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TOM PETTY

**Behind The
Rocker's
Mask &
Master Plan
For Stardom**

RUSH

The Toronto Trio Rocks
The Northeast On A
Five-Month Tour

JOE PERRY

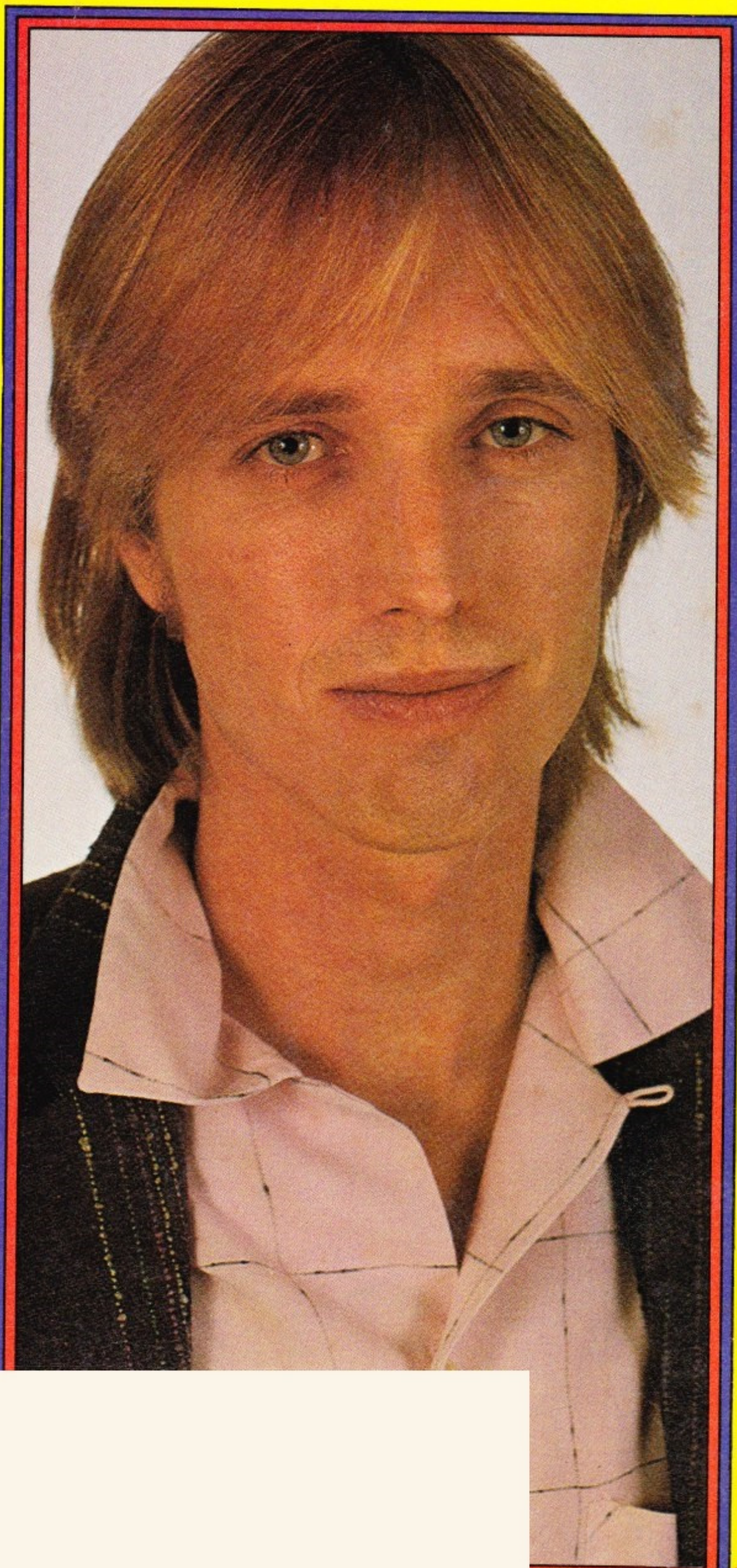
The Massachusetts
Axemaster Battles Back
With A New LP

KIM CARNES

How The Siren Of L.A.
Made It Big In A Man's
Music Game

SUMMER FILM EX- PLOSION

Inside 'Raiders Of The
Lost Ark,' 'Clash Of
The Titans' &
'Superman II'



**SPRING-
STEEN
MOODY
BLUES**

REO

Does Arena Rock Make
Them Rich?

VAN HALEN

Full Color Van Halen
Poster Inside

STEIN- MAN & MEAT LOAF

Can They Still Cook
Alone?

