

On listening to this album, it's very easy to imagine that the whole Who world has been made up of singles. Where Tommy and his lengthy and finally expatriated self come in, it's hard to say. Probably nearer the time of the second album, A Quick One, or Happy Jack, as it was called in the States. Before we even approached the idea of making an album that was an expression of our own feelings, or in the case of the Happy Jack, an album expression of our own insanity, we believed only in singles. In the top ten records and pirate radio. We, I repeat, believed only in singles.

In England albums were what you got for Christmas, singles were what you bought for prestige. It was the whole recreation of the local dance hall cum discotheque in your own sweet front room. You had to have the regulation tin speaker record player, tin, not twin, housed artistically in a vinyl covered box under a lid with a two-watt amplifier worthy only of use as a baby alarm, and a record deck on which the current top 20 singles could be stacked 12 or 15 high for continuous dancing of the latest dance – which differed only from last week's in the tiniest possible hip-wagging details. A long sentence, but a single sentence. One sentence and you have the truth about singles. We made them tinny to sound tinny. If you made them hi-fi to sound tinny you were wasting your time, after all.

Shel Talmy, who produced our first three singles, was a great believer in “making groups who were nothing, stars.” He was also a great believer in pretending the group didn't exist when they were in recording studio. Despite the fact that I go on to say that our first few records are among our best, they were the least fun to make. We only found out recording was fun when we made Happy Jack and the ensuing album with our later-day producer Kit Lambert. However, dear Shel got us our first single hits. So he was as close to being God for a week as any other unworthy soul has been. Of course it was a short week; I quickly realized that it was really the brilliant untapped writing talent of our lead guitarist, needless to say myself, that held the key to our success. Talmy and all following claimers to Who history are imposters.

As you can see, I feel pretty good about my own contributions to this, the greatest of Who albums. John Entwistle's contribution should have been a single too, that's why it's here. Without a hint of guilt I shout aloud that singles just could be what life is all about. What Rock is all about. What the Spiritual Path is all about! Ask Kit Lambert about shortening a song two hours long with 24 verses, six choruses and 12 overdubbed guitar solos down to two minutes fifty or preferably shorter. Ask him how he did it without offending the composer. Deceit. Lies. Cheating! That's what Rock is all about.

It really is the most incredible thing that after two years of brainwashing himself into being a producer of singles for Top Ten radio play, Kit Lambert actually turned his brain inside out and came up with Rock Opera. Enigmatic paradox. But good thinking for a group who stopped getting hits. Listen to “Magic Bus” and “I Can See For Miles” and tell me why those cuts weren't hits. Tell me why Tommy was. Kit Lambert knows some of the answers, and perhaps because this album covers not only a huge chunk of our English success record-wise, but also our evolving relationship with Kit as our producer, it is, in my opinion (doubly prejudiced, and tainted

by possible unearned royalties helping to pay for the tactical nuclear missile I am saving up for) the best collection of singles by the Who there is.

It's all our singles, and it includes all our earliest stuff, excluding "I'm The Face" which might be released soon on the Stones label. "I'm The Face" was our very very first record on an English label called Phillips. It was "written" by our then manager Pete Meadon, fashioner of our mod image. He pinched the tune of "Got Love If You Want It" by Slim Harpo and changed the words to fit the groovy group. That is another, even earlier story, which if ever told, would banish Who mystique forever.

"Can't Explain," more than any other track here, turns me on. We still play this on stage, at the moment we open with it. It can't be beat for straightforward Kink copying. There is little to say about how I wrote this. It came out of the top of my head when I was 18 and a half. It seems to be about the frustrations of a young person who is so incoherent and uneducated that he can't state his case to the bourgeois intellectual blah blah blah. Or, of course, it might be about drugs.

