

Filming With the Men Who Broke the Brink's

BY CLARKE TAYLOR

● BOSTON—A film producer, Ralph Serpe, woke one morning six years ago to find himself in the Presidential Suite of Boston's Sheraton-Plaza Hotel, whisky and call girl by his side, all compliments of an anonymous host.

Serpe now was relating the tale with all its ominous overtones. He said he was there, not in New York, producing his latest film, "Across 110th Street," on the strength of a mysterious phone call summoning him. He knew contacts were being made through his notorious friend, Frank Costello, so he obliged.

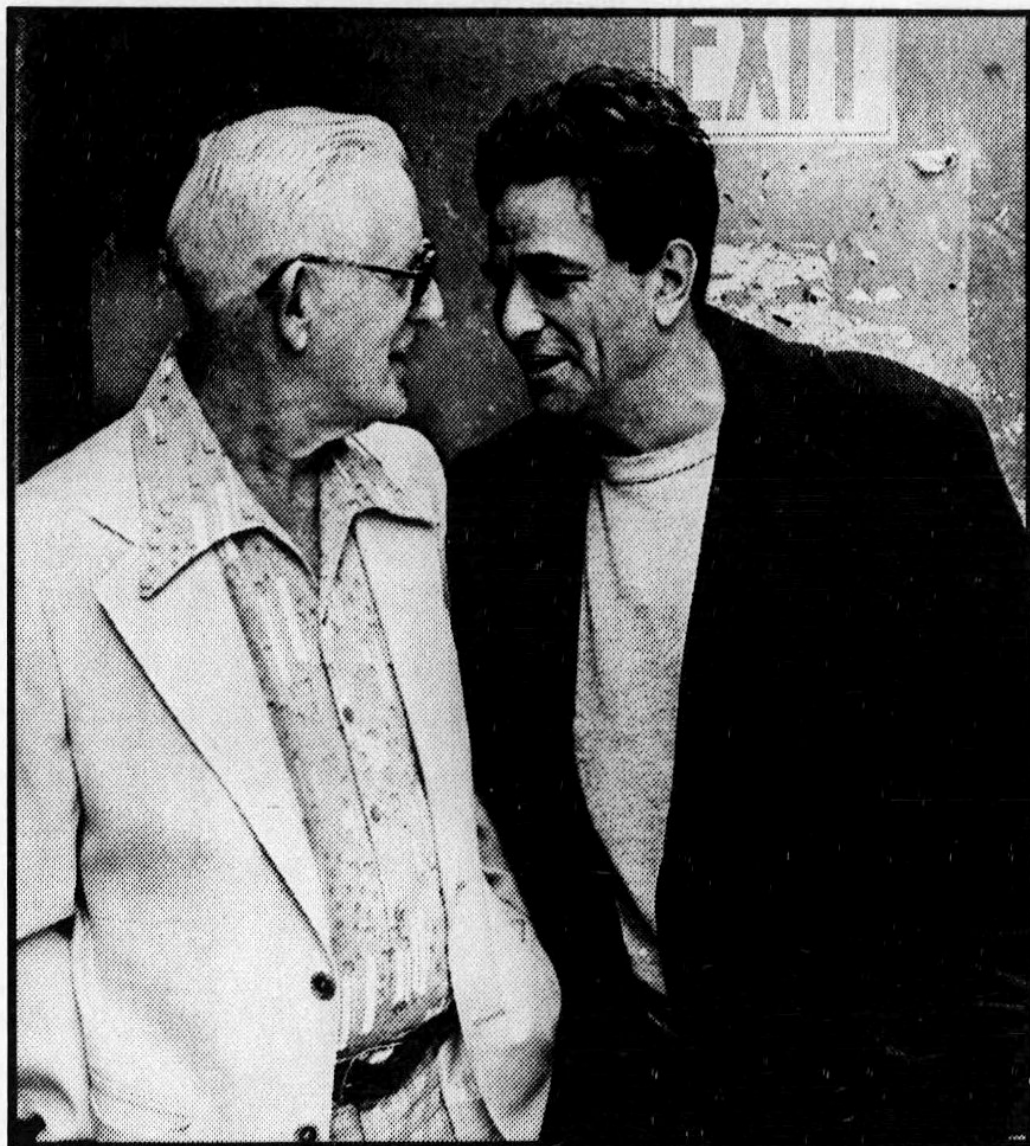
Serpe had been urging the now-deceased gangland leader to prepare the story of his life for the screen. But Costello declined, hinting at a hotter property.

