

RS694 ALL THE NEWS THAT FITS

ROCK & ROLL

THE ROLLING STONES *By Rich Cohen* 25
The *Voodoo Lounge* has turned out to be the highest-grossing tour ever. As the Stones travel, they are followed by rave reviews. And what had been seen as an absurdity — the band's age — has turned into triumph.

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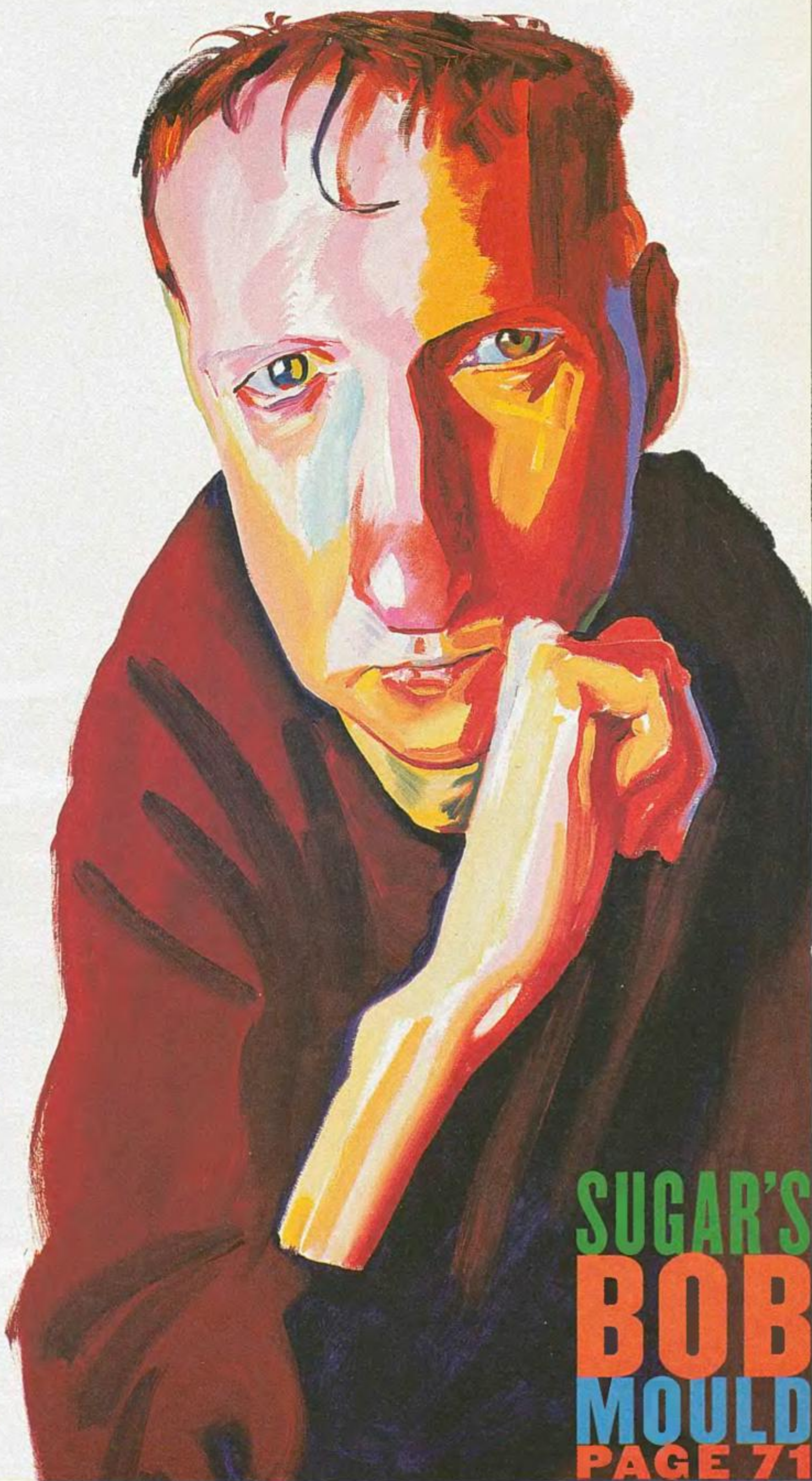
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COVER: Photograph of Steven and Liv Tyler by Albert Watson, New York City, September 1994. Hair for Liv by Jacqueline Colligan for Elizabeth Watson. Makeup by Rumiko for the Arimino Salon Ishi, New York. Styling for Steven Tyler by Lauren Ehrenfeld for Celestine, Los Angeles. Styling for Liv Tyler by Derrick Procope for Butler Reghanti.



