

by Ira Kaplan

The most frequently cited explanation for the breakup of Television was that Richard Lloyd's bandleading potential and songwriting ability (demonstrated on *Marquee Moon's* "Guiding Light" and emphatically reiterated on *Adventure's* "Days") were too great for him to continue as a sideman for Tom Verlaine. Even so, it was four months before Lloyd put together a group of his own, and with a few street posters to pass the word—I learned about it outside the B-52's/Nervus Rex dance party at the Club 57—played his first gigs at the Mudd Club last December. The band included TV bassist Fred Smith, ex-Feelies drummer Vinnie DeNunzio, and new-to-me rhythm guitarist Jim Mastro. Lloyd's guitar playing, of course, was never in doubt; the question was his voice. On his first time out, it was understandably thin, but for me the weakness was overcome by the spirit. The two songs Lloyd penned for Television were left to history; the only familiar original was "(I Thought) You Wanted to Know," recorded by Chris Stamey with Lloyd's assistance. The covers had all the swagger of Television taking on "Satisfaction" and "Knockin' On Heaven's Door": "Don't Be Cruel," "Beast of Burden," and "Baby Stop Crying" (!).

Seven months later, Lloyd and band—now quintet with the addition of ex-Reddy Teddy, ex-Nervous Eaters guitarist Matthew McKenzie—are at Bearsville recording their first album for Elektra. The familiarity of the musicians involved, plus the pervasive feeling among Television fans that Lloyd's emergence was only a matter of time, tends to minimize the achievement of just how little time it took for the pieces to fall into place.

Even though they recorded two of his songs, Television was obviously Tom Verlaine's band; after all, it wasn't named Radioland or Red Lips. That didn't deter Lloyd from writing—it just cut down his outlets. In fact, some of the songs Lloyd performed with his band, "Midnight Dream" and "Losin' Anna" for two, predate Television. For years, Lloyd stashed his songs away, aware that they weren't suited for Television, but without any clear notion of what was to become of them.

Nor were there many possibilities to develop his voice. Lloyd did record insane renditions of the Rolling Stones' "Connection" and "Get Off My Cloud"

for Ork Records, to be released under the name Blue Vein, but the dissolution of Ork US put a stop to that. So although in the short term the breakup of the TV was not unanticipated by Lloyd, the next step was challenging enough—becoming a lead singer, taking on the responsibilities of a front man—that one can easily understand Lloyd's temporary inertia, especially in view of his almost romantic image of his previous group.

"I did not know that Television would ever dissolve," he says today. "I thought it would be a 15-year group, not a five-year group. I thought it was gonna be a seminal group like, you know, Stones, Who—survive forever. But as time went by, things changed."

Right around the time Television called it quits, Vinnie DeNunzio was leaving the Feelies. He and Richard jammed together in the then-unfinished basement of the Mudd Club until they were comfortable with each other. Lloyd next played a few of his songs for Fred Smith, who liked what he heard and agreed to join; at the time, he was also working with Tom Verlaine on his solo LP, providing production assistance similar to his role on the second Television LP. Brook DeLarco of the Mudd Club suggested Jim Mastro, of a New Jersey band called Paper Men. Coincidentally, Terry Ork had once asked Lloyd if he would care to produce Paper Men (his refusal had to do with other members of the group). In addition to

their frequent gigs, the Lloyd quartet made a demo for Elektra, produced by Lloyd. The subsequent addition of a third guitar indicates that they may have been rushing things, but Lloyd cites ulterior motives: "The criteria at that point was to get it to the company quickly. We were all starving." With no intention of holding a day job, and with the money he'd made in Television all gone, Lloyd was in a hurry. The band recorded basic tracks for nine songs; Lloyd added overdubs to the three he figured would go the fastest.

In another part of town, Elektra had added former WBCN disc jockey Maxanne Sartori to its A&R department. She heard the demo, saw the band, and decided they could do better. She introduced Richard to guitarist Matthew McKenzie, whom she knew from Boston, and Mike Young, an engineer who'd worked with Todd Rundgren, and whom Sartori met when he helped with the Cars' pre-production for *Candy-O*. The enlarged group recorded four nights at CBGB's with Young mixing. Lloyd re-recorded the vocals and the result was the four-song demo that got him signed, one which cost nearly half as little as the first.

With that in mind, one of the ideas considered for the album was to recreate the circumstances of that successful demo, with the added benefits of a few months' live work and the voice lessons Lloyd started taking as soon as the deal with Elektra became official. Instead, they've set out for Bearsville, but with Mike Young still as producer. And although Richard says he has orchestras in mind for some of his songs, the tracks for this album will be recorded so that the band will have no problem reproducing the arrangements in concert.

