

Tom Petty ends rock 'n' roll drought with Bayfront concert

Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers in concert at the Bayfront Center arena, Tuesday July 18. ★ ★ ★

By ROBERT ELY
St. Petersburg Times Critic

Tom Petty played the Bayfront Center arena Tuesday night like a champion tennis player coming from behind. The first third of his nearly two-hour set lacked that winning style that puts an audience away, but the Petty mid-game and end-game built strongly to a smashing conclusion.

When he first appeared onstage beneath an elaborate bank of lights, and surrounded by walls of speakers that delivered crisp, high-decibel sound, Petty announced he'd been partying beforehand. It was, after all, a concert billed as the third annual '88 Rock Birthday Bash. But Petty's delivery and the band's energy were as wispy as the blond hair that frames his angular face.

When he arrived, after four or five songs at *Even the Losers*, a testament to endurance in the face of outrageous fortune, his performance began to hint at something more powerful. Before long, the Heartbreaker's key-

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board man, Benmont Tench, was pounding the big piano chords and organ fills to Petty's protest on bad love, *Don't Do Me Like That*. He had come alive.

Superb songs, including the *Refugee*, which is as guttural as *American Girl* is lyrical, brought Petty's and the Heartbreakers' form to a high cruising speed. And then he introduced a new song, a slow and poignant expression of good wishes to an old love called *The Best of Everything*. It is one of his best.

One of the most dramatic moments of the show evolved with the song *Breakdown*, in which Petty slowly acted out what the title implies, ending with his head folded in his arms across the microphone. He did three encores, but the 8,001 paying customers, obviously wanted more. The summer drought has paralleled a dry spell for engaging concerts on the Suncoast, but Petty and his hard-working band made good rock 'n' roll rain again.



Tom Petty's concert at the Bayfront started out slow but had a smashing finish.

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