

Keeping Promises

by Pamela White

After the first few numbers, Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers laid down the tone: they were going to deliver a down-to-earth concert. There would be no flash, no theatrics, no unnecessary embellishments—just a lot of straightforward rock 'n' roll.

It could have been a dangerous approach. The Heartbreakers have had so many radio hits in the last few years that a concert featuring one radio blockbuster after another could have been something of a let-down to the 16,000 or so people who showed up to hear their idol. But the music, despite its familiarity, carried the crowd through two hours of energetic euphoria. It was a quality concert that went from low gear to high solely on the strength of the music, which is all most people want anyway. If the concert was a little heavy on predictability, it was fun as well.

Another danger was that Met Center, the world's largest sound sauna, could have slain Petty's music, which depends heavily on a clean sound and clear articulation. The band overcame this problem neatly by sacrificing a bit in volume—a lesson that the opening band could do well to learn from.

Of course the Heartbreakers

played all the biggest hits: "Refugee," "Listen To Her Heart," "Here Comes My Girl," "Breakdown," and "Thing About You." What kept the concert from dying of predictability was the low-key manner in which the band played these numbers. They could have played back in the old Longhorn for their lack of pretentiousness. Rather than let a star-spangled songlist carry them along, they simply gave each number all they had. Equally appealing was their playfulness and good humor on stage. Petty is an excellent frontman, and he didn't try to be any more than just that. Consequently, the Heartbreakers came across as a cohesive, tight band.

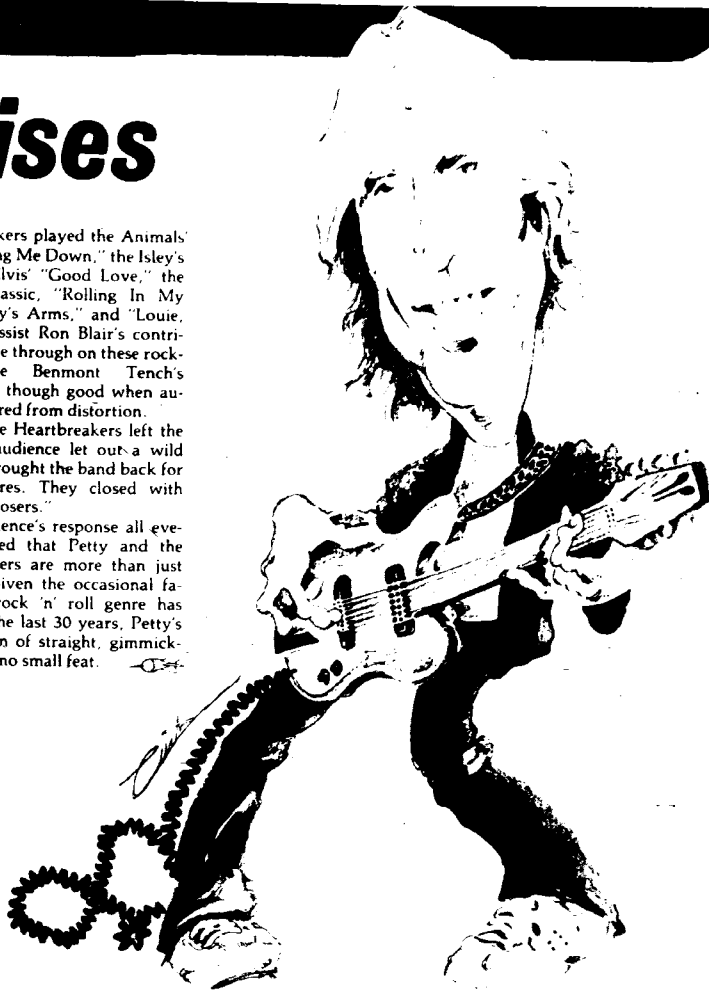
Along with the hits, the Heartbreakers performed tunes from the recent *Hard Promises*. New Heartbreaker Phil Jones on percussion and drummer Stan Lynch augmented "Nightwatchman" 's funky groove with a tight, in tandem introduction. "Woman In Love" suffered a bit from the diminished volume, as Mike Campbell's driving guitar lead got lost in the sound mix. These latter songs show Petty's rocker influences a little more than the earlier hits. Most of the material from *Hard Promises* points to both a new raggedness and a maturing sensibility.

The rawness of this newer stuff fit well with the surprise covers: the

Heartbreakers played the Animals' "Don't Bring Me Down," the Isley's "Shout," Elvis' "Good Love," the country classic, "Rolling In My Sweet Baby's Arms," and "Louie, Louie." Bassist Ron Blair's contribution came through on these rockers, while Benmont Tench's keyboards, though good when audible, suffered from distortion.

When the Heartbreakers left the stage the audience let out a wild roar that brought the band back for three encores. They closed with "Even the Losers."

The audience's response all evening showed that Petty and the Heartbreakers are more than just popular. Given the occasional fatigue the rock 'n' roll genre has shown in the last 30 years, Petty's rejuvenation of straight, gimmick-free rock is no small feat.



