WHO’S NEXT REVIEW

ABSTRACT
On August 1971, The Who released their fifth studio album Who’s Next by Track and Decca Records. The album was supported by three singles “Won’t Get Fooled Again,” “Baba O’Riley,” and “Behind Blue Eyes”.

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Preface

This review was started on May 29th and completed June 6th of 2017. I bought a vinyl copy of *Who’s Next* at a Goodwill thrift store in Pequannock, New Jersey sometime in early 2016 during my senior year of high school. I believe the album cost me only $2.99. I originally went to another record store in Wayne, New Jersey called Sound Exchange to look for some vinyl. In our unsuccessful search, me and my father drove to Goodwill as afterthought. Looking back, I’m glad we did, had it been any other day and I would have missed the opportunity to get this album at a cheaper price. It was a great bargain. In the following months, I would listen to *Who’s Next* extensively in my record player and even on my way to school through Spotify. What an experience. I haven’t heard a more cohesive and well written project since *Abbey Road*. The sound quality of this record on vinyl surpasses any remaster or re-release I’ve heard from cd’s or digital streams. Without any prior knowledge of the Who, or their background I believe this is an album anyone could listen to and enjoy thoroughly.
Kit Lambert and Chris Stamp were two British filmmakers who set out to make a documentary film about a rock and roll band in the early 1960’s. They set out to look for potential candidates in many parts of West London. At the Railway Hotel in Wealdstone they discovered a group by the name of the High Numbers. The High Numbers was a four-piece band who were heavily influenced by the Mod Culture in England. From the way, they dressed, to the way they spoke, everything about them was the quintessence of British youth. The post-war era teenagers of the 1960’s were different than any other point in history. For the very first time, young men in England could find jobs at the age of sixteen in sheet metal factories, power stations, making them accessible to some form of wealth. Mods were not the clean-cut boys with shaggy hair the Beatles depicted in the early 1960’s. Instead, Mods were composed of working class teenagers, with short hair, who wore military clothing, drove in scooters, and spoke in a vulgar matter. The popular drug of the time was ‘purple hearts’. There were rules to being Mod. Even though they were not explicitly written anywhere, to be a Mod, you had to dress, speak, and even stand a certain way. This is where the band stood. They appealed to Mods because of their aggressiveness onstage. Townshend would smash his guitar, and Moon would kick drums (and even throw them at the audience). Also, inspired by the pop-art scene, they would wear outlandish clothing such as a suit made of the British flag, or have war medals pinned to their shirts.

The two filmmakers took notice of the High Numbers onstage, and immediately decided to film their performances for a potential movie. However, as time went on, Kit Lambert and Chris Stamp decided to abandon the idea of a feature film and instead manage the band. The High Numbers soon became The Who. The members of the band: Roger Daltrey, Keith Moon, Pete Townshend and John Entwhistle all relied on the two to make them successful, even though they had never managed a band before. None of them thought the group would be last for more than three years. At that point no rock and roll band did. Even the Beatles were expected to fail, after their huge success in 1963, by 1965 the big question in everybody’s mind was: when is the bubble going to burst? Lambert, an avid listener of classical music and a member of the upper class, taught The Who all about the opulent lifestyle. Especially to the lead guitarist and songwriter, Pete Townshend. Lambert knew that it was important to sort of nurture Pete more than the others, so that he can have a sense of leadership being the one who writes all the songs. They sought the help of Shel Tammy, a famous American record producer who had made hits with other British groups such as the Kinks and made them big in America. The Who’s first single ‘I Can’t Explain’ was released in January of 1965. For the next five years Lambert and Stamp would go on to manage the band through all their endeavors.
Tommy: The Myths, The Music, The Mud

By 1969, The Who were distancing themselves from the guidance of Lambert and Stamp. The Mod movement of West London was dead. After the Who performed in the Woodstock Festival in August of 1969, they had finally won over the American audience. Many British groups attempted to invade America much like the Beatles did in ‘63 and although there were many who did, not all of them transitioned well into the 1970’s. Some bands were just novelty acts without the creative drive and ability to change they could not survive long enough. The Who attended the Woodstock Festival to perform their new album Tommy. While many were impressed by the live show, it was not until the film about Woodstock came out a few months later that all of America would be able to see The Who’s performance onstage.

