



Lisa Robinson

Television Stare Down the Eyes of Fame

A music business lawyer friend of mine said about the recent NARM (National Association of Record Manufacturers) Convention held in Miami: "It's a good thing I met Brian Epstein before I met these...underwear salesmen. If I hadn't, I'd be divorcing people today..."

Given the attitudes of much of the recording industry, no wonder it's taken so long for Television (the group) to get a recording contract. (And, as of this writing, I don't know which of the three major bidders won.) I suppose it's just a fact of life that the business is several steps behind the music. But in the past five years I've watched a lot of music being sold. Music being made with a passion, sense of originality rather than a "this will sell" attitude, is rare. That doesn't mean that when your average Southern boogie band gets together to do their next record they don't care about their music. I guess I just don't care all that much about their music. Obviously, there's a market for it. But concern with the market often prevents music that is new, different, and occasionally confusing to some, from being heard.

While the industry looks around for a new Kiss (and I remember how much

Rock, John-Boy, rock! Tom Verlaine may not be from Walton's Mountain, West Virginia but he sure tips a mean Hush Puppy.

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JULY 197



Bob Gruen

trouble Neil Bogart and Bill Aucoin had in convincing people about the old Kiss), a new Bowie, a new Dylan (still), a new Springsteen (already), talks of re-uniting the Beatles and busily re-packages former "supergroups," there is a band in New York making incredible music.

Forget about New York, forget CBGB, and anything you may have heard about a New York band "scene." It's irrelevant. Television (the group) would be great if heard in St. Paul or Bloomington, Indiana. Their music isn't weird, as you may have heard, or even like the early Velvets as some suggest. Perhaps those phrases make it easier to categorize TV's music, but Peter Laughner was right when he wrote in this very magazine that their music defies definition. They just don't sound like anybody else. It's not even avant-garde, it's just superb rock music. (Richard Robinson has suggested that Tom Verlaine, as a songwriter, is the Smokey Robinson of the '70's. Now there's a comparison...)

To me, TV's music operates on different levels. The (dare I say it) commercial songs like "Oh Mi Amore," "Fire Engine," "Prove It," "Friction," "Venus Di Milo," "I Don't Care," and "Elevation" are melodic, catchy, strikingly original. I wish I could turn on the radio and hear this stuff.

The longer, more improvisational numbers with instrumental solos like "Little Johnny Jewel" (the privately pressed single of that song sounds like a demo for the way they've been doing it live lately), "Psychotic Reaction" and others are inspired. And Television does the best version — and I mean the best version — of "Knockin' on Heaven's Door".

It's hard to write about music here, especially when I'm talking about rock and roll. There's no need to intellectually "justify" what Television does. But it is one of those bands with a capacity to change your life. For me, a

great night "out" now is sitting in front of Rhoda with a pizza, and yet I always feel like I'm missing something special if I skip one of the TV's sets at CBGB's. (Even New Year's Eve — amateur night — when I'm terrified to go out, found me ushering in 1976 haggling with taxis in the rain to get to CBGB's in time to see this, one of my favorite bands.)

Much of the appeal of this group unquestionably has to do with lead singer, songwriter, guitarist and guiding force Tom Verlaine. Tom Verlaine, even walking down a Delaware street, must have been a knockout. People would notice this boy even if he had never picked up a guitar, changed his name, or met Patti Smith. When I saw Ivan Kral and Amos Poe's film *Black Generation*, a New York band "documentary" combining the best of *Don't Look Back* and *A Hard Day's Night*, it became immediately obvious that his visual presence could transcend the rock 'n' roll stage to conquer celluloid. How many other people can do that?

The problem with Television, obviously, is they're not serious enough; should've called themselves Educational TV.

Those eyes were translucent — it was like *Village of the Damned*.

