

JOE PERRY'S NEW BAND • EXCLUSIVE PIX PAGE 26

HIT PARADER

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ROCK
HEARTBREAKER
TOM PETTY
SAYS HE DOES IT
FOR FUN

**CHEAP
TRICK**
GUITARS
&
AMPS

HOT ROCK: REO RELAX, POLICE PLANS
CAT STEVENS IN PHILLY, SYL SYLVAIN
EAGLES, LOU REED, STEVIE WONDER
CONCERT COMMENTS, LITTLE RIVER



39000


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"It's a real gratifying to the ego to go out to fifteen thousand people, but it really ain't — I don't think it's the ideal way to play rock shows."



THE HIT PARADER
INTERVIEW

HEARTBREAKERS AND AMERICAN GIRLS TOM PETTY DOES IT TO HAVE FUN

Now that modern music has replaced all the new waves that came crashing down on us, everyone has stopped worrying about Tom Petty's place in the new music and begun to just enjoy him for what he is — a go-for-broke rock and roller who's always said, "The main point of rock is to have fun; that's why I'm doing what I'm doing and that's why I'll continue to do it."

Tom, along with keyboardist Benmont Tench, co-guitarist Mike Campbell, bassist Ron Blair, and drummer Stan Lynch, formed The Heartbreakers in 1976 after several years of not getting anywhere in local bands in his hometown of Gainesville, Florida, and then moving to Los Angeles to try to get it to happen there — which he did, though not without a struggle.

"I want to always be just enough unsatisfied that I'll want to make the next album better than the last," he says, with the knowledge that satisfaction doesn't come easy, even with hit albums. The band's first album, *Tom Petty And The Heartbreakers*, established them and helped build their following; their second album, *You're Gonna Get It*, broke new ground for them; their third album, *Damn The Torpedoes*, found them firmly

settled in the rock and roll spotlight. But in the four years between the first and third albums, the band had an uphill fight that only their own determination let them survive: a fight that included a certain lack of attention from record companies and radio stations, a few negative attitudes from the rock and roll loving press, and a lot of hard work on the band's part ignoring it all in a constant effort to get their music to the audiences who are the only ones who really matter.

HP: Hello, Tom. Where are you?

TP: Tulsa, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

HP: You'll be delighted to know you were in the Sunday comics last weekend.

TP: I was?

HP: In this section called 'Pop Idols', between Dagwood and Beatle Bailey. More about that later. First, you've put in a lot of time at different points in your career being in a holding pattern in relation to business or an album finally breaking. Yet you've continued to pile drive forward with your live appearances. Do you feel at this point that it's basically between you and your audiences. And that radio and record companies haven't got all that much to do with your successes and failures?

TP: That's a dangerous question. I do

think that the kids made the band. I think the kids broke the band initially because there was never any support back on that first album, never even an ad or anything. So it was definitely from the audience. It just kind of built up through the gigs.

HP: Was radio the same way?

TP: I don't think entirely. I'd hate to just say that radio didn't help us because there were that handful that were there all the way from the beginning. Like in Los Angeles radio has always been with us, really supported us. I think that radio, especially the FM's over the last couple of years helped us sort of build a base to work from.

HP: Did you feel abandoned at any point?

TP: The only time I got worried was through all these lawsuits. Like the second record did pretty good, and we were kind of happy and thought everything was okay, and then these lawsuits.

