

## Tom Petty: Not the ultimate big-time, but big enough

By MICHAEL GOLDBERG  
Rolling Stone

The phone call came from Bob Dylan. Would Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers be willing to back him for a five-week tour of New Zealand, Australia and Japan? "Are you kidding?" exclaimed Petty, still jazzed from playing with Dylan at Farm Aid. "Put me down. Send me the itinerary!"

And so Dylan did: The tour begins Feb. 5 in New Zealand. It will be filmed, perhaps for a cable-TV special. No U.S. dates had been scheduled at press time.

At initial rehearsals in Los Angeles, Petty, the Heartbreakers and Dylan were all in top form, working out such recent Dylan songs as "Union Sundown" and "In the Garden," then jamming into the night on old blues changes. "I can't remember when I've had so much fun playing," said Dylan. "They play my music great."

"It's an outgrowth of the Farm Aid rehearsals," said the 34-year-old Petty. "We spent a week rehearsing for Farm Aid, and we would play a lot every night. Hours and hours and hours. We did Hank Williams songs, Motown songs ('I Second That Emotion'). We even played 'Louie Louie' one night. And 'Then He Kissed Me,' the old Crystals song. When we went to the gig, we only did 20 minutes, so everyone was saying, 'Boy, it's a shame we can't really play for a while.'"

"I think Bob's attracted to the idea of working with a group," Petty continued. "A handpicked band of good players doesn't always make

a great band. Somebody like him needs a sympathetic unit that understands that music. He told me, 'This band is like talking to one guy.'"

Tom Petty gets into his shiny red 1985 Corvette, revs the engine and pulls out of the garage of his Encino, Calif., home. "Right now, I'm into Corvettes," he says, flashing that sly, almost sheepish grin that still makes teen-age girls swoon. "I like to drive my Corvette. That's my hobby."

He accelerates past his sprawling home (complete with the 24-track recording studio he used to record most of "Southern Accents" and mix his new live album, "Pack Up the Plantation"), past the pool, then shoots down the long, unmarked driveway. An 8-foot-high chain-link fence topped with barbed wire circles the property; a sign on the fence warns of armed security guards, while Milo, a big German shepherd, keeps watch over the grounds.

Though Tom Petty may not be a household name on a par with his Encino neighbor Michael Jackson or his buddy Bruce Springsteen, he thinks such security precautions are necessary. Fans have made life difficult for Petty, his wife Jane (they've been married for 10 years), and their two daughters, Adria, 10, and Kim, 3. "People would steal my garbage cans," he says. "They'd steal my whole mailbox. Take it right off the post. I went through three mailboxes. And the garbage. I used to worry about what I was putting in the garbage. Finally, I said, 'Look, man, if you want to dig through the garbage for it, you're welcome to it.'"

*'I'd be very nervous to be on the tabloid level. You can get to the point with that where the joke's on you. I wouldn't be comfortable being the hero of a nation. It would make me want to do something really bad.'*

— Tom Petty

Twelve years after arriving in L.A. as a guitar-slinging singer/songwriter from Gainesville, Fla., Petty is a bona fide rock star. He's sold nearly 10 million albums in the U.S. alone and has scored several hit singles. Though his manager says Petty's "a lot more confident in himself now" than he was when he first settled in California, he's still basically the same shy, low-key Southerner who dislikes interviews ("a necessary evil") and avoids Hollywood scenemaking. He hasn't fallen victim to what he calls the "Elvis Presley disease." As we pull up to his favorite deli, he says, "If I came in here with 10 guys and really started pointing the finger at myself and making a lot of noise, then I could be as miserable as I want. You



Rolling Stone photo

Petty and his band, The Heartbreakers, will start an overseas tour with Bob Dylan in February.

could get away with that in the past, but now it's like cancer, it can be diagnosed and treated. I refuse to live

my life that way."

He orders scrambled eggs, fried potatoes and coffee, then considers whether he'd

like to be as popular as Springsteen. "It's too famous," he says, lighting a cigarette.

His 7 p.m. breakfast arrives. "My family acknowledges I'm sort of a Martian," he says. "It still cracks Adria up that I'm just waking up when she's coming home from school." He picks up a salt shaker with his left hand — the hand that he broke during a fit of temper while making "Southern Accents" — and sprinkles salt on his food. He puts down the shaker, then wiggles all the fingers. "It works pretty good," he says. "It's never going to be normal. It still hurts if I play for too long. It gets me out of a lot of work. I can always fall back on 'Well, I can't lift this.'"

As he finishes "breakfast," the conversation returns to Dylan, with whom he will be rehearsing in just a few hours. Petty was just 14 the night he turned on the radio and heard "Like a Rolling Stone." Now he's playing with a legend. "It's not that weird, really," says Petty. "You have to get by Dylan's legend as best you can. And you do tend to get by that. We get along pretty well. It's funny, I've met a lot of famous people but I've never met anybody that everybody's always asking me about."

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