the claustrophobic confines of the submarine hull, whose inner life — sausages and bananas hanging everywhere, the captain's record player, and unwashed dishes, clothes and bodies — occupy much of director Wolfgang Petersen's attention.

The maddening confinement and squalor of submarine life come across, along with the quiet courage and fear of the crew. Petersen reportedly kept his actors shut up on the cramped set for days to keep them pale and staring nervously at the walls.

He did something right, in any case. *Das Boot* has that rare attribute in war movies — a conscience.

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