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MUSIC » 15 Minutes: Arms - With 15M, LAS embarks on a series of quick interviews with people, but without necessarily knowing anything deep about them. This installment: Todd Goldstein (aka Arms). [07.31.2006]

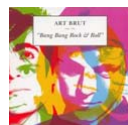


CINEMA » TV Party: The Documentary - TV Party was hip before hipsters and died in the same way that all trends die – it became a mockery of itself. Now, some three decades later, director and producer Danny Vinik revisits the seminal cable access show with a new documentary. [07.31.2006]



ART & DESIGN » Matthew Barney at sfMOMA - LAS staff writer Kevin Alföldy usually gets artsy after work on Thursdays, and a recent Thor's-day trip to San Francisco's Museum of Modern Art to check out a Barney exhibit left him asking, "Really, this guy's famous?" [07.28.2006]

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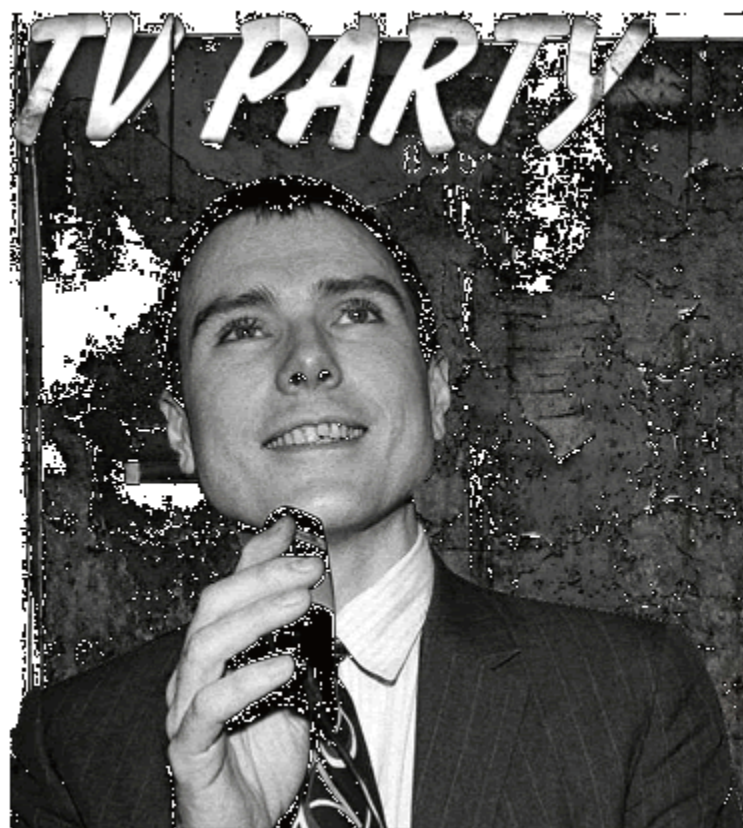


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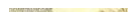
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TV Party was exactly the kind of late 70's/early 80's experiment that defined New York City's art scene. Glen O'Brien created a cable access TV show that drew a broad range of characters, from homeless guys on the street to David Bowie. The production was terrible and there was little to no sense of direction to the shows aside from perhaps a basic theme. To call TV Party pretentious, harsh and meandering would be like calling The Sistine Chapel "a church." TV Party was hip before hipsters and died in the same way that all trends die – it became a mockery of itself. However, during its early years, TV Party was an excellent insight into the lives of some of New York's most creative and interesting artists, musicians and writers.

Journalist Glen O'Brien's work for Andy Warhol's *Interview* magazine had provided him with connections into the NYC arts community. These were the people who had unlimited access to Studio 54. Glen tapped Blondie guitarist Chris Stein to be his co-host and in the process found a cameraman and a band to turn his show into a Late Show for the hip set.

Regular guests to the show included Debbie Harry, David Byrne and Bowie guitarist Robert Fripp. Jean Michel Basquiat, Fred Schneider (B-52's) and Fab Five Freddy also made frequent appearances. These guests, along with scores of others, converged on the tiny studio to, basically, have a cocktail party. The format was similar to a punk version of Hugh Hefner's *Playboy After Dark* in that it often featured a variety of conversations and events taking place simultaneously with the camera was free to roam throughout. Pervasive drug use was also part of the equation and in one scene O'Brien rolls a joint blindfolded. Walter Steding – another of O'Brien's associates through Warhol, provided droning musical interludes along with the likes of George Clinton and Alex Chilton.

While the idea of TV Party is interesting in concept, the execution is antiquated and often annoying or, even worse, boring. Unfortunately the documentary tries too hard to emulate the show's artsy style and often amplifies TV Party's intrinsic frustrating elements. There are long stretches where the camera is spinning or zooming frenetically throughout the room, caused an unnecessary dizziness and heightening the sense of directionlessness. The unusual gaps of silence in TV Party, rambling stilted speeches and skits by O'Brien or his guests and the ridiculously over the top music by Steding may have seemed really hip in 1979 but now seem exceptionally trite.

Despite its flaws, some elements of the show were simply incredible. Frequently viewers were asked to call in and voice their opinions, on air, about the show or the show's guests. Viewers would spew hateful and threatening rants live on the air about Chris Stein and in one episode Atlantic Records mogul Jerry Wexler calls in only to have Jean-Michel Basquiat hang up on him. This style in interactive spontaneity really was ahead of its time. Other highlights include a spooky performance by Klaus Nomi (who looks a lot like Ben from *Blue Velvet*) and Debbie Harry teaching viewers the history of and the proper way to dance The Pogo. In one clip, seminal NYC punk band DNA plays a blistering set that leaves viewers craving more.

TV Party: The Documentary highlights an interesting milestone in television history and certainly one of the first pieces of video art to receive broad exposure. Ultimately, however, the documentary itself really should have tried to step back from its subject and examine the show with less sentimental reverence and with more of an analytical lens. The show brought together many of the most interesting, creative minds, from both New York and abroad, but what it didn't do was put those creative minds to work creating something meaningful – instead we get skits and clowning and pretension, punctuated by the occasional amazing musical performance. For a show that claimed to be its



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own "political party" most of the political opinions expressed seem very naive – rambling, drunken tirades on such worthy topics as impeaching President Jimmy Carter. All things considered, *TV Party: The Documentary* is an interesting overview of a hit and miss television program that is most definitely noteworthy in the zeitgeist of early 1980's pop culture but shows little relevance today.

postage!

SEE ALSO: www.tvparty.org
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Jon Burke - *A contributing writer and a Chicago resident who will not be goaded by LAS's editor into revealing any more details about his potentially sordid affairs.*

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