

RAYGUN

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BOOTS

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THE BIBLE OF MUSIC AND STYLE AND THE END OF PRINT



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TV:

Tom Verlaine, founder of seminal seventies New York band Television, has already warned me that he hates doing interviews. In fact, he has told me (with a laugh) that he hates interviews so much that he once united a group of musicians to demand that publications pay for the privilege.

§ Tom has, however, agreed to discuss his recent work. He has scored his first feature film *Love & A .45*, and his second solo album *Dreamtime* has just been re-released by Infinite Zero, the record label formed by Rick Rubin and Henry Rollins to distribute their old favorites on compact disc.

§ Tom asks that we meet at Rocco's, a small Italian restaurant in the West Village. We arrive at exactly the same moment, each approaching from the opposite direction. Tom is tall and appears lopsided. Only one arm protrudes from his royal blue linen shirt. He has a hurt shoulder that has kept his arm in a sling for almost a month.

§ With one-arm, he enjoys a three-course Italian meal and smokes several Export A cigarettes, which, it seems, help him forget how much he hates interviews.

TOM VERLAINE,

RAYGUN: YOUR SOLO ALBUM *DREAMTIME* [HAS JUST BEEN RE-RELEASED. **¿A**ND WHAT MUSIC WERE YOU LISTENING [TO AT THE TIME?

Tom Verlaine: Ah, yes. It's been out everywhere in the world except for America for like six years. I haven't heard it in about five years. I just remember that it's really dense. The sound is really dense. We had this experiment — you know when you record, you have these meters that tell you how loud you are supposed to be before you do it? Well, I had read something about how they didn't really mean anything. So we just covered the meters and [laughs] recorded everything twice or five times as loud as it should have been just to see what it would sound like. So it has a very overloaded sound, not like some hippie's distorted record, but on the verge of it.

I didn't like anything then. In the Seventies, I was really fed up. I didn't have a television or even a radio until 1983. I was completely bored with media. And when I went to see other bands, I'd be really bored. So I sort of decided... well, sometimes you make music because nothing else around is what you want to hear, you know?

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¿SO WHY DID YOU NAME YOUR BAND [TELEVISION?

TELEVISION

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MANY PEOPLE HAVE OBSERVED THAT YOUR LAST SOLO ALBUM *WARM &*

COOL HAS A VERY FILM NOIR FEELING... I was aware that certain parts of the music could be cool in certain films. For lack of a better word, it has a very black and white kind of mood. A lot of it has to do with using the brushes on the drums.

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¿DID YOU EVER PICTURE THAT MUSIC IN [A FILM LIKE *LOVE & A .45*?

[Laughs.] No. But I hope people notice the comedy in that film. I think that some of the viewers might not pick it up at all. But it's absurdist pretty much all the way through.

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¿DID YOU PLAY WITH HUMOR IN YOUR [SCORE?

I recorded one song with keyboards and cheesy organs and synthesizers. It's very kitsch, and it was intended for a driving scene where [the lead actress] is talking about Hollywood films.

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¿DO YOU WATCH MANY FILMS?

Yes and no. I think in the Seventies, I spent several years checking out directors' styles. Like there's a director called Samuel Fuller, you know? I saw all his films, and they were great..

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¿DO YOU WATCH TELEVISION NOW?

Actually, my father won one in a contest, and he mailed it to me. So I started watching around '90 or '91, and it just broke about nine months ago. I've had long discussions with people about this — there are now two types of individuals in America: people who watch TV and people who don't. And there's a huge difference in these people, just a huge difference, especially in how articulate they are.

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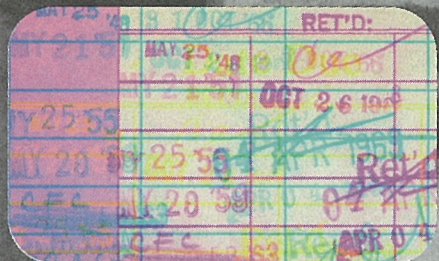
¿DO YOU LISTEN TO ANY NEW MUSIC?

There's such a proliferation of new stuff. Who can hear it all? Who can even buy it all? I admire all this do-it-yourself stuff, but it's tough. I think if you have no expectations about it you are okay, but if you actually have high hopes that something might happen, you are fooling yourself.

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¿BUT ISN'T THAT HOW YOU STARTED [TELEVISION?

Oh, yeah, definitely. In the Seventies, we thought it was so stupid to go shopping things around. We thought, 'Let's just start our own record company,' and actually we should have kept it going because, in terms of money, we probably would have made ten times as much. We recorded a song called "Little Johnny Jewel" on a



AND THE TELEVISION



VISION?

