

V · E · R · L · A · I · N · E

ONLY A GHOST OF HIS FORMER SELF

Richard Grabel gets into a scrap with a fallen idol. Referee: Joe Stevens

IT DIDN'T CLICK UNTIL I took a tape of the album out with me for a walk with my Walkman on a warm moony night. In this way — relaxed, the usual noise around me abated for a while — the dreamy lyricism and romantic meditation of 'Words From The Front' finally got through to me.

'Postcard From Waterloo' — a hint of the wordcraft Verlaine used to muster as a matter of course, and the only really memorable melody here. 'Words From The Front' and 'Days On The Mountain' — little dramas I was now able to let myself be pulled in by, canvasses of sound I was now ready to be caught up in.

It had taken a lot of prior listening, but I finally found the use. An album for quiet moments and moods, for reflection more than movement, for bemusement more than enlightenment. Not what I go for most these days, but certainly something with a place and a purpose.

But my problems with this record weren't done. There are sounds on it that captivate me, pull me back for more. But there is dead space too. There are a way out bits of ideas, playing for more time than they are worth, trying to sound profound when they are just bluffing to cover up their emptiness. Even after discovering a garden of delights in certain corners of this record, I still find large spaces where it is a stagnant pond.

It wasn't going to be easy to break this to Verlaine. Last time I interviewed him, just after his first solo album came out, I was still an unabashed fan, a former Television fanatic who thought that first solo record was brilliant. This time it would be rougher.

But there were good reasons for doing an interview. Verlaine has been a very major influence on many younger guitarists, especially in England. Television ghosts walk through the records of Echo, Teardrop, U-2, many others. And, even a lesser Verlaine album has its moments of greatness. And, in his slow, purposeful way, Verlaine is going to keep working. He's not going to disappear, and he's quite capable of surprising us again.

VERLAINE IS physically an unusual figure. He's very tall and very thin, with long bony fingers, a long nose, a long neck. Everything about him is long and loose and dangling, like a body of sticks held together by string.

He is a very private person, and volunteers nothing unless asked directly. To get things going I ask whether he though his new work stood up against his old.

"I think it's all one song, in a sense. Whether it holds up in anybody else's mind is their opinion. Maybe it's something slightly new and slightly the same every year."

Are you recycling your ideas?
"Uh-uh. I mean a person usually has a certain thing. I like the sound of two guitars, bass and drum. I haven't become disenchanted with that sound or its possibilities."

Your new songs seem less focused, more abstract . . .

"Well I'm tempted to just terminate this whole thing, 'cause we're not getting anywhere. You don't appear to be interested. And I'm not looking for attention or anything."

No. I am interested, very much. But I want to compare your reactions to mine. What I'm asking is how much the records means to you, do you stand by it?

"Of course. I wouldn't go on tour otherwise. I'm not trying to defend myself. I don't feel a need to defend my own work . . . Like I've said before, I don't have much to say about it unless you ask something specific."

Are your songs sometimes too introspective, self-involved?

"Well, it's not commentaries on pop culture or what's going on in the club on Friday night. I'll grant you that. But, like, introspective in the way of somebody who's talking to themselves in a song, which was very popular in the early '70's, Jackson Browne, that kind of thing, which never appealed to me either . . . I don't see myself as guilty of that."

No, but a lot of your songs sound mystifying and obscure.

"Yeah, but I know people that love them. Everybody writes songs that someone is going to say that about. Because people are conditioned to a certain type of verbal communication. So anybody that follows their own bent, that attempts to communicate something in their own way, a lot of people are gonna say that."

Well, take 'Words From The Front.' Is that really about a soldier?

"That's part of it. Or a person under some sort of conflict. With certain ideals. Conflict is a big part of life, isn't it? I mean look at this interview. It might be what life is itself, just a series of tensions that you have to somehow find your way through."

The mind tends to fixate. That's how it operates, it fixates on things. There are people I've met who think 'Marquee Moon' will never be topped. And then there are people who didn't start liking anything I did

CONTINUES OVER

2/2

MAZE

featuring
Frankie Beverly

If there's a better night in London this year, the shock to the system will be so great it'll likely precipitate musical paralysis

Jon Futrell — Black Echoes

A reception as tumultuous as any within my memory

Richard Williams — The Times

A performance that managed to ignite an entire theatre

Mary Harron — The Guardian

Surely the most important event of the year

Blues and Soul

MAZE

NEW 12" SINGLE

*Live at
Hammersmith Odeon*

**BEFORE I LET GO
GOLDEN TIME OF DAY**

12CL 244

Recorded Live Hammersmith Odeon March 22nd and 23rd 1982
IN FULL COLOUR PICTURE SLEEVE