RECORDINGS AMERICAN BOYS



★★★★
WILDFLOWERS
Tom Petty
Warner Bros.

IT'S EASY TO TAKE TOM PETTY FOR granted. Among his generation of heartland-rock heroes he's conspicuous for not having cultivated a clear public persona. Neither a blue-collar poet like Bruce Springsteen nor an outspoken maverick like Neil Young, Petty is most familiar to us in the dryly goofy, self-effacing guises he adopts in his videos — the Mad Hatter haplessly burping into the camera or the adoring oaf [Cont. on 97]

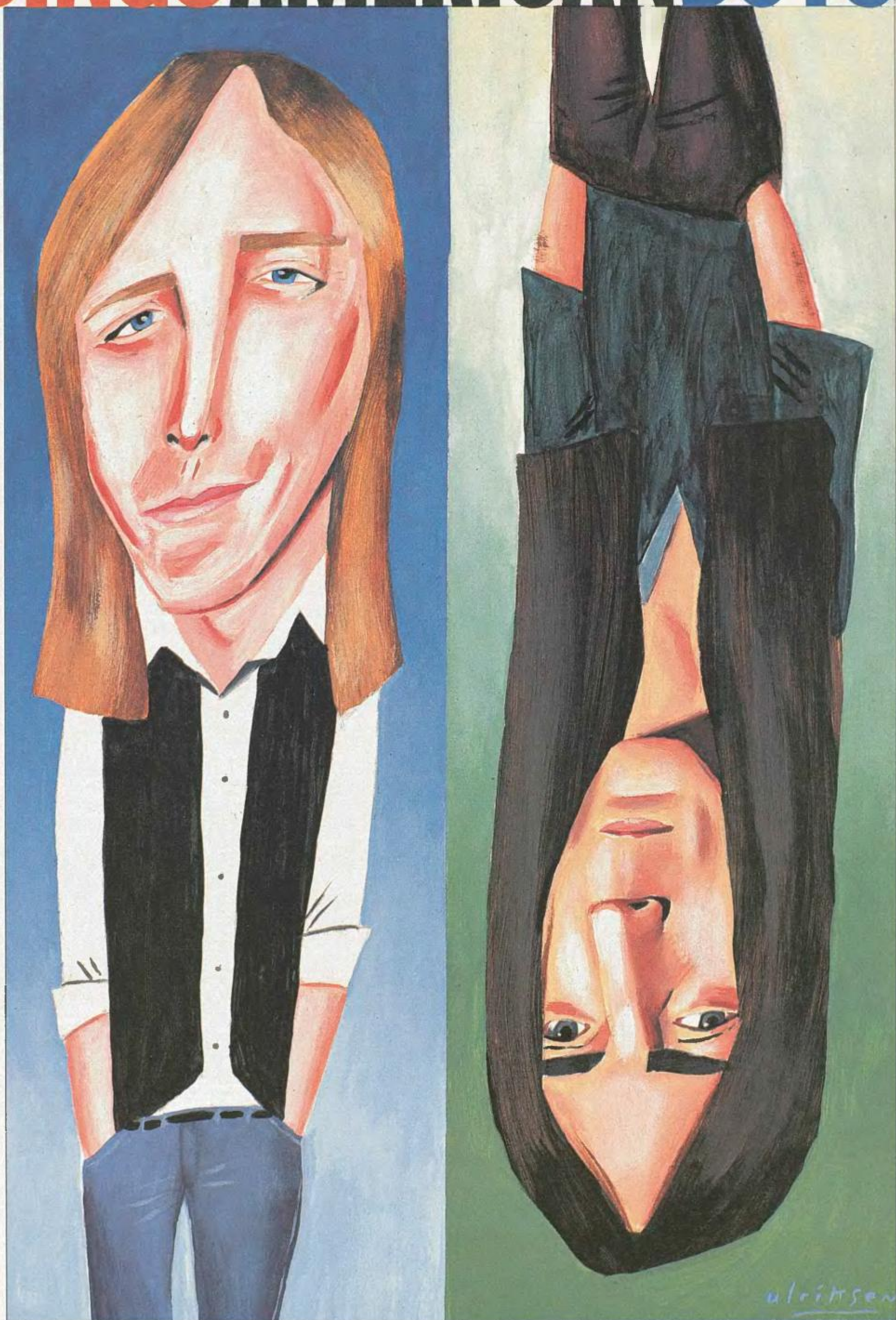
BY ELYSA GARDNER



★★★★ 1/2
AMERICA
The Black Crowes
American

AS BOLD AND RAMSHACKLE, HEART-felt and personal as rock & roll itself, *Amorica* finds the Black Crowes finding themselves. Still defiant in their untrendy insistence that the guitar bravado and rebel pose of classic rock furnishes an inspiration as authentic as that of blues and country, the Atlanta sextet now spin off from their heavy '60s and '70s influences so fluidly that they shake freer than ever before from the retro-

BY PAUL EVANS



rock tag that has dogged the band. The Crowes haven't ceased their cocky pil-laging of the universal jukebox — echoes of the Stones and Led Zep resound — but in jolting the mix with offbeat kicks (Latino rhythms, wah-wah guitar, strange vocal treatments), they sound remarkably fresh.

A knockout debut, *Shake Your Money Maker* (1990), presented brothers Chris and Rich Robinson, a fab rhythm section and guest godfather Chuck Leavell (keyboardist for the Allmans and Stones) reeling off Faces-meets-Skynyrd riffs more toughly than anyone since their homeboys the Georgia Satellites. At a time when