

# DARK STAR

*The Tubes*

Tom Petty  
Ian Matthews  
Big Star  
Jefferson  
Starship  
Good Rats  
Rubinoos  
David Freiberg  
Clover

Bob Dylan    Dire Straits  
Joanne Mackell    Spot The Dog



In just over a year Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers have, you might say, arrived, from obscurity to being a popular act whose music is also respected by discerning listeners, in rather alarmingly fast fashion, but so thoroughly deserved considering the excitement and energy of their live performance and the quality of material on record.

Their career took its biggest upward leap on their first British dates when they knocked out seemingly everybody who pulled any weight and got heaps of lavish praise poured over them from all directions. This

point and I don't think they were ready to take me on my word that I was going to join a band and stay in it, so we called it Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers. Now I think we'd pull my name out if we could, but I think there'd be confusion. I wrote "Strangered In The Night" at Leon's studio and that was the first thing the band put down. We were under no pressure to record quickly; we just hurried and hurried it real fast. I don't regret the band being together such a short time when we made the first record, I really wouldn't change anything, it's a good record of the band getting together. We were pleased that the press liked the album; it really didn't make us any money for a long time, we had to get out and work just to get the

drastically while we were in England that they were saying, 'Look, it wasn't me.' So we wanted it on paper; we said we wouldn't make another record unless they guaranteed that we could pay our rent. That took six months of lawyers and stuff. We wanted more of a royalty rate because we weren't getting anything the way the deal was structured. We also wanted some sort of promotion guaranteed instead of nothing. It was a dumb record deal, it was still half the Mudcrutch deal. (Mudcrutch was Petty's first deal with Shelter and the band also included Mike Campbell and Benmont Tench now with the Heartbreakers, with Petty playing bass. They made one single, "Deport Street"/"Wild Eyes" - both songs written by Tom Petty.) It was just a big mess and we wanted a clean slate. We never would have made a cent. We never agreed on anything, we never had any real direction. We'd been together

# TOM PETTY GETTING IT STRAIGHT

time around Tom's not quite so happy; they've had a rough time with the British music press. Nobody in the band quite understands why as they feel they have done nothing but improve since they last played here. Their performance at The Marquee would have been staggering if one could have become as involved with the music as much as one had to be wiping the sweat off one's nose. "Listen To Her Heart", "Strangered In The Night", "American Girl" and "Luna" were all rock'n'roll nuggets played with rare verve.

The next morning I arrived at their hotel eager to find out why Tom had picked up such a brash public image and, most of all, where he was plucking all those amazing tunes from. There was something daunting about doing this one knowing Tom had already read most of the remarks that were going down, but he was happy enough to retrace his career and fill in some missing details and proved to be the friendliest of people even though at that time he had no reason to be so towards any journalist. I'll let him tell it in his own words, it somehow seems more appropriate right now to let him have his say.

Tom: Leon (Russell) was making a demo tape and he called up the musicians, and I walked in, sat there and listened and thought, 'God, this is awfully good,' so I went out and said, 'Listen, I've got an idea.' Shelter wanted me as a solo artist, I'd been through quite a few excursions with them at that

people to understand, that was the real issue on that album. We then went to Florida and rehearsed for six weeks before we went on tour with Al Kooper, doing bars. At that time I hadn't gigged for three years. We then toured with Roger McGuinn with both acts doing two sets a night, so backstage was getting a huge dose of "American Girl"; everyone was wandering around humming it. I was flattered when McGuinn did it; we did it together in one of the shows one night. I wish I had a tape of it - he's got one.

We then came to England immediately after. The Nils Lofgren tour was great. He was in an unfortunate position, though, playing longer songs with long solos and he had us on before him just as we were getting a lot of attention. The tour of our own was put together within three weeks of being here. As soon as we got here people were saying, 'Hey, you can fill the halls yourself,' it was a really good time for us. I figured we wouldn't have broken the States if it wasn't for that; a lot of it got back and got us a lot more attention that was a big noise when we got back. We played all year long, we never stopped, never quite on the level we wanted to be but I'm glad we had to work up. Between that and the second LP we got into a fight with the record company about why the record hadn't been promoted and things. This problem was with ABC, not Shelter, but we were fighting with people that had nothing to do with it because they changed personnel so

too long and got just bogged down. We'd get in the studio and sit there all day doing nothing, there was nobody to take the authority to say, 'Alright, let's do it.' Everybody was outvoting one another; we had too many different ideas, too many pulls in different directions. I didn't mind playing bass, I got stuck with it 'cause nobody else wanted to play it.