But to say that he is the sole focus of this band is incorrect. The band is great — and they all look right. Billy Ficca is considered a "jazz oriented" drummer; a jazz oriented drummer hasn't hurt the Rolling Stones. Fred Smith has "replaced" Richard Hell admirably. As much as I liked the onstage visual clash between Verlaine and Hell when the latter was with the band (a long time ago, Tom always reminds me) it is a better band now. That ego clash was too much. Richard Lloyd has developed into a guitar force to reckon with, and Verlaine is, quite simply, one of the magical greats.

Their look is — of course — stark/spare/uncomplicated. Fortunately we have reached a time when you look like what you are, rather than you are what you look like. The Sixties popstar trip (and it was not without its charm) was fantasy packaging... hair, shiny clothes, freakout. Kiss aside, the costume now is you — and it has to be in the cheekbones. The style can't be "duplicated," because the person is the style. Maybe that's why Jagger has finally promised to stop wearing makeup onstage.

Television visually add to their music. The intense calm of dark colors and the space provided by unañored outfits offers a compelling antidote to superficial flash. But I've said this before.

An updated word on the energy impact of CBGB and Television in particular (of course I also get excited when the Talking Heads or the Ramones are there) compared to the "scene" at Max's in its heyday:

TURN TO PAGE 82.

Go down to CBGB's and decide for yourself: Can this possibly be better than Rhoda and pizza? What about Da Fonx and pizza? What about My Mother, The Car and knishes?



Bob Gruen



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joyful, rather zany emancipation celebration, "Kingdom Coming," which Peter Stampfel singles out as the first truly American melody. **B Minus.** "SILVER CONVENTION" (Midland International) :: I hedged last time for fear this group would turn into an annoyance if they got big, but they didn't. Instead they persist as an odd classic, instantly identifiable within a notoriously homogeneous genre, replacing soft disco's characteristic baby-oil flow with an endearingly square herky-jerk. Unfortunately, this collection necessitates a more serious hedge, on grounds of material ("songs" seems too arty a term). They should have borrowed "Lady Bump" and "Big Bad Boy" from Penny McLean, whose bland vocalizing is best buried in the mix, as it is here, rather than showcased on a "solo" album. **B Minus.**

THE SYLVERS: "Showcase" (Capitol) :: Carola thinks they're cuter than the Jackson 5. I think their single is cuter than their album. **C.**

JOHNNIE TAYLOR: "Eargasm" (Columbia) :: Taylor is a pro with as solid a commitment to the traditional soul style as any hit artist still active, even when he accedes to material as modish as the likeable but lightweight "Disco Lady." But to call him traditional is not entirely a compliment — he lacks the kind of aggressive originality that

can take a mediocre hook-and-lyric by the ear and drag it out of oblivion. Which is where too much of this album remains. **C Plus.**

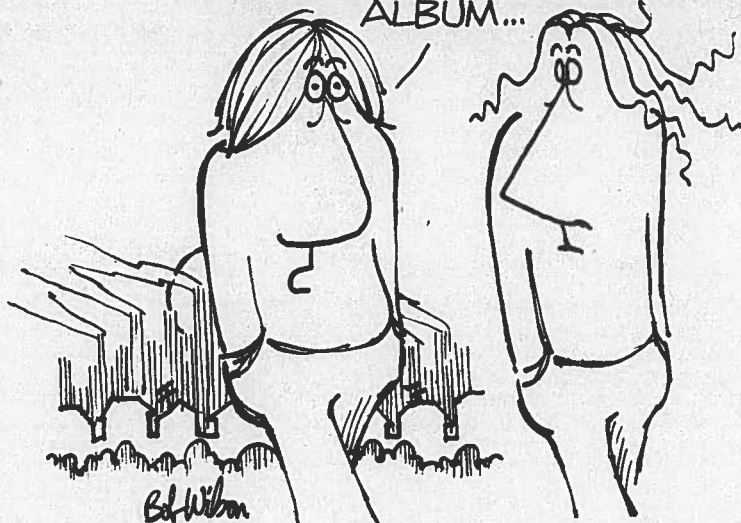
RICHARD AND LINDA THOMPSON: "Pour Down Like Silver" (Island) :: I wish there were an American folk duo that combined such engaging music with such committed intelligence. (The McGarrigles don't count — they're Canadian.) But since neither pessimism nor private poetry guarantees profundity, I also wish these lyrics earned their dourness as persuasively as the music does. Irresistible: "Hard Luck Stories." **B Plus.**

