

APRIL 16, 1999 ISSUE 1039 \$10.00

# THE ALBUM NETWORK

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## Tom Petty And The Heartbreakers

# Tom Petty

## And The Heartbreakers

Interview by  
Jim Ladd  
edited by  
Melissa Blazek

**APRIL 1** of this year was the 25th anniversary of the day Tom Petty and a ragged band of young musicians departed Gainesville, Florida, in a caravan of cars headed for the mythical lights of Hollywood in search of fame, fun and a record deal.

It took a few years, but they found all three.

Since that fateful cross-country roadtrip, Tom Petty And The Heartbreakers have perpetuated a distinctive vein of music that's part Byrdian grace, part fiery orange and purple California sunset, part Southern redneck snarl, part reckless rockabilly elation and all American rock & roll.

**APRIL 13, 1999**, marked the release of *Echo*, a collection of songs drenched with tales of loneliness and of resilient American Girls, of reflection and escape—an organic blend of the melancholy scent of Petty's second solo effort, *Wildflowers*, and the spunk of *Let Me Up (I've Had Enough)*. But its restless spirit is indicative of what Petty and his band have endured in the last few years: they ended an 11-year relationship with MCA to join the Warner Bros.' stable, stickman Stan Lynch relinquished his position after 20 years behind the kit, and Petty was divorced from his wife of 22 years. The tumult and transition the group was thrust into, however, has resulted in an album of uncompromising faith and depth. Radio's ravenous reception to *Echo's* first two singles, "Free Girl Now" and "Room At The Top," is surely an indication of how hungry fans of TP And The Heartbreakers are for a new album. It looks like it's going to be a good summer for rolling down the car windows and blaring some *Echo* through the night air.

—Melissa Blazek

The following is an edited excerpt from last week's SFX Radio Network World Premiere of *Echo*, which took place in New York City a few days before Petty and his posse were the musical guests on both "Saturday Night Live" and "The Late Show With David Letterman." Our host, Jim Ladd, sat down with Petty and Mike Campbell to talk about the music, money and the making of their latest album.

"I worry these days, with the advent of the \$150 ticket, that [rock & roll and pop music] could become the music of the elite, and that is not what this is about, not why it came to be."

**ORIGIN** Gainesville, Florida, but LA is home now.

**LINEUP** Tom Petty (vocals, guitar, harmonica); Mike Campbell (guitar); Brenton Tench (keys); Howie Epstein (bass, vocals).

**GUEST MUSICIANS** Scott Thurston (guitar); Steve Ferrone (drums).

**ABOUT THE CURRENT CD** *Echo* is the 10th studio album by Tom Petty And The Heartbreakers, the first full-blown release since 1991's *Into The Great Wide Open*. Their last recording together was the soundtrack for actor/director Ed Burns' sophomore film, *She's The One*, in 1996.

**PRODUCED BY** Tom Petty & Mike Campbell with Rick Rubin

#### DISCOGRAPHY

*Tom Petty And the Heartbreakers (Gone Gator, 1976)*

*You're Gonna Get It! (Gone Gator, 1978)*

*Damn The Torpedoes (MCA, 1979)*

*Hard Promises (MCA, 1981)*

*Long After Dark (MCA, 1982)*

*Pack Up The Plantation: Live! (MCA, 1985)*

*Southern Accents (MCA, 1985)*

*Let Me Up (I've Had Enough) (MCA, 1987)*

*Full Moon Fever (MCA, 1989) (Petty solo)*

*Into The Great Wide Open (MCA, 1991)*

*Wildflowers (Warner Bros., 1994) (Petty solo)*

*Songs And Music From She's The One (Warner Bros., 1996)*

*Echo (Warner Bros., 1999)*

**LABEL** Warner Bros.

**ECHO IS PERHAPS THE MOST DEEPLY PERSONAL ALBUM YOU'VE RELEASED IN A LONG TIME, MAYBE EVER.**

**Tom Petty:** "Yeah, it's very personal. It just kind of fell out of me. I didn't do second drafts, I didn't correct anything, I didn't even worry if things didn't rhyme. (laughs) I just went with what was there, so I guess, in retrospect, you look back at [the songs] and go, 'Oh, I see what I was thinking.' But I think if I knew what I was thinking about [when I was writing them], I would have been too embarrassed to write them."

**MIKE, WHEN YOU HELP ARRANGE AND PLAY ON A SONG THAT'S THAT PERSONAL, IS IT DIFFERENT THAN DOING SOME OF THE STUFF THAT THE HEARTBREAKERS HAVE DONE IN THE PAST?**

**Mike Campbell:** "No, I mean a song's a song. You know, if he brings in a song, he'll usually play it on acoustic guitar and we just kind of join in around it. I think what he was saying about when you look back on it later, sometimes you really see what the story was about more...."

**TP:** "We're so busy just getting the chords right...it's only later they go, 'Are you dredging up your personal problems?'"