*D.S.: So you spent six months waiting to go back into the studio...*

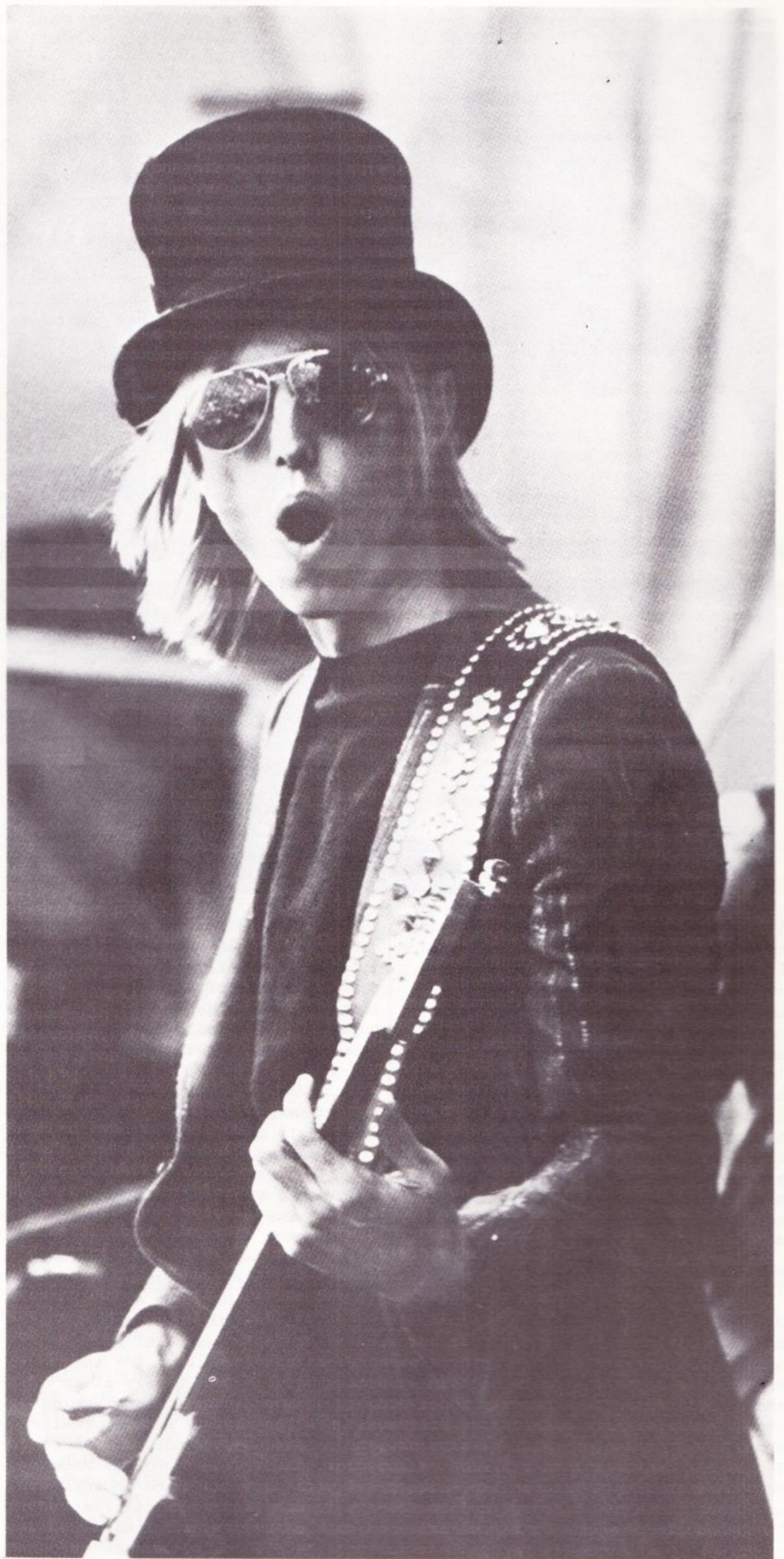
Tom: The six month wait put a lot of stress on the band, it almost drove me crazy; that was when I wrote "Too Much Ain't Enough". Every record company there is was involved in that six months, it was a big buy-out and ABC were saying, 'No! We'll beat their price, don't leave and we'll work it out here,' and I could see that if we left ABC there was gonna be another year of legal battles and I just didn't want it. I knew it was affecting everywhere, everything was tied up, there was no way we could release a record. But it was a matter of principle. It was like, do you want to work the rest of your life for nothing or stop now and get it right.

