

# First solo LP shows rock roots

Under a full moon we see Tom Petty, as he is driving down the road of his musical career. With his latest release, "Full Moon Fever," he takes a big right turn off of Heartbreaker Drive and turns down Nostalgia Avenue.

"Full Moon Fever," released at the end of April, finds Petty glancing into his rear-view mirror, looking back into his past and the influences of his music. The reflection that we see is a strong "solo" effort by a mainstaying rocker.

Petty's first solo LP is packed with reflections of the roots of rock and roll.

After bursting into the mainstream with the Heartbreakers and their successful album "Damn the Torpedoes," Petty's affection for the folky sound of the Byrds became more and more apparent.

From the Roger McGuinn 12-string Rickenbacker guitar to performing the Byrds' hit "So You Wanna be a Rock and Roll Star" on tour, the electric-folk influence increasingly became a prominent force in his music.

Petty takes a detour down Remake Alley and does a great job with "Feel a Whole Lot Better," the Gene Clark composition originally released by the Byrds in 1964.

There are no major changes, with the exception of a mandolin solo played by Petty's long-time guitarist Mike Campbell. The vocals are haunting and nearly identical.

Other ghostly alleys that Petty drives down include Buddy Holly Boulevard and Duane Eddy Drive.

"Runnin' Down a Dream," in which Petty's vocals are subdued and tired, has a rockabilly intro and chorus that reflects this Holly/Eddy influence.

The song is about driving and includes a reference to the old Del Shannon hit "Runaway."

Petty seems to be flyin' high on rock and roll throughout the



Tom Petty

File photo

## REVIEW

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album.

"The Apartment Song" has a guitar interlude straight from Buddy Holly's "Peggy Sue," and it works.

The short length of the lyrics reflect the days when rock was young. "The Apartment Song" has two short, repeated verses, a quirky little chorus and that's all.

"Free Fallin'," the album's opening song and one of the strongest it has to offer, is an acoustic slice of Americana about "good girls" and "bad boys."

"She's a good girl / crazy about Elvis / she loves horses / and her boyfriend too," sings Petty about farm girls growing up in the '50s.

The problems with this "solo — but not alone" project come in the form of Jeff Lynne's fingerprints all over Petty's rearview mirror.

Lynne, who produced George Harrison's "Cloud Nine," The Traveling Wilburys' project and several tracks on Roy Orbison's last solo effort, once again builds his mushy wall of acoustic sound and Electric Light Orchestra-type background around an artist with a distinct voice.

In the projects mentioned, it seems that Lynne was wondering what it would be like to have Bob Dylan, Orbison or other unique vocalists fronting his old band, ELO.

The result was four albums that have the same sound buried somewhere between the grooves.

Not all of the songs on "Full Moon Fever" fall into this pothole. In fact, Petty dodges enough pieces of bad road to make the album his own.

Despite the over-production goo of Lynne's style, Petty still has a good album on his hands.

But the question of solo status is still a fog clouding the next exit

sign.

Mike Campbell, Heartbreaker guitarist and co-author of two songs on "Fever" plays on every track.

Other Heartbreaker alumni include Benmont Tench on piano and Howie Epstein on background vocals.

Other notables include George Harrison on guitar and vocals in "I Won't Back Down" and Roy Orbison singing in "Zombie Zoo."

"I Won't Back Down," the first single, is symbolic of the album itself.

The opening bars are immediately identifiable with a Jeff Lynne production.

Almost immediately the song jumps into the chorus which is all Petty. The change in tempo, the vocals and the whole attitude are great at this point.

"Hey baby / there ain't no easy way out / Hey, I will stand my ground and I won't back down."

Petty doesn't back down on any of the songs except "Yer so Bad" and "Depending on You" which are hopelessly lost. "Zombie Zoo" is a toss-up.

Some old Petty gems that get locked in the trunk and don't show up on the album include his cutting-edge vocals from earlier albums, like those on "Woman in Love." Petty seems tired on a lot of songs.

And although Campbell plays all the solos, they're not the same haunting, tonality-based chimes that gave a uniqueness to Petty's earlier sound.

In spite of these shortcomings, "Full Moon Fever" is a very good album. Petty fans will like it, but don't expect that old familiar Heartbreakers sound.

The section of road Petty is travelling now reflects his past and has brought a welcome change.

"I rolled on as the sky grew dark / I put the Pedal down to make some time / There's something good waitin' down this road / I'm pickin' up whatever's mine."