

# Petty challenges The Boss



THE POLICE

No one else is like them.



TOM PETTY and THE HEARTBREAKERS

One of this year's blockbusters



STEVIE WONDER

Yet another project of personal integrity

THE TERM 'NEW WAVE' is applied not only to a definitive style of rock 'n' roll — definitions too big for this discussion — but also to that branch of rock which is fresh, urgent, off the streets, lyrically "meaningful," new, honest, daring — interesting.



Bruce Springsteen, for example, is not readily categorized as New Wave because of his mass appeal and at times lengthy songs, but under the descriptions he is and so are Tom Petty & the Heartbreakers and the Police.

TOM PETTY'S third album, "Damn The Torpedoes" (MCA 5105), will go down as one of this year's blockbusters, an album that makes you take notice. Already it's showing up on virtually every FM rock (AOR) playlist in the country. Big radio sellers are not usually unique works, but in this case the attention is justified.

Petty, as was Springsteen in his early days, has been a "cult" artist through his first two LPs, which is a euphemism for someone who doesn't have a big following. "Cult" also connotes an overlooked talent, and there are those who feel Petty is rock 'n' roll.

"Damn The Torpedoes" is more polished, more introspective, than Petty & The Heartbreakers' first two albums. Some of the edge is rounded off, some of the danger missing.

But whereas the two earlier recordings established Petty as a great collector and interpreter of various rock styles, "Damn The Torpedoes" delivers a singer-guitarist who has become his own man. The

album is another level in personal development, as Petty utilizes trademarks formulated earlier.

While some Petty fans might miss the edge in "Damn The Torpedoes," I think it's a great album, of scope and grandeur and the glory of rock. It's fluid and articulate from start to finish, without filler cuts.

I'd compare all three of his LPs favorably with Springsteen's records, even, though I'm not yet going to rank him with The Boss until I see him live. Petty will be at the Uptown Theater Nov. 24.

THE POLICE DIDN'T WAIT long to release their second album, "Reggatta De Blanc (A&M SP-4792), which is all right by me. Too often a group (Boston comes to mind) is intimidated by the success of its first LP to such a degree that its second product is agonizingly self-conscious.

On its first album, the Police had a tune called "Roxanne," which had "hit" written all over it. In fact, I doubt if the Police will ever write such an ingenious song again.

The tune that's supposed to fill "Roxanne's" role on "Reggatta" is "Message in a Bottle," the first song on the album. So I put on the record for the first time and thought the song was okay, I mean I liked it enough, being a fan of the band.

But then — something happened. The next song was even better, which was a pleasant surprise since "Message in a Bottle" is supposed to be the Killer Kut. In fact, the album just kept getting better with each cut, peaking on side one with "Deathwish," a sinewy, lurking beat fashioned after "Willie and the Hand Jive."

"Reggatta De Blanc" turns out to be better than the debut effort. It's not as commercial, which is quite unusual, and it's filled with such clever and catchy rhythms. Police, just a trio, has found a sound of the '80s — reggae rhythms that

explode onto rock refrains. White boys' reggae, which means it rocks. Right now, no one else is like the Police.

STEVIE WONDER doesn't make albums; he unleashes projects. His latest, after a recording absence of three years, is "Journey Through The Secret Life of Plants" (Tamla T13-371C2).

It's a double album of some pretty esoteric stuff that is the music score for a film of the same name.

At age 29, Wonder has been recording a long time. He was only 11 when he captured audiences with his first hit record, "Fingertips." One of his biggest was "You Are The Sunshine of My Life."

Always a Motown recording artist, Wonder's career hit a new stride in 1971 when he was able to take full artistic control over his projects. A series of gold albums followed, including perhaps his best ever, "Songs In The Key of Life." That album took two and a half years to make.

"Journey Through The Secret Life of Plants" is some history lesson. Side 1 opens with "Earth's Creation," when volcanoes erupted and the rhythm of life began. Side 2 goes through the "Seasons" and then journeys through the secret life of plants, about how they must hear man's world around them. Side 3 includes a few extraneous melodies and Side 4 is the tranquility of a forest.

But it's not up to me to make sense of all this. You're going to have to see the movie, I suppose. As an album, "Journey" is mostly jazz and Far Eastern raga, with just a tad of funk in spots. It's actually a very beautiful, peaceful album, but the story line is rather obscure.

Since I've often communicated with plants on my own weird silent level, I'd just as soon skip the message and listen to the album as a body of music only. As music, Stevie Wonder has created yet another project of personal integrity.

— MARTY RACINE

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