

{ *TRIBUTES from Tom Petty, Mick Jagger, Keith Richards, Yoko Ono, Elton John, Jim Keltner, Paul Simon and Bob Dylan* }

Remembering GEORGE



“I’m blessed to have known him.”

TOM PETTY

IFIRST MET HIM in 1974 when I came out to Los Angeles. I hadn’t been out here very long. I was working at Leon Russell’s, and there were a few nights with sessions with George and Ringo. It’s a scary thing meeting Beatles, but George was so nice to me and included me in everything. Then our paths didn’t cross again until years later. This was probably ’85 or ’86, when the Heartbreakers were touring England with Bob Dylan. George came one night to see us in Birmingham. Bob was busy with something, and so we wound up just talking.

I reminded him that we’d met, and there was some kind of weird click. It felt like we had known each other all our lives, and in a very personal way. We wound up just hanging a lot. I have a great photo somewhere – it was my birthday, and George brought a little cake to my dressing room. In the photo, there is me with George and Jeff Lynne, Roger McGuinn, Bob Dylan and Mike Campbell – all of my favorite people right there, and it was so sweet. I think Ringo was there as well. That night there was a surprise hurricane in London, and my life never felt the same again after that hurricane.

Interviews by
MIM UDOVITCH
and DAVID WILD

I went back to L.A., and almost by fate I went into a restaurant, spur of the moment. I hadn’t planned to go, and the waiter came over and said, “Oh, your friend is in the next room, he wants to see you.” I didn’t know who he meant. I walked in, and it was George. He said, “God, it’s so weird, I was just asking Jeff

Lynne for your number."

He said, "Where are you going?" I said, "I'm just going home." He said, "Do you mind if I go with you?" He came to my house and stayed for days. George came to L.A. fairly often, and I went to England and visited him a lot. That's going to be the hard thing - going to England from now on. It will seem so strange with him not there. See, George really treasured his friends. Mike Campbell was saying, "George was the only kind of friend I knew who would bring you a gift every time he saw you." He once brought me four ukuleles in a week.

Four?

I said, "George, I don't think I need four ukuleles." He said, "Well, this one is better than the other ones. And it's just good to have them here - you never know when we're going to all be over and need them." George's idea of a band was that everybody hung. From what he told me, the Beatles were that way. They were very, very tight. He really wanted the Traveling Wilburys to be like that. Like, "If we're going to the party, we're all going." I'm so glad I got to be in a band with him. He taught me so much.

What was it like being in a band with Bob Dylan?

George quoted Bob like people quote Scripture. Bob really adored George, too. George used to hang over the balcony videoing Bob while Bob wasn't aware of it. Bob would be sitting at the piano playing, and George would tape it and listen to it all night.

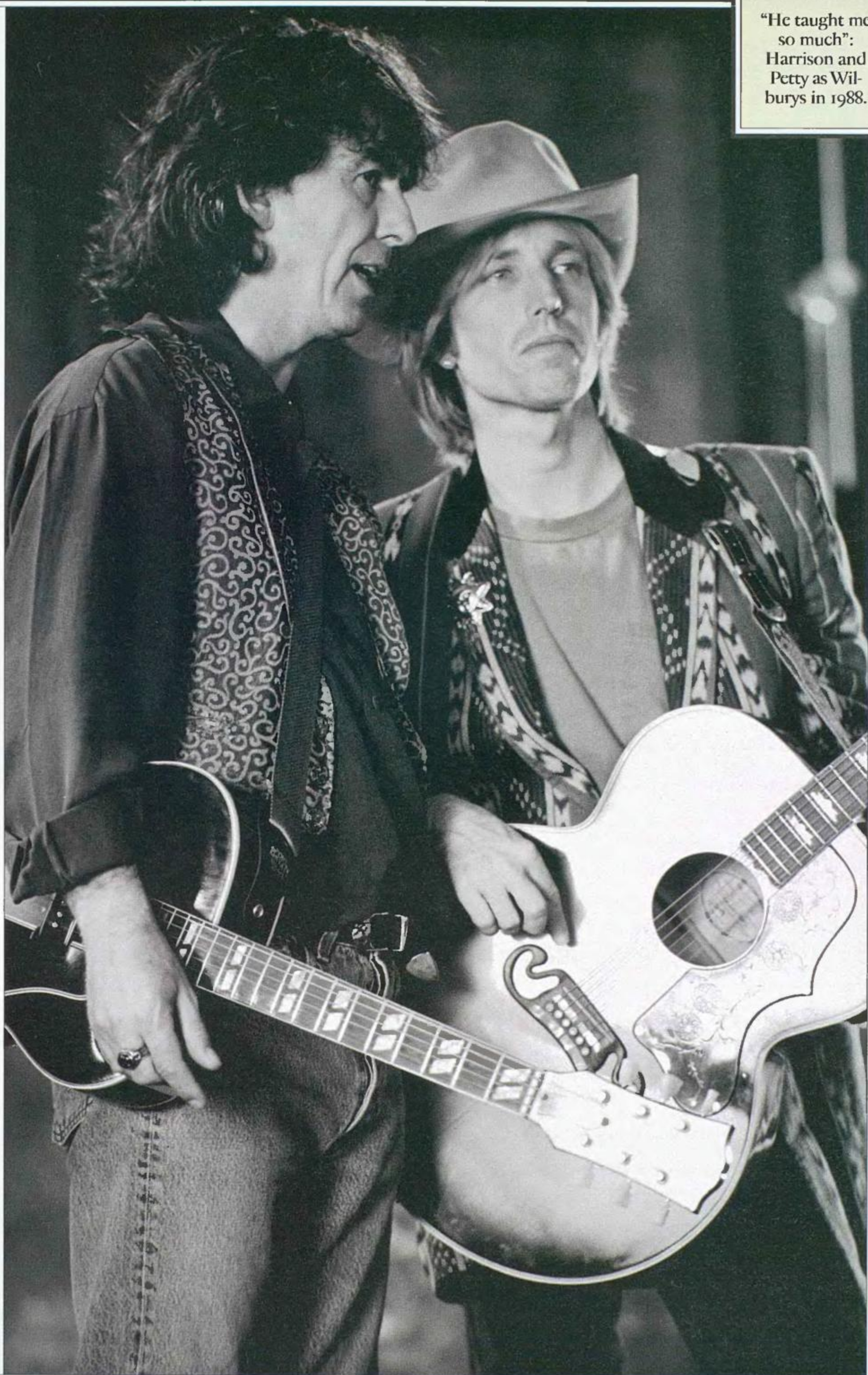
So George had his own private Dylan bootlegs?

