

Tom Petty's still got rock 'n' roll fever

By Hillel Itallo
Associated Press

NEW YORK — Rock 'n' roll has always meant the unexpected for Tom Petty, even when he was growing up in Gainesville, Fla.

"Rock 'n' roll came over me like a fever that I never got rid of," he recalled in a recent interview, "consumed me like a poison — completely consumed me to where I can honestly say I didn't think of any-

thing else. It was all I could do, think or anything.

"It made for a terrible home life. My family didn't understand; my father thought I was mental. I understand why because I was very obsessed with it."

Petty was a non-musical child who discovered a knack for guitar. A quiet, skinny kid who never dreamed of being famous. He was soon playing in local bands.

"You'd go and see some other kid whose hair was long and go, 'Wow, there's one like me! You'd go over and talk and he'd say, 'I've got a drum set.' 'You do! Great!' That was my whole life. Still is, I'm afraid."

The Traveling Wilburys was a surprise, the result of a jam session with George Harrison, Jeff Lynne, the late Roy Orbison and Bob Dylan that grew into a best-selling album. Petty's new record, "Full Moon Fever,"

was an accident as well.

Late in 1987, he pulled up to a traffic light in Los Angeles and in the next car spotted Lynne, who had just produced Harrison's "Cloud Nine."

"Jeff and George both started to come to my house a lot and we'd just sit around and play," Petty said. "One day, I was showing Jeff this song I'd written and he suggested some changes. It was really good input. We wrote another one and thought we'd put it on tape while he was in town."

They headed over to the house of Mike Campbell, a guitarist in Petty's band, The Heartbreakers, and went to work.

"Full Moon Fever" is Petty's ninth album, and first without The Heartbreakers, although Campbell and keyboardist Belmont Tench contributed. Lynne helped produce the record and co-wrote eight songs.

Petty makes no secret of his love for The Byrds; his vocals and 12-string Rickenbacker guitar have made some of his songs, notably "American Girl," sound almost uncannily like the 1960s group.

On "Full Moon Fever," he does a note-for-note cover of The Byrds' "Feel a Whole Lot Better." The song was recorded, naturally, on a spur-of-the-moment decision.

"We were in the studio and had seen (former Byrd Roger) McGuinn play the song. We started playing it, and said, 'Let's cut it.' I thought, 'Well, it's my solo album, I'll put it on, I don't care.'"

Petty has had his share of unpleasant surprises. When MCA bought out



Tom Petty

his first label, Shelter, in 1978, he angrily filed suit for artistic control and eventually settled out of court after a lengthy battle. In 1981, he fought to lower the list price on his "Hard Promises" album, forcing MCA to release the record at \$8.98 instead of \$9.98. While recording "Southern Accents," which came out in 1985, he punched a wall and broke his hand, an injury that took a year and a half to heal.

Then, Petty's house in Los Angeles burned down, destroying everything.

"I'm very cynical," he admitted, "I try to temper that somewhat because it's no fun to be cynical all the time and also not very productive."

But along came the Wilburys.

"I felt maybe, in a way, some cosmic way, that was given to me to compensate for the house," Petty said. "The nice thing about the Wilburys, other than it being a great album, was I made some very good friends, people that are very much a big part of my life."

'Full Moon' offers full range of musical and lyrical styles

By Jerry Spangler
Deseret News staff writer



ON THE RECORD

When Tom Petty teamed up with George Harrison, Jeff Lynne, Roy Orbison and Bob Dylan last year for the immensely successful Traveling Wilburys "Vol. 1,"

many hailed it as a great comeback for Petty, a brilliant move that revitalized a sagging career.

The only problem is those observations are simply and totally nonsense. Tom Petty was clearly on a roll long before the Wilburys rolled through town — more so than any of the others.

His 1986 "Let Me Up (I've Had Enough)" LP was a critical (if not commercial) hit, revealing a darker, serious side of Petty's songwriting. It also established Petty as a legitimate songwriter with more than formula hit singles to his credit.

That album came on the heels of six earlier albums, each of which was progressively better than the one before. There were a smattering of hits along the way, but the real flavor of Petty's creatively flavored music — as Petty fans readily point out — rarely makes it to radio airwaves.

Now along comes "Full Moon Fever" (MCA), a solo effort that not

only maintains Petty's distinctive rock style, but moves him firmly into the mainstream of radio-oriented rock. It also comprises the most solid start-to-finish package Petty has ever delivered.

The tunes offer a broad range of musical styles and lyrical approaches, some reflecting a relaxed feel, some brooding, some barn-burning rockers, some light-weight pop ditties that are at least enjoyable, if nothing else.

In addition to the current hit "I Won't Back Down," the best of the bunch includes the captivating "Free Fallin'" and the Byrdesque "Feel a Whole Lot Better" — a sure-fire hit if it's released as a single. A half-dozen other songs also have hit potential.

The album is produced by former Electric Light Orchestra guru (and fellow Wilbury) Jeff Lynne, though Lynne's influence over Petty's music seems rather subtle. This is clearly more of a Tom Petty album than a Jeff Lynne album.

But exactly why he chose to record this as a solo album is a mystery to just about everybody, especially considering his backup band, the Heartbreakers, play on most of the cuts anyway.

Whatever the case, Petty is scheduled to hit the concert circuit with the Heartbreakers in tow. And if "Full Moon Fever" is any indication of what's to come, it should be a great show.

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