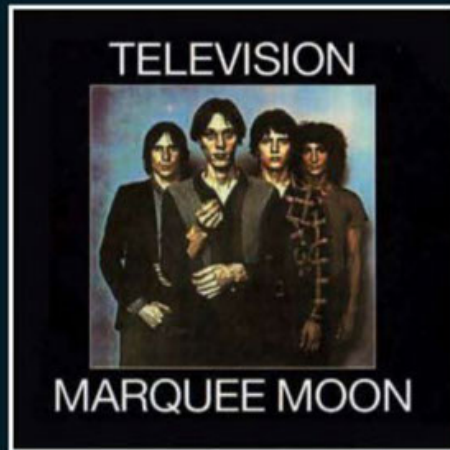


TELEVISION



YOU GIVE ME FRICTION!

Thirty-five years ago,
TELEVISION released their
extraordinary debut, *Marquee Moon*.
Now, **RICHARD LLOYD** reveals the
whole fraught story of an epochal
album - a tale of unrelenting tension,
disgusting shirts, drunken producers,
and the intense power trips
of Lloyd's sparring partner,
Tom Verlaine...

WORDS **BY** DAMIEN LOVE

PHOTOGRAPH **BY** ROBERTA BAYLEY





NTHE FALL of 1973, I had just come back to New York City and needed a place to stay.

I was in my early twenties, and had been pretty much leading a vagabond life. I was doing a lot of nightclubbing at Max's Kansas City, in the back room, where I met a fellow named Terry Ork. Terry had a very large loft in Chinatown and a spare room, so I moved in.

Mostly what I did during the day was play my guitar, with no amplifier. I didn't want anybody to hear me, until I was good. Terry's day job was managing a movie memorabilia shop on 13th Street, Cinemabilia. He had this disgruntled assistant, Richard Meyers, who would later become Richard Hell.

One day, Terry said to me, "I know this guy who does what you do."

I said, "Huh? What do I do?"

"You play electric guitar all alone all day. That's all this guy does."

This turned out to be Richard Meyers' best friend, Tom Miller, soon to become known as Tom Verlaine.

Terry told me Tom was going to be playing audition night at Reno Sweeney's, and did I want to go. Reno's was a hang-out for the Broadway set: Liza Minnelli, drag artists, gay wannabe singers. I wasn't too interested. But Terry was going, and I didn't have anything else to do. We got a cab up, Richard Hell came in, and we all sat waiting for Tom to arrive.

He came in with his guitar and an old Fender amplifier, and stood there looking irked already, like it was too much trouble to even open the door. Richard and Tom had between them what I can only describe as universal contempt.

Richard ran over and started helping him with his stuff. He said, "You don't look right." Tom was wearing what looked like a shirt from 1932: old, yellowing, frayed, almost disgusting. Richard put his fingers into a hole by the shoulder, and tore it. Then he enlarged another hole, so one of Tom's nipples could be seen. I sat watching them feeling like an anthropologist watching strange animals and their social habits.

Finally, Tom played. Three songs. The second was "Venus De Milo".

Now, Terry worked as assistant to Andy Warhol by night, and wanted to sponsor a band, like Andy had with the Velvet. His idea was to sponsor a band around me. But when I heard Tom playing "Venus", just all rhythm chords, I knew. I leaned over, shouting in Terry's ear. "Forget my band. Put me and this guy together. You'll have the band you've been looking for."

TOM AND RICHARD started coming down to Terry's loft. Tom and I, our guitars meshed immediately. I had studied classic rock guitar, where you do whole-step bends, half-step bends. When I was

a teenager, I had a friend who knew Jimi Hendrix. Jimi gave this guy lessons, who passed them on to me, and I met Hendrix and watched him.

Tom played a completely different style. He used the classical vibrato. Like on a violin: you move your wrist, the finger doesn't move. I don't know where he got it. It was more like a sitar player. Never whole-step bends, always micro-bends. But our two styles suited each other beautifully. Between us, we had all the guitar aspects you could want.

The next thing was convincing Hell to play bass. Tom couldn't. Richie said, "I'm not a musician. I can't do it." When Tom wasn't around, I asked him what the problem was. He said, "Listen. Playing with Tom is like going to the dentist. Except you'd rather go to the dentist." Tom and Richard had tried doing a band before.

I said, "But Richard, you've got the look. You're like a combination of Elvis and some movie star. You can learn." The compliments got to him. So then we had three.

