

# THE HIT PARADER INTERVIEW

With Lisa Robinson

To put it simply, Television - the group - is a New York based band comprised of guitarists Tom Verlaine and Richard Lloyd, drummer Billy Ficca and bassist Fred Smith.

But because of their uniquely experimental rock music, and the presence of lead singer / guitarist / songwriter Tom Verlaine, who is a truly charismatic rock figure, this band is much more than your ordinary underground sensation.

While I've willingly stayed in CBGB's until 4 A.M. to hear the final note of Television's second set, I find it difficult to define their music. Their guitars are magnificent; Verlaine has been compared vocally to Dylan, musically to Hendrix.

Critics have called Television the "Stravinskys of rock and roll", "the aural equivalent to Dr. Caligari's Cabinet", and said, "To call Television 'punk rock' would be to describe Dostoevsky as a short story writer".

This interview with Tom Verlaine was conducted in Wartoke's New York offices on January 5, 1977 - just prior to the release of Television's debut LP, "Marquis Moon".

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**HP:** What were your hopes, plans, dreams and ambitions for this first record?

**Tom:** The major concern was getting a decent sound. Not necessarily an Elton John sound ... or a West Coast sound ... but like an East Coast sound, like Springsteen's records have a good sound.

**HP:** Up to a certain point, do you feel you were inhibited on stage by the equipment you were using?

**Tom:** No, in fact our stuff sounds better on stage than it did in the studio. By the time we got to the studio, after two nights in the studio all our equipment was almost useless. We had to rent amps for the studio, because our amps were falling apart - completely. We would call up SIR (Studio Instrument Rentals) and have them deliver eight amplifiers, and out of those, six were no good ... it was a whole routine.

**HP:** But did you find it a problem in the studio ... just making that transition from playing in small clubs and making demos to doing the actual record?

**Tom:** Well, I don't think the studio is a big deal. I think what you have to do is be in tune ... Really. All you have to do is to be in tune ... everyone in the group knows what performance of the song is the strongest, so there are no arguments.



## TOM VERLAINE

Kate Simon

"I don't like being associated with anything ... It's like everything begins with a certain inspiration, without preconception or idea, ends up in politics."

Anybody can hear if the bass drum falls over, so we can't use this take or that take, or this take is out of tune, or that one is too rushed. Anyone in the group who isn't a maniac can hear that, listen back to a tape and know that "I blew it again" ... My policy is that you do it three or four times and then you forget it and go back to another number. Then maybe come back to it the next day, or maybe the next week.

**HP:** How long did it take for you to record?

**Tom:** I think it was about twenty days. The last days we were working 14 hours

to get certain things. I really had a good time ... we worked about seven days a week.

**HP:** What problems did you run into other than the equipment?

**Tom:** It was just that the equipment was all falling apart. Like the board was falling apart. There were some bad connections in the wires, and there would be some crackles, and it wasn't because of anything going on in the room, it was because of the board. That was the main problem, as far as I can tell, it happened with the voices too...

**HP:** You personally seem pretty dis-

ciplined. I don't think I've ever seen you stoned, or drunk ... It's pretty unusual for a musician, especially in this particular scene...

Tom: Well, I'm not conscious of it. I don't have the kind of health that I can take a lot of stuff...

HP: Did you ever?

Tom: Oh yeah ... I went through years of doing all that stuff ... from about 19 to 22 ... I don't know, the only thing that happens to you is you have peak experiences that sort of last with you, and you have certain experiences that are so horrible that you don't want to take the chance of repeating them at all. I don't think I'm disciplined enough. There are people who can write several songs a day. I really wish I could do that but I can't ... Also, you have to realize that you need a certain discipline to get things done. If you leave one thing out of an airplane, it won't fly right. You have to do everything on the ground to make sure it works.

HP: Do you feel that some of the people in the band have pulled themselves together in a way that wasn't evident a year ago?

Tom: Well, they have to. Everybody has their own set of problems, like my problems aren't Lloyd's problems ... Billy's problems aren't my problems ... but you have to pull yourself together. The whole pace changes when you're making a record. That's the thing I'm noticing now. There's a whole acceleration of pace. I don't know what it is, exactly. Maybe it's just that when you do a record, it might fulfill some idea you had about it. I wanted to do a record since I was 16, and I don't fantasize about it. Even then, Elektra was the label I was fascinated with, really. When I was 16 it was the Doors, and Love, and I thought their covers were great. It looked like somebody there really cared about the sound. They had the first great rock engineers, they really cared about it. It seemed like the hippest label, it was the hippest label. But there's this thing about pace, I don't even know what it is. It's really a mystery. But you feel like even if you aren't doing anything ... my days aren't that different than they were a year ago ... but I do feel that there is some acceleration.