Pete Townshend once said that Tommy was the turning point for the band. Everything after that was either pre-Tommy or the post-Tommy era. The Who gained worldwide success for their live performances of Tommy in its entirety between January of 1969 up until December of 1970. The last live performance for the 1970 tour was at The Roundhouse, London on December 20th. Townshend said to the audience: “This is the very last time we'll play Tommy on stage”, to which Keith Moon promptly cried, “Thank Christ for that!” By late 1970 The Who were constantly on tour, and as opposed to releasing a studio album like they do every year, they decided to push for a live record. Thus, Live At Leeds was the result. The Who played in Leeds University during Valentine’s Day of 1970 and released their performance on vinyl later that May. The album was given much praise from the critics, as their capabilities of performing was brought to the public domain in an official release. While on the road, Townshend miraculously found time to write new music for their upcoming album which would be titled LifeHouse, another concept album with a different story from Tommy. But after unsuccessful attempts to record this new album in New York’s Record Plant Studios, the band grew tiresome of recording in the states and flew back to England in 1971 to record with engineer Glyn Johns on what would be Who’s Next.

The Music Must Change

The first song on the album starts unlike any other previous record of the early 70’s. For the first time, Townshend implements new instruments to band’s catalogue. Electric organs and synthesizers. Instruments that would become much popular in the late 1970’s and dominate the mainstream radio. The use of synthesizers in fact got so heavy, that some rock and roll bands refused to use them to reach a

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1 Many of the Who’s live performances were recorded by concert goers and then released as unofficial bootleg recordings. To stop the bootlegging, the band put out their own recording which is now known as Live at Leeds

2 Glyn John’s work on Who’s Next would spark a collaborative partnership between him and the band. He would later produce three full albums with the Who and many solo projects for Townshend.
mainstream audience. Much like the impact of *Tommy* in 1969, *Who’s Next* introduced the band to a whole new audience in 1971. The sound of the ARP electronic synthesizers and Lowrey TLO-R Organ would continue to appear in The Who’s catalogue all the way up until 1982. The title name of this track was influenced by American minimalist composer, Terry Riley and spiritual guru, Meher Baba, hence “Baba O’Riley” or how most people coined the song, “Teenage Wasteland.” Written to counter Woodstock: the idea was to claim that the teenage era of the late sixties of peace and love were over and now we are simply living wasted lives. Whatever you make take away from “Baba O’Riley,” no one can call it a mediocre song. It stands up till this day as unique and refreshing. The band was able to piece it together in a timeless tune from Townshend’s demos. Most of the album follows a similar sound to “Baba O’Riley.”

Although “Bargain” may sound like a heavy tune, it’s a love song in disguise. Roger Daltrey sings on two of the verses and choruses with a voice unlike from *Tommy*. The once dull high pitched sound of Daltrey on the past records had changed to a more powerful tone of voice. Townshend’s writing was also incredibly maturing, and reaching a personal level. Much like “Baba,” the song “Bargain” followed the same structure where Daltrey would deliver the verses, and Townshend’s vocals would appear to deliver a bridge.

“Love Ain’t for Keeping” has a strong folk sound, with slow guitars to the lyrics themselves:

- Laying on my back
- In the newly mown grass
- Rain is coming down
- But I know the clouds will pass

Townshend continues the theme of love from the previous song. Running at two minutes and ten seconds, this is the shortest cut in *Who’s Next*, later transitions to “My Wife” one of John Entwistle's compositions. “My Wife” is not a song Entwistle coined to match the *Lifehouse* concept, but instead was a leftover track from his solo album. Entwistle contrasts Townshend's writing of love with dark humor. He even added his own brass section. Side one of the album concludes with “The Song is Over.” Oddly, this song is written as if it were to conclude the album. Townshend takes the lead vocals singing over a piano, with Daltrey singing the chorus.

The track tells the story of a relationship, but it is told as if the relationship was a song.

- When I walked in through the door
- Thought it was me I was looking for
- She was the first song I ever sang
- But it stopped as soon as it began

Many years later, it was discovered that “The Song is Over” would be the conclusion to the failed *Lifehouse* concept.

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3 Pete would record all his songs in demo form, playing all the instruments by himself. Then, he would present them to the rest of the Who for them to play.