GUITARS OF REO'S GARY RICHATH

TOM PETTY





The Heartbreakers still put on a gale force show. (l.- r.) Mike Campbell, Tom Petty, Stan Lynch, Ron Blair, Benmont Tench.

Tom Petty makes 'Hard Promises' to rock & roll

by Richard Hogan



Lynn Goldsmith/LGI

Tom Petty stood in a small boat on Lake Alice, Florida, hunched over the bow with a long pole. Petty was minding his own business, doing his day job with the boat's small crew. His task was to remove the thick layer of hyacinths which covered the surface of the lake. Except for the scaly green back of a cruising alligator, he saw nothing to

ruffle his composure. Suddenly he noticed that a water moccasin was slithering across the deck of the craft.

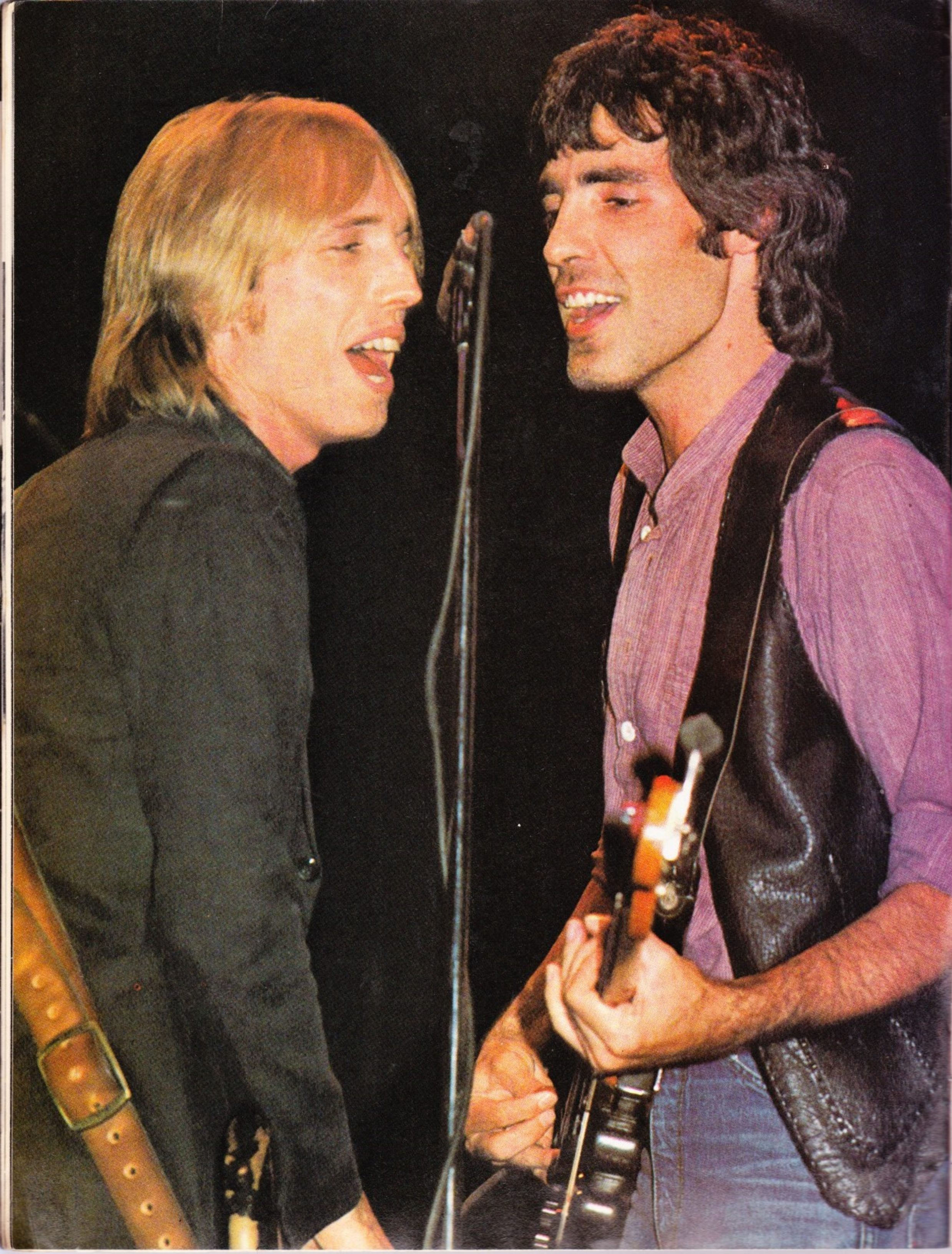
"Everybody panicked and tried to get the snake out of the boat," says Heartbreakers lead guitarist Mike Campbell, who spoke to Tom that night when their band, Mudcrutch, assembled to play.

