

SPOKESMAN SEEKS GENERATION



"I'm not in tune with the times – I'm in tune with my generation. It might be I've lost touch with them as well." Pete Townshend meets a recent recruit to the Twickenham rock fraternity, Cass Browne of The Senseless Things. By Sally Margaret Joy

TWICKENHAM, RICHMOND, EALING, CHISWICK, KING CROSS? Sorry, you'll find more "rockers" per leafy square metre here than anywhere else outside California. In West London teenagers, my gang were smugly conscious of, and yet blending with, seven for, our rock legends. We were tentatively blasé about hanging out at the town-dormitiously-Casby in Richmond, where The Rolling Stones had once played. We made jokes about steering wheels being polystyrene out of control whenever we drove past Marylebone's wine in Barnes. Crucially, we'd perform "rockers" – a guitar solo (slouching your left hand to your crotch) and wriggling your fingers while looking as though you were about to sneeze) whenever we passed by poor Peter Green on the turnpike at Kew.

But we were never ever truly about Pete Townshend. His and his songs were so sacred and angry and devoid of sexual content (or "atmosphere" as we called it), that even in the early '70s he was the perfect hero for righteous teenagers. In the school holidays, groups of us would congregate on the river at a quiet opposite Ted The Island. Perched precariously on the railings, we had a good vantage point of the tall, brown, rectangular building that Pete lived in.

"Do you know he's in [SHOUTING] the wife's coming out?" And we'd all stare at the woman with long, straight dark hair, as she strolls off with the Townshend daughters. She looked purposeful, small-conscious and beautiful, and we were merely horrible, unadvised creatures of pet indolence and sex, listening on as ice cream vans.

Our other sacred Pete moment was his arrival by Richmond lock – the studio which, over a decade later, I am standing in today. It's dreary. Myke. Outside is a patch of yellow afternoon with the Thames flowing calmly and greedily through it. Zephyr lifts the leaves of the big trees, and the rustling sound makes you feel deep.

Cass Browne, drummer of The Senseless Things, writes, growing uncontrollably. It's a Twickenham tale when, the local scene being what it is, Pete knows of since he was 11 – even then he was notorious as a rascal who could drink you out of your parents' house and home. Cass is here because Dave kicked the idea of bringing two generations of Twickenham rockers together. I'd heard that Pete was good friends with Cass. As it turns

out, Cass is mates with Pete's daughter Emma, and occasionally sleeps on the Townshend sofa, but the only verbal exchange between them to date has been, Cass: "Hello?" Pete: "Oh."

We're nervous about meeting Pete. I'd heard he can be a bitter, railing git. So it's a delightful shock to meet a calm, open-minded, open-minded and occasionally vulnerable man. Oh, still snared (he's as far with the Internet) and angry (he's as far with what Robert Maribou got up to). But bitter and railing? Where did they get that from? A man whose itinerary for July goes something like: LA, New York, Cornwall, London, Scotland, London, Cornwall, and for the father can't exactly call with any conviction now, can he?

I doubt that our last meeting is exactly scored across his memory. It was 15 years ago outside the Peking Inn in Twickenham when I blocked his station to get a cake for his family. I was in a rage, fully aware that I wanted to spark off a meaningful interchange, but was unable to because I was a smugly fat, a black slater, and he was a mature rock star, calm, tired and, in retrospect, drunk. I was grateful that he was only mildly irritated by me and, notably, did exactly the same of me over meeting today.

Cass and I walk into the leather furniture and begin.

CASS: Do you think intention can be valid music? I think that a lot of what you're doing has been an attempt to communicate with people but, in quite a lot of ways, you're doing it in the '80s. "Heavy" was per cent of the audience is going to be pretty thick", which I do actually agree with, and in that case, who try to appeal to them?

PETE: Your band is unusual because you built for those before you even put a record out. Most bands don't, as they need the media to convince people that their record is valid.

CASS: Possibly. But all of the stuff I've been listening to recently like *Beats*, *Boys*, *Real*, *Two*, *Wish* and *Back*, tend to make good, to-I, under-produced but best recordings which all by word of mouth. That's why I don't believe that censorship of bands, made in terms with as much as people think. There isn't anything released anywhere that you can't get hold of if you try. All the 2+

"I was just happiest being miserable."



