

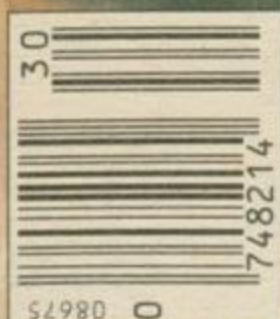
AMERICA EMBARRASSED AT CANNES ■ BLITZ: BRITAIN'S NEW RAGE HITS THE STATES
EXCLUSIVE! AN UNDERGROUND BOMBER'S MEMOIRS ■ MCCARTNEY FOR KAMPUCHEA

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**TOM
PETTY**

**ONE MAN'S
WAR
AGAINST
HIGH RECORD
PRICES**



"ALL THE NEWS THAT FITS"

Cover: photograph of Tom Petty by Aaron Rapoport, Los Angeles, June 1981

Dress right!

By Kurt Loder 14

Why look terminal when you can look terrific? ask the musicians and designers behind Blitz, the dressed-to-kill British movement that's unseated punk. "In New York, the coolest thing is being like Keith Richards," says Rusty Egan of the band Visage. "Here, you wanna be like Dirk Bogarde." Plus, David Fricke reports on Spandau Ballet, the first music-for-clothes group to hit America.



Joie de vivre at Cannes



Blitz progenitor Bryan Ferry

I bombed the federal building

By Jane Alpert 20

"Did we mean to overthrow the government?" asks the noted Sixties revolutionary in this memoir. The answer is yes, as four years of personal tragedy and life underground suggest.

Cannes 1981

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"Le cinema est malade!" hollered a wizened Cannes beggar during

this year's festival. And, between the million-dollar busts of Michael Cimino and Annie Ample, the man would seem to have a point.

Tom Petty

By Steve Pond 39

"I seem to attract problems," admits the creator of *Hard Promises*. "And it may look romantic, but I ain't Robin Hood, man." Fact is, he'd rather be called the Fernando Valenzuela of pop. Also, reviewer Debra Rae Cohen finds Petty grappling with rock & roll adulthood on his latest album.

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Tom Petty: a rock & roll hero keeps fighting on

By Steve Pond

LOS ANGELES

I still haven't gotten used to it," Tom Petty says, shaking his head as he steps out into the bright afternoon sunlight on Sunset Boulevard. "You know — putting another record out."

This morning, radio stations have received copies of *Hard Promises*, the new Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers album. Now, as Petty and guitarist Mike Campbell head off to view some promotional videotapes, Petty is clearly uneasy. I've just mentioned seeing an upcoming *Los Angeles Times* review of the album, and Petty's immediate reaction is an only half-joking "Should I start quaking?" As soon as he slides into the front seat of Campbell's tan BMW, Petty makes a stab at the tape player, popping out a cassette and flipping on the radio. Be- [Cont. on 41]

Hope of heaven

From golden boy to grown-up

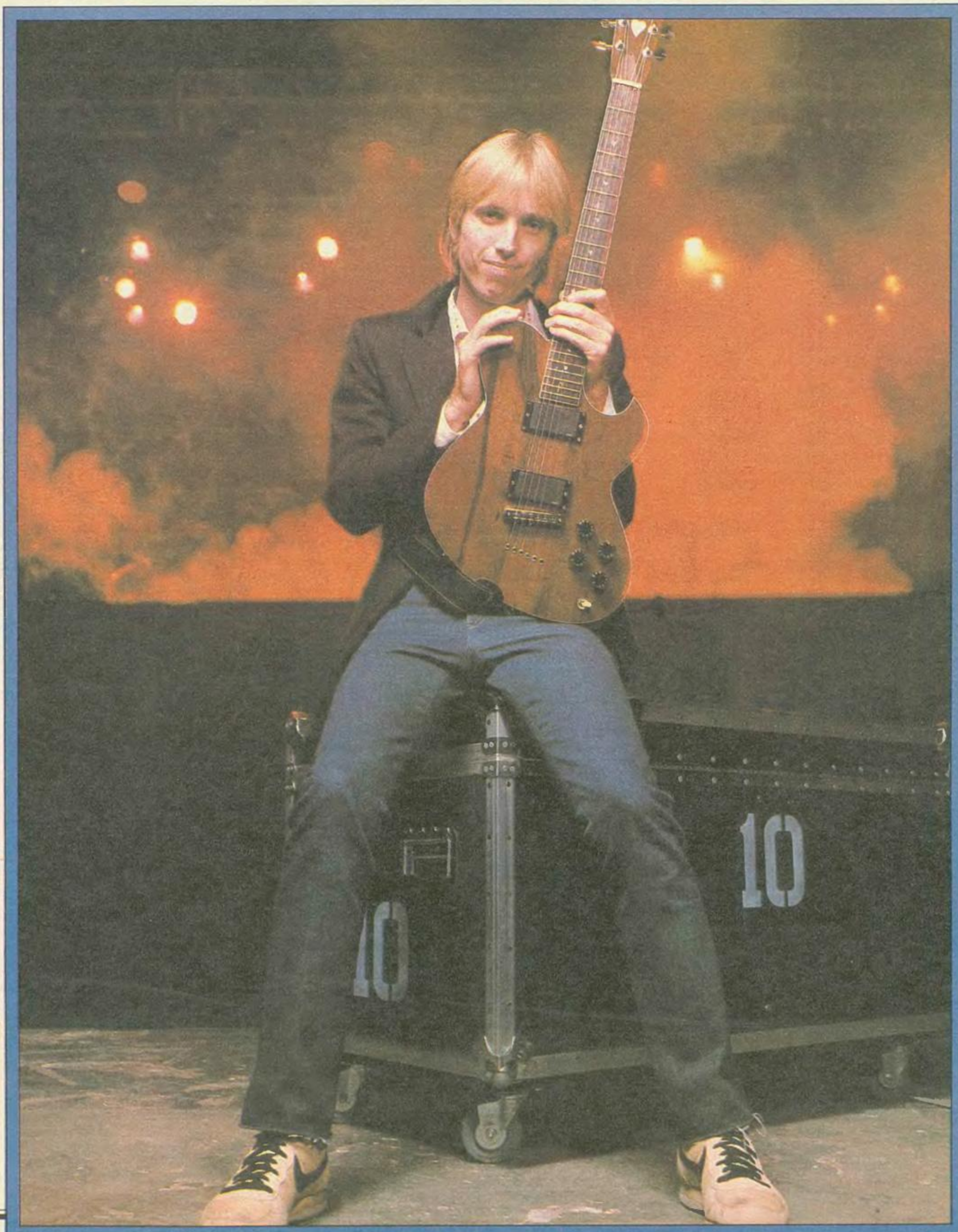
Hard Promises
Tom Petty and the
Heartbreakers

