

POP MUSIC REVIEW

Classic Rock of Tom Petty

BY ROBERT HILBURN
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Predictions are hazardous in any field where success depends on something as fickle as public taste, but there's enough evidence available to take a stab at one: Tom Petty's going to be a superstar in rock.

Rather than deal in a narrow jazz-rock, classical-rock, pop-rock fusion, he and the Heartbreakers band deal in a classic rock style so powerful and pure you'd think they'd stumbled across some long-lost formula.

Most importantly, Petty connects with his audiences.

When the blond, 25-year-old singer-guitarist walked on stage with the Heartbreakers Monday night at the sold-out Santa Monica Civic, the audience erupted with a shrieking, cheering ovation normally reserved for rock's most established figures.

And it wasn't just an opening surge of emotion. The enthusiastic response—especially the loud, piercing SHRIEKS of female fans—continued through the hour set and into three encores.

Sex appeal has long been one of rock's commercial lures, and Petty oozes it as he stalks across the stage, often striking dramatic freeze-frame poses in the intentionally shadowy lighting.

"WE LOVE YOU, TOM!" one girl screamed early in his Civic set. "WE ALL DO!" another female fan added. The hands reaching up at Petty through most of the show suggested those fans were far from alone in their affection.

But Petty's appeal is far from one-dimensional. His music is as consistently inviting and dynamic as any rock newcomer in years.

While revolving around romantic themes, Petty's deftly crafted, highly accessible songs touch on most of the classic, teen-oriented rock concerns: innocence, frustration, loneliness and desire.

The tone of the music is a stark, sensual blend of the blatant suggestiveness of Elvis Presley's "One Night" and the Rolling Stones' impatient "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction."

Behind Petty's commanding vocals and stage presence, the Heartbreakers—also dressed in black—demonstrate an equally solid understanding of rock's most enduring values. Rather than simply provide energy, the band—especially lead guitarist Mike Campbell—aims for signature pieces instrumentally that give each song a distinctive edge.

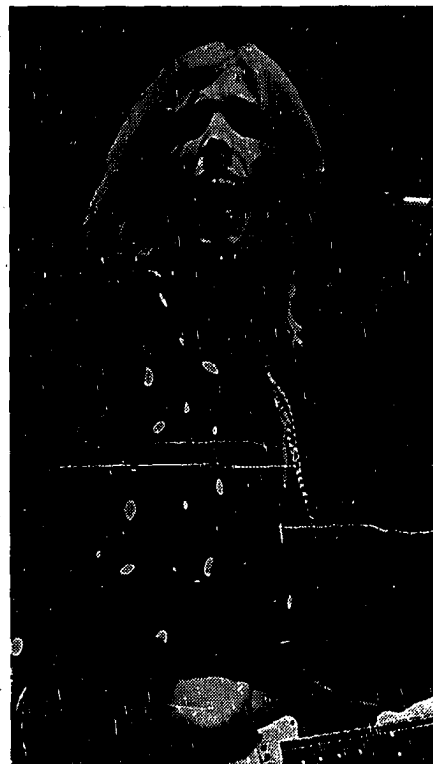
Operating from a taut, no-nonsense base, the Heartbreakers packed 11 songs into a dynamic one-hour set reminiscent of the efficiency and vitality of the old Creedence Clearwater Revival shows.

If the L.A.-based Petty can get a couple of hit singles from his new "You're Gonna Get It" album, he and the Heartbreakers should be ready for the 18,700-seat Inglewood Forum by early next year. That's a big jump from



ROCK'S HEARTTHROB—Tom Petty plays his fans at Santa Monica to a shrieking crescendo.

Times photos by Marianna Diamos



the Civic, but it was only a year ago that Petty was the opening act at the Whisky. He begins his most ambitious U.S. tour this week.

Monday's concert was opened by David Johansen, former lead singer and writer for the now-defunct New York Dolls, one of the models for the fiery, intense new wave movement in rock. Adored by many critics for its passion, the Dolls was dismissed by the rock audience in the mid-'70s as chaotic and sloppy.

Back with his first album and local appearance in four years, Johansen reflects much of same sassy Dead End Kid charm/aggression of the old Dolls. The songs still have a strong Rolling Stones tinge, but he has broadened his themes and sound. "Frenchette" is a poignant account of someone trying to protect himself after a traumatic romantic experience.

Johansen's band—augmented at the Civic by the Dolls' Sylvain Sylvain—has a more professional edge than the old group, but it maintains some of the Dolls' rough, unpredictable undercurrents.

While the rise of new wave acts has made Johansen's full-throttle approach less novel today, he still offers the individuality and purpose that rock can always use. The live show had more bite and energy than his new solo album. As if trying to make up for the years of inactivity,

Johansen and the band played with the torrential energy of performers trying to cram 20,000 watts into a 10,000-watt circuit. The audience response was strong. He'll be at the Roxy June 16 and 17.