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An aquamarine lava lamp and a classic Rickenbacker guitar: The icons are almost too cool. They're right next to each other, casually set against a wooden wall in Tom Petty's breathtaking Encino, CA, home. Although they don't appear to be deliberately displayed together, the two pop artifacts capture that sense of quirky playfulness and jangling sound that has defined Petty's rock'n'roll style since his debut album with the Heartbreakers back in 1976.

Seated comfortably in front of the guitar and lamp, Petty is smoking cigarettes and settling down to discuss his latest album, *Into the Great Wide Open*; his new Gone Gator Records label; his ongoing travels with the Wilburys; and other Mad Hatter tales. Though the lanky musician speaks softly and betrays a slight Florida drawl, his responses are down and forthright, with none of the usual Hollywood shuck or star-trip jive.

When Petty begins riffing about something that rankles him, his incredibly wry, lyrical wit takes over. Responding to a question about his support for Guns n' Roses, for instance, he bemoans the state of modern rock with a cutting diatribe. "Most other kids [in what] they call rock groups today are like Young Republicans," he says, shaking his head from side to side in disappointment. "They're as safe as milk, no matter how dangerous they look. It's very cookie-cutter. Fabian looks like a hero compared to most of these guys."

Petty knows a thing or two about rebellion. He took on his own record company, MCA, in a battle against rising album prices, stopped B.F. Goodrich from running an ad with a sound-alike singer, and threatened to cancel a New Jersey show when officials banned Greenpeace booths at the Garden State Arts Center. Perhaps his boldest rebel move came in 1989, when he recorded a solo project after seven studio albums with the Heartbreakers. *Full Moon Fever*, produced by ELO's Jeff Lynne with Petty and his longtime guitarist Mike Campbell, went on to sell more than three million copies in the U.S., notching the biggest commercial breakthrough of Petty's career.

Around the same time as the solo sessions, Petty received a different creative jolt when he joined forces with Lynne, Bob Dylan, George Harrison, and Roy Orbison in the first truly super super-group, the Traveling Wilburys. Orbison died shortly after their *Volume 1* debut, but the remaining Wilbury "brothers" recorded the follow-up *Volume 3* last year before Petty started on a



ILLUSTRATION: ALLEN T. MUDGETT

TOM PETTY:

Traveling Heartbreaker

B Y J E F F R E Y R E S S N E R



Heartbreakers reunion recording.

Reunion might be too strong a word. After all, Campbell shared co-producing credit on *Fever* with Petty, while two other Heartbreakers—keyboardist Benmont Tench and bassist Howie Epstein—performed on key tracks. Later, the whole band, including drummer Stan Lynch, backed Petty on a full tour supporting the solo album. On *Into the Great Wide Open*, the group's first studio album since 1987's *Let Me Up (I've Had Enough)*, the Heartbreakers exhibit a sense of renewed commitment. As Petty describes it, the tension some might have expected never materialized.

"It was real normal," he says, with a slight shrug. "It wasn't strange or indifferent or anything. It's actually a relief to [play with] people when you know how they're gonna act. Just getting them to dig the trip and understand what I was doing, and to trust Jeff—that was the biggest hurdle at first. But even that wasn't really a hurdle. The only thing I had in the back of my mind was the hope that they'd trust me. And they did. And they were great."

CD Review: Why did you decide to do an album with the Heartbreakers instead of another solo project?

Tom Petty: Well, I don't want to leave the group. It's as simple as that. I just said to them, "Listen, if I can use Jeff, if you'd be willing to go along with the direction I'm going in, I'd love to do [the new

album] with the group." And that's the way it was. It was a very tentative start, 'cause we didn't have the songs—I kinda wrote as I went along. But it went real good. Everybody liked it, and I didn't feel that I had to turn around and go in the opposite direction.

CDR: How would you describe that direction?

TP: I've been doing a lot more acoustic-based stuff, and it's a lot more melodic than the last record I did with the group, *Let Me Up*. That one was really a wild record, just barely in tune. I'm taking a lot more care with the production now. Not a lot more time, just more care.

CDR: Another difference is having Jeff Lynne behind the control board. How did the group react to his presence?

