

# JOHN ENTWISTLE POURS IT ALL OUT

The following discussion and incidents took place in Seattle during the recent Who tour of the Pacific Northwest. We joined John Entwistle and Who manager Bill Curbishley in a bar; they and discussed the Who's for several hours. The conversations were included here abridged at their respective discretion.

**Bill Curbishley**, totally responsible for running Who tours, obviously enjoys his job. His manner is relaxed and he seems able to fill his role without the tension and worry that are usually an unavoidable result of managing the affairs of a top rock group. If anything, his fresh enthusiasm for promoting the Who would seem more appropriate for the manager of a protest act. It's clear that he feels the band is not supported nearly as much as it deserves, particularly by its US record company, MCA.

**John Entwistle** ("I'm 38 in my opinion") could write lines for Blindly Alton songs. His over-praised and in any but a figurative, He is an expert about discussing Who history as on any other topic. John's answers were terse though not unduly brief beyond simple responses, including phrases like "no" and "no one asked you."

As our conversation John's mood, by all accounts, was an interesting cross and through him it is obvious from his forthcoming book. It was a combination of John's lively, the Who's light-colored band, creating a scene for the city in a surprise act with a big "I" for "Loser Man." The drawing was a delight, but it was John's gesture of sharing it with us.

The interview begins, for some background on current Who activities, with Bill Curbishley.



Interview by Ed Hanel and Joe Corbett

**TP:** Is there anything about the recent European releases, *The Story of the Who*, you would like to tell us?

**BC:** Well, it's an important release for a lot of reasons. The Who have been getting ripped off by prior management and record companies. I was asked by the Who to become their manager and put together the album. I've been with them for a long time and was a "Go to" as you call them. I took them over I wanted to make them what they should be—the world's greatest rock band. They were already that but they didn't get the credit or the recognition they deserve. *The Story of the Who* is an attempt to finally package the Who as they should be packaged. That was the idea but there were problems, of course. I didn't want the royalties to go to anyone except to the people who created the music—the Who. So we took it out that actually taking to the band and put them together. They are not the 26 I would say are the Who's best and they are not all my favorites, but at least this is an album where the Who will be the ones to get the profits instead of someone else. The album is going to make it in England probably is quickly did—[Ed] because we will get the support we deserve from Polygram.

**TP:** Any single?

**BC:** Yes, a four single. Every band in England today is doing a cover of "Sabat-

ine," so we figured why not re-release the original which is a much stronger version. "You're a Boy" and "I'm a Boy" are also on it. A limited, initial release will be printed on a 12-inch record for maximum sound quality.

**TP:** What is the story with the release of "My God" it received so much attention.

**BC:** That's an example of one problem with MCA. I, the Who, didn't want it released. It was too long a time after *The Who by Numbers*. But MCA claimed a release was necessary to honor the LP's sales. When it did get released it should have been processed, but there was nothing.

**TP:** The edited version also makes a mess of Tompkins's work.

**BC:** Well, it didn't even make the charts.

**TP:** After the break with Talley didn't the group negotiate a contract to avoid this sort of thing?

**BC:** The problem is getting proper advice. That's difficult. At one point the Who had a 12-record contract with Decca. That was renegotiated to an eight-record deal with MCA. Quadrophonic records for two and CBS and then and by Numbers make a total of four or five. From our view, it seems we owe our lives to the recording industry.

**TP:** Aren't the early contracts explained by the fact that a young band has very little negotiating power—sign here or you don't record.?

**BC:** That is the case and it is unfortunate also because the company is taking a big risk. But once a group establishes itself, I think that the company and the artist should re-examine their positions and find a position that is equitable to both.

**TP:** CBS and both were paid but now it's unclear. Any comment?

**BC:** That is just explained by the nature of the record—a collection of little tracks. However with proper promotion I think the album would have done better.

**TP:** Perhaps part of the problem is that MCA retains some of the old Decca image of poverty, not a rock label.

**BC:** That could be. I do think a major part of our promotion comes from the band who think that anything else I mean, MCA doesn't even promote [Don't like].

**TP:** What about the next Who album?

**BC:** I can't say too much—everything is tentative right now. It should be a live [The Tompkins] concept LP. The idea is tentative and possibly involves a movie as well. We have 50 minutes of video in the can going back to Manchester days.

