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behaved like recent Dale Carnegie graduates; moving nimbly about the stage, interacting with the audience and each other, cracking jokes. Guitarist Mike Campbell actually smiled — not once, but many times. It's obvious that T.P. and the boys are a lot more confident and loose since they started touring, and that's all their shows needed to move a step beyond skillful playing and create real empathy and excitement — as this one unquestionably did.

You never could fault them for poor execution, and it was hard to imagine a more high-stepping "I Need To Know," a more vibrant "American Girl," and a "Refugee" that rolled more powerfully forward than the renditions fired off this night. Petty is an engaging front man as well as a knowledgeable leader; the Heartbreakers are four seasoned professionals who know exactly what to play and when to play it. When they cooked, the crowd boiled with them, and when they eased it

down to "simmer" in "Breakdown," everyone slipped right into the groove. For being sick, Petty's voice was unusually character-filled and resilient, and the Heartbreakers' instrumental accents seemed to add a musical "Amen!" to his pleadings. Not a minute was wasted, and even their energetic song endings topped off each number with a final, dramatic flair. No doubt about it — at a time when economy is a big issue, Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers set a good example by making everything count. This was one of the strongest performances I've seen all year.

The Fabulous Poodles deserve some credit for setting it up. Jokers? Sure they are, but who said rock shouldn't be fun? Fact is, the Fab Poodles wed humor to music in a manner that benefits both and compromises neither. "Mirror Star" bore witness to their prowess at pure, original rock, but the crowd got the biggest charge out of their suave choreography to the Ventures-ish "Pink City Twist" and their frantic "My Generation." They're almost too good to be an opening act — but most everyone in attendance at the Palace was glad they were.

Dave Voelker

SCENE photo by Bob Fennell



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TOM PETTY AND THE HEARTBREAKERS THE FABULOUS POODLES Palace Theatre Nov. 17

performance of rare luster on Saturday; then Brian Sipe rallied from the flu to do it to the Dolphins on Sunday. Germs, anyone?

The only thing that kept me from liking last year's Tom Petty show was the band's cool, stand-offish stage presence — they acted supremely bored and distant. This time, they

It was to be a weekend of great showings under duress. First Tom Petty overcame the effects of a sore throat to turn in a vocal