

Two gems by Petty, Prince

By Jim Higgins

Records

**Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers *Southern Accents*
MCA**

Sometimes you have to trust the people who make the music you like, even when they do things that scare you. When Tom Petty announced some months ago he was recording tracks for a new album with David A. Stewart of the Eurythmics, I nearly panicked.

Since the first time I heard "American Girl," and particularly since I heard Petty in 1979 at the Uptown Theater, he has ranked high on my list of favorite rock performers. I've loved the basic simplicity of his arrangements and the yearning quality of his songs. When he sang "The Waiting" on "Saturday Night Live," he nearly broke my heart.

And I've loved the way he has defied record labels and "industry" conventions. What was this guy doing in the studio with a Eurythmic? At the time, I could have grudgingly admitted Stewart was a talented producer with a knack for turning out spooky songs. But I couldn't see much common ground the two musicians could explore together.

Well, Stewart has caught me twice with my head buried in my preconceptions. The Eurythmics' "1984" soundtrack was a marvelous album that captured the terror and immense sadness of George Orwell's book better than the film did. And Stewart's three collaborations with Petty are the best songs on "Southern Accents," a generally fine album.

On "It Ain't Nothin' to Me," Stewart puts his exquisite producer's ear in service of Petty's off-beat sense of humor. Stewart occasionally filters Petty's voice through some kind of distorter, a la Joe Walsh on "Rocky Mountain Way." "Don't Come Around Here No More" is a fine "Get lost!" song. I'm sure I'll enjoy hearing it the next time I feel hurt.

Of the album's other songs, I most enjoyed "Southern Accents." It's a song about accepting



Rock singer Tom Petty.

who you are, and feeling glad about it: "I got my own way of livin', but everything gets done." Petty's rough but tender singing and Jack Nitzsche's string arrangement create a feeling of serenity. It's difficult not to feel sad when such a beautiful song ends.

**Prince and the New Power Generation *Around the World in a Day*
Warner Brothers**

Prince has the rare gift among popular musicians of keeping listeners happy even as he experiments, grows and changes radically from album to album.

After unleashing the scandalously entertaining "Dirty Mind" on an unsuspecting world, the Minneapolis singer and multi-instrumentalist barely gave his audience a chance to catch their breaths before battering them with "Controversy," which was both politically and sexually outrageous.

After "Controversy," Prince followed with "1999," which had more musical than lyrical surprises. Take, for example, the huge synthesizer wash that opens the title track. It sounds like an old pump organ!

The depth of Prince's "Purple Rain" (the album) surprised me — probably because I didn't give him enough credit. I haven't finished plumbing the emotional depths of "When Doves Cry," and I doubt I ever will.

It's already commonplace to compare the new "Around the World in a Day" to the Beatles' "Sgt. Pepper." The comparison has some value. Both albums are loaded with psychedelia. Both "concept" albums also seem to be attempts to represent entire fantasy worlds.

But the fantasy world of "Sgt. Pepper" was created largely out of irony, satire and parody, and that's why I don't find it nearly as satisfying (apart from "A Day in the Life") as the worlds represented in The Beatles' "Rubber Soul" and "Revolver."

While Prince uses satire and parody as elements in his music, I don't think those are his primary interests. "Around the World in a Day" is deliberately simple and occasionally childlike, but not for ironic reasons. That's simply the music Prince wanted to create. When he sings "America ... keep your children free," it sounds literal to me. Prince always sound literal to me, and I get confused when people try to read elaborate messages into his songs.

"America" is the only song from "Around the World in a Day" that carries the big dance floor beat of his past few albums. But the album contains other pleasure: a classically melodramatic Prince ballad ("Condition of the Heart") and several pieces of good, old-fashioned psychedelic pop ("Paisley Park," "Raspberry Beret" and "Tamborine").