Tom and I talked about drummers. Tom was insistent the best rock'n'roll drummer he knew was his friend Billy Ficca. We called Billy, and started rehearsing. Three days in, Tom called me aside: "I'm about to pull my hair out. I can't stand it. Billy's turned into a jazz drummer."

And Billy was all over the place—but in a good way. I said to Tom, "Look. All the greatest guitarists we know—Jimmy Page, Jeff Beck, Hendrix, Townshend—they all had crazy drummers."

We were having a great time, although Tom was already growing frustrated with Richard Hell, because Richard never practised. But we meandered along in rehearsals in Terry's loft, and started planning for our first gig. Thing was, there was no place to play. Literally.

"FROM THE SPEAKERS CAME THIS HUMONGOUS DRUM SOUND. TOM STARTED FREAKING OUT: 'NO NO NO!'"

Finally, we rented a place, The Townhouse, an 88-seat theatre on 44th Street. We put up flyers Hell had designed. The four of us went around with paste and plastered the town. We'd go up to journalists and ask them to come watch us rehearse, so we could get quotes. Terry knew some film people, and asked Nicholas Ray, the director of *Rebel Without a Cause*, to come to the loft to see us. Nick didn't want to. Terry offered him a gallon of wine. Nick said, "OK."

So, Nicholas Ray came down, and sat on the bed in his eyepatch, drinking wine, while we went through our ridiculous repertoire. We'd

knock things over. If a mic fell on the floor, we'd lie down and sing into it. When the wine was almost done, Nicholas said, "Well, I'll tell you, Terry: these are four cats with a passion." Then he proceeded to pass out. So we used Nick's quote.

We took an ad in the *Village Voice*. The night came—March 2, 1974—and, well: we were like the Sex Pistols that couldn't play. We were all over the map. But we were surprised: 88 seats, and we filled most of them.

AFTER WE HAD to rent our own theatre to get a gig, we started talking about where there was to play. There wasn't anywhere.

Tom lived on the Lower East Side, which meant, when he walked to rehearsals in Chinatown, he walked down the Bowery. Now, the Bowery had a reputation, but it was not dangerous. It was just full of drunkards. You could step over them on the street. And had to.

One day, Tom came in and said, "I might have found a place. On the Bowery. It's a dive."

That's what we needed. A dive. Somewhere nobody else wanted to play, where we could move in and take over. Tom said he had seen a guy outside this place, working

on the front. He and I went back to talk to him. We saw the owner, a man called Hilly Kristal, on a stepladder, fixing up this awning: CBGB OMFUG [Country Bluegrass Blues—Other Music For Uplifting Gormandizers]. We looked up at

him: "You gonna have live music?"

We played our first gig at CBGB the last Sunday of March. Sundays were Hilly's worst nights. Terry convinced him to let us play by guaranteeing he'd fill the place with friends who were all alcoholics. So Hilly gave us four Sundays in a row. Pretty soon, other bands started hearing about it, and coming down asking for gigs. Hilly didn't know anything about rock music. Basically, we steamrolled him. Terry offered to start booking the club, so long as it was understood it was Television's place. Bands would audition, and Terry would ask me what I thought. Talking Heads, the Ramones, Blondie: that's how they started playing CBGB. We were picking the bands and playing, and it was like hosting a three-and-a-half-year-long New Year's Eve party. Once we got some steam, CBGB was *it*.

Sure, it was a dive. It was difficult to get people in suits down there, or even the older generation from Max's. We were like hobos to them. But there was almost a glamour to the poverty. Nobody had done that before. Up 'til then, in rock'n'roll, everybody wanted the finest shoes. Everybody was chasing this glamorous high-life.

We weren't. When you hear bands say they don't care about anything? I guarantee you: they do. We were probably the closest to a band that really didn't care.





Television including Richard Hell (left) live at CBGB, March 1974

CBGB WAS TAKING off. Labels were showing interest. Late in 1974, Richard Williams from Island wanted us to go into the studio with him to make a demo, but said, "I don't know much about a studio. Can I bring a guy to help? His name is Brian Eno." Eno came in with all these whacked ideas. "Let's glue the amplifiers to the ceiling." "Let's cut up the lyrics and throw them in the air." We weren't having any of it.

We did six songs. Hell was upset because he only got one of his songs on the tape, while Tom got five. Richard got scorched. Tom was beginning to push him out.

From the very beginning, when we played live, Tom was on at Richard to "stop moving". He said it was distracting him, and it looked "artificial". It used to be that I stood in the middle of Richard and Tom onstage. I was the George, with the John and the Paul either side. Then Tom suddenly decided he wanted to be in the middle.

