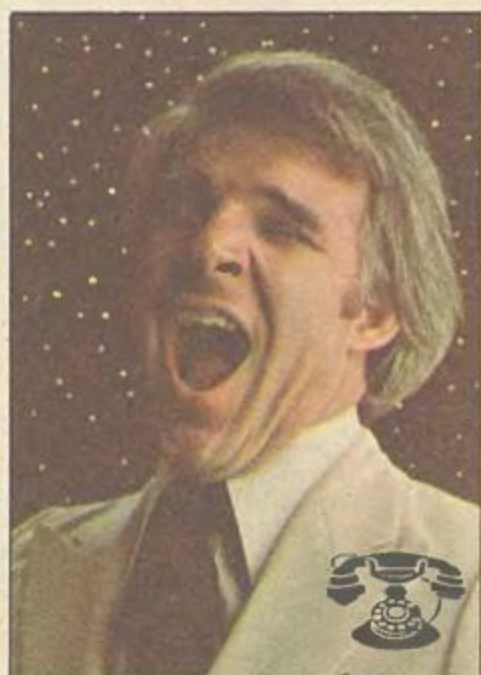
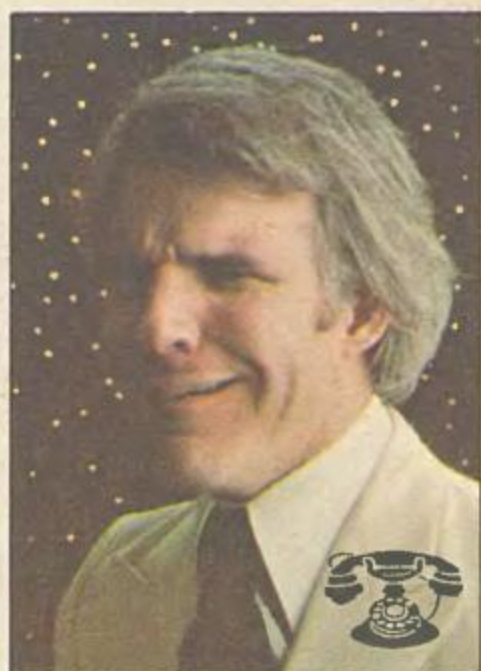


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Rolling Stone

curtain speech, a wanderer's warm and desperate memory of an unrouled life on the road. The memory is not firsthand, though, and the image fades to sepia at the center:

*There was a time
When lonely men would
wander
Thru this land
Rolling aimlessly along
So many times
I've heard of their sad story
Written in the words
Of dead men's songs.**

This is a song about looking for roots in a rootless tradition, and the chorus ("Please tell me where/Have all the hobos gone to...") would cloy if it weren't sung just as Prine sings it: directly and without self-pity, but flirting with a sense of destination.

No matter when you play it, *Bruised Orange* carries the chill of Midwest autumn beyond autobiography (the title track begins its parable of bleak optimism with the recollection of a wintry childhood) into a kind of personal pop mythology. The chorus of "Sabu Visits the Twin Cities Alone" owes a lot less to Bob Dylan than to Sherwood Anderson:

*Hey look Ma
Here comes the elephant boy
Bundled all up in his
corduroy
Headed down south toward
Illinois
From the jungles of East
St. Paul.**

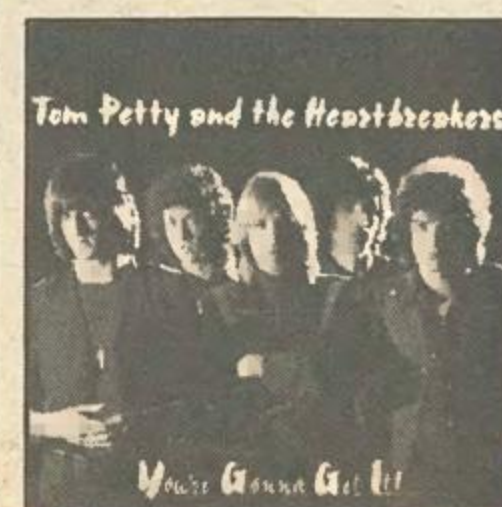
But, of course, it owes the most to John Prine. This is not an album about a man finally finding his voice; Prine's already done too much good—if erratic—work for that. Rather, *Bruised Orange* is about a musician taking a chance and finding new limits, fresher expression. This is a man stepping right to the front.