The *Freemasons* moment, Peter: "If you don't mind me saying, the way you give the choice is quite extraordinary."

120 *interviews* is where people's life more that it's out there.

PETE: (Deep sigh) Well, maybe. But I do believe in the conspiracy theory. I believe in censorship. I believe in its power that at a certain point you need good editors or to be prepared to live in a world and come to death. And if they don't like the feeling colour of you, they'll bury you.

CASS: Do you take in a lot of media? I thought maybe you wouldn't be able to tolerate all the wittering.

PETE: I read the newspapers, the music papers, mainly magazines, political ones like *The Spectator* and *Private Eye*, *The Economist*, *Time*...

CASS: But if there was no-censorship, then by rights all the information in them is already vetted, thereby making them almost redundant.

PETE: I'm conscious of that. But I still believe interviews are good because you do make contact with living human beings, your audience. Newspapers and editors have their functions and people have a requirement of those functions. And there you find your function as an artist is responding to what the audience is requiring.

CASS: Do you think you have to play to that requirement?

PETE: I try to. Because that's how things were when I started. I'm not in tune with the times. I'm in tune with my generation and one wanting to their best, or I like to think I am. It might be I've had touch with them as well.

I wonder what the function is of music today, hearing you say that you don't want to use the music papers or media or record companies or feel any obligation to the audience.

CASS: The writer Josephine Wintersen also...

PETE: Why are you the critical straightening her?

CASS: Because she's a lesbian and a feminist?

PETE: She's a fucking good writer.

CASS: Anyway, she said exactly that she does feel a responsibility to her audience, and that she feels that, as an artist who's young and not to tear herself away from everything she knew, she feels a moral imperative to show people courage in their lives.

CASS: I know some people do feel a responsibility to earn up people's feelings and communicate and others don't. They're both as valid. I don't feel any obligation to make anything for anyone other than myself. And I think that really, when you were writing for a whole generation, Peter, you were just writ-

ing about how you felt inside yourself.

PETE: That's partly true. I could only write from experience. But in the '60s youth was a new power that demanded we express it. I got it from kids down the Goldhawk Club saying, "You will speak for us!" Well you, in some as I could get out of being, I did. But I'm still very conscious of a group of others, and maybe less or three women, who are between 40 and 50 years old and who are thinking, let's hear it! Your work's still in love with us.

The tradition of the British mind between 40 and 50 is that they think that Mark Krawford, Phil Collins and Eric Clapton are affecting their needs.

CASS: Which have you preferred, being followed - being before of less following your progress - or following, like when you followed Meher Baba?

PETE: Meher, really. I needed to follow Meher Baba because I was out of step with what was happening in London, where everyone thought God was LSD. I never liked it. I liked what I was sometimes, but Meher was only available to follow because we used to have to take three days off at a time because we couldn't eat, read or drink. Right now, I feel I can't eat what I need, and I can't do what other people want me to do, it's do what I want to do. And I don't mean it in an egoistic way.

CASS: That's always the last way. If someone says, "Fuck it! I can't give a damn about anyone else. I'm gonna do my own act," everyone goes, "Yeah! That's what I wanted to hear!" Because that's the emotion that everyone feels.

PETE: But Cass, do you make that important distinction, which is that we're only talking about artistic thought?

CASS: Yeah.

PETE: What emerged from the said analysis was the sense that what was good and you up and what was bad showed you down. Those values suggest that you are the creator of your own morality and that no-one can overrule you something that can help you. And yet, look at *Misobolus Anonymous* where people really can help others. If they are abused and if the people that want the help are able to listen. The problem of the people of my generation is that we still have difficulty in treating our authority flat as all. And I don't mean police and teachers and politicians, but our own poets. If someone offers you a choice of either you look off.

CASS: But is that a generation thing? Doesn't everyone feel like that?

PETE: I find that stuff very difficult. Take someone like Roger Daltry who's been alongside me all my life, lights and friendships all the way. We've done everything that's possible for two men, and if he's concerned for me and says, "Can I give you a bit of advice?" my instinctive thing is to say look and galls him of much better! [Laughs] But I should listen to him. Because, in certain respects, he knows me better than I know myself. And I'll be grateful that the same is true for him. I wish in ways I could tell him certain things that I know he would listen to, because I know I could help him. But then he's got to do what he's got to do and so here I.