Backstreet

★★★★

By Debra Rae Cohen

There's a peculiar challenge that faces rock & rollers who aren't at the music's cutting edge: the problem of how to mature. The genre's intellectuals may challenge themselves with philosophical lyrics and ethnic rhythms, changing the parameters of their music with every LP, but those musicians wedded to what Robert Christgau's called "the rock & roll verities" face the prospect of eternal boogie-down adolescence. [Cont. on 56]



PHOTOGRAPH BY AARON RAPOPORT

Tom Petty

[Cont. from 39] fore we get half a block, he's twirled his way to pay dirt: a station playing the final bars of the Petty-Stevie Nicks duet, "Insider." "Heyyyy," he says with a toothy, thin-lipped grin. "Here we are."

From the back seat, the whole scene seems ludicrous. Maybe such concerned dial-twisting made sense back in 1977, when Petty's airplay was scant and his sales slow. But these days, he's a certified FM hit. *Damn the Torpedoes* reached Number Two last year, spawned a couple of hit singles and turned the sinewy Florida gator into the most authentic all-American rock hero this side of Bruce Springsteen—a grand, fervent, mainstream rocker who fought a vicious court battle to wrest his future from the hands of his record company and emerged with a batch of anthems shot through with the spirit of a cornered gunfighter going down with both barrels blazing.

For weeks, radio stations have been fighting to grab a few morsels from the closely guarded new album. So why is Petty searching the dial so anxiously?

"It still makes me real nervous," he says. "The minute the album leaves my hands, it's an ordeal. I start thinking, 'Oh God, what's gonna happen to it?' or 'Hey, let me listen to it again, I gotta make sure it's okay.'"

But with his track record of late, isn't success a foregone conclusion?

"Well, yeah, I can't get that worked up about it." Petty speaks more quietly, slowing his pace and choosing his words deliberately, the way he does whenever a subject hits close to home. "But it's different for me now. It's not just that I want them to play it....Now it's important that they like it, too."

Radio, for one, loved it. *Hard Promises* didn't hit with the startling force of *Damn the Torpedoes*; it's a more seductive, less assaultive album that finds Petty straying—sometimes too tentatively and awkwardly—into such uncharacteristic areas as narrative songs and lighter musical textures. The record derives its impetus not from personal turmoil but from a venturesome musical eye, its keynote not the passion of vindication but the eclectic musi-

cal embellishments brought to the established Byrds-cum-Stones sound of Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers.

That sound is just now fizzling to a halt inside the airplane hangar-size Universal Studios soundstage the band is using for its tour rehearsals. Ten minutes into this particular practice session, the Heartbreakers—Campbell, keyboardist Benmont Tench, bassist Ron Blair, drummer Stan Lynch and percussionist/semi-Heartbreaker Phil Jones—have already blown two bass amps. "We gotta

stop buying our stuff at Sears," mutters Petty as "Kings Road" limps through its premature coda.

He steps down from the stage and in his distinctive rolling gait heads toward an island of furniture and food. One bony knee sticks out of a hole in his faded straight-legged jeans; an elbow protrudes from a ripped sleeve in his untucked red and white shirt. At several inches under six feet, Petty's too short to earn the term *gangly*, but that's the impression he gives.