Yeah. One day George was hiding in the hedge at the house where we were recording. As everybody flew off, George would rise up out of the bushes with his video going. And he did that with Bob. I think George frightened Bob. When the Wilburys started, George was so reverent of Bob. At the end of the first day, he said, "We know that you're Bob Dylan and everything, but we're going to just treat you and talk to you like we would anybody else." And Bob went, "Well, great. Believe it or not, I'm in awe of you guys, and it's the same for me." I said to George, "That is really amazing, how you said that to Bob." George goes, "I can say those sort of things. But you can't" [laughs]. George adored Bob Dylan, like, "Dylan makes Shakespeare look like Billy Joel." And George absolutely adored the Wilburys. That was his baby from the beginning, and he went at it with such great enthusiasm. The rest of his life, he considered himself a Wilbury.

It doesn't really sound like he was the quiet one.

Well, he never shut up. George had

"He taught me so much": Harrison and Petty as Wilburys in 1988.



Remembering GEORGE

a lot to say. Boy, did he have a lot to say. That's hysterical to me, you know, that he was known as the quiet one. I assume he got that name because the other ones were so much louder. I mean, they were very loud people [laughs]. One time he told me, "Me and Olivia had Paul and Linda over the other night, and you would have thought there was a hundred people in the house, it was so loud." I'll tell you, nobody I've encountered ever lived his life more every day than George did. He crammed in a lot of living and didn't waste his time. And he had an idea a minute. Some nights he would have so many great ideas. George really said everything that crossed his mind. I used to say, "You really can't get a thought to your brain without it slipping out your mouth." And he was painfully honest. It was an endearing trait, but sometimes you hoped that he wouldn't be quite as honest as he was going to be.

Was it sometimes difficult to be around him?

Let's be honest. There was Cranky George, and he could be very cynical at times. He would always be the first to nail himself as being too cynical, but he was quite funny when he was really cynical.

How do you think he felt about the Beatles as he got older?

I just know what I've heard from George as the years went by. But he was very funny, like, "The Beatles, they weren't all that they were cracked up to be" [laughs]. He loved the Beatles. He used to bitch sometimes about individual Beatles who got on his nerves. But he really loved them down deep, and I knew this. I think that a lot of George's personality was formed by John. This is just a guess, but that was the way it appeared to me. He looked up to John so much. He said, "Oh, John would be a Wilbury in a second." He'd say about Paul, "Paul is a year older than me, and he still is." But he really loved Paul, too. And he really loved Ringo.

What George Harrison songs mean the most to you?

Oh, God, there are so many. "Here Comes the Sun" always has a big effect on me. "Isn't It a Pity" is a masterpiece.

Any of the songs you recorded with him?