Writing in a band, some people listen to others but they're still them. And if they're quiet, they're subordinate. John Entwistle never said anything for 20 years but he was always ready to get in there and undermine. He got louder and louder and in the end you go anarchy, it doesn't matter what the feeling offers, message or sociological thing is, doesn't matter whether it's turned, good or bad - all music has it the best!

How do you feel about working with that sort of stuff in a group? How do you feel your artistic integrity generally?

CASS: We just argue and sometimes we argue for the sake of it. But we're tolerant towards each other. We never feel uncomfortable, and I never did feel so.

PETE: What I'm wanting to do, you're very prescient about the idea that ultimately you should be true to yourself and that suggests there's a...

"I ended up with a real deep streak of familial misogyny."

me! Individual, a walk it means, OK, you play the drums and, if you don't mind my saying, the way you play the drums is quite extraordinary and different to other drummers I hear, and it's very much your way of doing it, but the band must have an artistic idea. Do you find someone offering you advice leads to compromise?

CASB: Well, if you compromise you're satisfied because you know it's cooler than any.

PETE: Whether the result is aesthetic or not!

CASB: If something's unresolvable, then the idea's kicked out. I've honestly never thought about this before.

PETE: We found that it's the thing that's finally undermined my ability to work in a group. I don't believe a group with Daley, because although I expect what he wants to pay-out, I'm willing to compromise, part of me says, "Yes, now is the time for me to go to the public show." To some extent that comes from those pieces of frustration out of years of compromise.

CASB: Don't you ever bounce off people then?

SAH: It seems to me that there are two basic kinds of band personalities. One like The Who, all around us and perhaps growing with the band, and the other much more laid-back and harmonious, the Beatles Things Usually It's got something to do with how the royalties are shared out.

CASB: Clumsy are pretty much right.

SAH: If someone's taking the majority of the money, the frustration will break the band in the end. How do you have LO managed to stay together for so long?

PETE: If you get all the money you get all the control. God! The political running a group. Anyway, I don't want to go on with a band. Yesterday, I spent some time with Roger which is off to LA and Japan with a band - which I have no problems with. I just feel that what I want to do now is indeterminate and that that's quite correct. I've been in this position for quite a long time now, since the band stopped in 1982. I did some concerts for my football club last year and I liked the contacts but I didn't like the response to the record. I felt I'd created a lot of energy, so I've just cancelled my second deal. It's possible to be in that position but I don't know whether it's the right response. But I can almost make mistakes and get away with it, and I've known do whatever I feel is going to give me the most pleasure.

One interesting thing that's happened through my life is that people have got agitated to hear I describe the work I've done as being done by depression, violence, frustration and anger, and misery and self-hatred. Yet I did enjoy it all throughout the years. I don't know whether it was an act or whatever, I was just happy being miserable.

CASB: Listening to the box set, I was aware that there was so much humour there, in all the jingles and in all the comedy in something like Pictures Of Lily, but The Who were always taken very seriously. Nowadays there's no room for bands to get away with that level of humour without being immediately written off.

SAH: I was thinking how weird it was that when I was about 12 or 13, kids would giggle chiefly along to Keith singing Poodle Skat from Tommy, but listening to you now, well, we're talking child abuse here, aren't we?

CASB: He one took a song like that which probably or would assume that it would cause an outbreak of postlephils. Nowadays, every song is held up to close scrutiny and, well, that's why when you hear Go And Hurry by Snop Doggy Doggy, you just think, "This is funny. When I hear someone bumping him off between tracks, that makes me laugh. Everyone knows it isn't real. Hearing a song like Poodle Skat makes me laugh.

PETE: Well, when I wrote Eric's song was written it was looking outrageous to talk about that stuff. I commissioned John Entwistle to write it. He said, "Why don't you write it?" Well, it's how to write all the parent's songs!" I said, "One it actually happened to me and I don't want to do a serious song."