"I'm Tony Pino," said the rotund little man who finally materialized in Serpe's room to reveal the nature of the rendezvous. "And we're the guys who did the Brink's. You wanna do a movie?"

Pino had led his gang of 11 men into the offices of that venerable guardian of the American Buck on the night of Jan. 17, 1950, and out again—clean—with \$2.7 million. After serving 14 years of a life sentence, Pino was free and again consorting with partners in crime, this time, shaking hands on a movie deal.

The result these several years later (Pino, meantime, died in 1973) is "Brink's," director William Friedkin's latest, now in the middle of shooting here and starring Peter Falk with Warren

Please Turn to Page 48



Two of the principals in the making of "Brink's" chat on location in Boston—Sandy Richardson, left, a member of the infamous Pino Gang that ripped \$2.7 million off the company 28 years ago, and actor Peter Falk, who's playing Tony Pino, now deceased.

Photo by Josh Wiener

Liberating the Tonys: An Experiment

BY DAN SULLIVAN

● NEW YORK—Anita Gillette, who is up for a Tony Award tonight for her performance in "Chapter Two," violated a Broadway taboo the other day by telling a press luncheon at Sardi's that no, the thrill of just being nominated wasn't enough. She wanted to win. However, she resented being put in a horserace with her friends Anne Bancroft ("Golda"), Estelle Parsons ("Miss Margarida's Way") and Jessica Tandy ("The Gin Game"). Why couldn't they all be winners?

Because the more prizes handed out in a competition, the less each individual prize means. Seventy-six Tonys—the number of actors, directors, designers and writers nominated this year for Broadway's version of the Academy Awards—would be absurd. But we are with Miss Gillette to this extent. All these show-biz award ceremonies—Tonys, Oscars, Emmys—would provide a far more accurate picture of the season they cover if they'd stop trying to provide one winner per category, no more, no less, and simply cite the most excellent work seen, regardless of slot.

Since the 1978 Tonys for acting will be for "outstanding" performance, not "best" performance, why not have more than one winner per category—or none, if nobody did a really outstanding job?

That's unlikely with so many performances to choose from, but we can remember the year a show called "Hallelujah Baby" got a Tony for "best musical"—despite the fact that it had closed months before, to nobody's regret. Why decorate the best of a bad lot?

For experimental purposes, here's one out-of-towner's choices for this year's Tonys, assuming the awards could follow the contours of the season, rather than nailing it to a best-of-breed format. Our choices are so free-form that they include some artists who weren't even nominated for Tonys, and some categories as yet uninvented. As for the actual winners, the Tony Awards show will be on Channel 2 tonight, starting at 9:30. Two winners have been announced in advance: New Haven's Long Wharf Theater, for distinguished regional-theater productions, and Irving Berlin, for his songs.

For leading lady in a straight play we'd go with Estelle Parsons in "Miss Margarida's Way." This is an astounding one-woman show in which Miss Parsons baits the audience into behaving like a classroom of obnoxious kids, and then slaps them down. She gives it the excitement of a bullfight, but makes it also a viable metaphor for the nearly erotic connection

that a certain kind of dictator might effect with his captive audience. If not acting, it is superb crowd control. She's talking about bringing it to the Hartford.

Two actors merit Tonys for starring roles in straight plays. Frank Langella's Dracula is definitive—proud and damned, like Satan in "Paradise Lost," but with better manners. And Barnard Hughes couldn't be more endearing as the flustering old father in "Da," who comes back from being dead because "I didn't care for it." There's no choosing between performances so different and so complete.

