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RECORD REVIEW

AUGUST 1979

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Rock's "Second Wave"

Tom Petty

Joe Jackson
The Police

Strong Comebacks

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The Beatles

Second of Two-Part
Complete History
Plus George Harrison

Maynard Ferguson

Definitive Interview, Part I

Charlie Parker

Complete History



ROCK

RECORD REVIEW INTERVIEW Tom Petty

BY DAVID M. GOTZ

Popular music in America is going through some very uninspired times right now. Disco Reigns, but its dependance upon endless repetitions of percussive and verbal nonsense is boring the hell out of a lot of people. Mellow rock seems to be another alternative for the masses, but there too, insipid lyrics and melodies are making mush out of many active souls. There's rock too, but how many power chords are there, and how many times can you play the same lead? So where do we turn? Back to good old rock 'n' roll. Yes, the sheer energy of punk and new wave has brought with it a new awareness of this most valuable native American asset.

Tom Petty understands the worth of rock 'n' roll, and he'll keep on playing it until there is no more. His debut album slept for about eight months (even though our English friends were going crazy over it); then a simple tune called "Breakdown" made Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers American favorites. Other songs on that album reinforced the initial feelings, giving

Tommy a strong footing for his next album. It should be mentioned that T.P. and the boys spent a great deal of time away from home, driving their rock 'n' roll to everybody's doorstep, making many friends in the process.

You're Gonna Get It was well received, but it didn't show T.P. at his best. He admits now that it's a moody album, because it was a moody time. The band spent another few months on the road, refining their stage technique and strengthening their following all over America.

The time is right for a powerful rock 'n' roll album from Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, and from the small amount I heard, this is the one. Using the full potential of today's 24-track recording facilities, and with the assistance of veteran engineer Shelly Yakus and "wiz Kid" producer Jimmy Iovine, T.P. has assembled an album that is rock 'n' roll for a new decade.

Since the album was not finished at press time, our interview was limited, but I was able to catch up on some of the events

of the past year, and to get a little insight into the recording of this new album.

For *You're Gonna Get It* you said that you wanted an album that sounded like 4-track rock 'n' roll; how does this new album differ?

This is the first album we've done in a 24-track studio, which is the kind everybody uses, so it has a bigger sound. We did the first mix last night and I love the way it sounds; I'd say it's more of a 1980's record than the last one was.

Why did you decide to change the approach?

We did the other thing; with each album we try to do something a little different, because the music is different, it has a different feel. This album is going to be bright, a lot brighter than the last one. *You're Gonna Get It* was a little shady.

Did you do a lot of overdubbing?

Not a whole lot; we did do a lot of tracking [basic tracks] though... an intense amount of tracking.

Did you write more than you're going to use?

Yeah, I think we wrote about 20 songs. **And you'll use 10?**

So far we're using 10, but we've only mixed one, so I don't know yet, but we've got 10 favorites that we'll mix first. If we can fit more on without hurting the balance we will; if you go over 18 minutes a side, the sound starts to go bad.

Were the songs written for this new 24-track sound, or are they just Tom Petty



songs?

They're just my songs: I'd write the songs same as I always have, get the band in the room and work them out. One big difference was that we used a big room to record in; we've always used little rooms in the past. We used a big room to cut the tracks, to get live echo, real echo, and we could play louder, more like we do live. All we did was play almost two dozen songs until we had the feel and the arrangements the way we wanted. I'm real happy with the tracks; they feel right.

Had you written any songs before you went into the studio to cut the tracks?

We had six, three that I had written with Michael [Campbell, guitarist], and three I wrote myself, that were done before we went in.

So Mike is still contributing a lot?

Yeah, I know that three of the songs that we wrote together are going to be on the album, and we wrote a few more together too. I wrote a lot on my own too.

The last time we talked, you mentioned getting a unity amongst the tracks, where there is strength both separately and as an album. Has that aspect developed yet for this album?

Well I've been real conscious about this album 'cause I want it to be an album. I trust that the unity is all right; there are a lot of different songs here. Song for song, they're very different, in style and intensity.

Where are the songs coming from lyrically?

Well, all over the place.

A lot of love songs?