I loved "End of the Line." I remember the day he wrote it. He had started it off on the piano. And we all kind of sat in a group. "Handle With Care" I like. His enthusiasm was very contagious in a recording session, in a writing session. He just had unbridled en-

thusiasm. One of the things I'll miss most is when he used to drop by and he would always have a guitar or a ukulele in his hands most of the evening. He taught me so much guitar. I miss him showing me the guitar and some Beatles lick that I never could figure out. He would show these licks to me, and they would be the simplest things in the world, but they'd eluded me because I didn't think they could be that simple. But what a beautiful player he was. He just had that extreme taste. He really was something on the guitar.

And the ukulele, too?

He really got into the ukulele. It sounds kind of corny, but it gave him so much joy, you know. I was there when he first discovered it. The rest of his life was ukulele. He played the hell out of the thing. When my kids were little, we could clear rooms with those things, because they knew George was going to carry on till daylight with the ukulele.

sing all the songs. It was just not his idea of fun.

The thing he was proudest of was the Beatles. He said the Beatles put out such a positive message. He was appalled at the things being said in pop music. Once he got into his Indian music, that rock & roll music to him was in the past. I don't think he had much interest in rock music past about '57. I remember him visiting me on tour in Germany. He would come to the side of the stage and look out. But he really didn't want to go on. He would go, "It's so loud and smoky, and they are acting so crazy. I just feel better back here."

In the car today, I was listening to a song you two wrote together, "Cheer Down." Where did that one come from?

Olivia would say that to George when he got a little too happy. He would get a burst of enthusiasm, and she'd say, "OK, cheer down, big fellow."

“George
quoted Dylan
like people
quote
Scripture.”

For a guy who loved music and people so much, he rarely played in public.

He was never far from music. The last time he came over here, which wasn't that long ago, he was playing the guitar and singing, singing me new songs that he had written, which were just so beautiful. I said, "I wish you would just put a mike up, and let's tape you just like this." He didn't want to do it - "Maybe later." But he told me something once like, "I never really pursued a solo career. *All Things Must Pass* was a reaction to leaving the Beatles. I had to do something." And when that went so well, he made another one. But he never really had a manager or anybody to report to, and I don't think he had any interest in touring. He told me many times he was very uncomfortable being the guy up front having to

Were you impressed with Olivia's defense of George when he was attacked in their home in 1999?

When I heard about it, I sent George a fax, and it just said, "Aren't you glad you married a Mexican girl?" [laughs] Olivia really kicked ass. She is a beautiful person. His son, Dhani, is a beautiful kid, man. I've seen him recently. He is doing very well. Very strong and inspired. Olivia had the hardest job in the world, because she loved George more than all of us, and she really took care of him and cleared the path in front of him, behind him, and inherited that crazy life, you know.

Do you believe his spiritual life helped him cope with what had to be a horrible few years?

I would think it helped him immensely. He is just a really brave guy, and he died with a great deal of dignity.

It's so much easier for me than if he had died that night in the attack. I don't think I could have dealt with that. I told him so. When I put on my TV the morning he was stabbed, it looked like he had died, there were so many biographical things coming up on the TV. After that, I told him, "I already kind of went through your death." And I said, "Just do me a favor and don't die that way, because I just can't handle it." He said he promised me he wasn't going out that way.

Not that long ago, he released a statement telling people not to worry about him. Was that just characteristic of him?

I'll tell you, the media wasn't very sweet in the last year of his life. He was probably the most hounded of his whole life when he was trying to deal with that. Especially in Europe, he never got a moment's peace. He would have helicopters follow him when he left the house. I guess that comes with the territory. That's part of the price you pay. He paid that price so many times - well, overpaid. But he'd be the first to say there's nothing to be gained by bitterness or anger, hatred. I don't know how many times he would remind me that bitterness or pessimism is only going to slow you down finding the solution. And he lived that way. George was the kind of guy who wasn't going to leave until he hugged you for five minutes and told you how much he loved you. We knew where we stood with each other.

It sounds like this relationship was very important to you.

Oh, I feel blessed. And it's the only time in my life, really, that I had been that close to somebody - outside of like my mom dying or something. I loved him so much, and if he had never played a note, I would have been so blessed to have him in my life. And then over the weekend, it really comes home to you that, oh, wow, the whole world feels this way. They all knew him in their way, and they are mourning him as well. It was very hard, because there's a duality to it. I mourn for my friend, and then I also am a huge fan just like everyone else. I'm just blessed by God to have known him. He had so much love in him. I realized it more with him gone that he was just pure love. My daughter Adria used to visit him a lot in England when she was over there. She would go and stay at Friar Park. She was telling me the other night that one night they were out walking in the garden and he goes, "Oh, Adria, sometimes I just wish I could turn into a light beam and go away."

Perhaps that's how it works.

Yeah, maybe that is how it works.

Is there anything else you'd like George Harrison fans to understand about the man you knew so well?

I would assure all his fans that George was just really as beautiful as they pictured him. And maybe more.