

**ROCK DISCOS**  
Where the action is

**BILLY IDOL & JELLO BIAFRA**  
Review the latest US and UK singles

**STEVE MARRIOTT**  
Finishes the Pie story

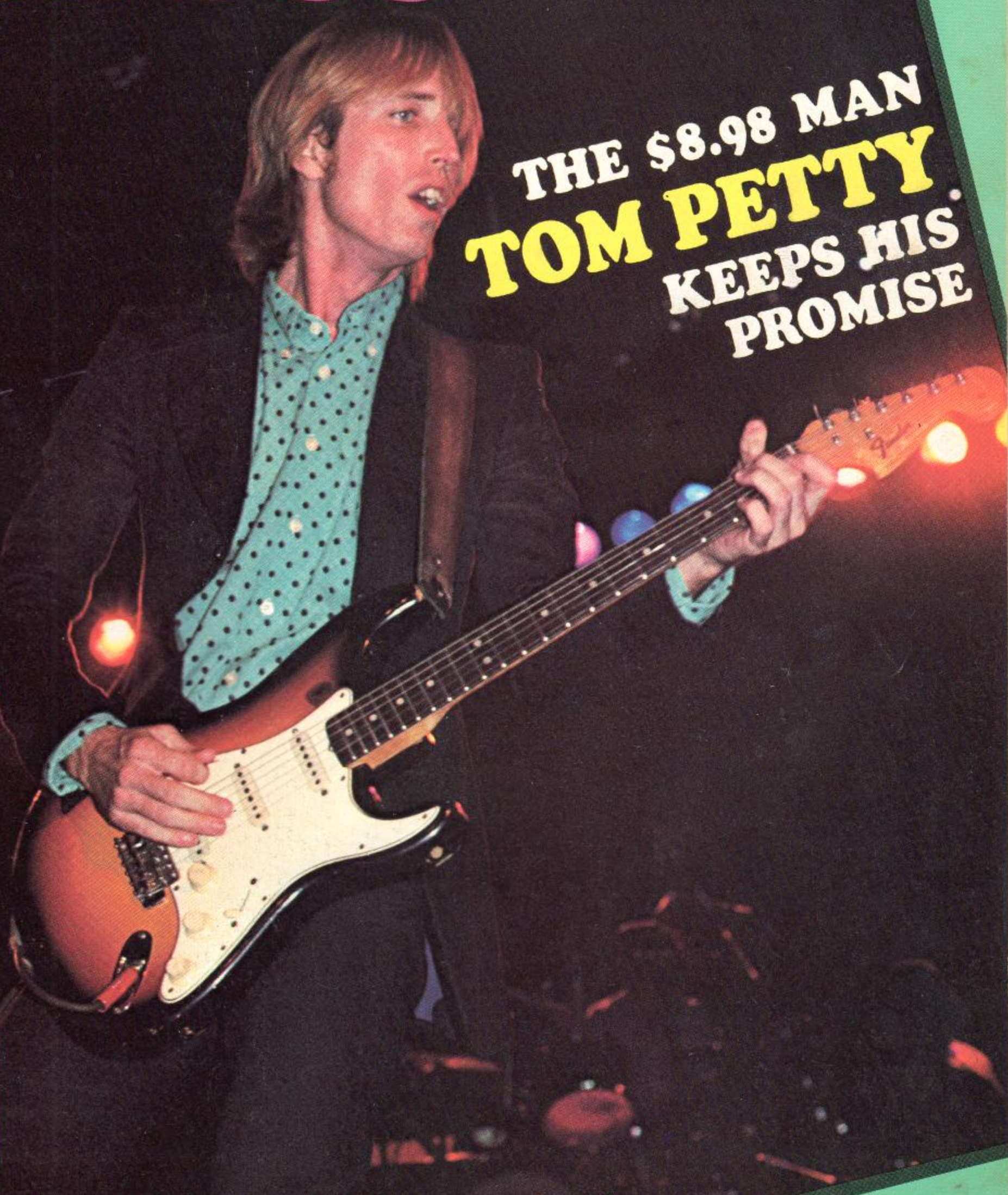
# Trouser press

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THE \$8.98 MAN  
**TOM PETTY**  
KEEPS HIS  
PROMISE





