

COMPRISING classical guitarist John Williams and other similarly-inclined musicians, Sky looked like a one-off affair when they got together in 1979 to cut a record which, in spite of their classical and jazz leanings, was aimed at a rock audience.

The move was logical as it enabled them to dabble in more experimental and less constrained musical forms. But the band hardly seemed a permanent aggregation.

Now two years on, unlikely as it seems, not only have they stuck together but have gone from strength to strength. Of course, their commercial success could have something to do with it.

Their latest album, *SKY 3* (Ariola), is an extension and progression of their first two efforts. It is a mature, self-assured exploration of pop, classical, rock, and jazz norms, fused to create the unique Sky sound.

Many other groups have trodden along this musical path before, but not many could boast of such a strong line-up of talents. And those who could soon showed themselves extremely prone to excess and pomposity.

Sky, after three offerings, still retains a remarkable freshness in

The unique Sky sound

approach and performance. This, I believe, is as much due to their refusal to take themselves seriously as to the surfeit of ideas from all five members.

Everyone, except Williams, not to be confused with his namesake who composes movie themes like *Star Wars* and *Superman* apart from being conductor of the Boston Philharmonic), is involved in writing the 11 tracks.

Williams takes credit for adapting Handel's *Sarabande*, originally written for the harpsichord, and adding new variations to suit his guitar excursions.

Original keyboardist Francis Monkman has departed since recording *Sky 2* and his replacement, Steve Gray, seems to have settled in well, coming out with two compositions.

Hilfo, which he wrote the day he joined Sky, is a showcase of his keyboard skills while *Sixty Nine* is more interesting. Opening with some lovely guitar work. Herbie

Flowers' strong bass riffs soon injects pace and power. It is a masterful blend of styles.

Two brief numbers by Flowers, *The Grace* and *Krep Me Safe and Keep Me Warm, Shelter Me From Darkness*, opens and closes the album respectively.

In between are tracks like guitarist Kevin Peck's *Westwind* and *Mostruff*, and drummer Tristan Fry's *Connecting Rooms*.

Each one is a delight as the band's talents flower. Each musician takes a turn to spotlight brief but engaging solos.



Peek of the new records

SAW TEK MENG

So long as they can turn out inspiring stuff like this, the sky's hardly the limit for them.

ELTON JOHN — THE FOX (Rocket Records)

If Elton John's last set, 21 at 33 signalled his return to form, then *The Fox* is proof the previous album was hardly a fluke.

The Fox is by no means an excellent record, even by John's declining standards since his superlative *Goodbye Yellow Brick Road*, but it is a vast improvement over some of the sorry works he has since turned out.

The album also marks the renewed partnership of John and Bernie Taupin and their four efforts turn out to be the most outstanding tracks in a set of 11, two of which are instrumentals.

The two, *Carlin*, *Etude* and *Fanfare*, has John plunking the ivories to the accompaniment of

the London Symphony Orchestra and are only so much unnecessary bombast.

Nobody Wins is the only outside composition and it turns out to be the most disappointing. Written by Jean-Paul Dreau and Gary Osborne, the lyrics are painfully pretentious in a synthesised number that is as emotionless as it is ill-conceived. Coupled with John's fatuous phrasing, it ends up as an inexcusable excess in an album whose other songs, fortunately, never comes close to this nadir.

John co-wrote three songs with Osborne. *Breaking Down Barriers* is a rocker with a catchy tinkling piano break, while *Heart In The Right Place* is about a muckraking female journalist set to instantly absorbing rhythms. *Chloe* is a love song where the instruments hash up the right quantum of emotion.

Of the John-Taupin collaborations, the most impressive is *Fanciest Faces*, a powerful track, both musically and lyrically. Coming on the heels of the synthesised *Nobody Wins*, it is a welcome return to basics as a garage guitar blitz by Richie Zito gives an urgent edge to Taupin's lyrics which avoid sermonising and are tinged with humour while retaining a cutting incisiveness.

Both *Just Like Belgium* and *Hills Of The Wind* are rollicking fun numbers while the mid-tempo title track is filled with nice little touches, particularly Mickey Raphael's sensitive harmonica licks as John lays down some lovely vocals.