Our other picks, by categories:

Leading performances in a musical. John Cullum and Liza Minnelli are the probable winners here, Cullum because the snarling John Barrymore type that he plays in "On the Twentieth Century" is such a stretch from the country boys that he usually plays; and Miss Minnelli because she knocks herself out in "The Act." Those aren't good enough reasons. We'd make this an ensemble Tony to the five performers who make such a gorgeous fuss in "Ain't Misbehavin'": Nell Carter, Armelia McQueen, Charlaire Woodard, Andre De Shields and (as the mighty Fats Waller) Ken Page. Fats would claim them all as his progeny in an instant. Incredibly, only Miss Carter and

Please Turn to Page 62

SPOTLIGHT



'Civilisation's' Kenneth Clark interviewed by William Wilson, Page 92.



Simone Signoret's autobiography: more than a memoir. Charles Champlin interview on Page 49.



Tom Petty puts the passion back into rock 'n' roll. Page 76.



Curt Jurgens works to live. Roderick Mann interview on Page 40.



What's hot in summer films? See Page 41 and 'First Run,' a special color magazine, in today's Times.

● ABC Records president Steve Diener was excited by the field reports on his desk. The new Tom Petty album had been in the stores only a few days, but reorders were already coming in. Lots of them.

"The interest is phenomenal," Diener said. "The reaction is the kind you normally expect only for an artist who has been around five years and has a dozen gold albums. The record is an event. I feel something building here that is like an eruption."

Across town, Petty—whose Monday night concert at Santa Monica Civic Auditorium is sold out—smiled at the possibility of finally having an album high on the charts. It's only his second LP, but Petty has been on the rock 'n' roll trail for nearly 10 years.

The slender, 25-year-old rock singer also seemed encouraged by signs of a turnaround in the bland, unchallenging pop-rock diet of the mid-'70s. He feels a kinship with such equally passionate rock figures as Bruce Springsteen, Patti Smith, Bob Seger and Elvis Costello.

"I remember when you could hear great stuff on the radio," Petty said here last week. "There'd be the Beatles' records and the Stones, Otis Redding, the Byrds, the Zombies, Dylan. I mean you could hear 'Like a Rolling Stone' on the AM radio. That's when the Top 40 meant something to me."

"I can't get behind most of the stuff they play now. It's either disco or MOR or those faceless rock bands. That's not my idea of a good time. But I can feel it changing. We got into the '30s with the 'Breakdown' single. Patti Smith's going to do better than that with 'Because the Night.' Costello should be up there."

"As soon as one of those records gets into the Top 10, it could break things wide open. Once kids get a taste of it, they're going to say 'Amazing!' and demand more. If they do, whoever those radio guys are who closed the door on rock bands will have to reopen it. Then we'll start having fun again . . ."

Petty started dreaming of being a rock star the day a decade ago he saw girls go crazy over Elvis Presley on a movie set near Petty's home in Gainesville, Fla.

"I just couldn't believe it," Petty has said. "I just thought it was the coolest thing I had ever seen. When I got home I started collecting everything I could about him. I even combed my hair back like he did. It was only about a year or so until the Beatles came out. And then the Stones. I was stuck. I must have listened eight hours a day to the record player. It was my world."