FILM

Aggressively Stupid Space Comics

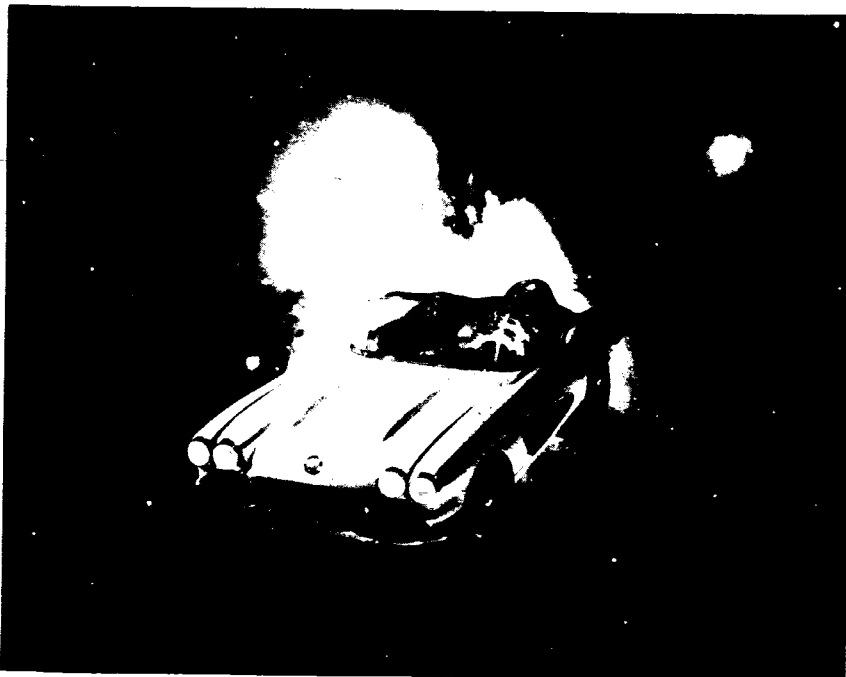
Heavy Metal/Directed by Gerald Potterton/Written by Richard Corben, Angus McKie, Dan O'Bannon, Thomas Warkentin & Bernie Wrightson/Mpls Skyway, St. Paul Clna 4

by David Dean

When Walt Disney's *Dumbo* first played theaters, younger children became upset (not surprisingly) at the death of *Dumbo's* gentle elephant mother. If only there were even one such moving moment in the new animated movie for sex-and-violence zonked teenagers, *Heavy Metal*. I can just imagine some media-insulated mommies and daddies ignorantly trooping the kids out to see this cartoon, laboring under the (mis)impression that it's strictly buckeroos-in-space stuff. They'll either have to haul the kids away slaving with shock, or they'll have a new group of Van Halen/Krokus/AC/DC fans on their hands. Get down, you mothers, as they say.

"Heavy Metal" is a term used initially by the brilliant and influential critic Lester Bangs (yes, his real name), who writes in a white hot stream-of-consciousness manner about rock and sundry other matters. He culled the phrase from a dystopian novel by William Burroughs—a cut-up science fiction vision about Mayan consciousness and modernist paranoia. The phrase that once defined music as varied as The Velvet Underground's "Sister Ray" and thudmaster Black Sabbath's "Iron Man" has almost become a derogatory term. In some quarters, "Heavy Metal" is synonymous with what is most annoying, stupid, and crass in rock music today.

Heavy Metal is also the name of a widely circulated French import magazine that inspired the new car-



Heavy Metal's space Corvette—not worth the drive

toon movie. The connection between a specific branch of rock music and a sophisticated fantasy cartoon rag isn't obvious. Both are violent, sexual, disordered, far-out, often deliberately unpleasant, and sometimes science fiction-oriented—definitely not mellow.

The film *Heavy Metal*, directed by Gerald Potterton, is comprised of disjointed episodes loosely tied together by the presence of an evil green thing, a mystically powered ball named Loch-nar. According to press info, the producers enlisted "today's foremost sci-fi illustrators" to create the visuals. However,

without prior knowledge you'd barely know there is any stylistic difference between various episodes because most of the imagery washes over you in classic head-trip fashion. You soon lose track of any central impression and succumb to the flow of visuals, many of which are absolutely brilliant. Unfortunately much of the movie is so aggressively stupid, cynical or violent that it doesn't matter how clever the visuals are.

Take one of the early episodes, called "So Beautiful, And So Dangerous," for instance. Evil ball Loch-nar relates a tale of his, um,

heavy influence in New York of the future to a captive young girl who, at the end, we learn is the spirit of goodness. (Why didn't they just hire Dream Whip's Mrs. Tucker?) The central character in post-apocalypse New York is a completely nihilistic cabbie who stops one day for a beautiful young woman in possession of the ball. Illegal aliens prowl around (really alien—from Venus and Mars) and if a rider gets a bit testy or demands the driver's money, he hits a floor switch and the culprit dissolves in a death beam. After the young woman, the daughter of a scientist, spends a

"heavy" night in bed with the cabbie, she persuades him to help her sell Loch-nar. After the trade-off, she pulls a gun, wants all the money after they have agreed to share it, and he zaps her. The cabbie says something like, "I took a long trip that day, but I sure ended up with a hell of a tip," and we are moved to the next sequence.

The last episode of *Heavy Metal* is probably its most lyrical or serious but it bogs down because its heroine, "Taarna," an Amazonian space woman, never says a word. She is pure feminine principle embodied in a "perfect form" and thus is tedious (not to mention sexist) because she's inhuman. She can punch her fist into an alien bad guy's head (completely—her hand emerges dripping with green blood) but her adventure, though it has its visual moments, is so trite and comic-book fantastic it's meaningless.

Why do people want to escape into this stuff? *Heavy Metal* is ultimately a reactionary fantasy in the guise of going inward to a fantasy level of consciousness, it instead moves outward into mindless escape.

About the music: it's not there. The soundtrack album is a solid set, but in the fashion of current companion albums to films, lots of it isn't even heard in the movie. Instead, Elmer Bernstein's incidental music wastes much of the screen time. When the soundtrack music is used, the songs appear in severely truncated versions. A charming light jazzy number by Donald Fagen (Steely Dan) is heard for about two seconds during the NYC episode. At least Devo's reworking of Allen Toussaint's "Working In The Coal Mine" is heard intact. But that it plays as the credits reel away and viewers file out of the theater is just one more instance of *Heavy Metal's* lack of integration.