

facturers' returns policies — which discourage stores from taking a chance on a title that might not sell — are speeding the demise of the LP. "If it were being done more sensibly now, vinyl LPs could last a couple of more years than they're going to," says Russ Solomon, head of the fifty-three-store Tower Records chain. "Right now they're not going to last through 1990, but if it was being done more sensibly, they could last through 1992."

No matter who is to blame, the makers and the sellers of LPs have effectively squeezed out the customer who wants vinyl. "It's a real Catch-22 on who's going to be hurt the least, retailers or manufacturers," says Steve Bennett, a vice-president at the 147-store Record Bar chain. "Unfortunately, the person who gets hurt the most is the consumer who still wants to buy this stuff."

Who exactly is feeling the pinch? Pop, rock and classical listeners have almost entirely switched to cassettes and CDs, but R&B, blues, folk and other genres are still doing strong business on wax.

"We love vinyl," says Ken Irwin, cofounder of Rounder Records, the independent roots-music label based in Cambridge, Massachusetts. "LPs still account for about fifty percent of our overall sales and about eighty percent of our mail-order business."

Alligator Records, the Chicago blues and folk label, does a third of its total business in LPs, says Bruce Iglauer, the president of the company. He adds that his vinyl sales have "dropped off some but not nearly as much as the industry says they should."

Some major companies, like PolyGram and WEA, Warners' record-distribution company, say they still have a solid commitment to vinyl. "Generally, we are still strong believers in vinyl," says WEA president Henry Droz. "All the talk is premature. There's a strong underground movement in vinyl, believe it or not. Because many larger chains have reduced or eliminated vinyl, it's driving customers to smaller stores."

Iglauer predicts that in the future, vinyl buyers may have to go to LP-only stores for albums, and prices in the used-record market could skyrocket because of limited supplies. "I think there'll be big bucks made in selling old albums," he says. "There's going to be a lot of stuff that never will show up on CD, and people will want to have it."

But many major labels disagree. At MCA, vice-president Walt Wilson says there have been discussions about not putting out LPs of some new Nashville artists. The company

also plans to cut back packaging and manufacturing plans for some established groups. For a new Nitty Gritty Dirt Band album, for example, MCA is pressing just 10,000 vinyl copies and putting them in a less elaborate package than the CD or cassette version. "About the only reasons we're doing vinyl on it at all is for critics and for Canada, where there are lots of hip-

pies and draft dodgers from the Sixties who still buy vinyl," says Wilson.

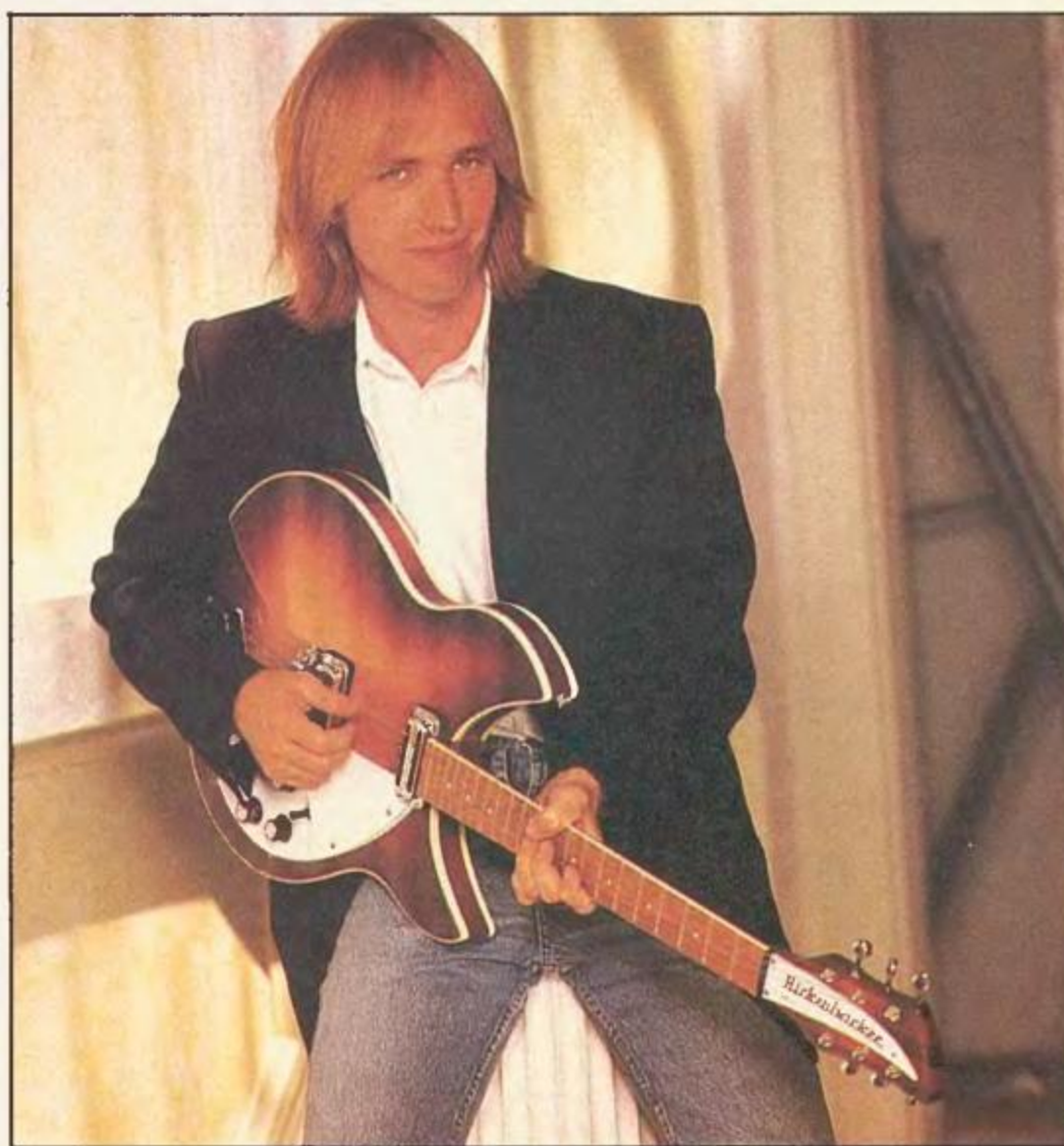
At this time, no major record company will say for sure when it will put out a new pop, black or country album without a vinyl version. That means some of the biggest shocks in the LP funeral march are yet to come, when new titles by superstar artists are released on compact disc and cassette

