

TELEVISION

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MORE THAN JUST A BOOB TUBE

by Stephen Demorest

VENUS: The oldest song on Television's *Marquee Moon* album is about the arms of Venus de Milo. I heard a "true story" about a Greek restaurant owner in Chicago who was loony over this doll. He kept a life-size replica of the armless statue in the middle of his dining room, and had small copies scattered over all the tables. All his life he plowed the restaurant's profits into expeditions looking for the actual missing arms of the famous statue — this guy was out on two limbs. Naturally, he died without having the pleasure of making their acquaintance, but he lived as a hero in his own dream: he wanted to know what the broad's attitude was! Do those amputated arms beckon? Or repulse? Do they modestly try to cover her privates? The high ones or the low? Suppose she were giving us the invisible finger all these years? Tom Verlaine says: "The arms of Venus de Milo are everywhere. It's a term for a state of feeling. They're loving arms." (I bet they're hugging the head of the Winged Victory.)

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ABSTRACTED: (ab.strak'tid) adj. 1. Lost in thought. As a child, Tom Verlaine loved listening to symphonies. Half asleep and half awake, it was like dreaming. In sleep alone one sees such festivals. He sleeps light on these shores tonight. A warrior can tell all kinds of things from the shadows.

Out of sequence. The shadows are rising. Out of sequence. The shadows begin their assault. In perfect sequence. The shadows embrace him like a brother.

—"The Night" (xii) T.V.

"A lot of editing goes on," Verlaine says, "and sometimes a song we drop has a part I'll remember and put in here and it's exactly where it should be."

Whatever you did is still around; it's meant to be somewhere. The whole thing of modern art is based on fragments, really. But I don't hear it as fragmented, I hear it as one thing. People who say it's fragmented don't see the whole; it's like they're making a premature decision. The songs are written in a certain atmosphere that gives something to you and that's what you pass along. The lyrics make their own sense."

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JUST THE FACTS (Tom Verlaine: guitar, vocals, piano): Born December, 1949, in Morristown, N.J., seven minutes older than his twin brother. Brought up by middle class parents in Delaware. Took piano lessons for five years, beginning in third grade. In fourth grade, aspired to be a hobo. Always in trouble in high school; knew Billy Ficca and Richard Hell. First rock

“
There's people
who are definitely
out to occupy space that
they really shouldn't be
taking up, and that
to me is a real
misdirection.
Tom Verlaine
”

song to have impact was "19th Nervous Breakdown." Voted Most Unknown in class. Went to college a few months, and split in November, 1967, to drift through parents' home, friend's house in Philadelphia, and then to N.Y.C. by August, 1968, staying with Hell. Has lived in East Village ever since. Formed band with Ficca and Hell in 1971 which broke up after a few months. Played brief acoustic stints around town. Changed name to "Verlaine". Spotted by Richard Lloyd while playing at Reno Sweeney in October, 1973. With Hell, they drafted Ficca from Boston, rehearsed a few months, and played debut performance March 2, 1974 at Town House Theater (capacity: 88). Short on bookings, Tom stumbled on

Bowery bar called CBGB & OMFUG and persuaded them to present rock and roll bands. Met Patti Smith in April, 1974, and she championed them in press. Tom played on her privately pressed single, "Hey Joe"/"Piss Factory". Co-wrote and played guitar on "Break It Up" on Patti's *Horses* LP. Demo tape sessions with Eno December, 1974, proved fruitless. Hell left band and was replaced by Fred Smith. Television released "Little Johnny Jewel" in 1975. Television signed with Elektra July 30, 1976. *Marquee Moon* released February, 1977. Previous jobs include: bakery; bookstores; sheet metal work; installing furnaces; counting towels and bird-baths in department store; and lying to foreman about broken merchandise.

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*The ole warehouse burned furiously,
and with it my matches.*

—"The Night" (x) T.V.

ARSON: My closest brush with arson came during my first decade when I nearly torched Grover Perdue's back pasture. The field was a haven for havoc, the Edge of the neighborhood, and it was there that we prayed an airplane would crash in flames (no such luck). The fire, I suppose, was a little private rite between us and the sky to conspiratorially the afternoon. Unfortunately, the situation quickly got too hot to handle, and though we stamped around the edges, the circle was soon expanding faster than we could run around it. Television plays dangerous like this.

*The bright cloud and dark meadows.
High gloss lipstick kiss. Over the hill
the siren and the flames.*

—"The Night" (xviii) T.V.

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JUST THE FACTS (Richard Lloyd: guitar): Born in Pittsburgh, October 25, 1951. Moved to N.Y.C. at age six or seven. Went through high school in Greenwich Village (good in science). Played drums four or five years in early 60's. "The first time I saw an electric guitar, I knew this was what I was going to play." Bought used Fender Stratocaster from friend for \$60 at age 17. Went home to his room, turned up bass amp to 10, and "just made noise," knocking dishes out of cabinets in the kitchen. Fall, 1973, met Terry Ork and arranged to stay in the spare room of his large Chinatown loft. Ork (who knew Hell) tipped him off to Verlaine.