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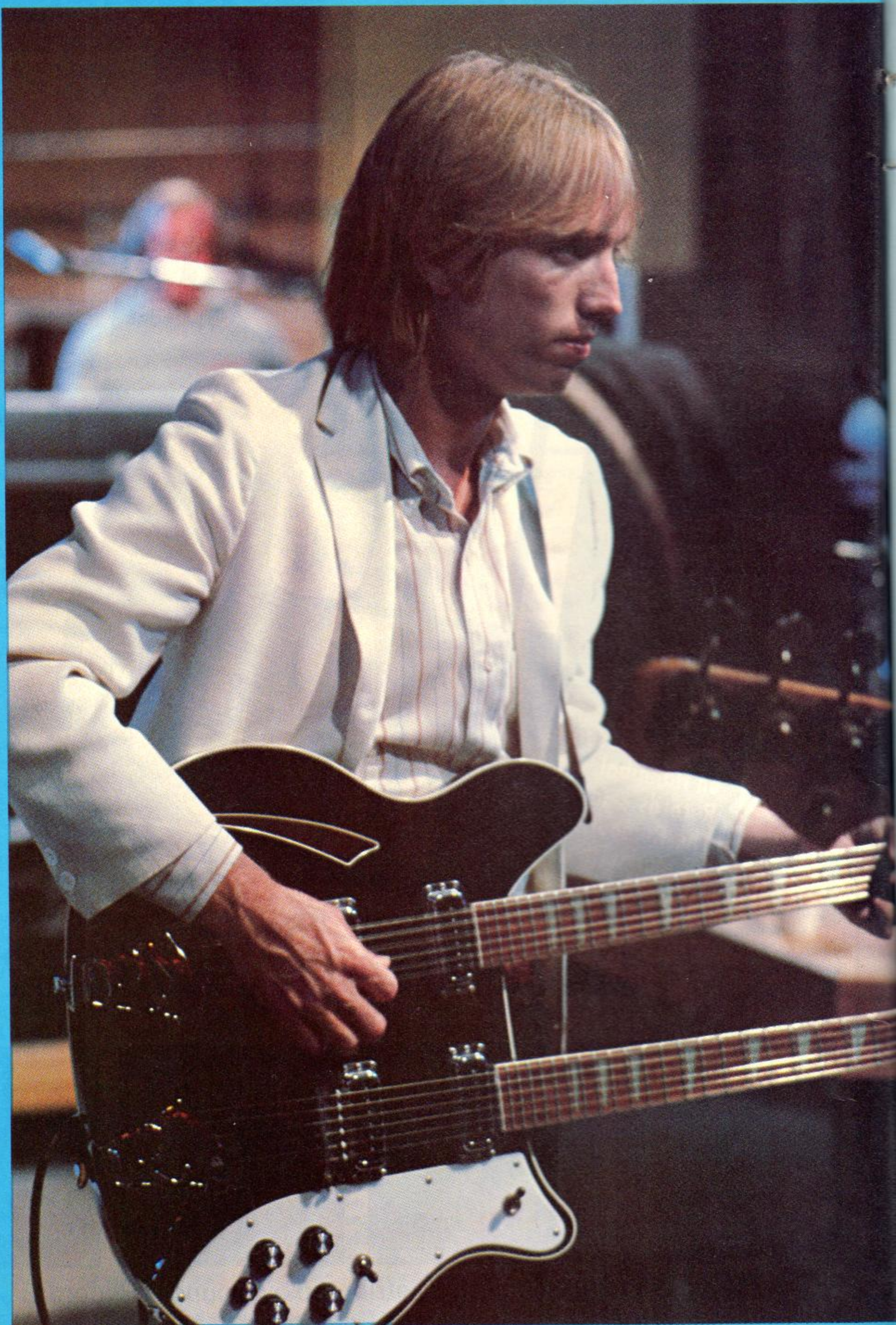
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# JUST A POPULAR ROCK 'N' ROLL BAND



