

Tom Petty understands audience

By GARY GRAFF
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Tom Petty does something with his songs that too few musicians are doing nowadays: he writes about fan's frustrations, which also happen to be his frustrations. Topics range from romance (mainly) to generally being fed-up with life, but in each case Petty tries to become a mirror for the feelings and frustrations he senses in his teen-age audience.

The audience at his Stanley Theatre concert last Thursday was certainly teen-age — and abundantly female — and if the fans wanted to indeed use Petty as a reflecting glass for their problems, he was happy to comply.

Listening to his records, it's easy to doubt his sincerity and his "understanding" nature. Writing about teen-age frustrations (particularly when you're no longer a teenager) is one thing, but understanding what you're writing about is another. In concert, even if he doesn't really understand what he's writing and singing about, Petty sure makes it look like he does.

And, most importantly, the kids believed that Petty understood. They screamed their agreement for lines like "sometimes this town just seems so hopeless" from "Here Comes My Girl" and the cautiously optimistic chorus of "Even the Losers."

The girls in the crowd were there to watch Petty more than to listen to him. Dressed in a green shirt with black polka dots and tight black

slacks, Petty served their interests by tramping around a platform that extended across the orchestra pit, giving the girls a good view of all sides.

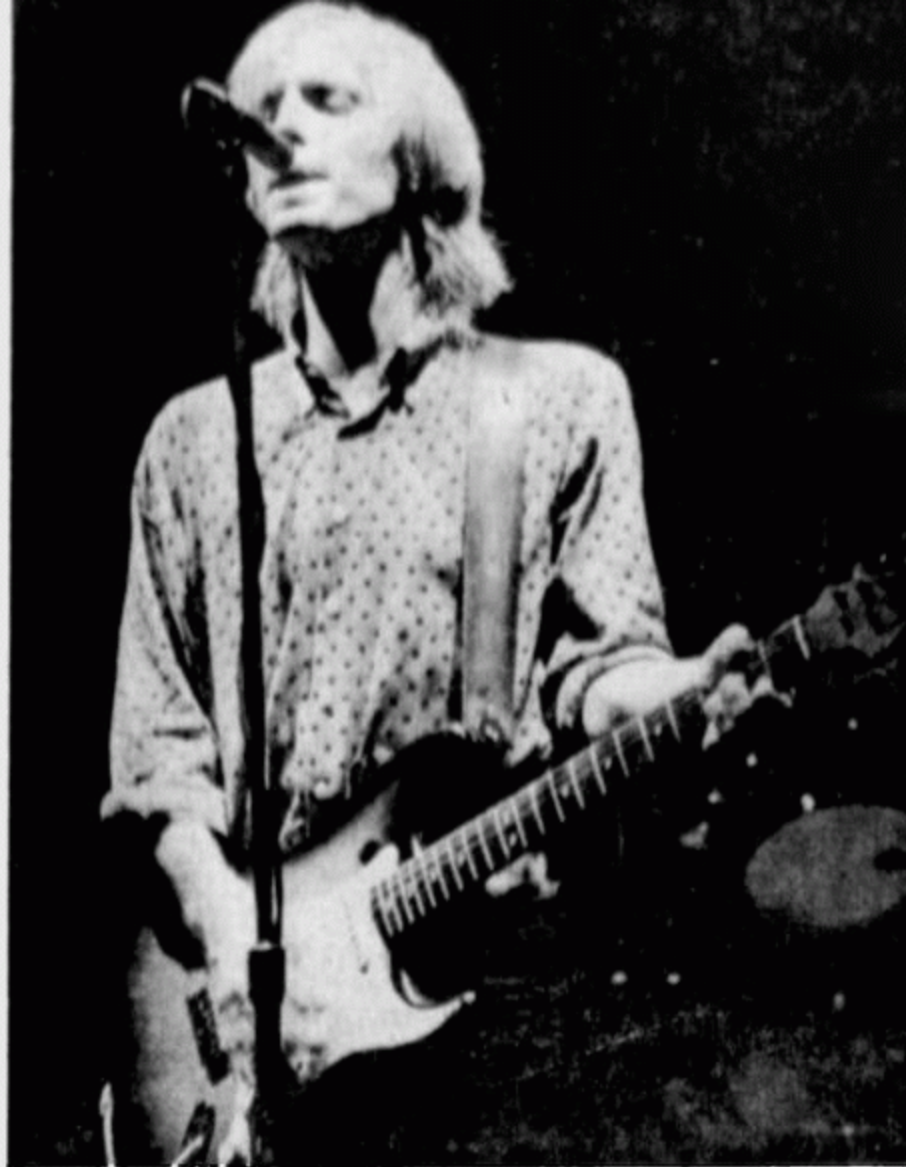
He also managed not to lose his macho appeal. More than anything else, Petty sings about girls from a male viewpoint. Songs like "Shadow of a Doubt" (the opening number), "Here Comes My Girl" and "Need to Know" from all indications gave Petty's male audience what it came to hear.

Whatever appeal Petty has, the clincher in the concert's success was the Heartbreakers. After the second number, an aggressive rendering of "Fool Again," Petty told the sold-out audience "the band is in a particularly good mood tonight." The statement was accurate.

Mike Campbell, the lazy-faced lead guitarist, provided the most dynamic musical moments of the concert. Perched on the edge of the stage, Campbell's searing solos took the spotlight almost as many times as Petty did. Ron Blair and Stan Lynch provided a solid bottom and some moments of their own: Blair's came with his base leads on "American Girl," while Lynch's moments were his harmonies with Petty, whose singing was a bit weak and raspy.

Then there was Benmont Tench. Behind his friendly smile and congenial bounding around, Tench supplied keyboard strength that wasn't really noticed until you thought about it. He never really soloed, but his playing on the spooky, "Luna" (with Petty on organ), "Don't Do Me Like That" and "Breakdown" stood out.

The only thing wrong with Petty and the Heartbreakers' show was the song selection. The right songs were played, but by the time a rendition of "Shout" ended the main body of the concert, all the hits — "Refugee," "American Girl" and "Break-



Tom Petty, who sings about romance and generally being fed-up with life, tries to become a mirror for the feelings and frustrations he senses in his teen-age audience.
(Photo by Gary Graff)

Petty

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down" — had been played. They were all strongly performed, except for "Breakdown" in which Petty's mock breakdown seemed a little boring and a lot contrived.

There was even a new, unrecorded song that fit Petty's style well. "The Best of Everything" is a ballad, a lament over lost love but with a (seemingly) amicable resolution. It worked.

But the encores didn't — some-

thing was missing. There were no hits, no show-stoppers left to end the performance. Petty and his band did deliver four pounding rockers including "Strangers in the Night" and "Century City," but the lack of a first-line song was noticed by the crowd as many left while Petty was still performing the songs.

It may not have been a suitable ending, but it was in general a more than suitable night. Petty fans — male and female — got exactly what they came for and no one left the concert feeling frustrated.