The minute that was resolved we were straight in the studio. We spent a great deal more time on the second record, we made about twenty tracks and just played with noises a lot. We were so happy to get in there, we got very comfortable. There were some drastically different things there, but I wanted it to have a continuity to where it was a collective thought all the way through. Some of the tracks were too radical - they'll probably creep out later; I just put down ten songs and thought, 'That sounds good, let's stop there.' For a long time we had twelve in but it never seemed to run right, even adding one more just

upset the balance. It's twenty-nine something, almost thirty minutes. If we'd written longer times on the sides and put thirty-five minutes on the bottom nobody would have said anything. It was a risky album, but if you don't take chances, where are you at? I always said at the beginning to all the guys, 'We won't do this again, you know, it won't be the same thing next time.' "No Second Thoughts" turned out to be my favourite track on the new album; I wrote it at home on a twelve-string acoustic, I thought we would do it acoustic. The band thought I was crazy; they hadn't heard it then, and I didn't want to play the song 'cause I knew it would get limp real fast, those kind of songs are hard. So we talked Stan into a bongo drum - which was no mean feat, Mike and myself played twelve-strings and Ron played six-string. We all sat in a circle but the organ wasn't baffled to stop the sound leaking, there was

nothing dividing anything. We went straight through the song twice - I was just singing through the guitar mike and by the third time around Stan was screaming at them to turn the tape on because the groove was really good. The organ was bleeding through everything, it was just going crazy and that's why they weren't taping it. But they turned it on and we went straight in from the second to the third take with Mike screaming, 'Aaahh!' When we went in and heard it back we loved it because it made all these strange overtones, all these strange instruments that weren't there, so we kept it and put some bass on it. We couldn't get the screaming and the noises out at all and you can even hear us laughing at the end. I wasn't gonna throw that away. We do a lot of that stuff and we could do it really well if we wanted to, but the fans want the louder stuff. Really, it's just a matter of easing them in, but I don't mind 'cause I like the louder stuff live, too.

On "Baby's A Rock'N'Roller", Mike brought in the demo that he had done at home and I liked it. We sat around a while putting a melody down, then we took quite a while cutting it 'cause we were trying to make it sound like his demo. It's a real Midwest teenybop song; it was intentional to finish the album with it. I didn't want the album to get heavy in a college sense where it was a piece of art or something so I said, 'Let's make it like a Kiss song or something and put it on the end.' Denny Cordell, our producer, and Jim Lenahan went down Hollywood Boulevard with a cassette deck, turned it on and walked down. It's an interesting street to walk down in the middle of the night, slightly dangerous. They went into a Penny Arcade and the first noise they recorded was one of those guns in a booth that shoots rockets and we