**TP:** Is it fair to compare this with the "Sabbath" period?

**BC:** I think that is a good comparison. It should be a double album. But if things don't come together we will release it as a single LP.

**TP:** When can we expect it?

**BC:** The band is tentatively scheduled to go into the studio in January. So shortly after that—early spring.

Doodling with the Os;  
Who tour manager Bill Curbishley also speaks

The opening spots with John covered several subjects not included in the following interviews. Because of their interest to *W&A* and *Go* fans, they are summarized here.

**Q:** We started off by showing John several old asks for *W&A* singles from 1988-1991. "That's not my 'jam lineup,'" John stated as he looked at the pictures for "I'm a Boy" and "Mystery Juice." "God, did I really look like that? I joined the group just a bit back. They had somebody else in the group back then... had to be." John's amusement became self-critical when we showed him some pictures from the late tour in Hawaii. "I'm already overweight." It was obviously of concern to him because he said that some weight in the right places, looking extremely fit and about 24 pounds lighter.

**Q:** We asked John about Frank Frazetta and what had happened to the project for either a movie or a book. He felt the original idea was excellent but that the music was lost in the movie. Dissatisfied in the production of the album, he would rather forget the whole project. However, the discussion led to an investment insight as to how John works on his solo LPs. John showed his producers, i.e. the individual who primarily deals with the mechanics to play with Frazetta. Except for Matt King, John feels the arrangement that worked best well. As for an future solo efforts are commercial, John hinted "before the end of next year," and informed us that with his other projects he is not working as much as before. John examined the notion that one or two Frazetta songs per album LP is more than satisfactory to him. "We talk and we talk until I finally come up with something."

**Q:** As some *W&A* Frank fans, *Beatles* did not play on the UK single, "The Last Time." "Under My Thumb." Most concerts in America at the time as his bandmates, but according to John, he and Allison were on a cruise ship in the middle of the Atlantic heading for New York. The *W&A* were concerned about releasing the single without his knowledge. So he was rescued from his bed in the middle of the night, asking whatever you does on a honeymoon, to go to the ship's radio station. There he received a radio announcement for his permission to release the set without his fans. John couldn't believe that anyone would think he was the last to be concerned with such things and assumed that the *W&A* could have anyone they wanted to play him.

**Q:** In discussing *Quadruplets*, John explained that despite all the audience calls for *The Jimmy*, the *W&A* were not interested in performing any sets from the LP. Although the reason was that the background songs proved to be too confusing, John took exception. "Tim and Roger found themselves extremely limited in what they could play or sing. But I was able to stretch out during the hours. Actually *Quad* was a challenge for me. I was the only one who had some freedom to play some songs."

**Q:** Finally, for those keeping count of the number of John's guitars, "I have 97. Don't quote me because when the tour's over, I'll have over a hundred."

well. Her father had died when she was about seven.

**Q:** What the band name of Daltry's first marriage?

**A:** We know he was married and we know what he got a divorce. But it wasn't talked about because it was his business really and not ours.

**Q:** That's interesting, because women often seem to cause disunion in bands for whatever the reason. At least that's how it appears. Yoko-Ono, Linda-Lanman, Cher, Brit, but you keep a very separate private life and can still be the *W&A*.

**A:** Yeah, I don't know how we've done it actually.

**Q:** Maybe that's the only answer.  
**Q:** What for instance. We get very few who have married my band. When they come up I usually thank 'em anyway. The wife/husband leaves me alone - that's probably because they think I practice their religion and stuff. They think I'll put a curse on 'em.

**Q:** Your French horn is not featured much any more. At one point you even played it onstage, didn't you?

**A:** No, it was never played on stage. I did once a couple of times on "Top of the Pops" in England. Roughly speaking, once it was in a tube just ("California and Strangely"). I don't know why I missed on a French horn. Horns don't get "amps," it was actually the only brass instrument the tubes I owned. So, when I left school I had to get the horn back to the school band and I didn't actually use one until I could afford to take out an HP agreement. I didn't have a French horn for about three and a half years after I left school. Once you stop playing French horn it is very difficult to pick it up. It's one of those three-to-five hours of practice, every

**Q:** You are working on a cartoon/book. How is it progressing?

**A:** Well, according to the *Island Review*, I am supposed to be drawing it on the set now, you see, so it's going very well. I'm drawing books up, rolling the eyes, an' stuff like.

