

Life's not all heartbreak for an L.A. rocker who gets chased by adoring fans and hounded by overdressed music critics. When you're a star, you don't have to live like a refugee.

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## 20 QUESTIONS: TOM PETTY

*rock's hottest heartbreaker reveals dark secrets—about record-industry execs, rock-'n'-roll marriages and what's in his pockets*

**C**ontributing Editor David Rensin met with Tom Petty in Los Angeles during the recording sessions for his new album. "He's a regular guy," Rensin told us. "He drinks Coke. He doesn't even act like a rock star—though he is very skinny. But underneath his good manners are strong opinions and an informed rebelliousness. Presumably, that is what makes all the girls go crazy."

1.

**PLAYBOY:** You fought quite a battle in the press to keep the price of your *Hard Promises* album down to \$8.98. How much is this next one going to cost?

**PETTY:** [Laughs] Eight ninety-eight, I hope. It's funny that the prices haven't gone up yet. We were dead right. Mick Jagger told me that what we pulled off had a lot to do with keeping prices down. But if the record company came at me again with a price hike, I couldn't do much about it except scream. I never expected our battle to get as much play as it did. But we got so much mail, so many thanks from record buyers, that it felt real, real good.

2.

**PLAYBOY:** How has fame inhibited your lifestyle?

**PETTY:** It bugs me that I have to fight wanting to go down to the store or something. That's been the only inconvenience. On the other hand, I've never been a real sociable person. When strangers come up to me and start talking, it's hard for me not to be slightly rude. But if I were to see, say, Roger McGuinn someplace and went over and said, "Hey, Roger" and he just moaned and walked away, I'd be crushed forever. So I do try to be friendly to people, because I know how much it means to me. I'll never cry about the fame.

3.

**PLAYBOY:** You've been married for five years. You have two children. Do marriage and rock 'n' roll mix?

**PETTY:** You mean, like, wanting to take nine girls home each night? Well, I can't do that. But I don't have the desire, either. I've been a musician since I was

I was playing when I met Jane, my wife, so we're both used to it; and at times, she's more of a rocker than I am. If I had a conflict, I wouldn't be married. Both of us would call it off. If I had to choose between my wife and my career, I'd choose my wife, but we both know we'd never be happy. I could say, "Well, babe, I'm gonna lay down the guitar and just hang out with you every day." But that would be bullshit. After a few days, I'd be down playing at some bar. And she knows it. For a long time, I never told anyone I was married, because I figured discussing it made us a public couple and pretty soon we'd be reading about ourselves in magazines. That would ruin it. I have a pretty good marriage these days. I haven't always.

4.

**PLAYBOY:** What's changed?

**PETTY:** When you're gone nine months out of the year, you're not really married. I used to be gone so much it was hard to feel I had anything going. Telephone romances don't work. I'd take Jane on the road with me, but it's awful to be on a tour and not have a job to do. We're both hyper people, and being a road wife is a waste of time. Jane used to do it, but she's not into it anymore. With two kids, she's got her hands full.

5.

**PLAYBOY:** What would you do if your children were listening to some music you couldn't stand?

**PETTY:** I might say, "How can you listen to this garbage?" but I'd never take the record away—which was done to me. For a long time, my father couldn't understand why I didn't go outside and play or go hunting with him. Now he's a huge fan. My kid listens to Olivia Newton-John, and I'm not really wild about her, though I've learned she makes good singles. I can appreciate them on a craftsmanship level, and there's something noble about making all those people happy. My kid also listens to Devo.

6.

**PLAYBOY:** The music business is in a slump these days. What's your analysis of the problem?

*of the problem?*

**PETTY:** There are no record people left in the record business; now it's some guy who used to be with the leased-car department and got a promotion. Or maybe he was an accountant and now he's a record-company president. And he hires more accountants and leased-car men. They just don't know what's good or bad. Records don't sell now because they aren't any good.

Those businessmen forget that with today's economy, a kid has maybe nine or ten albums at home—albums he paid for, unlike critics and reviewers. And the kid is rooting for the album to be good; it's his money on the turntable. But today's albums have maybe two or three tracks you can stomach and the rest is awful. You know there was no thought put into the remaining seven cuts. When you deliver an album, it should be something that will endure. I like to think that today our first album is still worth the bread.

