Off the record

Of Petty, McGuinn and packing it in

JON MARLOWE

It's gonna go down like this: Sunday afternoon at 3 at Peacock Park, a multi-talented singer-songwriter sporting severely cropped hair will take to a makeshift stage with just a battered acoustic guitar. The

reason: He can't afford amplifier or backing band. Although 20 years ago he once resided at the Top of the Pops, this man no longer has a six-figure recording contract and/or flashy video in heavy MTV rotation. Some people will recognize him and genuflect. Most will just walk on by laughing and chalking him up as one more poor, pitful, aging foikle.



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A few months ago, Tom Petty stood on the University of South Florida's Sundome stage and introduced this same gentleman as "one of the main influences on my career, and without him I might not be here tonight." He then brought on Roger (nee Jim) McGuinn — former leader and guiding light of The Byrds. Together he and Petty roared through McGuinn's classic "So You Want to Be a Rock and Roll Star." It was almost enough to make you break down and cry to see how good old fickle fate can step right in and really get downright nasty and dirty and

do a really heavy number on someone when it wants

Come Monday, Tom Petty and The Heatbreakers' latest MCA LP "Pack Up the Plantation — Live!" will arrive in your friendly neighborhood record stores. This riveting in-concert double LP opens with "So You Want to Be a Rock and Roll Star," although the song was recorded at LA's Wiltern Theater and doesn't feature the McGuinn duet.

While McGuinn is sadly almost all but forgotten today, Petty's inclusion of his vintage song here not only pays back a musical debt long overdue, but more important, proves McGuinn's music is just as meaningful and timeless in 1985 as it was in 1985 when he, instead of Petty, was the one wearing the black suede boots and blue Granny glasses.

Fate doesn't stop there: "Pack Up the Plantation — Livel" seems to be a make-or-break LP for Tom Petty and The Heartbreakers. If it dies, Petty could soon be headed for the same land of 1,000 forgotten genuises himself. When The Byrds clipped their own wings, it was Petty who picked up the 12-string Rickenbacker torch and carried it onto critical acclaim and immense financial success.

Yet, Petty seems to be in serious status-quo trouble himself these days. His recent "Southern Accents" tour sold out in Florida (his home state) and again in LA (where he lives). Yet in many other parts of the country there were more empty seats than Petty or the promoters cared to count.

Despite still crafting some of the world's most unique music, it seems Petty is somehow in danger of becoming another forgotten folk-rock godfather as younger bands such as (meet the new bosses) Lone Justice. The Beat Farmers, The Men They Couldn't Hang, Jason and The Scorchers, R.E.M. and The Long Ryders are now tapping into this same joyous, jingle-iangle motherlode.

It's bad enough we already wrote off McGuinn. To dispense with Petty that easily would be a grievous error and total mistake, as "Plantation" brilliantly proves that Tom Petty and The Heartbreakers are more than alive and well. They're amazing.

Through 16 songs — "Rock and Roll Star," "Needles and Pins" (with Stevie Nicks), "The Waiting," a chilling "Breakdown" (in which the audience sings the song by themselves and Petty Jokes "You're going to put me out of a Job"), "American Girl," "It Ain't Nothin' to Me," "Insider" (another magical duet with Nicks), "Rockin' Around (With You)," "Refugee." "I Need to Know," "Southern Accents," "Rebels." "Don't Bring Me Down," "You Got Lucky," "Shout" and "Stories We Could Tell" — Petty and The Heartbreakers offer a mesmerizing vinyl testament to the old school of blood, sweat and tears rock 'n' roll where you major strictly in heartfelt passion and raw gut emotion, then throw in a little frat-party rock

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when things get just too intense.

Unlike Bob Dylan and Dire Straits, Petty doesn't mess around that much with the melody, structure or texture of his music in concert. Outside of the LP's cover versions, the songs here are almost the same as the ones on Petty's studio LPs, with two major differences: Mike Campbell (rock's most underrated guitarist) stretches out his scorching solos just enough to add that extra injection of high-octane fuel to this already raging fire, while Petty's voice takes on a surging, hypnotic energy not found on his studio vocal tracks. Anyone who saw "Live And" and/or "Farm Aid" knows that Tom Petty and The Heartbreakers stole both those shows with this same kind of lethal musical attack despite the fact that most critics commented more on TP's mutton-chop sideburns than his incredible music. "Pack Up the Plantation —

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Tom Petty's own tne same traditional American rock 'n' roll values as when he first began. In a bizarre sense, that has become Tom Petty's own Catch-22. By being true to his school, he's caught in an evertightening, musical-fashion vise. The little girls no longer seem to understand.

first began. In a bizarre sense, that has become Tom Petty's own Catch-22. By being true to his school, he's caught in an evertightening, musical-fashion vise. The little girls no longer seem to understand, because Tom Petty refuses to give in and tease his baby-fine hair, don dangling diamond earrings and slip into glittery spandex pants. Tom Petty rendsetter as anachronism. When everything today comes shrinkwrapped, pre-packaged and easily categorized, TP just might be a little too much to comprehend. In December, Tom Petty and The Heartbreakers will release a theatrical film and ensuing video-cassette of "Pack Up the Plantation." On Dec. 15, Shaker's nightiub in Fort Lauderdale will present "The Byrds in Concert." Only two of the original Byrds — vocalist Gene Clark and drummer Mike Clarke — will be there. Roger McGuinn will be at home wondering where his next dollar is coming from. Tom Petty will be at home wondering if straight hair and straight music still have some place left in this world.

 There's only one John Keasler. His home is the pages of The Miami News, pages of The Miami Monday through Friday.