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"Yess, big wamba, we be blood
brothers" (here Lynott jokingly at-
tempts to sever my thumb with a butter
knife). The photographer asks him to
look up at the ceiling. "Oh jess, boss
man," he drools. "I'm rollin' my eyes
right now, massa."

After a few more minutes of this
foolishness, we take a break. Lynott
boasts about his photographic prowess.
"I always send in pictures to this British
magazine that runs readers' wives
shots. The mates and I take Polaroids
of our girls in the hotel rooms each
night. We're having a contest to see
who gets accepted first."

"Are they naked?" the buxom pho-
totrix asks. Lynott laughs. "Well,
honey, they're not wearing evening
gowns."

An hour later we adjourn to a local
record outlet, where the band has been
promised for an in-store appearance.
Since your reporter is driving, we arrive
a wee bit late. There is a gigantic crowd
of kids jammed inside. Fortunately, for
me at least, the rest of the Thin Lizzy
contingent has not arrived. Lynott is
pissed off. He wants this to be a group
effort.

"Where are those lazy grafters?" he
grumbles, eyeing the Lizzy posters
lining the store windows. "They're
probably still sleeping it off, the slack-
ers." His star's temperament disap-
pears as quickly as it surfaces. He slips
on his cat glasses, unbuttons the top of
his shirt, and plunges into the fray. A
high-pitched chorus of squeals and
shouts greet his entrance. I hang back.
It looks like a good time to be late.



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who was playing unaccompanied elec-
tric guitar at Reno Sweeney. "I didn't
want to go, but one of my strings broke
at the last minute and I couldn't replace
it to practice, so I said 'Let's go.' As
soon as Tom started playing I knew
something in his approach was correct.
It had humor, it was unpretentious, and
I knew I could augment it." Now splits
guitar solos with Verlaine about equal-
ly. Has photographic memory. First
thought upon signing with Elektra:
"Well, finally we can start."

NAMES: "Verlaine" just had the right
sound to it. It wasn't too soft or too
hard. That's really all it is. That
Television's leader's initials are T.V.,
was "purely incidental"; Tom didn't
realize it until Hell pointed it out one
day.

"Hell thought of the name 'Televi-
sion,'" Tom says. "He was really drunk
one night and he had this list of about

200 names and he looked around his
room and saw his television set and put
'Television' on the bottom of the page.
Then he brought it to rehearsal and
everybody said, 'This one is really
good.' He had all kinds of names:
Goo-Goo, The Libertines..."

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JUST THE FACTS (Fred Smith:
bass): Fred is from Forest Hills and met
Television while he was playing with
the Stiletos (now Blondie) sharing the
same bill. When the situation with Hell
got rocky, Television asked Fred to jam
with them and he loved it (he already
knew all their songs by heart). Mean-
while, he was having troubles with
Blondie, so when Hell left, he was in
the right place at the right time. Fred
used to play "Motowny" bass (with his
fingers) but switched to a pick when he
found himself falling behind. Quote:
"In some bands a bassist can relax back
in the pocket with the drum, but Tom
likes the bass to be melodic, so I have to
fit notes into some unusual places." First
thought after they signed their
Elektra contract: "I went to a shoe store
and wondered if I could afford to buy
another color besides black."

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JUST THE FACTS (Billy Ficca:
drums): Grew up in Delaware, and
began drumming in 6th grade musical
assembly. Met Verlaine in 8th grade,
played with him sporadically in high
school. In early 70's, spent a year in
Boston playing "gig music"—soul,
boogie, jazz, and originals—including a
stint in Bermuda. First thought on
signing with Elektra: "It felt good to
have something down on paper."

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COOL FIRE: Television does to rock
what Stravinsky did to classical music,
breaking it into fragments and reassem-
bling it anew. Just as Verlaine's name is
a mixture of hard and soft, the music
can be challengingly abstract or charm-
ingly melodic. Most of the short
melodies, like "Prove It" and "Venus"
are sweet and memorable, and their
gouging version of "Knockin' On
Heaven's Door" easily out-dramatizes
Dylan's original. The boldness stands
out in longer, freestyle numbers like
"Marquee Moon" and the unrecorded
"Kingdom Come." Ficca's percussion
is shifty and unsettling as high winds at
midnight. The guitars surge and sputter
like live wire dancing with an appre-
hension for balance. The drums are the
tension, the guitars the release; dark-
ness doubles, and lightning strikes
itself. Television skirts the Twilight
Zone with dissonance, discords, minor
keys, and pinging harmonics. Some of
their best notes are the ones they don't
play, sudden silences and hesitations
that jerk through the air like a crack
through a cup. They don't forfeit