

# Reviews

NEW ALBUMS ..... Pg. 68  
SINGLES ..... Pg. 70  
MOVIES ..... Pg. 74  
CHARTS ..... Pg. 82

## Tom Petty's New American Dream

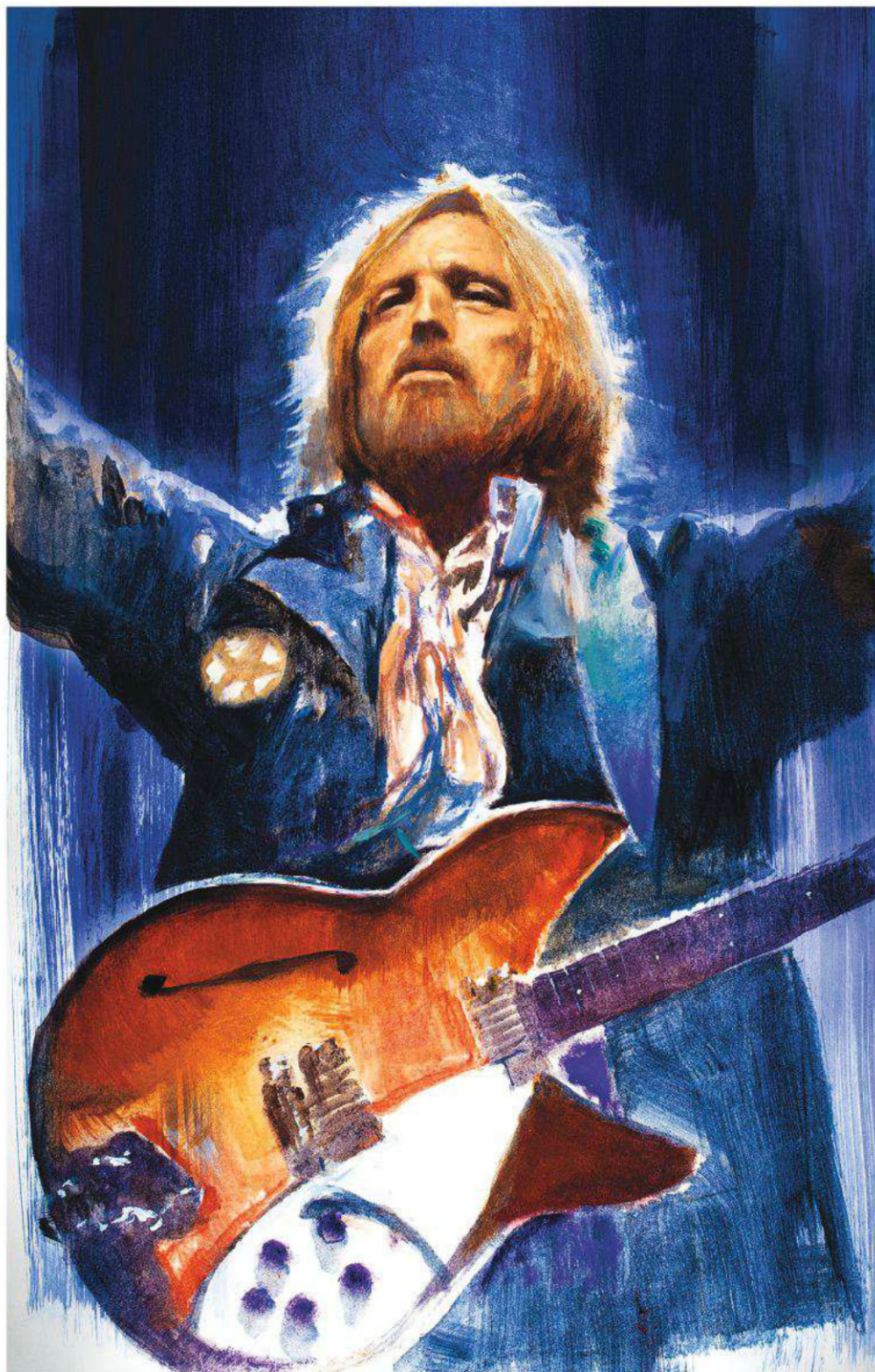
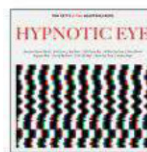