Listening to Lloyd describe his writing, it quickly becomes apparent why he needed his own group. "I don't write esoteric baloney," he maintains. "I don't write things that take you 15 million listens to listen to, 'cause I'm basically a simple person." The major influence on his writing is pop music; Richard even likens his "Number 9" to the Monkees' "Last Train to Clarksville." But while the melodies are there, the emphasis remains on Lloyd's phenomenal guitar playing. On his own, he displays a skill that wasn't often called upon by Television: a rare ability to play long, single-note solos within pop chord progressions without losing the feel of the song.

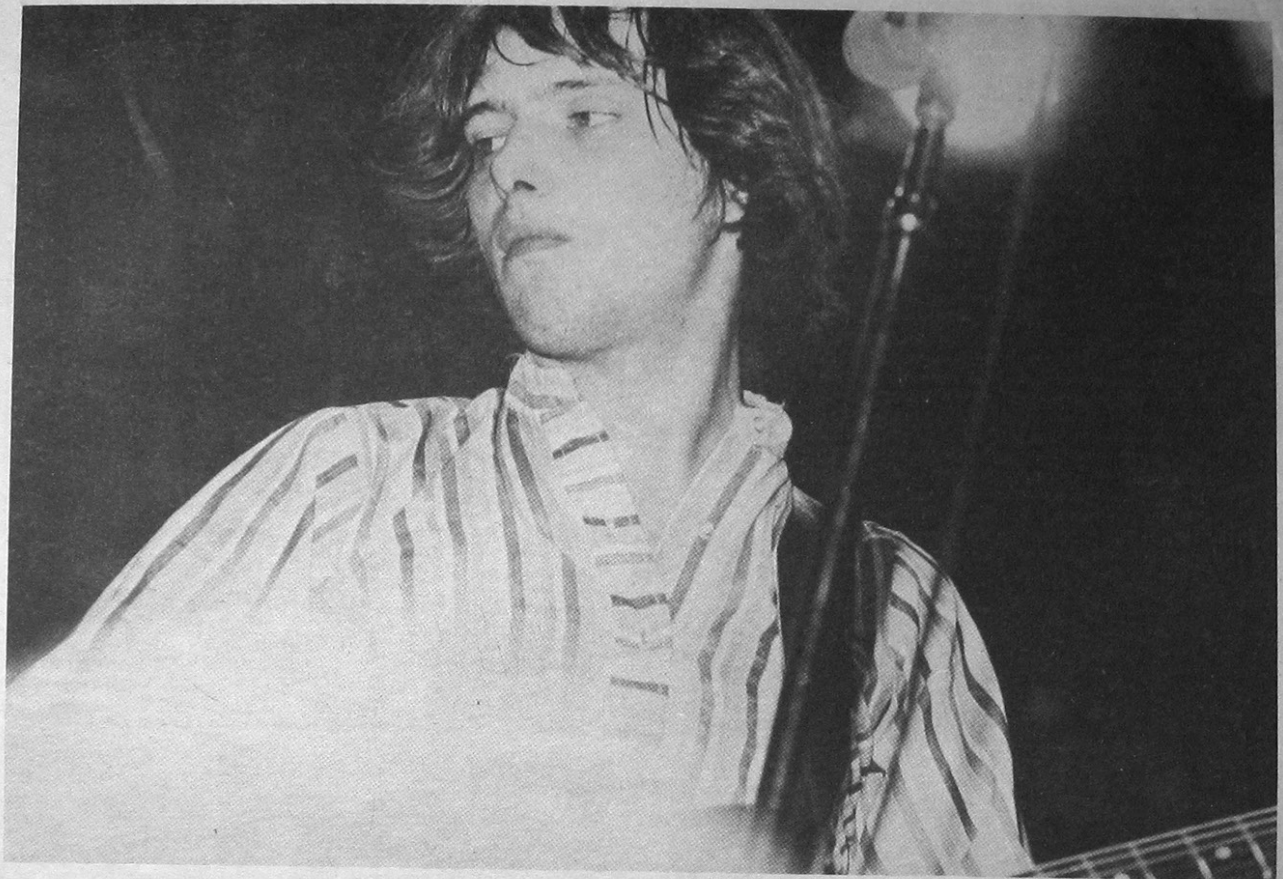
A New Voice

A New Band

A New Deal

RICHARD LLOYD'S TEST PATTERNS





Sartori, who Lloyd is eager to credit for selling him to the Elektra brass, sees Richard as a candidate for the next great guitar hero, noting that even Ted Nugent is toning down the heavy metal these days. Personally, I can see Lloyd filling the slot that was reserved for Nils Lofgren for so many years, one into which Lofgren never fit, and that Peter Frampton wimped his way into instead. In contrast to Lofgren, whose career stagnated because he was unable to write a song that he hadn't already written three times before, Lloyd can't stop. Even now, it's difficult to get any sure idea of what the nine songs on his album will be, because he's likely to come up with more tunes at the last minute. Similarly, the band has given up performing covers, although Richard reels off a provocative list of songs he'd like to do: "Crimson and Clover," "Rebel Rebel," "Changes," "Shapes of Things." "I've got so many songs, there's not enough time to anybody else's," he explains. "I can't even do all of my own."