"Anyway, Anyhow, Anywhere," our second record, was written mainly by myself, but those were political days in late '64. Or was it '65? Roger helped a lot with the final arrangement and got half the credit. Something he does today for nothing, bless him. I was laying on my mattress on the floor listening to a Charlie Parker record when I thought up the title. (It's usually title first with me.) I just felt the guy was so free when he was playing. He was a soul without a body, riding, flying, on music. Listening to the compulsory Dizzy Gillespie solo after one by Bird was always a come-down, however clever Gillespie was. No one could follow Bird. Hendrix must have been his reincarnation especially for guitar players. The freedom suggested by the title became restricted by the aggression of our tightly defined image when I came to write the words. In fact, Roger was really a hard nut then, and he changed quite a few words himself to toughen the song up to suit his temperament. It is the most excitingly pig-headed of our songs. It's blatant, proud and – dare I say it – sassy.

Musically it was a step forward. On "Can't Explain" we had been fully manipulated in the studio, the like of which hasn't been seen since (aside from my dastardly treatment of Thunderclap Newman). Jimmy Page played rhythm on the A side and lead on the B, "Bald Headed Woman." He nearly played lead on the A, but it was so simple even I could play it. The Beverly sisters were brought in to sing backing voices and Keith has done poor imitations on stage ever since. "Can't explaaaaain," he screams, hurling drumsticks at the sound man who turns the mike off because he thinks it's feeding back.

"Anyway" was the first time we encountered the piano playing of Nicky Hopkins, who is a total genius, and likes the Who. He likes John Lennon too and a lot of other people who give him work. A lot of bands breathed a sigh of relief when he and his missus showed their weary cheery faces in England again this summer. We did, and so on. He's still working.

Kit Lambert described "Anyway, Anyhow, Anywhere" to reporters as, "A pop art record, containing pop art music. The sounds of war and chaos and frustration expressed musically

without the use of sound effects.” A bored and then cynical Nick Cohn – Christ he was even more cynical than me – said calmly, “That’s impressionism, not pop art.” I repeated what Kit had briefed me to say, mumbling something about Peter Blake and Lichtenstein and went red. Completely out of order while your record is screaming in the background: “I can go anyway, way I choose, I can live anyhow, win or lose, I can go anywhere, for something new. Anyway anyhow anywhere.”

Then we released “My Generation.” The hymn. The patriotic song they sing at Who football matches. I could say a lot about this, I suppose I should say what hasn’t been said, but a lot of what has been said is so hilarious. I wrote it as a throwaway, naturally. It was a talking blues thing of the “Talking New York” ilk. This one had come from a crop of songs which I was, by then, writing using a tape recorder. Kit Lambert had bought me two good quality tape decks and suggested I do this, it appealed to me as I had always attempted it using lesser machines and been encouraged by results. But when you sit down and think what to play, it’s a little hard. The whole point is that blues patterns, the ones groups use to jam with one another, are somehow the only thing forthcoming when you are gazing at a dial and thinking mainly of how good it’s going to be to play this to Beryl and proudly say, “I played all the instruments on this myself.” All the instruments being guitar, guitar, bass guitar and maracas.

Anyway, ensconced in my Belgravia two-room tape recorder and hi-fi showroom, I proceeded to enjoy myself writing ditties with which I could later amuse myself over-dubbing, multitracking and adding extra parts. It was the way I practiced. I learnt to play with myself. Masturbation comes to mind and as a concept making demos is not far off. “Generation” was then praised by Chris Stamp, our “other” manager, who was worshipped only as a source of money from his ever active roles as assistant director in various film epics. He was convinced it could be the biggest Who record yet. Bearing in mind the state of the demo it shows an astuteness beyond the call. It sounded like (I still of course have it) Jimmy Reed at ten years old suffering from nervous indigestion.

Kit made suggestion after suggestion to improve the song. He later said that it was because he was unsure of it. I went on to make two more demos in my den of magnetic iniquity, the first introduced the stutter. The second several key changes, pinched, again, from the Kinks. From then on we knew we had it. I even caught a real stutter which I only lost recently.

Over the period of rewriting I realized that spontaneous words that come out of the top of your head are always the best. I had written the lines of “Generation” without thinking, hurrying them, scribbling on a piece of paper in the back of a car. For years I’ve had to live by them, waiting for the day someone says, “I thought you said you hoped you’d die when you got old in that song. Well, you are old. What now?” Of course most people are too polite to say that sort of thing to a dying pop star. I say it often to myself. The hypocrisy of accusing hypocrites of being hypocritical is highly hypocritical. See the new Lennon album. See “My Generation.”