VAN DER GRAAF GENERATOR: "Godbluff" (Mercury) :: Inspirational Verse (from Peter — note spelling — Hammill, yet): "Fickle promises of treaty, fatal harbingers of war, futile orisons/swirl as one in the flight, this mad chase./this surge across the marshy mud landscape/until the maning is forgotten." **D Plus.**

BILL WYMAN: "Stone Alone" (Rolling Stones) :: In which an unsung hero creates an unsung record, manifesting his delight in the pop, the catchy, and the cute even though he doesn't have the voice, or the vocal cunning, to go with it. The result is ingenious frills with no center, quite likeable and quite forgettable. Alternate title: "If Ringo Can Do It..." **C Plus.**

BARNEY & MIKE by Bob Wilson

...THE NEW STONES ALBUM
IS OUT AND I DONT EVEN CARE
ABOUT IT... A COUPLE YEARS
AGO I WOULD'VE BROKE DOWN
A DOOR TO GET A NEW STONES
ALBUM...



PRIMETIME

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 73.

games of good vs. evil. In short, we're being set up. Already made half lame by our daily encounters with a world whose main function is to divide and conquer our capacity for thought and feeling, our atrophic condition is being further nourished by these unspeakable forces so that when the time comes for them to take over we won't babble helplessly, we won't even whine. We simply won't care.

Or. That's just the sort of textbook fantasy that someone might believe if they were prone to the obsessions resulting from the more extreme forms of paranoia...and watching a lot of TV can make you just that crazy. I know.

ELEGANZA

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 59.

Max's Kansas City was a glorified pickup bar even though with the exception of those who preyed upon the help I know of very few who got lucky there. Donald Lyons used to say, "When I'm happy, I don't go there." There were the Warhols, Artists, scene-

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makers (my favorite word) and much glorified cruising. When bands were booked upstairs, it was an afterthought, an attempt to cash in on the already established popularity of the place. CBGB can obviously make no such claim.

CBGB is funky, a railroadflat-like room. A bar, some tables, a pool table in the "backstage area," and a small stage complete the decor — such as it is. From the outset, people came there because of the bands. A love of rock and roll, and a longing to escape the uptown Music Business of the Beacon Theater or press parties. With the assistance of John Rockwell's *New York Times* coverage, and perhaps James Wolcott's *Village Voice* articles as well, suburbanites and groupie scenemakers have attached themselves to the place with alarming frequency of late. But the bands make more money, so one can't complain, even if one couple stood in the middle of the place *soul-kissing for an entire half hour* one weekend, and several others appear to be on the verge of disco-dancing...

For those fans who flock to CBGB when TV is there, it is not unlike a semi-religious experience. James Wolcott standing with his eyes fixed intently on the stage, Trixie A. Balm perched high on a wooden ledge above the crowd, Lenny Kaye cheering and whistling after each number, Danny Fields with eyes closed and smiling as if it was a 1970 Grateful Dead concert.

When I asked Television to pose backstage at CBGB for photog Bob Gruen (see pic), his reaction to a whirlwind session was telling. "They're pretty cool," said Gruen, who has photographed everyone. "It's like Dylan in the early days...the way they pose. They've got it down, but none of them are trying to be pretty, or extravagant in any way." In Gruen's photo, all four are directly staring into the camera, unafraid, yet retaining an aura of mystery. To paraphrase something Lenny Kaye once told me about Patti Smith: "They looked fearlessly into the eye of fame, and pronounced themselves ready."