It was nine years ago that Petty

labored at his strange laketop job in Gainesville; and it was about the time of his run-in with the snake that he and Campbell came to the conclusion that day jobs were not for them.

"I had some lousy jobs," Petty drawls in a soft, grumbling voice. "I was fired from every job I ever had. I just couldn't take 'em seriously."

So Mudcrutch stepped up its search



for dates in the college town, gigging whenever they could at Dub's topless bar, the Keg, the Women's Club and the Cin City Lounge on 13th Street. Before taking the lake assignment, Tom had worked in a music store and had picked up keyboard tips from Don Felder (now with the Eagles) before being fired. Mike Campbell shelved books in the library and loaded a feed mill. They were all dead-end jobs, the only ones these Southern long hairs could get. Both Petty and Campbell knew their only way out of drudgery row was the rock & roll that they played by night.

"Our families were just scraping and barely making ends meet," remembers Campbell, the handsome, dark haired six-footer who cowrites many of the Heartbreakers' hits. "Tom and I come from a poor, Southern background—you wouldn't believe how poor," he laughs. (Tom's dad sold insurance; his mother sold auto tags.) "Rock & roll is your ticket to make something of yourself, if you can do it well. It's the dream."

As he moves into his thirties, Tom Petty knows he's gone the distance. To fans, he's still the rebel: the smirking, blond working-class hero, one-quarter Cherokee Indian, who sings of the pain of being single and spurned, and who clutches his guitar like a rifle in the Old West. To his friends and neighbors in Encino, California, he's Tommy, the musician who's married to Jane Petty. They're the couple from Florida with the detached house and the Camaro. Wasn't it too bad that those crazy fans stole his garbage cans and that he had to put a night watchman on the door? People should leave them alone. "I don't want people standing in my living room," Petty's asserted, "and worse." ("If you're a target, you're a target," organist Benmont Tench contends.)

But Tommy and Jane Petty have most of the American dream now. Tom's last album with the Heartbreakers, *Damn the Torpedoes*, has sold 2.4 million copies; he's got a recording contract that one source claims is a three-million dollar one. The band's latest Backstreet album, *Hard Promises*, is # 6 less than a month after its release, and #1 on Billboard Magazine's rock album chart.

Petty is now in the midst of a 35-city American tour that is so hot the band has to play three nights at the Los

Tom Petty (l.) of Mudcrutch came to work with Ron Blair of R.G.F. when the two attended a Ben Tench demo session in 1976.



Dennis Callahan

Mike Campbell and Ben Tench left Florida for fame in L.A. Besides 'Hard Promises' their latest ventures include LPs with Stevie Nicks and Del Shannon.

Angeles Forum just to satisfy the ticket demand. It's everything a poor boy could want.

In real life Tom Petty is a mixture of these two characters, the slinky rock & roller and the moneyed family man. If he's older and more settled than the part he plays (he's been known to give his age as only 28), the fact that he troubles himself to make nitty-gritty rock singles in a marketplace dominated by slushy pop is a nice bit of nose-thumbing at the industry he works in. "Tom Petty sings like he has marbles in his mouth," says fan Joanne Sherman. "He has the most powerful, awful rock voice since Bob Dylan." After nearly 18 years of working steadfastly at the same ringing brand of rock song ("The Waiting," the current hit, is a prime example), it would seem that Petty and Campbell deserved better, sooner.

"Maybe the reason it's taken us so long to succeed," muses Campbell, 30, "is that Tom pisses people off. For as long as I've known him he's bugged people in authority. In the Mudcrutch days, it was the disc jockeys. Tom always rubs them wrong. Once, we were playing really well at a festival in Florida. The band coming on next, who had an album out, got the promoter to pull the plug on us in mid-song."

"Tom ran backstage; he wanted to know who'd done it. It was a guy who looked like he played on the Florida Gators football team—six feet four, two hundred pounds. Tom, who's a wiry, skinny little guy, put his finger on the bruise's chest. He poked him like a woodpecker. 'You goddam son of a

bitch!' he said. 'Don't you ever pull the plug on my band.' The guy could have crushed Tom, but he was so taken back that he just backed off. Tom's been like that for as long as I've known him."

Petty still bothers media people. Chicago's high-rated WMET, annoyed with him for favoring a rival station in a concert promotion, recently struck "The Waiting" and "A Woman in Love" from its playlist. Other jocks and critics have been confused by Tom's way of doing business, too. He doesn't make himself accessible; he likes to keep control over everything he does up to the last minute.