In the somewhat obtrusive *Etude*, *Carlin* and *Song* (but perfectly logical, if you recall he wrote a number titled *Your Song*), John plays the voyeur, staring at

alone as the girl with the gypsy hair and dark

brown eyes cut him to the bone with her razor blade smile.

Even if *The Fox* is flawed, it does contain ample good moments to merit giving John a second chance before writing him off as a has-been. Why, it's even enough to forgive him his trillion pairs of glasses and gaudy outfits.

JEAN-MICHEL JARRE — MAGNETIC FIELDS (Polydor)

If you always thought the French are self-opinionated and possess an inflated self-importance, then look no further for confirmation.

Here is proof in the form of Jean-Michel Jarre, surely their least necessary export since Mirage jets and other assorted arms.

In this sorry set of an album composed and produced by him, he is not content to weave layer upon layer of mechanical noise trying to pass as music but attempts to make it seem as part of a larger plan of things.

The music, despite being titled *Magnetic Fields Paris 1, 2, 3, 4* and 5, lacks cohesiveness or linking ideas, coming across as a mere gamut of synthesised sounds. And Part 5, subtitled *The Last Rumba*, is an oddity because, as the title implies, it is in rumba beat and is even more disparate from the other tracks.

Maybe Jarre is trying to tell us something but whatever it is does not register through listening to the music. Perhaps next time he would do well to remember music, even if completely programmed by computer, still needs a human audience. In the meantime, if he wants to pursue a technorock career, he should try taking some lessons from the Germans or Japanese.

CHICAGO: The doorman at the luxury hotel didn't know whether to help with the baggage or call Security as the scruffy men, some with their shoes in hand, headed toward him.

Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, who had slept during the bus ride from the Cleveland, contrasted with the well-groomed businessmen and women who stared at them as they stumbled through the lobby.

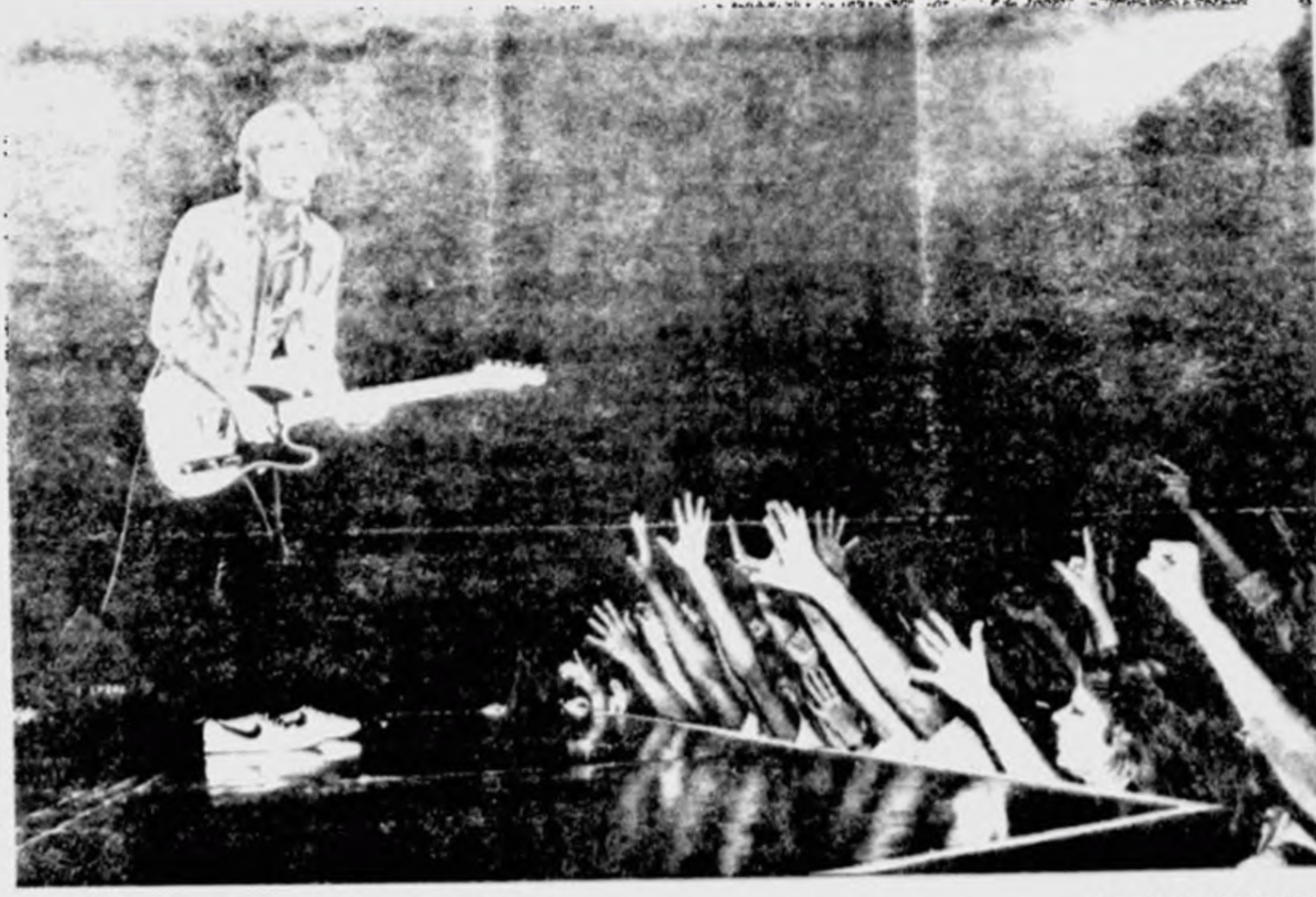
Through mid-morning, it was still the middle of the night by rock 'n' roll time.

