

# Tom Petty: Sunshine Rocker

By RANDY MIRANDA  
News Journal Staff Writer

Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers with flowing, stormy organs, punchy guitar surges and strong, hard driving



PETTY

and Keyboardist Benmont Tench — are from the Gainesville area.

From the simple beginnings of playing high school dances and area lounges in a band named "Mudcrutch," Petty and the band burst upon the national scene in 1976 with the release of their self-titled debut album and the Top 40 smash "Breakdown." The band's creative juices and enthusiasm were somewhat diminished for a time by minor personality clashes and record company contract hassles. The release of the second album, "You're Gonna Get It," was met with less than critical and commercial success. But the band has returned to the road to rock superstardom with a vengeance. The third album, "Damn The Torpedoes," has sold more than two million copies and a recent 27 city tour saw the band play to sellout crowds everywhere.

It was no different when the Sunshine State native returned to his stomping grounds. More than 3,400 fans, including more than 35 relatives of band members, recently turned out for a show at the Orlando-Seminole Jai Alai Fronton and Petty sent them home happy. Petty, lanky and lean, has a dynamic stage presence and he had the crowd in the palm of his hand from the beginning. After playing "Shadow Of A Doubt"

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and two songs from the first album, "Anything That's Rock 'n' Roll" and "Fooled Again," he announced that "the band's particularly doing well tonight and it's great to be back in Florida." Two hours and three encores later, all realized he meant it. Dressed in jeans and a blue silk shirt with black print, Petty's rapport with the audience was superb. He teased the crowd, several times playfully refusing to go on until they cheered louder.

The Petty-Heartbreaker sound is a synthesis of British flash, Southern grit and late '60s folk rock. Petty combines the best aspects of Springsteen, Dylan and McQuinn, and the emotion on his recordings is seen on stage, from pained expressions to a sly smile. Petty moves about with unlimited energy and enthusiasm. Whether it's playing the hauntingly slow ballad, "Luna," or the rocker "Strangered In The Night," he gives it his all.

The band's 18 song concert set included many Petty classics, including "American Girl," "Even The Losers," with its hopeful chorus that even losers get lucky sometime, and a new keyboard dominated blues number, "The Best Of Everything," slated to be on his next album. Everything came together with "Refugee," the band's important anthem from the last album. A volley of cheers and flickering cigarette lighters expressed the crowd's appreciation. Another highpoint was the band's 20 minute version of "Breakdown," with its extended instrumental opening and emotional finale that had Petty with his head down and arms folded over the mike stand at the finish.

Tom Petty and his Heartbreakers had returned and what a homecoming it was!

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