TP: They dug Jeff. It was a good vibe, you know, having a new person in the room. We all tended to listen to him more than we would each other. He's very cheerful at sessions. And when you've known each other as long as we all have, we can get really dour on some days, real mean and nasty. But Jeff keeps things very happy, very light. And he has a real good sense of organization, so he gets a lot done each day. At this stage in our lives, all of us really dig that—when a lot's done at the end of the day. We've been through the other thing where it's like, "Well, nothin' got done today." Jeff was essential to everything, 'cause it made for a captain of the ship other than me, who they're going to have to put up with anyway.

CDR: Your musical direction and production have evolved, but how do you think your songwriting has changed? It seems like your material is tighter, like you're not trying to jam in as many words and thoughts as before.

TP: Yeah, I dig that I can get away with fewer words. I think my songwriting is better. That's

really the goal—to write songs. I just felt like if we're going to keep making records, we've got to really get better at songs. They've got to constantly improve.

CDR: How do you feel about your old songs?

TP: Some of 'em I like. Some of 'em make me feel like, "Oh, that was good, but I wish I'd done this differently here"—I'm always thinking like I wish we could fix the mix on some. And some make me cringe a little. But there are none that embarrass the shit out of me.

CDR: Now that the Heartbreakers are back again, do you think you'll do another solo album?

TP: Maybe. We'll see how it goes. I like to have the freedom to do a solo album. It really improves my music in general being out of the fold for a while. When you have that sense of freedom, change just comes naturally and you grow up in some ways. Then, coming back, you realize what a good thing it is to have a group like the Heartbreakers. They're so ridiculously good. You could never go out and call up session guys and form a band quite like that. There's something magical about having a group with your friends for so long, and I think they all understand that. We understand that, even if we all have our own desires. Howie has his production thing, Stan's doing real well [he co-wrote two songs with Don Henley on the former Eagle's *End of the Innocence*], and they're all very busy. So the Heartbreakers is no longer our sole outlet for stuff. We can look at it now as a little more special than it was.

CDR: These days it seems odd that you have two bands—the Heartbreakers and the Traveling Wilburys.

TP: Yeah, well, they're different groups. One doesn't work very much. But I like the Wilbury

thing because you learn a lot without even trying. I can see things I wouldn't normally see. Seeing other people's approaches to the same thing is invaluable.

CDR: *Anything specific you've picked up?*

TP: I don't know that you learn anything that's etched in stone, but you start seeing, "That's not a good idea," or "I never thought about that." Like in the way somebody plays the bass—you think, "I wouldn't have put that chord over that, but you can do that." You know, George has so many chords, I've learned so many more guitar chords from him, Jeff, Bob... They're all just talented people, and I'm lucky to get to work with them.

CDR: *Any new plans for the Wilburys?*

TP: Who knows? They're always lurking around the corner. I hope it's an ongoing thing because I really enjoy it. It's a great relief from real life every now and then to just go into that group for a while. I always feel as if I come back a little fresher.

CDR: *With the Heartbreakers, you're the leader, but in the Wilburys you become kind of the kid brother.*

TP: It's a different role. Since I'm not the leader, the pressure's off and I can do other jobs. It's also not a serious thing. We never go in and try to make a record with some serious statement—or any statement at all. It's just to see what you can turn out in six weeks, and that's what we've done, both times: "Today is the time, we start now, and when the clock runs out we're done."

CDR: *I imagine the songwriting process is much different than you're used to, since it's writing by committee.*

TP: Oh, yeah. It's entirely different. I don't think people really understand how much a committee that group is. Sometimes every other word is coming from a different place. Writing a song with four people, or five, is an experience. You have to lose all inhibitions about lyrics. That's one thing that's real good for me. You just blurt out, "Okay, how about *da, da, da, da*." Then somebody would go "oh, and *da, da, daa, da, da, da*" and finish the line for you, and somebody else would go "*da, da, da, da, da, daa, da*" and then it's happening, it's all done, and there's just the editing process.