That was the beginning of the end of the first Television: the Television that was sloppy, punk-ass, and a mess; but also extremely exciting. That band was like being in a circus. You never knew what was going to happen. A train wreck, sure, but fun.

It was driving Tom nuts, though. Tom was a control freak when it came to music. Without a solid bass player, especially with Billy being nuts all the time on drums, there was no grounding, no solid bottom. Tom was beginning to talk about replacing Hell, but Richard quit. I almost quit myself, because I thought, without Richard, the fun was gone. However, Tom asked Fred Smith to leave Blondie and join us, and asked me: "Come on. Just come play."

Within 10 minutes, I had to admit it. Fred was keeping down the tempo, which meant Billy could go crazy nuts, but we still sounded like a band. Television suddenly made sense.

WE WAITED TO sign. We auditioned for Atlantic. Atlantic President Ahmet Ertegun said, "This is not Earth music." Meanwhile, everybody else from CBGB signed as soon as they could, for peanuts. We waited until Elektra made a reasonable offer, and signed in the summer of 1976.

It was time to record an album. Tom and Fred looked for a studio and finally picked this place on 48th Street, A&R, Phil Ramone's personal studio. A small, rectangular room, with a control room that still had old tube boards, volume knobs that were curved, like the old Beatles consoles.

We didn't want a producer. We'd already done "Little Johnny Jewel" as an independent single in 1975. We knew how we wanted to sound. All the songs on *Marquee Moon* were songs we had honed for years playing live. We were ready. Tom, especially, didn't want a producer after the Eno experience. He didn't want someone coming in with their ideas.

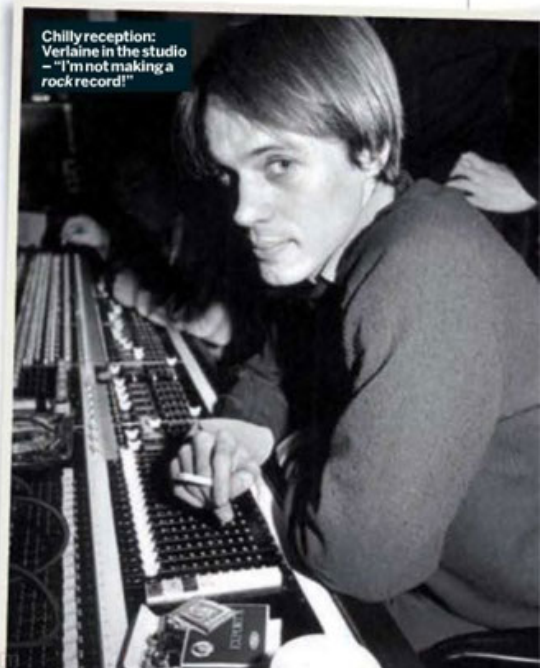
But Elektra would not allow us to produce ourselves. So, we decided to get in someone who was a great engineer—someone who knew his way around, and wanted to produce, but was just starting. We hit on Andy Johns. Andy had been engineer on a great number of great records: the Stones, Zeppelin. He was Glyn Johns' brother. Anything that Glyn produced, Andy was engineer on.

The first day in the studio came in November 1976. We had a 2pm start. Andy was nowhere in sight. Finally, about 4.30pm, he came traipsing in. He said, "I came in yesterday, to see what the place was like, and... I can't work here!" He started listing all the technical tools these old studios didn't have. We tried to calm him down. Finally, grudgingly, Andy said, "Well, I did manage to set the drums up last night. Got a good sound. Wanna hear it?"

He put on this tape he'd made. And, by God, from the speakers came this humongous, pumped-up John Bonham drum sound. Tom started freaking out. "No! No, no, no, no, no! We don't want that! You need to take that apart!"

Andy was outraged. "Well, why **CONTINUES OVER**"

Chilly reception: Verlaine in the studio — "I'm not making a rock record!"





Television backstage at CBGB, New York, February 27, 1977: (l-r) Tom Verlaine, Fred Smith, Billy Ficca and Richard Lloyd

did you hire me? That's what I'm famous for. Fuck this! I'm getting a flight back!"

For the next few days, Andy would mutter, "Oh, right, so, this is some kind of New York thing. You want to sound bad like The Velvet Underground. You want to sound crap like The Stooges. I see..."

But we were recording. I had always wanted to produce, and I was forever thinking, what can I do to prevent this from sounding like simply a live record?

