

The Who: the 100 most inspiring musicians of all time

The Who: the 100 most inspiring musicians of all time

The principal members of The Who were Pete Townshend (b. May 19, 1945, London, Eng.), Roger Daltrey (b. March 1, 1944, London, Eng.), John Entwistle (b. Oct. 9, 1944, London, Eng.—d. June 27, 2002, Las Vegas, Nev., U.S.), and Keith Moon (b. Aug. 23, 1946, London,

Eng.—d. Sept. 7, 1978, London). Moon was replaced by Kenny Jones

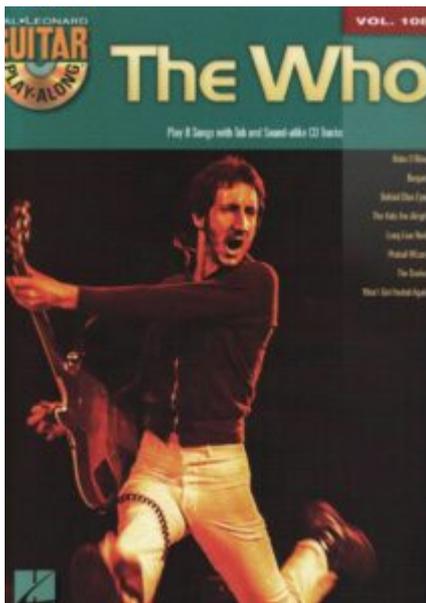
(b. Sept. 16, 1948, London, Eng.).

The Who was a British rock group that was among the most popular and influential bands of the 1960s and '70s and that originated the rock opera.

Though primarily inspired by American rhythm and blues, the Who took a bold step toward defining a uniquely British rock vernacular in the 1960s. Eschewing the Beatles' idealized romance and the Rolling Stones' cocky swagger, the Who shunned pretension and straightforwardly dealt with teenage travails.

At a time when rock music was uniting young people all over the world, the Who were friendless, bitter outsiders. Townshend and Entwistle joined Daltrey in his group, the Detours, in 1962; with drummer Doug Sandom they became, in turn, the Who and the High Numbers. Moon replaced Sandom in early 1964, after which the group released a self-consciously mod single ("I'm the Face") to little notice and became the

Who again in late 1964.



The West London quartet cultivated a Pop art image to suit the fashion-obsessed British “mod” subculture, and matched that look with the rhythm-and-blues sound that mod youth favored. Townshend ultimately acknowledged that clothing made from the Union Jack, sharp suits, pointy boots, and short haircuts were a contrivance, but it did the trick, locking in a fanatically devoted core following. Fashion, however, was strictly a starting point for the Who; by the late 1960s the mods were history, and the Who were long past needing to identify themselves with the uniform of any movement.

The band’s early records dealt with alienation, uncertainty, and frustration, lashing out with tough lyrics, savage power chords and squalling feedback by guitarist songwriter Townshend, the kinetic assault of drummer Moon and bassist Entwistle, and the macho brawn of singer Daltrey.

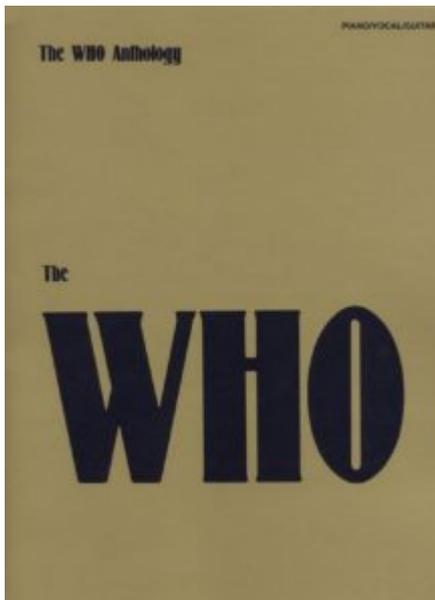
The four singles that introduced the Who between January 1965 and March 1966—“I Can’t Explain,” “Anyway, Anyhow, Anywhere,” “My Generation,” and “Substitute”—declared themselves in an unprecedented fury of compressed sonic aggression, an artistic statement intensified onstage by Townshend’s habit of smashing his guitar to climax concerts. While other groups were moving

toward peace-and-love idealism, the Who sang of unrequited lust ("Pictures of Lily"), peer pressure ("Happy Jack"), creepy insects (Entwistle's "Boris the Spider"), and gender confusion ("I'm a Boy"). As one instrument after another ended in splinters, the Who firmly declared themselves proponents of making violent rage a form of rock catharsis.

[Sheet Music Download here.](#)

Until the 1967 release of *The Who Sell Out*, a sardonic concept album presented as a pirate radio broadcast, the Who were primarily a singles group. They were, however, more successful in this regard in Britain than in the United States ("I Can See for Miles," released in 1967, was the group's only Billboard Top Ten single). It was the 1969 rock opera *Tommy*—and a memorable performance at Woodstock that summer—that made the Who a worldclass album-rock act. In the process, Townshend was recognized as one of rock's most intelligent, articulate, and self-conscious composers.

The Who cemented their standing with *Who's Next* (1971), an album of would-be teen anthems ("Won't Get Fooled Again," "Baba O'Riley") and sensitive romances ("Behind Blue Eyes," "Love Ain't for Keeping"), all reflecting Townshend's dedication to his "avatar," the Indian mystic Meher Baba. That same year, Entwistle released a solo album, the darkly amusing *Smash Your Head Against the Wall*; Townshend issued his first solo album, *Who Came First*, in 1972; and Daltrey offered his, *Daltrey*, in 1973. Still, the Who continued apace, releasing Townshend's second magnum rock opera, *Quadrophenia*, in 1973, *The Who by Numbers* in 1975, and *Who Are You* in 1978.



Moon ("the Loon"), whose excessive lifestyle was legendary, died of an accidental drug overdose in 1978 and was replaced by Jones. So constituted, the Who released Face Dances (1981) and It's Hard (1982) before disbanding in Daltrey pursued acting while letting his solo career taper off. Entwistle released occasional records to little effect. Townshend busied himself briefly as a book editor while undertaking a variety of solo ventures—from well-received Who-like rock records such as Empty Glass (1980) to The Iron Man (1989), a less-successful experiment in musical theatre that nevertheless paved the way for the triumphant delivery of Tommy to Broadway in 1993.

Townshend, Daltrey, and Entwistle reunited for tours in 1989 and 1996–97. The Who was about to embark on a U.S. tour in 2002 when Entwistle died. Tommy remains the Who's most enduring creation. On its way to the theatre, Tommy became an all-star orchestral album in 1972 and a garish film with Daltrey in the title role in 1975. Quadrophenia also was made into a film, in 1979, and was revived by the touring Who as a stagy rock spectacle in the 1990s.

In 2005, and 2006 Townshend serialized a novella, The Boy Who Heard Music, online, and a set of related songs constituted Wire & Glass, the mini-opera that made up part of Endless Wire

(2006), which was the first album of new Who material since 1982. A full-blown musical based on this material and also titled *The Boy Who Heard Music* premiered in July 2007 at Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, N.Y. A year later, the Who were celebrated (and performed) at a VH1 Rock Honors concert.

The Who – [My Generation](#)

“My Generation” appeared on The Who’s debut album of the same name. It was released as a single on 5th November 1965, reaching No. 2 in the UK charts and 74 in the US. “My Generation” was recently named the 11th greatest song by Rolling Stone magazine on their list of the “500 Greatest Songs of All Time”.