I don't like that for a band name anymore. I really liked four-track — it was actually almost like a rap it at the song, just a riff with me talking on it — and time magazines like *Penthouse*, the oddest magazines, because it gave little write-ups because I think the seemed so journalists were equally fed up with what the blank and record companies were doing. They thought, all- 'Wow! What's this little weird homemade record? encompass- This is cool.' So this got written up in the most sing at the unlikely places, and they all printed the address same time. so we sold several thousand of these through the And there mail.

was a
cheesiness
to it that I
really liked,
as well. I don't think so. No, I wouldn't say that.

TELEVISION WAS PERFORMING AT [CBGB'S OFTEN...
I think we played there about once every two weeks. They still had a lot of folk music then. They tended to have rock music on weekends and lower key stuff during the week. Then in late '75, I think, they decided to have the New Rock Festival. It was the first time they spent a lot of money on advertising, which attracted the *New York Times* and other established press to this dump on the Bowery to see what was going on in this "field."

AND WHO WAS THERE?
Everybody who you could figure out was around plus probably three dozen bands that never made a record.

DID IT FEEL LIKE SOMETHING WAS FINALLY HAPPENING, [SOMETHING IMPORTANT?
Nah. It just felt like you still gotta lug the amp in the cab. The good thing about it was that we actually made money because people who'd read about it in the paper had actually paid to get in, so all of a sudden you have a couple hundred bucks in your pocket after one show, which was very surprising.

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WHERE WERE YOU LIVING AT THE [TIME?
11th Street and First Avenue — I lived there from '68 to about '80.

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WHY DID YOU LEAVE THE EAST [VILLAGE?
I can't remember, just a change of scenes. Of course, that neighborhood was vastly different then. There wasn't a single expensive restaurant there, and you didn't have two thousand people descending on Avenue A at night. In fact, you only had about two bars that you went to. I don't know what the crime statistics are, but there was a hell of a lot more crime back then.

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WERE YOU MUGGED?
Three times. Twice with a knife and once with a gun. The time with the gun, I was so drunk, I just kept staring at the guy, and he thought I was nuts and walked away. He had looked me in the eyes and said, "You know what you've got? You've got cats' eyes. You've got cat's eyes, and I'm not going to mess with you!" I guess I was so drunk and pissed off, I must have been glaring at him like a maniac. He just got scared — it was very peculiar.

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DID YOU GROW UP HERE IN NEW [YORK?
I actually grew up in Delaware and came here in '68.

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DID YOU COME HERE FOR SCHOOL?
No. I went to college for like three days in South Carolina. Literally. All these guys came after me to cut my hair. It was '67 and long hair still wasn't happening in the South yet, only in little enclaves.

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WERE YOU INTO THE HIPPIE THING?
No. My hair had just been growing all summer. I didn't bother to cut it. I wasn't big on hippies actually. I remember being in New York one

Saturday, and the whole Village was vacant. I looked around and finally went in a restaurant, and there was a TV on showing these helicopter views of Woodstock. I saw all these people sliding in mud, sitting around and cooking in the sun, getting sick, and I thought, "Who would go to this?" Of course, everybody I knew went.

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WHAT WERE YOU DOING IN NEW [YORK BEFORE TELEVISION?
I was sort of playing guitar, but I was more interested in writing back then.

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WRITING WHAT?
Oh, I guess, poetry, songs and stuff.

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WHO WERE YOUR POETIC HERGES?
In the late Sixties, it was French poets, and then by the Seventies, it was Spanish poets: These are people who have a certain, to put it in a non-literary way, they have a certain spunk.

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WHAT ABOUT AMERICANS? THE [BEATS?
The Beat thing happened when I was younger. I used to run away from home, inspired by Beats, like in '64 and '65.

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YOU WERE A PROBLEM CHILD...
I didn't think so, I just didn't like school. Me and a friend got away once for three weeks and ended up in jail in Alabama. We were hitchhiking through southern Alabama and couldn't get a ride. So late one night, we went into these woods and started a little fire to keep warm. A cop came out of nowhere and put us in jail. [Laughs] We said we were college students going back to the University of Miami, and we gave him phony names, but I guess they didn't believe us. The next day, he came to the bars of the jail cell and he said, "Well, Tom, well, Richard, I think your folks will be happy to see you..." We never figured out how he found out who we were.

FOR JIMENEZ VALLEJO

INTERVIEW BY AMY TALKINGTON