most young players seemed hardly to have heard of Otis Redding, the Crowes' crunching cover of "Hard to Handle" was a reminder, and with "She Talks to Angels" (still their finest tune), they showed a gift for unsentimental balladry. Southerners rekindling the Keith Richards motifs Keith had copped from earlier Southern R&B was a cool payback; Chris' gruff vocals suggested a pre-sell-out Rod Stewart or an unwearied Paul Rodgers; and with grunge yet to explode, the sound was enough to feed guitar-hungry hordes. With its stronger material ("Thorn in My Pride," "Bad Luck Blue Eyes Good-bye") allowed to meander, *The Southern Harmony and Musical Companion* (1992) disappointed — even if Chris' delivery had matured and the band's rock power remained unchecked.

Amorica boosts and expands on that power. A wham-bam number, "Gone," with drummer Steve Gorman dealing vicious syncopation of the sort John Bonham patented, starts things off, and the Crowes pounce lean and brutal. "Gone" is prime Chris Robinson, all wry phrasing and desperado attitude. Pissed, nervy, stubborn, Chris writes best about the inchoate urge for deliverance ("Want you to burn me, baby... Cover your eyes with my ashes/C'mon, why don't you pray for me/Sit back, and watch my divine spark flash"). It's less his gypsy scarves and *Between the Buttons* drag that make him a true rocker than his unquenched restlessness. "A Conspiracy" hits equally hard, but "High Head Blues" shows new range: Eric Bobo's percussion lends a low-riding strut, a relaxed assurance the song shares with the countryish "Wiser Time," its pedal steel provided by American Music Club's Bruce Kaphan.