4 In later albums, ie by *Numbers* Roger Daltrey would become uncomfortable singing Pete Townshend’s lyrics because they were so personal to him, he felt wrong as if they came out of his voice instead of Pete’s.
Lifehouse and Loneliness

“Getting in Tune” is one of the highlights of the album. Like “The Song is Over,” the track begins with a piano riff, then eventually all the instruments join in. The Who’s backing vocals are great and give the song a dramatic ending. Once again, the song is about a relationship, but told as if it were a relationship with the song. I never caught any of these references up until I started to look deeper into the lyrics. I usually do not try and interpret every song to have a deep meaning. Sometimes music is just supposed to be fun, without conveying any seriousness. But with Who’s Next, it’s not that Townshend was trying to spread a subconscious message through his music, but instead convey a story. Apparently, Lifehouse was supposed to be accompanied by a movie and full written script. But when Pete showed the band members, and the rest of their road crew his script and ideas, no one could understand it. Townshend reflects to this album as a failure, not because the collection of songs was bad but because no one understood his ideas so they had to scrap the entire concept album. Unlike, the rest of the album, this song contains no synths. “Going Mobile” is an interesting track when comparing it to the grandeur of the album. Pete is singing without the accompany of Roger, and starts off with an acoustic guitar. For the guitar solo he uses a synthesized guitar sound with a wah-wah pedal. Strange combination. Bizarre sound. One of the best things I took out of this track was Keith Moon’s drumming. He’s completely all over the place with random fills, but somehow stays true to the rhythm. Keith had his share of personal problems, but to the band and public he was a great showman. His image of being off the rails is something he promoted to be talked about by everyone else.

“Behind Blue Eyes” starts off sounding similar to ballad but then picks up after the second verse. One of my favorites off the album. Townshend once said that this song is loosely about the Aryan race. I believe this is a song about an intrapersonal conflict, whether it was about one of the band members or Townshend himself. By 1971, much like the kids of the Mod movement matured, so had the members of the Who. Keith Moon was the first to be married and have children, meanwhile Daltrey lost interest in being part of a band, and wanted to pursue a solo career. John Entwistle developed as a writer and put his first solo album before Who’s Next release. Pete Townshend was fascinated with the spiritual beliefs of Meher Baba, and had a family he would not see often because of touring. Townshend always displayed his dislike of touring. In the Woodstock Festival, Townshend said that he hated being there, with an abundance of people who were so intoxicated out of their minds they could not fully appreciate the music. Since they played their gig at midnight, some of the audience members were sleeping in their tents, so the band had to play louder than usual to wake them up. During that time, Townshend resented going on tour with the Who between ‘69- ‘70. The venues were not only increasing in size but also became dangerous. “Behind Blue Eyes” speaker evokes emotions of loneliness and the incapability to spread love.
The Triumph of the abandoned Lifehouse

“Won’t Get Fooled Again” is The Who’s most successful commercial single. It’s the song that you still hear today in commercials, radio stations, and films. Once again a synthesized organ sound is used to open the track much like “Baba O'Riley,” bringing the whole project to a complete circle. One might interpret the lyrics of the song as depicting a revolution, an anthem for rebellion against rules and political leaders.

We'll be fighting in the streets
With our children at our feet
And the morals that they worship will be gone
This song was supposed to play a major role in the Lifehouse project when the main character of the story dies. Of course, none of this was known during the time of release. Nevertheless, still a good song to play often, even running at its full length of eight minutes and thirty seconds. The use of synthesizers would the way The Who performed in front of a live audience. Keith Moon had to wear headphones to hear the synthesizers so he can sync them with his drum patterns. And you could imagine with his hectic style of playing, the headphones would always fall off, so in some cases he had to duct tape them around his head. Townshend and Entwistle also had to play along with the tape machine, which restricted them from the free form style of playing they were accustomed to playing. Even with all these difficulties, “Won’t Get Fooled Again” remained in their set list for every single tour since then, and withstood the test of time.

Overall, this is one solid album. From start to end, there is hardly any song you would want to skip. There were several other songs that The Who released prior, which could have made it to the final album, had the Lifehouse concept been followed through. Songs such as “Water,” “Pure and Easy” were written and even performed live during the Tommy performances and said by Daltrey to be on the upcoming Who album. This album brought the band into the new decade with a hit. From this point on, the Who would stray away from their pop-art roots and become innovators for the rock genre. Who’s Next was commercially successful upon release, praised by fans, and would influence the use of new instruments in mainstream rock.