It’s understandable to me, perhaps not to you, that I can only think of inconsequentially detrimental things to say about the emergence of lyrics from my various bodily orifices.

“Substitute,” for example, was written as a spoof of “Nineteenth Nervous Breakdown.” On the demo I sang with an affected Jagger-like accent which Kit obviously liked, as he suggested the song as a follow-up to “Generation.” The lyric has come to be the most quoted Who lyric ever, it somehow goes to show that the “trust the art, not the artist” tag that people put on Dylan’s silence about his work could be a good idea. To me, “Mighty Quinn” is about the five Perfect Masters of the age, the best of all being Meher Baba of course, to Dylan it’s probably about gardening, or the joys of placing dog shit in the garbage to foul up Alan J. Weberman. “Substitute” makes me recall writing a song to fit a clever and rhythmic sounding title. A play on words. Again it could mean a lot more to me now than it did when I wrote it. If I told you what it meant to me now, you’d think I take myself too seriously.

The stock, down-beat riff used in the verses I pinched from a record played to me in “Blind Date,” a feature in Melody Maker. It was by a group who later wrote to thank me for saying nice things about their record in the feature. The article is set up so that pop stars hear other people’s records without knowing who they are by. They say terrible things about their best mates’ latest and it all makes the pop scene even snottier and more competitive. Great. The record I said nice things about wasn’t a hit, despite an electrifying riff. I pinched it. We did it, you bought it.

“The Kids Are Alright” wasn’t a single in England; it was in the States. Funnily enough, this broke really well in Detroit, an area where both Decca records and the local community were a little more hip to the Who than they were elsewhere. Detroit, or at least Ann Arbor, was the first place in the States we played after New York.

There are a few cuts on this album that are good because they are as simple as nursery rhymes. “Legal Matter,” for example, is about a guy on the run from a chick about to pin him down for breach of promise. What this song was screaming from behind lines like, “It’s a legal matter baby, marrying’s no fun, it’s a legal matter baby, you got me on the run,” was “I’m lonely, I’m hungry, and the bed needs making.” I wanted a maid I suppose. It’s a terrible feeling, like an eligible bachelor but with no women seeming to agree with you. “Pinball Wizard” is, quite simply, quite pimply, from Tommy. It’s my favorite song on the album and was actually written as a ploy to get Nick Cohn, who is an avid pinball player to be a little more receptive to my plans for a Rock Opera. Nick writes on and off for New York Times. I know which side my Aronowitz is buttered, mate!

From the superb production of ‘Pinball’ it is hard to imagine that anything produced by Kit Lambert with the Who before “Pinball” could stand up. There are two songs that do. “Pictures of Lily” just jells perfectly somehow. Merely a ditty about masturbation and the importance of it to a young man. I was really digging at my folks who, when catching me at it, would talk in loud voices in the corridor outside my room. “Why can’t he go with girls like other boys.” The real production masterpiece in the Who/Lambert coalition was, of course, “I Can See For Miles.” The version here is not the mono, which is a pity because the mono makes the stereo sound like the Carpenters. We cut the track in London at CBS studios and brought the tapes to Gold Star studios in Hollywood to mix and master them. Gold Star have the nicest sounding echo in the

world. And there is just a little of that on the mono. Plus, a touch of homemade compressor in Gold Star's cutting room. I swoon when I hear the sound. The words, which aging senators have called "Drug Orientated," are about a jealous man with exceptionally good eyesight. Honest.