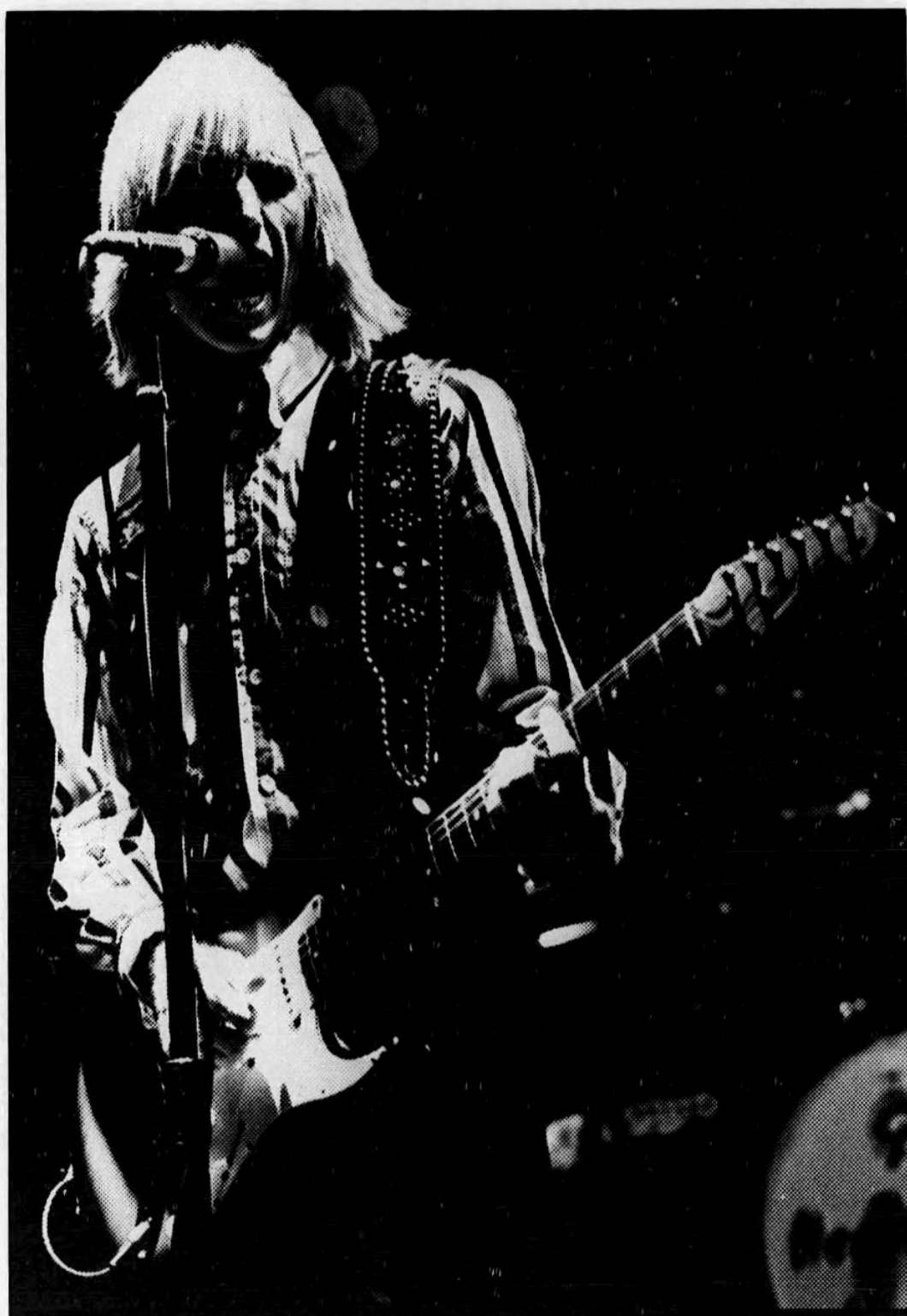
After teaching himself to play the guitar through a Beatles songbook, Petty put together a band when he was 13. By 15, Petty was on the road. His school principal sent Petty to a psychologist to find out why he'd rather play rock 'n' roll than go to school. Simple, Petty remembers telling him, rock was more fun.

Petty and his group, the Mudcrutches, had enough confidence by the early '70s to try for a record contract. They made a demo tape, piled into a VW van and headed for L.A., where they were signed by Denny Cordell's Shelter Records, a label distributed by ABC.

But the recordings went poorly and the Mudcrutches broke up. Petty stayed with Shelter as a solo artist. Cordell, who had worked with Leon Russell and Joe Cocker, got Petty together with some L.A. studio musicians, but the sound wasn't what Petty wanted. It was too tame.

Almost by accident, Petty hooked up in L.A. with some musician friends from Gainesville. They, too, had come to California looking for a contract. He jammed with them a few times and realized they had the driving, shadowy rock 'n' roll sound he wanted.

Cordell, too, was impressed and the Heartbreakers band was formed: Mike



With his new album, "You're Gonna Get It," Petty hopes to break open Top 40 playlists.

Pop Music

Tom Petty: Plugging In to the Glory of Rock

BY ROBERT HILBURN

Campbell on guitar, Ron Blair on bass, Stan Lynch on drums and Ben Trench on keyboards. After three years of frustrating wrong turns, Petty was finally heading in the right direction. The band recorded the debut album in two weeks.