No shortage of love songs this time, though some of them aren't love songs. There's one called "Louisiana Rain" which isn't a love song, and a song called "Casa Dega" which isn't either.

You played that song live didn't you?

Yeah, we played a couple new songs during our Christmas tour of the West coast.

From what I've heard of this album, it sounds much stronger and more powerful than anything you've done before.

This record has a very different feel. We took a long time to make this record. It wasn't intentional, but when we came off the road last year, I said: "Before anything else goes on, I really want to make this record that we all know and we all hear so let's sit down and actually do it." So it's really been fun; I didn't notice that it had been so long until the managers and people started saying, "Come on, where is it?" I mean we were having a lot of fun and time didn't matter; we did 40 songs, 20 we had written and 20 covers. There is so much tape around from the last six months.

You all knew what you wanted in this album, without talking about it?

We never talk about things like that, but I think we knew what it was, that strength like you said, and that strength was in the sound of the drums. This time Stan [Lynch, drummer], myself and Shelly Yakus our engineer spent two days getting the drum sound right before we started. In the other albums we've done the drums on one

track, all the drums on one track, which no one does anymore, and we knew that, but at that time we wanted to do something that was... um, kinda out to the left. Like we said: "We'll put the drums on one track like it used to be in the 60's, and we'll get that sound." This album, I don't think has any 60's on it. I think this one is more us; the other records had more sounds from other places, and people would always be asking us about influences. Well I don't think that will go on so much this time.

Can you see a closer association with the first album and this one?

Yeah, now that you mention it, yeah. It's hard to talk about it clearly until it's done, but I know it's closer in feel to the first album than the second. The second album was kinda moody; it was a real moody time for all of us. I think that album sounds like the cover looks, real murky. Which is fine if you're in that mood, but we're not in that mood anymore.

Do you think the touring will be less intense this year?

Nope, it's been so long that everybody's getting itchy to get back out there. I think we will put in until at least early winter.

"The second wave of bands are starting to come through, which is really great."

What kind of halls do you think you'll play this year, still the smaller ones?

Yeah, I think like 6,000 seaters.

Bumping up the size a little?

Bumped it up a little, but everyone can still see pretty well.

Think you'll play any clubs?

We played one club last year, and that was fun, but it's too difficult to play a small club. It's an ordeal. It's much more organized at a bigger place; things don't get quite so out of hand. How can we do it? I'd like to drive down some night and play the Whiskey [L.A.'s famous club], and that's the only way I'd like to do it, just decide on the spur of the moment. But if it's two weeks of planning in secrecy, and mail order tickets, I mean what's the point? But I don't want to ever stop playing clubs; we've just got to figure out a way of doing it.

Have you chosen a support band to tour with you?

No, not yet.

It must be quite difficult to find a band that will make your show complete.

It's a real problem sometimes.

I would think that a young band with a sound similar to yours would be best.

Well, you don't always want to go with someone similar; you need someone that your audience would probably enjoy. That's all you have to do.

Where do you think your audience lies, agewise?

I don't know for sure, but I think it's about 14 to 30.

Are the girls a heavy part of your audience?

Yeah, there's a lot of girls at the shows, screaming and throwing clothes and that sort of thing. [Silence, then heavy laughter].

It's old hat now, huh?

Well, it's nothing we try to take seriously [chuckle]; it's not the objective. But screaming girls are always good for a rock show; they make you play better. The audience is what's important; if the audience is up, so are we. The more they give, the more it pulls out of the band. When you hit the balance, it's a great show, a really good time, when everyone in the room is involved.

How often does that happen for you?

Most of the time, knock wood.

It's really something you can't do much about.

I don't know; it's just a feeling.

To keep that up night after night, in different cities, with different people and different halls, it must be quite a challenge.

I guess it is, but I don't think about it much. I mean it's the most fun of the day. The rest of the day is in a hotel or on a plane, and after the gig, it's back to the hotel, so the time on stage is the most precious time of the day. God forbid that we don't play well, 'cause you would have wasted the whole day.

Is there anything that you can describe that you get from the audience that gives you that great feeling?

There's just a vibe in the room; it's as cosmic as that [laugh]. I don't know; I can feel that it's right.

Do you have any international plans for this year?

I would like to go to Japan.

Have your records sold much there?

