

Petty's 'Caravan' tour revives the '60s spirit

By BILL DeYOUNG
Sun music writer

TAMPA — When Tom Petty conceived the "Rock 'n' Roll Caravan" tour, he saw it as the modern-day equivalent of a 1960s roadshow — three strong acts on one bill, barnstorming the country with electric guitars wailing, leaving no Anywhere, U.S.A. audience unsatisfied. With the Georgia Satellites and the Del Fuegos, Petty and his Heartbreakers hit the road in early June.

By the time the Caravan rolled into Tampa last weekend, for its next-to-last show, the tour had become quite a different kind of flashback to the '60s. Petty's 90-minute, 19-song set was heavy on oldies, rocky chestnuts from that long-ago time when his group was playing six nights a week in Gainesville bars. And with the onstage appearance of Roger McGuinn, once the leader of the Byrds, and a big influence on Petty and the Heartbreakers, the evening took on the tangible spirit of a '60s concert — not repackaged nostalgia but a careful, loving and altogether fun celebration of an exciting period in rock 'n' roll history.

The sold-out audience of 9,300 saw and heard a lean, muscular band, at the top of its form. After two months of roadwork they were playing like a well-oiled machine.

There were the usual, gotta-play 'em songs from their hit catalogue (including "Breakdown," which opened the show, "Refugee," which closed it, and venerable warhorses like

"Listen to Her Heart," "American Girl," "The Waiting" and "Even the Losers"). Each song came across with more energy than might be expected after years of in-concert renditions, and with most of the long hot summer tour already over.

Legendary rocker Roger McGuinn, once the leader of the Byrds, joined the band for a set.

In the past, the band members have sometimes seemed to just be going through the motions onstage, but at this show they were feeding off the energy, and in turn contributing to it. As if they didn't know exactly where it would go next, and enjoyed the challenge.

This excitement was never more apparent than during McGuinn's appearance, halfway through the set. With his trademark 12-string guitar slung over his shoulder, the legendary rocker steered the Heartbreakers through three of his classic songs — "Mr. Spaceman," "Eight Miles High," and Bob Dylan's "Mr. Tambourine Man." The combination was magical, since Petty's sound was in part styled after the Byrds.

But it was especially noteworthy because the Heartbreakers had not rehearsed with McGuinn; he simply showed up and tossed out some song titles. So guitarist Mike Campbell's ominous fretwork on "Eight Miles



Tom Petty loosened up with "Breakdown" in his Tampa concert

Photos by Stephen Morton

High," bassist Howie Epstein's letter-perfect runs on the Dylan song, and pianist Benmont Tench's honky-tonk fills on "Mr. Spaceman" were all unrehearsed. They knew the songs (Petty even sang on "Eight Miles High," getting nearly all the words right) from years ago, and they played them like they were part of every night's show.

Petty began a long rap about how it's hard to trust anyone in the '80s. "Who do you trust?" he asked the audience. "Ronald Reagan? Jerry Falwell? The KKK? Ollie North? Do you trust condoms?" Then he paused, a

mischievous glimmer in his eye. "You'd better trust condoms before you trust Ollie North," he advised. Then he added "How about Oral Roberts?" before musing on Roberts' claim that he has raised the dead. "I think we coulda used him in Vietnam," Petty said, and began "For What It's Worth," the Stephen Stills classic about deceit, change and social upheaval. It was a slow, bluesy version, with simmering background vocals from Epstein and drummer Stan Lynch.

"Don't Come Around Here No More" was transformed into a simple song of angst, stripped of

its sitar and drum-machine accompaniment. Petty and the Heartbreakers performed it as it was originally written — as a blue, Otis Redding-styled soul ballad.

They barreled into a joyous rendition of the old Bobby Freeman/Beach Boys song "Do You Wanna Dance." It was spontaneous; they had not played the song before on the tour.

The least successful numbers were the new ones, from the "Let Me Up" album. "Runaway Trains" was sluggish, and "Think About Me" and "Jammin' Me" were somewhat mechanical. The Heartbreakers seemed tired of them.

The final delirious encore was a call-and-response arrangement of the Isley Brothers classic "Shout."

And, just for this show, Petty sang "Southern Accents," his poignant lyric about growing up in Florida. It was a fitting addition to an evening that was all about looking back.

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