

SOUNDS April 9 1977 15p

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# SUPERTRAMP

# SOUNDS



**Tom Petty fingered  
ALL THE HOT NEW  
US BANDS  
INSIDE**

Tom Petty meets his hero, Roger McGuinn — Pic: Chuck Pulin





Pic: Michael Putland

**A**NY SEASONED critic, worth their salt — heh heh — will evaluate a record not only on the basis of its music and their taste but also according to its ordinal position in a group's career. A debut LP gets a different sort of treatment than a second, third, or fourth. It is easier to call 'Goat's Head Soup' a bomb in light of the Stones' LPs preceding it; I doubt that as a first record any critic would have deemed it quite so worthless.

History is grist for critical perceptions; history alters the focus of appreciation. Remarks centre less on the music and more on the process, the arc of changes. First records are in some perverse way the easiest, even if they require the bigger leap of faith. All you have before you is this shiny black pancake of sound to appraise, no previews, no past triumphs or disasters, no *a priori* prejudices, except your own. If you loathe heavy metal, the first Kiss LP didn't alter your opinion much.

OK, so here's Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers and their debut album. It's not as auspicious a premiere as Television's 'Marquee Moon' but that's unfair. Television is King Kong in a World of lobotomized Fay Wrays. Tom Petty is more a protean talent who's not giving away too much too soon. He's a calculated exhibitionist who knows when to disappear behind a veil of imagery, behind a change of voice, and when to come out front and execute some of the cleanest rock and roll this side of Byrds and Raspberries. TP and the HB's are, at their worst, the runaway progeny of Gary Lewis and the Playboys, or silhouettes of a long decrepit T. Rex.

At mid ground they do a bit of image mongering: their contrived punky name for example; the wearing of black en masse. Petty himself is the first guy I've seen who makes black look like a happy rainbow of colour. Then there's the snarl, shrug, sway-hipped stance of indifference, rebels without the claws.

But at their best, Petty and the HB's can twist the predictable into the stubbornly enigmatic. Having done their home work in classic Anglo-American rock, they can convert the staple drum/bass/guitar elements into their own deliberate mumbo-jumbo style. The HB's do not make computer rock, there are no synthesizers, no 2001 pompous solos to clutter the simple songs.

I like the record. I like the mysterious 'Luna'; its sad, sexy, prismatic baying at the moon goddess. I like 'American Girl' as much as Roger McGuinn, who recorded the Petty single on his own 'Thunderbyrd' LP. McGuinn folkies up the tune some, but Petty ensnares the so-near-yet-so-far ambivalence of teenage lust. McGuinn's experiences have forced him into too much distance from that.

The yes-no curiosity of relationships seems closer to Petty, and he conveys its urgency in his strangled vocals. I like the evil wimp of 'Stranger In The Night'. The songs are quick to stick in the memory; the tricky licks and breaks are easy to master, the technique is sparse and intelligent, nicely balanced by non-intricate sentiments. The record's biggest fault is also its highest attribute: Petty doesn't give enough, he leaves you wanting more.

