

Television by BARRY CAIN

FIVE FLOORS above the deranged contours of Glasgow a dismembered light in the three am thickness.

Pretty metaphorical huh? Specially when the denizen of this particular eight by eight chamber happens to be ol' glue-eyes Tom Verlaine - midnight rambler and word conductor of Television.

The opening night of his short British tour is already a five-hour-old statue. Over. A stunning confirmation of piercing talent maybe, Newcastle next. The world will follow.

So now on this fading tight toy night Tom, sits on a wooden chair by the side of his bed and smiles.

He's a thinking smiler, a million years away from the 'bawling egomania' stance ascribed to him by one journalist.

"There's a lot of irresponsibility in journalism - and everything else. It simply depends on whether you like what you're doing. With 'I don't care' attitudes there's absolutely nothing you can do.

"Sometimes that attitude can also leave someone with a feeling of superiority. See, there are times when you've got to say 'I don't give a toss.'"

What times?
"Like landing up in a hole in the wall hotel somewhere, that's the only one in town. Sure, it's an easy way out."

Do you ever get that attitude when it comes to Television?

Spirit

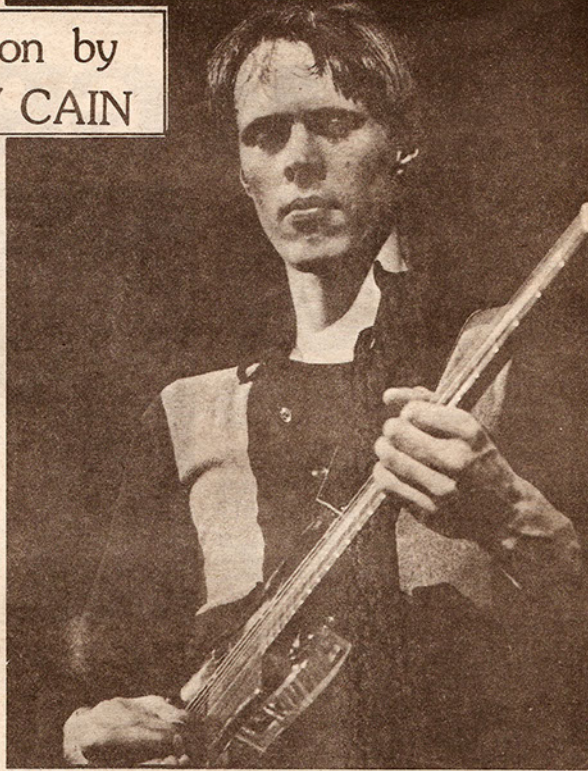
"I care about what we do completely. It's no big deal when you realise that everyone has a certain spirit which is almost taken for granted. A vitality. It's just being unconsciously aware that there's intelligence in life. It's up to you how much of it you choose to use."

The band's debut album 'Marquee Moon' has been selling in consistent high numbers over here and the title-cut single was a minor hit.

Unfortunately Television (that's Verlaine lead vocals, guitar, Richard Lloyd guitar, Fred Smith bass and Billy Ficca, drums) have been sucked into the new wave whirlpool by the uninitiated.

Maybe it's the inherent anguish on the album. Maybe it's the ripped-up New York tag. Anyway it's crap, 'cos compared to say the other bands on these two pages Television are on another wavelength. They are the most important American band to have emerged in a long time.

"The current set-up in Britain with the new bands just couldn't happen in the States. America is so blasé, so comfort orientated. The vitality and response is not what it should be.



TOM: ol' glue eyes

"Just look at the kind of records that sell. Over here some people really are wasted, you don't get that back home. Class structure in the States is on people's minds - but it's more of an intelligence structure.

"Regardless of what kind of background you come from people can gravitate upwards. What I've gleaned from this country is, if you don't have money you really don't make money.

"The attitude in music here now just wouldn't be accepted in the States. There, nobody seems to want a committed sound - the wallpaper not the wall.

"People wouldn't lump us with other new wave bands if we came from New Orleans."

Television began in 1974 in New York. Richard Hell was in the line-up then but was replaced a year later by Smith, ex-Blondie bassist. They played all the city's joints like Max's and CBGB's and attracted a large following. Fame spread straight from the fridge and after the relative success of a bootleg single - "Little Johnny Jewel" - they were signed.

The album has been hailed as being motorway new, innovative and ingenious.

"I'm not saying that our album is perfect. Our best reception has come from New York and England - your home is where your heart is.

"It also doesn't strike me as being so fantastically different from anything else. It's all a question of style - and I was satisfied with that."

Are your songs of a transitory nature?

"I guess my desire to do more stuff is greater than my desire to perfect recent stuff. That doesn't mean my songs are off the cuff,

they're particular memories in a lifetime.

"For example, I like London. When I first got here I didn't do any writing for three days, then I started.

"It's funny how people have this impression of me as being a very literate person. I very seldom get past the first two pages of a book. All I read is Nerval, a French author who strung himself up on a lamppost in 1870 and Lorca. I also like Persian writers who are always talking about wine. They have a certain grace.

Novelists

"Marc Bolan puts references to novelists in his songs. I don't."

I confess to finding the New York music scene a trifle over-rated...

"I've always been disappointed with it, that's why I never hang out there. We all try to keep away from the centre. Besides, reporters make scenes more than anything else.

"By the time clubs got their reputations in England they had already peaked. CBGB's was a bar that happened to have a stage and a liberal owner. To develop as a band in New York you have to play the Top 40 and please the drinking customers."

Time tiptoed by. The darkness doubled.

"It's funny when I read about the band in papers and all this cut figure stuff. I always seemed to forget it. OK, it's nice to read good stuff about yourself when you've worked on something very hard.

"But it concerns me more when people just write lies. Inaccuracy is depressing.

"Music is something special, and when someone is over exposed to it, be he a journalist or DJ, he becomes jaded. He actually stops responding."

Complete change of subject. Why'd you change your name from Miller?

"It's a way of disassociating yourself from yourself. I used to write poems under my last name (laugh). It was just something to do I guess. Most people who change their name do it for something to do."

The connotations of that remark are pretty frightening, if the notion was intended. Why need to disassociate etc? Does that make you a loner?

"I'm not a loner. You've just got to know who your friends are. Everyone has their own crowd, birds of a feather... I number Patti Smith and John Cale among my New York friends.

"But there are certain things you should do on your own. There are certain movies you should see alone. There are some places you should go to alone. When you find yourself alone you find you are not.

"I don't have a telephone. People's lives are centred around them."

The old hurl - old - quotes - at - them - and - see - their - reaction - one - two.

"The standard of musicianship is higher here - you expect that in New York."

So explain - "If a guy is a good musician over there they can make 2,000 dollars a week on sessions, so why should they bother to put a band together? What you've got left are guys like me who only just learned how to play. We make the bands. In England all musicians seem to start forming bands."

Right. What about: "I'm not into theatre at all."

"I'm not into pre-meditated shock efforts like blood capsules. I like variety in the music. Anyone I've ever admired has always changed his style - Bowie and Dylan are classic examples."

It seems appropriate to leave. Tom will sleep light on these shores tonight.