

ALWAYS

FREE

April 7, 1978/Issue #29

BAMM

The California Music Magazine

John Handy

The Hard Work Pays Off
By Michael Zipkin

California Jam II

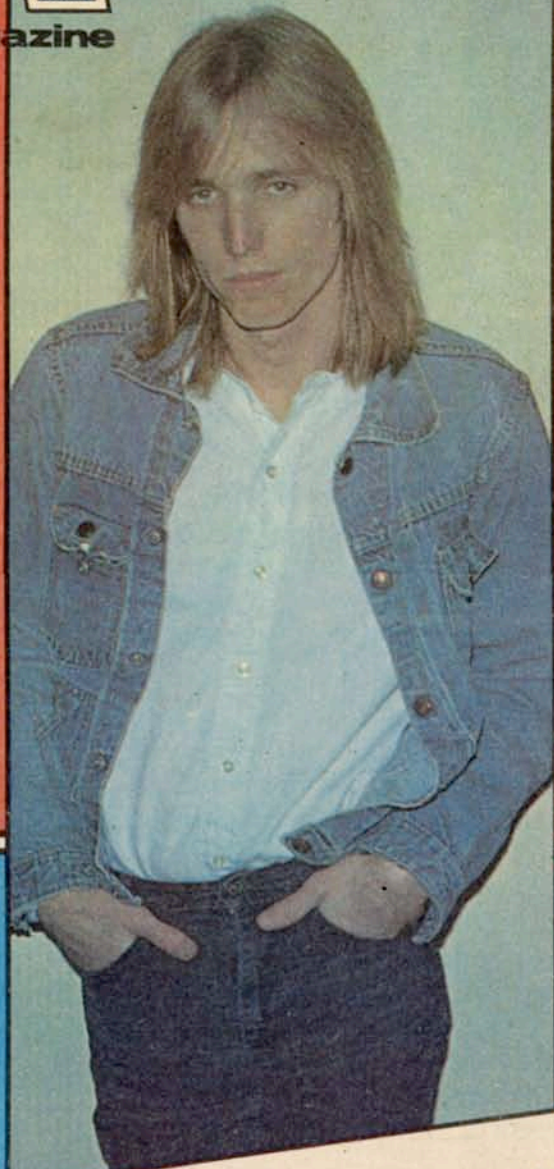
Behind The Scenes
By Jim Nash

Country Joe

Premature Punk
By Malvina Reynolds

Tom Petty

The Wild One,
Forever
By Blair Jackson



Now Published
TWICE MONTHLY



Tom Petty & the Heartbreakers

IT'S ONLY ROCK

LOS ANGELES—Cruising down Hollywood Boulevard at a hair-raising 55 m.p.h., Albert Ruiz, a 53-year-old cab driver from East Los Angeles, was having the time of his life, weaving from one lane to another like a crazed young punk unleashed on an amusement park's bumper cars for the first time. As he barely averted one potentially cataclysmic accident after another, his smile widened under his bushy mustache revealing a set of jagged, rotting teeth. His demonic glare was a far cry from the grim countenance that stared, like a convict's mugshot, from the license posted on the dashboard in front of me. The car radio, blaring KHJ at an obnoxiously loud and distorted volume, belched out a string of mediocre hits. Player gave way to Andy Gibb, who was in turn followed by the latest abomination from Kiss.

And then it happened. The opening guitar riff of "Breakdown" came on and Ruiz went nuts.

"Tom Petty! Tom Petty!" he shouted in a thick Spanish accent.

Petty's shadowy voice filled the car.

Iss awwright if you love me

Iss awwright eef you don—

Ruiz sang along in a raspy, barely audible voice, punctuating each beat with an open-handed slap to the steering wheel.

"You like Tom Petty?" I asked incredulously, my eyes glued to the road Ruiz was studiously ignoring.

