

# Where to Plug Into Television

By JOHN ROCKWELL

Television, the underground New York rock band, will be at CBGB's through tomorrow. Ordinarily that would not be so unusual: the band has played the Bowery club persistently for nearly three years. It can even claim legitimate credit for starting the whole CBGB's scene, as the first rock band to play there. But people who like to be in on things from the outset might make an effort to get down to the club this weekend, because Television's tenure at the club may be drawing to a close.

The reason is simple enough: The band has just put out its first long-play record, "Marquee Moon," and it's attracting the sort of critical notices and even sales success that may make continued engagements at minuscule clubs financially self-defeating. Furthermore, Tom Verlaine, the band's singer, co-lead guitarist, songwriter and undisputed leader, wants to expand his surroundings.

"There's a certain point where you think you deserve something," Mr. Verlaine said the other day. "Besides, I'm sick of playing in places where we bump into things."

Mr. Verlaine is a striking-looking man. Patti Smith, the high priestess of the New York underground rock scene and a friend of Mr. Verlaine's, once described him this way: "The lead singer Tom Verlaine (initials TV) has the most beautiful neck in rock 'n roll. Real swan-like—fragile yet strong. He's a creature of opposites. The way he comes on like a dirt farmer and a prince. A languid boy with the confused grace of a child in paradise. He plays lead guitar like a thousand bluebirds screaming."

Television dates back to 1974, and it was that year that Mr. Verlaine approached Hilly Kristal, CBGB's owner. "I went and asked him, 'Why don't you play rock here?'" Mr. Verlaine recalls. "He wasn't making any money, so he said, 'Why not?' Soon we got a following, and every band in the world converged on the place."

That last remark gives an idea of Mr. Verlaine's personality. He is proud, a bit defensive and very much a loner.

Mr. Verlaine is 27 years old and came here in 1968 from Wilmington, Del. "In Delaware," he says, "there's nothing to read, but there are radio stations. They get good Philly jazz stations." As a result his early influences were mostly avant-garde "free" jazz. Later his brother introduced him to Kinks and Rolling Stones singles. "They had the same qualities as the jazz I was interested in—the same sort of drive.

"First I played piano and sax, but then I got a little acoustic guitar, which I used to play day and night. Then I worked one summer for my father to get an electric guitar. I saw the Stones on the Ed Sullivan show and they were hilarious. What they were doing looked like so much fun and so easy, I wanted to do it, too. I was never interested in being a star, per se. For me, the whole thing was to get across.

"My whole generation came out of an 'artificial paradise,' which I think was Baudelaire's phrase. Between 1966 and 1969, they experimented with every possible drug. They didn't come out of a Depression or a war; they came out of paradise."

Mr. Verlaine worked here and there—as a salesman at the Strand Book

## Tips on Tickets

Television will perform at CBGB's, 315 Bowery, at approximately 10:45 P.M. and 1:30 A.M. tonight and tomorrow night. There is an admission charge of \$4 and a two drink minimum. Reservations: 473-9763.

Store, among other places—and had a band called the Neon Boys in 1971 and 1972 that was a direct precursor of Television. It consisted of people Mr. Verlaine had met before he came to New York—Richard Hell, who sang and played bass, and Billy Ficca, a drummer. "I didn't see anybody in New York then who was doing anything. It was all glamour—all visuals. It was very success-oriented."

The Neon Boys weren't success-

oriented enough, however. After they broke up, Mr. Verlaine kicked about.

Still, Mr. Verlaine stayed in New York—"I really don't like it much anywhere else"—with his small circle of friends, mostly poets and artists. In 1974, Television came together, consisting of the old Neon Boys and another guitarist, Richard Lloyd. In 1975, Mr. Hell left and was replaced by Fred Smith, formerly of Blondie, another New York band, and since then Television has steadily improved to the point of recording "Marquee Moon."

At the moment—the group's style is continually evolving—Television's songs are characterized by Mr. Verlaine's raw, spat-out singing, by the twanging solidity of the massed guitars and their sweet solo flights and odd, even psychotically opaque yet telling and evocative lyrics. There really isn't anything quite like it around, and it's definitely worth hearing.



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