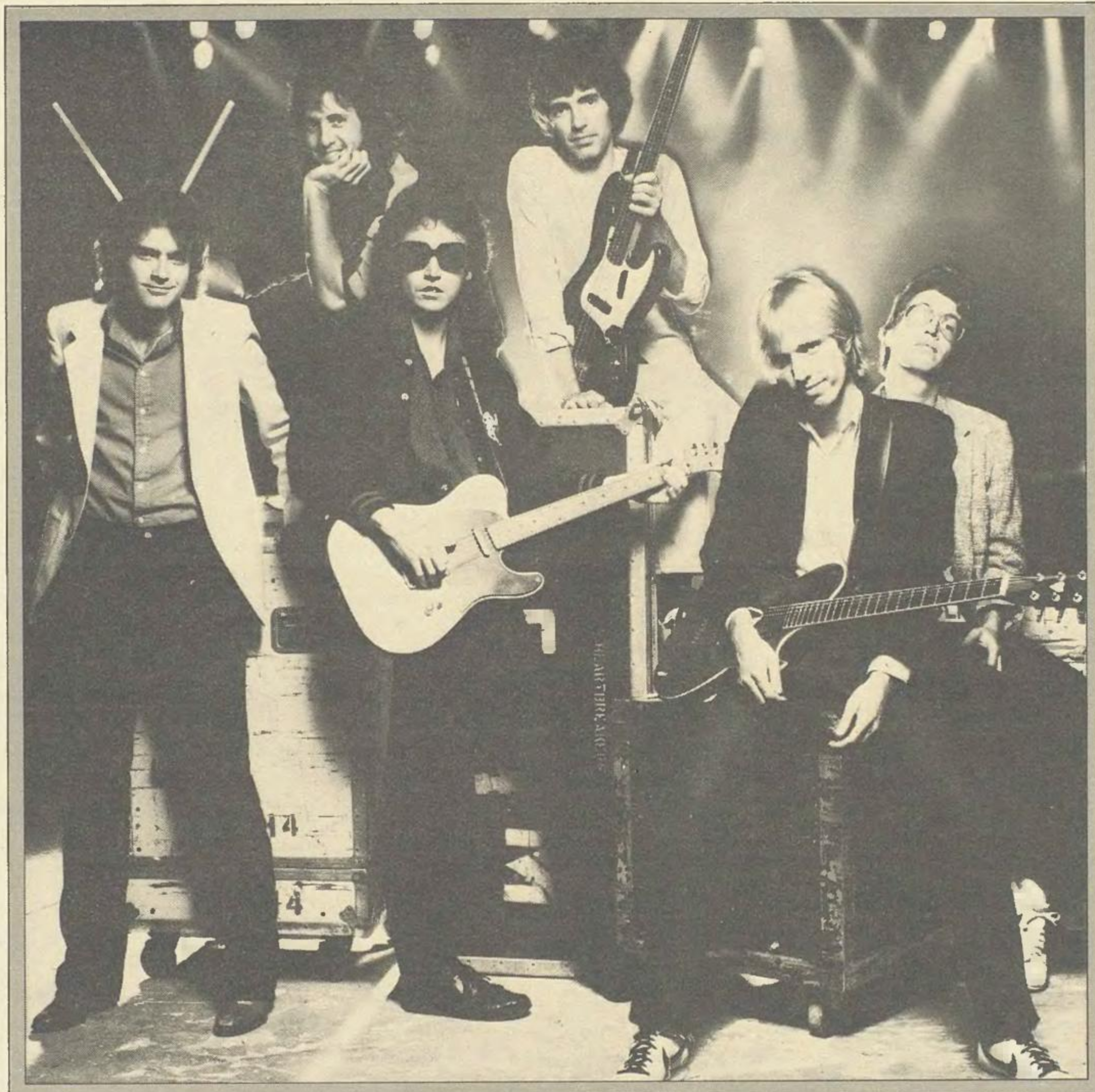
While he's waiting for the amps

to be repaired, Petty pulls a bottle of Gatorade ("no puns intended") out of the dented refrigerator and plops down on a ratty, cigarette-burned thrift-shop couch. With a grin, he waves a copy of Bill Hard's latest tip sheet. Inside, it makes two pointed references to Petty: one calls him rock & roll's Picasso, the other, its Fernando Valenzuela.

Everyone agrees that the Picasso tag is a little weighty. But *Fernando Valenzuela*—that's pure flattery to Petty, who's already called this rehearsal "spring training," and to a roomful of baseball fans

scheming to play hooky the next time the Dodgers' young pitching phenomenon takes the mound.

But to fit Petty into Fernando's uniform you'd have to make a few alterations. You'd have to take the docile, unflappable Mexican and have him complaining about overpriced bleacher seats, suing to renegotiate his contract, and infuriating everyone from Tommy Lasorda to Bowie Kuhn. You'd have to take away Fernando's string of effortless shutouts, because Petty's record more closely resembles a series of come-from-



Heartbreakers (from left): Tench, Lynch, Campbell, Blair, Petty and honorary band member Phil Jones

behind victories. You'd have to make Fernando a scrappy, street-wise fighter—more like Don Sutton, the feisty Dodger pitcher who bitched himself into a trade, all the while remaining the club ace. But not Fernando—Fernando makes it look easy, and between lawsuits and tonsillectomies, Tom Petty has never made it look easy. To wit:

• In 1976, the Heartbreakers' first tour found them opening a slate of English shows for Nils Lofgren. When Lofgren—then recording a live album—and his roadies wouldn't allow Stan Lynch to set up his drum riser, the band acted like "arrogant asshole bastards" (in Petty's words) and canceled. Peace was restored, sort of: "Every show, we'd get a better reaction," Mike Campbell says, "and every show, they'd give us less room by moving the drums closer to the edge of the stage."

• When "Breakdown" became an AOR favorite some nine nervous months after *Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers* was released, Petty met with ABC Records to renegotiate his contract. During the meeting, he pulled a switchblade out of his boot and started cleaning his fingernails. ABC renegotiated.

• When Petty's English record label released "American Girl" as a single, they adorned the sleeve with a photo of "a real Lolita-looking chick with heart-shaped sunglasses." Petty made them withdraw the cover.

• In a move that stalled his career just as the momentum from the gold *You're Gonna Get It* seemed certain to make his third album a huge hit, Petty sued MCA Records when that company claimed rights to his ABC contract upon ABC's demise. During the suit, Petty filed for bankruptcy. After nine months of grueling court appearances, he signed with Backstreet, an MCA affiliate.

• When the producers of the *No Nukes* shows were putting together their film of the event, Petty refused to let them use his performance. "We hadn't played in a while," he says, "and we were playing with borrowed gear after one day's rehearsal. There were like 102 people on the bill that night, we were on right before Bruce [Springsteen] and it was his birthday. When he told me that, I just went, 'Aw, fuck — your birthday?' The crowd was nice, but the monitors went apeshit. When I saw the film, all I saw was myself going, 'How long before I get off?' A few people seem to think I was a cunt

for pulling out, but it just wasn't anything I'd want to see on the late show for the rest of my life."