I think so.

What are your feelings about Japan?

Well, I'd really like to go there. Beyond that, I really don't know; I've heard a lot of good things about the audiences there. A few people have told me that I'd really like it there, so hopefully we will.

Is it a certain trip?

I'd give it a strong 90 that we'll go.

Does it excite you to be an international rock 'n' roll band?

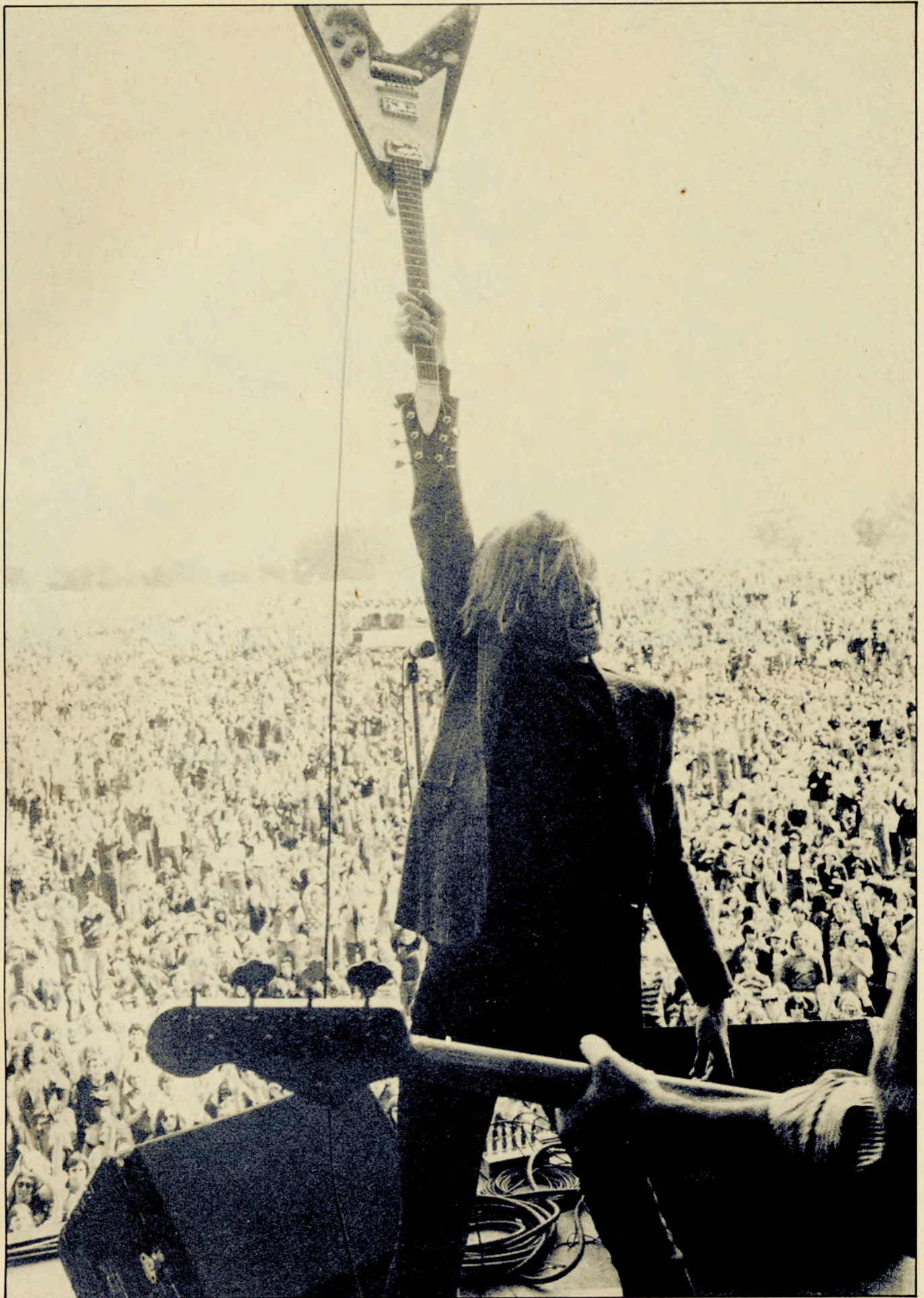
Sure, but you know we had more notoriety in England and Europe before the States, so we've always felt that we could play in more than one country.