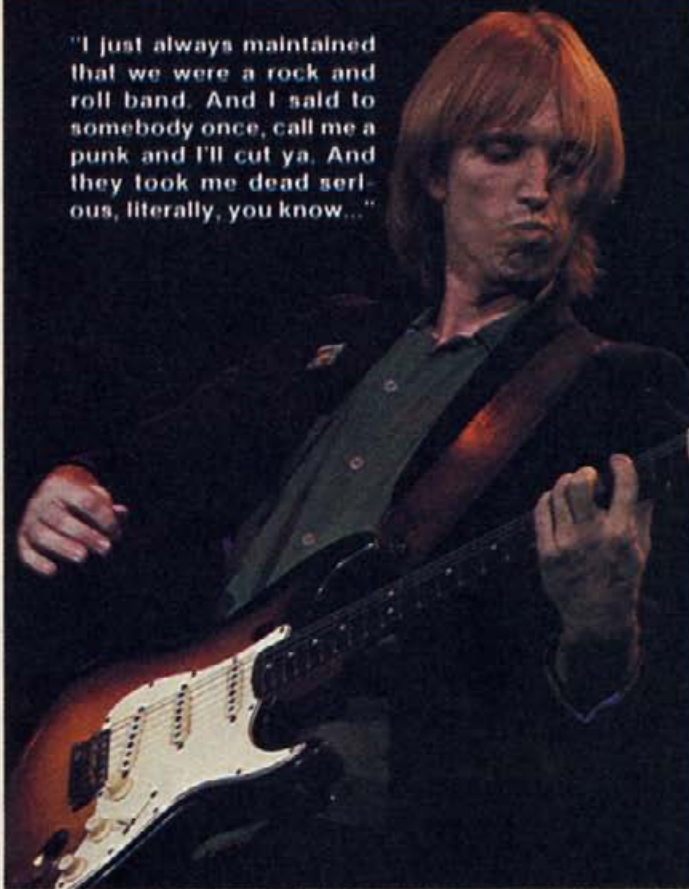
HP: Yeah, you made the Sunday comics with that too.

TP: With what?

HP: The Sunday comics reads, next to a little cartoon of you, 'Fresh from bankruptcy court (\$75,000 assets, \$750,000 liabilities)...'

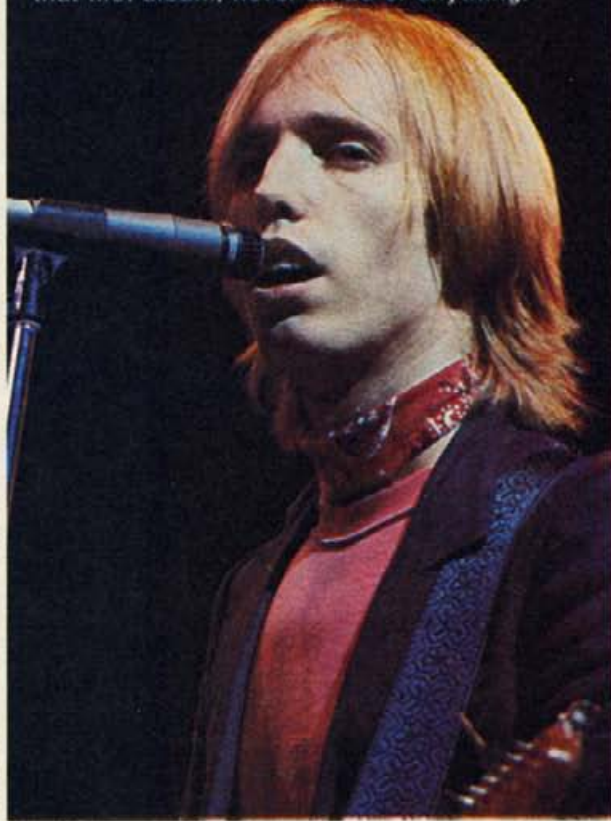
TP: Well, that's not exactly what...

"I just always maintained that we were a rock and roll band. And I said to somebody once, call me a punk and I'll cut ya. And they look me dead serious, literally, you know..."



Neil Preston

"I think the kids broke the band initially because there was never any support back on that first album, never an ad or anything."



Richard E. Aaron/THUNDER THOMAS

HP: Dagwood and Beatle Bailey aren't too accurate either, no doubt. Is that something you can talk about?

TP: Yeah, I can talk about it some. Part of the settlement was that I can't talk too much about it. We never went bankrupt, you know, we almost did, we filed for bankruptcy. To get technical on you, there's a thing called Chapter 11, where you're not really liquidating your assets or anything.

HP: You're still paying your debts.

TP: Well yeah, you try just to ask the court to devise some sort of plan where you can pay everybody back.

HP: Did you have to do all that by yourself?

TP: Oh no, I had management, and twenty — thirty lawyers.

HP: So you weren't just sitting there by yourself with your guitar and amp.

