

Petty wins battle to lower record price

By ROBERT PALMER
New York Times

NEW YORK — Relationships between rock performers and the large corporations that most of them record for are not always cordial, but few rockers have fought as many battles with their record company as Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers.

The group's album *Damn the Torpedoes* was one of the best-selling rock LPs of 1980, but it was released only after a year-long contractual dispute that at one point found Petty filing for bankruptcy and ended only after MCA records granted him the right to become the major artist on the smaller, more "personal" MCA subsidiary label, Backstreet Records.

The just-released Heartbreakers' album, *Hard Promises*, was held up for a month by another dispute: MCA wanted to sell it for \$9.98, and Petty insisted that it sell for the now-standard price of \$8.98.

Trusted by fans

"A lot of our fans have been with us for a long time, and I think they trust us," the 29-year-old singer, songwriter and guitarist said recently.

Petty, who is blond, blue-eyed and wiry, doesn't talk like a man who eats giant record companies for breakfast.

"The record company isn't the enemy," he insisted in a soft Southern drawl that lingers on from his early years in Gainesville, Fla. "My beef with MCA was that they originally told us *Hard Promises* would be \$8.98 and then changed their minds.

"I like to devote my time and energy to being a musician but sometimes there's a communications breakdown and, when that happens, you just have to stand up for yourself."

Petty has been standing up for himself, and singing and playing rock 'n' roll since he was a teenager. He is the son of a Gainesville insurance salesman who wanted him to pursue a more conventional career, but in the mid-1960s he left high school dur-

ing his junior year to play with a popular Florida band, Mudcrutch.

The group, which included two future Heartbreakers, guitarist Mike Campbell and organist Benmont Tench, thought enough of Petty to send him to Los Angeles in search of a recording contract, and he landed one, with Shelter Records.

Mudcrutch moved to Los Angeles, but they broke up before they could make a first album.

In 1975, Petty ran into Campbell and Tench again at a Los Angeles recording studio. They were working with two other musicians that Petty had known in Gainesville, bassist Ron Blair and drummer Stan Lynch.

Petty taught them some new songs he had written and that was the beginning of Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers.

The band's first two albums, *Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers* (1976) and *You're Gonna Get It!* (1978), yielded two hit singles, *Breakdown* and *Listen to Her Heart*, and another song, *American Girl*, which became a hit for Roger McGuinn.

The Heartbreakers' future looked bright, but then Shelter was sold to MCA Records, and Petty, whose original recording deal had not been very advantageous, contended that the sale violated his contract.

Year of wrangling

That was the beginning of the year of wrangling that finally sorted itself out when Shelter accepted a settlement and bowed out of the picture and MCA allowed Petty to sign with Backstreet, which was run by a sympathetic 26-year-old MCA executive named Danny Bramson. "Danny's really taken a load off my mind," Petty noted with evident relief.

Nevertheless, the pressure on Petty to follow up his best-selling *Damn the Torpedoes* with another success was intense. "I had to constantly talk myself out of wondering whether people would accept this or that," he recalled, "and so did our producer, Jimmy Iovine. But we weren't interested in making *Torpedoes Two*."



Tom Petty got his wish to record on a smaller label

'Hard Promises' packs powerful emotional punch

By JOHN GRIFFIN
of The Gazette

Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers like to take chances.

Petty could easily have turned out a replica of last year's highly successful *Damn The Torpedoes* and pleased his fans, his recording company and his accountant.

Instead, his new album, *Hard Promises*, marks a departure from the 12-string guitar, Byrds-influenced rock 'n' roll that Petty and the Heartbreakers have brought back to popularity.

Hard Promises is, well, harder than anything Petty has recorded in the past. He and the Heartbreakers are moving further away from the Byrds and closer to the Rolling Stones during their slide guitar, British-factory-blues, *Beggars Banquet* period.

Though Petty's passionate adonoidal vocal warbling still smacks of Roger McGuinn locked in some unholy alliance with Bob Dylan, his emotional intensity has, if anything, increased since *Damn The Torpedoes*.

And Petty's lyrics have progressed well beyond the "boy meets girl, boy loses girl" parameters of his early work. Increasingly, he is preoccupied with a deeper sense of loss, false promises and failed expectations.

The mysterious *Something Big* is set — Raymond Chandler fashion — in a dingy motel "corner room / that overlooked the marquee / of the Plaza all-adult."

Against an aural wall of organs, acoustic guitars and bongos, Petty tells of a man named Speedball spending a weekend waiting and "workin' on somethin' big." What he wants is never clearly defined. What he finds is death.

These themes are returned to again and again in the course of the

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album. "The waiting is the hardest part / everyday you see one more yard" sings Petty against a classic Heartbreakers' accompaniment of cascading guitars in the *The Waiting*.

A Woman In Love (It's Not Me) offers Petty at his most fevered, wailing out the lines "I gave her everything, she threw it all away" and amplifying the loss with a molten electric guitar figure.

He lightens up lyrically with cuts like *Kings Road*, a straight-ahead rocker, and *A Thing About You*, a stadium burner with liner notes that suggest we "Raise Both Arms and Repeat Chorus." No surprises here.

The surprises come with *Insider* and *You Can Still Change Your Mind*. The former is a moody, melodic ballad "to a broken-hearted fool" sung by Petty and Stevie Nicks of Fleetwood Mac. Nicks' ethereal voice, and the dramatic, funereal pace set by drummer Stan Lynch and organist Benmont Tench combine with majestic, emotionally-charged results.

You Can Still Change your Mind ends the album with Petty pointing in yet another direction. This wistful, dream-like ballad recalls the musical structures employed by the Beach Boys — all swirling vocal background, keyboard washes and glassy slide guitar.

As the cut fades out with the end of John Lennon's *Strawberry Fields Forever*, one is left with the strong impression that Petty is close to discovering a pure, personal means of expression within rock 'n' roll.