

SUMMER PRYOR FIX

'Bustin' Loose' should satisfy all Pryor's fans

By JOSHUA GRODSKY
Red and Black Staff Writer

"Bustin' Loose" is an unevenly contrived comedy that has its problems. Nevertheless, it should satisfy the legion of Richard Pryor fans eagerly awaiting their summer comedy fix.

The plot is pretty corny in corner, and slinks dangerously close to being a Walt Disney Productions reject. But here it is in a nutshell.

Vivien, an attractive lady social worker (nicely played by Cicely Tyson), decides to rescue a group of juvenile delinquents from the Philadelphia ghettos by transporting them across the country in a dilapidated school bus to her farm in Washington.

Enter Richard Pryor as a four-time loser ex-con. He has a debt to pay his parole officer who just happens to be Viv's boyfriend. Vivien finagles her boyfriend into conning Richard to fix the bus and transport the troop to her farm.

Along the road, Richard falls for Vivien and the tots and learns what it's like to be needed again. What they don't count on is the parole officer, who follows them to Washington in a fit of jealousy, and will go to any lengths to separate them from their dream. And another upset awaits them when they reach their destination: the farm's going to be sold if they can't come up with the mortgage money. Surely such upsets were better left to the silent movies!

The kids get to stay on the farm. Pryor gets Tyson at the end in a marvelously mundane *deus ex machina* and everyone leaves the theatre happy.

Pryor is on his own here. It's arguable as to whether his solo work is better than his teamings with Gene Wilder in films like "Silver Streak."

But he does have the children to play off. And these "underprivileged" tykes are no ordinary kids. They include some street-toughs, a pyromaniac, a 9-year-old prostitute and a blind lad with a penchant for driving school buses.

With such a bizarre mix of characters, the movie fragments into face, sentiment and slapstick. The characters are never given much development, but this is a plus. If we felt for these kids this plot could easily fall into sappy melodrama.

Pryor has somewhat more leeway than do the rest of the cast in overcoming the plot restrictions. Much of the humor

"Bustin' Loose," starring Richard Pryor and Cicely Tyson and directed by Oz Scott, is a Universal Pictures release.

comes from Pryor's funky character being reluctantly thrust into the role of den mother to these off-the-wall kids. There is, perhaps, not as much room for his wild brand of levity, but he does have his moments. One of those is in the beginning, when having just been nabbed for robbery, he is given his prison sentence. Pryor pleads with frenzy to be given the maximum sentence allowable because he loves prison with its free-meal plan. The judge decides that the best punishment, naturally, is to parole him right away. Pryor cleverly gets his way while gently ribbing the country's prison system.

Some disturbing moments arise when Pryor manages to set himself on fire. Although meant to be funny, these scenes pensively remind us of Pryor's off-screen tragedy with butane. The film was shot before Pryor's accident, and the scenes are in questionable taste in lieu of those events.

Pryor is definitely up to par, performing his explosive style of comedy which often means his wild-eyed wit is pitted against imminent death. Agreed—it's funny; but has society grown so tough that the only thing funny is a human being thrust into a life-or-death situation? This has been the recent trend of horror films and television shows like "That's Incredible." Must comedy films inevitably follow suite?

Though "Bustin' Loose" leans too heavily on gimmicks and too lightly on characterization, comedy fans will find it a mildly pleasant summer diversion.

Music on 'Promises' reflects Petty's expanded view

By JAY WATSON
Red and Black Staff Writer

Tom Petty's "Damn the Torpedoes" was a great album in the midst of a very good (for a change) rock-and-roll year, 1980. Now with the release of "Hard Promises," "Torpedoes" appears even greater. It took a 1979 bankruptcy as well as a host of other problems to get Petty making music at the level of his previously unrealized potential. And his two albums since then complement each other so well that it seems sublime to consider them apart.

"Torpedoes" was the sound of a man on the rebound: dense, urgent, reckless, it contained a go-for-it attitude that was

"Hard Promises," by Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, is a Backstreet Records release. Review copy courtesy of Record Bar.

downright infectious. Petty found a way to see the bright side of everything. His women were complicated, never easy, yet that made loving them all the more wondrous.

He looked to the West ("Century City"), to the "modern world" and the new. And when things looked bad, he held up the example of the refugee, or, in "Louisiana Rain," he waited out the bad times for the baptismal showers and the rebirth, the good times that

had to come soon.

And now "Hard Promises" gives us a look back from those good times as well as a look into them. If "Torpedoes" found Petty on the move, obsessed with hope and not reality, "Promises" finds him resting, taking in his surroundings with a practiced eye. There are songs on "Promises" where the protagonist does not come out on top, but this makes the album much more real to us.

The music reflects Petty's expanded view and serves as a running commentary on his lyrics. While "Torpedoes" rarely abandoned its ambitious, high-toned, guitar-bass-drums attack, bringing to mind a marriage of mid-'60s California rock with mid-'70s California rock, "Promises" embraces this formula in the midst of others, going the extra mile to pick up where "Torpedoes" tunes like the brooding "You Tell Me" or the lyrical "Louisiana Rain" left off.

The step from innocent freshness to maturity is breathtaking. Petty dabbles in various genres and musical phrases, yet his multi-media creation succeeds unquestionably.