"Cursed Diamond" updates the rhythm & blues testifying the Crowes first assayed on *Money Maker*'s "Jealous Again." It's another Chris Robinson confessional ("I hate myself/Doesn't everybody hate themselves"), as is "NonFiction" — the latter, however, brightens its cartoon gloom ("Some like their water shallow/And I like mine deep/Tied to the bottom/With a noose around my feet") with humor ("While

you pull your hair out/I buy the drinks at the bar") and Eddie Harsch's delicate keyboard work.

Electric piano and the chugging guitar interplay of Rich Robinson and Marc Ford move "She Gave Good Sunflower" closest to the Rod Stewart/Ron Wood stomp the Crowes' have flashed before. It leads into the only real clunker, "P. 25 London," a rocker ruined by an inane Alice Cooper-like chorus ("Empty bottles saviors they crawl... There's a hornet's nest in my head"). The epic "Ballad of Urgency," however, redeems *Amorica*, and the album ends with gems: the acoustic bottleneck-powered "Downtown Money Waster" and Chris Robinson's most soulful performance yet, "Descending."

Their swagger intact and their musical inventiveness progressing, the Black Crowes are evolving like the great bands they respect. And that respect has nothing of the archivist's reverence, no follow-the-leader submissiveness. Ultimately, the Crowes are classic rockers simply in their unholy worship of the groove. ■

PETTY

[Cont. from 95] dragging around Kim Basinger's corpse.

Petty's music, however, has always demanded a respect that no amount of wry humility could undermine, and his new album, *Wildflowers*, proves no exception. On it the fortysomething rocker offers 15 songs that focus on the conflicting emotions of adulthood, from rueful nostalgia to cynical self-doubt to hope and yearning. True, *Wildflowers* is not as sonically adventurous as *Southern Accents* (1985) or as instantly accessible as *Full Moon Fever* (1989), Petty's two most impressive albums since the early peak he reached in 1979 with *Damn the Torpedoes*. But *Wildflowers*' resolute passion and maturity grow more evident with each listen until the album acquires a haunting, enduring resonance.

Wildflowers is tagged a solo effort, sans the Heartbreakers, Petty's backing band since the '70s. Like *Full Moon Fever*, his only previous solo project, the new release features two musicians who have been central to the Heartbreakers' sound since the beginning: guitarist Mike Campbell (who also co-wrote two songs on the disc) and pianist Benmont Tench. (Bassist Howie Epstein, a member of Petty's band since the early '80s, also appears on several tracks.) And manning the boards this time with Petty and Campbell is *Wunderkind* industry honcho and producer Rick Rubin, whose strength lies in his ability to pinpoint and accentuate the strengths of the artists he works with (particularly veteran artists like Mick Jagger and Johnny Cash, with whom he has worked recently).

In Petty's case the key virtues are grit

and grace, and Rubin's taut, muscular production emphasizes both these gifts. Buoyant tracks like "A Higher Place" and "You Wreck Me" remind us that Petty and his band were the first to marry the chiming lyricism of the Byrds to a more raw, harder style of rock & roll, prefiguring the approach R.E.M. and others would later use to revitalize contemporary music.

Also at the fore is Petty's sense of humor. For all its urgency, *Wildflowers* brims with flashes of the singer's trademark deadpan wit, from the crisply rhythmic "You Don't Know How It Feels" — on which he asserts, "Let me get to the point/Let's roll another joint/And turn the radio loud/I'm too alone to be proud" — to the sly, snarling irony of "Honey Bee" and "Cabin Down Below," two steady burners fueled by Petty and Campbell's testosterone-drunk electric guitars (and by such lyrics as "I'm a man in a trance/I'm a boy in short pants/When I see my honeybee").

