

Stan Lynch, the Homebody Heartbreaker

By BILL DeYOUNG
Sun Music Writer

Stan Lynch can have anything he wants. Cars, women, drugs, you name it, any of the trappings that rock stardom has to offer, Stan can get 'em. As the drummer for Tom Petty's critically-and-commercially potent Heartbreakers, he's been around the world seven times, owns an apartment high above Santa Monica Bay in sunny California, can boast of two platinum and three gold albums, and nearly as many hit singles as Michael Jackson.

What Stan wants most of all, he says, is a nice house on Little Lake Geneva, where he can water-ski, and the chance to hop into Gainesville when he pleases for an exciting night on the town.

This is not merely a rock-star retreat for Stan Lynch, a place to get away from it all. He's a Gainesville native, like three of the other original Heartbreakers (Tom, too), and he'll tell you he hangs out here, lives in Keystone Heights half the year, because he wants to. It's the only vice he clings to stringently.

"I feel comfortable here," he says, "my roots are here. Really, I come back because I can. I don't have to be defensive, I don't have to have my guard up, to have a rap, or a glad hand. It's comfortable for me to be here, that's all. I don't feel like I'm lazy if I'm not working. In L.A., if I'm not working I feel very upset about it."

It's been 10 years since 19-year old Stan Lynch, who'd attended every high school in Gainesville and deigned to graduate "because that was one thing I could do for my parents," stuffed his drum kit in an old Volkswagon and headed, without any real goal, for California. Ostensibly, he was going to hook up with guitarist Marty Jourard, his cohort from Road Turkey, a popular local group, to try for a recording deal. Jourard bailed out at the last minute and Stan, with the \$100 his father had given him, went to see what would happen.

He lived, for a dollar a day, in a friend's basement, without kitchen or bathroom. He took a job in a record store, and by night drummed in a Heavy Metal band. "This was around the Bee Gees and disco time, and there wasn't a big audience for what we were doing," he remembers. "I had to beg the record store to fire me so I could get unemployment."

Enter pianist Benmont Tench, a friend from Hogtown, who'd also gone West with his band Mudcrutch (along with guitarists Tom Petty and Mike Campbell). He and Stan literally ran into each other on the street, and Benmont told Stan he was about to record some demo tapes in a 24-track studio: would he want to come and play? Without much else to do, Stan said sure, and he brought along bassist Ron Blair, another transplanted Floridian, to the sessions. Benmont showed up with Mike Campbell.

Road Turkey and Mudcrutch had shared billings in Gainesville for much of the early '70s, and the reunion was something of an old home night. They got along fabulously well, played together famously. Benmont then invited Tom Petty, who was working on a solo recording deal since Mudcrutch hadn't clicked in L.A., to the sessions.

"Then Tom invited me to Tulsa, where he was working on his record," Stan says, "and, I guess, on the way back, he made the commitments in his mind that we were gonna be the band he worked with."

So were Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers drawn together. Their self-titled first album, recorded in six weeks in 1976, did nothing until "Breakdown," the single, was included on the "FM" soundtrack two years later. "You're Gonna Get it," the second album, was a critical smash. "Suddenly we were getting on the radio," Stan recalls, "and they started checking out the albums. And then we went to England."

