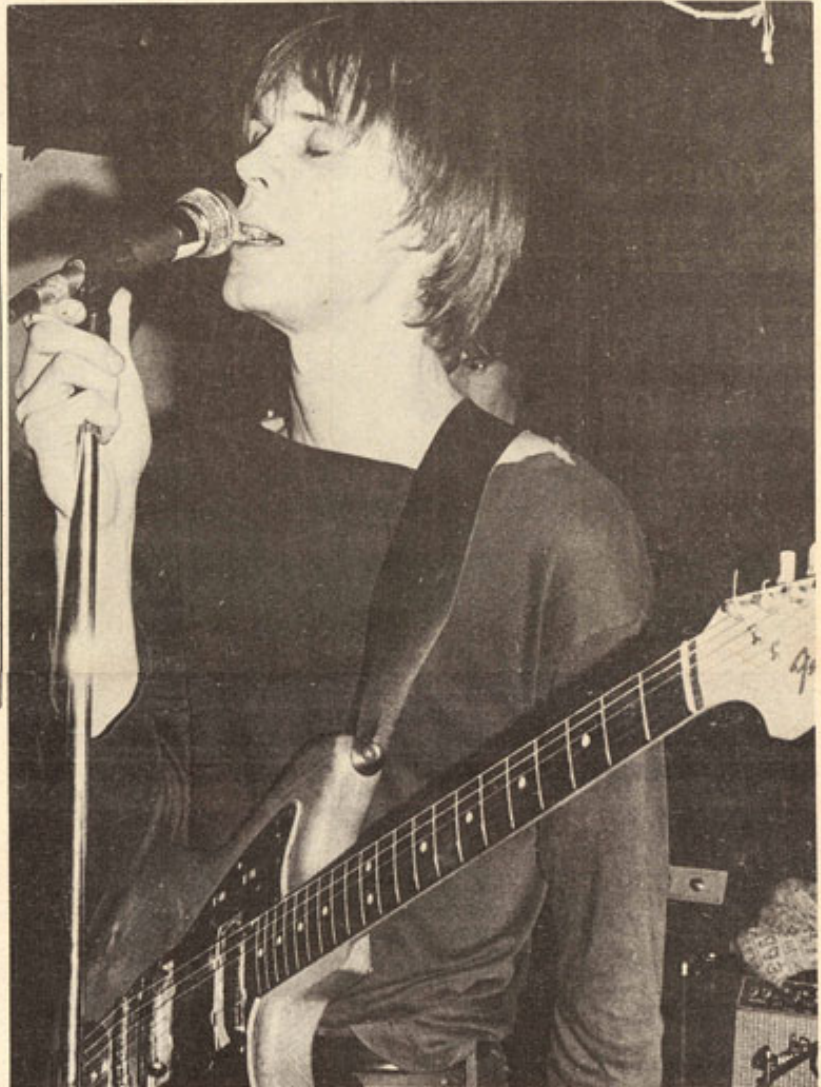


NEW YORK ROCKER

featuring

THE RAMONES
WAYNE COUNTY
TALKING HEADS
MARBLES
MILK 'N' COOKIES
MIAMIS
BLONDIE



TELEVISION'S TOM VERLAINE

MICHAEL BROWN
 on the right banke
LA ROCKS
 on Iggy, Runaways
 and other Stars
PATTI SMITH
 on the pix scene

PLUS:

TALES OF THE HEARTBREAKERS
IS SAN DIEGO NEXT?
CATCHING MUMPS

-MAP OF THE STARS-

TOM VERLAINE

I was born in Morristown, New Jersey. Actually I was born in the hospital there but I spent the first few years in this lake that I can't remember the name of. We had this little wooden frame house by this really huge black like polluted lake with all these rotten piers and my father was a milkman---I can hardly remember any of it---and then we moved to Delaware when we were about three.

I was taking piano lessons when I was about in the 3rd grade. I can't really remember too much about bein' a kid. I can remember this huge hurricane--I guess it was hurricane Hazel--I don't know what year that was, '55 or something; I just remember how terrifying hurricanes are.