• During the first week of what should have been his triumphant *Damn the Torpedoes* tour, Petty ruined his voice onstage. After a painful month of touch-and-go shows and postponements, he entered a Los Angeles hospital for a tonsillectomy; unable to speak after the operation, he lay in bed wondering if he'd sing again. Three and a half weeks later, he was back playing London.

• When Petty read that MCA might release *Hard Promises* at a \$9.98 list price instead of the standard \$8.98, he threatened to withhold the album and urged fans to write letters. The LP was released at the lower price. Its cover shows Petty in a record store, standing in front of a crate of albums selling for...\$8.98. "It was just too irresistible," he says, laughing, "not to do a little...retouching."

• During the scheduling of his current tour, Petty agreed to let Chicago rock station WLUP buy all 14,000 seats for his show there and distribute them for free. WLUP's arch rival, WMET, then refused to play *Hard Promises*. "This is so fucking silly I can't get beyond it," said an incredulous Petty. "I'm getting paid and 14,000 kids are getting in free? Fuck, yeah, I'll do that. For anybody."

Hell, maybe this guy's not the Fernando Valenzuela of rock — maybe he's the Lone Ranger, armed with a pile of silver guitar picks. Or, as England's *New Musical Express* called him, "the last great rock & roll romantic."

"Yeah, I guess I am a romantic, in a sense," Petty says. "Just to do this, to believe you can get away with it, you have to be pretty romantic."

"But fighting the record industry—that ain't romantic, man. That's survival. All I've tried to do is get my ass out of a huge sling so we can continue to play. Sometimes we get carried away and shoot off our mouths. But I'll tell you, I seem to attract problems. It's getting like dodging boulders. And it may look romantic, but I really ain't Robin Hood, man."

Surely, though, this is more than Tom Petty's bad-luck streak. Says Stan Lynch: "The cat's just pissed. I see it every time I play with him. He's real passionate. Even in rehearsal, he'll come stompin' in. He means it." Maybe it's not bad luck at all but anger and overdeveloped morals.

"God, I hope it ain't overdeveloped morals," Petty says, laughing. "I don't know. It ain't that big a deal. We've just had three or four fights that were big ones." He breaks out laughing: a nicer version of Snidely Whiplash's wheezy chuckle. "I hope we're not remembered as the band that fought the record company."

But Petty does appear distinctly heroic to many fans. And he looks like one of them: one fan, prompted by ROLLING STONE's reporting of Petty's price war with MCA, concluded in a letter to the editor: "After all, Tom Petty is on our side."

Which makes him, presumably, a soft touch for letters like this one: "... I'm dying. I only have four weeks to live. Can I please have two tickets to the Forum? [signed] Your friend for life (not long)." Or easy prey for the mostly female fans who show up at his San Fernando Valley home to camp out on the front lawn. (He hired a guard to keep them off the property, partially inspiring the song "Nightwatchman.")

To Petty, that's the worst. His private life has always been just that—private, guarded and, insofar as is possible, unpublicized. The home he shares with his wife, Jane, and their five-year-old daughter, Adriana, is off-limits to intruders—official or otherwise. "It's not my idea of a good time for us to become a showbiz couple," he says of himself and Jane, who shares Petty's light-blond hair and slender build. "We'll go to a club if there's something really good, but we don't make it out in public much."

"My home and my family, that's all I've got to myself anymore. So when I get home with Jane, it's like, 'Could you lock all the doors, please?' It's all I've got."

Duhhhhh...uh, what was the question again?" Tom Petty cups his face in his palms and shakes his head. He's sitting at a wooden school desk, watching his image on a television screen in the corner of a small room at the Sunset Strip offices of Lookout Management (headquarters for his managers, Tony Dimitriades and Elliot Roberts). Cringing, Petty looks between his fingers at a weary, slightly glazed-looking Tom Petty, who's groggily answering a reporter's questions.

The interview is part of a home movie that Ron Blair has been making for the past couple of

years; far from finished, in its rough cut it's a freewheeling pastiche of grainy Super 8 stage footage, backstage pratfalls, in-jokes and segments from *Saturday Night Live* and *Fridays*.

There's only one part of the hour-plus film that makes Petty uneasy: the interview. Partly to

There is hope, but it might all go out the window tomorrow.

blame was the codeine he was taking for his throat, but it's also because, as many people have commented, he thinks he's a lousy interview. He's not; he's outspoken and articulate, if inclined at times to extricate himself with self-deprecating answers: i.e., "They're just records; sometimes you make the best one, sometimes you don't" or "We're nothing more than six Southern guys who have been together for seven years and a band for five."

But Petty keeps on giving interviews—fewer than before—not because he wants to be a public figure but because he has to be a rock & roller. It's a lifestyle he converted to early in life. He was drawn by the coolness of a guitar slung across the saddle of singing cowboys like Gene Autry and the spaceship design of an electric guitar owned by the older guy across the street—a guitar he used to gaze at and admire but could never touch. And when Elvis Presley brought his looks, his limos and his girls to a movie location in Florida, the eleven-year-old Petty was hooked. Never mind that he didn't actually play a guitar until after the Beatles hit. His path was so clear he never had to consciously choose music over any other options. "That decision was made," he says quietly.

"Just the other day," he says, "I was telling Jane about the first time I asked my mom, God bless her, for a guitar from the Sears catalog." The conversation apparently went something like this:

"Ma, if you'll just put \$38.50 down, I can make payments."

"You don't have any money—how are you going to make payments?"

"I'll mow yards or whatever. Anyway, we're gonna start a band and make money, and I'll pay you that way."

"How are you gonna start a band when you don't know how to play?"

"I do know how to play!"

"What songs do you know?"

"Well, I don't know any songs, but we're gonna write our own. The Beatles write their own songs. We can write ours."