HP: Do you feel you're on a different level now, now that you have an album out?

Tom: I don't know if it's a level, I don't think it's a level. I know there is some feeling of it being too fast.

HP: Really? After all this time?

Tom: Really. yeah. When it happens it starts to happen fast and I think it happens a little too fast.

HP: You can't deal with it?

Tom: Well, I have to deal with it. I think there is a way to slow it down, too. It's just a matter of letting everyone you are involved with know that you're not going to run around like a maniac. That you're going to take your time with this. Even if, before you could take your time with it naturally, now you actually have to slow down just to take your time. It's a feeling I'm not used to.



Television ... is Billy Ficca, Richard Lloyd, Tom Verlaine, Fred Smith.

HP: Do you think there is going to be a misconception on the part of the media, or kids across the country, that you're a 'New York band'?

Tom: Well, there are always misconceptions, I guess. It's really a matter of how much airplay we get. If people just hear it ... all I can say is they should hear it. If they hear it, they won't have any misconceptions.

HP: You never really hung out very much...

Tom: Well, that's a matter of being shy, really...

HP: Is it that, or is it that you wanted to disassociate yourself from this particular scene?

Tom: No, I don't like being associated with anything. It's probably inevitable that you are associated with something... There's this friend of John Cage's, named Morton Feldman, he's like a modern composer. His music is close to being no music at all. It's just these little sounds. He got close to Cage, and Cage, of course, was like the politician of the whole 1950's avant garde, classical music thing. Anyway, this guy Feldman said that everything begins with a certain inspiration, without any preconception or idea, and ends up in politics. I don't mean politics of democracy, or political ideas, or that sort of thing. It ends up with ... well, "Blank Generation" is the example of a political song. If something begins with a certain idea ... and ends up in politics ... politics, politics, what's another word for it ... Well, ends up academic.

I think the New York scene is ending up academic, in a certain way. I think people already think of it in a certain way ... If the words 'New York' are used in our ads, it's immediately going to register that the other bands from New York have used the same thing ... and that's politics, that has nothing to do with anything. I think our company wants to use it, because they want to present us as the best act from a certain place...

HP: Well, that's okay...

Tom: Yeah ... but New York groups have a reputation of being more personality, more like they are inspired amateurs. I like that, I have nothing against it ... alot of reggae music, to me, is made by inspired amateurs. I like that whole thing. But I think it should be seen for what it is. I don't think it should be ... I don't think it needs to be called anything more than inspired amateur stuff. It is inspired. The level of inspiration is not that high, but...

HP: You're talking about others, right? Not you ...

Tom: Right.

HP: Do you think the level of inspiration is higher with your music?

Tom: Well, fuck ... I can't sit here and say that it is, because everybody sees their own stuff the same way. I do think we have more ability. I definitely think we have more ability than most of the groups in New York. I haven't seen them all, but most of the ones that are on record anyway ... But I think that's obvious to anyone who sees us.

HP: Do you think of yourself as amateurs?

Tom: No. I definitely don't think of ourselves as amateurs. In fact, I would be embarrassed by doing anything amateur. The only way you can defend being an amateur is through an artistic point of view, which to me, is what Jonathan Richman does. He is like the perfect inspired amateur ... although I don't think he's so inspired, either, you know? 'Cause his whole thing is like ... amateurism is holy ... and I don't respect that. I like it, but I don't respect it. I don't hate it, it's just that the whole thing leaves me cold. It's like they're afraid of losing something. And I don't think you can go through life being afraid of losing something.

HP: How do you feel about this whole New York scene thing that has grown up around CBGB ... you must be surprised in a way, since it was you who convinced Hilly to let bands play there...

Tom: Well, in a way, I wish there was a real scene...

HP: You mean like Andy Warhol's Factory in the 1960's...

Tom: Well, I don't think it would hurt. That kind of stuff is exciting, and I don't think there really is one...

HP: How do you feel about all the stuff that's happening ... knowing that you have the record out, and you can play ... you don't have to worry about another job ... like in a bookstore again...

Tom: Oh, but I am in that situation, though. In a way, I mean I may end up working in a bookstore, I don't know.

HP: You think so??

Tom: Well, you never know what's going to happen. I have no idea what's going to happen. I don't know how commercially successful we're going to be, I don't know what to say about this. I don't know who our audience is. Or the age group. I can't predict any of that stuff... □

To be continued.