**Q:** Will it be released in the country as well as England?

**A:** Oh, yeah. I should imagine roughly the same time as the next *W&A* album. We will try to get it out there.

**Q:** What are the contents?

**A:** It starts off with some imaginary answers of the band's members. Each answer has a little bit of the character of one of the group. I have about four sections by each one of us. Completely imaginary, of course. There have nothing to do with my real intentions. The names have been changed to protect the guilty. There is gone into the history of the *W&A*, written from my point of view; then when I first started playing going all the way through to when I met the rest of the band.

**Q:** Is there any particular viewpoint of John/Strawberry on how he views the *W&A*?

**A:** Perhaps I should say no. "From my point of view" but rather that I'll be doing the history in the first person. I'm talking about my side of the history. I suppose I've known Strawberry for 20 years now, playing with him for 20 years now, on and off

The book will follow that.

**Q:** How is it that the group has been able to create a myth that is separate from the four individual members? All of you have seemed to keep your private lives very personal, except for a little opening up about the *Tommy* film.

**A:** I don't know. When we first started out, before we were all married, we used to do the interviews, the photo sessions, go out every night, and so on. It didn't particularly matter because our private life was public. And when we did get married we cut ourselves off from the fans and we kept them going as two completely separate things.

**Q:** Don't you view that as unique among rock bands?

**A:** No, I think we're lucky to have succeeded in marrying to do it. I guess a lot of people have tried and it hasn't worked out.

**Q:** Either the same authors or the personal relationship suffered?

**A:** In my case, my wife knew me before even the *W&A* began. I suppose I had been playing the guitar for almost six months when I first met her. So she knew what she was getting into and she goes up with it. She was about 18 and I did my first gig when I was about 27.

**Q:** "Tommy's Coming" was written by and about Allison, wasn't it?

**A:** Yeah, but I put in a father figure as



single day, instruments to keep your pitch in.

**TP:** Is your French horn on Quadricord?

**B:** Actually that's a mellotron. It sounds like a French horn. The thing about French horns is you have such a tiny mouthpiece, there's about 18 notes you can get without moving any keys down. The notes go so close together harmonically, you have to be able to sing the note in your head before you play it. If you play just a slight bit off you get a split tone or a note that isn't pure. With a trumpet you just press the valves down and the notes come automatically. The French horn is a kind of singing-playing instrument and it's very easy to lose the ability to play it. I still own a couple of French horns and I still play on an occasional afternoon. But I play fewer. It's gotten much easier to play French horns here on the mellotron.

**TP:** What kind of instrument is it?

**B:** It's like a marching French horn, it's a straightened-out version with valves. It's supposed to be a hybrid between the trumpet and the trombone. What it really looks like is that you can make it sound like a French horn.

**TP:** The first song on which the French horn appears is "Instant Party" on the US Convention album. Is the single "Cinder" a different take or a different mix?

**B:** Those are different mixes of the same take. The version without the French horn on "Ready Made" was a result of the hassles we had with our first producer, Mad Talamo. He said we couldn't use the tapes with the horns. The same change to "Cinder" was just an attempt to get away with putting it out as a B-side to a single... "Individual," I think it was. But what happened was that eventually Talamo's intention prevailed as far as recording is all. He was through a song from Brother Simpson and that was "Walk for a Mile." Mad then knew we liked the Graham Bond Organization plus that we saw many earlier than both Ginger Baker and Jack Brack play on it. Talamo was the biggest and so far as I know up in Tammy he was entitled to 74 of our recordings.

**TP:** Working in your wife's career, which album do you like best?

**B:** I think "White System." I really liked Roger Miller. So in his last book on the life of the album, "White System" is the most interesting. Roger Miller is better myself.

**TP:** Did you get the musicians together?

**B:** That was John Almond's work.

**TP:** With Peter Francioso lead.

**B:** Yeah. He did all those solos in a day. We'd fall asleep in a sitting. There we'd say "Time for another solo," and we would get him up to do it. He'd have a brand of mine once he gets back to the bed.