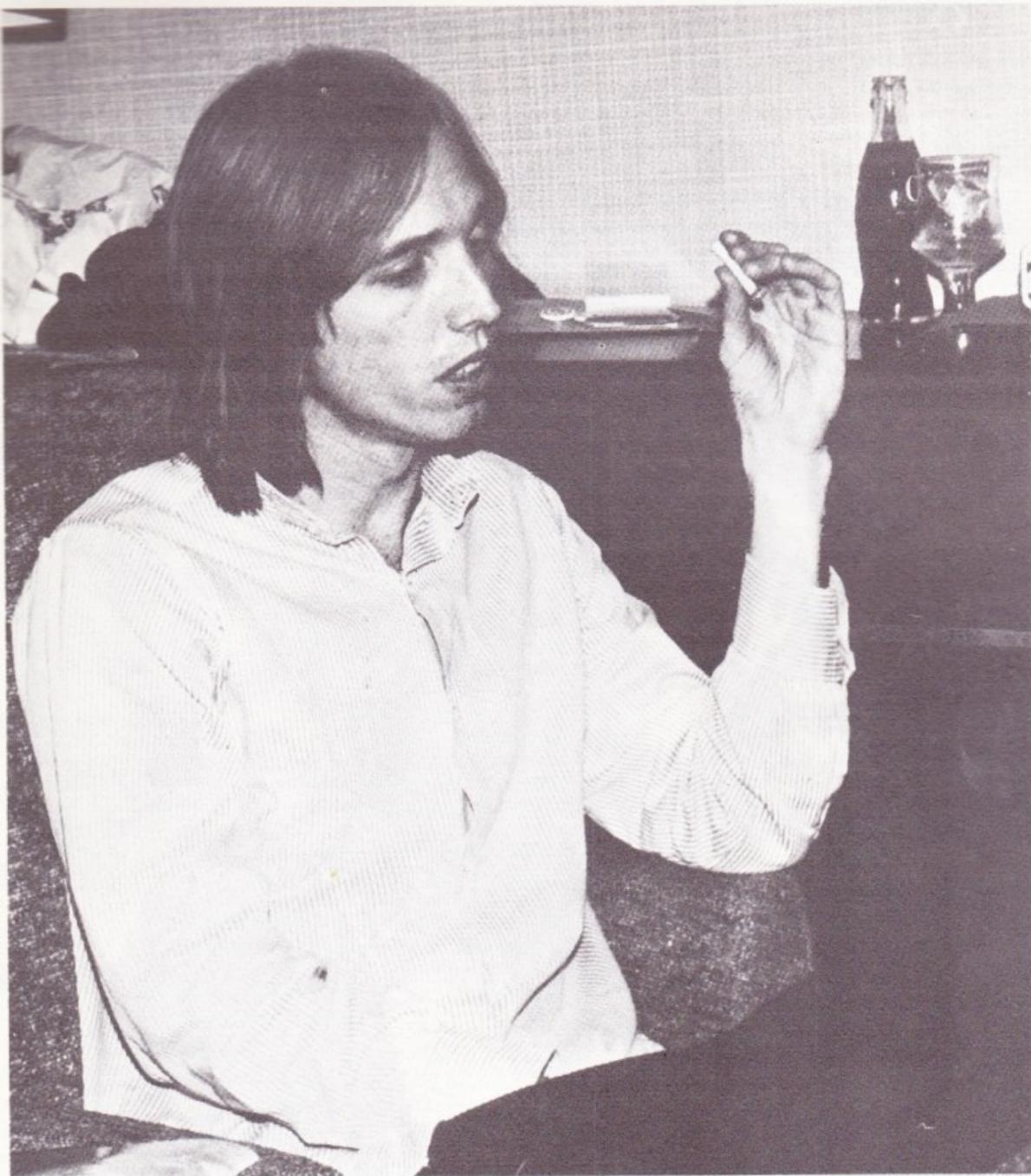


liked that so we put that in front of the track. There's a lot of street noise running throughout.

"I Need To Know" and "Listen To Her Heart" took the longest to

cut because we knew them too well. I'm never gonna learn a song again until we cut it because you've got such a preconceived idea of what it

*Pic: Adrian Boot*



is that you just hang there waiting to get this one thing, which is no fun at all. If you're just wandering it just happens - what you've got is what you've got. I wanted "Listen To Her Heart" as the single but the BBC and the FBI don't like the word 'cocaine'; the company wanted me to change it to champagne but that puts it back to 1950 or something. It's not advocating cocaine, it's putting it down, it's an attack on the cocaine generation, but they don't see that. They'll play it at night but not during the day, they think they might offend housewives.