"It was as innocent as that," Petty says, laughing. "We'd say 'Gimme this guitar' and write a surf-type song."

The high-school band gave way to the Epics, a prototypical Southern bar band: a handful of twenty- and thirty-year-olds, one or two teenagers and an equipment van. Five hundred-mile drives to some dive for a weekend gig. Four sets of Sam and Dave and Animals songs, and the James Brown revue for the last set. All the groupies, drugs and alcohol you could get your hands on. And then back home in the van so that the teenagers could make algebra class Monday morning. Once in a while, you might get beaten up for having long hair.

It didn't take much of that life before Petty was ready to say "fuck school" when a week-long booking in a topless bar came along. But a few years of being on the road and sharing an apartment with the Epics convinced Petty that drugs, liquor and sex were overshadowing the music. He went back to high school, finishing in two lackadaisical years and keeping himself exempt from the draft in the process. Then he left Gainesville, because it "wasn't happening." A bus ticket, a bass and \$150 got him as far as a seedy motel in Tampa.

Back in Gainesville, he almost immediately wound up in Mudcrutch, a local band that also included Campbell and Tench. Superstardom in Gainesville got tiring after a few years: "It was ridiculous. We said, 'Well, great, but what the fuck are we gonna do? Are we gonna sit here the rest of our lives?' That's why I started writing songs: to write my way out of Gainesville somehow, so I wouldn't be stuck there forever."

If you wanted to make it in music, there were only two places to escape to: New York or Los Angeles. The former was too cold;

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L.A., on the other hand, was home to Gainesville natives like Don Felder, who found a niche in a California band called the Eagles. Mudcrutch made a demo tape and drove to the West Coast. "After a week in town," says Petty, "I got myself into enough shit to last five years."

The shit, Petty hopes, is behind him. But there's only one way to top a Number Two album, and it didn't take a lot of schooling to figure that out when it came time to record the followup to *Damn the Torpedoes*.

"I have to laugh when people ask me about the pressure I had making this album," says Petty, pulling on a cigarette. "I had to make *Torpedoes* after spending eight hours a day in court, where I was fighting to keep from losing everything. What pressure could I feel after that? The biggest thing hanging over our heads was just to deliver. You can never part the Red Sea like they want you to, so you do what you can."

Petty went into the studio armed with fifteen songs, and his objectives were simple: to "make some new noises" and to record an album that worked as a whole — something Petty feels he didn't achieve in his first three outings. The new noises were relatively easy: he brought in veteran Stax bassist Donald "Duck" Dunn to play on the moody, R&B-style "Woman in Love" and recorded Mike Campbell's Beach Boys-like ballad, "You Can Still Change Your Mind."

For months, the schedule was monotonous: record, break while Petty wrote more songs, record, break.... The band would tell Petty to write one song, and he'd return with five. The record had too many rockers; Petty would go home and write ballads. When there got to be too many ballads, he started ditching them like crazy. "I was trying to get the right balance — saying, 'I want something in this vein, but I want it to say *this*,' so I'd pull the lyrics from one song and put them in another. A real body shop there for a while."

Petty saw the light at the end of the tunnel when he recorded "The Waiting." That same watershed week also produced "Letting You Go," "Woman in Love" and "Insider." The latter song, which may have been the final tune recorded (nobody quite remembers, though it's all down on videotape somewhere), was the result of an elev-

enth-hour writing session to give Stevie Nicks a song for her solo album. Petty wrote it "very... extremely fast, shocked-even-... fast," and only reluctantly played for producer Jimmy Iovine. When he did, the volatile producer started jumping up and down and shouting, "We're through! That's the best fucking song you ever wrote!" When it came time for Nicks to record it, she sang harmony instead of lead, gave it back to Petty for his own album and took a rocker called "Stop Dragging My Heart Around."

"Insider" also solved the problem of a title for the album. None of the ones suggested early on seemed right: *Benmont's Revenge* and *Benmont Goes Hawaiian* just didn't make it (though Tench maintains that "one of those would have been great"). Then Petty latched onto the "Insider" chorus:

*I'm an insider
I've been burned by the fire
And I've had to live with some hard
promises
I've crawled through the briars....*

"I kept waiting for a title to jump out at me," says Petty. "It was the last minute when that tune came in, and I thought it applied to what was going on. The tunes, they're all just hard promises." The words come more slowly. "I thought the word was funny... that a promise could be hard. That it might be a difficult promise. Like it was granite," he says, knocking on the desk top. "You know, etched in stone.... A promise you have to deal with."

"Damn the torpedoes" begins a phrase that's completed, of course, with the words "...and full speed ahead." But *Hard Promises* is more of a half-speed album; its driver is in low gear, picking his way cautiously through a busy intersection, where the lines in the road are a little indistinct. It's about people waiting, perhaps, until they're called upon to live up to their promises.

"Yeah," says Petty tentatively. "It's about issues that aren't really resolved. I think I was trying to move on from the battle to deal with what goes on after the battle. When you're in a place to continue — there is hope, but it might all go out the window tomorrow. It's dealing with that, I guess, but there's a lot of positive stuff in there, and it ends saying, 'It's gonna be all right.'"

But in moving from the battle to

its safer aftermath, Petty has stoked the fires of Heartbreakers critics, who've often been ready to write him off as a lightweight, retrograde rocker. "... This album is simply awful," wrote Billy Altman in the *Village Voice*. A more common opinion is that it sounds all right but lacks passion.

"There's gotta be some shit going on to create the tension you need," says Mike Campbell. "On *Torpedoes*, there was a lot of tension. On *Hard Promises* there was some, but it wasn't like, 'Are we gonna be in court for the rest of our lives and will we never be able to get another credit card?' This time, it was more like trying to

Fighting the record industry ain't romantic. That's survival.

outdo ourselves musically."

