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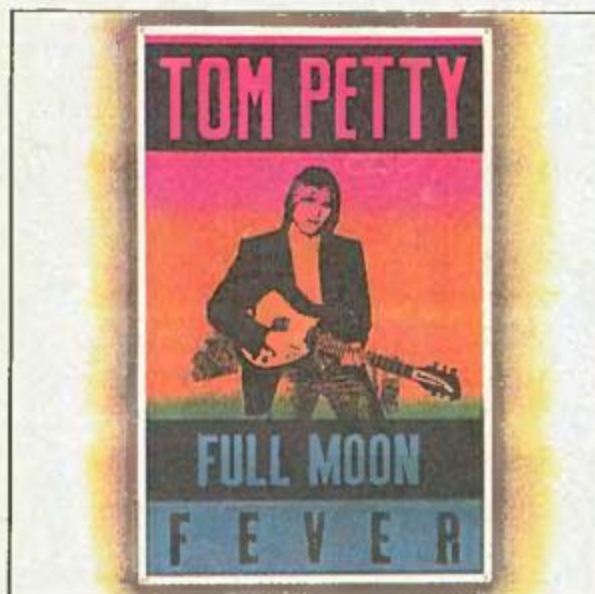
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COVER: Photograph of Lou Reed by Mark Seliger, New York City, March 1989

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★★★★½

FULL MOON FEVER

Tom Petty

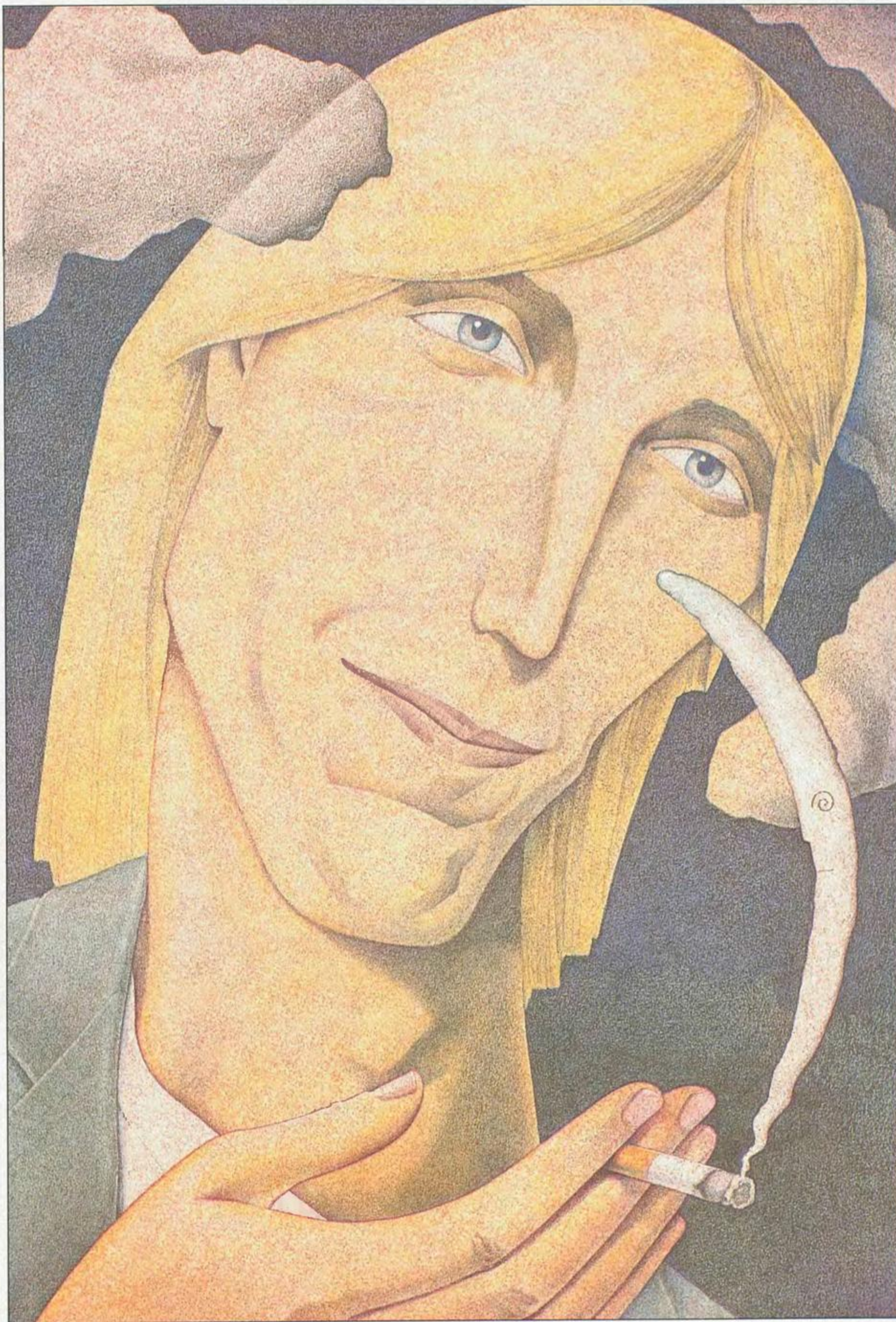
MCA

Tom Petty's Solo Effort: An Infectious 'Fever'

By Jimmy Guterman

TOM PETTY PICKS HIS FRIENDS well. Touring behind Bob Dylan in 1986 helped him and his band, the Heartbreakers, make their most spontaneous and feisty record, 1987's *Let Me Up (I've Had Enough)*. And his tenure in the Traveling Wilburys let the usually straight-faced Petty loosen up even more: He came up with one of his funniest tunes — "Last Night" — but more important, his performances seemed to gain strength from the relaxed atmosphere. Instead of worrying about writing songs as barbed as Bob Dylan's, playing guitar as tersely as George Harrison or singing as gloriously as Roy Orbison, Petty just casually leaned forward and played and sang as directly and freely as he could.