In the Broadway show, it starts off, "You poor wicked uncle Eric," and there's always a tapping of giggles from the audience - to be to, here's the comedy song, we know what to do, we laugh! Then they realize they can't laugh any more because of Quax and others who've rendered the situation made it a big open debate.

SAH: I find the character of Tommy really sympathetic and warty dead, dumb and blind, and a right hard-faced bastard to boot. Yet there must be a

trace of autobiography in such a big work. Is that character part of you?

PETE: Yes. At the time I had the sensation that I was trying to get in touch with my spiritually when all I could do in touch with was what I had naturally, what was good to me, from when I got into, from much money I had, and how popular I was. When I started to write the piece I thought, "What contribute to a metaphor for this feeling of being completely identified with a spiritual person and, why not I did that?" Why I became, you know, I used to sing in the choir and the choir was a choir, or something?

I couldn't get anyone and peace and the LSD thing, individual, dumb and bludge those values. When I got into Michael Bates I realized that I'd been using my mind and my eye to tell myself there wasn't such a thing as spiritually because I'd been afraid of what I might say. After a month I wanted to write about what I'd been and I did Tommy.

SAH: Most bands have songs with "I love my spirituality" as their whole raison d'être. Your songs don't. Your words character tend to be either a put upon man who's lonely but distant, and/or busy coping with the demands of a relationship, or the Acid Queen, the witch who'll do nasty things to you. What do you say to that?

PETE: It seems like analysis.

SAH: Sure.

PETE: I met my wife when I was 18. I started going out with her when I was 19, and I've still married to her now. So I've had this very strong, beautiful, great woman in my life throughout. It gives me a very positive relationship and all the Paul McCartney unbroken.

But I've got a real grievance with my mother who was for her two years when I was four and into dampening with my grandmother. My mum was a good nice mum. She'd always track, got married too young to a handsome musician and was worried that it wouldn't work. She never got over and she was going to go off to Aden. I wouldn't have minded living damaged with my grandmother my mum was real. So I ended up with a real deep streak of hatred.

al energy.

Mum, I really do love women. Anyway, well, what I can't come to grips with is that when I write, I write a bit about that grief and about that mother. And the years is the well old which, maybe even sometimes the mother too, and the woman who's clear but beautiful, beautiful woman who I love, who's certain still very widowed address up for it in her own words and beautiful clothes and speak with her hair done and I like. "My mum is no bad thing because I was so good with her." But because she was a great mother, but because she was beautiful. So I've ended up with a distorted view about what makes a woman's right

women in my life at any particular time.

I chose my wife because she was beautiful, not because she was a good person. I was lucky she turned out to be a good person. I could have done what a lot of men in my position have done and gone through 20 or 30 identical women, constantly in search of the ideal one.

When my parents finally got back together they brought my feeling grandmother with them. So I always had this confused idea of who was in charge. George got all the pity work and my mum got all the glow work. I never thought even considering about to quite a normal, beautiful, but very, very it was too late. I'm not saying it was wrong. It was just complication. The way that I talk to my mother about it now is I say, "Listen mum, don't worry about it. It's been very useful." It's given me an acute view of relationships. I don't really write about relationships, I don't often love to do with it, but when I have to write a serious into play or a story, she might as well be made out of paper-maché. It's terrible. I just can't do it.

CASB: So, what if you reckon on playing again?

PETE: I don't know. You know what my right now? Someone like Neil Young who can get up onstage with a guitar, sit on a stool and just play without meaning. You see a look of his hair moves and it's enough. His nails can work that MTV thing.

SAH: But why can't you just get up there with a guitar?

PETE: My problem is that whenever I stand up with a guitar, I see it helping me out. I feel like Tracy (God, the character in the Alamy Whitehouse Experience (the patron a flippie expression, shows our his behind and waggles it). And I can't go to gigs anymore because I think, "Well, it's a matter time.

CASB: You can do what you want, can't you?

PETE: Well, I know I can do what I want, but I don't want to do that. ■

"You know who I envy right now?"
Neil Young."

1988, Peter Townshend/whoopi on early alternative as not all lady experiment. "When you get into Mike's [Townshend's] hands, using my eye to tell you if there wasn't such a thing as spirituality."

