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Glenn O'Brien's TV Party episodes

Posted by [Madison Carter](#) on 09/13/2006, 06:06 AM



You know DVD has hit its apex when even local access shows from the late 1970s are given the digital treatment.



You know DVD has hit its apex when even local access shows from the late 1970s are given the digital treatment. Is it a sign that the format has hit the bottom of the barrel or that it has become more daring,

unearthing items so obscure they barely make sense in today's world?

TV Party was the brainchild of Glenn O'Brien, a music critic who contributed to *High Times*, *Playboy*, *Rolling Stone* and more. Most importantly, he was a protege of Andy Warhol, and that more than anything is telling in how he ran his public cable show. Along with co-host Chris Stein (of the band *Blondie*), O'Brien held court over a bizarre, free-form show. In concept, it would be similar to the standard late-night talk show, with a regular band, guests, interviews, skits, etc. In concept, at least. O'Brien didn't care much for the normalcy of such shows. He took those ideas and turned them into something...well, different. In a time when *CBGB's* and punk rock were converting the city's youth and killing off *Disco*, O'Brien's show was an outlet for the same sort of random rebellion the movement embodied.

Several episodes from the 80 ep-plus run have been released on DVD through *BrinkDVD*. Three separate shows made it our way: "The Halloween Show" (10/30/79), "the Time & Makeup Show" (08/19/79), and "the Crusades Show" (02/17/81). The themes of the shows are rarely as structured as the titles suggest. They instead rely on Walter Steding's fairly horrible free-form studio band (the *TV Party Orchestra*) to play nearly throughout each show while O'Brien rambled about various topics. Things to watch out for include *Fab Five Freddie* performing a short, but entertaining rap on the "Crusades" episode and, of course, *Debbie Harry's* appearances on two of the DVDs.



The quality of the shows aren't always great, but they're still watchable. For something that was intended to be shot live and never captured on tape for future market release, they certainly could be worse. *Party's* worst enemy as far as quality goes isn't even the archiving of the footage, but the original recordings themselves; shot in a studio in which half the equipment seemed on the verge of destruction, mics are often soft, camera shots are hazy, etc.

The extras on the discs range from stuff as abstract as the show itself (oftentimes taken from other episodes not released yet, it looks) to stuff with a bit more substance (Steding's music video "the Secret Spy" shows him to be a rather competent artist).

TV Party will appeal mainly to those who grew up in the New York region of the late 70s/early 80s, and are nostalgic for when things were a little more anarchic. It's definitely got the punk scene vibe, but without the anger. It was live television at its best and worst, allowing a different voice to be heard, albeit in one region (two, if you count the time period it aired in California, where it inspired *Black Flag's* punk anthem "TV Party").

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Comments

That's a good review. I tried to watch the Halloween episode and just gave up. I'm too old for that crap.

Posted by [Stefan](#) 09/13/2006, 03:02 PM

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