The leftover songs clearly pinpoint the difference. *Torpedoes* was barely a half-hour long, and its outtakes consisted of two B sides, an aborted version of "Surrender" and—product of a desperate night in the studio—five cover versions. This time, the leftovers have names like "Gator on the Lawn" and "Heartbreakers' Beach Party." The last is a particular favorite of Petty's. "It sounds exactly like a song in one of those Troy Donahue movies," he says, leaning back to recite some lyrics.

*Gonna have a cookout
Gonna wear muumuu
We'll have potato salad
And lots of weenies too
I'm gonna do the clam
I'm gonna do the swim
Wear mosquito repellent
And play on the jungle gym*

"It's a real hoot," he laughs. "But I just couldn't see taking off 'Insider.'"

A week later, Petty walks into the rehearsal hall again. But this time he's moving slowly, carefully. He'd installed a trampoline in his home ("I'm too lazy to jog") and aggravated a knee injury while working out. As a result, the impending tour will start two

weeks late. Maybe it was an omen, but the day before Petty's accident, Fernando Valenzuela lost his first game. So now it's more waiting, and no chance to practice the strutting, running and James Brown bopping that Petty does onstage.

Last year, recovering from his days in court, Petty wrote these lines: "Even the losers get lucky sometimes/Even the losers keep a little bit of pride." Now it may be time for the flip side of those words: can the winners stay lucky? If some pulled tendons and a two-week delay is all that happens, Petty's luck is holding.

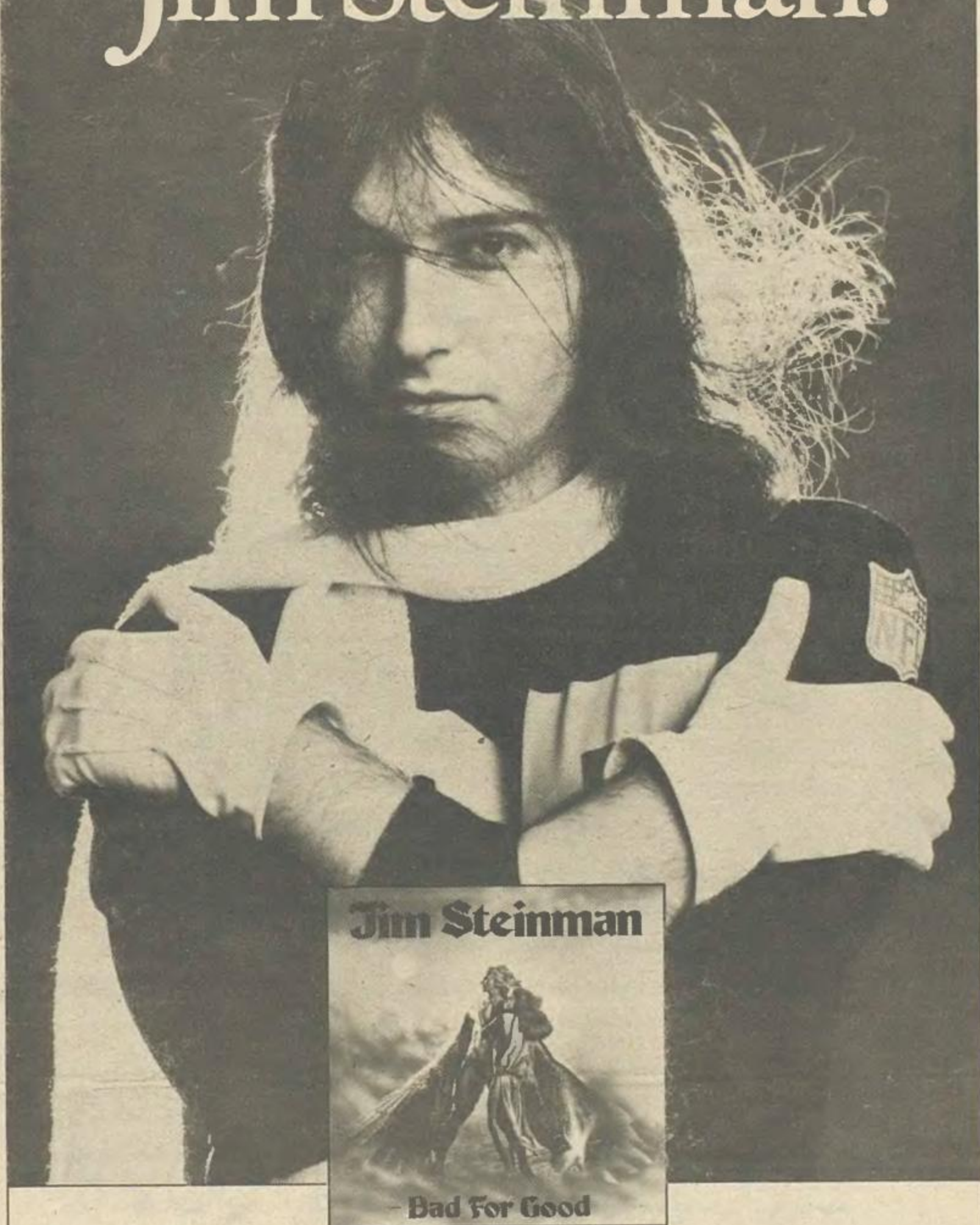
But the fans are waiting, and he's always aware of that. Giving me a gingerly tour of the stage, Petty recalls some previous let-downs: the night in Denver last tour when, tired of playing the same set night after night, they threw in seven brand-new, unrecorded songs. The fans were polite, but you knew they came to hear "Refugee." Or the comment he made to *ROLLING STONE* last year, about how his songs were just "cheap shit, disposable crap." That one drew enough letters to paper the house, mostly from kids who'd just spent two weeks getting their next-door neighbor to really listen to "Century City."