"Yeah, man. 'Breakdown.' That song it is my girlfriend's favorite. Is rock and roll, man!" he added sharply, obviously proud of his apparent hipness. The song excited him more and more as we talked. He pounded the wheel ferociously for an instant, utterly consumed by the beat.

"How ironic," I thought as I felt the car jerk wildly with each slap of the wheel, "my very reason for being in L.A.—Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers—is going to lead me to a grisly premature death."

But no, the car screeched to an abrupt halt, sending me and my tape recorder crashing into the dashboard. "I drive too fast sometimes," Ruiz said, grinning. "No...No you don't," I replied, almost apologizing for his sudden pang of guilt.

As he roared away leaving me in a huge cloud of blue-black exhaust, I could hear the final notes of "Breakdown" oozing out of his radio.

"Is rock and roll," I said to myself.

The offices of Shelter Records are located in a fairly rundown section of L.A., across the street from a gay porno theatre in a humble wooden bungalow that resembles the Symbionese Liberation Army "safe house" where Field Marshall Cinque and his soldiers were barbecued by L.A.'s crack S.W.A.T. team a few years ago. Certainly, the house has little in common with the plush but sterile corporate digs that house most record labels in L.A., but it definitely has its own charm.

Next door sits the building containing Shelter Studios, "home" for the last three months for Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, who have been spending 12 hours or more each day recording their long-awaited second album for Shelter/ABC.

Like most studios, it is abysmally lit. Walking down the dark, steep staircase from the studio to the front door is an open invitation to the grim reaper. One grows accustomed to functioning in almost total darkness after a while. It's fairly well known that rock musicians, like bats and armadillos, are nocturnal creatures—the dim studio lighting foals them into believing it's always nighttime.

In the studio proper, Heartbreakers keyboardist Benmont Tench is banging out a rough version of the Stones' "Heart of Stone" while guitarist Mike Campbell strums an unplugged axe and an amused Petty looks on, drawing long drags from an endless chain of cigarettes. In the adjoining kitchen, bassist Ron Blair and drummer Stan Lynch teach me a new

game—"smash the toy helicopter." The object of the game is to throw potentially destructive matter at a small, battery-powered plastic helicopter that flies in a circle at the end of wire attached to a fixed base on the counter. I toss a huge roll of construction tape at the chopper, grazing its tail and smashing a cup behind it. My next toss knocks over Lynch's coffee.

"That's pretty good," Blair tells me. "You learn fast." Not fast enough to actually put the whirly-bird out of commission, though. Lynch had that honor. "As I recall," Petty would tell me three weeks after this initial visit to the studio, "Stan got so into it that he threw a hammer at the damn thing." So much for studio fun and games.

The Heartbreakers deserve those rare moments of brainless leisure, however destructive or aberrant they may appear to those unfamiliar with the hard work and tedium of recording. The band played an astronomical 200 gigs in 1977, touring extensively throughout the U.S. and Europe. And it evidently paid off, too. The constant touring took the Heartbreakers from complete obscurity in January of last year to borderline-superstardom. Their first album (*Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers*) went from being just a critical favorite to being a record-buyers' favorite as well—particularly after the Heartbreakers' second single, "Breakdown," shot up the charts, reaching Number 40 nationally and floating into the Top Ten in a handful of cities.

"I think it's great for a band like ours that's playing rock and roll to crack the Top Ten or the Top Forty or even the Top Hundred," Petty says, "because this kind of rock and roll *iss 't* on the AM radio and I want to put it there. I'm after it. I want to *get it*."

"It's only going to take one or two artists of the rock mold—the radio people would probably call it 'new wave'—to go into the Top Ten before we might see a turnaround in music. Kids *love* rock and roll—*real* rock and roll—on the AM radio."