MAZE

THESE ALBUMS
NOW AVAILABLE AT A SPECIAL PRICE



MAZE
FEATURING
FRANKIE BEVERLY
CAPS 1039



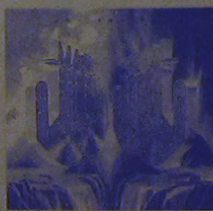
MAZE FEATURING
FRANKIE BEVERLY
GOLDEN TIME OF DAY
CAPS 1040

MAZE

ALBUMS ALSO
AVAILABLE



LIVE IN NEW ORLEANS
(Special Priced Double Album)
ESTSP 22



JOY AND PAIN
EST 12087



VERLAINE

FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

'till that Elektra solo record came out, who thought Television was a bit unvaried or something, a bit at odds.'

Your music does strive for harmony more now.

It's also the arrangements that have changed. I have tried to keep simplifying my work, rather than to take it into more complications. I'm trying to get more essential. That was one of the main things about the new record, I just wanted to do what was essential to get the result across, rather than get architectural about it. If I do another architectural record I want to use more keyboards on it because sonically I think it works better than piling up guitars. I've already done guitar records. I've always been interested in horns, I've got a lot of ideas for horns. It's just finding people that are adaptable to them because they're not R&B charts.

I got an offer from another label to do an instrumental record. I don't know if I'm going to do it, but that's something that's always interested me. You wouldn't have to keep reminding yourself that there's a vocal in there, you could expand the whole arrangement.

VERLAINE HAS recently made his first real foray into the video world.

I knew what I didn't want to do. I think the trouble with video is that the people who are getting into it have no background in film, they have no background in script or content. They've just learned certain techniques and their attitude is surface.

I read a couple of lives of film directors. One of them was Mankiewicz who did *All About Eve* and a few other classic comedies. To me the whole downfall of films in the last ten years is scripts.

I wanted to do videos that projected the mood of the songs. So 'Words From the Front' is very slow moving and stylized in a certain sense. And there's one for 'Clear It Away' that's actually a parody of video and of performers who think they are 'sexual'. Whether or not people are going to pick up on that I don't know. They are somewhat contrary to the image I seem to have in the music business. It's not me standing there playing the guitar. I'd find that pretty uninteresting.

He is modest about the influence he has had. I tell him that Television's records are frequently cited in this paper's *Portrait Of An Artist* section, and he's surprised.

Is that right? I haven't seen that. I've met some of them and they've said nice things, but I didn't know that it was in print.

I met the guys in U2, just through acquaintances, and they told me complimentary things. I met the singer from The Teardrop Explodes, who wanted me to produce for them, but that didn't work out.

I don't know if there's anybody interested in playing guitar anymore. Or that are taking it up when they're 16.

I can see the fun of synthesizers. You lay one finger on it and all this sound pours out. I like keyboards myself, they lend themselves to instant melody. Whereas guitar lends itself more to personal expression at the moment.

Another thing I find about the music scene today is that there are a lot of ideas men. David Byrne is an ideas man. Eno is an ideas man, though he does have some melodic gifts. They have an interest in music and they like to hear it, but whether they really have it in them to project out of themselves to my mind remains to be seen. But they do create some interesting sounds. But the minute I hear certain records I know exactly what records these people have been listening to.

On the other hand don't we need to get away from the dominance of the musos, people involved in technique for its own sake? Where do you think you fit in between the idea of men and the musos.

Well, I'm not putting myself into their category, but John Lennon was neither of those. Dylan never struck me as a concept man. The Band weren't. These aren't records I sit around and listen to, this is just stuff I realise was in my life when I heard it. They had a certain quality which wasn't a concept and wasn't virtuosity. It was on the beam. Presley, The Stones. It's basically personal expression. It comes from something real, in the sense that your body feels it. Reggae. The roots stuff might have some religious dogma involved in it, but it's basically not a concept and it's not based on virtuosity.

What advice would you give to a 15-year-old guitarist who was forming a band or something and came to you?

I'd probably say, stop listening to everything he's listening to for a while.

All I can say is that I never consciously tried to imitate anyone. Some people, that's the way they learn. They sit down with... I guess these days they sit down with an Eddie Van Halen record and they pick out the licks. I never tried to do that. That's what I would say. If he started giving me the stuff about being a fan and liking the guitar playing I would probably hit him pretty hard and say Why, what for? Because if you want to create something in this world, you have to maintain your ability to appreciate other people's work, you can't close yourself off, but at the same time I don't see the point in imitating anything.

**DEXYS
MIDNIGHT
RUNNERS**
&
THE EMERALD EXPRESS

NEW SINGLE
COME ON EILEEN

AVAILABLE ON 7" AND 12" IN FULL COLOUR BAGS!

phonogram amercury