The trick in checking into the hotel is to make it from the bus to the room without waking up, at least not fully. That way you avoid the risk of not being able to get back to sleep. Rest is the best defence against the craziness of the road.

On this day, the band was lucky. Everybody picked up three or four hours more sleep before beginning the cycle again. Lunch, a sound check at the hall, the concert, a late snack, back on the bus, on to the next city.

It's a process that Petty and the four Heartbreakers will repeat for the next three months on a tour that includes three shows, starting tonight, at the Ingwood Forum.

Tom Petty: Life on a carousel



'A road tour is like going round and round'

It can only happen when you get an audience and a band together. With a video it's safe. But when you go on stage, it can be either a great night or a disaster. It's something everyone there remembers. You're part of something special.

But what about the strain of the road?

The slender, 25-year-old Petty has been in rock more than half his life. First excited by the image of Elvis Presley, he was in a band in Gainesville when he was 13. By 15, he was on the road, playing weekend gigs. His school principal once sent him to a psychologist to find out why he wanted to play rock rather than attend classes. Simple. Petty remembers telling him: Rock was more fun.

Petty, part of a group called Mudcrutch, drove 3,000 miles to Los Angeles in a VW van in the early '70s, hoping to get a record contract. They didn't have enough money for hotels so the band drove straight through. He remembers standing in a LA phone booth with a handful of change, calling record companies to see if anyone would listen to the demo tape.

"I feel real lucky sometimes," he said in his soft, Southern drawl, as the bus purred along the highway. "You get to where you ask yourself, 'Why Me?' I mean, I was consumed by rock 'n' roll as a kid. It was the only thing I had any interest in. It's still that way pretty much I have to force myself sometimes to do other things so I won't be a total bore."

"I think it must have been total preoccupation with music that kept me going during those times when nothing seemed to be happening. But you could also take great comfort in small steps. I was thrilled the first time we went to California."

"It didn't matter that we were still struggling. I had made it out of Gainesville. Nobody in my family had done that. It was real hard in the beginning to think I'd ever make it out of town either or that I'd have enough money to pay the rent, much less own my own house."

The Silver Eagle pulled into the Chicago hotel parking lot around 9 a.m. While the band slept, road manager Richard Fernandez checked in. Returning to the bus, he gave each member of the group envelopes with keys so they could go straight to their rooms.

By 1 p.m. everyone was up, but on their own. Lynch worked out on exercise equipment in the hotel health club and others went to the restaurant, but Petty stayed close to his room, listening to music. By the end of the tour, he said, he'll be struggling so hard against fatigue that he'll sleep until a half hour before the sound check.

Though most of Petty's songs touch on traditional boy-girl themes, his lyrics are broad enough to speak about grappling with goals and dreams. The key tracks from *Damn The Torpedoes!* dealt with reaching for the goals. *The Heart* of the new *Hard Promises* is maintaining integrity after achieving the goals. Fittingly, the album is softer and more thoughtful.