Many people, Petty included, were surprised that

Heartbreakers K'N ROLL (AND THAT'S THE POINT) By Blair Jackson



"Breakdown" was finally the single that put the Heartbreakers onto a zillion transistor radios in teen-land. That song had been ABC's first choice for a single when the album was released 14 months ago, but it had failed to catch fire. The second single, "American Girl," made more sense since it had been an FM "hit"; but it, too, failed to dent the AM charts.

"American Girl" would have made it if its release had been planned right," Petty claims. "It came out right when we went to Europe so we weren't around to support it at all." It was a big hit in Europe, however, as was "Anything That's Rock and Roll," which reached high in the charts in both England and Germany.

Although the Heartbreakers were unquestionably gaining momentum as they toured the U.S. (the West Coast was particularly enthusiastic), the European tour gave them their first real taste of monster success. Crowds were large and ecstatic wherever they played, and the always hyperbolic European rock press nearly became hysterical. The English papers decided that Petty was going to be The Next Big Thing and one German paper ran a headline that screamed "TOM PETTY: DER NUE MICK JAGGER!"

The Europeans were ready for the Heartbreakers' searing but always melodic three-and-a-half minute songs. There was no punk ugliness in the group's demeanor, nor was there pretentious posturing. It was just straight-ahead rock and roll in the Grand Tradition of the Stones and Yardbirds and a handful of other classic bands. Coming into a Europe seemingly obsessed with safety-pinned mutants on the one hand and artsy neo-classicists on the other, the Heartbreakers were hailed for their simplicity and no-jive approach to rock and roll.

And in Germany, they were welcomed by zealous customs policemen who were eager to add five American rock stars to their list of prestigious arrests.

"They found some perfectly innocent pills—vitamins and aspirin, mainly—and I guess they didn't like the look of them, so they said to us, 'You vill schtopp here,'" Ben Tench explains with a wry smile. "They dragged us into some *Mission Impossible*-looking room where guys in strange nondescript uniforms were analyzing the aspirin. 'Das is LSD pill,' they told us. They held up another and said 'Das is cocaine pill.' They strip-searched us and held us until a guy from German TV came to our rescue and said, 'These guys have to do a show!' [The band made a one hour special for German TV.] Then, some brain was smart enough to look at the pills... 'Ah...One-A-Day vitamins!'"

Yes, Europe was rough for the innocents abroad. "Frankfurt looks exactly like the San Fernando Valley," Tench moans, "and they don't know how to make sandwiches in England."

"All we heard on the radio in Germany were polkas," gripes Mike Campbell; and "In Paris," says Ron Blair, "we must have stayed on the wrong side of town because Campbell and I started getting hassled and nipped by poodles who seem to have been trained to attack Americans."

"I didn't really see much of Europe," Stan Lynch laughs. "I was always either playing or passed out."

"I passed out on the couch you're sitting on," Blair tells me later. "It's great to be back home, but making this record hasn't exactly been like a leisurely vacation."

"I've spent so much time in the studio," Petty says, "that the outside world has begun to look very strange to me. I went out to a diner down the street the other night and I couldn't believe how disoriented I was. It was like [he rolls his eyes], 'What is this? What's going on out here?'"

Though the Heartbreakers have all been living in the L.A. area for about five years now, they are seldom regarded as an "L.A. band" as that term is generally used. Their short, catchy, usually R&B-based songs

and their occasionally dapper *High Tides* and *Green Grass*-era Stones stage appearance owe more to British rock than to the L.A. cocaine cowboy scene; and though they originally came from Florida (for a fairly detailed history of the group, see *BAM*, June 1977), they bear no resemblance whatsoever to Southern boogie bands of the Wet Willie/Lynyrd Skynyrd school.

"You're only an 'L.A. band,'" Tench says, "if you go out and hang out on the Strip a lot and make a big deal of pointing out to people that you hang out on the Strip a lot. We're not into that."

"We're sort of a band without a country in a lot of peoples' eyes," comments Lynch, "but I really feel like we're a U.S. band."

Lynch, like the other members of the group, has good things to say about his home-base of L.A.