**TP:** You're glad you finally making it?

**B:** Yeah, maybe I even have a couple lines for 200 pounds I owe him for doing my album. He keeps on mentioning it every time I see him.

**TP:** What is the problem with singles for John? Individual? You don't seem to get any promotion.

**B:** I think MCA was worried that if any



individual musician had a hit solo album it might break the group up because we were going through a sticky time in our relationship. That's why Roger came over to do a live gig and some promotion for "Side a Right Horse." He wanted to make sure the album was put out.

**TP:** We discussed the problems you had in making Mad Dog. Do you think it was overproduced?

**B:** As far as my way of writing was concerned, it was seriously overproduced. It cost something like \$600,000 to make it, which is far too much money. Additionally, the staff just didn't sound right... Maybe if I had put my own brass section in the album would have been a lot easier to do. But the way it worked out we hired a brass section. That translates to them but I wanted it to sound and I just got too lazy. I probably wrote simple, straight block chord brass parts. I like brass parts with some impact. I don't like word, leading, church and preacher.

**TP:** It's my bad because some of the things like "Call Black Man" had great potential—were so effective.

**B:** The backing track was a lot better on that. It didn't have anything. Most of the songs didn't have anything to start with and we started overproducing. The backing track on "Black Man" didn't fit. The main problem I have on my album is that I'm leading the band. I don't really get a chance to play it down. One part is opposed to something like "Success Story" where there isn't really a lead guitar at all, it's all singing lines and background.

**TP:** Do you still play covering bands? You were trying to develop it as a lead instrument.

**B:** I've started writing a lot on right-hand bass. There's a four-string bass string in between like a 12-string guitar. And I want to start using it on stage. As far as the six-string bass goes, something very strange happens to the top two strings. The sound completely changes. It could sort out the string problems, then obviously it would be quite nice to work.

**TP:** Before we get into this live tax, we have a last question about Mad Dog.

What's the significance of the poster?

**B:** It's just a joke. I always wanted to buy a convertible—a Mustang or Bentley—but couldn't find one. Someone asked what I was going to do when I was supposed to be working the shops. I said I'd stick three in the back seat and just giggle and fly things to them. I just followed it through. I got the Cadillac, which, by the way, is the one used in the "Money" movie. That's my other chauffeur, Roger and Ann-Margret.

**TP:** Have you ever thought of playing regular guitar?

**B:** No, I prefer to stick to bass. I really don't think the right string is the answer. The one I forgot would be a seven-string bass. It's an Olympic. I've got a Kalamazooker but it's not nearly as good. The strings are far enough apart so I can play just the upper strings. I want but they're close enough to get that wackering sound when I want that. The seven bass has a two octave finger board—like all Olympics—so I can go high low.

**TP:** Do you play any keyboard?

**B:** Other piano stuff and I've got a synthesizer I play around with, all one-note stuff. The thing takes five hours to set up so it's not suitable for developing any skill.

**TP:** Do you have any comments on your solo tour in 1992?

**B:** Well, it cost me a lot. I lost about \$20,000. But it was worthwhile to me. It gave me a sense of self-confidence. I had to make the arrangements, play the lead, and sing. I learned a lot about my voice and my capabilities. If I had to do it over, I probably would. There were problems in the way of a slight conflict between myself and my lead guitarist (Richard Johnson). I hate the guy! It never play with him again. But all in all I learned a lot. To read all your next question, there are no more dates planned for another year, but it's on my mind.

**TP:** What is it like when Peter calls up and says, "We're going on tour?"

**B:** Well, it doesn't happen that way. Peter doesn't decide that. We talk things ourselves and say, "Maybe we should go at your same time," and our manager keeps

reminding us until we do. My wife hates me going on tour. But I think she would also hate me to stop home and never go on tour because I'd be totally unadaptable. I don't particularly like confiding or phone sessions, interviews, that sort of thing. The only thing I stay in the business for is playing to audiences. That's where I play best. If I'm not on tour within six months, I start getting extremely restless. My wife understands I need to go on tour.

TP: After the "Tommy" tour, Davey said it was time to get the band back on the road, that the Who was going to tour frequently. You've been here in Seattle twice in one year. Are you going to keep up this type of schedule?

