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"Glenn O'Brien's TV Party: The Documentary" (Brink)

Up until recently, Glenn O'Brien's TV Party was a sought-after VHS rarity that you could only find through collectors or on Ebay. But thanks to Brink Films, Music Video Distributors, and this documentary – an official selection from last year's Tribeca Film Festival, no less – O'Brien will remain preserved in the pop culture bubble forever.

The documentary film serves as an excellent primer to watching actual episodes of the show, which ran from 1978-82, especially if you've only previously read about it. It's hard to get a handle on the how and why of the TV Party aesthetic, filmed mostly in low-budget black and white, without some background information. What we get is an explanation of what O'Brien was after, what motivated him, how he procured his guests, and a sense of the impact the show made – which is not to be underestimated. We learn that the impetus for TV Party was indeed Hugh Heffner's show, which was the first televised "party" – and apparently made quite an impression on the handsome O'Brien. Interspersed throughout are current interview segments with many New York celebuitantes who recall the show in one way or another, including O'Brien himself; brace yourself – not everyone has aged as gracefully as Debbie Harry.

TV Party is a vibrant slice of life from pre-Guiliani (and mostly pre-aids) Manhattan, a seemingly forgotten anything-goes period when NYC was still filthy and New Yorkers loved it that way. Seen here is a montage of clips that illustrates the burgeoning downtown arts scene and how the show provided an entertainment intersection for musical, visual, and performance art to come together. Blondie's Chris Stein played Ed McMahon to O'Brien's Carson, while scenester/musician Walter Steding enlisted Stein to help him as the Doc Severinsen counterpart.

The guest list is staggering: B-52 Fred Schneider, Patti Smith Group's Richard Sohl, George Clinton, Fab Five Freddy, Arto Lindsay, David Byrne, Bowie, John-Michael Basquait, Tish & Snooky (one time back-up singers for Blondie that went on to launch the Manic Panic company), underground film director Amos Poe, and Tav Falco top the list.

Perhaps the most revealing (and amusing) portion of the film is a series of negative call-ins, thus clarifying just how infuriating more conservative New Yorkers found O'Brien's show to be – and how much he and his cohorts just didn't care.

- CHRISTOPHER JOHN TREACY

Extras:

*Film Trailer

*Slide Show