

THIRTY YEARS OF MAXIMUM R & B

PETER DOGGETT REVIEWS THE WHO'S LONG-AWAITED CD BOX SET

Pete Townshend's the last man to get sentimental over the Who. "I don't like the Who," he writes in his typically acerbic introduction to Polydor's four-CD retrospective. "Good old Pete. So many times he has willingly sat down to write about the good old Who. Isn't he too old to masturbate?"

Entered into with that spirit, it's no wonder that the band's last reunion tour, in 1989, was greeted with such distaste by so many. "Nothing is worse", Pete writes elsewhere, "than a reliable group in which one of the essential members is dead." That's a damning verdict on every piece of Who corporate activity since Keith Moon's demise in 1978, from their recruitment of Kenney Jones (now virtually a non-person in the band's history, from the evidence of this booklet) to Roger Daltrey's most recent 'tribute' to Townshend's songwriting catalogue.

Few Who fans will return very often to the final segment of this box set, which skips as lightly as possible across the self-conscious betrayal of the band's career After Keith. But the reasons why Pete, Roger and John have never escaped the lure of the Who are transparently obvious if you listen to the rest of "Thirty Years Of Maximum R&B".

RANT

No box set has opened with a more defining moment. Pete Townshend's crazed, expletive-filled rant from a 1971 concert drops you hard into the London R&B of "I'm The Face", magically recreated into a gem by the CD remastering. After a nod to the beat boom via the unreleased "Here Tis" and the amusing "Zoot Suit", we're propelled into the vicinity of a hurricane — alias Daltrey, Entwistle, Moon and Townshend circa 1964/65, anticipating punk, grunge and the end of the world across a chest-crunching series of mock-anthems and Mod classics.

"I Can't Explain", "Anyway, Anyhow, Anywhere" and "My Generation" remain an opening salvo unmatched in rock history, unless it's by the Sex Pistols' equally manic hello to the outside world. What happened next is the subject of the box set, which charts the Who's turbulent, driven passage from chroniclers of a youth cult and a time to patently unwilling vehicles for Pete Townshend's increasingly personal psychological excavations.



Roger Daltrey delivering the finale to Pete Townshend's rock opera *Tommy*, which is heavily represented on the band's new four-CD box set.

Townshend set out to confront the world with the confusion and psychodrama of *EveryMod*, as played by actor-in-the-wings Roger Daltrey. Within a year or two, the cosmic force that was the Who had become so tightly woven, despite continual inter-group battles, that Townshend was speaking on behalf of the group as a schizoid but indivisible unit. But after "Tommy", his brilliant examination of the limits of human power and cruelty, Pete was writing increasingly as a spokesman for himself — first in his role as rock critic extraordinaire, then as nothing more than a highly talented and extremely articulate individual. At that point, the Who of "My Generation", "Substitute", "Dogs" and "Magic Bus" effectively ceased to exist, though no-one told the band, who continued to deliver ferociously committed live shows until Moon's death.

That's the sub-text, often catapulted to the surface, of a box set that attempts to be all things to all ears. For the band, it's their shot at immortality; for collectors, it's an enticing mix of the familiar and the unknown; for Polydor it's a revamp of a moribund back catalogue in the grand tradition of Eric Clapton's "Crossroads", prior to a full-scale restoration of all the Who's work on definitive single-CDs over the next few years.

Some objections have been raised in the RC office to the box's mix of rarities and

classics, and the omission of key Who moments like "Circles", "Doctor Doctor", "The Good's Gone" and "Mary Anne With The Shaky Hand". But aside from the musical deterioration after Moon's death, it's hard to imagine any real Who fan being disappointed by the sound of these CDs, or by their sheer visceral and lyrical thrust.

"Thirty Years Of Maximum R&B" obviously isn't aimed at those who can't listen to anything the band issued after 1970; my cut-off, for what it's worth, comes around 1973, after which I'd take Townshend's solo work over the Who's fatally compromised collaborations any day. Polydor are planning a series of CD repackages covering all the band's original albums, complete with bonus tracks; one assumes that all the relevant rarities from the box set will in turn be divided across these reissues in years to come.

That being the case, Who fans can revel in the chance to hear unissued (but heavily bootlegged) songs like "Early Morning Cold Taxi", "Melancholia" and "Jaguar" in best-ever sound quality; appreciate the skill with which studio and "Rock'n Roll Circus" renditions of "A Quick One, While He's Away" have been combined into one; and lap up a set of unreleased live recordings ranging from "See Me Feel Me" to "My Wife", via "Dreaming From The Waist" to a 1989 version of "I'm A Man".

SOUNDBITES

Linking together the hits and the rarities are a canny selection of soundbites, dragged from bootleg LPs, studio off-cuts, and a series of mildly amusing Keith Moon comic interludes, never heard in public before. Add in a superb booklet, masterminded by co-compiler Chris Charlesworth and including wonderful essays by Keith Altham and Dave Marsh; the wonderful sound quality, supervised by Pete's brother-in-law, Jon Astley; and enough certified classics to fuel at least five rock careers, and you have a box set that sets out the Who's claims to divinity with ease.

None of that lifts the final CD out of the ranks of mediocrity, or wipes clean the memory of comeback tours and tribute concerts. But a band as defiantly obstinate and erratic as the Who can't be smoothed into a bland historical overview. "Thirty Years Of Maximum R&B" may be fifteen years too far, but the first fifteen make you forgive anything.

WHO'S IN THE BOX?

After years of repetitive compilations, haphazard CD reissues and apparent corporate indifference, the Who's back catalogue is finally receiving the lavish attention it deserves.

