

Drifters performance hampered by acoustical problems



By KEVIN BICKNELL
Red and Black Entertainment Editor

With the possible exceptions of the Temptations, there has probably never been a vocal group in popular music with the greatness of the Drifters. No group has ever sung better and no group has ever had better songs to sing. They may not have advanced much past their golden age (from 1968-63) but as they proved in their engagement at the Mad Hatter this weekend, the strength of their singing and the excellence of their material can push any other considerations aside.

Admittedly, there was a lot to push aside. For every concert except the post-game one on Saturday the group was booked in the Mad Hatter main room, an acoustic nightmare that makes Memorial Hall sound like Carnegie. The Drifters' band sounded listless and drab. Seeing them in those conditions was painful, like watching a former heavyweight champion fight in a third-rate ring.

And then Bill Pinckney stepped out to sing "This Magic Moment," the song that says better than anything else what

their music is about and what it is for, and the show immediately perked up. Bands like the Drifters depend on the ability to take "magic moments" from the past or present and make them real. These moments go beyond nostalgia unless romanticism itself is nostalgic.

As the group sang "Under the Boardwalk," "Up on the Roof" and "Saturday Night at the Movies," one forgot about the bad acoustics as the Drifters' magic moments let you just drift away like Dobie Gray said you could.

Unfortunately, those numbers were about the only ones that the acoustics allowed to work. On almost all of the other songs the performances bounced off the walls. You couldn't tell how well the band was playing and singing. One felt sorry for the Drifters. It was obvious that their "magic moments" were few and far between.

But then came Saturday's post-game show in the Mad Hatter's disco room, and any notions of a band over the hill were pushed aside. The room has a much better sound quality and the group made good use of it.

The Drifters' band reflected the improvement; while they sounded like a bad funk outfit the night before, here they were as crisp and tight as the best soul bands. Their instrumental jam before the singers came out was inspired and unlike most such efforts, not boring for one minute.

Actually, every performance was nothing short of excellent as the Drifters created those magic moments that reflections on the past recall while avoiding nostalgia almost completely. If this band could get the right kind of material to cover, they could be as great as ever.

Or maybe not. Magic moments don't come cheap these days as the most honest music of today tells us. The Drifters are grounded in romance and romance in popular songs today is a dead issue. It is possible that the Drifters music means nothing more to people than a return to lost innocence.

I don't think so. All the Drifters have ever said is that there's a place, under the boardwalk, up on the roof, or at the movies where you can get away and forget your troubles just for a little while. God knows we need a place like that now.

Tom Petty and Heartbreakers to play Civic Center tonight

By JAY WATSON
Red and Black Staff Writer

One of rock music's most exciting and intelligent bands, Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, play the Atlanta Civic Center tonight at 8:00. Petty and company bring along the turgid but bright sound and lyrical excellence which have graced four albums and the strength and commitment that has survived heat from the courts and record companies alike.

Petty, aided by guitarist Mike Campbell, bassist Ron Blair, drummer Stan Lynch and keyboardist Benmont Tench, released two well-

received, moderately successful albums before plunging into massive personal debt and eventual bankruptcy. Ironically, the bankruptcy kindled Petty's emotional resiliency and songwriting prowess to a level light years above his first pair of efforts.

"Damn the Torpedoes" and "Hard Promises," the resulting albums, may be viewed as companion pieces. "Torpedoes" crystallized Petty's trebly blend of Byrds-like electric 12-string guitar, crackling drum work and Tench's tremulous organ into a product for mass consumption and immense critical praise.

The sound pushed along Petty's lyrics, parables of sorts expressing an optimism not justified by the hardship the artist went through.

"Promises" found a more versatile use of sound, including Petty's voice, notably on the ballad duet with Stevie Nicks, "Insider," and the anguished "Woman in Love (It's not Me)." The lyrics took on a more worldly, less romantic perspective, as though Petty no longer had to convince himself of anything.

Petty's live show promises to be every bit as interesting as his studio efforts. It boils



By DEBORAH SHARP
Red and Black Staff Writer

Instead of "Rabbit is Rich," John Updike could have called his latest novel "Rabbit Runs Out of Gas." Harry Angstrom is getting old. For the high school basketball hero of "Rabbit, Run," and the hero forgotten ten years later in "Rabbit Redux," middle age hangs heavy. The Rabbit is in a rut.

For Harry life has become hum-drum, middle-class and dull. There is little action and less adventure shaking up the streets of Brewer, Pennsylvania. With his job as chief sales representative at the Toyota car lot, his evenings at home with his pain-in-the-neck family, and his beer commercial weekends around the club pool, Rabbit is just an average guy, living an average life.

In his middle years, as top dog at Springer Motors, Rabbit is finally respectable, mildly prosperous, but not

inflation-proof rich. For Harry, life is ordinary.

What is extraordinary is that Updike manages to fascinate the reader with the details of such an unexciting existence. Updike has an exceptional gift for description — his ear is tuned to the sound of words strung together, his eye is focused on the images the phrases create.

At times, Updike's style can slip over into excess. When it does, the passage overpowers. This tendency is especially evident when, while jogging, Harry's mind begins to free-associate. This goes on for several miles (and several pages). Street scenes flash by and Rabbit's memories and musings gurgles up from his subconscious. The reader, running alongside, begins to suffer sensory overload. Words and images lose their distinction, and the reader stumbles on a heap of verbiage.

But when Updike is on target, the purity of his words is startling. Updike describes "... an old man's sour sad body smell ..." and

The care and craftsmanship in building such passages is obvious, but somehow the total product — characters and story — does not impress. It's as if individual stones were painstakingly carved and etched for a special house, and then, in the final construction, the stone stuck together haphazardly. In this book, the beauty of the individual stones is hidden. The story as a whole lacks the special quality of those finely-wrought passages.

In this third book, Rabbit is still evolving. At 46 years old, Rabbit still searches for an identity. The character is less shallow than in the earlier books, and here, at least, the facets compose an interesting whole. Updike has given us more substance to this Rabbit. Harry is easier to like because he is easier to understand.

Not as easily understood is the conflict between Rabbit and some of the other characters. The complexities of his relationships are never fully developed. Again, Updike gives us in-

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"In his inner life too Rabbit dodges among more blanks than there used to be, patches of burnt out gray cells where there used to be lust and keen dreaming and wide-eyed dread; he falls asleep, for instance, at the drop of a hat. He never used to understand the phrase."

— From "Rabbit is Rich," by John Updike. (467 pages Alfred A. Knopf \$13.95.)

writes that "... getting out of bed in the morning sometimes Harry surprises it on himself, this faraway odor like a corpse just beginning to sweeten." ...

triguing bits and pieces — especially in the love-hate relationship of Harry and his son — but the pieces fail to come together. One may say the same of the entire novel.

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