You can hear the change—and the progress—most clearly in the love songs, which are funny and ironic without ever turning the other cheek and getting wise-assed. For Prine, a love affair is a free-fire zone, a combat between two insurgent forces, equally matched. Battles rage with passion and good humor, range from the bemused recollection of "There She Goes" to the wry testimonial of "Aw Heck," a half-sly, half-serious avowal of undying devotion ("I could get the electric chair/For a phony rap/Long as she's/Sittin in my lap"). The tone holds tougher and truer in these anthems sung with a bloody grin than in the morose "If You Don't Want My Love," cowritten with Phil Spector. Prine has better things to say just now about rug burns than about the bruises of misplaced love.

*All songs by John Prine ©1978, Big Ears Music, Inc.

Steve Goodman is likely the best and certainly the most congenial producer Prine has ever had. *Bruised Orange* shows no strain, comes on a little too well varnished maybe, but sounds snug and comfortable, too. Goodman might have kept Prine from repeating some of his verses so often, but maybe that's just another expression of the good will, guarded and hard won, that pervades this LP. You catch it right away in the opening song, "Fish and Whistle," a sort of unruffled epistle to the Almighty ("Father forgive us/For what we must do/You forgive us/We'll forgive you"), and, more seriously, in the title tune, where the quiet caution of lines like "a heart strained in anger/Grows weak and grows bitter" seems to cut very close, passing through reflection into self-revelation.

This is John Prine's first record in three years. If that particular statistic got past you, it never will again. After *Bruised Orange*, people will be counting the days.



You're Gonna Get It! Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers

Shelter/ABC DA-52029

By Tom Carson

TOM PETTY AND the Heartbreakers, released last year, was a debut album that declared almost nothing, but intimated all over the place. The music was intricate and deft, with spooky hints of everyone from J.J. Cale to the Guess Who, all played very close to the vest. Petty himself lived up to the "Mystery Man" title of one of the songs, practicing a terse and elliptical romanticism, always just out of reach. Anything more explicit might have made him banal: his very elusiveness was what gave the record most of its tantalizing, unsettling charm.

On *You're Gonna Get It!*, Petty has shed some—but not all—of his cloaks. "Magnolia," the most straightforward love song he's yet done, maintains the mystique: "Then she kissed me and told me her name/I never did tell her mine." But by the song's end, it's the girl who's forgotten the singer, while he's left remembering her. Everything's open-ended enough to make you want more.

Overall, the current LP boasts an impressive stylistic cohesiveness with its predecessor, but what makes the album exciting are the fresh hints of openness and expansion just beneath the surface. The rhythms are a bit looser, and there's a new emphasis on Petty's rough, driving, rock & roll guitar in the mix. Some of the cuts have a Latinized swing, and you can hear bits and pieces of outlaw grit, urban blues and Los Angeles harmonies everywhere. The slippery, layered textures of sound that occasionally seemed mannered on the first record are completely under control here. The new material is, if anything, stronger, and only "Baby's a Rock 'n' Roller" falls short. Like the earlier "Anything That's Rock 'N' Roll," the number's too self-conscious a celebration to be entirely convincing: the Heartbreakers are clearly on better terms with ambiguity than with joy.

Petty omits all narrative signposts from his lyrics, depending instead on cryptic, repeated catch phrases and the doomy shifts of the music to flesh out his images. On "You're Gonna Get It," the story is left mostly untold. Instead, a stray piano vamp here, a drumbeat there, and jagged guitars slipping in and out of focus build to create a brooding, violent tension, while the singer sneaks through the cracks in the music. Even during the LP's most upbeat interludes, the aura of undefined menace—coolly accepted as a fact of modern life—is always palpable in the background.

Tom Petty's achievement is all the more remarkable because, for all his eclecticism, he's basically working in a mainstream style, mining the obsessions and quirks beneath the sentimental conventions of Seventies pop. He's got too much determination and integrity to be contained within a cult, and *You're Gonna Get It!* is a bid to break him loose. You can't exactly dance to the album, but it's still great highway music. And for a restless mystery man like Petty, who's always impatient for the next step, there's no doubt which matters more.

Deer in a Field

Someone yells "hey!"
from a car
& the deer
started
look up
ears perked
& one deer says
"what
do you want
we're only
some deer
in a field"

—JOEL DAILEY