Illustration by ROBERT HUNT

The Heartbreakers get back to their roots with a set of urgent grooves and last-ditch hopes



### Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers

*Hypnotic Eye* Reprise/Warner Bros.  
★★★★

BY JON DOLAN

When Tom Petty emerged in the mid-Seventies, he was the perfect down-to-earth rock star for the times: a hungry Southern boy playing tight rock & roll in mellow Southern California, kicking against the era's soft-bellied complacency with hard-jangling realism. On *Hypnotic Eye*, the 63-year-old and his eternal Heartbreakers return to the scrappy heat of those early days with their toughest, most straight-up-rocking record in many years, deepened by veteran perspective. "I feel like a four-letter word," Petty sings on "Forgotten Man," which sounds like "American Girl" remade as a Bo Diddley roof-rumbler. You can be sure as shit that four-letter word isn't "darn" or "rats."

*Hypnotic Eye* took three years to make, but it often sounds like buddies out on a weekend garage-jam bender. It's especially reminiscent of their first two records, 1976's *Tom Petty & the Heartbreakers* and 1978's *You're Gonna Get It!*, before they hit on the crystalline polish of 1979's *Damn the Torpedoes*. It's also of a piece with the foundational vibe of 2008's *Mudcrutch*, where Petty convened the country-rock band he and two future Heartbreakers (guitarist Mike Campbell and keyboardist



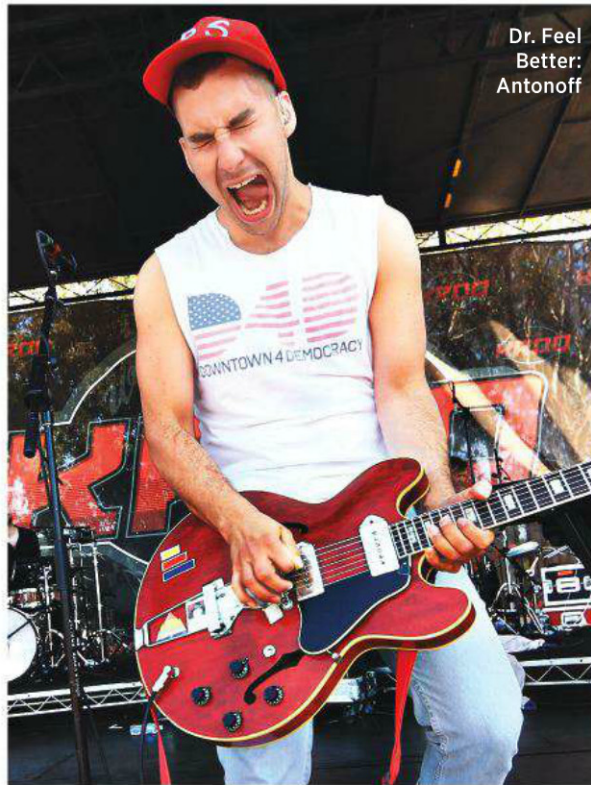
Benmont Tench) played in Florida in the early Seventies before they hit L.A.

Yet there are few, if any, attempts to re-enact Petty's vintage hits. This is the Heartbreakers four decades and a million shows later, deepening their attack with sturdy reliability. On "Faultlines," Petty and Campbell exchange snarling guitar phrases against a swamp-boogie swing from drummer Steve Ferrone and bassist Ron Blair. On "Red River," the band's trademark Byrds-y shimmer comes with extra crunch and desert-horizon beauty. Sometimes the intensity doesn't even need to be loud, as with the subdued "Full Grown Boy," where Tench plays jazz-shaded piano and Petty pushes his voice into a relaxed croon for the wee small hours.

Petty populates these urgent songs with a cast of desperate dreamers, zealots, doomed lovers, loose cannons and alienated zombies – like the woman in "Red River" stockpiling powerless religious talismans, the doomsaying town crier in the highway rocker "All You Can Carry," or Petty himself in the forebodingly caustic "Shadow People," wondering what role he can play "in my time of need, in my time of grief."

