

Scrape-Prone Tom Petty Well Worth The Wait

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TOM PETTY'S latest album, "Hard Promises" could just as easily have been titled "Hard Times (Hopefully) Past."

Despite Petty's tremendous commercial success — particularly with his "Damn the Torpedoes" album — it seems that he's always pulling himself off the deck from one personal or professional scrape or another.

For example, Petty and his band the Heartbreakers, originally were scheduled to appear at Centennial Hall June 1. Then the show was canceled because of an injury to Petty's leg. Then it was rescheduled. Now, unless any other disasters befall them in the meantime, Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers will perform at Centennial at 8.30 p.m. June 14. It will mark the group's first appearance in Toledo.

According to Tony Dimitriades of the band's management team, Petty has tendonitis in a knee, which he injured a couple of months ago while jumping on a trampoline. The knee had not been getting any better during the band's rehearsals for the upcoming tour, and no one could give assurances that it would not go out on him during a show. "Rest was the only cure," Dimitriades said. So a decision was made to give Petty a couple of weeks' rest.

The first two weeks of what originally had been a 62-date tour had to be changed completely (concerts in Detroit and Cleveland also were pushed back). The "readjustments" as Dimitriades called them, will cause the band to miss some of those dates completely. "And that hurts," he added.

Like the concert, the release of "Hard Promises" also was delayed, and it undoubtedly it also will prove to be well worth the wait.

Laced with Petty's distinctive vocals, the album contains some of his most carefully constructed rock rhythms to date, and a duet by Petty and Stevie Nicks of Fleetwood Mac on the song, "The Insider." The hard-driving "Kings Road," with its rockabilly flavor, seems destined to be one of his biggest hits. And "A Thing About You" is another charmer.

The delay in the release of the LP occurred when Petty went to the mat with MCA Records (parent company of Backstreet Records, the label Petty records for) over the album's price. Petty has said that he was told the album would be priced at \$9.98; when MCA wanted to sell it for \$9.98, Petty publicly insisted that it sell at the lower figure. Petty won that battle.

Of that whole flap, Petty has said, "MCA has done a great job selling our records, but they couldn't see the reality of what it's like on the street — they

couldn't see that raising the album's price wouldn't be fair."

But in the next breath, he added, "It would be wrong to single them out; every other company would like to push record prices right up there. I'm not usually as concerned with record company business as you might think."

That is an unusual statement indeed from an artist who seems to have been particularly involved in the business end of the music business. In fact few in the industry have fought as many battles with record companies as Tom Petty.

A couple years ago, Shelter Records (the label with which Petty and the Heartbreakers originally signed) was sold to MCA. Petty, whose original recording deal had not been all that advantageous, maintained that the sale voided his contract. That initiated a year of hassling which finally was sorted out when Shelter accepted a settlement and stepped out of the picture. At one point Petty filed for bankruptcy. MCA Records eventually granted him the right to become the major artist on its Backstreet label.

At that time, the record company was banking on the promise of the band's first two albums: "Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers" and "You're Gonna Get It." The first album, which didn't reach the charts until nearly a year after its release in 1976, nonetheless yielded the

singles, "Breakdown" and "American Girl." The following LP contained the singles "Listen to Her Heart," and "I Need to Know."

But it was "Damn the Torpedoes," released towards the end of 1979, which established Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers as one of the top bands on the music scene. One of the best-selling LPs of 1980, the album featured the hit tunes "Don't Do Me Like That," "Refugee," "Here Comes My Girl," and "Shadow of a Doubt."

Besides his work with the Heartbreakers, Petty just recently finished producing an album for 60s rocker Del Shannon — soon to be released on the RSO label. It includes cover versions of "Sea of Love," the Rolling Stones' "Out of Time," and the Everly Brothers' "Maybe Tomorrow."

All of this is quite a climb from the time when Tom Petty quit high school at the age of 17 to join a local rock band called Mudcrutch in Gainesville, Fla. Two members of this group, guitarist Mike Campbell, and keyboardist Benmont Tench, would later become key figures in the Heartbreakers.

Petty was sent to L.A. in search of a recording contract, and landed one. The other members of Mudcrutch moved west, but the band broke up before they could make an album. Then one night in 1975, Petty dropped in on a recording session being held by Tench and

Campbell. Also present were old Gainesville band players bassist Ron Blair, and drummer Stan Lynch. The Heartbreakers were formed that night, and the lineup has remained the same ever since. Phil Jones, who was a drum roadie on the band's last tour, has become an added percussionist with the group.

The band's debut album was released at a most inauspicious time. It was given little advertising, and came out at the same time as new albums by the Eagles and Fleetwood Mac. Worse yet, a highly visible punk outfit also was called the Heartbreakers. Undeservedly, Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers were incorrectly labeled. "The press thought we were punks," Petty once recalled. "Most people didn't know us at all. We were just another new group."

Perhaps one of the reasons the label stuck longer than it should have was that at one point the blond wiry Petty was said to bring quasi-punk, wise-guy antics to his concerts. Now the shows are delivered with smoothness and control, yet with enough stage presence to keep the crowd fired up.

Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers are at the top of their game, and Petty recently said, "I guess we're in the mainstream of the music right now, but that's where I always wanted to be. We're proud of our band, and we always wanted to be successful, but not at the



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cost of compromising what we're trying to do. We have to keep delivering the songs and the playing, and if it becomes necessary to stick our necks out, like we did when the pricing disagreement came up, well, we have to do that too."