



Tom Petty, Ron Blair and Mike Campbell at Paradise

Tom Petty catches on with lean, snapping beat

TOM PETTY & THE HEARTBREAKERS — In concert with Donna Price at the Paradise on Sunday.

By Steve Morse
Globe Staff

Two years ago, Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers were the opening act at the Jazz Workshop, of all places. Al Kooper was the headliner, and that was when he had a slick 10-piece group that was supposed to help him along to his umpteenth comeback. The audience had come to see Kooper, but there was a pocketful of young rowdies who wouldn't let Petty and the Heartbreakers leave the stage. If truth be told, Petty did blow Kooper away during that engagement.

Since then, Petty et al have continued to improve their concise, joyously unrestrained brand of rock & roll, only this time a sizable audience has begun to catch on. Petty almost vanished from sight last year until his record company, ABC/Shelton, re-released his debut album and the single, "Breakdown," began ascending the charts.

Petty would seem to be unstoppable now. The band's second album, "You're Gonna Get It," has just been certified gold (500,000 units), and their Paradise appearance here was a cataclysmic success. "This is the only club we're playing on this tour, so we're making the most of it," Petty said between sets.

Like his friend Dwight Twilley, Petty emphasizes a lean, snapping rhythm section (Stan Lynch sledgehammered his snare drum much of the night, providing the taut beat) and incisive, gut-wrenching guitar and vocals. To his

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own originals he also added the Bobby Fuller Four's "I Fought the Law," Slim Harpo's "Buzz Me Baby" (Petty, who is from Florida, used to listen to Harpo and a lot of vintage R&B artists while driving from gig to gig during his teenage years in the South), the Isley Brothers' "Shout" and Eric Burdon & The Animals' "Don't Bring Me Down." Each shimmered, although the Animals tune was too much of a note-for-note copy and didn't offer anything new.

Petty's originals were exquisite, from his electric 12-string bow to Roger McGuinn on "American Girl," to the cascading "I Need to Know," where the cross-harmonies of Lynch and pianist Benmont Tench lent an ecstatic counterpoint to Petty's own bright, clipped phrasing. And Petty, although a slight, frail figure, was self-assured throughout. He moved with a compressed boil to his gestures, and he exploded unpredictably, but never vengefully, at the audience. For instance, on "Breakdown," he bristled about as if ready to break down and kept screaming "Is it all right?" to do so. There seems to be no question, as he gains yet more confidence, that he is going to be a superstar. He is that magnetic.

Walter Egan was scheduled to open the show but canceled because he was added to several Fleetwood Mac concerts in the Midwest. Folksinger Donna Price, who has paid her dues as a local street-singer, was a list-minute replacement. She handled herself well, albeit nervously, and revealed a strong, affecting voice.