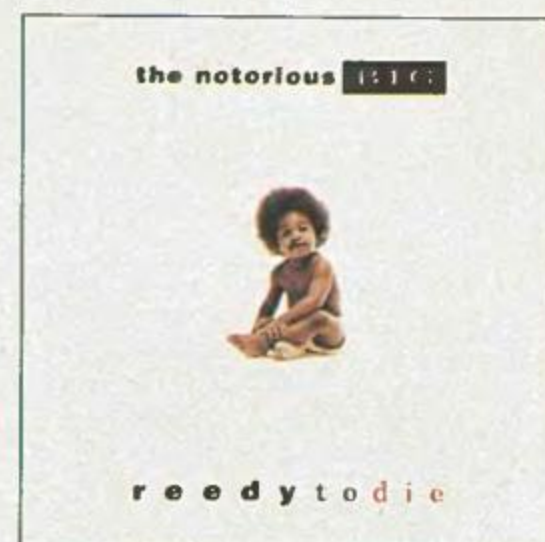
On "It's Good to Be King," Petty assumes the identity of your basic self-obsessed male, singing, "It's good... to have your own way... It's good to meet girls/A sweet little queen/Who can't run away." Characteristically, his sarcasm stops short of judgmental sneering. "Can't help it if I dream from time to time," he allows sympathetically.

But the heart of *Wildflowers* can be found in its more wistful numbers. "Which way to something better," Petty wonders on the bittersweet "Time to Move On." "Which way to forgiveness/Which way do I go?" "Don't Fade on Me" is more unsettling: Over a darkly lyrical acoustic duet with Campbell, the singer pleads with a lover who's drifting from him and possibly from herself.

"Wake Up Time" is a lovely coda, a dramatic ballad about the struggle to triumph over failed dreams, with Petty on piano (temporarily filling in for Tench, whose supple playing supports other tracks). It's one of the album's more poignant songs, thanks to Petty's stringent musicianship and his typically unaffected vocal.

As a final note, it's worth mentioning that *Wildflowers* arrives about a month after the release of *You Got Lucky*, a tribute album (yes, another tribute album) featuring endearingly scrappy, distortion-fueled covers of Petty classics by such relatively obscure groups as Everclear ("American Girl") and Fig Dish ("Don't Come Around Here No More"). Of course, those seeking proof of Petty's influence on today's younger bands can also look to Soul Asylum's "Runaway Train."

Wildflowers is worthy of that long-standing impact — and evidence that this American boy is moving through middle age with all the gusto and poise that his admirers have come to expect. ■



★★★★
READY TO DIE
The Notorious B.I.G.
Bad Boy/Arista

CROOKLYN'S NOTORIOUS B.I.G. walks along the razor's edge, gat in hand, a self-described menace to society (and sexual dynamo), yet haunted by his own propensity for heartless violence and self-destruction. "When I die, fuck it, I want to go to hell/'Cause I'm a piece of shit/It ain't hard to fuckin' tell," he says on "Suicidal Thoughts" before splattering his brains all over the wall, claiming that a heaven filled with "goody-goodies" has no place for an evil muthafucka like himself. The sound of the gunshot and the drop of the telephone receiver after he pulls the trigger are at once bone chilling and completely irresponsible, yet you can't help being affected by it. *Ready to Die* is filled with moments like this.

Like any good director (or rapper for that manner), B.I.G. maintains a consistent level of tension by juxtaposing emotional highs and lows. One minute he sits on the curb reminiscing about more innocent times when parents had more control over their kids and there weren't so many guns ("Things Done Changed"); the next, rapping against himself as part of a Laurel and Hardy-like stickup duo, he's the one doing dirt, boasting of a boosting career that dates back to the days of slavery ("Gimme the Loot"). A few songs later he makes something of himself in the rap game ("Juicy") but soon after, in "Everyday Struggle," barks of his frustration with the fast life, the lack of people he can trust and how he hears "death knockin'" at [his] front door. With his prodigious, often booming voice overwhelming the track, he sweeps his verbal camera high and low, painting a sonic picture so vibrant that you're transported right to the scene. He raps in clear, sparse terms, allowing the lyrics to hit the first time you hear them.

Not that every moment finds B.I.G.

RECORD RATINGS

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

Ratings are supervised by the "Rolling Stone" editors.