



TV Is On Again

by Richard Robinson

"We sort of withdrew a bit this past year, mainly because of this punk phenomenon, which already looks sort of dead to me," says Tom Verlaine, namesake of America's most progressive band, Television, over coffee and cigars. "I knew we were never really a part of that, but I think it was good to get totally out of the picture for a while and let whatever was going to happen, happen, then just come out with a record after most of it went by."

Television hasn't played much in the past year, but the band hasn't been standing in the shadows. For almost a year they've been working on their second album in the New York night, including several months at NYC's Record Plant where Tom stalked the corridors along with Bruce Springsteen, Patti Smith, and David Johansen who were also working

on lps. Now TV's new album is released. It's called *Adventure* (Elektra 6E-133) and to me it's a successful and sophisticated extension of their first album, *Marquee Moon*.

"It took us a long time to do, about five months. I don't know, maybe I just got inspired or something. I started hearing a lot of different things we could do, and I started changing a lot of things around. We did a lot of songs in the studio, which was much more immediate."

The album was produced by Verlaine with the aid of John Jansen, a former recording engineer turned producer who really helped him get the sound he was looking for. "We don't have a standard guitar sound that most bands get," explains Verlaine, "and a lot of engineers don't know how to approach that. Sometimes they don't know what to

make of the sound we get — they think it's like 1961, or something."

Verlaine describes the sound: "Well, it's a bright kind of sound. It's not fuzzed up, it's not like say, a Bad Company sound where you plug a Les Paul into a Marshall — which is the formula for about 80 per cent of rock and roll. We've got a number of weird little guitars which we use with weird Fender amps, and it produces a very different kind of sound. A lot of engineers don't know how to translate it so it will work on a record."

"You have to realize that with a record, it's never the same as with live music. You have to create a sound that gets what you're doing across, and it has nothing to do with the way you sound when you play in front of an audience."

Putting TV into their own wavelength is a group accomplishment with Verlaine

on lead vocals, guitar, and keyboards along with Richard Lloyd's guitar and vocals, Fred Smith's bass and vocals, and Billy Ficca's drums. But in many ways Verlaine himself is the driving force behind the band and his own determination to do it right is reflected in the end result of the band's sound.

Verlaine's reputation as a mystery man comes partly from the complexity of TV's music (if you don't like it, you'll never understand him or the rest of the band) and partly because he admits that he's a shy person. "You can live a completely public life," he says, "if you are going to do that. But ... I'm just naturally private you might say." As for how much his music reveals who he is, Verlaine pauses before he answers that question. "Uhm, I just think in a way that depends on sort of what kind of window you look at their work through. I mean if you look at somebody's work through a modern psychology point of view you might think the person's a psychopath. If you look at it from an 18th Century painter's point of view you might think the guy is like a talented painter. You know what I mean? It just depends upon exactly what you are looking for. What you're looking for is the stuff you're going to find in it in a way."

As for the songs on the album, while they are often fanciful Verlaine doesn't see them as fantasy. "I wouldn't call it fantasy. I mean fantasy implies some kind of escapism to me. But then, no, they're not like escapist tunes. They're not trying to withdraw from anything."

After you hear the new Television albums you might have your own ideas of what Tom Verlaine and the band are like. Verlaine shrugs off the idea. "I just think anybody who does anything that ends up in the public eye or something, that people sometimes have real mis-

conceptions about you. And that's hard to work around because they just see you a certain way. If somebody's really wacky and really has like outrageous ideas about you, it's sometimes just funny to let them see what they are doing to themselves in a way."

The conversation drifts back to the new wave rock and the so called 'punk' scene in New York that produced Television, Patti Smith Group, The Talking Heads, The Ramones, David Johansen, Robert Gordon, and so many other artists whose music has nothing to do with each other and who you wouldn't compare if you listened to what each of them is doing.

"If people still think we are a punk rock band, they're not even going to listen to this record. I mean I know, especially among radio people, I know how they are — "Oh another New York punk band" phhhewwt they're not even going to open it."