CDR: *Are there any situations where you wrote a lyric and felt torn between giving it to the Wilburys or the Heartbreakers?*

TP: No, because all the Wilburys' songs are written during the recording sessions. They're usually on tape an hour after you've written 'em. One day we wrote six songs and did the tracks in one afternoon.

CDR: *Six songs?*

TP: Yeah, we put the tracks down live with [drummer] Jim Keltner and then ran and finished the lyrics off.



Behind Tom Petty are (left to right) Mike Campbell on guitar, Benmont Tench on keyboards, Stan Lynch on drums, and Howie Epstein on bass.

CDR: *It sounds like an intense session.*

TP: It was hysterical—that's what was so great about it. In just one afternoon, we did nearly the whole side. We'd sit down, get one done, and before we'd get up somebody would say, "Hey, how about this?" and there'd be another one.

CDR: *So far the Wilburys have released Volume 1 and Volume 3. What happened to Volume 2?*

TP: Ah, it's still floating around. Maybe it'll come out one day.

CDR: *George Harrison supposedly wanted to put it out as a bootleg—just release the album without any publicity.*

TP: That was discussed once, I remember. I don't really know if we ever took a hard look at *Volume 2*. I don't know what we'll do with it.

CDR: *What was on it?*

TP: It's just crazy. I don't remember much, to be honest. I remember a song called "Maxine." We did "Runaway" and a few other oldies, too. And there were probably some more songs we never finished.

CDR: *What was it like in the studio without Roy Orbison?*

TP: We were over [the shock] by then, but of course we missed him and wished he was there. But we never got too gloomy about it; the sessions occurred some time after he died. There was some [outside] controversy about putting somebody else in the group, but there wasn't much controversy within the group. We thought, "Nah, let's just do it as we're used to doing it." We're not doing it to have the ideal band or to please anybody other than ourselves, so we did it that way.

CDR: *The Wilburys never actually went "traveling," although occasionally there are rumors of concerts. Any regrets about not touring?*

TP: I think it could work, if we wanted to do it. I don't think we ever considered it, really. There were a lot of nights when the conversation would roll around to that. But I don't think anybody ever took it seriously. I think it would ruin [the concept], in a way. Then you're obligated to be responsible, and it's not in the character of that group. It would make it very formal, and that would be the wrong spirit.

CDR: *The Wilburys helped revive interest in Roy Orbison, and you did some work on Roger McGuinn's last album. Are there other musicians from the '50s and '60s you'd like to work with?*

TP: Not really. I would certainly always help somebody if I could. I'm more interested in finding some new person that has something going on.

CDR: *Will your new label, Gone Gator Records, be signing new talent?*

TP: Ideally, I'd love to do that—to make some deals where we would say something like, "Do an album or two for us, and when the big guy comes along and wants to take you away, okay—but you owe us one within the next five years." Not deals with big advances; I don't want to be a record mogul or anything. But I would enjoy just finding people and giving them exposure the way they don't normally get it. Unfortunately, I haven't had much time to get into Gone Gator.

CDR: *Will the label follow a regular release schedule or just issue things haphazardly?*

TP: I think it'll be very haphazard, because I don't have time to pursue running a record company. And I don't really want to go hire guys that are good at it, or it'll be just like all the others.

Continued on p. 88

Tom Petty, Then & Now

Into the *Great Wide Open* is one of those albums you put on with great expectations—only to find yourself bored. But you want to listen again. And again. And again. And it starts getting better and better.

The initial indifference stems from the fact that the disc sounds so much like *Full Moon Fever*, Tom Petty's previous release and his only album without the Heartbreakers. Using Jeff Lynne as a producer for *Full Moon Fever* was a pleasantly surprising stroke of pop genius. On paper, the former ELO commander was a bizarre recording mate for Petty, but his influence—the cleaner arrangements, the ELO-type subtleties, the lushness, the emphasis on melody, the warm production—worked perfectly. On *Great Wide Open*, the formula is basically the same. But the surprise is gone.