MAIL

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10.

—thank you for the use of your eyes,
Mortie Sneaky-Lay
McLean, VA

home of the next big thing!
(All right, Woodstein, come down, this time
you've gone too far. — Ed.)

BOY HOWDY ASSAULTED BY HOMICIDAL MATRIARCH!

Dear Barry Kramer!

I just read the April issue of CREEM and I was disgusted! My daughter bought one and showed

me the Bay City Rollers part (for she really loves them) and I read the part about them and said to her to throw out CREEM!!! I must admit that I like the Rollers, but if you have something bad to say about them just keep it to yourself!! What kind of people would ever buy a magazine like yours! My daughter has brought home other magazines such as *Tiger Beat*, and *16 Magazine* they have good pictures plus good write ups about them! The only thing I'm letting her keep out of CREEM is one picture of them! Who would pay one dollar for a junky magazine like CREEM? I hope you've had other letters like mine for I don't see what kind of people write these things about them are like?? One of God's mistakes!! And another thing is that write up about the Rollers you spelled "FUCK" just in big letters so everyone could see well, I'm going to stop everyone in my community to stop buying CREEM and I'm even going to get in and stop it being sold at some stores and I have three good chances for I own Claire's and I have two friends one who owns Max's Smoke Shop. They both have lots of stores throughout this state and lots of other friends that are managers, presidents and owners of other big stores, too! I hope this letter gets through to you, but if you start to clean up your junky magazine into something like *Tiger Beat* I'll settle down, but till then watch out! Smarten up too!

signed,
anonymous

P.S. I hope some one sues you, too!!
(Dear Anonymous: Would your first name be
any chance be Al? Love, Boy Howdy.)

VIA CON DIOS

Boy Howdy, Lou Reed, Lester Bangs, Hand-
some Dick Manitoba, MOR, Whipoid, Ace
Frehley, LEE Black Childers, Heartbreakers,
Beer, Gin, Vodka, Cheap Dago Wine, New York
Dolls, Kim Fowley, Stooges, MC5, Jack Daniels,
Lisa Robinson, Kiss, Dictators, Johnny Thun-
ders, Johnny Walker, Koozy, Fun House,
Freddie Mercury, Ian Hunter, Mick Ronson, Mick
Zippo, Mick Butane, Elton John, Dana Gillespie,
Bowie, Ziggy, Iggy, Wowie, Zowie, Tits, Ass,
Rod Stewart, Hangovers, Wayne Kramer, Kick
Out The Jams, Bryan Ferry, Staten Island Ferry,
Fee Trenchmouth, Holly Woodlawn, Cherry
Vanilla, Andy Sernoff, White Punks on Dope,
Cycle Sluts.

How'd that for a third try to get my name in
your lousy mag?

Sincerely,

Elgrove, Village, Ill.

(Not good enough. — Ed.) ("What does it mean,
I don't understand?" — Lester Bangs.) ("What
are ya Bangs a retard, it's obviously a takeoff on
Rockefeller red-baiting Scoop Jackson!" —
Boy Howdy.) ("All of you slobs shut up and go
home, we're closing early tonight 'cause I got a
date with Una Merkle." — The Publisher.)

WHAT'S A "NIGGER"?

I saw a picture of Bowie in your May issue stand-
ing stark in front of a mirror. Now come on, if
you're gonna show me a dude's ass (or whatever)
show me a macho one. Understand it's not that I
don't dig Bowie because contrary to what he says
(May issue) all of us people of color up here were
impressed by his try at R&B in *Young Americans*.
And we should know. But as far as I'm concerned
anything from Bach to Elvin Bishop is laid-back.
In the immortal words of some dude with curly
hair and a hick voice, "I believe in music."

Sweat Pea
Spfld., OH

P.S. I dig your mag but limit your use of the word

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