TP: Oh no, it was a cast of thousands. And it was a drag and all that. I've talked about it so much I'm blue in the face. But the great thing about it, the real relieving thing about it was when the record came out — you know without sounding overly humble or anything about it — I have to say the radio was very helpful and the kids were still right there. I think the album broke a record for being added the first day, I think it still holds the record for the most stations to add an album in one day. I was kind of touched that the radio stations were there for me like that.

HP: That's great, because that kind of thing can be physically debilitating.

TP: Very. But we're over the moon right now.

HP: You came up through a period of time when there was great rock and roll turmoil and people trying to figure out what

was happening. There were the punk bands in New York, and the new wave bands in England, and people trying to put you in various categories — then after listening to your records they realized you didn't fit in those categories. Was there a time when you found some of the commentary frustrating, or annoying?

TP: Yeah, I'll tell you, there's a thing about that that's always been misunderstood. Hold on, let me drink some coffee. Alright, what happened was they called us a punk band a lot, this is '76, when we first came out, the end of '76 I guess. We went over to England — the album did kind of well in England — and this is when Johnny Rotten, and The Ramones and the whole New York thing was going on. We would say in interviews, well we're not punk, you've got that wrong, because we didn't really think we were, and we weren't you know. But that got misconstrued, like I read not long ago in, I think it was the Voice, this guy was saying he made some horrible statements about the punks. But I never knocked the punks. We were always sort of in favor of them.

I didn't think that's what we were. I thought there was a great difference between us and those bands. But we totally supported those bands because I thought they were the real people that changed everything, really. I always felt that the label, new wave, or whatever, would become really irrelevant in a couple of years. I didn't think it would matter much what you called it.

So I just always maintained that we were a rock and roll band. And I said to somebody once, call me a punk and I'll cut ya. And they took me dead serious, lit-

erally, you know. And I kept reading, 'Call him a punk and he'll cut you'. I was trying to make a little play on words there. So ever since, a lot of people ask me, well, you hate punks, right? The truth is we really enjoyed a lot of those records, and still do.

HP: So you may turn out to be not as tough a guy as it seems, eh?

TP: No, I'm not a killer really.

HP: After growing up in Florida with no doubt a lot of Southern music influences like gospel, blues, and rhythm and blues, when you went to LA, how did you get it all together? Did everything come into focus in LA?

TP: I think the only real difference LA made — because it really didn't change my musical taste because I took all the same records to LA...

HP: Don't they sound different in LA?

TP: Yeah, but the only thing that I really got from those early days there, was I'd never had the chance to play with the tape recorder a lot, and that was when we first started recording a lot of things and listening and that way it helped me to learn to write a little better, I think.

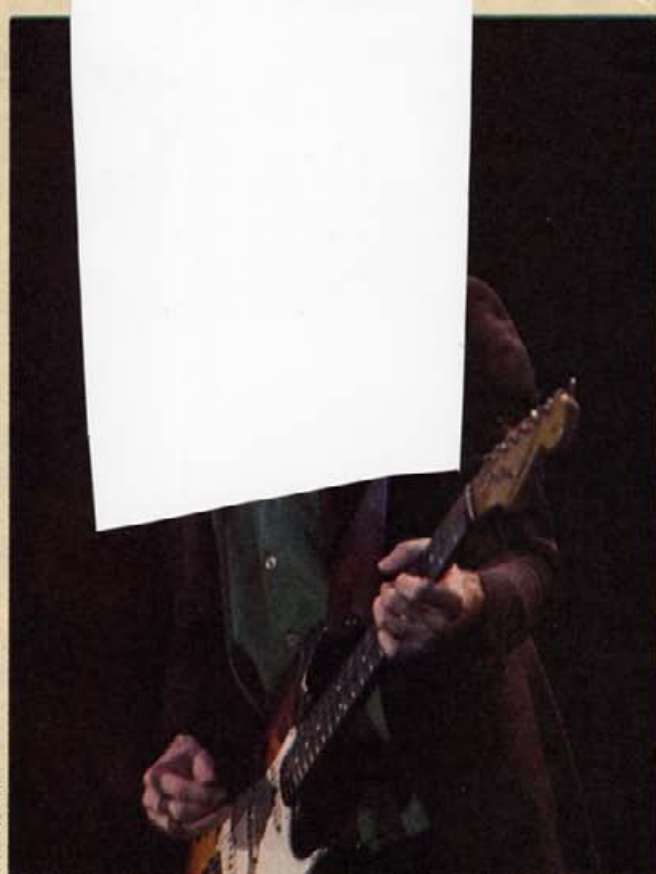
HP: Have you become familiar with the technology of the recording studio, past just going in there and having somebody point their finger at you and say 'Play'?