I was thinking about the chiming parts on "Venus", and said, "Let me double that." Tom and Andy said "Huh?" I said, "Well, let me play the part again, so you can have a stereo pair." One ability I've always had is, anything I play, I can do it again, exactly the same. And again and again. Tom isn't like that. When Tom plays a solo, he never plays the same solo twice.

They said, "Uh... well, go ahead and try." So I did it. Tom said, "Holy crap - that sounds great! Do that to everything!"

So, for example, "Elevation": that solo is me playing twice, verbatim. We wanted to rent a rotating speaker to get the sound for that, but

the rental people wanted too much. So Andy took a microphone and stood in front of me in the studio, swinging it around his head like a lasso. He nearly took my fucking nose off. I was backing up while I was playing.

Andy was hilarious. He's a real child of rock'n'roll. Television weren't like that. We were punctual. We were serious.

One day, Andy didn't show up until 6pm. It seems he'd picked up two hookers the night before, who talked him into letting them handcuff him to his bed - then, of course, they took his wallet and blew kisses as they left. The hotel had to free him with a hacksaw. Another day, we came in and Andy was flat out in the producer's chair in the control room, snoring, holding a three-quarters empty bottle of red wine, with empty bottles scattered around on

the floor. We looked at him, then at the tape operator. We said, "Listen. All the mics are set up. Can we just keep the volume down in here and run a song around him?"

So we went in and did "Prove It". Then we came back to listen back. It sounded pretty good. So we played it back again, a little louder. And we kept increasing the volume until, finally, Andy snorted himself awake.

He sat bolt upright, panicky, paranoid as hell. The music's playing, and he's looking between us all, demanding,

"WE REHEARSED, WE PLAYED, WE WROTE SONGS - THEN TOM WOULD THROW THEM AWAY"

"Did I record this?"

We said, "Well, sure Andy." He breathed a sigh of relief. "God, I'm good." That was Andy. And that's the cut of "Prove It" that's on the record.

We delivered the album in late 1976. *Marquee Moon* came out February 8, 1977. In 35 years, it has never been out of print. It's become a permanent fixture in rock'n'roll.

A lot of people were disappointed with Television's second album, *Adventure*. I'm one of them. Sonically, *Adventure* has a colour *Marquee Moon* doesn't. But it was already a losing prospect when we didn't rehearse for the album first. With *Marquee Moon*, we drew from a repertoire we had been playing live for years. And, actually, we had a whole *other* album's worth of songs from that period - "Kingdom Come", "Double Exposure", "Breakin' In My Heart". But Tom, fickle as he is, didn't want to record them. On *Adventure*, only "Foxhole" and "Careful" were in our live repertoire.

That was the demise. On *Marquee Moon*, everybody knew what they were going to do.

'I FELT JOY AND KINSHIP...'

PATTI SMITH recalls her first, life-changing encounter with Television



The first time I came into CBGB, around Easter 1974, I heard Television doing some of the songs that became *Marquee Moon* and was immediately struck. I felt immediate joy and kinship. You had two poets, Richard Hell and Tom Verlaine, delivering very heightened lyrics and this music that was both raw and glorious. It was very important, because the void that my band - Richard Sohl, Lenny Kaye and I - were working in suddenly seemed open. We had kinship, fellow workers - who we looked like! We all dressed the same, all tattered, and we all loved poetry, read the same books. No-one played guitar like Tom Verlaine, although Richard Lloyd is a great guitarist. But Tom's sensibility spoke to me. Tom, when he was young, played saxophone and was into Coltrane and Albert Ayler and the same people I was into. He abandoned saxophone for guitar, but you could hear what he'd gained from soloing on the saxophone. It was unique. And remains unique. He's greater than ever, really.

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Rad moon rising – the classic lineup onstage at CBGB circa '76

On *Adventure*, nobody knew, including Tom. We got into the studio, and it was just Tom's world. He would try out ideas and it would go on and on. We would talk about the other songs we could record. Tom would just say, "No." That was the end of Television. *Adventure* came out in April 1978. Within three months, we had split up.

THE YEARS WENT by. Then, around 1990, my manager ran into Tom's manager and they decided to see if they could get us together again. We met up, just jammed. And it was there. It was Television.

We started talking about a new record. One day, Tom was complaining about being short of breath when he was singing. Of course, Tom smoked like a chimney and drank coffee all day. That's all he did. I said, "Well, maybe you could take vocal lessons, to get some breathing techniques."

That was it. Suddenly, Tom was screaming at me: "I need singing lessons!?! Listen: I'm not making a pop record! And I'm not making a rock record!"

