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### TV Party: The Documentary (2005)



**Starring:** Glenn O'Brien, Chris Stein, Walter Steding, Deborah Harry, Amos Poe, Lenny Ferrari, Lisa Rosen, Tim Wright, Fab Five Freddy, Edo Bertoglio, Robert Aaron, Kate Simon, Tav Valco, Arto Lindsey, and James Chladek

**Director:** Dany Vinik

**Category:** Documentary

No, it's not an in-depth history of the Black Flag song, nor is it not about [Billy Ingram's very cool website](#), but it *is* about a TV series...albeit one which, unless you lived in New York City or the general vicinity, you either never saw or only caught via bootleg video tapes.

The New York cable access show, "TV Party," was, for lack of a better description, the Avant-garde/punk rock version of "Playboy After Dark"...and if you've never seen or heard of "Playboy After Dark," well, it was literally a party masquerading as a TV show. As host Glenn O'Brien said at the beginning of almost every episode of "TV Party," it was "the TV show that's a cocktail party, but which could be a political party," and the rule of thumb was that, if you were tuned in enough to know where the show took place, you were cool enough to attend the party. (And if you couldn't find the studio, you could always participate in the live call-in segment of each show.) At one point, David Letterman declared it to be his favorite show...and you can see why; you'd never know it now, but Dave's show was once almost as anarchic as "TV Party."

The majority of the footage is in black and white, there are a lot of quick cuts from camera to camera, and you can never tell when the cameraman is going to get bored and just start bouncing around...or, for that matter, whether or not he's been smoking pot or shooting heroin. And, no, that's not a joke. O'Brien tells a caller at one point that, if the camera's very steady, "well, that just means there's a lack of good drugs down here at the studio." In fact, there's an extended discussion which, fascinatingly, reveals that, during the show's four-year run (1978–1982), they were regularly doing drugs on the air...which, if nothing else, proves that "TV Party" had an almost-exclusively hip audience, i.e. no narcs. (The hipness quotient, by the way, was confirmed when artists like Andy Warhol and Jean-Michel Basquiat dropped by.)

Fans of the late '70s / early '80s music scene will be in awe of this footage. To make some "Tonight Show" analogies, punk violinist Walter Steding played the Doc Severinsen role, while Chris Stein of Blondie served as O'Brien's sidekick...his Punk McMahon, if you will. Debbie Harry and the rest of Blondie turned up on a regular basis, and Fab Five Freddy – famed both for the lyrical reference to him in "Rapture" as well as his stint on "Yo! MTV Raps," served as the show's "token black" (O'Brien's words). The late Charles Rocket, famed for getting kicked out of the cast of "Saturday Night Live" for blatantly and unabashedly saying "fuck" on the air, became a semi-regular after finding himself suddenly unemployed, at least once turning up to play an accordion version of "Wild Thing." Thrill as Nile Rodgers of Chic has a ventriloquist dummy (sporting a Hitler mustache) sitting on his lap, or as Mick Jones from the Clash appears onscreen and looks completely out of it, or when Fred Schneider of the B-52's reads poetry. There are also clips from live performances by the Fleshtones, David Byrne of the Talking Heads, Tuxedomoon, Mellow Mel, Elliott Murphy, Jeffrey Lee Pierce of the Gun Club, Robert Fripp of King Crimson, Arto Lindsay, Tav Falco (the latter two showing up for present-day interview segments about the show), and, of course, a ton of bands you've never head of, mostly because their fan bases didn't extend much beyond the five boroughs of Manhattan.

The original footage from the show is sometimes hard to watch, due to the, uh, varying states of coherency of those operating the camera, but the content is undeniably fascinating. Brink Films, who put out this disc, is planning to release several episodes of the series on DVD, the first coming out simultaneous to this film's home video debut. If you dig this doc, then you'll want to check out the original source material...but you'll also find yourself sighing and asking, "Man, why isn't there a show like this on the air nowadays?"

**Special Features:**

There aren't many, unfortunately. The trailer for the film is here, and there's a slideshow featuring pics of the show's regulars as well as some of its greatest guests, but that's about it.