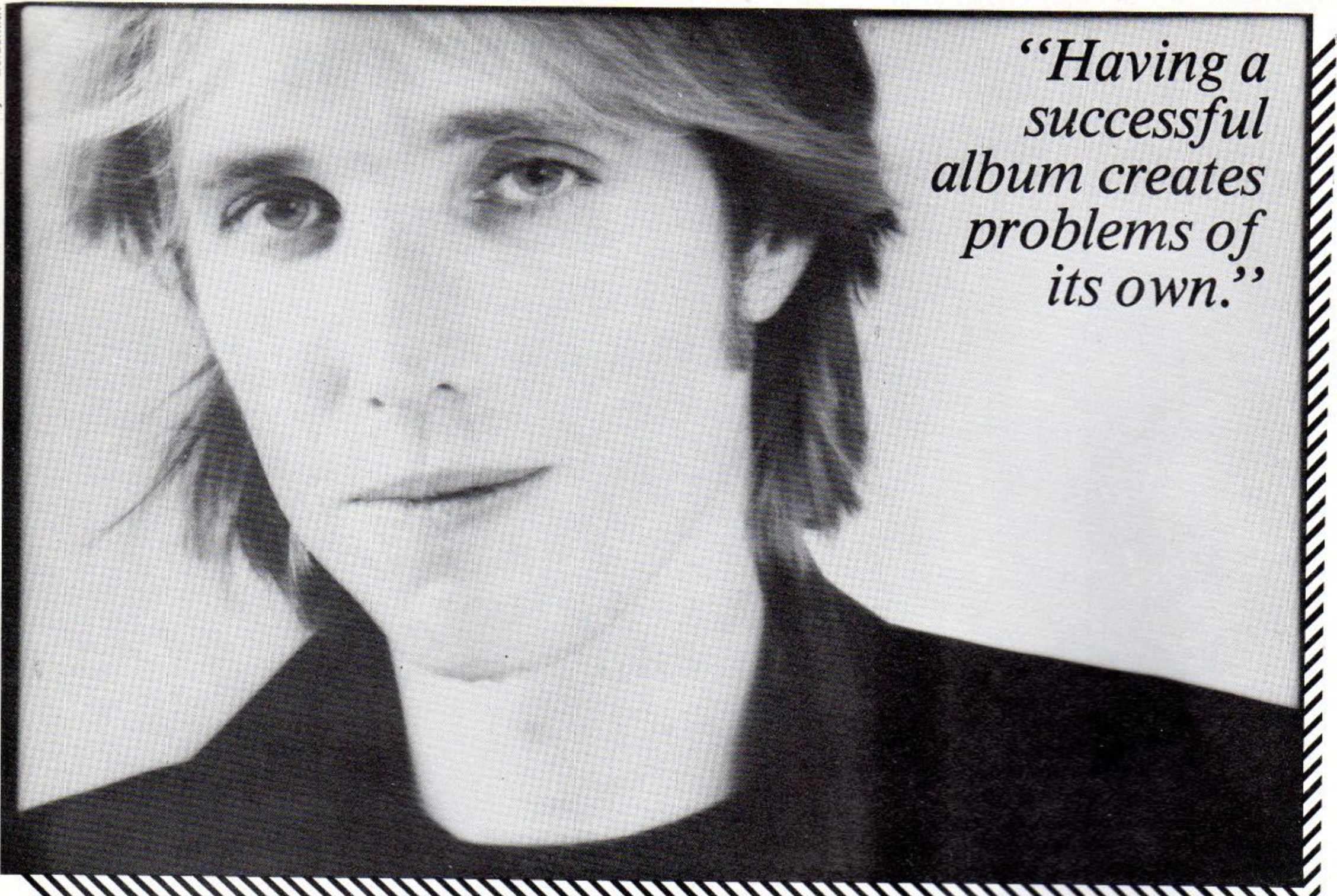
Dennis Callahan

Mike Campbell, Tom Petty, Ron Blair, Stan Lynch, Benmont Tench

**Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers**  
**fight the good fight—for decent rock**  
**on AM radio, \$8.98 albums and**  
**the American way of life**

**By Blair Jackson**





*“Having a successful album creates problems of its own.”*

Two years ago Tom Petty's career was in a strange limbo. His record label, ABC, had been sold lock, stock and barrel to entertainment giant MCA, and his contract was part of the deal—unknownst to Petty. He had two successful albums under his belt, yet he was virtually broke.

Petty fought MCA for his freedom in hopes of signing with another label. The protracted legal battle delayed his third album by several months, costing Petty and his Heartbreakers precious momentum built up through month after exhausting month of touring. With the legally-enforced idleness came a restlessness within the band, a gnawing feeling among some members that the group had reached the end of the line. There were rumors of a break-up; when Petty filed a chapter 13 bankruptcy petition in court, many believed the singer had been brought to his knees.

