

RECORDS

'Southern Accents' translates into winner for Tom Petty

By Pete Bishop

The Pittsburgh Press

The inspiration for Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers' "Southern Accents" (MCA-5486) was their last tour, which included a lot of dates below the Mason-Dixon Line.

"I started feeling real Southern again," says Florida native Petty, "so I started thinking about using various Southern musics and building the album around a Southern theme."

But "Southern Accents" is not, strictly speaking, a theme or concept album like The Who's "Tommy," Kiss's "Music from 'The Elder'" or Pink Floyd's "The Wall" because it has no story line.

There are indeed some Southern references in the lyrics, such as "Even before my father's father they called us all rebels while they burned our cornfields and left our cities leveled. I can still feel the eyes of those blue-bellied devils" and "Now that drunk tank in Atlanta's just a motel room to me. Think I might go work Orlando if them orange groves don't freeze."

And there is a protagonist who pops up in most songs. He's a clod, a loser who wallows in his woes and

never fights back — on "Rebels," all he needs is a "Kick Me" sign on his back — but no geographical area has a monopoly on sad sacks, and Petty's not known for writing happy songs to begin with.

Neither is the music especially Southern-sounding, except for "Make It Better (Forget About Me)," a lively, zippy, horn-backed slice of Memphis-style soul reminiscent of Booker T.

A lot of it is the same strong, simple, straight-ahead rock that has made Petty and the Heartbreakers one of America's best bands, although there are some new wrinkles such as horns, strings and female backup singers. Never, however, does the hired help clutter a cut or detract from the basic sound.

Winners abound. From Side 1 come "Rebels"; rowdier, funkier "It Ain't Nothin' to Me" with Benmont Tench's piano blasting almost jazz-like over it all at the end; slow, mournful "Don't Come Around Here No More" with droning sitar by the Eurythmics' Dave Stewart, and the title track, a ballad with strings adding poignancy.

From Side 2 come "Make It Better (Forget About Me)"; "Spike," with lyrics resurrecting the stereo-

typical redneck with silvered shades (the "y'all drive careful now" sheriff in the old Dodge commercials), and ballad "The Best of Everything," on which the man longs for a lost lover and backing horns add a soulful touch.

"Winner" is an apt summation of "Southern Accents," Petty and the Heartbreakers' first album in almost three years. The wait has been worth it.

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ALISON MOYET says she's "just a general, average-educated girl who's made a career out of singing" and then asks, "I just wonder what happened to good, old-fashioned entertainment?"

First things first. Very few "general" women have full handles like Genevieve Alison-Jane Moyet or are nicknamed Alf, but she has and is. And very few "general" women have voices like this 23-year-old Briton's: low, powerful, soulful, quality-filled, Tina Turner without the grit, an alto Pat Benatar.

As far as whatever happened to entertainment, a goodly portion of it found its way to "Alf" (Columbia BFC 39956), which already has been a Top-10 LP in England, France, Germany, Italy, Holland, Sweden,

Denmark, Japan and New Zealand.

Instrumental support is minimal: keyboards, drums and only one cut with guitar. Miss Moyet's voice is the attraction, as it should be, although backup vocals obviously are overdubbed (and over and over).

Listen to her turn on the soul on "All Cried Out" and "Steal Me Blind" and the steam on "Invisible." Listen to her belt out "Twisting the Knife." This "general" woman can flat-out sing — and her diction's so good the words don't have to be printed anywhere.

If you want to dance fast, "Love Resurrection" and "Twisting the Knife" will fill your bill. If you want to dance slow, try "For You Only" and "Steal Me Blind." If you'd rather just listen, I don't blame you.

"Alf's" biggest weakness is that too many numbers are too much adult contemporary rock. "All Cried Out" and especially "Invisible" could support faster tempos and harder-edged arrangements, such as the choruses of "Money Mile."

But that's quibbling. "Alf" is well worth hearing and well could establish Miss Moyet in this country as it has elsewhere — if fans will accept a singer instead of "Boy Toy" Madonna and Playboy-posers Vanity.



Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers found inspiration for new album in Southern concerts.