

FRICKE'S PICKS

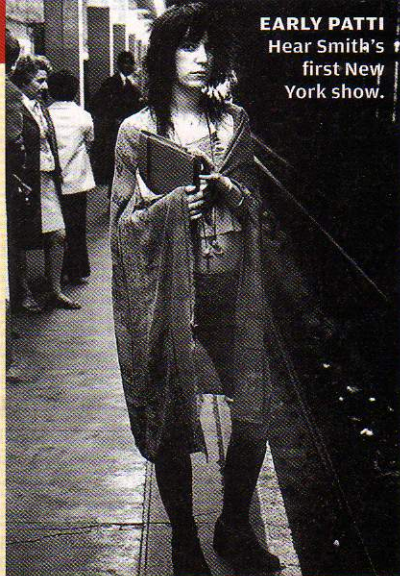
By David Fricke

Patti Smith's Opening Night

February 10th marks the 38th anniversary of **Patti Smith's** coming-out – as a poet and singer – with her constant guitarist **Lenny Kaye** at St. Mark's Church in New York. Their half-hour performance in 1971 was raw history. You hear Smith, then 24, reading poems at a coltish gait and bumping into her mike on the tape made that night by Brigid Polk (who also recorded the 1970 Velvet Underground show that became *Live at Max's Kansas City*). But *February 10, 1971* (Mer) has prescient glimpses of Smith's rock & roll bloom: the first lines of "Oath," which later opened her 1975 album *Horses*; Kaye's racing strum under Smith's incantation in "Ballad of a Bad Boy," like a dress rehearsal for the *Horses* epic "Land." Send \$12 for the CD and postage to Kaye c/o Mer Records, P.O. Box 407, Murray Hill Station, New York, NY 10156 – and you are there.

Progressive-Rock Insurgent

In his review of Radiohead's *In Rainbows*, published in the Mexican edition of *Rolling Stone*, **Steven Wilson** – singer-guitarist-founder of the English band **Porcupine Tree** – applauded his fellow Britons for taking "experimental and underground music to



EARLY PATTI
Hear Smith's
first New
York show.

listeners who probably didn't even know they liked that kind of thing." That's a two-lane road. With his group and side projects like Blackfield and No-Man, Wilson has gone the other way: adapting the strong-bone riffing and oblique-hook strategies of progressive rock and art metal into a decisively melodic melancholy, like Radiohead's Thom Yorke without the aversion to grandeur. *Insurgentes*

(K-Scope), Wilson's first solo album, is among the best of his many records, in part because the precise labor of playing many of the instruments himself makes for enriched concision in bleak dreams and sleepless reveries like "Abandoner" and "Significant Other." Wilson does King Crimson almost as well as the real thing with the heavy-guitar algebra and pregnant quiet in "No Twilight Within the Courts of the Sun." But the fragile tangle of Wilson's piano and a Japanese koto in the title song is just as provocative in its invitation.

Traffic's Original Acid-Jazz Man

At a recent New York show, **Steve Winwood** played a great set heavy on songs from his Sixties-Seventies band **Traffic**, complete with a sax-flute player to re-create the original acid-jazz charge of the late **Chris Wood**, who died in 1983. In Traffic, a group rich in writers – Winwood, Dave Mason and Jim Capaldi – Wood was a perfect utility man, threading songs with dynamic countermelodies and a vocal-like luster. But Traffic's 1974 breakup left Wood stranded. *Vulcan* (Esoteric) compiles his later unreleased solo sessions; Wood, who battled substance abuse, never finished an album of his own. Most tracks sound like Traffic instrumental sketches (one also appears in a live Traffic version), and the effect is modestly rewarding. Wood's true legacy is on Traffic's '67-'74 albums. Start there before you go here.