TP: Oh yeah, I think I've spent so many dollars sitting around the studio by now I'm used to it.

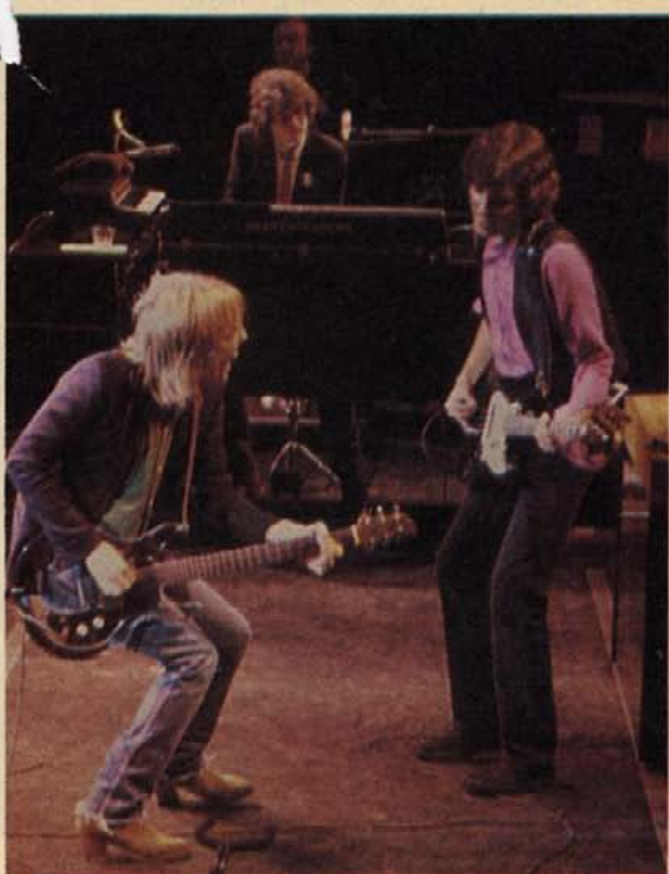
HP: Do you take advantage of the technical end, do overdubs and stuff like that when you record?

TP: We have, but we don't make it a rule. I get kind of bored with it. We usually cut everything with at least all five of us there at once. We try to get it kinda live, as we

Neal Preston



"The main point of rock is to have fun; that's why I'm doing what I'm doing..."



"I think the idea all along was that it would be more than a singer — songwriter trip, it would be a group..."

would play it onstage. There are overdubs, but not always, not the rule.

HP: Do you spend weeks and weeks doing this and then agonize over the mixes?

TP: Well on the last album we did, we spent a long time on the mixes. We can't spend too many days, or really even more than one, we might work on a song all day, but by the next day it's kind of hard for us, okay same thing again. So we would usually just change songs, or sit down and try to write something else.

HP: Do you write in the studio?

TP: Well we did a lot — the first two albums were almost totally written in the studio, and this one not quite as much, but some of it was.

HP: As you become more successful, is there a paranoia or anxiousness that develops, knowing you're going to have to go in to record the next album, hoping that it's going to be better?

TP: I think that I've always had that. Even on the first album, I would sit there and agonize over it. Is this just me, is this good, or what? Me and Jimmy Iovine (producer of *Damn The Torpedoes*) would literally stay up all night.

HP: He hasn't been to sleep since he was seventeen.

TP: He's still calling me. I think he's still mixing the record.