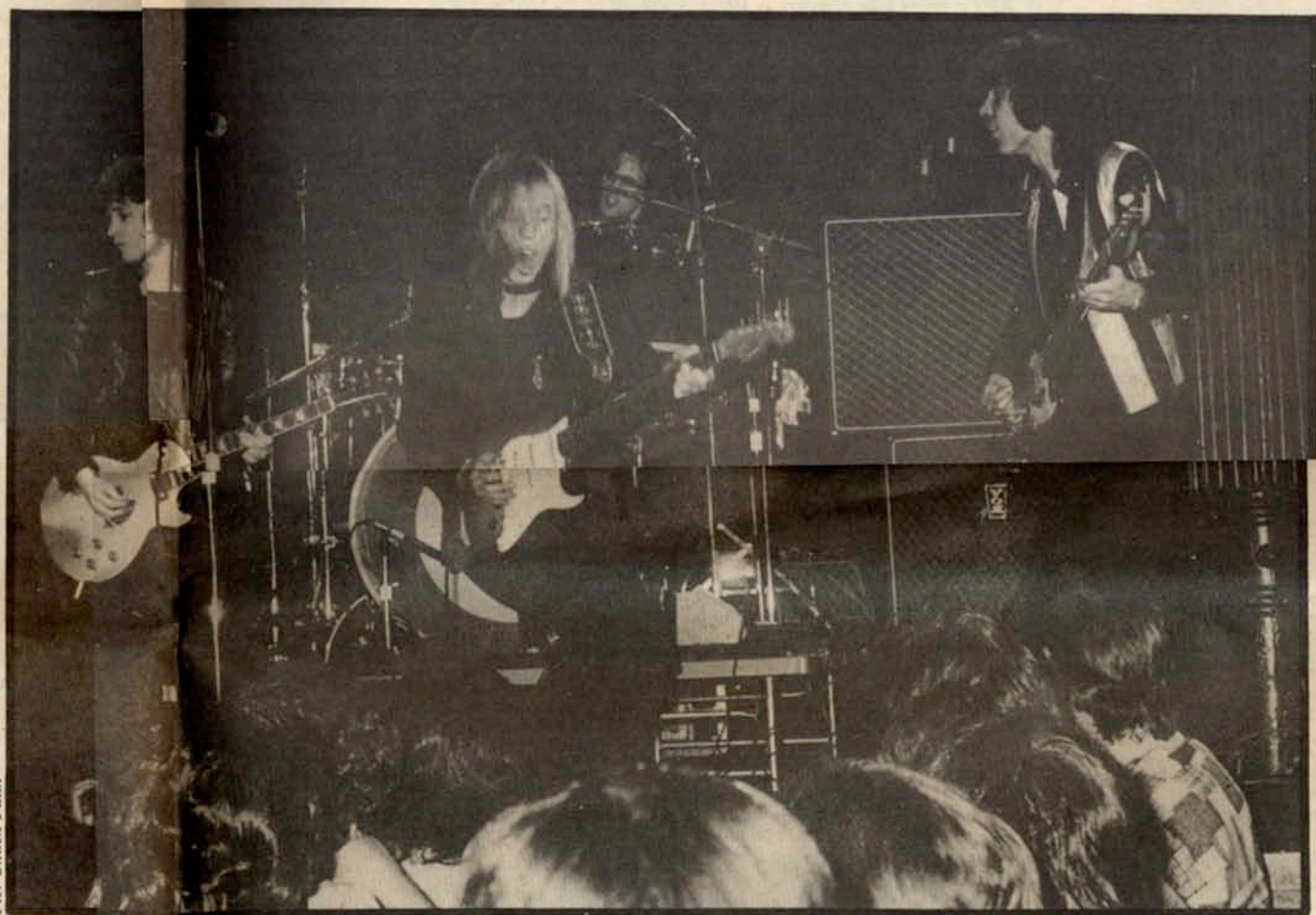
You can quote me on this: Petty's going to be a big star, the new Heartbreak Kid of rock. He's twanging his bow at the eagerest consumers in the market, the jailbait ladies who drag all their friends to concerts and record stores. One look at Petty's smirking face and blonde locks on the LP cover will have them coming in droves. Petty probably couldn't be more pleased about this, though the cool and restraint indigenous to most musicians keeps him from counting unborn chicks of pay-checks.

His live show is consistently excellent, full of chord charisma and no-sweat delirium. Petty seems to have grown up on a stage, a renegade at home among the amps and wires. Why people call him a punk is beyond me. He's not in an adversary space with his audience the way Johnny Rotten is, or all those other depraved no-talents who equate razors, swastikas and hatred with art. Petty and the Heartbreakers push it out with precision and the only thing they're fanatic about is having fun.

I meet Petty backstage after the show. Twenty-four years old, one-quarter Cherokee, three-quarter's subtle and friendly. The glint in his eyes is unmistakable — he is enjoying himself immensely. He wouldn't trade places with Mick Jagger right now if he could. Bank accounts, maybe. But Petty's future is in front of him, cheering him on as wildly as the crowd at the Bottom Line. He'll have the same glint in his eye after he does 'American Girl' alongside Roger McGuinn, who topped the bill that night. Petty guitars his way around the stage while McGuinn stays solid and the two mix voices. Petty is a clearly in awe of McGuinn; he looks like a kid with a dollar in a lollipop store. Still, it's the Old Guard and the New, and Petty is the one to watch.



# THE HEARTBREAK KID



He's twenty-four, he's part-Cherokee, he sings like a Byrd, and he says he's 'in this business for chicks'. He is Tom Petty, and Susin Shapiro thinks he's going to be the next big thing

I've already chalked him up in mind as too pretty (therefore, of course, not worth talking to, but I'll be proven wrong before long). Elsewhere it's been noted that he resembles a cross between Mick Ronson and Frank Gorshin, but I'd like to add to that description Farrah Fawcett Majors' dripping white front teeth, Petty is small and skinny and cute and laid-back, your basic, archetypal rock and roller.

Our interview is relaxed and sanguine. Petty tells me how much he hermits out around strangers, but none of that withdrawal is evident. He turns out to have brains behind the Breck blonde sheen, and a sense of humour as well, about himself, the business, the future. That's the good news. The bad news is my tape recorder isn't speaking to me. Maybe it has laryngitis but in any event, the bloody thing doesn't work. Petty seems unconcerned by this catastrophe and says: how's your shorthand? Answer: lousy; as lousy as my lefthanded long-hand but here's as close as I can

get:

*When did you decide to become a rock and roller?*

TP: "One day my uncle, who worked on a movie crew in Florida, took my cousin and I down to the set where Elvis Presley was filming. We were about eight or nine, and my uncle took us into the trailer and introduced us to Elvis. I remember all these good-looking girls losing their heads over him. He looked fantastic you know? That hairdo and those sleepy eyes.

"From that moment on I became a fanatic about Elvis, I bought all his records; I'd trade anything in school for one of his 45's, even my Whammo slingshots. It gave me something to do. I mean, I was in the 5th grade and *not* into Little League (baseball, to you limeys). I started greasing my hair, letting it grow long.