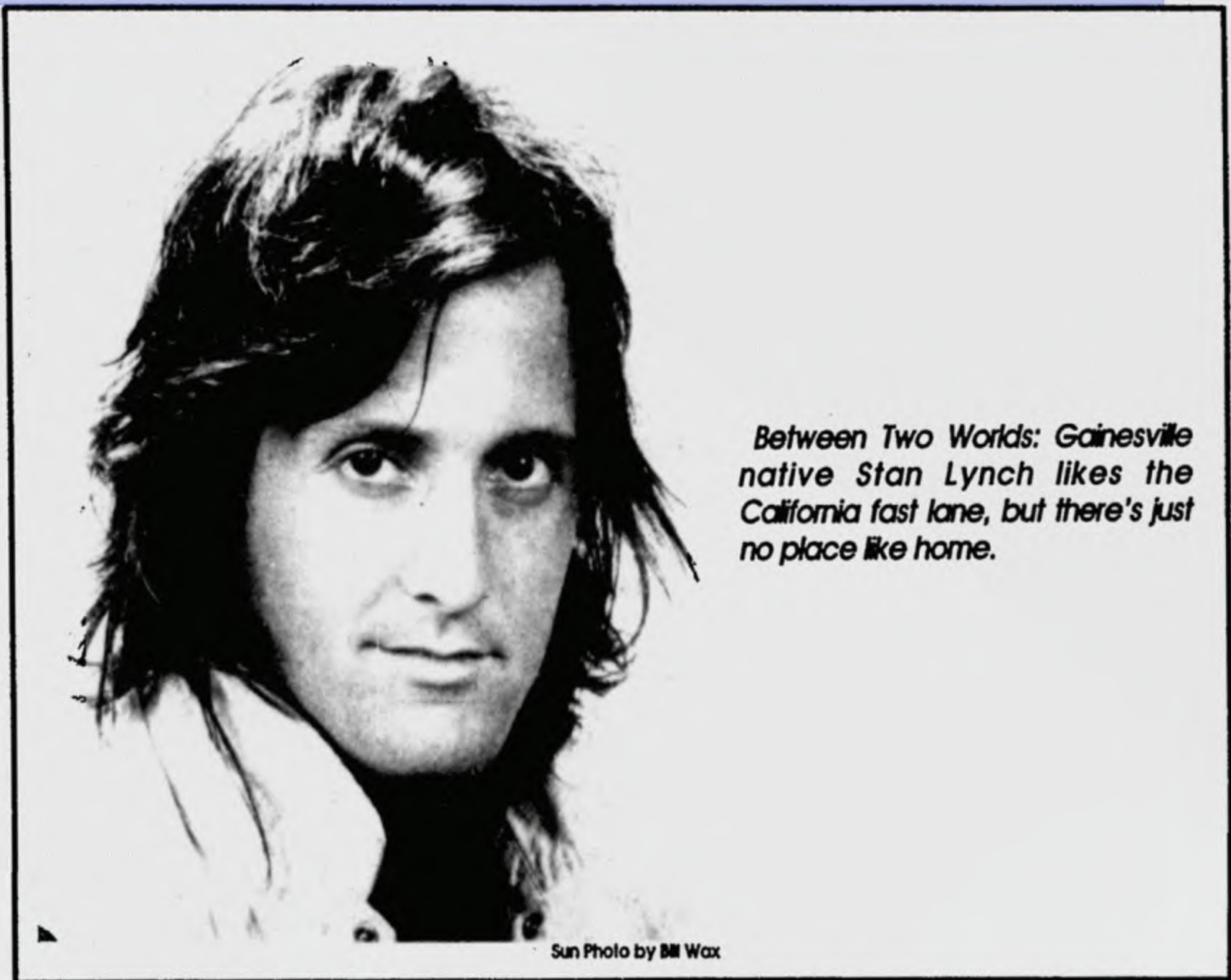
The group was ecstatically received in Britain, the albums having sold there in large quantities already. Stan remembers screaming fans and his first taste of "big hotel rooms and lots of women. And then it was back to California, and I was back living in the basement."

It took another year for TP and the band to really hit it big in America. After a bout with bankruptcy, numerous hassles with their record company, and their share of personnel problems (Stan admits he's been fired from the band several times, only to be invited back quickly) they scored a direct hit with "Damn the Torpedoes" in 1979. Platinum album, three very big singles. They had made it.

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At 29, Stan Lynch looks more like a lanky kid from Gainesville than a fast-living rock star. It's a contrast that baffles him sometimes, for while he's grown quite accustomed to money and notoriety, he's never outgrown some of the awe of his almost daily experiences.

"That's a real twilight zone, when you walk on the stage and the lights are down and it's 'Ladies and Gentlemen..' time. I don't know what happens at that point, if I'm five years old or 50. I'm literally lost on that stage before they turn the lights on.



Sun Photo by Bill Wax

Between Two Worlds: Gainesville native Stan Lynch likes the California fast lane, but there's just no place like home.

"It's like 'How did I end up here? What's going on? How come there's only five of us and 20,000 of them?' This music stuff, it's really cool."

But he likes being able to turn it off. "When I'm onstage, people know me — I'm the drummer in the band. As soon as I walk off, that's it. I can almost, at my own gig, walk in the front door.