"To me, the songs are about living up to challenges not taking the easy way out. You meet a lot of people who have given up on their dreams. They're just thoroughly disillusioned because things have been so rough for them. They don't even want to think about the future because it's so painful for them."

"But people can also give up on their dreams because they got sidetracked. They get rich or get famous or whatever it was they thought was going to bring them happiness, and they find that it's not everything they thought. People sometimes have the wrong dreams." LP5

POP CHARTS

U.S. ALBUMS:	U.K. ALBUMS:
1. (1) MISTAKEN IDENTIFICATION (EMI-America) Kim Carnes	1. (4) LOVE SONGS (EMI) Cliff Richard
2. (3) LONG DISTANCE VOYAGER (Threshold) Moody Blues	2. (1) DISCO DAZE & DISCO NUTS (Rancho) Various Artists
3. (2) HI INFIDELITY (CBS) REO Speedwagon	3. (3) NO SLEEP 'TIL HAMBURG (Motor) Motorhead
4. (4) PARADISE THEATRE (A&M) Styx	4. (2) STARS ON LONG PLAY (Mercury) Stars On 45
5. (8) STREET SONGS (MCA) Rick James	5. (7) PRESENT ARMS (Dep Int'l) UB40
6. (6) HARD PROMISES (MCA) Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers	6. (6) SECRET COMBINATION (Warner Bros) Randy Crawford
7. (7) FACE VALUE (WEA) Phil Collins	7. (5) ANTHEM (Safari) Toyah
8. (5) DIRTY DEEDS DONE DIRTY (Atlantic) AC/DC	8. (10) FACE VALUE (WEA) Phil Collins
9. (9) STARS ON LONG PLAY (Mercury) Stars On 45	9. (8) KINGS OF THE WILD FRONTIER (CBS) Adam & Ants
10. (10) ZEPHOP (CBS) Santana	10. (-) KIM WILDE (Rak) Kim Wilde

U.S. SINGLES:	U.K. SINGLES:
1. (1) BETTE DAVIS EYES (EMI-America) Kim Carnes	1. (2) GHOST TOWN (Specials) Michael Jackson
2. (2) ALL THOSE YEARS AGO (Dark Horse) George Harrison	2. (1) ONE DAY IN YOUR LIFE (Motown) Michael Jackson
3. (3) THE ONE THAT YOU LOVE (Arista) Air Supply	3. (3) CAN CAN (Magnet) Bad Manners
4. (4) JESSIE'S GIRL (RCA) Rick Springfield	4. (15) STARS ON 45 MEDLEY TWO (Mercury) Stars On 45
5. (5) YOU MAKE MY DREAMS (RCA) Daryl Hall & John Oates	5. (4) GOING BACK TO OUR ROOTS (Odyssey) Odyssey
6. (6) ELVIRA (MCA) The Oak Ridge Boys	6. (7) BODY TALK (I&B) Ima Generation
7. (8) THE THEME FROM THE "GREATEST AMERICA HERO" (Elektra) Joey Scarbury	7. (6) MEMORY (Polydor) Elaine Paige
8. (9) I DON'T NEED YOU (Liberty) Kenny Rogers	8. (5) BEING WITH YOU (Motown) Smokey Robinson
9. (10) SLOW HAND (Planet) Sisters	9. (12) NO WOMAN NO CRY (Island) Bob Marley & The Wailers
10. (16) BOY FROM NEW YORK CITY (Atlantic) Manhattan Transfer	10. (14) YOU DON'T STOP PINGHOOD (Rak) Tom Club

EMI MUSIC CONTEST No 16

Entries close one week from now

There are no winners for EMI contest No 15

Each of the five winners will receive three LPs. All you have to do is answer the following questions correctly. You may send in as many entries as you wish but each entry must be accompanied by the entry form below.

1. What was the longest charting single of 1967?
2. Who sang backup on the Boz Scaggs hit "Miss Sun"?
3. Which Beach Boy is now on a solo trek?
4. Who wrote "The Day I Met Marlie" for Cliff Richard?
5. What is the new single from the Commodores?

Send your entries to: EMI Contest No. 16, c/o New Sunday Times, 31, Jalan Biang, Kuala Lumpur.