How did it go in England last year?

We played this huge festival thing, and we're a little burned up about it. I didn't want to do it, but we didn't have time to do a tour of the whole country. So there were about 100,000 people at this thing.

Was it Knebworth?

Yeah, Knebworth. So we played Knebworth, and I didn't even know what a Knebworth was. And I went and I played; the show was fine and everything, just pretty distant to me. I felt really distant from 100,000 people. So that was cool, and then before we left, we decided we'd play the Marquee [a small club in London, with a long history of great rock 'n' roll shows]. I went on the radio at about six and said we'd be there at eight. What a mess; it was a



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mess, but what a great gig, a great gig. I got it on tape.

It must have been tough getting in and out of there.

Sure was, and there's only one way, that's the front door. It was kinda scary. You know you couldn't breathe in the place. There were like 900 people in the place [normal capacity is about 500!]; it was stupid to let so many people in. You couldn't get any air; a lot of people were passing out and they wouldn't fall down because they were held up by the people squeezed around them, all mashed together. Beforehand, we said to ourselves, "Here we go; we're gonna play the Marquee, and we're gonna play all night, do anything we want." We played shorter than normal, because we just couldn't breathe. I fainted once, and put my head in a bucket of water; I came back out with my head in a bucket of water! Michael and I would sit down on the drum riser, and play sitting down for a while. We were making them turn off the lights; I mean the stage lights really heat up everything. You can hear me on the tape of the show sayin': "Turn off that fuckin' light."

How did it sound?

Sounded great. I remember it was a great audience. Like we did "Breakdown" and I didn't come in with the vocal right at the front, they did; the whole place sang the first two verses. It was great; I didn't sing, I just stood there conducting.

Has any new music caught your attention lately?

Only recently I finally heard the Cars album, and I was very impressed; I thought that it was an excellent album. I had a cassette of the album on the road, but for one reason or another, I never really listened to it. So I finally got the album a few days ago and listened to it right the way through, something I rarely do, and I said: "Damn, these guys are really good." So there's my plug for the Cars; I like a few others too.

Last year you were telling me how nothing in the record store really interested you, but there have been so many new groups and individuals this year that are contributing a lot.

Yeah, the second wave, the second wave of bands are starting to come through, which is really great... which means... well, I don't know what that means. It means more bands! I like the Police thing, "Roxanne"; that's pretty neat. I don't know what the album's like... I really like that sort of thing; it's real fresh. Some of the Cheap Trick records are alright; they're a real good American rock 'n' roll band.

And yours is still an American rock 'n' roll band?

Yeah, I think that's still the best description. I don't think we're the same year to year; on stage we are, but the records show the different frames of mind that we are in. On stage, it's turn up the amps and let's go. Most bands these days, seems to me, work very hard to put up some sort of image and stick really hard to it. Sort of, "this is what we do; here's the official stamp on this." Like here's the slab that's Boston... look

here, this is Boston. I know it's Boston all the way through. But we don't do that; we haven't recorded "Breakdown" forty times. We figure you do other things, get into something else.

Has radio improved over the last year?

I haven't listened much to AM, but the FM seems to be improving, giving more time to new music. They're finally starting to move away from the long solos and mindless sax breaks; that stuff isn't going on as much. You hear more songs now, a lot more songwriters. I enjoy that... the energy's good, there's more rock 'n' roll.

That's where you belong; that's where you fit in.

Yeah.

Are you hoping that through your music and the music of this "second wave" of rock 'n' roll songwriters that AM radio will finally come around too?

I'd really like to see that happen. Whether it will or not, I just can't say. You can't tell people to play more songs; they just gotta do it. You can't convince them in any other way than that's the music they want to hear. The reason rock 'n' roll is so far back down the charts, and disco's in the front, is because that's what the people go out and buy in the stores, disco records, and that's what they like at the moment, to dance to the disco records at the disco. Not me! I'm just not entertained by disco records, for the most part. I'm sure there are exceptions to everything. But ah... beats me, I just don't see it lasting forever, and rock 'n' roll isn't gonna go away.