



Tom Petty

Bitter year left Tom a 'bit cynical'

This time last year, Tom Petty was in debt to the unhappy tune of about half a million dollars.

A protracted legal battle with his record company, he says, almost finished him — mentally and financially.

Being hailed by the

music press as the new saviour of American rock wasn't much consolation when he had to spend most of the year in court instead of in studio or on stage.

Happily, that period is now just a memory, although a slightly bitter one, for the 28-year-old Florida-born musician who is bound for Australia.

Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers will open their tour at the Capitol Theatre on Saturday, April 26.

The success of their latest album, *Damn the Torpedos* (its riding high in the US top-10) is probably helping to erase those bitter memories.

In a curious way, the courtroom dramas helped him as a spur to his songwriting.

Speaking by telephone from Los Angeles last week, he said: "Damn the Torpedos is a slang term for full-speed ahead. That was a favourite saying of mine during the legal troubles because everyone had his own little torpedo aimed at me."

When Petty sings in his hits single, *Refugee*, "Everyone's had to fight to be free, You see you don't have to live like a refugee," the words have an authentic ring.

Petty's problem began when his record company, ABC, was swallowed up by the giant MCA conglomerate. Petty argued that the take-over made him a free agent but MCA sued him for breach of contract.

While the dispute dragged on, his debts mounted to \$576,000, rather outstripping his assets of \$56,000.

Finally, a compromise was reached: MCA would create a new label, Backstreet Records, and Petty would be its first artist. Into the bargain, he was rewarded with a new contract worth nearly \$3 million.

Quite a panacea, but Petty said: "It has left me feeling a bit cynical about the business. I couldn't believe all that was happening over a rock band."



SHOWBIZ
by Don Groves and Jacqueline Lee Lewes

Kev makes it home at last for a concert

After four years of singing to packed-out theatres in Europe, Sydney singer-songwriter Kevin Johnson is at last to make his Australian concert tour.

He'll be at Sydney's Regent Theatre on April 23, following performances in Melbourne, Wagga and Canberra.

Kevin, 37, said: "Although I've done more than 30 concerts overseas, I've never really given a proper one here."

Not that he hasn't wanted to.

"We'd even get round to setting dates, then we'd have to cancel because something else would come up, like going overseas," he said.

"And so another year would go by. This time the promoter said, 'Let's do it now.'"

Since the international chart-topping success in 1974 of his song, *Rock and Roll I Gave You All My Life*, Kevin has enjoyed enormous popularity in Europe, more so than here.

His first European tour was in 1976, and he's been back nearly every year, visiting France, Germany, Luxembourg, Holland, Ireland, Switzerland and England.

He plans to go again in

October but that depends on when he finishes writing and recording his new album — his fifth. His latest single, *He Was Just a Boy*, was released a few weeks ago.

He admits he's often tempted to move to Europe with his wife Jill and their two young sons, Shane and Scott.

"It's made sense to go for some time but I don't know whether I'm a sensible person."

That his songs are sung in English is apparently unimportant in Europe. "Sometimes I think they understand the lyrics more," he said.

"Because English isn't their first language, they seem to be able to go straight to the heart of the songs. There's a history of poetry in those places. Perhaps it's in them, too."

He describes his new album as being "more up-tempo" than previous ones, a progression from the "escapism" of his 1978 *Journeys* album and the introspection of earlier LPs.



Kevin Johnson



John Townley

John flies in to introduce us to... John

John Townley came to town last week for a hectic series of press, radio and TV interviews to introduce us to John Townley.

John who?

As he soon explained, Briton Townley is a 28-year-old singer-songwriter. He has one solo album to his credit, and plans to record another in June.

You couldn't pigeon-hole his music as soft rock, folk or pop, because he could wriggle out of any category.

In his short Australian visit, he was told he sounds like Cliff Richard, Jackson Browne, the Eagles and the Beach Boys (what, all of them?).

He says simply that his music is "bits of experience put in writing." His music isn't intensely personal, he says, "because I'm not one of those people who enjoy pouring their hearts out."

His first album, titled *Townley*, was released in the UK and US last July. The reviews were encouraging but sales were not, he says, partly because he did no promotion, and partly because he had management problems he's overcoming now.

In June he'll record the follow-up in the US, under the guidance of executive producer Bobby Columbi, a Capitol Records executive who used to play drums for Blood, Sweat and Tears, and who has produced albums by Tavares and Henry (Shannon) Gross.

The London-based musician's career might have taken a different course if he'd pursued an advertisement he noticed in *Melody Maker* magazine a few years ago.

The ad called for a lead guitarist for a band located in an area neighbouring Townley's. He rang the number, and told the band was rehearsing in a hall about half a mile from his house, and was invited to attend that Saturday.

A couple of years later, he heard the band's name again, and realised too late that it was destined for things far greater than the local pub. It was Gary Numan's *Tubeway Army*.

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