B: Well, a couple of members—Pete and Roger—mean touring for only up to three weeks at a time. I don't mind touring for six weeks, two months. I enjoy touring and so does Keith. However, touring depends on each member deciding whether he wants to go or not.

TP: What do you think about the Who's performance as they are today? It is sometimes suggested that Pete is tired of playing in front of audiences, for example.

B: An overtime I think that was true, but not any more. I think Pete was going on stage and finding himself playing just as he did a few years before with no progression. After the tour he just got on stage and we all started sweating. We could remember how to play and how we used to be. But we hadn't developed at all. In fact after we started recording *My Generation*, we realized we were not playing well together. So we just booked ourselves a rehearsal studio and jammed the three days. We would show up and just play in. We found we could play even better together. That's what changed my mind to go back and record the album. In the six days we played every weekend and we'd only practice if we had a new song to put into the show. But we can't do that, not after not seeing each other for five months.

TP: A question you answered the other day was if you had favorite Who cut.

B: What did I say?

TP: "Pictures of Lily."

B: Yeah, I think it is. It's the one I've been the least, so it's my favorite.

TP: Is there any Who LP you prefer?

B: That varies; the best on *Quadrophenia* is well mixed, and well played. I might add *Tommy*. I think I like listening to the live one the most. I don't remember any points in the recording of it. It's recorded live almost, one at Leeds, one complete one. The other one didn't have a live part because the mike broke, so we had to use the Leeds take. I like the album because if you hear the balance controls all the way over to the left, you can hear the bass. You can turn it the other way if you don't want to hear me [grinning]. We were going to put out another live album but it was basically the same set as the first one. The only track which would have carried the album was "Subd. Don't You Do It." That originally got released on a Radio 1st "Top Ten" tape.

Generally, I don't like listening to live albums. I don't like audience screaming and all that. We purposely cut our audience out so that there wouldn't be a strong feeling and there a large roar. Usually it sends people running to the front to change the record.

TP: How do you view Pete Townshend's role in the Who? Jimmy Page, in a recent interview, says he is dynamic and the one of you are his robots, or something to that effect.

B: I know that a lot of people think that most of the decisions in the band are made exclusively by Pete Townshend. He's the main writer obviously, but the rest are all collectively. We haven't got a leader. If anyone tried to pull that role, we'd have broken up a century ago. We've been making our own decisions for as long as we'd mean, it's true that if Pete didn't want to do a show we wouldn't do it, but that's also true if I didn't want to do a gig.

TP: Are you much of a Who history buff?

B: Yes, sort of. My grandmother used to cut out every article she could find about us. I've carried on since she died. I've got

charts and drawers full of stuff. Some time when I get a pile off I'll arrange it. By the way, good pictures are hard to come by. I need pictures of different angles or special effects to give ideas for theoretical books.

TP: We also wanted to ask about "Karl" on *The Who Sell Out*. It is possible to get the lyrics to "Karl"?

B: I don't know. I do remember the lyrics but not that far back in time. Our early producers had no idea of how a song just could be used. I was supposed to write an "accompaniment." Actually there were two different versions of "Karl." We did one version in New York with Al Kooper playing organ. The take was left in the studio overnight. When we came back the next day, part of the tape was blank. It was returned to London and recorded the version on the LP.

TP: A couple of quick questions. Why did Roger change from lead guitar to vocals in the *Outrigger*?

B: He was a doctrinal worker. He made with cut up so often he couldn't play. So I let him sing.

TP: Did you play with Pete in the *Scriptures* (see *Outrigger*)?

B: Yeah, I did. In fact I just had dinner a bit back with the drummer of the old *Scriptures*. He works with Tony now. When I look at my old school mates, I think, "Geez, I'm so old as they get." All the kids who used to play with thick jerseys and clean out their teeth during school lessons and get expelled are now hard to recognize. It's incredible.

TP: Speaking of bands, do you plan to relocate here in the US for tax reasons?

B: No, not now. My friends and family all live in England. I would save only about eight to ten per cent by moving to America. At 12 to 14 per cent I might change my mind.

TP: Do you ever think of what your life would be like today if you had continued working for the *Island* *Business* Service?

B: I will do some odd and ends for them.

TP: You do?

B: Yeah, I pay them once a year.