I sat thinking, "Jesus. What business does he think he's in? Flamenco?"

That, though, is closer to the truth. Tom is into cowboy music and old TV scores. On that third record, any time it came to record my parts, Tom would say, "I hear the amp buzzing. Could you please look into that?" Often, he would turn it down, until it was barely audible. So that nothing rustled, nothing moved. For me, that third record was Television-lite. It has a beautiful, nice sound. But it's not rock'n'roll.

What happened next, though, was we began playing live again. That's where the real power came out. Songs that sounded tiny on that

record really blossomed to life.

Across Television's final period, we rehearsed, we played – and we would write new songs. Then Tom would throw them away. For 14 years, from 1993 to 2007, when I finally quit, Tom would talk about us making a new record. But nothing ever came of it.

We recorded nothing. Tom would always poo-poo the notion. It was like he didn't want to give anything to Television. Tom never really wants to share credit. When we first signed with Elektra, I found out years later that Tom had tried desperately to make the contract so he would be the only one signed as "Television". The rest of us would be hired musicians. Elektra wouldn't have it.

Tom had a twin, John, who died long ago. I really think Tom has a sibling rivalry thing that started in the womb. It's the only psychological motive I can come up with for some of his behaviour.

Tom, I think, was just done. Finished. In 2007, after I left, Jimmy Rip, Tom's buddy, took my place, and put a message on Facebook, saying he was looking forward to being on the new Television album coming that year. Well, guess what? It's five years later, and it still hasn't happened.

Look at it this way: I left Television in 2007. Within six months, I had my album *The Radiant Monkey* out. Since then, I've put out two more records of my own. Meanwhile, I joined Rocket From The Tombs, we put out the *Rocket Redux* album, and we made a new record just last year, *Barfly*.

Tom Verlaine is wonderful to laugh with. Tom can be the funniest guy on Earth. But, often, Tom just doesn't want to get out of bed. I'll certainly never do business with him again.

But there will always be *Marquee Moon*.

I don't think of that album as just a collection of songs. I think of *Marquee Moon* as one thing. It contains so many songs that reach you, but there's no way to separate them. These days, people download a song or two from an album. Well, *Marquee Moon* is not for that.

Marquee Moon is the whole thing. One thing. Like Mount Everest. ☺



Verlaine's about to hit the roof: the reunited band back in 1992

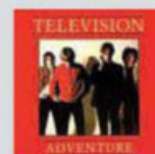
THE MOON AND BEYOND...

Your guide to Television's albums



MARQUEE MOON

(ELEKTRA, 1977) ★★★★★
Failed to scratch the Billboard Top 200 on release, though it hit No 28 in the UK. A key New York punk artifact, but its influences are Nuggets garage, the sharpest Brit-invasion groups, and, in the guitar trade-offs, the flourishes of Coltrane-esque jazz.



ADVENTURE

(ELEKTRA, 1978) ★★★★★
Sold even less than *Marquee Moon* in the US, but hit No 7 in Britain. There's a warmer, more delicately shaded sound, though "Foxhole" and "Ain't That Nothin'" hew closest to its predecessor. Elsewhere, calmer, sometime folk-tinged pop predicts the US underground of the '80s.



THE BLOW-UP

(ROIR, 1982) ★★★★★
This "official bootleg" compiles live performances from 1978, just before Television fell apart (for the first time). It's no-fi, but here is the band in its raw glory: Television live is a fiercely different proposition to Television in the studio.



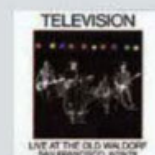
TELEVISION

(CAPITOL, 1992) ★★★★★
After a 14-year silence, the third album arrived unexpectedly. The burden of expectation saw it indifferently received, but it's worth revisiting. "1880 Or So" and "Rhyme" are among their most gorgeous songs.



LIVE AT THE ACADEMY 1992

(OHOO, 2003) ★★★★★
"When we began playing live again," Lloyd says, "songs that sounded tiny on that third record blossomed." The proof lies in this document of the 1992 tour, originally self-pressed by the band for sale at 2003 shows. Of 12 tracks, eight come from the *Television* album.



LIVE AT THE OLD WALDORF

(RHINO HANDMADE, 2003) ★★★★★
Recorded for radio in June 1978, this was a popular bootleg for years, before gaining official release (albeit in maddeningly limited form). Not as insanely wired as *The Blow-Up*, perhaps, but still on fire, and with infinitely superior sound.