"I wouldn't miss it if it ended today. I've been to Japan, I've seen what adulation is like. It's like being a football player — you put that uniform on and you're seven feet tall. But I couldn't go to sleep with that thing on. It'd drive me nuts."

Stan Lynch is a creative, rather than just hard and loud, drummer — lean, subtle and bombastic as Petty's eccentric arrangements warrant. He's proud of his band, proud of his contributions to their music, and he's proud of Tom Petty's songwriting. He's careful to take each song, one at a time, and give it what he feels it needs.

"When Tom plays you a song, it's usually just on acoustic guitar or a rough demo. Really in a seed-germ form.

"Our job, my job as drummer, is to listen real close and decide what I could do to add to it or if I should walk away from it. As a drummer my job is not to get my nut off and put as many drum licks on the record as I can, it's to make that song work. To make Tom be heard. I don't want people to notice, particularly, that I'm doing something different with my kick drum. I just want them to know that the song flows, the chords are big and it explodes, and it's memorable."

It's taken a while, but Stan's developed an ear. "It's really sophisticated to make an unsophisticated-sounding record. It's hard to explain — you'd have to see it to believe it. I know some people who'll walk in and hear 20 different takes of the same song and go 'They all sound alike.' Tom, or me, or somebody will go 'Yeah, but take 15 is the one.'"

The Heartbreakers are all close friends, but, as even Stan admits, that's a bit of a grey area. Tom is not the easiest person to get to know. "We travel together, and he trusts me," Stan says. "If there's a jam, it's 'Lynch'll get me out of it.' You know, I don't point to him and yell, 'Hey, I've got Tom here!' We look out for each other."

And, on the Heartbreakers stage, Stan sings all the main harmonies with his boss, not a pedestrian task given Petty's idiosyncratic style. "Tom's always been a style singer. He's never gonna do Pavoratti, but he's a style man. Singing with Tom is a riot, because you have to fake him. You've got to, otherwise you stick out like a sore thumb. Tom has his own way of thinking, walking, talking, and just doing it."

He has nothing but praise for his bandmates, too. "They're the only people who'll put up with me," he says of Benmont, Mike

and newcomer Howie Epstein (Ron Blair left the group in 1981). "When you're making a record or you're on the road, they're your friends. They're the only constant you've got."

Currently, the Heartbreakers are working on LP number six at Petty's home studio in Los Angeles. Stan says they've already recorded "probably 30 songs," with some done up in a country groove, some as Heavy Metal. Dave Stewart of Eurythmics has been co-writing with Petty, and adding horn charts to the recorded songs. "It sounds great," Stan reports enthusiastically, "but I won't know what songs'll be on it until they send me the album." Stan also drummed this year on Rank and File's second LP, and is helping out on former Eagle Don Henley's work-in-progress.

He returns to Gainesville every few months, while the band takes a breather. Tom came with him earlier this year, and the pair, hyped up from their studio work, couldn't sit still at Stan's Keystone home, so they played, unannounced, at The Islands before a stunned audience. "The whole visit really had an effect on Tom," Stan says (since his first make-or-break departure, Tom had never come home for a holiday). "He still talks about it."

Although he loves California, loves his black Jaguar and his high-rise over Venice Beach ("It looks like the building in the Bob Newhart show") he always makes it back to Gainesville, to see his father (a Santa Fe Community College instructor), to water-ski, to hang out. He's gone drug-free for a good long while, a fact he's understandably proud of, and thinks the women in Gainesville are more beautiful than California girls. He lives there; he lives here. He likens it to one of Tom's song titles: between two worlds.

He's looking for a bigger house on the lake, "where I can have a music room, a big junk room I can make a lot of noise in" and entertain his buddies. "This town has a lot of really talented musicians, and one of my goals is to get some of these guys out there. They're a little in awe of the physical dynamics of getting to California, or they've got families and can't just pick up and split. But maybe I can be a spark, and help them to do something — and help me, too.

"And I'm getting to that funny age where I'm starting to think a little bit about children, and not letting them grow up in L.A. They'll grow up in a place where they can have bicycles and stay out after it gets dark. I want my kids to grow up where there's creeks, and where they can learn to drive a boat. I don't want no city kids!

"That's my ideal, anyway. I'm not gonna drop dead if it doesn't happen. I didn't know what a Mazuratti was or a Jaguar was until I was 25 years old, and I'm glad."