I have a terrible time singing something if I don't believe it; most of my songs border on being autobiographical, although the names and places are changed to protect the innocent. "When The Time Comes" was real quick, first or second take, and "Restless" was real quick also. I wrote "Magnolia" specifically for McGuinn; he asked me if I had another tune he could use on the "Thunderbyrd" LP. They went in and cut it right at the end of the album but I don't think he could get it how he wanted it, so he went on to other things. I never thought we'd do it, but Michael still had the demo tape and really liked it so he brought it up and we did it. That was a pretty last minute decision.

I think it's a California album, but not in the Linda Ronstadt sense; it's an East Hollywood record, it's the other side of Western Avenue, so it's different. We've been in California quite a while and it's really nice now, it's great for us to play there.

*D.S.: Denny Cordell must have been a big help in your career; almost a sixth member of the band...*

Tom: Yeah! He's down in Argentina at the moment trying to get out of the country. He went for the football and he was born there, so now they've come at him wanting to know why he didn't join the army. He's having a terrible time trying to get out. Exile in Argentina. Denny found us in the first place; for the last four years he's been very close to me, always worked with everything I've done - a close friend, really, so he's always around. Noah Shark, too. Denny loves to produce records. He just doesn't want to do anybody he doesn't like; he gets offered a lot but he doesn't respond. (Denny's credits include Moody Blues - "Go Now"; Move - "Flowers In The Rain"; Procul Harum - "Whiter Shade Of Pale" and the first Joe Cocker LP.) "Whiter Shade Of Pale" alone is enough. He owns Shelter Records. In the early days they had an office in Tulsa and one in LA. Leon Russell

looked after Tulsa and Denny LA. He came from England with Joe Cocker and went on to manage and produce all Leon's albums. I helped with the production of the new record; I think I can do it with Noah and Denny there because they're not gonna let me get away with anything. Noah engineered the first LP and for the new one Denny was busy a lot and so it ended up with 'the Shark' and I sitting there trying to figure out how to do it. Noah's great, he's doing Twilley at the moment and he's doing the next Andrew Gold, which is strange. I walked into the studio one day and Andrew Gold was there listening to the albums; I think he's gonna do it.

*D.S.: What about the "FM" movie?*

Tom: Irvin Azoff's office called one day and said they would like to use "American Girl" and "Breakdown" in the movie. We said, 'Okay,' then

they phoned again and said, 'Would you like to be in the movie?' I wanted to be in it because I thought it was gonna be exposing the truth about FM radio; I think Azoff thought that too. The band weren't into it very much, we certainly never went into it as a Heartbreakers project. I just said, 'I'm gonna go down and see how they make movies,' and I went down twice for twelve hours and did a five minute scene. I just do one of those interviews where I'm meant to be on the road; I come in looking really burned and talk to this guy and chick. It ain't very interesting to tell you the truth, I wouldn't advise going to see it, it's just a beach-party radio movie. We don't really have anything to do with it. "Hurt" was written the night of the movie scene. I came in and we didn't have anything to play so Michael and I sat down and wrote "Hurt".

*D.S.: Are you happy with the way The Marquee was arranged?*

Tom: That was only thought of the night before. We said, 'Let's go and do it,' we didn't think that many people could know. We stipulated 600 people but they didn't listen and they let in over 800. It was totally out of hand, it was too hot, I almost fainted up there. There were far too many people in and the air had gone. We'd planned to play for hours and it was just one of those out-of-control things. I have never been that hot; I came back here two hours later still sweating after a shower, it didn't do me a lot of good, physically. We were gonna play every number we knew. But they did keep the price down to a pound, which was great. It was just a reaction to Knebworth. Knebworth was very sleepy, no vibes at all and then our keyboards broke after three numbers, it wasn't my idea of a good

time. I thought it would be a chance to play to the kids all at once, but we just had a lot of ageing hippies out there, so why are they giving me shit in the papers? I was a teenybopper out there, man, and they give me shit like that. (Tom was talking about a particularly scathing attack on him by that well-known smart-ass Allan Jones in Melody Maker the week after Knebworth.) I knew with the new LP the press were gonna give me some shit. If we'd stayed the same they'd have criticised us for that. I'm a real easy target, they've got all this ammunition to throw at us. What's hindered us more than anything is the way we look and we can't do anything about that. They keep saying we're more the teen-mag/TV star kind of thing and that happens, but it's not our doing. People just come along, take a photo and stick it in Sixteen or something. I don't care, I get as much stock in Jackie as I do in NME, it doesn't

