

Guitar

the magazine for all guitarists

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*The Who have recently returned to the music scene with a double-disc set of a double album called *Quadrophenia*. Amazingly, the group have been together for 30 years. Dave Punterford talks about his guitar theory and some of the innovations he brought to rock music.*

The first guitar I ever had was a GI Byrs, bought for me by my grandmother when I was eleven. Then I had one from my mother's antique shop which was a lot better. It was a German-made guitar, good hardware and everything. It lasted quite a long time, but it got pitched in the end. Then I had a very cheap Harmony.

This was before the Who started to go electric.

Yes, when the group began to move I was into Rickenbackers. A lot of our enthusiasm will remember that too. We played them because the Beatles used to play them — that's why I liked them!

You must have listened to someone before the Beatles?

The Shadows. Hank Marvin is still one of my favorite guitarists.

Because of his clean sound?

It was the cleanest sound around, but it still sounded dirty in those days. At first, it sounded mean. I also used to listen to quite a bit of vocal jazz, I liked the Duke Ellington band, especially the boppy sound. I was playing more boppy than, used like the top four strings of a guitar. After that I got into B and B, and people like John Lee Hooker, Jimmy Reed, Lightnin' Hopkins...

Where did you make your first public appearance?

John Entwistle and me, we played together as kids, we begged around from the age of 12, at school. Then we were

▲ Pete with friends, 16 and Mrs Jagger and Keith Moon.

'I don't feel like a guitar player...'

Pete Townshend talks to Tony Jasper

in the real band. I was on banjo and juba on trumpet. Then he started to go on his guitar. It made it, in fact, from banjo of wood, piano strings, things like that. Our first public appearance was at the Congregational Church, Cleveland Road, Kansas. It was known as the Congo Club. That was the first group, me on banjo. Very nervous I was.

Has your developed a guitar style by this time?

Well, I didn't have an amplifier, so there was nothing like feedback. I only really became an innovator in the early days of The Who. '64-'65. You could hardly innovate on a three quid banjo strung up as a guitar.

So how did your distinctive guitar style originate?

When I first got amplified with big speakers, I used to have them at waist level. I could never work out why most people played with them on the floor. I wanted them higher in my technique. So I used to put mine on a great stand so the speaker was actually being into the guitar pick-up direct loud. Feedback started by accident and I started to use it. Simple as that. The more I used it, the better I got.

On a Rickenbacker I can still play a note on feedback — through breaking harmonics and picking up the parallel and feedback — without actually touching the strings, just depending on what angle you turn in.

How does it work?

You're actually shortening the feedback vibration, the actual note of pitch. The distance you are from the speaker affects what partial of the particular note that's feeding back is going to stand out more. Like it might be the root note, or the first or second partial — you even get overtones and quarter notes. You can't get some of them any other way, there are only seven usual parallels you can get them on there — what do you call them? — wind things, wind laws. I think they're called. The wind blows across across twenty strings that are all tuned to A, and you get three strings humming parallel above up, just from the note A. On the guitar, with feedback, you can get all of these, and even things like the leading note. That's a pretty difficult harmonic to get, but you can get it easily with feedback.

When did you start writing the guitar on fire and wrecking the instrument, throwing bits to the audience and all that?

That all came about by accident too. It first happened at the Railway Road, Harrow. I was sure of wrecking the guitar to try to get sound out of it, you know, wringing the neck, banging it on the ceiling and stuff like that. Well, it hit the ceiling and made a hole in it. I thought, that's great! Then as I pulled it out the neck fell off. Rather than look an idiot, I continued to smash it to bits, just to stop people laughing. Then I picked up a Rickenbacker 33-string, after doing as the hearing, and carried on with the act as if nothing had happened. Nobody in the band believed an optical.

So everybody rolled up next week to see me do it again. My friend Barney, who used to promote gigs, and who used to show a flat at the time, put fly-posters up announcing The Great Smashing Stanzas — and it all started being something which was an extension of my playing. Amazing. I occasionally feel now that the necessary, the occasion is much bigger than I am... but it goes straight up just the same.

Do you think your guitar playing has changed over the years?

Yeah, I think I've improved slowly. Though I've never sat down and practised and practised. I've still got a sound that's peculiar to me, you know, dirty and edgy.

Do you adapt your guitars at all to get your sound?

No, not really. I find I can get the sound I want from any guitar. At the moment I'm using Gretsches with double-pick-

pick-ups. In the studio I use a Chet Atkins-type Gretsch. On stage I use the 'Les Paul' Gretsch. It's the same shape as a Les Paul, but it sounds like a Gretsch. Those pickups have a fantastic sound. I think it's mainly the set-up, you know. I've got ampoperated made for me by Hi-Watts. They don't make it any more for the open market, but they do especially for me. They're incredibly robust, very loud, directed in the right way, and clean when I want them to be clean. It's the only common denominator across my sound. I strap guitars around. I use Gretsches, Gibsons and sometimes Fenders, for their strength. I know people like Ronnie Wood had their guitars especially made for them, custom made. Never been moved that way myself. I can get away with anything because the amps are so good.

What's the difference between playing on stage and in the studio?

I'm more abandoned on stage, more liberal. I don't rate my guitar work highly on record. I know what I can do, I know my limitations. I've spent far more time learning to play the piano, operate the synthesizer, drums, learning to play the bloody violin now — all the things that might help me as a guitarist. I don't feel like a guitar player yet so: it's obviously my dream instrument, but honestly enough I compare on the piano or the tape recorder, or even on manuscript.

You never use the guitar as an extra voice in the band?

Well, the way I used to use it was more as a weapon! I've still got a guitarist's guitar in the traditional sense, but I feel it's scarcely an instrument that lends itself incredibly to style, it brings out the personality of the individual who's playing.

Who do you enjoy listening to now?

Over and above everybody, Johnny McLaughlin. He's a fantastic guitar player technically. I enjoy listening to him tremendously. I've heard it rumored that I'm one of his favorite guitarists. That seems incongruous to me because we're world apart, geographically.

I still admire Eric. Sort of pure and unadorned... it rings in a way. There's something about it I really enjoy. Like I enjoy playing rhythm guitar with Eric. I occasionally hear Jeff Beck. I like the distance of his sound. I like listening to Ronnie Wood, Keith Richard and Steve Marriott. I particularly like the Steve Winwood's guitar playing. A lot of people don't know that side of him now.

I used to watch Hendrix whenever I could. He embodied everything that was perfect in behavior and musical virtuosity. I like to remember, remembered that was good about Eric and all that was good about my showy acts. Hendrix was showy and aggressive, with no respect for the guitar. He used it as an extension of himself, rather than something to use of polish.

What's it like playing with The Who?

They're not an easy band. The limitations, the traditions, the disciplines are so strict that they're hard to transcend. And it isn't in any way with someone like Keith who doesn't just go on so boorily and predictably. Same with John: he's not a foundation bass player. He's a guy that contributes to the musical structure and decoration. I mean, we're only a three-piece, so you have to play a lot of notes and make a lot of noise to fill in the sound picture. Consequently, I don't think much of jamming. If ever you see Keith and juba jamming at a club, you can see your hands they're taking the piss out of somebody. The last jamming I ever did was with a band called the Double Brothers, for a couple of hours or so. But they're all sensitive. I was just incorporated with them. But bands which rise on the spur of the moment and jam are not my scene. I'm just not keen on playing with another group — we've got enough problems of our own, thank you. ■