"I like the energy," he says. "You wake up and you can almost feel the city rumbling. There's an intense competitive drive that keeps the whole place rolling all the time."

"L.A. is opportunity," adds Campbell. "It's where we went to do what we wanted to do but couldn't do in Florida."

"This city has the top-of-the-line rock scene," Blair points out, "and if you live here, you have to feel a bit a part of that. I like L.A. and I love this place," he says of Shelter Studios. "We keep it funky and it's a great place to work."

And a hazardous one as well. About a month ago, Petty was nearly buried in rubble when the ceiling in the kitchen area collapsed after a heavy rain. ("Rock and roll is excitin'," Petty jokes of the incident.) But the death-trap of a staircase and the poor lighting have not prevented the Heartbreakers from being productive

continued on page 35

L to R: Petty, Stan Lynch, Benmont Tench, Mike Campbell and Ron Blair.

Photos: Richard McCaffree (except Tench shot)

Tom Petty

continued from page 33

in the one-time Armenian night-club. Work on the new LP, titled *You're Gonna Get It (Terminal Romance)* was the original title, but Petty scrapped it, is almost complete and Petty expects the album to be in the stores either late this month or in very early May.

Everyone involved with the Heartbreakers—band members, management, and ABC—firmly believes that the release of *You're Gonna Get It* will firmly establish the band as a top national act (they're so close already), and on the basis of the tracks Petty played me at the studio in late March, I'd have to agree wholeheartedly with that prediction. Not only is *You're Gonna Get It* more powerful and better-made than the group's first LP, it's one of the best rock albums I've heard in the last couple of years. If this album doesn't sell a million copies, there will be sufficient cause to worry about the health of this country.

Petty's new songs, like the ten that graced the first Heartbreakers LP, are charged with the sort of thunderous urgency and manic energy that has always characterized the best rock and roll. These songs are a quick, glorious nitrous oxide high—they take you up with a rush, vibrate in every pore of your body, and leave you tingling when they're gone. The twenty-odd years between Chuck Berry's first rumblings and Petty's steamroller rockers may seem like a long time,

"It may take a second for your ears to adjust to the volume," Petty warns me.

Indeed, the wall-mounted studio monitors that sit no more than ten feet in front of us are so powerful that the first few seconds of "You're Gonna Get It" practically knock me into Petty's lap. But the sound is as clear as it is loud and the song instantly puts me in a rocking frame of mind. Its swirling, ethereal quality places the tune somewhere between the slightly tough and sinister "Breakdown" and the other-worldly "Luna," from the first album. The song rocks slowly but relentlessly forward, cushioned by a rich, complex instrumental backdrop that stuns me at first.

"Did I hear synthesizers on that track?" I ask Petty.

He smiles. "Noah, did you hear that?"

"Yeah. Good. Good."

"Nope. No Synthesizers," Petty answers, smiling.

Evidently, Mike Campbell's guitars had fooled me as intended. I'd passed the idiocy test with flying colors.

Next, Shark cues up "No Second Thoughts," a rousing shaker 'n' mover with a definite Caribbean feel to it. This isn't some white reggae rip-off, however. Its roots are more implied than stated, and it's definitely still rock and roll—imagine a Heartbreakers treatment of Stones songs like "Sweet Black Angel" or "Luxury." The rough edge in Petty's voice and Lynch's conga part carry the song.