Two of the tracks here are produced by the Who, not Kit Lambert. One is "Substitute." We made this straight after "Generation" and Kit wasn't really in a position to steam in and produce, that honor being set aside as a future buncce for Robert Stigwood. God forbid. A blonde chap called Chris at Olympic studios got the sound, set up a kinky echo, did the mix etc. I looked on and have taken the credit whenever the opportunity has presented itself ever since. Keith can't even remember doing the session, incidentally, a clue to his condition around that period. The other Who-produced cut was "The Seeker." "The Seeker" is just one of those odd Who records. I suppose I like this least of all the stuff. It suffered from being the first thing we did after Tommy, and also from being recorded a few too many times. We did it once at my home studio, then at IBC where we normally worked then with Kit Lambert producing. Then Kit had a tooth pulled, breaking his jaw, and we did it ourselves. The results are impressive. It sounded great in the mosquito-ridden swamp I made it up in – Florida at three in the morning drunk out of my brain with Tom Wright and John Wolf. But that's always where the trouble starts, in the swamp. The alligator turned into an elephant and finally stampeded itself to death on stages around England. I don't think we even got to play it in the States.

The only non Townshend track on the album is also a non single. Politics or my own shaky vanity might be the reason, but "Boris the Spider" was never released as a single and could have been a hit. It was the most requested song we ever played on stage, and if this really means anything to you guitar players, it was Hendrix's favorite Who song. Which rubbed me up well the wrong way, I can tell you. John introduced us to "Boris" in much the same way as I introduced us to our "Generation": through a tape recorder. We assembled in John's three feet by ten feet bedroom and listened incredulously as the strange and haunting chords emerged. Laced with words about the slightly gruesome death of a spider the song had enough charm to send me back to my pad writing hits furiously. It was a winner, as Harry would say. It still is, for the life of me I don't know why we still don't play it, and the other Entwistle masterpiece, "Heaven and Hell," on the stage anymore. There is no piece for the wicked, John's writing is wicked, his piece here is "Boris."

Of interest to collectors is "I'm a Boy." This is a longer and more relaxed version of the single which was edited and had fancy voices added. The song, of course, is about a boy whose mother dresses him up as a girl and won't let him enjoy all the normal boyish pranks like slitting lizards' tummies and throwing rocks at passing cars. Real Alice Cooper syndrome. Of course Zappa said it all when he wrote his original Rock Opera. Nobody noticed, so he had to write a satire on the one Rock Opera people did notice. "I'm a Boy" was my first attempt at Rock Opera. Of course the subject matter was a little thin, then what of Tommy?

We get right down to the Who nitty gritty with "Magic Bus." Decca Records really smarmed all over this one. Buses painted like Mickey Mouse's first trip. Album covers featuring an unsuspecting Who endorsing it like it was our idea. "Magic Bus" was a bummer. For one thing,

we really like it. It was a gas to record and had a mystical quality to the sound. The first time ever I think that you could hear the room we were recording in when we made it. The words however are garbage, again loaded with heavy drug inference. For example, “thruppence and sixpence every way, trying to get to my baby.” Obviously a hint at the ever rising prices of LSD.

When I wrote “Magic Bus,” LSD wasn’t even invented as far as I knew. Drug songs and veiled references to drugs were not part of the Who image. If you were in the Who and took drugs, you said “I take drugs,” and waited for the fuzz to come. We said it but they never came. We very soon got bored with drugs. No publicity value. Buses, however! Just take another look at Decca’s answer to an overdue Tommy; “The Who, Magic Bus, On Tour.” Great title, swinging presentation. Also a swindle as far as insinuating that the record was live. Bastards. They have lived to regret it, but not delete it. This record is what that record should have been. It’s the Who at their early best. Merely nippers with big noses and small genitals trying to make the front page of the Daily News. Now Peter Max – there’s a guy who knows how to use a bus! They pay him to ride on them.

To wind up, this album is a piece of history that we want you to know about. It’s really a cross-section of our English successes, and when in the States, and we get compared to come and go heavies who, like everyone else, influence us a little, we get paranoid that a lot of American Rock fans haven’t heard this stuff. They might have heard us churn out a bit on the stage, but not the actual cuts. As groups, Cream, Hendrix & Zeppelin etc. have gotten bigger than the Who ever did and a lot quicker. But they don’t have the solid foundation that we have in this album. This album is as much for us as for you, it reminds us who we really are. The Who.