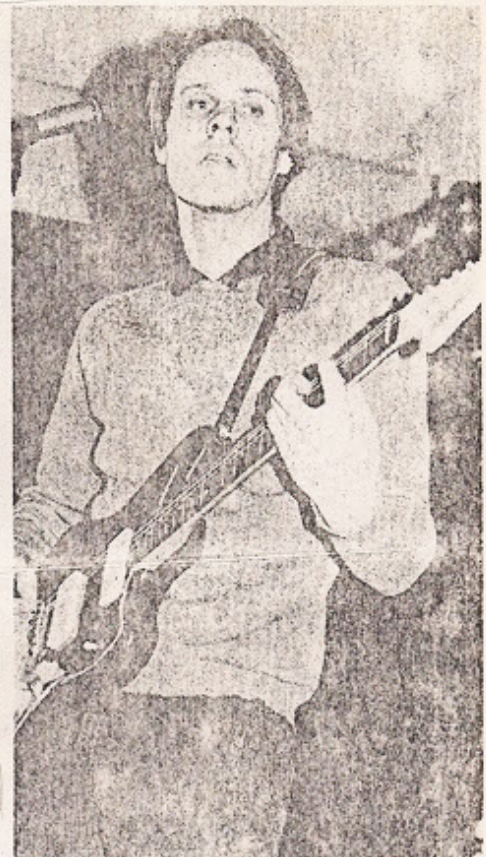
"If people listen to, you know, Fleetwood Mac — they're going to think our first record was grating. There's all guitars, there's no sweet harmonies, I mean sure. They're just going to hear it as like exhausting or something. I mean I like that about records. I think a record should exhaust you by the time it's done, otherwise it's not worth the seven dollars."

How does Verlaine feel about the new TV album?

"I think it's exhausting, yeah."

Still no sweet harmonies.

"Yeah, but the sounds of it are better though. It's just recorded better. Most people, a lot of people, probably don't know what it means. Just in terms of how to make a record sound good. I mean you can do the whole thing with one microphone. You can turn a microphone on in a room and play all your songs and put it out or else you can spend two days just



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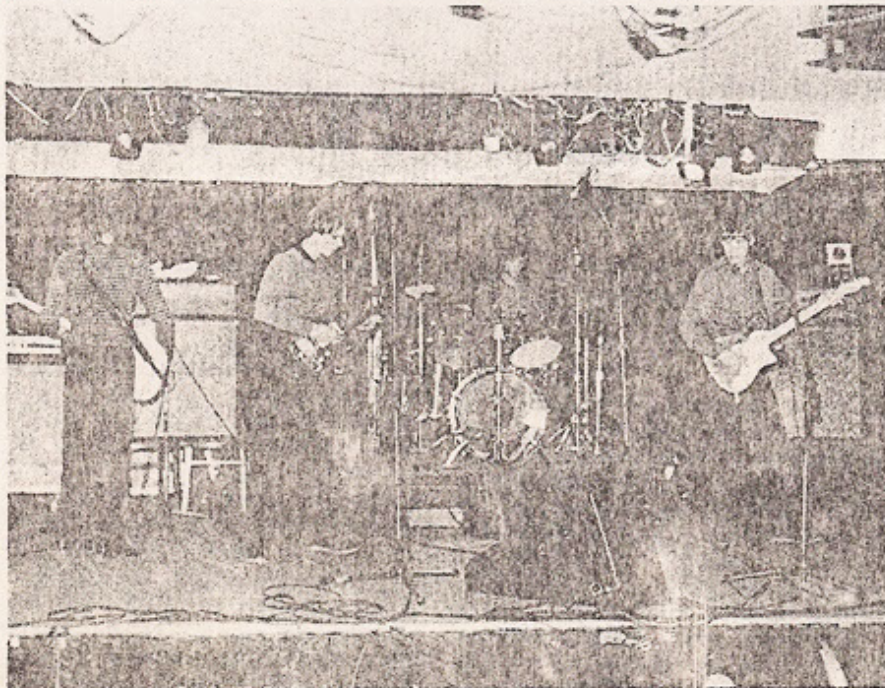
getting your microphones. I mean you rented a different kit of drums for every song just to get the drum sound right."

We talk about other bands. "I think some of the energy of the punk stuff was good, and there are a few singles I liked — one by the Clash especially — but I'd heard the MC5 and the Stooges a long time ago, and that was as good as it got."

"I don't think the punk thing helped us at all, really, because a lot of people tied us in with it and didn't listen to us. Or listened to us for the wrong reasons."

At the risk of making this sound like a promo for TV, I've got to agree with Verlaine. TV is by far my favorite rock band of the 70's, they have the power and majesty that bands like the Velvet Underground and Grateful Dead achieved in their hey-days in their own atmospheres. I know a lot of people who don't like TV, who really can't understand what they're doing. But then in the 60's I knew a lot of people who didn't understand what Lou Reed and Otis Redding and Smokey Robinson were doing (until, of course, they had a hit, and then those same people said they knew it all along). So the dilemma that TV seems to be in, of being too good, isn't something that will last. Their new album is an 'adventure', but unlike most of the pap on the radio and the refried nonsense of 60's rock stars who are still hanging on, Television know what they're doing and for my seven dollars they're making real rock and roll music on a level that most bands will never aspire to in their wildest dreams.

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