The most sympathetic of these characters is the defiant free-faller in "American Dream Plan B," clinging to hope against all evidence. "My success is anybody's guess/But like a fool I'm betting on happiness," Petty sings over acrid blasts of distortion. You can imagine the guy hearing this song on his car radio and using it to steel himself for life's next knee in the grapes. When the God-touched chorus kicks in, full of Petty's ringing chords and Campbell's psychedelic fuzz, it's like a backslap of brotherly reassurance. If a Katy Perry song had come on the radio, he might've swerved into oncoming traffic. But not today. Tom Petty has saved drive time once again, just like he's been doing since he was a cranky young man himself.

**LISTEN NOW!**  
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Dr. Feel Better:  
Antonoff

## An Eighties Pop Party for the Instagram Age

**Fun. guitarist Jack Antonoff goes solo for an LP packed with tears, fears and supersize hooks**

**Bleachers** *Strange Desire* RCA ★★



As the guitarist for pop-rock stars fun., Jack Antonoff helped build a sound that brought Eltonian grandeur to the kind of open-wound introspection that's usually confined to the dark, comfy corners of emo records. With this one-man side project, he goes deeper into his Eighties synth-rock and Arcade Fire influences, piling snazzy hooks and knotty feelings into ravenously over-the-top therapy rock.

The hit "I Wanna Get Better," which came with a video directed by his girlfriend, Lena Dunham, sets the mood with its buoyant affliction. "I'm standing on the overpass screaming at myself," Antonoff hollers over tense Cure guitars, before a thunderous chorale and hyperactive synthesizers rush in behind him. Nothing else on Bleachers' debut quite reaches that height, and enticing collaborations with art-pop heavies like Yoko Ono fall flat. But the bright ideas keep coming like mosquitoes at a backyard BBQ, from "Rollercoaster" – which suggests a colder-hearted update of Modern English's "I Melt With You" – to "Shadow," which piles on Eighties echoes (Tears for Fears, Duran Duran) into a bear-hug anthem for anyone "feeling small." Rest easy: Antonoff's big-sounding songs are a warm, safe place for the whole world to hide. **JON DOLAN**

**KEY TRACKS:**  
"Rollercoaster,"  
"Shadow"



**Jenny Lewis**  
*The Voyager* Warner Bros.  
★★★★½

**Ex-Rilo Kiley singer makes a sunny solo LP with A-list pals**

Former Rilo Kiley frontwoman Jenny Lewis gave her Rolodex a workout while making her third solo album, tapping a Wrecking Crew's worth of backing musicians: Beck, Ryan Adams (who co-produced seven of the 10 tracks), Lou Barlow and a slew of other pals. The result could have been a muddle, but *The Voyager* hangs together as a loose yet polished California-pop travelogue of Lewis' endlessly messy life. Her songs are sometimes more revealing than deep ("All those times we were making love/I never thought we'd be breaking up," she sings on "She's Not Me"). Still, Lewis' slippery, expressive voice and sunny SoCal tunes make *The Voyager* a rewarding journey. **ROB BRUNNER**



**Various Artists**  
*Country Funk II 1967-1974*  
Light in the Attic  
★★★★½

**Rare grooves from Dolly Parton, Willie Nelson and more**

Country has always drawn from African-American music, but as part two of this Southern-fried funk compilation series shows, that cross-genre impulse got wildly amplified in the Sixties and Seventies. Dolly Parton sings "Gettin' Happy" with a gospel choir, pedal steel and an amped-up, sample-ready drum beat; Kenny Rogers gets all funky outlaw on "Tulsa Turnaround" ("Oooh, Lord, I wish I had never been stoned..."). Even Willie Nelson ("Shotgun Willie") gets his greased groove on, alongside Townes Van Zandt ("Hunger Child Blues") and Jim Ford ("Rising Sign"). With acts like Florida Georgia Line re-integrating today's country, it's a timely flashback. **WILL HERMES**