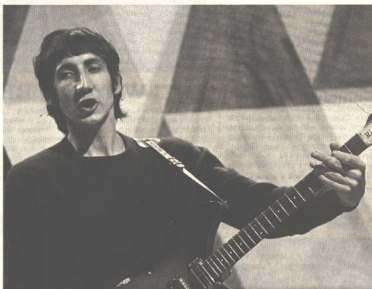
Due for release this spring — late March is the provisional date — is a four-CD box set, "The Who: 30 Years Of Maximum R&B". It's been compiled by longtime Who freak and author, **Chris Charlesworth**, with the active assistance of the band themselves. "I wrote to **Pete Townshend** early in 1993," **Charlesworth** explains, "enquiring why there had never been a Who box set. I thought it was an appalling omission, especially given the calibre of some of the other bands who have been given the multi-CD treatment, and who aren't worthy of licking the Who's boots! **Pete** replied that there had already been vague talk of the need for just such a set, and that if I was interested, I could have the job of putting it together."

"I met **Jon Astley**, **Pete's** brother-in-law, who co-produced 'Who Are You', and gave him my ideal track listing. Then we started looking through the files to see what was actually available. I soon discovered that we couldn't have access to any of the band's wonderful BBC sessions, as they'd been leased to a foreign radio station under some exclusive agreement. Even the head of Radio 1 couldn't help.

"But **Pete's** own library made up for that. He's got hundreds of miles of tape, both live stuff and studio out-takes — everything, in fact, apart from the **Shel Talmy** productions."

Charlesworth says that the idea of the box is not to act as a rarities package, but "to provide the definitive 'best of', presented in the best possible conditions. But we have included quite a few unreleased tracks. We found the original tapes of the four **High Numbers** studio tracks, which were in magnificent condition. One of them was hidden in a box marked "Crazy 'Bout My Baby", but turned out to be the old **Bo Diddley** number, 'Here 'Tis'."

The full track listing is detailed below. As you'll see, it includes several unfamiliar titles, like "Poetry Cornered" and "Life with the **Moons**". "I wanted to include as many soundbites as possible in the set," **Charlesworth** says, "everything from stage announcements to comic routines from **Keith Moon**. The **Who**, and **Pete** in particular, have got to the stage where they're always regarded in a very po-faced,



Pete Townshend's reputation should be done no harm at all by the announcement of a four-CD Who box set.

serious manner. I was very keen to stress the band's sense of humour."

Charlesworth is hopeful that Polydor might be able to follow this set with a live retrospective of the **Who's** career. Some of the existing tapes didn't meet technical standards, however: "the great Isle of Wight performance from 1970 sounded too rough on tape to use, as did the Hull University show recorded the week before the 'Live At Leeds' concert. But to make up for that, we found some stunning material from San Francisco in 1971, plus the tapes from the legendary Swansea show in 1976."

To pre-sell the four-CD set to its subsidiaries, Polydor has prepared an internal sampler CD, featuring five cuts: "Armenia City In The Sky", "Happy Jack", "Dreaming From The Waist", "I'm The Face" and "Saturday Night's Alright For Fighting". (PD)

THE WHO: 30 YEARS OF MAXIMUM R&B — track listing

CD1: Pete Dialogue (1971)/I'm The Face/Here 'Tis (unissued)/Zoot Suit/Leaving Here/I Can't Explain/Anyway, Anyhow, Anywhere/Daddy Rolling Stone/My Generation/The Kids Are Alright/The Ox/A Legal Matter/Pete dialogue/Substitute (live at Leeds, 1970)/I'm A Boy/Disguises/Happy Jack jingle/Happy Jack/Boris The Spider/So Sad About Us/A Quick One (studio/live edit)/Pictures Of Lily/Early Morning Cold Taxi (unissued)/Coke 2 ad/The Last Time/I Can't Reach You/Girl's Eyes (unissued)/

Bag O'Nails ad/Call Me Lightning **CD2:** Rotosound Strings ad/Can See For Miles/Mary Anne With The Shaky Hand/Armenia City In The Sky/Tattoo/Our Love Was/Rael 1/Rael 2 (unissued)/Track Records ad/Premier Drums ad/Sunrise/Russell Harty dialogue/Jaguar (unissued)/Melancholia (unissued)/Fortune Teller (unissued)/Magic Bus/Little Billy/Dogs/Overture/Acid Queen/Abbie Hoffman incident/Underture (live at Woodstock)/Pinball Wizard/I'm Free/See Me, Feel Me (live at Leeds, unissued)/Heaven And Hell/Pete dialogue/Young Man Blues (live at Leeds)/Summertime Blues (live at Leeds) **CD3:** Shakin' All Over (live at Leeds)/Baba O'Riley/Bargain (live, San Francisco)/The Song Is Over/Pure And Easy/studio dialogue/Behind Blue Eyes/Won't Get Fooled Again/The Seeker (edit)/Bony Moronia (live, London)/Let's See Action/Join Together/Relay/The Real Me (1979 studio rehearsal)/5.15 (single mix)/Bell Boy/Love Reign O'er Me **CD4:** Long Live Rock/Life with the Moons/Naked Eye (live, London; unissued)/University Challenge/Slip Kid/Poetry Cornered/Dreaming From The Waist (live, Swansea; unissued)/Blue Red And Grey/Life with the Moons 2/Squeeze Box/My Wife (live, Swansea; unissued)/Who Are You/Music Must Change/Sister Disco/Guitar And Pen/You Better You Bet/Eminence Front/Twist And Shout (live, Toronto; unissued)/I'm A Man (live, New York; unissued)/Pete dialogue/Saturday Night's Alright For Fighting