



Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers.

Tom Petty concert promises to be a rocker

Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers in concert Tuesday at the Bayfront Center arena, 8 p.m. Tickets: \$7.98, reserved. Information: 893-7211.

By ROBERT ELY
St. Petersburg Times Staff Writer

It has been a particularly slow summer for concerts around the Suncoast, which heightens excitement for Tuesday night's show by Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers.

Booked as the star attraction for the third annual "98 Rock Birthday Bash," Petty is a performer whose humble refusal to take rock music too seriously has led to some of the best and most unpretentious material around. "I mean, it's only rock 'n' roll . . . that won't mean much in 10 years," he told *Rolling Stone* writer Mikal Gilmore early this year. "They're just rock 'n' roll songs."

MAYBE SO, but Tom Petty, 28, isn't just any rock star with a grab-bag of hits. He is a survivor of his own particularly tempestuous 20s, a period that nearly had him leaving out the back door to escape bankruptcy and legal hassles with his record company that kept him out of the studio just when his creative juices were brimming.

Despite it all, he emerged unbowed with *Damn the Torpedoes*, his most recent album and an essential part of anybody's record collection who has even just a passing interest in rock music. That assortment of nine songs contains, among its many great moments, one of the best-delivered lines in popular music. When

Petty sings "Somewhere, somehow, somebody must've kicked you around some," from the song *Refugee*, there is something in his husky voice that makes one not merely a fan, but a partner in Petty's own quest to restore trampled faith.

In that sense, his songs have an intense honesty. He has the knack, possessed by only a few, to make potentially trite subjects into the symbols of universal expression.

None of this would matter were it not for the excellent musicians who are the Heartbreakers. At one time, guitarist Mike Campbell, drummer Stan Lynch, bassist Ron Blair and keyboardist Benmont Tench were rivals of Petty's when they played around Gainesville in the early '70s. Petty was a member of the popular Florida band Mudcrutch back then. Together, this group plays with a chaotic power that seems almost the antithesis to their tight, intertwined instrumental work.

THE FLORIDA connection extends to St. Petersburg as well — one of the reasons that this may turn into an especially good show. Petty spent one summer in town working at Mathews Funeral Home on Ninth Avenue S. He lived in one of the establishment's dormitory rooms.

This is a home crowd Petty has come to see, and if he displays the concern for his audience he has in the past, people well may feel \$7.98 ticket is a small price to pay for the attention. The concert is expected to sell out.

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