I read the other day that video games are taking 15 billion dollars directly out of the record business. As far as I'm concerned, I'd rather put seven dollars' worth of quarters into a Pac-Man machine than into some dip-shit album.

7.

**PLAYBOY:** What do you think about America's fascination with video games?

**PETTY:** We're bored. I've got a home system, and I've gotten real addicted. It frightens me. I feel weird after 30 minutes of smashing electronic rocks. I used to have a Pac-Man game at my house. I played it until my hand got fucked up and the skin rubbed off. I finally went, "What have I been doing eating dots for hours?"

8.

**PLAYBOY:** How do you get along with critics, reviewers and the record industry in general?

**PETTY:** I've never had much patience, even in the old days. I never entertain the record industry backstage; it's not a scene where I want a lot of people checking me out. I'm sorry for hurt feelings, but it's just too weird to have some guy in a three-piece suit tell me that the

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*14. I was on the road the first time at 15.*



# TOM PETTY

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*"I don't talk to people on cocaine. I get tired of hearing that something is so great and blah, blah, blah..."*

show was "really rocking." As for critics, there are some I know personally and like. Most are saying, "Impress me"—like, with free records. But I don't have a huge beef, because they've been good to me. Reviews don't mean shit, but you always want to believe them when they're good.

9.

PLAYBOY: Where were you when John Lennon was shot? And what was your reaction?

PETTY: His death hurt real bad, still hurts. Each time I see his picture or hear him sing, I immediately get pissed off that some fucking jerk could just blow him away. In fact, the only two people I have ever looked up to, idolized—Lennon and Elvis—are both dead. And I'm not someone into idols.

I was in the studio when Lennon died. My producer, Jimmy Iovine, had worked on a few of John's albums, and Ringo was recording just down the hall from me. The day before John died, we heard that he was planning to come out and do something with Ringo, and I thought, Great! He'll be right next door. When he got shot, Jimmy got a call with the news. We went on working for a while, then stopped. The spark was gone. It hurt for so long, it fucked me up. My mom died the same year. It was a black

year. But I don't worry about it much now. I saw the Stones recently on cable TV, and there was some guy who ran onstage and went for Keith. Keith jabbed him in the head with his Telecaster. I stood up and cheered. Fucking A, no one's gonna shoot Keith. It's the attitude you have to take.

10.

PLAYBOY: You're an acknowledged Beach Boys fan. Given a choice of listening to their 1966 album *Pet Sounds* or the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, which would you choose?

PETTY: Interesting question. Well, I like both. But these days, I'd probably play *Pet Sounds*. I can hear *Sgt. Pepper* without playing it, but, frankly, I don't think it wears that well into the Eighties. *Pet Sounds* still sounds great to me. Hell, I once heard a radio interview with Paul McCartney in which he said that after hearing *Pet Sounds*, he had to do something like *Sgt. Pepper*. And he was right. Brian Wilson is the greatest. The root of his personal problems was that he did genius work and never got recognition for it from the man in the street. He took a real artistic risk. It's a brilliant album.

11.

PLAYBOY: Drugs eventually became part of Wilson's problem. You claim to have

gone through your drug phase, saying you haven't used cocaine in two years. How, then, do you deal with the cocaine consciousness supposedly rampant in the industry?

PETTY: I don't talk to people on cocaine. I get tired of hearing people tell me something is so fucking great and blah, blah, blah, until the coke wears off and they're embarrassed and I'm embarrassed. But I'm not knocking it. If I want a line, I may have one. Once, I was a person who couldn't keep his shit together on cocaine. It made me weird. I lost my temper regularly. I got into these huge depressions. And then I'd wonder why and do another line. But I never looked at it as if I were some big drug addict. Maybe I was; I don't know. I do smoke a lot of marijuana, though. It helps keep me level. It makes some people paranoid, lazy or sleepy. Not me. I enjoy a good joint. But I don't take drugs when I play. Alcohol tends to fuck things up in the business more than drugs do. Most of the musicians who are supposed to be great junkies are just drunks. I've seen guys drink 15 beers before going onstage. But, again, I don't want to be prudish about it. It just doesn't work for me, that's all.