We were living in these apartments in Delaware, and I used to go to Chester, PA. to take these piano lessons from this old lady. [Delaware and PA. are only a mile apart...] It was just miles and miles of these huge oil tanks, and it stinks of oil all the time. I was really into symphonies when I was a kid. My father got a house when I was about 8, and I used to have a room in the attic. I used to go up there and remember those records in supermarkets like 'Excerpts From 12 Great Symphonies', there were like four and they came in a red box; I'd get those all the time and it'd be like dreamin', listening to them all the time; they'd just totally sweep me away; it was like dreaming. I remember being half-asleep and half awake, it was a totally great state of mind.

I got a twin brother who still lives in Delaware. My brother was always in the house and I was a real run-around; when it got to High School it was the other way around---I used to stay around and listen to jazz. I started composing stuff on the piano when I was in the fifth grade but I can't remember any of it. Then I heard John Coltrane or something and that seemed to me to be alot like classical music; it had the same intensity to it.

So then I got a saxophone; for about \$30. I used to have these jam sessions with a friend. We couldn't play at all; we just used to like to make noise; fantasti noise this raw expression. My parents wanted me to get

good grades and keep music a hobby.

I quit the piano because the teacher said I had to go to this conservatory; I have very big hands--real good piano hands--she said she took me as far as she could in 5 years; so I started going to this conservatory two nights a week and got this teacher who wouldn't let me do anything; just said you gotta do these exercises for six years--ya know, 'you hafta play Bach, ya hafta play this stuff, you gotta stop thinking about writing, and everything else'; so I just gave up after three or four times.

I could write, but I never took the time to write it down. It wasn't improvised; it was at one point--but then I'd have it all in memory. I wish I could remember it, wish I had a tape of it.

Then when I took up saxophone my parents became less and less supportive--they wanted me to stop. In High School I was always in trouble, like I had this crazy friend, and one day we went around and took all the locks off all the classrooms, and threw 'em all in this pond--but somebody squealed on us, and we got caught.

The first rock song that really knocked me out was "19th Nervous Breakdown"; cause that seemed to me like Coltrane alot, real barrage of sound. Then this kid gave me a Silver Tongue guitar and I started playing that; I liked Dylan at the time; it was like a Sears & Roebuck \$14 acoustic guitar. Then me and my previous bass player Richard Hell; we were going to the same school--this dumb private school. He was a boarding student, he lived there, and I used to go home at night. We weren't even good friends; I'd always just hang around his room & one night he said 'wouldn't it be great to take off across that field there and not come back?' I said 'yeah let's do it'. And he said 'really?' And I said 'yeah'. So I went home and stole some money and we took this train to Washington. We were gone for about three weeks. They picked us up because we had started this fire in Alabama out in the woods to keep warm and the cops picked us up and somehow traced us. So then I went back home and into public school. This was probably late '66 when I was 16. I had always wanted to start this rock band; it's hard in Delaware, cause all

these rich kids get all this equipment from their families; but my father wouldn't buy me any---he didn't have that much money. My parents were pretty much middle class---especially in attitude---but they're alright.

So then I finished High School; I got voted Most Unknown In My Class; I was never there and nobody knew who I was. I would have flunked out but this girl who was brilliant went around to all the teachers tellin' them that I was this problem child and had to graduate so they all gave me passing grades and I got out.

I went to work in a department store counting dishes and towels. I was really hungry to read stuff, but I didn't really understand it. Like I was reading Genet, but I couldn't really see it all. I liked Kerouac. I was reading little Zen books; all kinds of stuff. I'd sort of agree with it but I really didn't know what was going on with it. It didn't really reach me; when you're 16 you think everything reaches you, but it really doesn't.

My brother was a real class A student and athlete who won all these letters, but my parents never really compared us---that was good. They only dressed us the same until we were three---I'm seven minutes older. I believe that stuff about twins having this ethereal connection between each other.

"I'm really not that proud of much of my work---I think 'Venus De Milo' is a good song---but I'm never satisfied..."