But, of course, this story has a happy ending. In the fall of 1979 Petty signed a lucrative deal with Backstreet Records—distributed by MCA, but definitely autonomous—and the first album under the new arrangement, **Damn the Torpedoes**, became one of 1980's best-selling LPs. Petty landed three singles near the top of the charts (“Don’t Do Me Like That,” “Refugee,” “Here Comes My Girl”) and tickets to his shows sold out faster than you could say “superstar.”

Now, a year and a half later, Petty has emerged with **Hard Promises**, a potent

follow-up to **Torpedoes**, and nothing short of an unforeseen disaster seems likely to keep him from bounding over every other American band on the charts. On the first single from the album Petty sings that “the waiting is the hardest part.” For Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, the wait for success is over.

Which is not to say that all Petty's problems will now disappear miraculously. Yes, the band is the most solid it's been in three years. Yes, there is financial security where once there was dangerous insolvency. Yes, there is the adulation of millions of fans worldwide, something every artist dreams of. But there are trade-offs, too. Fame is not all roses and champagne, as the somewhat subdued tone of much of **Hard Promises** will tell you.

“Having a successful album doesn't solve all your personal problems,” Petty acknowledges while reclining on a comfortable sofa in his manager's Hollywood office. “It creates problems of its own. It can confuse you. The rough idea of this album is to touch on all that: the confusion, the loneliness, the happiness. I wanted to get all that in there and a little more. I never really thought success would solve all my problems, so I'm lucky in that respect. You want to think that when you become successful you'll wake up one day and all your problems will have been cleaned up. But *you've* got to clean them up.

“There have been a lot of changes in our

lives over the past year and a half, a lot of them good changes, but I don't think we're a lot different than we were,” he continues. “We mainly feel less oppressed. You know, when we were doing the **Torpedoes** album we were being hassled by so many people over all the legal stuff that we retreated and just said, ‘Get away from us. Leave us alone.’”

“My main concern with **Hard Promises** was to move someplace we hadn't been before. I think we've made a sound that is ‘The Heartbreakers’ but we've also been able to change. This isn't ‘Anything That's Rock 'n' Roll.’ The side of the band this album shows has always been there, but I don't think people are that aware of it. There are more ballads, and I think it's a little more lyrical than the other albums we've done. I wanted to try and open the door for experimentation in more than just one musical style.”

Indeed, **Hard Promises** does cover a broader range of styles than any of Petty's previous three albums. Some songs certainly hark back to earlier work—“The Criminal Kind” is an obvious cousin of **You're Gonna Get It's** “Restless,” for example—but the Heartbreakers have never attempted as affecting a ballad as “You Can Still Change Your Mind,” or the contemporary R&B flavorings of “Nightwatchman,” or “Insider”'s lyrical duet singing (with Stevie Nicks). The last-named marks a particularly interesting partnership—one that was seemingly unthinkable a couple of years



ago when the Heartbreakers were at their most insular.

"In the early days we thought everyone else was full of shit," Petty remarks. "We've always kept our group enclosed unto itself and never let anybody else in. I think we even put poor Stevie through some weird stuff because it's so hard to get inside our closed circle."

Petty had known the Fleetwood Mac siren for about two and a half years, and originally penned "Insider" (written in one day near the end of the **Hard Promises** sessions) for her upcoming solo LP.

"She came into the studio to sing it, and she left my lead vocal on in one earphone so she could learn the melody. But she kept singing harmony instead of the melody, and finally decided that that's the way she wanted to do the song—as a duet. It sounded great."

"I got really excited about it, because I'd always wanted to record a song like that. I'd always loved duets like Gram Parsons and Emmylou Harris on **Grievous Angel**, or George Jones and Tammy Wynette. Those things kill me. Finally, Stevie just said, 'You take the song,' and it ended up fitting the album perfectly."

In exchange for "Insider," Petty surrendered a song that had been slated for **Hard Promises**: "Stop Draggin' My Heart Around," written with Heartbreaker guitarist Mike Campbell. "When Stevie heard it," Petty recalls, "she lit up like a Christmas tree and said, 'That's what I wanted all along!'" She could have written a million

songs like 'Insider,' but she wanted a rocker and that's what we ended up giving her."

