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Tom Petty's new album explores his southern roots. UPI photo

# Tom Petty explores roots on new album

By FRANK SPOTNITZ  
UPI Feature Writer

NEW YORK — Tom Petty had been working on his new album, *Southern Accents*, for the better part of two years and had reached the conclusion that there was no way he could finish it by the end of 1984.

Partly out of anger, partly out of despair, Petty last October slapped his left hand against the wall of the stairwell outside his Los Angeles recording studio and broke three bones.

The album still was incomplete and now Petty had to face the possibility he would never play the guitar again, or perhaps for only short periods.

"I think from the time I did it, I just realized what I was up against and I just set my mind to healing it," Petty said in a telephone interview from Los Angeles.

Only now getting his guitar-playing ability back after months of not being able to play at all, Petty is calling together his band, the Heartbreakers, in preparation for a summer tour in support of *Southern Accents*, his first LP since 1982's *Long after Dark*.

It is Petty's first "concept" album, exploring the attitudes toward Southerners and those that Southerners have toward themselves, and it makes several changes in the Heartbreaker sound, which is traditionally dominated by the organ and electric guitars.

The difference is most noticeable in the album's stunning first single, *Don't Come Around Here No More*, a brooding piece of work that adds the sitar, a cello and female backup singers to the band's usual arrangement.

It was co-written by Dave Stewart of the technopop British act, the Eurythmics, whom Petty met along with his producer Jimmy Iovine one night last summer. The two immediately hit it off and, Petty estimates, had written *Don't Come Around Here No*

More within 30 minutes of their meeting.

Petty rose to prominence in 1977 with the hit, *Breakdown*. He continued to have minor hits until the release of 1979's *Damn the Torpedoes*, which was a critical and commercial smash, producing Top 20 singles including *Don't Do Me Like That* and *Refugee*.

Petty, a Gainesville, Fla., native, said the idea of writing an album about the South came to him while he was touring in support of the *Long after Dark* LP and making frequent visits to Florida.

"Initially I was going to do it as a double album," he said. "I wrote 26 songs and got really immersed in it and it was just too vast. I had to trim it back. It was a harder album to record than to write."

On the title track, Petty begins: "There's a southern accent, where I come from / The young 'uns call it country / The yankees call it dumb"

Petty said the song commented on prejudices directed at and shared by Southerners.

"I've lost a lot of my Southern accent," said Petty, who has lived in Los Angeles for 10 years. "But when it's strong, and if you were in New Jersey or someplace, there would be that tendency to think you were stupid because you're talking with a Southern accent."

The album's final track, *The Best of Everything*, was intended for 1981's *Hard Promises* record, but when it did not fit there, Petty offered it to ex-Band member Robbie Robertson for *The King of Comedy* soundtrack he was producing.

Robertson added to the song a horn arrangement and the work of his own former bandmates, Richard Manuel and Garth Hudson, but disputes between the soundtrack's record company and Petty's kept it from being released. That's when Petty decided to use the song for *Southern Accents*.

# Soap opera writer's life reads like one of her scripts

By BRAD SMITH  
UPI Feature Writer

DENVER — By her own description, soap opera writer-cum-playwright Elizabeth Levin is outrageous. Her life sounds like a script from one of her soaps.

Married three times, she and her current husband (Michael Levin, star of *Ryan's Hope*) live in upscale Seaside, N.Y., with their three children. Trained as an actress, Levin has been writing soap operas six years and was the head writer for *The Doctors* until she walked out in a storm over one of her scripts.

Her father was driving a motorcycle in his 70s. Levin says he once talked about taking her mother out into the woods and shooting her because she was suffering from Alzheimer's disease.

Open to the point of being shocking to some people, Levin talks about being an instrument of some mysterious force using her to put words on paper. She says she laughs and cries as she reads what she is writing.

It wouldn't take a lot of imagination to take the material from Levin's life and turn it into a play. That's what Levin has done, writing *The Female Entertainer*, which had its world premiere in April at the Denver Center Theatre.

Levin says she had wanted, for some time, to write a play about a middle-aged housewife who wanted to be a comedienne. That woman, Molly in her play, bears a striking similarity to Levin.

About two years ago, a series of personal misfortunes struck Levin's life. She responded, in a sort of catharsis, by writing some of them into her play.

"The dog got run over by a Volkswagen. My tall, blue-eyed son (a successful athlete) was discovered to have a bad heart. I developed cancer.

"Then my father, who at the time was 78 years old and still driving his Harley-Davidson motorcycle, told me that if my mother got any worse he would take her out in the woods and shoot her."

From that point, Levin said, she became obsessed with the play, weaving many of the events into the story.

She finished the play in April 1984 and within a matter of days one of her parents died in a manner similar to how the play describes a death. Levin thinks her play mystically foreshadowed the death.

Levin describes the play as "outrageous," but not in a sinister way.

"This is the funniest play I have ever written," she says. "But it also has more force than any other I've written."

# Fellini meets Darth Vader, and wins

SCRANTON, Pa. (UPI) — If you want elusive film gems, such as the chilling anti-war documentary *The Atomic Cafe*, or Rainer Werner Fassbinder's 13-part *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, a unique store in Scranton has them for rent.

You will not find box-office hits featuring villains such as Darth Vader or heroes like Indiana Jones. At Home Film Festival, the rare is the common — and the common is unavailable.

"When we started the place, the whole industry thought we were out of our minds," said entrepreneur Dan Jury. "Probably some people still think so. But we've got a lot going for us, most notably all of the people out there who are hoping we survive."

Most video stores are concerned primarily with either the newest releases or pornography, films that will be rented night-after-night for quick turn-around and quick cash.

But HFF provides an extensive list of documentaries, foreign films, independent features and movie classics. The fast-food style of the neighborhood video store simply won't cater to the Hitchcock enthusiast or the film buff itching for another viewing of Nick Nolte in "Who'll Stop the Rain."

And despite a \$50 first-year fee, when video stores are dropping membership fees, Home Film Festival is turning a few industry heads.

During the first five months, about 700 people from around the world have become members and between 50 and 70 more are enrolling each week.

"For people who love film, walking into this store is like a child walking into a candy store," Jury says.

Forgoing any type of market research, the Jurys and physician-friend Tom Roush began the project with a lot of prayers and about \$250,000 from various investors.