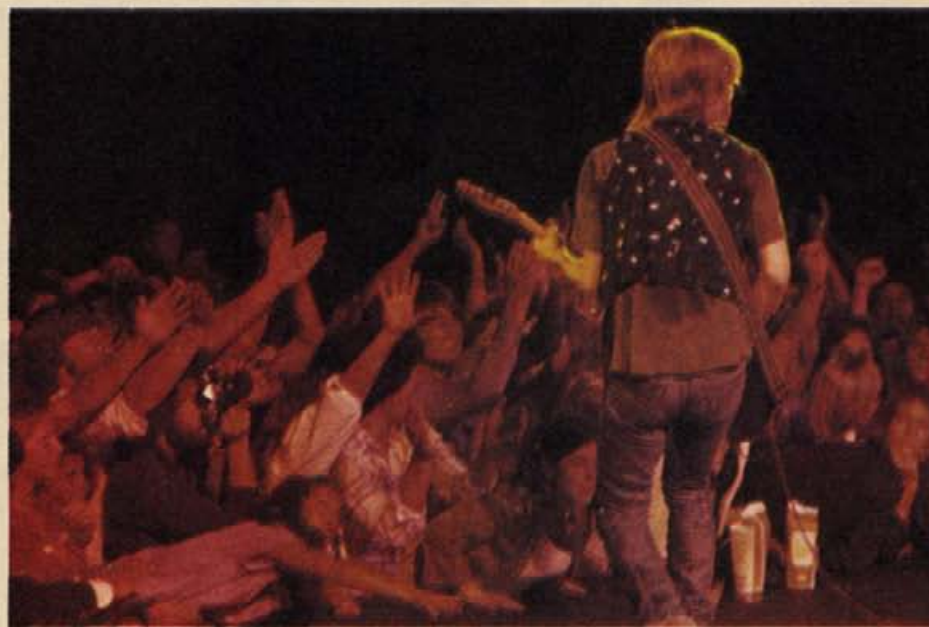
HP: He's terrific. Although he doesn't seem to have been outside much in this life. He was probably left as a baby in a basket in front of the door of the Record Plant. How did he affect what you're doing? He's one of the great rock and roll producers in terms of real dynamics. You have to have your ears checked at the end of the session.

TP: Jimmy really taught me a lot. I think he brought a kind of New York influence into the studio.