"I felt terrible," he moans. "I felt like I'd insulted everybody by saying that. I didn't mean it's cheap shit—what we've done means an awful lot to me. But I can't approach it that seriously. I can't sit down and say, 'Here's a classic.' I've got to say it's disposable. You move on to the next thing; you can't dwell on what you've done. But if the old ones live forever, great."

Petty sits down on the drum riser to take some weight off his feet and looks out across the large black stage to the ramps leading toward the now-empty floor. "I used to have these soul-searching nights where I'd lie awake and think, 'When it's all over, all you're gonna leave behind is the records. That's all the fuck you're doing.' You can talk about money or fame or whatever gets you off, but all that's left is the records. You've been given that chance, and if you don't do what you want, then you're a real fool, no matter how they sell or what people say."

Tom Petty can only think of one epitaph for himself, he says. Just one phrase to tell people who he was: HE REALLY LIKED ROCK & ROLL. □

Part magician part superhero part dreamer all around wizard of rock & roll Jim Steinman.



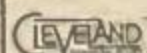
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I'll be the last." "Low and Lonely" is a swinging showpiece for Skaggs' top-notch group, featuring Ray Flacke on electric guitar, Bruce Bouton on steel guitar and Bobby Hicks on fiddle.

Only the title tune is a little dull, a mite too melodically reminiscent of Johnny Lee's "Lookin' for Love." In Merle Travis' "So Round, So Firm, So Fully Packed," sexism rears its ugly head. The song rather crudely promotes the idea of women as property ("If you don't think she's a lot of fun/Just ask the man that owns one"), though I'd like to believe that the hidden punch in the lines "She always wears a .45/Gun, that is" suggests that the singer's pistol-packin' mama can take care of herself. Well, good ol' boys will be good ol' boys, I suppose, mixing piety and impropriety until they're blue in the grass.

What's really important is that Skaggs, on his major-label debut (he cut an earlier LP for Sugar Hill) joins the ranks of those artists who continue to renew contemporary country music by going back to its roots. Willie Nelson, Rodney Crowell and Emmylou Harris ought to feel right at home with Ricky Skaggs.



The Lord Will Make a Way
Al Green
Myrrb
★★

By Dave Marsh

One night, after listening intently to the grand and ancient gospel groups (pre-psycho-babble Staples Singers, the Soul Stirrers with and without Sam Cooke, Dorothy Love Coates, the Golden Gate Quartet), I tried a favorite contemporary gospel track, "I Feel It" by the Meditation Singers. For years, that number had struck me as pure blinded-by-

the-light Motown: arching harmonies and wailing lead vocals, driven by a piano based on the Four Tops' "I'll Turn to Stone." But this particular night, it just seemed (to quote a friend with whom I was listening) "decadent," a pack of jumped-up jive.

Same goes for *The Lord Will Make a Way*. Al Green hasn't bothered to change his approach much. Except for the lyrics, this is almost exactly the same music that brought him to the top of the secular charts in the early Seventies: pulsating rhythms, horns soaring above the melodies, singing that veers between joyous heartbreak and sheer nervous breakdown. The only "surprise" here is "Highway to Heaven," which Green likes so well he closes both sides with it.

"Highway to Heaven" is an abomination, featuring a twanging banjo and a children's chorus so banal it's hard to tell whether the song is meant to approximate a United Nations anthem or a Chevrolet commercial. Yet the composition's very egregiousness makes it more interesting than the rest of the record. If there's nothing about Jesus that can move Green beyond the mannerisms and intensities that so beautifully described his passion for physical love, what's the point?

Granted, *The Lord Will Make a Way* is less ponderous than Aretha Franklin's more traditional *Amazing Grace*. But Franklin grew ponderous because she was taking on the greatest mystery in the world, and attempting to solve it or succumb to it with no weapon stronger than her voice. Al Green found more mystery in his search for a soul mate than he seems to find in the search for his soul. And while you can still listen to him hit those high notes all night long, attempting to probe further is like piercing the center of a void.

'Hard Promises'



[Cont. from 39] The times, the tours, the business don't support that sort of stance: what looks like heart or heroism in Chuck Berry (or Roy Brown) seems strained in Southside Johnny Lyon.

The alternative—and it's a dangerous one—is growing up on vinyl in a kind of continuing recorded *Bildungsroman*. It's dangerous because it implies that the artist is big enough to transcend the pop ideal of the frozen moment, that what counts is the singer not the song, that the audience is content to grow old right alongside. And it's not an easy thing to do. Bruce Springsteen may have made the transition into adult wisdom on *The River*, yet his stage persona is straight from *Born to Run*, and so are the tunes the crowd cheers most. The Who has been older than their audiences for so long that Pete Townshend's sardonic reminders have become a ritualized ingredient of the celebration—and the band still plays "My Generation."

Tom Petty's just old enough and successful enough to have to start grappling with rock & roll adulthood. "You don't have to live like a refugee," but how do you live instead? *Hard Promises* isn't an answer. It's more like a series of

teaching exercises in elementary ethics, each as deceptively simple and elliptical as a Biblical parable. The luminous certainties that shaped *Damn the Torpedoes* (and have studded Petty's work like gems since "Anything that's rock & roll is right") have given way to blind approaches, maxims for improvement and the hollowness that sets in when all the certainties come up no.