I was playing with Billy off and on; we never really did any jobs; a couple; we were doing really complicated stuff; people would throw stuff at us. We weren't bad, it just didn't go over too well. I went to college for about three days in South Carolina; my hair wasn't long, but they chased me all across campus with like Nair, and big shears--I thought they were going to kill me; I had to jump out of third-story window---it was really scary stuff. So I left there and went back to Wilmington. The next day some college called to say that they had an opening. I stayed with all these seniors from Long Island and they'd take me to NY; They were all hip and

showed me all the ropes and led me to a lot of different stuff. Then there was this big drug bust, even got written up in Time. It was at Penn-Morton, and these farmers were hired by the FBI to help them, but they didn't know what grass looked like. So they picked this up and said 'what's this?' and I said 'oh, it's just seeds and tobacco'. I never went to class; I'd just go play this pinball machine and eat turkey subs. I had a girlfriend who used to pick me up and we'd just drive around and spend a lot of time together.

I left there in November '67, messed around for 9 months, just taking drugs and growing up, whatever you call it. I was still a huge fan of Albert Ayler--he was my favorite; and the Velvet Underground. All kinds of stuff. I was staying at my folks house. Then I went to Philly for a month to stay with a friend and then came to NY. I stayed with Hell here; he had been living here already---this was August of '68. He was doing this poetry magazine. I did a few things here and there, but not much. We were real good friends and then I didn't see him too much; he was running around his circle an' I was working at the Strand Bookstore; same place, as Patti.

I approached drugs deliberately. They help confirm your intuitions about stuff and open you up. I didn't use them alot--just enough. I still don't use them alot; in fact I use them very seldom now. The thing is that drugs totally uproot you and I don't think it's so good to be totally without roots. Like a tree without roots is not a tree. It's just this thing that's blowing in the wind. It's not whole. It's not liking having your cake and eating it too, but you gotta be able to see both sides. By roots I don't mean bourgeoisie ideals or anything, but you just have to have a foundation in yourself not be constantly blown back and forth by every little thing.

At the Strand I really got to read alot, and also took some drugs, and began to see that people are really doing things. It's not just words; it's a real event that's happenfng, so to speak.

I always lived in the East Village section, 2nd street, 11th street. I played with some guys, but nothing was ever too exciting. None of the rock groups really interested me too much; I was too interested in everything else. The possibility of a band here just seemed too unrealistic. I hadn't seen Hell too much, just off and on and then I decided to get a band together in 1971. I called up Billy in Delaware and he came to NY, but we couldn't find a guitar player or a bass player. So I told Hell that there was nothing to playing bass, 'you just go bump-bump', which was my idea at the time which has since changed; once you get into it, that gets kind of limited. We rehearsed a lot for a few months and made some tapes that were real awful. I really liked Richard but I couldn't stand his vocals; of course he couldn't stand hearing from me that 'I don't like your vocals'; then Billy got fed up so that kind of broke up.

SPEEL GITAAR IN 1 WEEK

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Then I started doing these little solo things at like Gerde's and that kind of shit. Just once in a while. Then I got 15 minutes at Reno Sweeny. I was doing acoustic stuff, like "Venus De Milo". I decided to play the sets like I had a whole electric band behind me; so I just went in with an electric guitar and turned it up and they really hated it. Richard was there and he liked it; he was deciding to be my manager at the time, he was walking around.

Richard had this friend named Terry Ork, and he had this guitar-player friend named Richard Lloyd, and so Lloyd was there, and he said why don't we get a band together and we can rehearse at Terry's loft and I didn't know what to think. But Hell really talked me into it, and said let's get Billy back. We rehearsed for about three months and did our first job in early '74 and that was a real disaster. It was in this tiny theatre that sat 100 people up on 46th street or 48th street. We got a really big crowd, tho, and they gave us all these quotes saying how good we were. So we had this miniature reputation even before we even played anywhere.

We couldn't find a place to play, and one day I stumbled upon CBGB's, and convinced them to present rock n roll. I think he was reluctant to have us after our audition, but he gave us eight Sunday nights there,

and we started getting this following. Then all these stars starting coming to see us like Bowie, Lennon, and that really helped build up our confidence.

I didn't meet Patti until April '74; she came and saw us and was real knocked out. She asked me to play on that single, "Hey Joe/Piss Factory". I think what's happened to her is great---she's gone from esoteric to exoteric, and I don't think she's sacrificed anything. There comes a point when you know you're good, like the first year we played we knew we weren't good; then comes another period where you do what you do to become good; and it has to go to another level.

