

QUADROPHENIA

JOHN REED CATCHES THE 5.15 TO BRIGHTON... WELL, THE 6.30, ACTUALLY... TO CELEBRATE THE RETURN OF THE WHO'S MOD MOVIE



"Out of my brain on the train" — a smashed'n'blocked Jimmy catches the 5.15 to Brighton.

Chaos. Utter chaos. Victoria station hasn't seen the like of it since Bowie's notorious hand wave. Hundreds of excited people pushing and shoving, aware that places on the specially-commissioned train to Brighton are rapidly dwindling. Feature Films, the company that's been responsible for repromoting "Quadrophenia," just isn't equipped to deal with this kind of hysteria. Grown men are wearing parkas. Others have even polished their shoes. And all this for a film which is now nearly 18 years old...

By now, anyone currently residing on planet earth must be aware that the Who's critically-acclaimed tale of Jimmy The Mod™ has returned to our cinema screens, having been fully restored — both technically and PR-wise — by Feature Films, whose track record includes an overhaul of that other cult perennial, "Withnail And I." Just in case any Martians are reading, here's the lowdown on a film which is (a) far and away the least superficial film to have been coordinated by a rock band, and (b) the best cinematic account of Yoof Cult-ure ever attempted on this side of the Atlantic.

"Quadrophenia" was the brainchild of the Who's Pete Townshend, who laid the ghost of his mid-60s mod roots in West London to rest by writing a concept double album based around an impressionable teenager. Issued in 1973, it was effectively the Who's follow-up to "Tommy" — and "Quadrophenia", likewise, was transformed from vinyl to film. The concept revolved around the central character of Jimmy, who suffered from the usual teenage angst. And the skill with which director Frank Roddam and actor Phil Daniels portrayed

Jimmy's problems with his employer/girl-friend/mates is what elevates "Quadrophenia" from a nostalgic celebration of a British youth cult into a film which has universal appeal.

The title itself was based on the idea of a four-way split personality — a double dose of schizophrenia, if you will — taking elements from the four Who members. Crap idea? Well, it doesn't really have any bearing on the film, which charts Jimmy's lifestyle in West London, popping pills down the Goldhawk Road and doing the block at the local nightclub as the build-up to the fulcrum of the plot — a bank holiday trip down to Brighton. And that's where Jimmy's dreams come true. He meets the Ace Face. He gets intimate with Lesley Ash up a back alley. And, most important of all, he feels a sense of belonging.

"I ride a G.S. scooter with my hair cut neat/ I wear a wartime coat in the wind and sleet"

Life thereafter is one drawn-out anti-climax for poor Jimmy: Lesley Ash gets off with his best mate; he crashes his beloved Lambretta; and he walks out of his job. The film ends cryptically with him throwing a stolen scooter — and possibly himself — off Beachy Head. It's impossible not to link this self-destructive ending with Townshend's legendary penchant for smashing up his guitar.

Released in autumn 1979, "Quadrophenia" had an enormous impact on a post-punk generation too young to remember the 60s mods. In fact, the film helped to fuel a mod revival, which attracted the universal derision of the



media. Two decades on and the coin has been flipped. Mod, in its broadest sense, has been a buzzword for cool for the last three years — Oasis, scooters, desert boots, neat fringes, Paul Weller, Northern Soul, narrow jeans, Ben Sherman shirts. You know.

In fact, the film's relaunch couldn't have been timed more perfectly. Five years ago, the Who's profile had dropped to an all-time low. Last year, in contrast, the band toured with "Quadrophenia" for the first time, and while the jury is out on whether such a theatrical stage show was really called for, it did introduce Jimmy to a younger generation which doesn't even remember the '79 mod revival, let alone the 60s.

Like most cult classics, "Quadrophenia" enjoyed only modest success on the big screen, making its name instead on video. The film has barely been off the shelf since it was first transferred to the sell-through market in the early 80s, and PolyGram are planning to re-issue the film again next month — suitably upgraded and featuring the extra six-minute ending which was dropped from the original video — after the film has run its course through the cinema.

It's still chaos. The train arrives in Brighton just as the on-board revellers are getting a bit rowdy — and hundreds of local mods, scooterists and sightseers have lined the station to meet us. We disembark to board a fleet of red buses for the short trip to Brighton seaford and the Odeon cinema, accompanied by a fleet of scooters. Drum'n'bass star Goldie is holding court on a top deck, dressed in a parka, while members of the original cast — older but none the wiser, judging by their bemused expressions — posed for photographers, although there's no sign of Sting or Toyah. Oh well.

After such hysteria, the premiere (if you can call it that) has an air of anti-climax. Maybe it's because most of the audience have probably seen "Quadrophenia" a dozen times — though it's still possible to revel in the film's attention to detail and an authenticity that any mohair-suited mod would be proud of, from the high collar acting to the skills of the costume department.

As the credits roll, we stumble across to an afterhours club to hear the spirit of the 90s mod scene courtesy of the DJs from groovy London nightspot Blow Up. Actors mingle with journalists, old mods with teenagers, and for a few short hours, the assembled throng live out the "Quadrophenia" byline — "A Way Of Life". And if that sounds a bit sad, then remember what Jimmy said: "Take it or leave it, my son. Take it. Or leave it".