To one who used to watch Lloyd dementedly bounce his guitar on the stage—"I managed to keep a straight face, but believe me, the humor in it was certainly full-fledged and there," he claims—Lloyd's constant emphasis on "professional attitude" was a revelation. During our interview, he brought it up in relation to recording budgets, the need for an outside producer, and the importance of putting himself on salary and ignoring the temptation to blow his advance on guitars. "I suppose I could become a folk act. Now that I've got the money I can become a folk act and go to Tangiers or Aruba and make an album on a cassette machine and send it in," he muses during a relaxed moment.

Part of that new attitude came about through the loss of Innocence that occurred in Television. "When Richard Hell left," he recalls, "to me, it was like the Beatles breaking up, even though we stayed together. When we changed one member, even though I felt that Fred was far the better musician and the band got far better, subsequently. But when that happened, it shocked me into the reality that no group lasts forever." As a result, Lloyd says, he'll "never be in another group again, even as a leader. It's me." The group he has now is under no contractual commitment; in fact, possible problems lie ahead.

Particularly with Fred Smith. Verlaine's album should be out by the time this article is, and shortly thereafter he'll be going on the road. Smith would like to continue to work with both Lloyd and Verlaine, and doesn't care to speculate on how that will or will not

happen. "It'll all work out," he hopes, "or they'll both fire me." Not being signed exclusively to Elektra will also keep him free to do outside production. Recently, his single with the Revelons, "The Way" b/w "97 Tears," was released on Ork UK, arousing some major label interest in the band.

Likewise, Jim Mastro continues to play with Paper Men, and Matthew MacKenzie, who was the leader of Reddy Teddy, is a song-writer who presumably will be looking to play his own material. This doesn't faze Lloyd: "When I asked him to join the band, I said, 'If you want to, use me as a stepping stone.' If any of the guys in my band ever feel that they're gonna be better off anywhere else, I can't stand in their way."

As earlier comments noted here make clear, whatever bitterness arose in the breakup of Television has been dealt with. Lloyd speaks very warmly of Verlaine. "A lot of people don't understand," he explains, "that for as much aggravation Tom caused, everybody, sometimes, he also could be one of the most humorous and—I mean, he had, at times during those five years, nearly had me piss in my pants for laughter. That's a bit crude, but it's true. Now that the band's broken up and a lot of pressure's off him, I think that, having heard his new album, a lot of people are going to be surprised." Lloyd reports that Verlaine heard his first demo and liked "Alchemy," while contradicting the story in *NY Rocker* that there was any sort of reunion planned at any of the Mudd Club shows. All in all, he considers Television "one of the best groups I've ever heard."

Lloyd speaks no less self-assuredly when I ask him how he will break through to a market that has proven resistant to his type of music in the past (although admittedly, there are signs that that is changing). "I'm a workaholic, and I think about the job I have to do literally 24 hours a day," he replies. "Due to that fact, I'm gonna leave less stones unturned than perhaps other bands do, in terms of getting this stuff out. A lot of rock and roll bands really are in it for the fun. They're not in it 'cause they need to. They're not in it because their heart compels them to play certain things. They're in it for the side effects, you know, the pharmacological aspect, for the limousines, or they're in to make a living. I have to do this, and it will happen, and I don't really have a choice about it."

From here, Lloyd moves on to a topic not normally encountered in rock and roll interviews: a defense of record companies. "A lot of bands that write great songs, what do they do with those songs?" he asks.

"They give them to the record company and expect the record company, which is a mass of people like an ant hill, they expect this whole mass of people, all to get behind it and push it into the world's consciousness. Whereas if they recognize that all a record company basically is is a distribution system, and that the job is still theirs to have the public hear their material and to recognize it for what it's worth, whatever it's worth, a lot of the songs I think you're speaking of would be a lot more appreciated. The thing is, if you sell records, everybody makes money, or everybody makes a living. And if you don't sell records, everybody's screwed anyway."

Clearly, Richard Lloyd expects to sell a lot of records, which makes him no different from at least half the people who make albums. But to go from a sideman, albeit in one of the finest bands of all time, to leader of a pack, get signed, and put out a record as quickly as he has—that's unusual. "Suddenly it seems very easy to have been just a guitarist for five years," he realizes. And all protestations of "no more groups" to the contrary, it's at least comforting to look around and find stability in what you see. Despite their outside interests, Lloyd can say, "I feel the group is permanent. You know, I feel privileged to be in this band, too. 'Cause it's really, as far as I'm concerned, a fine unit. I'm just luckier than punk. . . I mean Puck."

I hope he's right on both counts.