always been a kind of female reaction, it's a funny world we live in. Like when we heard about Susan Shapiro it just plastered us, man, we did four encores that night, the gig was sold out and it was one of the best gigs we'd ever played musically. And she's trying to get you to fuck her and you don't want to and she goes back to New York and says, 'Screw 'em,' and she's the one that wrote the first really nice article we had. So their minds just swing around. I don't give a shit, I'll give 'em shit right back. I can see why people would rather not bother doing interviews because it doesn't make any difference anyway. I'd defy any one of those papers to try and put us out of business. I'd like to see them mount a fully-fledged campaign to wipe us out, because I think we'd be the biggest band England's seen if they did that. When I look back, Melody Maker gave the first LP a bad review and so did NME. They gave it

a children's show with him, I played bass, it was called "Wacko" and it was on TV every Saturday morning. It's all ten-foot rabbits and stuff and Dwight really wanted to do it. It's kinda strange when I think of it.

*D.S.: What about the live phone-in?*

Tom: That was fun, but it took the engineer a long time to patch the phones up. I'd done one in the States before but not in England. They're more spontaneous in the States, you just punch a button and pick up the phone and a girl will say, 'What are you wearing?' or something and they're a real lot of fun, but here the kids are screened. Somebody says, 'What is your question?', then they write it down, the question's approved, then it goes through a board of directors and it goes like that all the way down to me, so by the time the kid gets on

make any difference to me, they're all music papers.

A chick by the name of Susan Shapiro, who works for the Village Voice in the States, once said to me, 'Why are you in this business?' I thought it was such a dumb fucking question that I said, 'I'm only in it for the chicks,' and that's been printed everywhere ever since, so when anyone walks up to me now and says, 'Are you in this just for the chicks?' I say 'Sure.' I think it's obvious we're not in it for the chicks. Chicks are real funny, man, Susan Shapiro just blasted us in her paper 'cause nobody would fuck her, it was one of those kind of things. So they go away and write fucking mean things about you. You can't fucking win, can you? And she says she fucked us! It's made it worse now; if you meet a chick they're thinking, 'I know about you,' so it's really hard at first overcoming your big bad wolf image. I don't know why the press have done this to us, it's funny. They must have been hanging around the hotels in the early days, 'cause in those days we were actually stringing a lot of girls through the hotels. There's

two reviews; the first one was pretty bad and the second time the guy said, 'I've been listening to this and I think it deserves a bit better.' He still didn't rave but he made some better qualifications. Sounds was a great review and they helped break the band, they were behind us a great deal, bless their hearts. I think people are under the impression the papers like us but MM and NME have never been behind us.

*D.S.: The band started on a parallel with Dwight Twilley; why are you leaving him behind in the popularity stakes?*

Tom: He doesn't go on the road. If he had it would have helped him a lot, he's just not inclined to playing live, he's not that interested. He put together a couple of bands but he was never happy with them. We've never ever gigged together, the closest we got was San Francisco when I got up for the last four numbers and played with him. He's welcome to come out on the road with me at any time, but I don't think he'll do it. He likes the young kids; the very very very young kids. I did

the phone it's like a very serious thing, so it's a little more serious over here, I think. Island Records in England have done us a lot of good; the only complaint I've ever had with them is that advertisement, 'John Travolta sucks, Tom Petty rocks', which infuriated us. We knew nothing about that so we had a good row and they apologised. The fans think it's our idea and we've never said anything bad about anybody. What's the point in slugging somebody else? But I think England saved us; it was looking down, we just did it right here. We weren't able to do it right in America because of money and support. I want to come back in the Fall, I hope we do, the kids are great and the shows are fine. It's the extra-curricular shit, you know? The press are such a big part over here, it's annoying. I don't think I'm going to speak to the press much any more because they come up to do interviews and they don't even bring music up, they just want to know about girls and what I do with my money and it goes on and on. Is the lobby full of journalists?

*Dave Fagence*



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