"Kings Road" helps exemplify the fact that Petty is now well-rooted in reality. The no-punches-pulled attack recalls "What're You Doing in My Life?" from "Torpedoes," but the lyric is an out-and-out reversal of the frontier spirit of "Century City." While "City" caught Petty dreaming of



Tom Petty

joining the security of suburbia, assuming a new urban identity and fleeing his former misfortune for a kind of egalitarian anonymity. "Kings Road" finds him a newcomer in a town where tradition reigns, where newcomers don't slip in but rather stand out: "I'm a new-world boy on the old Kings Road."

"The Waiting" is a bittersweet celebration along the lines of "Here Comes My Girl." Everything about it is pure pop majesty; Petty's luscious blend of pain and ecstasy in the vocal, the soaring and succinct guitar lines of Mike Campbell, the resounding snap of the

drums and the heart-throat backing vocals. "Nightwatchman" marries a big drumbeat with two prickly contrapuntal guitar figures and more slide work. The staccato delivery of the entire song contrasts noticeably with the apparent boredom of the title character, who passes the time by inflating his own ego: "I am security." Finally, though, he realizes: "But listen my life's worth more than the minimum wage." But "Something Big" finally sums up everything Petty has learned in the slow transition from naivete to experience. It is the story of

a man on the way up, but unlike Petty, this man's motives are questionable. People, even lovers, are tools to him, instruments fitted with care into a grand scheme of success, power, wealth — it matters not what. "It wasn't no way to live. But he could put up with it for a little while. He was working on something big."

The music is the album's darkest, creating a kind of slow, brooding power, a turmoil paralleling the moral vacuum of the stranger. Throaty 12-string arpeggios lead into a swirling mix of muted tone colors featuring organ and subdued drumming. Petty's vocal tried to deliver the narrative detachedly, but contempt shows through as he snaps off the words with a sneer.

The backing vocals are jeering but strangely lacking in force, sounding almost disembodied; the electric piano solo stands out in a murky sort of way, like a distant streetlight in the fog. The overall effect is chilling and cathartic; perhaps this is because Petty, who has taken his licks and risen above them, is so outraged.

Here is a man who sued to prevent his record from being a dollar more expensive, a hard promise indeed, a man who knows all about the waiting. And you've got to admire him for that waiting and clench your fist with him when he looks down Kings Road into those old-world faces — and stays there.

Gallery

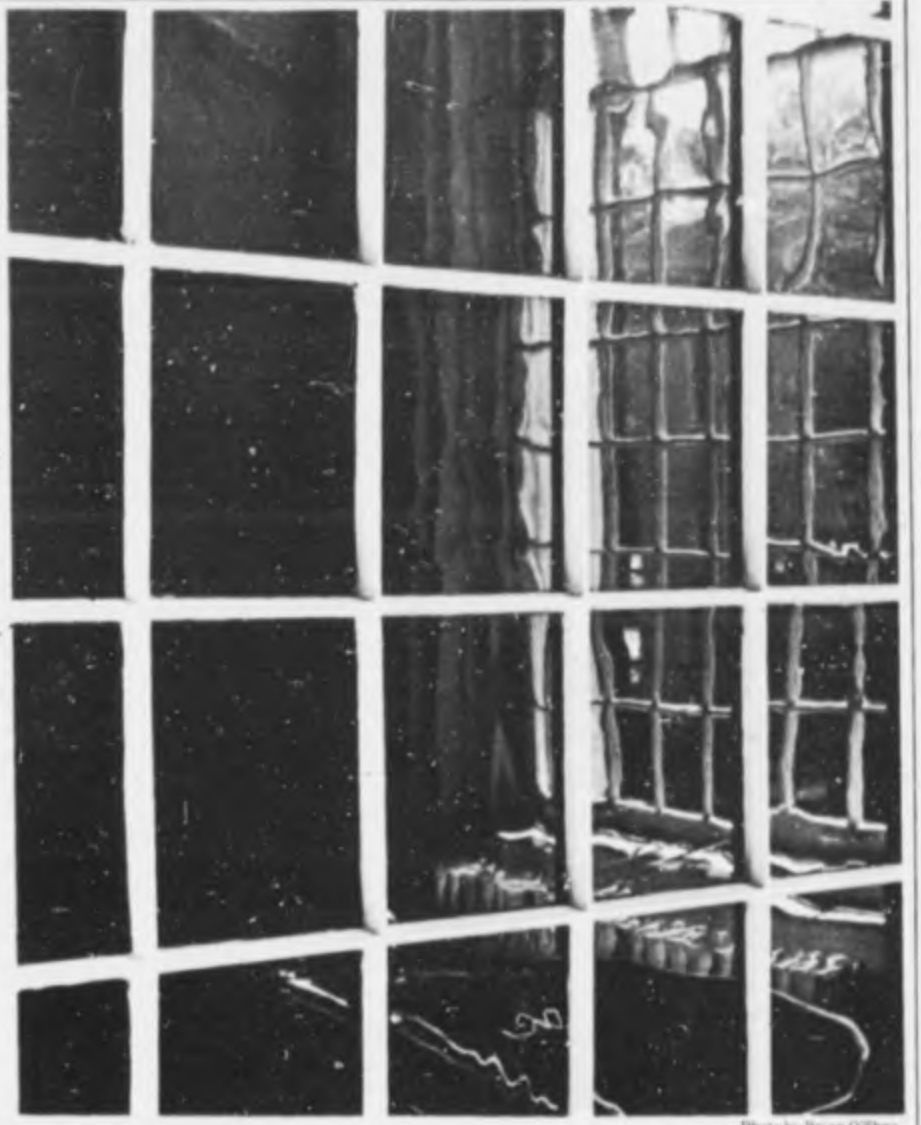


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