But the point on which Petty is most often excoriated is his persistence in playing the girl-hungry guitar player on the road to riches. "We all get paid and we all get laid," is the way Tom once described his reasons for rocking—more than four years after he married Jane. Campbell jumps to defend his songwriting partner when he explains how Petty puts autobiography into his lyrics; he says the words are neither completely real nor completely fabricated.

"There's times I'll hear a line and I'll think, 'He must be writing that about Jane, or somebody,'" Mike points out. "But you can never really tell. We've all been hurt, you know. Tom doesn't write 'Good Day Sunshine.'"

After an Oklahoma City show early in their career, each of the Heartbreakers—drummer Stan Lynch, bassist Ron Blair, Campbell and Tench—was observed taking

two women back to his hotel room. Campbell refutes the popular notion that the band is as sex-crazed as it often appears to be. "My wife, Marcie, sometimes comes on the road with me—to New York or to San Francisco. Tom's wife comes out with him, too." The reasons Petty's marriage and child haven't been more publicized seems to rise from the fear of losing large numbers of female teen-aged fans. "As long as they think they have a chance to get Tom or one of the guys," says a cynical New York press agent not connected with Petty, "those girls will go on buying the records and the tickets." The truth is that the only bandmembers who aren't married are Ben and Stan.

The future rock stars weren't so stable in the years between 1968 and 1974, when they were eking out a living near the Gainesville swamps. Only Benjamin Montmorency Tench III, whose father was a prominent Florida judge, had seemed to have a future. He'd attended Exeter and Tulane, but even so, he'd chosen to "fuck off" (his words) and join a prep band, the Apathetics. "Our mission was to prove that white men can't play the blues," he explains dryly.

At about the same time, Tom Petty was writing songs and fretting a Hofner bass with Mudcrutch, the most chameleonic and best-known of the Gainesville outfits. Stan drummed with Road Turkey and Ron Blair was a member in full standing of R.G.F. ("Real Good Fuck"). When the Campbell family moved from Jacksonville to Gainesville, Mike met Tom near the University of Florida campus. An opening in Mudcrutch in 1970 meant a chance for Mike to work with Tom. "He was the only guy from Gainesville who could even come close to writing and singing songs of the quality of Lennon's and McCartney's," insists Campbell.

Mudcrutch refused to play enough Allman Brothers songs to land steady gigs, and the next few years were touch and go. In 1973, Tom and Mike "infected" Ben Tench with a yearning for "pussy and fun," and Tench dropped out of Tulane to join, in Tom's words, "the band with the worst name in the history of show business."

"Mudcrutch left Gainesville to come to L.A. on April Fool's Day, 1974," chuckles Benmont Tench. After cutting one single for Shelter Records, the band finally broke up. During some demo sessions that Ben was doing in '76, Campbell recalls, the five Gainesville zanies found themselves working together and liking it. They've been together ever since; they've done four al-



James Shive

Petty (r.) and Campbell are the heavy Heartbreakers songwriters; they've worked together for 11 years. Mike writes music; Tom, both music and words.

bums, eight hit singles (including the English ones) and too many shows to count.

In their teens and early twenties, the musicians who became Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers were the ultimate music junkies. By his own admission Petty collected LPs of British bands, like the Beatles and the Searchers. Tench thought that Del Shannon was immortal for penning "I Go to Pieces," and Campbell considered Bob Dylan the most talented American rock songwriter. The Heartbreakers' music has mirrored the influence these past stars had; "Listen to Her Heart" has an arrangement that's a 12-string tribute to the Searchers, while "Something Big" is strongly reminiscent of Dylan's "Wheel's on Fire."

It's strange how rock & roll goes full circle. Last year, the Searchers released a recording of Petty's song,

"Lost in Your Eyes." In '80 and '81, the Heartbreakers, Tom included, backed Del Shannon on his just-released comeback album. And this winter, Ben Tench became the first Heartbreaker to record with Bob Dylan when he played a week of L.A. sessions with the folk-rock king.

Yet for Petty there doesn't seem to be a lot of ego involved in acknowledging these tips of the hat from his sources. Although he's sharply aware of making the right career moves, right down to supervising the design of T-shirts merchandised through the band, Tom continues to view his group's music (if not the business of it) on a garage-band level. Rock & roll, he says, is "really a simple thing. You get a little band together. If you're any good, you'll get some gigs, you'll make a record, and things will get weird. You may get some money, some chicks, some dope, but all you'll *really* get is the enjoyment of the music."