Even so, this is hardly a failure. Consider the hook-filled, upbeat songs. (Petty and Lynne wrote six; Petty wrote four alone; and Petty, Lynne, and guitarist/co-producer Mike Campbell collaborated on two.) "Learning to Fly," "The Dark of the Sun," "Built to Last," and "Kings Highway" are great cuts. Using Roger McGuinn for back up vocals on "All the Wrong Reasons" is a nice touch; so is the appearance of former ELO keyboardist Richard Tandy on "Two Gunslingers."

The arrangements may not be groundbreaking, but they're sensible, inviting, and full of strumming, uplifting touches. If Lynne is a bit heavyhanded, he's also effective in keeping Petty's voice up-close and personal. And the sound is in line—rich and well-defined, never jarring.

As *Into the Great Wide Open* was reaching record store shelves, so were a trio of reissues that illustrates Petty's development as a songwriter and singer. His first two albums, *Tom Petty & the Heartbreakers* and *You're Gonna Get It!*, have been reissued by his own label, the MCA-distributed Gone Gator. (A quick complaint that MCA will hear from bargain-hunters who have become spoiled by the label's "two-fer" offerings: Both of these short albums would have fit nicely onto one disc.) Meanwhile, Mobile Fidelity has turned Petty's breakthrough release, 1979's *Damn the Torpedoes*, into gold (literally) as part of its Ultradisc series.

First things first. Petty's self-titled debut, from 1976, is a considerable contrast to his new album. Back then, the Heartbreakers sounded tougher, edgier, and more southern-rockin'. "Breakdown" (Petty's first Top 40 entry) and "American Girl" attracted the most attention; 15 years later, they retain their urgency and gritty appeal. In fact, the whole album has aged particularly well, from the opening "Rockin' Around (with You)," a relentlessly raucous Byrds-flavored cut, to the simple rocker "Hometown Blues" to the almost psychedelic, art-rock-styled "Luna."

By the time Petty & the Heartbreakers

recorded their second album, the Byrds influence seemed more pronounced. "When the Time Comes," the leadoff track on *You're Gonna Get It!*, and "No Second Thoughts" sound like vintage Roger McGuinn. But Petty also continued to burnish his own style with such highlights as "Listen to Her Heart," "You're Gonna Get It" (which sounds like a precursor to "Don't Do Me Like That" from *Damn the Torpedoes*), and "Hurt."

The sound of the two Gone Gator re-releases obviously doesn't rival that of *Into the Great Wide Open*. Petty & the Heartbreakers is the better-sounding of the two, giving us a clear sonic view of Petty's voice, Mike Campbell's guitar, and Benmont Tench's keyboards, as well as a good feel for the rhythm section of drummer Stan Lynch and bassist Ron Blair (the latter was subsequently replaced by Howie Epstein).

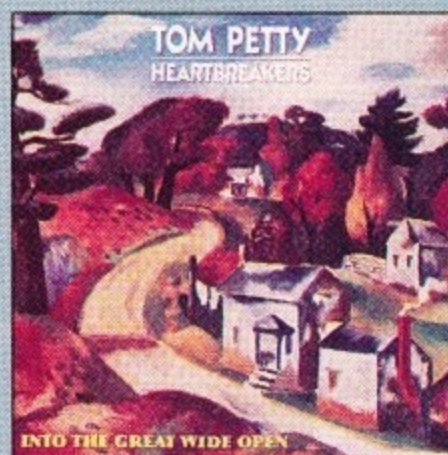
"Anything That's Rock'n'Roll" and "Stranger in the Night" stick out for their fuzzy, noisy sonics—flaws that pop up more frequently on *You're Gonna Get It!* That CD, in fact, sounds older than its predecessor. There's a certain measure of grunginess, even though it's appropriate for the music. On such

cuts as "Magnolia" and the title track, the soundstage is thin, shallow, and slightly muffled. But who expects pristine, astonishing sonics from '70s rock'n'roll created by one of the most important bands spawned in that decade?

Actually, Mobile Fidelity does—at least in the case of *Damn the Torpedoes*. The audiophile label's 24-karat gold reissue gives the recording an extra kick compared to the analog version. Petty's voice still doesn't have the isolated clarity you hear on *Full Moon Fever* or *Into the Great Wide Open*, but that harkens to the tactics of the original recording team (producers Petty and Jimmy Iovine; engineer Shelly Yakus). Overall, Mobile Fidelity has improved *Torpedoes* to the point where its dynamics become more powerful and its tone fuller and richer.