**A**s a lyricist, Petty blossoms on **Hard Promises**. He has come a long way from the fairly mundane romantic themes of his first two records; now many of his songs can be appreciated on several levels, and some are downright obtuse. The two songs that close side one of **Hard Promises**—"Something Big" and "King's Road"—contain some of Petty's most intriguing verse yet. The former has the sinister feel of a detective story:

*It didn't feel like Sunday*

*Didn't feel like June*

*When he met his silent partner in that lonely corner room*

*That overlooked the marquee*

*Of the Plaza all-adult*

*And he was not lookin' for romance—just someone he could trust.\**

"It's just a weird story," Petty chuckles. "It's a Raymond Chandler type of thing. I was interested in that song because I had to sing three or four different characters and that was basically the first time I'd tried that approach. At the same time, it's a little autobiographical, too. Michael [Campbell] was saying that he thought it was a great road song, with the maids and the bed and all that. I can see the whole gangster/road trip/dope deal thing in there."

"King's Road," on the other hand, deals with Petty's own sense of alienation when

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the Heartbreakers toured England last year. According to the song's author, King's Road is "a street in London where the kids come out in this week's fashion and sort of pose for each other. You see teds, and punks, people into the whole pirate thing. At the same time, you also see a lot of Arabs and Pakistanis selling things out of little booths."

**Hard Promises** has its share of love songs too (notably "Insider" and "You Can Still Change Your Mind"), but even these have more depth than most of Petty's past writing.

"As the last year went by," Petty comments, "I decided I wanted to say more on this album than I had said in the past, and I realized I could if I tried. Really, these records are all I'll leave behind, and for some reason I wanted to put as much as I could about what I felt on the record. The dilemma was that I didn't want to stand up and preach it; I also didn't want it to be so obscure that only people in the music business could understand it."

"You can look at a lot of these songs on a couple of levels," he clarifies. "I used the boy/girl thing to get across some other points. I think a lot of people cruisin' and listenin' to the radio are in different stages of love affairs, and they can grab onto that initially in my songs. Then, as they listen they can hear other things coming through. That's what I wanted to do with this record."

**I**t is typical of Petty that he cares so much whether or not he is singing to his fans. From the beginning, he has been nearly obsessed with the idea of getting

## Romeo Void is a new American band.

Send check or money order for \$7 (includes US postage) to:  
415 Records  
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San Francisco  
CA 94114

### Critics grope for comparisons:

Greil Marcus — *X, The Ventures*  
Sue Klein — *U2, Psychedelic Furs*  
Mark Leviton — *Patti Smith, Blondie*  
Phil Elwood — *Pharoah Saunders, Albert Ayler*  
Billboard — *The Pretenders*  
Liz Lufkin — *Jefferson Airplane*  
Ron Young — *Supertramp, Blondie*  
Ken Tucker — *Clarence Clemons*  
Eric Feber — *The Motels*  
Adam Block — *Booker T & the MG's, Marianne Faithfull*  
David Fricke — *John Cale, Joy Division*

But there are no simple comparisons because, ultimately, what romeo void sounds most like is romeo void. And the only place you can hear them is on their debut album:  
**its a condition.**





decent rock music on AM radio—believing that if kids can only hear it they'll buy the real thing instead of the MOR schlock that has dominated the airwaves for so many years.

"Some people were very alarmed that we put out a rock 'n' roll song like 'The Waiting' as our first single," Petty says. "There's a tendency right now to put out your mel-lowest song as a single, your catchiest sing-song thing. It all comes from this misconception that people are stupid and the sing-song, la-de-da songs are the only ones they can appreciate. I wanted to put 'The Waiting' out as a single to prove a point: that people will buy rock 'n' roll singles."

At the same time, though, Petty says that "the important thing with this band has always been the albums, not the singles. It's nice to have hit singles, but I worry about them only because they prolong the life of the album and open up the audience a lot."

Singles have definitely opened Petty's audience a lot. Two years ago he and the Heartbreakers played mainly 3,000-seat halls, and even then most Midwestern cities failed to sell out. Now Petty headlines huge arenas and his shows sell out in a matter of hours.