Full Moon Fever is another rewarding, low-key side project for Petty. Produced by fellow Wilbury Jeff Lynne, the record is technically Petty's first solo outing, though all the Heartbreakers except for drummer Stan Lynch make



an appearance. What's more, all the Wilburys save one (Bob Dylan) also show up: *Full Moon Fever* has the same restless charm and barbed wit as the Wilburys' LP.

Although Petty and Heartbreaker guitarist-songwriter Mike Campbell earn coproduction credits on the album, it is Lynne who holds sway. The former Electric Light Orchestra leader's production technique often builds banks of keyboards and backing vocals so high it's hard to see the song behind them, but on *Full Moon Fever* there are few of his characteristic excesses. In fact, the broader sound that Lynne brings to these twelve songs (most written by Petty and Lynne) usually fills them out without cluttering them. On songs like the brooding, deliberate rocker "I Won't Back Down," Lynne adds his trademark layers with a slightly lighter touch than usual; only on the grand-sounding "Love Is a Long Road" do the synthesizers and extra vocals beef up an arrangement with fat instead of muscle.

The opening song, the delicate "Free Fallin'," is not only the standout on *Full Moon Fever* but also one of the most concise, well-rounded performances of Petty's career. Over a spiral of acoustic guitars, Petty sings the tale of an abandoning lover. His story is full of internal inconsistencies — if he doesn't miss her, why is the whole first verse

about her? — that serve to underline the character's misgivings. "I'm free!" Petty cries as he barges into the chorus, holding out some redemption for his narrator. But after a pause, he delivers the dark punch line: He's not free, he's merely "free fallin'." Although Lynne's smooth backing vocals cushion Petty as much as they can, this is one story that holds no happy landing.

"Free Fallin'" isn't the only high point on this sprawling album. The hell-bent "Runnin' Down a Dream," which offers a bruising solo by Campbell, suggests that Petty picked something up from touring with the ferocious Georgia Satellites, and "A Mind With a Heart of Its Own," a pop variation on the Bo Diddley beat, offers up offhand verses absurd and unexpected enough to make even Dylan smile. The barbs reach their peak on "Yer So Bad," which burps up a hilariously understated opening couplet ("My sister got lucky/Married a yuppie"); it's a track that could have fit on *Beatles '65*. "The Apartment Song" — more folk rock, but with a Chuck Berry edge — also engages in some nostalgia, with a drum break swiped wholesale from Buddy Holly's "Peggy Sue."

Although *Full Moon Fever* doesn't sound like a Petty-with-the-Heartbreakers record, there is much on the album to please longtime Petty fans. The chorus of "Depending on You," with its cas-

cading guitar and keyboard parts, is the most overtly Heartbreaker-like, and the hard-earned lullaby "Alright for Now" recalls "It'll All Work Out," from *Let Me Up (I've Had Enough)*.

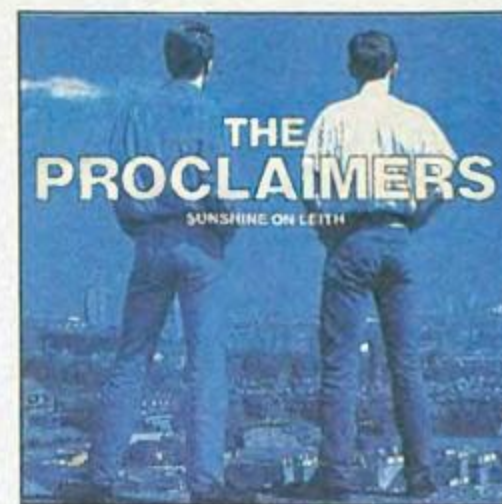
The most inexplicable track is a note-for-note cover of the Byrds' "Feel a Whole Lot Better" that's all too obvious — Petty's voice has always been a ringer for Roger McGuinn's, and this song is the clear antecedent to Petty's "Listen to Her Heart." But Petty's just-as-obvious love for the song steam-rolls over most objections.

The whole point of *Full Moon Fever*, however, is that it makes room for something like "Feel a Whole Lot Better," which would never find a place on a Petty-Heartbreakers record. The album is a chance for Petty to explore, play and maybe fall on his face without having much at stake. After all, he's already at work on his next effort with the Heartbreakers. So even if *Full Moon Fever* isn't Petty's best record, it sure sounds like it was the most fun to make. ■

RECORD RATINGS

- ★★★★★ CLASSIC
- ★★★★ EXCELLENT
- ★★★ GOOD
- ★★ FAIR
- ★ POOR

Ratings are supervised by the 'Rolling Stone' editors.



★★★ ½

SUNSHINE ON LEITH
The Proclaimers

Chrysalis

COME ON NATURE, I DON'T WANT to read a book or talk about the world/Come on nature, I just want to spend some time being boy to the girl." It doesn't come much more simple and direct than that, though compared with *This Is the Story*, the bare-bones 1987 debut by these thick-accented Scottish twins, Craig and Charlie Reid, *Sunshine on Leith* is downright baroque. But the country and rock & roll embroidery — provided by a versatile pack of British folk rockers (including Fairport Convention veterans Jerry Donahue on lead guitar and Dave Mattacks on drums) — obscures not a whit of the innocent charm that carries over intact from the freshman effort.

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