One of *Hard Promises'* recurrent themes, which jibes with the album's musical dilemma, is a reluctance to let go of the past. The problem is that the perfect sound Petty and coproducer Jimmy Iovine found for the group on *Damn the Torpedoes*—clear, soaring and exultant—isn't always appropriate to *Hard Promises*. Yet, understandably, they've been reluctant to abandon the formula that worked so well on the earlier LP. Often, the new record derives its tension from the way Petty's vocals—hard-bitten and ironic in "The Criminal Kind," suffused with regret in "A Woman in Love (It's Not Me)" and "Insider"—struggle against their contexts. It's as if the Heartbreakers have to be restrained so as not to show more confidence than Tom Petty's willing to admit. In "Letting You Go," the jaunty arrangement, with keyboards and percussion mixed uncomfortably high, plays the part of the easy surety the singer's being forced to scuttle: "I always knew, one day you'd come around/Now I wonder if dreams are just dreams." And Mike Campbell's leaping guitar solo in "A Thing about You" has the same air of last-chance desperation as Petty's everything-is-ephemeral-but-I-love-you lyric.

In other numbers, the band achieves a deliberation of pace that doesn't sound as much like a somber mood devised for the occasion as it does a tethered version of the old exuberance. This pace cuts Campbell's guitar arias to asides while throwing pressure on drummer Stan Lynch, who knows how to canter but falters in a trot. The plodding, cymbal-tinged tempo of "Insider," Tom Petty's duet with Stevie Nicks, drags the song down like quicksand. It'd fare better with no drums at all.

But, like much of *Hard Promises*, "Insider" is rescued and transfigured by Petty's newly soulful singing. And if, objectively, his whispery croon (at first apparently intended as a scratch vocal) supports Nicks' intermittent gasp like a friendly shoulder—well, that says

a lot about the kind of vulnerability and interdependence that "Insider" is, after all, concerned with. Whether it's flaunted like a badge in "Nightwatchman" or caught stealing through the Raymond Chandler-type terseness of "Something Big," a gray mist of loneliness blows throughout *Hard Promises*, and Tom Petty's voice always captures a hint of it even when the rest is nearly lost in the mix. Sometimes, it's in the bittersweet edge of his old, swaggering half-sneer. In "The Waiting" (the twelve-string-and-build-to-the-bridge single that brings back the best of *Damn the Torpedoes*), it's in the eager way he jumps at even the prospect of salvation, as if to say, "Get me out of here." In "You Can Still Change Your Mind," Petty holds out hope to another as though wishing to be redeemed by it himself.

This taste of loneliness is clearest in the album's masterpiece, "A Woman in Love (It's Not Me)." Petty's aching, murmured vocal—leaping for and missing a falsetto in a move that sums up dashed hopes and heartbreak—is the finest thing he's ever done. The tune's stirring dynamics underline the contrast between the high-flying illusions of the past and hard-boiled present-day reality. A Byrds-style guitar break works like a nostalgic glimpse backward, while the chorus harmonies sweep the singer off into romantic dreams until he thuds back to earth with the words: "She's a woman in love, but it's not me."

Hard Promises' most personal song may be "King's Road," with its ironic doubts about having to play catch-up professionally in all the wrong ways for all the wrong, fashion-conscious reasons, but "A Woman in Love (It's Not Me)" is the one that hits hardest. It exemplifies the change in Petty's stance from the cocky pinnacle of self-sufficiency he reached on *Damn the Torpedoes* to the doubts and dilemmas of the current LP. In the last verse, Tom Petty screws his voice into anguished knots as he confronts the toughest possible truth: that all his charms and qualities won't add up to the person the woman wants, that he'll always be almost, but not quite, loved. It isn't that he's discovered he's less able than in the past—just that other people don't always fall into line. That's not a bad first step on the road from golden boy to grown-up. It's worth all of *Hard Promises'* flaws and sighs to learn a lesson so concise.

CALENDAR

Beach Boys: Lake Tahoe, NV (7/9-15); Los Angeles, CA (7/17,18).

Jimmy Buffett: Salisbury, MD (7/11); Columbia, MD (7/12,13); Hampton, VA (7/14); New York City (7/16).

Doobie Brothers: Virginia Beach, VA (7/8); West Orange, NJ (7/9); Philadelphia, PA (7/10); South Fallsburg, NY (7/11); Syracuse, NY (7/12).

Emmylou Harris: Holmdel, NJ (7/8); Williamsburg, VA (7/10); Columbia, MD (7/11); Saratoga Springs, NY (7/12); Cummings, GA (7/18).

Jefferson Starship: Mobile, AL (7/8); Baton Rouge, LA (7/10); Houston, TX (7/11); Dallas, TX (7/12); Shreveport, LA (7/14); Little Rock, AR (7/15).

Judas Priest: Myrtle Beach, SC (7/9); Atlanta, GA (7/10); Johnson City, TN (7/11); Memphis, TN (7/12).

B.B. King: Savannah, GA (7/10); Atlanta, GA (7/11); Nashville, TN (7/12);

Chattanooga, TN (7/14); West Memphis, AR (7/15); St. Louis, MO (7/17).

Moody Blues: Detroit, MI (7/9-11); New York City (7/14).

REO Speedwagon: Columbia, MD (7/8); New York City (7/10); Hartford, CT (7/11); Boston, MA (7/14,15); Houston, TX (7/18).

Linda Ronstadt/Joe Ely: Clarkston, MI (7/21-24).

Squeeze: Pasadena, CA (7/8); Phoenix, AZ (7/9); Denver, CO (7/11); Dallas, TX (7/14); Austin, TX (7/15); Houston, TX (7/16); New Orleans, LA (7/17); Atlanta, GA (7/18); St. Louis, MO (7/20); Kansas City, MO (7/21).

Van Halen: Indianapolis, IN (7/9); Chicago, IL (7/10-12); Pittsburgh, PA (7/14); New Haven, CT (7/16); New York City (7/17); Long Island, NY (7/18); Philadelphia, PA (7/20-22); Boston, MA (7/24,25).