I didn't try to talk Richard into staying when he left, because I knew we needed a good bass player. So we got Fred and he's really solid. Then we did this thing with Eno, and it was really, I mean even John Cale said it ruined our chances---the band wasn't that bad, it was just the way it was recorded there was no life or vitality which are our strongest points---the drums and bass sounded good; the guitars sounded like the Ventures; except not as good---the Ventures at least sounded warm and wet and ours was cold and dry---very brittle with no resonance.

They said 'we'll sign you up and Eno will produce your record', so I said 'ok, but let's get another producer';

so there was a lot of run-arounds and nothing ever happened. I'm not disappointed that we haven't signed, but it's about time now. I mean you have to decide if it's going to be a career or a hobby, and if it's a career, you have to sign. I think we have a sound that people want to hear---we ain't Barry Manilow, but people shouldn't think that since we're from N.Y., that we sound like the Dolls---who to me were more surface than depth.

I mean, NY's a great town---Coltrane, Dylan, The Blues Project---but now all they think of is glamour.

I find it hard to write unless someone wants it---then you know it matters to somebody. I worked with Richard on some poetry books back in '71 & '72, but only because he got me to do it. It's different with songs though, because I get tired of doing the same songs all the time. I like to try to break in new material all the time---although it tends to hold a band back because it's not as strong as material you might have been doing for the last 6 months or a year. So people come and see the band and think they're not together.

[Con't. on Page 15.]



VERLAINE

[Verlaine]

[Con't from p. 11.]

Some stuff gets richer over a period of time, but other stuff I have to drop and then bring back later.

Sometimes Billy comes up with a new beat and I just make up words to go to it---I like to improvise in rehearsal. I also sit down in my room and just write stuff--I do it both ways. Of the stuff I've written, I'm not really that proud of much of it. You can't really get a good idea of what the band sounds like when you're up on stage. I've never been able to hear my voice---I don't know what my voice comes across like; I've never been able to develop it that much; it has gotten better. I try to sing at home with an acoustic guitar 'cause then you can really hear yourself. I'm not satisfied at all. I'm never satisfied with my guitar playing. I think 'Venus De Milo' is a good song, 'Prove It' is alright. I tend to like the newer ones 'cause they're... fresher.

In the beginning publicity is great because its feedback, but soon it doesn't really move you much---I mean we're still in the same situation, playing bars and all that stuff. I'm sure they'll be comparing us to Patti, but I think she's more of a minimalist. It's hard to say. We do have similarities, like we both improvise lyrics on a good night; when the atmosphere is right.

A lot of record people don't see us on the big stage; but to me we're made for a big stage--we have a thick, big sound. In a bar it can tend to give you a headache if you don't feel what's going on...

Patti was over my place one night and I was picking this melody out on the guitar, and she really loved it, and I said 'well the guys in my group didn't like it, so why don't you do it?'. We shuffled through one of her notebooks and just made up a song. I showed her where to sing the notes and put the chords to it and then I went to the rehearsal room. They used to do it very low key, almost cocktail music, but

it was originally supposed to be this grand thing. On the album it comes out as a real bone-crusher, and I'm happy about that. The great thing about the New York bands is that they have a great drive, but too many seem overly fixated on someone else---you know the Beatles, Lou Reed, or the Dolls.

I really love 3-minute great singles, but our single was designed more as an album. It's more subtle; it has different passages---and we never figured it would get as much airplay as it did---it got played all over--- We could only afford to press 1,000 or so, so what would have been the point of recording something ultra-commercial. We did it live in Patti's rehearsal loft, and just the voice is overdubbed. We kept the second take.

As far as our album goes, I'll want to play some keyboards. I don't want strings, but I don't foresee a strick garage sound either. You want to produce a live sound, but not a bad live sound.

You have to channel your energies more in the studio. I was in with Patti almost every night and I've been in with a lot of other people.

My main concern right now is to convince whatever company we sign with, that I can produce our record as good as anybody else could---that's essential to me. If a song is good and it's produced with common sense, then putting strings or horns on top won't make it any better or worse. To me it's the song and its quality that's important.

'Why am I doing what I do?' ---Well, just because it's something I love to do... mysteriously. I just want to be able to keep on doing it for a long time. I want to get a record out soon, and go on from there.