

ENTERTAINMENT

Powerful songwriting enhanced by studio treats

TOM PETTY:
FULL MOON FEVER
MCA Records

At first listen, producer Jeff Lynne sounds like a good match for the music of Tom Petty. On this first solo outing for the Heartbreaker's guitar-playing leader, Lynne opens up both his voice and the instrumental tracks, relieving Petty of his too-frequent bouts with musical constipation.

But all is not as good as it could be. Just like so many others he has produced, from Dave Edmunds to the Traveling Wilburys, Petty ends up sounding like a member of Lynne's erstwhile Electric Light Orchestra taking only a tentative step on his own.

That quibble aside, *Full Moon Fever* also turns out to be one of the best albums Petty has ever recorded. It is packed with powerful songwriting — much of it done in conjunction with Lynne — recorded clear as a bell, and filled with delicious studio treats like the superbly layered chorus of "I Won't Back Down," which has already garnered considerable radio and video play.

Other songs such as "Love Is A Long Road," co-written with Heartbreaker Mike Campbell, who also shared some of the production duties, emerge as hard-hitting pleas for salvation through human relationships.

"I guess I can only hope," it concludes, "For maybe one more chance—To try and save my soul..."

Other songs find what they're looking for, but only within a context of superficiality. Witness "Yer So Bad."

"My sister got lucky, married a yuppie/Took him for all he was worth/Now she's a swinger, dating a singer/I can't decide which is worse-/But not me baby, I've got you to save me..."

For the most part, however, Petty does have a consistent voice in his songs. He's able to see a world where



Tom Petty has a consistent voice in his songs

OFF THE RECORD—JIM ZEBORA

love and mutual dependence are a salvation from loneliness, even if they are occasionally fraught with danger.

Petty, on *Full Moon Fever*, is into taking such risks, as he does with stepping away from his band for a moment of solo introspection. There remain some pitfalls, but by and large it's a successful move. B plus.

THE RAMONES:
"Pet Sematary" (12-inch single)
Sire Records

For the second time in their illustrious career, New York's wonderful Ramones have recorded the theme song to a movie, this time to Stephen King's latest slice'm'dice epic.

"Pet Sematary" is a typical Ramones song, which means that it sounds like a lot of other Ramones

songs, especially "I Want To Live." Produced by Jean Beauvoir, this classic of both musical and spiritual reincarnation has more melody on record than it did at Toad's during their April concert at the New Haven club.

"Pet Sematary" also appears on the Ramones' just-released album.

Bound to be more obscure — and thus of more interest — is "Life Goes On," which quotes extensively from "Cum Feel The Noize," the Slade chestnut. This cut, also from the movie, is available on this disc only.

Rounding things out is "Sheena Is A Punk Rocker," the best East Coast surf song ever written.

This is not an absolutely essential record, unless you are a Ramones maniac. And a lot of us will confess to the disease. B.

JOHN SEBASTIAN:
"THE BEST OF ..."
Rhino Records

Continuing its tradition of resurrecting fallen rockers, Rhino has just given us this solo career retrospective of Lovin' Spoonful founder John Sebastian, the man who embarrassed even the most organic of us at Woodstock.

Oh, well, he was sincere about it. Sebastian has always been an emotional musician, a family man and a sensitive guy all around. That all comes through on *The Best of John Sebastian*, which includes among its 1970s hit the singer's hit theme song to the TV show "Welcome Back Kotter."

Also from memory lane are "You're A Big Boy Now," the gorgeous "She's A Lady," "Didn't Want To Have To Do It," and a not-bad version of Jimmy Cliff's "Sitting In Limbo."

With Rhino's good-as-usual liner notes, *The Best of John Sebastian* will make a good companion to your copy *The Best of The Lovin' Spoonful*. B.

ERASURE:
"CRACKERS INTERNATIONAL"
Sire Records

Sure it's all formula, but how can you dispute success?

Erasure's latest, a six-track collection of songs previously unavailable in the States, is modern dance club music at its most fun and frivolous. The EP's strength is two versions of "Stop," a top five British hit and a song that is unstoppable in its forward motion.

"Knocking On Your Door" is also present in two version — short for the radio and long for the dance floor. The other cuts — "The Hardest Part" and "She Won't Be Home" — are slower, though still with a beat.

Erasure's Vince Clarke is known as a dance-rock genius, and there's no doubt that he has all the chops necessary to keep the hits rolling. Crackers International is just another proof of his powers. B plus.

ARETHA FRANKLIN:
"THROUGH THE STORM"
Arista Records

The Queen of Soul is out to keep her 1980s revival going with *Through The Storm*, a powerful album that makes the most of several all-star duets.

Franklin, whose gospel-bred r&b style has given her more R-E-S-P-E-C-T than almost any other vocalist, is still a fine and flexible singer. Here she can scream with James Brown ("Gimme Your Love"), rap cattily with Whitney Houston ("It Isn't, It Wasn't, It Ain't Never Gonna Be") and explore the peaks of pop with Elton John ("Through The Storm"), all with equal facility and success.

Through *The Storm* also features contributions by The Four Tops and reedman Kenny G., with the Tops' Levi Stubbs delivering one of his classic emotional vocal performances on "If Ever A Love There Was."

And if a thing there was that would keep these songs off the singles

charts, it's that their own classicism is perhaps too much for today's pop radio to take. But if this were 1964, Aretha would be in power rotation with the strong performances on this disc. A minus.

THELONIOUS MONSTER:
"STORMY WEATHER"
Relativity Records

For lo these many years, L.A.'s Thelonious Monster has been perceived as a kind of Replacements, but even more serious about being idiotic. They were known for their drunk and disorderly performances, their general irresponsibility, and their failure to get noticed east of the Sierra Nevada.

With luck, *Stormy Weather* could change that. The record has all the strength and none of the nonsense that has made Thelonious Monster legend.

TM is led by Bob Forrest, an unlikely-looking person with shades, dreadlocks and an odd way of expressing his sincerity. That's why the band's reverent cover of Tracy Chapman's "For My Lover" was mistakenly thought to be a goof when it's actually one of the most powerful and fully realized cuts on the album.

And much of singer/songwriter Forrest's own material is equally powerful. Songs such as "Colorblind" point out racial absurdities in a way that nobody could mistake; "My Boy" laments for an estranged infant son; "Real Kinda Hatred" is a love song that faces a final reality.

Musically, Thelonious Monster is a guitar-heavy band that draws on hard rock, blues, country and psychedelia for its sound. The mix is usually powerful and always appropriate with a vintage feel to its rocking.

Like Jane's Addiction, a fellow bad-boy band from L.A., Thelonious Monster does its best at times to shock you. But there's always substance behind the surprise. B plus.