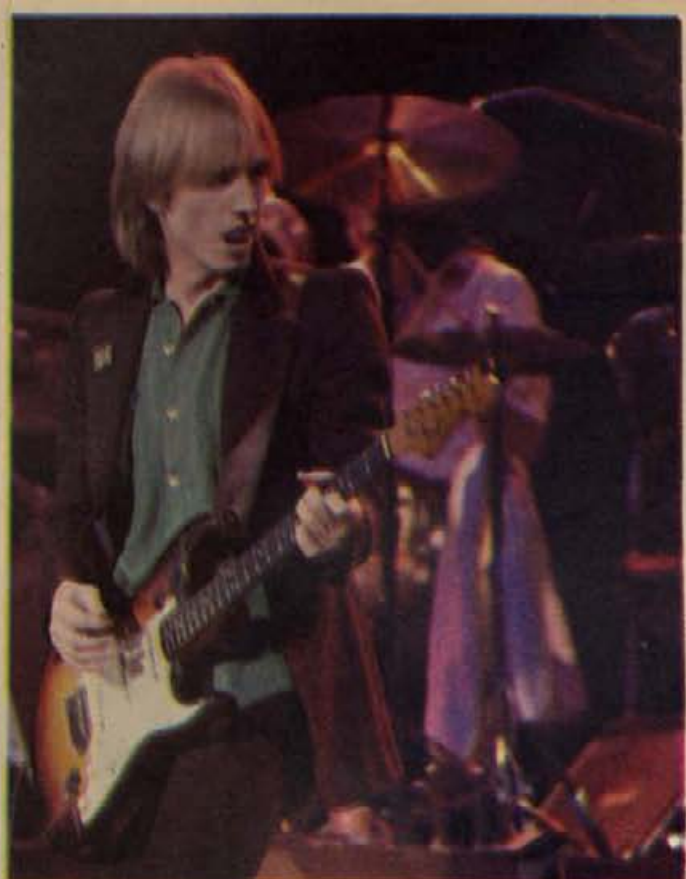
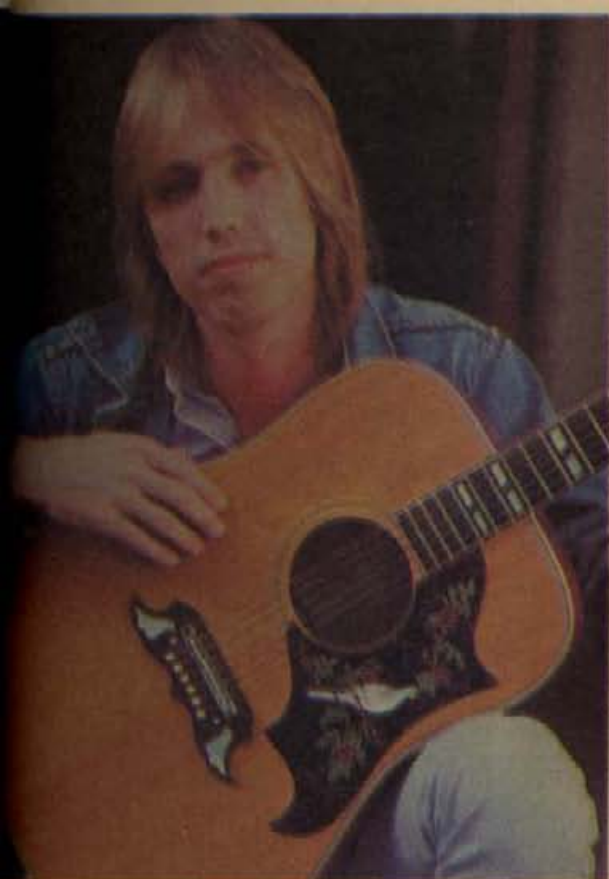
HP: Of all the New York producers, producer-engineers, he's the one.

TP: I think so too. I'd never met him but I'd admired his work a lot. I'd kind of followed him back since he was doing the John

Lennon stuff, when he was engineering it. We met over the phone — it's funny now because he's really like one of my best friends now. It's always amazed me that I could hit it off so well with somebody that I didn't know. I think he taught me a lot about getting the sound to be wide, and big, and more like the band is onstage, but



"I think rock and roll is the whole thing. It made my life worth living."



"Jimmy (producer Jimmy Iovine) really taught me a lot. I think he brought a kind of New York influence into the studio."

In the four years between the first and third albums, the band had an uphill fight that only their own determination let them survive...

without slicking it up too much. I didn't want it to come out sounding like it was... I don't want to mention any names, but like one of those real pop slick records.

HP: Are you now at the point where you have favorite microphones and things like that?

TP: Yeah, we're like that.

HP: One of the things you seem to be doing is emphasizing the importance of the band as a co-element in what you're doing. Which is important because if they're doing it with you, they should be upfront with you. Obviously, at first, there was more of a 'Tom Petty' focus. Were there problems with the band feeling that they should be on the front of the album covers too, or was it just a progression? How'd that work out.

TP: I think it was fairly natural. We get asked that a lot. But we've never really had fights or arguments about it too much. I think the idea all along was that it would be more than a singer-songwriter trip. It would be a group, we'd keep the same five people and try to develop the group.

HP: One of the enjoyable things about your records are the harmonic elements that used to make the early Buffalo Springfield records so great. You credit the Everly Brothers to a certain extent. Is that melody and the harmony really difficult, something that has to be a conscious thing in making a rock and roll record yet still keeping it harmonic and melodic?

TP: I don't know because I don't really concentrate on it. I find that all the records that really drive me crazy are like that. I used to listen to those first Buffalo Springfield records a lot, and I used to

listen. I still listen to the Everlys a lot, that's my main kick. I'm still going back and finding Everly Brothers records. Stuff like Roy Orbison, and stuff like that that really drives me crazy always seems to have the melody. I think it just comes from records that you're subconsciously influenced by.

HP: Do you write your songs on the guitar?