12.

PLAYBOY: You've spoken of Elvis as a hero. You once met him. What was that like? And what did you think of the Albert Goldman bio?

PETTY: I couldn't read the book. I don't care what Elvis did offstage or out of the studio. I never gave a fuck about how many women he had or about girls in cotton panties. If I died tonight and Goldman came to find out what sort of panties I liked on a girl, I wonder who could give him the straight poop? Who could give him the dirt? There's nobody who can tell us what Elvis dug, not even the girls he was with. Goldman is a real jerk. Another guy cashing in on Elvis.

As for meeting Elvis, I was 11 years old. It was on a movie set and I just said, "Hi." All I remember is a scene with thousands of people. And trailers. And Elvis in a white Cadillac. He looked great.

13.

PLAYBOY: What was the first thing you bought when you finally had enough money to buy anything you wanted?

PETTY: A Camaro. I had been driving a rented Camaro, and I liked it. So I went to this car lot and said, "I want to see your Camaros." They were all pretty much the same color, so I just got in and checked out all the radios. Then I paid

the guy cash and was broke again. I



learned later that paying cash for anything is real stupid, but it was a rush to say, "I want *that one*."

14.

PLAYBOY: How has your attitude toward women changed in your songs since the early days? Do you *really* like them?

PETTY: I like women more than I used to. But I don't want to get so hung up that I can't write some sexy fuck song. I hate women raising hell about The Rolling Stones' songs. Those songs don't give women shit; they're just good rock 'n' roll. I have lots of women friends, but I've never gotten much into women's liberation. I've always thought it was boring. In fact, I've written a lot of songs about this one character—a small-town chick who knows there's more out there for her but doesn't know how to get at it. And she gets fucked up trying. The American girl. I've always felt sympathetic toward her. She was, as I've said, raised on promises.

15.

PLAYBOY: What should women know about men that they don't?

PETTY: Women know more than they let on most of the time.

16.

PLAYBOY: What's in your pockets now?

PETTY: I've never been asked that question. Let's see—\$35, 55 cents, two guitar picks and the keys to the Jag.

17.

PLAYBOY: How did you feel at Winterland in 1978, when you were pulled off the stage by *adoring* fans?

PETTY: I honestly thought I was dead. I know they loved me, but they were trying to kill me. I watched a video tape of the whole thing later, and though it didn't take so long on tape, I thought I was down there for an eternity. My roadie, Bugs, dived in—"crowd swimming," he calls it. I could see him about five layers of people away. Our eyes met for a moment, and he gave me an "I don't know if I can get you" look. I've noticed that I can't get near an audience as Bruce Springsteen does. They rip me up. Bruce can walk *through* them. I think they look at him as their buddy. With me, there seem to be some violent or sexual vibes. I'm the last guy on earth to be violent. But there is a definite sexual thing to the show. Girls enjoy it tremendously.

18.

PLAYBOY: What are you listening to these days?

PETTY: I bought the last Police album. Otherwise, there's been nothing lately. I'll always go back and buy another Roy Orbison collection, though.

19.

PLAYBOY: Are you still writing songs about your wife?

PETTY: Not all the time. That would be boring, you know? If you write romantic songs, there's so much to draw from. I just keep my eyes open. Of course, I have been fortunate, from a writer's standpoint, in having a pretty wild relationship. I've been thrown out and I've been brought back in. We've been on and we've been off. But usually, I draw on other people's experiences. I don't like to get too autobiographical,

because I don't feel I'm that interesting. Even when I do, I never do it graphically.

20.

PLAYBOY: Mick Jagger used to say he didn't want to be doing what he was doing when he was 40. He is. Elvis was. Will you?

PETTY: I'll do it as long as I can. I don't see any reason to quit. I don't see myself going into insurance sales. I've been fired from every job I've ever had except playing music. So as long as somebody is willing to listen, I'll do it. Hell, Muddy Waters is only 67.



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