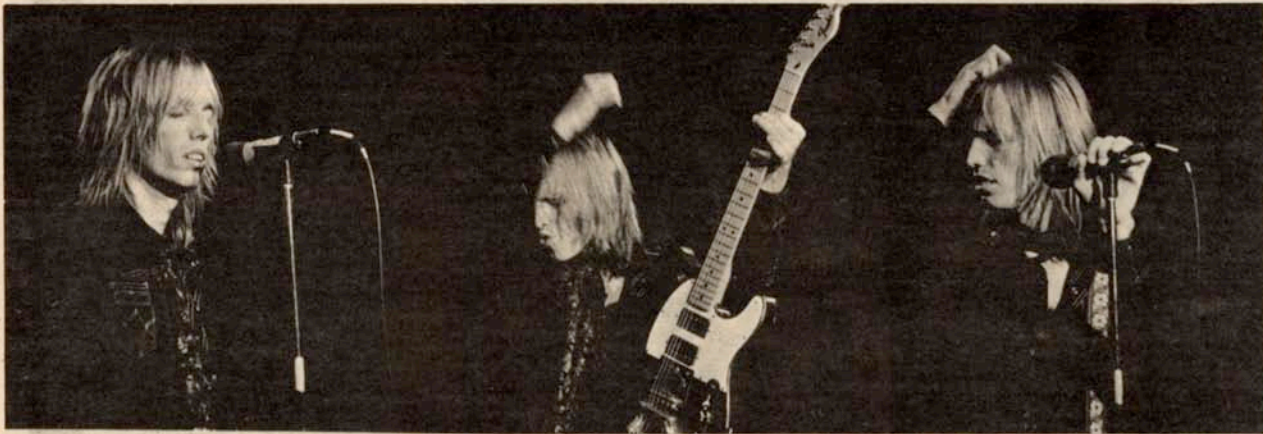
Though Petty will have to go a long way to top the overall brilliance of "American Girl," the new LP's "Too Much Ain't Enough" is the wildest, ballsiest song the Heartbreakers have ever recorded. Mike Campbell's frenzied playing on this track makes me wonder if the friendly, soft-spoken guitarist might actually be possessed by dark forces lurking God-

undefinable power that, here, derives from the band's ability to play like a band rather than five individuals, and from the purposefulness and desperation in Petty's singing. "Hurt" opens with a loose instrumental passage which features electric and acoustic guitars charting several seemingly independent, self-propelled courses. The paths magically coalesce and fall into a nicely textured, medium-tempo song that contains some of Petty's finest vocals to date. And it is here that we learn something about his feelings about life in the Golden State. "Thank God for California, he sings plaintively. "Thank God for a home."

Also included on the new album are two songs which were part of the group's live show for most of last year—"I Need to Know" and "Listen to Her Heart." The former song is yet another savage rocker, a dashing Ferrari in a rock world dominated by look-alike Dodge Darts; "Listen to Her Heart," which the band had originally hoped to release as a single on Valentine's Day, is the sort of hauntingly melodic ballad-with-a-beat that inevitably draws Byrds comparisons from rock critics, and heavy sighs from young girls.

"This is more of a group record," Petty says of *You're Gonna Get It*. "The first record was us getting to know each other musically. I think this one has more depth, and I hope it's going to force more people to pick up on the fact that there really are five people involved with this group."

Despite his attempts to emphasize the band rather than himself, the star-hungry rock press has constantly pushed Petty into the spotlight by himself, ignoring the other four band members for the most part. After all, Petty does write and sing lead on all the Heartbreakers' songs. But live and on the new record, it really does



Photos: Richard McCaffree

out they both clearly sit on the same time-line. Great rock and roll will never change because it will always be defined by the same energy—it will always mean freedom, defiance, and youthful independence, and it will always say "let the good times roll."

Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers know rock and roll and they know the tradition. What they play is not startlingly new—just startlingly good. And they know it, too.

"We knew the first album was really good," Petty says, "and that's why we were playing constantly all last year. We refused for that album not to succeed. We could see that when we played the songs, we were getting a great reaction; so we just tried to play all the time so the following would keep building. It accelerated the entire year."