TP: Well the guitar mostly, and the piano. I'm just a real dumb guitar player. I don't know too much about it, so I just kind of sing over chords.

HP: When you went to LA, did you expect that you'd wind up with a band from your home town of Gainesville, Florida?

TP: No. Well, I went with this group from my home town that I was in. I was playing the bass. We'd been together a real long time, we went to LA, and that got to be the end of the line out there. We didn't agree on anything and the studio kind of bust the band up. And then I just floated around out there for a long time, with Denny Cordell. I would just kind of go along to whatever project he was on and hang out. Every now and then I'd do a session. He'd bring in the session players and stuff. They were all real good, but I always thought it was kind of cold, you know. I didn't really relate to those guys too much — though they were all nice guys and they played good I just didn't feel like it was rock and roll really. And then, by a coincidence, I ran in to one of the guys who'd been in my band Mud Crutch from Florida, Benmont Tench, and he had rounded up all these people from Gainesville that had been living there almost a year. When we got together it was obvious the easiest thing to do was to go behind my deal because I already had a recording deal.

HP: Did you release some records, or are there records in the can, that are pre-Heartbreakers?

(Continued On Page 58)

TP: There's a Mud Crutch album somewhere.

HP: Some days when you least expect it...
TP: There was a single out in '74, '75 that just hit the dirt. I seen them selling it in places. It was a reggae song, it's kind of weird that it was a reggae song that long ago. It ain't that good.

HP: What do you see happening ... do you see the band playing bigger and bigger places as you go along ... or how do you see the whole business that you're in at this point?

TP: Well we've just started to face that now. On this leg of our tour we're doing a couple of coliseums. It's real gratifying to the ego to go out to fifteen thousand people, but it really ain't — I don't think it's the ideal way to play rock shows.

HP: Does it just get lost out there?

TP: No, I think it can be done. I've seen people do it, and do it well. I think Springsteen does it really well. But I think it's just as easy ... like I'm trying to see if why you can't play the three thousand seater for three nights, or mix it up, where you play a variety of venues of all sizes. I think that's a little bit hipper than just going to the big rooms because that way you stay interested, the audience gets to see you up close. I can have as much fun playing a bar as a coliseum. It doesn't really make that much difference. But where we're at right now, we have to play a couple of them to pay for playing all the others.

HP: Do you have to re-gear yourself up to play the big places?

TP: No, we just add on to the sound system. We're carrying a lot of equipment. We have kind of a modular rig that can set-up in a lot of different size venues.

HP: What do you think is going on in the West Coast in the sense that it seems like you're awfully unique? In New York there were dozens of bands coming up over the last few years playing rock and roll, but it seems like in LA it was the Heartbreakers, and the Heartbreakers alone who've come up playing rock. Is it just because you were displaced there and so it happened there, or are there other bands there who are trying to play rock and roll?

TP: I'm sure there's a lot that are trying. In the last year, I guess, it kind of broke into a little club scene in LA. I think it's like most club scenes where there might be three or four good bands, and then there's two hundred that are really terrible, completely derivative.

HP: Especially in New York, one tends to think of LA music as very laidback, very polished, very boring, sleeping pill polish. There was a surprise, perhaps a certain resistance to what you were doing among people on the East Coast because nobody was willing to believe there could be a real rock and roll band out of LA to start with.

TP: Yeah, I felt that a lot.

HP: When are you going back into the studio to record the next album?

TP: We're planning to go back in June when the tour ends. This is our first whole world tour, we've never been to Japan or Australia before. We're going down there at the very end of the tour. We're just kind of out, we're on a pattern of being out four weeks, we take a week off, then we go back out for four weeks.

HP: Then back in June to get the album out in September?

TP: I hope so, I really do hope so. I'm not making any promises.

HP: Are you writing songs while you're on the road?

TP: Barely beginning to write. Iovine's calling me every night. 'What'd you write?'

HP: And do you still believe that rock and roll is fun?

TP: Yeah I think rock and roll is the whole thing. It made my life worth living. □



Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers are, left-to-right: Petty, Mike Campbell, Stan Lynch, Ron Blair, and Benmont Tench.