only. That day of reckoning will come sooner or later . . . probably sooner.

"The real catalyst will be when a Bob Dylan album comes out and there's no vinyl behind it, because he's still the best vinyl seller in the country," says Musicland's Eugster. "When a new Dylan comes out without an LP, then you'll know the LP is really dead." ♪

# Tom Petty Goes It Alone

*Full Moon Fever*' marks the chief Heartbreaker's solo debut



By Jeffrey Ressler

IT'S JUST A LITTLE TERM I USE when I'm doing things and I don't know why," says Tom Petty about the title of the new *Full Moon Fever*, his first album without the Heartbreakers. "I thought the phrase pretty well fit the circumstances behind this album."

Petty still shakes his head in disbelief at the twists and turns it took to complete his solo debut, originally conceived in late 1987. The album had its genesis in a chance meeting with George Harrison's producer Jeff Lynne at a traffic light that Thanksgiving. Petty and Lynne met again soon after-

ward at a restaurant, and then they hooked up to kick around some sketchy song ideas during the Christmas holidays.

Lynne and Petty became fast buddies, and even faster collaborators, whipping through the writing and recording of a pair of tunes — "Yer So Bad" and "Free Fallin'" — in just two days. "I wasn't really planning on doing a record," Petty says. "But the Heartbreakers were spread out all over the globe, and I thought, 'Shoot, we done these in a day each — we'll just go back and write nine more and put out a solo album.'" Like so many other attempts at doing an instant record, however, the project eventually took more than a full year to complete.

Last summer both Petty and Lynne

got happily sidetracked on the Traveling Wilburys album with pals Harrison, Roy Orbison and Bob Dylan. Then Petty and Lynne helped work on material for Orbison's comeback album, *Mystery Girl*. Orbison also sat in for some background vocals on *Full Moon Fever*, while Harrison sang backup and contributed acoustic guitar on one track.

A different sort of time factor also stalled the release of Petty's album, which was expected last year: The nine songs Petty recorded totaled just twenty-two minutes, hardly enough for an album. Petty came up with six more songs, including a "mystical rocker" with the Bangles that was never finished to his satisfaction. One of three new tunes that did make it onto the album is a nearly exact, note-for-note cover of the Byrds' "Feel a Whole Lot Better," recorded days after Petty and Lynne saw a reunion concert by the group.

*Full Moon Fever* also reflects many other influences. A greatest-hits album by the Searchers, Petty says, led him to write "Depending on You," while the jaunty "You're So Bad" owes a solid debt to the Kinks. Other songs popped out of odd phrases Petty had picked up. The title "Zombie Zoo," for example, is taken from the name of an L.A. dance club he heard about from a group of Mohawked punks while he was eating at a diner. And "A Mind With a Heart of Its Own" is a nonsense switch on an old Connie Francis tune, "My Heart Has a Mind of Its Own."

"I didn't want this album to be too serious," Petty says. "I'm not such a serious person all the time." Nor, he says, should *Full Moon Fever* be interpreted as the end of the Heartbreakers. The members of the band have just recorded two new songs, and they are planning a summer tour.

"I'm still very much in the Heartbreakers," says Petty. "I wouldn't think of performing with another group." ♪