The label couldn't have chosen a better Petty album to intensify. *Torpedoes* gave him two more Top 40 hits—"Refugee" and "Don't Do Me Like That"—as well as a slew of outstanding album cuts. The best is "Here Comes My Girl," but "Even the Losers" and "Louisiana Rain" also help to make this effort Petty's strongest album—yet.

—Larry Canale



Into the Great Wide Open
MCA MCAD-10317
(AAD) 1991 (91)
Disc time: 44:12

8/9



You're Gonna Get It!
Gone Gator/MCA MCAD-10134
(AAD) 1978 (91)
Disc time: 29:37

7/5



Damn the Torpedoes
Mobile Fidelity UDCD 551
(AAD) 1979 (91)
Disc time: 36:43

10/8



Tom Petty & the Heartbreakers
Gone Gator/MCA MCAD-10135
(AAD) 1976 (91)
Disc time: 30:53

9/7

Tom Petty

Continued from p. 30

CDR: A lot of people would probably buy an album because it had your stamp of approval on it. How do you feel when you consider the number of hardcore fans you have?

TP: Well, as you get to be 40 in this business, you look at it and think, "We're just lucky that anybody likes us at all, let alone to be doing as well as we are," because we've never really gone out of our way to be extremely commercial or to present ourselves in the most saleable way.

CDR: For a lot of young people, their first exposure to Tom Petty came from your solo album. It's like that old joke where the kid says, "Weren't the Beatles the group that Paul McCartney was in before Wings?"

TP: I know, it's hilarious. But I do know what you mean about young kids. Real little kids got into *Full Moon Fever*—8- and 9-year-olds. I get so much mail from kids who are pre-teen and just mad for that record. So many parents tell me, "You gotta get a new record, because every time we get in the car our kids want to hear *Full Moon Fever*." I don't know why. I think maybe it's just a real happy album, a real pleasant album... It's a very strange phenomenon. I don't know if the kids got into it from watching the videos on television, or where it came from. But it's a funny time when you can dig your parents' records, too.

CDR: My parents were into Nat King Cole, and now I'm listening to his old albums.

TP: Yeah? I am too. I dig Nat. I got Nat on my jukebox. I dig it. Nothing I like better than getting Nat at the end of the day on the jukebox. Never thought I'd dig that, either, but I do.

CDR: What else have you been listening to?

TP: Nothing in particular. I bought a record of surf music the other day in a "guitar greats" series. I really like that. Otherwise, I'm just listening to the normal stuff, going through the oldies for the most part. There isn't much new stuff that attracts me. I like R.E.M.'s latest record a lot—it's excellent. There's probably somebody else I'm forgetting, but nothing really compels me to get in the car and go buy a record. And that's not a good thing.

CDR: You keep using the word "record"—do you miss vinyl?

TP: I miss the packaging. I just miss having big record sleeves. It seemed like you got more for your money somehow.

It took me a while to come around to CDs. *Into the Great Wide Open* is the first record where I actually made it as a CD, and everything else just had to fall into line. It was primarily made to be a CD sonically, in terms of how much high I could put on, how much bass I could get away with, how much time I could get away with—all those things. I was real pleased that the sound is so good on it, that you can get a much closer realization of what we were going for in the studio. You could put the CD on flat, with no equalizing, and get almost exactly what I was hearing. That depends on the speakers, I suppose. But it's pretty close—much closer than you could on a [vinyl] record. With

records, your stereo really created its own version of that record. I dig records. I still play records, but they've been left behind.

CDR: What do you think of the sound of your older albums on CD?

TP: I haven't really heard a lot of them. But the two on *Gone Gator* [Tom Petty & the Heartbreakers and *You're Gonna Get It*] sound great because I've been able to take the time to deal with them and make sure they sound great. The others were all released—without even a phone call—when the CD boom came. I just discovered them in the racks as they came out. I don't really ever listen to them very much, although I heard *Southern Accents* the other day, and some tracks sounded real good to me and some sounded like they were EQed all wrong—real tinny and bright.