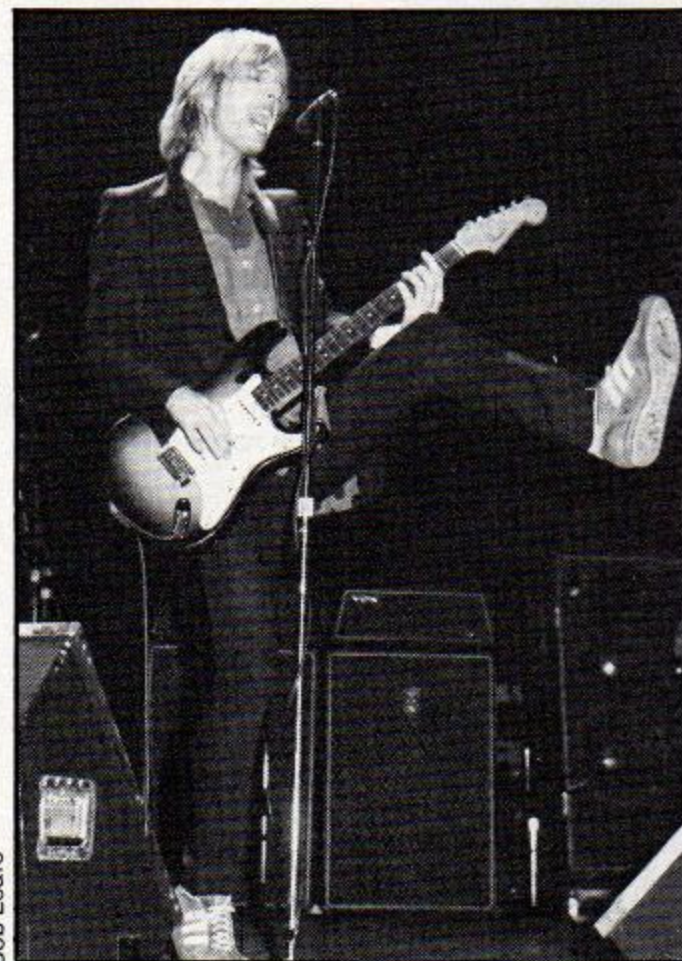
Petty understands that hockey rinks make less than perfect rock venues, but, he adds, "from our standpoint, the jump to larger halls happened at a critical time because we desperately needed the money. I know it's not the ideal way to go, but at the same time I think we're one of the few acts that is real good in a coliseum. We work very hard at seeing that people can go to the shows and get a decent seat, see good lighting, hear good sound. We have to work a lot harder to make the show good. In a club, you can raise an eyebrow and say something with that gesture, but in a coliseum you have to wave your arms and carry on to reach the people in the back. I've never heard a lot of kids complaining about where we play, so I think we must be doing alright."

Petty's caring attitude towards his fans also carries over into areas not related to performing. Just before **Hard Promises** was released he became embroiled in a dispute with MCA over the list price of his album. The label wanted to charge \$9.98, rather than the current industry standard of \$8.98. Petty refused to hand over the album masters until the label capitulated. He won the fight, despite MCA's having no legal obligation to change its decision.

"I think the press had a lot to do with winning that particular battle," Petty says. "Not because they intimidated MCA, but because they made the kids aware of what was going on. My hat's off to the press because there wasn't much I could do except speak out about it. I wasn't going to let it go for two reasons: one, \$9.98 is just too much to pay for a record, and two, I didn't want MCA hanging a record price rise on me."