**HOW LITERALLY SHOULD WE TAKE SOME OF THESE SONGS?**

**TP:** "Well, take them as literal as you want. I mean, it's up to the listener to make his own little movie of each song, and let it affect him how he or she wants it to. If it lifts you up, then it was meant to lift you up. And if it gives you some information you needed, then even better. I mean, you gotta remember, it's rock & roll music—it's not supposed to be that good, you know?"

**THE FIRST TRACK, "ROOM AT THE TOP," CONJURES UP THE FEELING OF A LUXURIOUS LONELINESS, LIKE A SOFT, SAD PALACE OF ISOLATION. IS IT STRICTLY A METAPHOR OR WERE YOU ACTUALLY IN A PENTHOUSE WHEN YOU WROTE THIS?**

**TP:** "No, no, I was far from a penthouse. I think I was in a really terrible mood. It's one of the few times I've been able to write when I was in a really bad mood. I felt a little forlorn and I just went out in the back of my house and sat down at this little piano I have and this song rolled out; I made a quick tape so I wouldn't forget it 'cause it was really late at night. And then in the morning I took it over to the session with the Heartbreakers and they added their own kind of swing to it. They made it into something entirely different than I had pictured in my mind, but that's kind of the great thing of working with a band, you know? Especially a band that's been together for so long. You don't have to talk a lot, they just start doing it."

**WE WERE DISCUSSING THE FACT THAT THE ALBUM IS VERY ATMOSPHERIC WITH REALLY MINIMAL INSTRUMENTATION; YOU TOLD ME THERE WAS A BAND THAT YOU LISTENED TO BEFORE YOU STARTED RECORDING ECHO.**

**TP:** "Yeah, before we started we were listening to The Doors a lot. The album's not anything like a Doors album, but what we admired about them was the use of space in the arrangements. It's often the hole in the music—the air and the space around the instruments is so important. Like here in this album, I don't think we ever use more than four or five, maybe six instruments. But it's very big and present and that's a result of space—so, we can thank The Doors for that. And Carl Wilson, I wanted to say 'Room At The Top' was...I was really trying to imitate Carl Wilson of The Beach Boys, with his angelic voice."

**"COUNTING ON YOU" ALSO DEALS WITH LOOKING FOR SOLACE IN A WORLD OF UNCERTAINTY. YOU, OR PERHAPS THE CHARACTER IN THE SONG, IS WILLING TO BARTER THINGS FOR COMPANIONSHIP, IT'S RATHER LIKE A....**

**TP:** "Garage sale, yeah."

**YEAH. A GARAGE SALE FOR TRUST.**

**TP:** "Yeah, that was a really insecure number there, trading your Eldorado for love. But...."

**IT'S HAPPENED BEFORE WITH GUYS.**

**TP:** "It has, it's happened to people I know."

**THE FIRST SINGLE OFF ECHO IS CALLED "FREE GIRL NOW." WAS THIS WRITTEN ABOUT THE LIBERATION OF A SPECIFIC WOMAN STUCK IN SOME DEAD-END JOB?**

**TP:** "Yeah it was, someone I knew was having her butt pinched and being intimidated by her boss, they wouldn't let her close her door...I never really understood that sort of harassment in such vivid detail, to where I was saying, 'Well just quit, just leave.' [She said] 'I can't quit, this is my living.' So I just picked up the old guitar one night and out it came...you a free girl now."

**THAT WAS THE ANSWER TO MY QUESTION ON YOUR FEELINGS ON SEXUAL HARASSMENT, IF YOU'RE FOR IT OR AGAINST IT—BUT OBVIOUSLY YOU'RE AGAINST IT.**

**TP:** "Yeah. You know, I sometimes harass myself sexually. I pinch my own ass occasionally, and go, 'Looking good, Tommy.'"

**TOM, ONE OF THE THINGS THAT I'VE ALWAYS RESPECTED ABOUT YOU IS THAT YOU'VE NEVER BEEN AFRAID TO TAKE A STAND WHEN YOU FELT STRONGLY ABOUT SOMETHING. WHAT GAVE YOU THE CONVICTION TO DO THOSE THINGS WHEN SO MANY PEOPLE IN THIS BUSINESS WILL GO ALONG WITH ALMOST ANYTHING RATHER THAN JEOPARDIZE THEIR CAREER?**

**TP:** "Well, I don't know, I try to remember. I was very young and idealistic, I think I still am idealistic, in a way. More than the idea of the [price of my] records being raised a dollar was the idea that they were gonna use my success to do it. I've always thought this music, rock & roll and pop music, should be accessible to the average guy out there. I worry these days, with the advent of the \$150 ticket and so on, that this music could become the music of the elite, and that is not what this is about, it's not why it came to be."

**MC:** "You know, when we were growing up we didn't have much money. To go to a concert back then, even just to scrape up that kind of money, was a big deal."

**TP:** "It's sad, it sucks! \$1,000 a ticket? \$150 [a ticket]? I hate to...let's break the news: (dropping his voice) it ain't worth it. There ain't no damn rock band worth \$150. Don't pay it, baby. And them prices will come right down."