

# Still Won't Back Down

## Tom Petty Rocks Against The Clock

Story and photos by Randy Falsetta

Exploiting an enviable catalogue of three and four-chord timeless masterpieces, Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers performed to a nearly sold-out show at the Palace of Auburn Hills in Auburn Hills, Michigan. Armed with his traditional Rickenbacker guitar run through a row of Vox Super Beatle amps, Petty had fans easily chiming in on his iconic repertoire of classic hits, including "Free Fallin'", "American Girl", "You Wreck Me", "Mary Jane's Last Dance" and "Refugee".

The energy present in the building was a refreshing change in atmosphere following the Detroit Pistons' devastating season-ending loss to the Boston Celtics the night before. Not only a spectacle for the ears, but surprisingly for the eyes as well, thanks to a well-designed light show that caught even long-time fans off guard. A stunning semicircle of video panels hugging the rafters above captured each of the six musicians as they performed. Suspended as well were five large video cubes also making it easier for outlying seat-holders to experience the action down below. In addition a curtain beaded with bright white bulbs behind the band added to the spectacle.

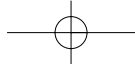
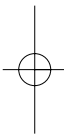
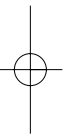
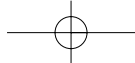


While celebrating just over three decades of work, the always mellow yet artistically brilliant singer-songwriter confesses he would be lost without the Heartbreakers. From the documentary "Running Down A Dream," Petty states, "There's something special about this group of people. I treasure it now because one link in the chain gone can make it all go away". Evidence of their close

bond was witnessed in their leader's heart-felt introduction of his fellow band mates to a grateful audience.

Petty, now 57, appeared confident and, at times, carefree as he glided across the stage with arms flailing outward resembling a plane taking flight. Founding lead guitarist Mike Campbell, sporting some unique guitars himself, supplied all the great accompanying melody lines and solos while Benmont Tench, also an original Heartbreaker, proved to be not only a tasteful keyboardist, but entertained the crowd as well with his stylish sidekick antics.

Bassist Ron Blair successfully held down the bottom-end as Steve Ferrone displayed his vibrant drumming skills without unnecessary embellishments. Lastly, Scott Thurston flaunted his musical muscle as the group's multi-instrumentalist and more so as accom-



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panying vocalist with brilliant harmony vocals evidenced on the Travelling Wilburys' hit "End of the Line".

Like many rockers of his generation Thomas Earl Petty realized he wanted to be performing on stage after witnessing The Beatles' historic appearance on The Ed Sullivan Show in 1964. He fulfilled that vision by creating his first three groups, The Sundowners, The Epics and Mudcrunch (the third of which introduced him to future Heartbreakers Mike Campbell and Benmont Tench). What came next brought this Gainesville, Florida youth the attention of a national audience. Though initially unpopular in the United States, Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers released their self-titled debut album in 1976, spawning the release of the classic single, "Breakdown". The following decade saw the band refining their sound through six more studio albums containing mentionable hits such as "I Need To Know", "Listen To Her Heart" and "Don't Do Me Like That".

In the late 80's Petty became a founding member of the Traveling Wilburys, along with Bob Dylan, George Harrison, Roy Orbison and Jeff Lynne. "Handle With Care", the band's initial collaboration, lead to a full-length album, Traveling Wilburys Vol 1. A second Wilburys album oddly entitled , Traveling Wilburys Vol. 3, was recorded without the recently deceased Roy Orbison in 1990.

While still with the Wilburys in 1989, Petty released his strongest work and first attempt as a solo artist with the album Full Moon Fever. Song writing gems like "Free Fallin'", "I Won't Back Down" and "Runnin' Down A Dream" ensured commercial success and critical acclaim. Although recorded during a break from the Heartbreakers, various members from the band, as well some fellow Wilburys, participated in the record's production and contributed various backing vocal tracks.

Whether a solo artist or in the company of the famed Heartbreakers or Wilburys, Tom Petty has proved to be a "hit-making machine".

Though this tour has yet to prove itself as a top grossing act on par with arena rock heavyweights like Bon Jovi and Van Halen, this American institution will undoubtedly satisfy the needs of classic rock & roll lovers across North American. In an ever-changing and often unpredictable music business with more and more bands relying on increased ticket prices to generate revenue lost from fading disk sales, groups are now forced to pay more attention to the overall concert experience to draw paying customers. This hard reality may send some less creative rock acts to an early retirement. But with Tom Petty and his Heartbreakers still at the top of their game, one might wonder if "Mary Jane will ever have her last dance". **TDM**