There's another question about how [earlier Tom Petty & the Heartbreakers releases] are really not long records. People ask why we didn't put more mixes on them. I just didn't want to do that. I thought they should be released as they were [originally]. Maybe someday if people cry out for it I'll do that, but there wasn't a lot of leftover stuff. There were some outtakes, but they really just sounded like outtakes. They weren't very good.

CDR: Have you listened much to digital audio tape?

TP: We had a [DAT unit] in the studio. It's okay, but I sense that it cuts the top and the bottom off, although a lot of people probably wouldn't agree with that. DAT is probably fine if it's something you want to listen to music on, but as a tool for my job it still hasn't become as valuable as it should be. DAT is convenient for a lot of things, like if you don't want to play your masters a lot, you can copy them on DAT. But I'd rather see a good recordable CD, even if most of the record industry wouldn't. It would be great to be able to take your rough mixes home on CD at night and play them. It would be fabulous.

On the new record, I didn't take a DAT copy home at night; I'd use cassettes. I thought, "Most of the audience is gonna hear it that way, so let's work in this format."

CDR: How do you feel about cassettes?

TP: They leave a lot to be desired. So much. Those cassettes that come from record companies? You've lost so much it's unbelievable. Just unbelievable! And it's the most popular format! You work all those hours, spend all that time on such intricate details of the sound and then you can't stand it 'cause it's noisy. I hate Dolby. You know, people put Dolby on the things so there aren't any highs. There's no life in the damn thing if you put the Dolby on. You know, they've been brainwashed into thinking, "Oh, Dolby—no noise." There's no sound either!

CDR: You've always been a crusader for lower album prices, even butting heads with your record label some years back when they wanted to hike the cost of your *Hard Promises* album. How do you feel about CD prices hovering in the \$15 range?

TP: They're pretty high. It saddened me when I was talking to a 16- or 17-year-old kid the other day and he told me that most people in his group don't buy a lot of albums 'cause they're expensive. It's a drag.

It used to be great. I mean, I'm old enough that I remember getting an album for three bucks—a mono one. And I could always raise three bucks somehow. If I wanted it, I could go out and collect a crate of bottles, then mow a lawn to get a dollar and seventy-five cents, and by the end of the afternoon I'd have three bucks, I'd buy the album and I'd go home and play it. That was one privilege I had as a kid—access to music. It was affordable.

But now, who knows? There's such a strange economic climate. Everything is expensive, and it's hard for me to go badger the record company when I can see why, in most cases, prices keep going up. I don't really feel as inclined as I was at that time to bitch about it because it's nuts. Just trying to keep concert tickets down is hard when you're going in there and you know your show is two dollars cheaper than your normal ticket. You've got all those people on the road and they cost more and more and more. To build the set costs more this year than it did last year. It's the age-old story, I guess. But at some point it's going to have to level off, or it'll eventually wind up out of the consumer's grasp. Then it will be only the elite people who buy CDs and go to concerts. ■

D I S C O G R A P H Y		
Title (Year of Release)	Catalog No.	CDR Performance/ Sound Rating
With the Heartbreakers, plus solo recordings		
Tom Petty & the Heartbreakers (1976)	MCA MCAD-10135	9/7
You're Gonna Get It! (1978)	MCA MCAD-10134	7/5
Damn the Torpedoes (1979)	Mobile Fidelity UDCD 551 (Also on MCA MCAD-31161)	10/8
Hard Promises (1981)	MCA MCAD-31066	10/7
Long After Dark (1982)	MCA MCAD-31027	7/7
Southern Accents (1985)	MCA MCAD-5486	8/8
Pack Up the Plantation Live (1986)	MCA MCAD2-8021	8/8
Let Me Up (I've Had Enough) (1987)	MCA MCAD-5836	8/7
Full Moon Fever (1989)	MCA MCAD-6253	9/9
Into the Great Wide Open (1991)	MCA MCAD-10317	8/9
With the Traveling Wilburys (on Wilbury/Warner Bros.)		
Volume 1 (1988)	25796-2	9/9
Volume 3 (1990)	26324-2	9/8