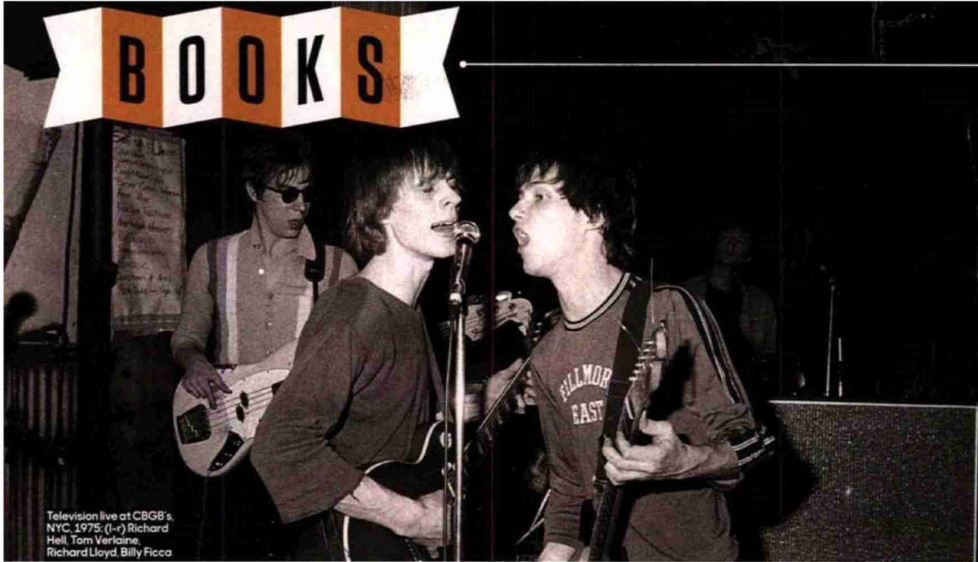


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Television live at CBGB's, NYC, 1975. (l-r) Richard Hell, Tom Verlaine, Richard Lloyd, Billy Ficca

I SUPPOSE I wanted to be God," writes Richard Lloyd in *Everything Is Combustible*, the Television guitarist's eccentric,

episodic memoir, which feels at times like stumbling into an unmapped and somewhat inhospitable foreign land.

Lloyd's life has been scarred by mental illness, drug abuse, alcoholism and prostitution. "I have a huge tolerance for pain," he writes, not unreasonably, having been hospitalised several times since his teens, in places that "made *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* look like kindergarten". As a child, he takes refuge in "sacred sciences" and "magical thinking", bending reality to fit his will. It seems to work. During an unanchored adolescence he talks "space dribble" with Hendrix, gets a guitar lesson from John Lee Hooker, and projectile vomits in Buddy Guy's dressing room. He plays drums, until his drums start speaking to him: "You need to play a melodic instrument," they say. He sells drugs to raise \$200 for a Stratocaster, and we're away.

In scuzzy '70s NYC he enters the orbit of Tom Verlaine and Richard Hell, and forms Television. Verlaine is a stern, abstemious musical director, Hell an untutored agitator. Billy Ficca also arrives, a stubborn drummer with a carrot addiction so fierce it turns his skin orange. Lloyd tries to find his place, as Television make their debut at CBGB's in 1974, where they help build the stage and the scene. There are soft words for The Ramones and Blondie, harder ones for Patti Smith. Already a "raging alcoholic", Lloyd gets into heroin with Hell, who is gone long before the majestic *Marquee Moon* lands in 1977. He is befriended by Keith Richards and Anita Pallenberg, bonding over

REVIEWED THIS MONTH



EVERYTHING IS COMBUSTIBLE
 RICHARD LLOYD
 BEECHMILL PUBLISHING
 7/10



PEGGY SEEGER: A MEMOIR
 PEGGY SEEGER
 FABER & FABER
 8/10

pharmaceutical cocaine and a willing quack-doctor, whose Uptown waiting room at one point also contains Mick Taylor and Felix Pappalardi.

By Television's second LP, *Adventure*, Lloyd has tired of Verlaine's "silly little songs" and "dictatorial" attitude. Now a "full blown junkie", in London he's delivered to hospital DOA by Peter Perrett, who'd administered a dose of super-strength heroin. Electric shock treatment saves his life. Following his first solo album, *Alchemy* – "A pop classic" – he's dropped by Elektra and descends into "the Great Depression of 1980-'84". Later, come periods of sobriety and relapse, happy spells playing alongside Matthew Sweet, and far too much detail about his torrential sexual appetites. ("I'm lucky enough to have once had sex with a girl who was a sword swallower. She loved to swallow my sword...")

Lloyd's writing is like his soloing: utterly individual, adventurous, tonally uneven: at times disjointed; at others thrilling. Recent events are covered in haste. In 2007 he leaves the reformed Television, still cursing Verlaine. "He never lost his free-floating contempt for anything or anybody that wasn't him... He was an absolute embarrassment to be around." More happily, he writes of profound encounters with the work of Gurdjieff and Cynthia Plastercaster, the mixture of the sacred and profane summing up the governing forces of a chaotic life.

Peggy Seeger's poetic, unflinching autobiography, *First Time Ever*, takes its title from "The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face", the song Ewan MacColl wrote for her in the mid-'50s at the start of their love affair. Her 30-year relationship with MacColl – 20 years her senior, and already a husband and father when they meet – is

at the core of her book, though her 82 years have hardly been short of further incident.

Part of a large family raised by left-leaning musicians Charlie and Dio, Seeger's background is one of relaxed, liberal privilege. At their Maryland homestead, the arts prevail: Jackson Pollock and Alan Lomax are liable to pop over; by her teens, her folk-guru older brother Pete is already a star.

She is wilful, clever, curious. Seeger arrives in England at Lomax's behest in March 1956. "Banjo in hand, I tottered in on high heels to meet my next 33 years." What she actually meets is MacColl, who sternly declares his love the following day, overcome with "sudden amorous urges". Seeger reciprocates, though she doesn't always seem sure why. She writes about his "vociferous and hypocritical purisms", his selfishness and cruelty, as well as his power. His death in 1989 comes shortly after the beginning of Seeger's unexpected love affair with a woman, Irene, who remains her life partner today. She confronts the pain, guilt, wonder and duplicity of this domestic rupture with disarming honesty.

Her writing is a treat. MacColl's mother, Betsy, is "the size of tuppence, all tongue and temper, short on tenderness". A young Albert Grossman is ripe with "entitled self-confidence... an unappetising man, fish mouth, little pebble glasses, little pebble eyes." Music flows through it all, natural and unforced. Amid the personal detail, Seeger tracks the changing tides of the folk tradition from the '50s to the present day. She regards herself as a "link in the chain of oral tradition. Like my physical children, [songs] form my core... Unlike my physical children, they have grown towards me rather than away." © GRAEME THOMSON

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