As Petty and I sit in the two chairs at the sound board in Shelter Studios, Noah Shark—a jovial, bearded fellow who is co-producing the new LP with Denny Cordell (who produced the first LP alone)—puts reel after huge reel of tape onto the room's playback console.

knows-where in the Hollywood Hills. This is *not* the work of the same guitarist who, in a narcotized stupor, stepped blindly off the stage in Akron, Ohio. Look out, Ted Nugent!

Lynch provides a killer Phil Spector via Charlie Watts drum beat on "Too Much..."; Blair adds a clear, loping bass line that rattled my chair; and Tench's furious keyboard work conjured visions of the crazed pothead piano player in *Reefer Madness* banging away at the keys like his very survival depended on playing as fast as he could at all times. I was literally sweating by the time the song's three minutes had elapsed. It's bound to be a complete showstopper on the Heartbreakers' next tour (which, incidentally, begins shortly). They don't need old war-horses like "Shout" and "Route 66" in their repertoire when Petty is writing songs this hot.

"Hurt" slowed things down again, but did little to change the intensity of the listening experience. Like Bruce Springsteen and the Rolling Stones during their *Exile on Main Street* period, the Heartbreakers manage to infuse all their songs (regardless of tempo) with an

sound like a tight, five-piece rock and roll band, not a leader and four sidemen. Amazingly, Petty's bandmates express no resentment and little jealousy of the attention that has been lavished on him.

"We all get our ideas into the music," Campbell says. "We all put our personalities into the music. Tom knows that and the people who really understand how this band works understand that. That's enough to satisfy me, so I don't really care how others see it. We all get paid and," he adds with a chuckle, "we all get laid."

Since the Heartbreakers have not toured since "Breakdown" catapulted them from being 'cult favorites' to bona-fide hit-makers, the band members are hard-pressed to speculate about whether their next tour will be received much differently than their last one.

"There's no question that having a Top Forty hit has broadened our band's appeal," Campbell says, "because a lot of housewives and truckdrivers and people who would never listen to Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers are going to hear it and identify with it and maybe want to see us play...which is not to say we

continued on page 36

Tom Petty

continued from page 35

play for truckdrivers!"

The release of what is sure to be an ecstatically-received new LP may be all it takes to launch Petty and Company into teen-idol orbit once and for all. After all, in parts of Europe the group already gets the Leif Garrett treatment in the fan mags; and even in America, both *Teen* and *16* magazines have shown more than just a passing interest in the group. Things could get pretty crazy a few months from now.

"Yeah, it's going to get crazy," Blair agrees. "But our minds are going to stay street-level for the rest of our lives."

Even after you've tasted the Holy Dollar a year or so up the road?

"I'm not going to bite it," he says, "I'll just take it."

Petty echoes Blair's determination not to let success co-opt the band's fiercely independent spirit. He would like, one suspects, to think of himself as—to quote the title of one of his best songs—"The Wild One, Forever."

"I don't think an increase in popularity will change us much," he says earnestly. "I think it's great all these kids are hearing us and liking us 'cause that's what our whole thing is about—playing rock and roll for the kids. We're not so popular that it's at all uncomfortable." He snickers. "It's not a Farrah Fawcett situation yet."

But it could come to that if more singles break into the charts and the teen magazines decide the Heartbreakers' tough-but-clean image is going to click with their readers.

"It's part of being in a rock band. We want to look good on stage in the sense that we don't want to wear overalls and straw hats and stuff like that, but we're *not* trying to put accross any sort of glamorous image.

"I don't think we're in danger of becoming Peter Frampton-types or Shaun Cassidy-types," he smiles. "Basically, I think we're *much* too seedy for that trip." □



Photo: Richard McCaffree

Tony Dimitriatis, Tom Petty's manager and a dead ringer for **Leggy Montbatton**, relates that a **Tom Petty** impersonator has turned up in Atlanta and, most recently, San Jose, signing autographs and buying drinks for excited fans. You don't suppose it's the same fellow who was arrested for imitating **David Bowle** in San Francisco and Toronto a few months back, do you? Hardly a petty crime.