"Elvis was just the *end* until the Beatles came along on the Ed Sullivan show in '64. I had a complete orgasm then. They threw me out of

school because my hair was so long. As long as it was greased back Elvis-style no one knew how long it really was but when the Beatles and their bangs came along I let my hair fall naturally. They took one look at me in junior high school and kicked me out."

*I hear Gainesville, Fla., where you grew up, is this place full of beer-drinking jerks? Any comment?*

TP: "Well, I never much related to the Southern, backwoods types, like my parents, who used to get angry when I played 'that Negro Music'. Actually Gainesville wasn't a bad place. It was full of roadhouses, little bars, and lots of concerts at the University.

"I used to live right across the park from Dan Felder, who was to join the Eagles. We used to cop licks from him all the time; he'd teach us how to play Gerry and the Pacemakers stuff. I really have no identification with the South, except for rhythm and blues.



"We'd listen to Percy Sledge, Otis, Wilson Pickett, and Slim Narpol. Oh God, wasn't 'Scratch My Back' great? We recorded that song for the first record but it never went on because we had original songs to do.

"We played gigs with Lynyrd Skynyrd and the Outlaws in Gainesville. The Allman Brothers, eug! We never wanted to be like them. It was more the Beatles and the Stones who impressed us."

*That's like saying I was inspired as a writer by Shakespeare. Aren't there more obscure groups you liked?*

TP: "Yes. Remember The Move? I loved them. And the Pretty Things too."

*(Freaking out) Yes! Especially 'Silk Torpedo'. I love the Phil May cut, 'Joey'. What do you make of being called a punk rock band?*

TP: "I think it's ridiculous. When I think of punk I think of Gene Vincent and Elvis. I picked a fight at a radio station the other day when the DJ called me a punk. I said: 'You call me a punk? You think I'm a punk? You wanna step outside and I'll show you what a punk I am!' it was great, it went all over the waves. I mean, I don't wear safety pins in my ears. In fact, I'm not doing anything differently now than I was 10 years ago."

*What sector of the audience do you hope to reach?*

TP: "Well, I'm not interested in being sophisticated. Of course I want all the kids to hear us. I think radio should be given back to the kids. I can't stand all this disco, dancing music that the fags go for. You know, there's a lot of straight kids out there too."

*Are you straight?*

TP: "Very. Heterosexual all the way. In fact my biggest hobby is chasing women. Although there are those I could live without, like the ones that come backstage and start undressing you before the gig. Some'll send a note back to our hotel room. I mean, I wasn't no football player, you know? I'm in this business for chicks."

*Have any gay guys come on to you?*

TP: "Yeah. They are politely removed. Most of the time when they find out I'm straight they don't want to bother any way."

*Shall I print it that you're a ladies man?*

TP: "Of course! I've never had any relationships that lasted, though. I've been fucked over from here to California. I guess a long-term thing requires a certain amount of understanding on the girl's part. The band is sort of rowdy, you know, we sometimes share each other's girlfriends' Very communal."

*That sounds more like competition with the guys than caring about any one particular girl.*

TP: "Well, we're very close, the guys in the band."

*Do you think you're cynical? A lot of people have commented about the smirk on the cover.*

TP: "Well, it's not a Three Dog Night smile, that's for sure. I guess I'm cynical to an extent."

"A guy I met worked in a movie theatre and said he had seen 'O! Lucky Man' about 40 times. He said my picture reminded him of the last scene where Malcolm MacDowell refuses to smile until he's beaten and beaten. What finally happens is he looks into the camera and gives off this grin similar to the one on the cover. I really hadn't thought of it that way but I liked the comparison."

*What are your plans now?*

TP: "We're touring Europe in May? We'll record our next record there, in England. I've never been there and I have many friends. I'd like to see. Denny Cordell will produce the second record. I've already got some songs written but no, I won't tell you what they are . . . it's a mystery. It's definitely not a concept record."

*Are you having fun doing this?*

TP: "Well, I met my good friend Dwight Twilley one day in L.A. and he came over to me and said: 'You havin' fun, Tom?' I said: 'I dunno, I guess. What about you Dwight? You havin' fun?' Dwight said: 'I dunno, I guess.' That about sums it up."

There's more I can't decipher, some mutual grooving on Steve Cropper. Then a dialogue having to do with Paul McCartney's vocal ventriloquism, an asset Petty admires, and Robert Plant's monotonous howling, by which Petty is repulsed. Also a slight worry about becoming a critic's band, which is what happened to Petty's friend, Dwight Twilley. Whether the critic's praise will prove the kiss of death is too early to tell, but I think not.

So there you are ladies, the Heartbreak Kid sends you all an open invitation to come and see for yourself. But first, check out the logo on Petty's LP — a red-blooded heart pierced in the centre by an unbending guitar. Maybe he's telling us something? One other thought:

Whenever a guy says all he wants to do is get laid, the insistent superficiality is carefully concealing a real romantic. And anyone who has as much control over his music and image as Tom Petty is no pushover, but you're welcome to try. In fact, he dares you. But by the time you hit the aisles, you might only get a glimpse of his heels as he flies up the side of the mountain. Petty's got a great way of giving warning though, and that's what makes him shine.