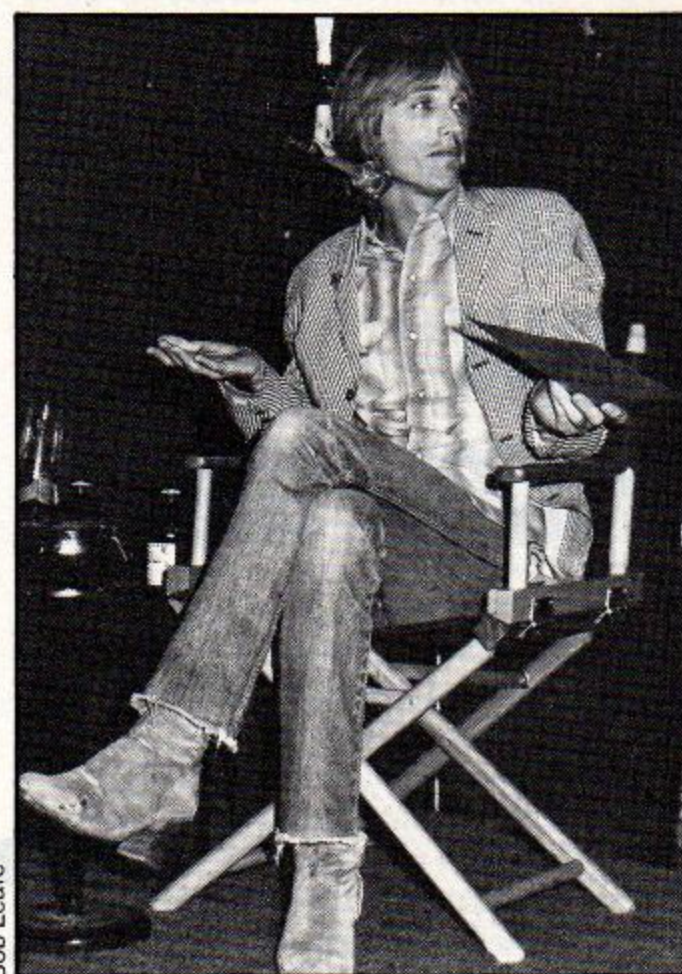
"The response from the kids was amaz-

ing! We got a lot of letters pledging support, people saying 'We'll wait a year for the new record if we have to. Don't give up your fight!' It's important to have that kind of support on the street. Kids can control entertainment prices: Just don't pay it! I think that fear hit MCA and that's why they changed. I had no legal power. They can charge \$100 for a record if they want."



Bob Leafe

"I never wanted to be a big show-biz personality."



Bob Leafe

"I sympathize a little with MCA," he continues. "They're in an awkward position because they don't want it to look like I can push them around and get away with all the things I get away with; then every artist on the label will start doing the same kinds of things. That's fine with me," he laughs. "If the artists don't take some responsibility for the prices of records and shows the company will, because money is their objective."

At the rate **Hard Promises** is selling, MCA can only be pleased with its decision not to tempt fate by tacking a dollar increase onto the record. Petty is one of the hottest selling artists in pop music right now and his stock is still going up. What was once a band that appealed largely to the hip fringe is now an undeniable part of the rock mainstream, albeit to the left of giants like REO Speedwagon, Styx and Journey. Nevertheless, Petty thinks that "we're not that big in my opinion. Elvis was a *big star*. The Beatles were *big stars*. We're just a popular rock 'n' roll band."

Such modesty is unbecoming. The Heartbreakers—Mike Campbell (guitar), Ben Tench (keyboards), Ron Blair (bass) and Stan Lynch (drums)—are perhaps the most exciting American rock band to appear since the prime of the grossly underrated Little Feat. Petty has emerged as one of the most striking personalities in music—a figure with the charisma of Mick Jagger, some of Bob Dylan's dark mystique, and lyrical insights that rival Bruce Springsteen's.

Yet he seems remarkably unaffected by his enormous popularity. If anything, he is more open and friendly now than he was when the Heartbreakers were just one more struggling rock band. Success has brought inner peace to Tom Petty, even as it forces him to sacrifice some privacy.

"I never wanted to be a big show-biz personality," Petty comments. "I think it's fine for people who like it, but it would terrify me to make my life so public. You get nervous because you go places and you start to draw a crowd. People never *do* anything to you. It's more like, 'Hi, Tom. Love your album. Will you sign this?' and that's fine. But it's still a little embarrassing to be standing in line for a movie and everyone starts to shout."

"I'll do it—go to the movie and risk that—because I think it's important that I do it. Otherwise you isolate yourself too much and you stop realizing what real life is like. And if that happens, how are you going to write about it and sing about it if your whole existence is your big pad and pool?"

Petty's pad isn't *that* big, he insists, and he still owns the Camaro he's driven for the last few years. He now has a guard (immortalized in **Hard Promises**' "Nightwatchman") to keep the curious away from his front door, but that is about the only overt sign of his enormous popularity. **Hard Promises** gives no indication that Petty is going to rest on his laurels.

"I feel satisfied," he says, "but not so much so that we can hang it on the wall and forget about it. Mostly, I'm happy to see that we've done more than just be a rock band. We came along at a time when change was in the air. Things had gotten pretty dull. We haven't changed the world or anything, but the kids like what we're doing and that's always been the key thing. That's always been what we wanted most."