But then: another dead end. The album received almost no airplay or critical attention when released in late 1976. By the time Petty & the Heartbreakers played the Whisky in January of 1977, the LP had sold less than 7,000 copies. Two singles—"American Girl" and "Breakdown"—fizzled.

Though the Whisky engagement brought the band some attention, it wasn't that big a deal. Most of the writers and disc jockeys were on hand just to see the headliner, Blondie.

The Heartbreakers did begin picking up some isolated success after that—some glowing reviews, enthusiastic response during a return Whisky stint—but the turning point was England.

Arriving there as opening act on a Nils Lofgren tour, Petty did so well the band

was booked on its own tour. This time as headliners. The album made the British Top 20.

The experience made Petty a stronger and more confident performer. It also made him more demanding. The British success told him they could sell records. He blamed his U.S. label—ABC—for not pushing the record harder.

Before starting work on a second album, he and manager Tony Dimitriadis demanded a commitment from the company for more promotion. ABC, which had undergone a change in top management, agreed. It rereleased "Breakdown" as a single and this time the record caught on. The album eventually reached the Top 40. An audience was set up for the new work and true to its title—"You're Gonna Get It"—the new LP delivers. It's gripping, invigorating rock 'n' roll—energized yet classy.

Because Petty wore a black leather jacket on the cover of his first album, some incorrectly lumped him with the punk movement. Others, noting the

Heartbreakers' L.A. base, assumed the band was part of the laid-back, Southern California folk-rock contingent.

The misconceptions show how silly the labeling process in pop music can be. The only real dividing line should be between what's good and what's bad. Whatever the outward style, the important thing is whether the band stirs one's imagination and emotions.

Petty—whose long blond hair and tough-but-vulnerable stance fits perfectly the rock star mold—meets that test. He and the Heartbreakers reflect the power and glory of mainstream rock 'n' roll. The music combines the shadowy, late-night compulsion of the Rolling Stones with the classic charm and accessibility of Elvis Presley and the original '50s rockers.

"Maybe that shadowy feeling is in the records because we always record late at night," Petty said, when asked about the dark, somewhat hidden undercurrents in his music. "We're also night people. We're usually up real late."

"But some of the mystery is put there on purpose. It's good to intrigue people a little, leave room so they can explore and find things out for themselves. That's one reason we never put a lyric sheet in the album."

While the driving "I Need to Know" has been released as a single from "You're Gonna Get It," the album's most memorable selection is "Listen to Her Heart."

Set against a rousing, Byrds-flavored arrangement, the song reflects the teen-oriented romanticism and idealism that is at the heart of many of rock's greatest records. It's the somewhat underdog-ish story of a guy's belief that his girl won't be tempted by someone else's swagger:

*You think you're gonna take her away
With your money and your cocaine.
You keep thinking her mind is going to change*

*But I know everything is OK.
She's gonna listen to her heart
It's gonna tell her what to do.
She may need a lot of lovin'
But she don't need you . . .*

The album's other highlights range from the nostalgic, romance-behind-the-grandstands aura of "Magnolia" to the mocking anger of "Too Much Ain't Enough" to the wounded emotion of "Hurt." While only the Caribbean-flavored "No Second Thoughts" fails to contribute to the album's momentum, the straight-ahead simplicity of the Kiss-flavored "Baby's a Rock 'n' Roller" may strike some as too teenyboppish. Petty disagrees.

"We put that song on the album as a statement," he explained. "It's just like the lyrics say: 'Rock 'n' roller . . . That's all she ever wants to be.' There's a lot of people who take rock too seriously. They mix it up with all sorts of cosmic and political concerns."

"I take rock seriously, too, but that seriousness should never interfere with the fun and excitement of it. That's what we're trying to point out in the song: 'Rock 'n' roll itself is all you ever need.' You don't have to add those other things to give it strength."

While Petty retraces some themes in the new collection, the production is generally firmer and more potent. Coupled with the tunes from the first album, the songs should give the Heartbreakers one of the most uplifting bodies of work of any new band in years. The group has also developed into a crack live attraction.

"The amazing thing is the audience reaction," Petty said last week after returning from a series of tour warmup dates. "When we walked out, the whole room was screaming at the top of their lungs. It was wilder than England for us, and I didn't think anything would ever be as crazy as that." ●