

*Pop***THE WHO  
THIRTY YEARS OF MAXIMUM R&B  
MCA MCAD4-11020 1994**

Over the last five years the number of boxed retrospective sets has exploded. So many groups have been covered by now that five-CD sets from The Captain and Tenille and The Partridge Family can't be far away. I think box madness started soon after the unexpected success of the Robert Johnson collection. If the complete, scratchy recordings of a long-dead bluesman could sell over a million copies, what would the groups of today be able to pull in? Amazing the ways record companies keep finding new ways to repackage things. Another new angle is to "remix" old albums and add bonus tracks that weren't included the first time around. Smashing Pumpkins have even re-released their debut "gish" (1991!), because they weren't happy with the original production. Expect more and more of this as the ability to manipulate the 0s and 1s in the digital process improves (Sgt. Pepper may be on its 10th remix by the time we turn to dust). All of which leads us (sort of) back to the four-record set in question. The Who don't seem to be much of a conscious reference point for modern rockers (it's kind of hard when classic rock radio keeps playing "Baba O'Riley" and "Won't Get Fooled Again" to death), but The Who's influence on EVERYTHING in rock is impossible to deny. Feedback, Keith Moon's incredible drumming, the voiced frustration and anger of youth, psychedelia, mod/eccentric/art-rock, operatic/thematic albums, instrument demolition, etc., this is a band that catapulted the possibilities of hard rock into the consciousness of thousands of young musicians throughout the 60's and early 70's. This boxed collection expertly captures the scope of The Who's career, starting from their R&B days as the High Numbers and the revolutionary trio of 1965 singles "I Can't Explain," "Anyway, Anyhow, Anywhere" and "My Generation." The box is at its best covering the largely ignored year of 1967. Only recently has "The Who Sell Out" been given its critical due as a thematic, psychedelic masterpiece. It's always been my favorite Who album and favorite musical relic of '67. The box does a fair job of unearthing previously unreleased gems, including the stunning "Melancholia." As The Who were always more genteel and melodic on vinyl than in concert, the box also tries to mix in live versions of a group that exploded once it hit a stage. The excellent double album "Quadrophenia" is given confusingly short shrift here, however, especially considering the skill with which the mid-'60s to early-'70s period is handled. The fact that the transcendent moment of "Quadrophenia," "The Punk Meets the Godfather," isn't included is mind-boggling. By the time you reach the tracks from "Who Are You" (1978) it's time to turn your player off. But that makes three and a half CDs of a mostly amazing career. While this collection has a few holes in it, it was obviously crafted by real fans and is well worth your money ... 8