

## LEISURE TIME

## Howard's success as director is rubbing off on Wall Street

By Richard W. Stevenson  
N.Y. Times News Service

LOS ANGELES — To television fans, Ron Howard will always be the actor who played Opie on "The Andy Griffith Show" and Richie Cunningham on "Happy Days."

To film buffs he is known as the director of "Splash," "Cocoon" and this summer's latest hit, "Parenthood."

Now Howard is developing a reputation on Wall Street as well.

He and Brian Grazer, a producer and longtime friend, have slowly built the company they took public in 1986, Imagine Films Entertainment Inc., into one of Hollywood's most promising independent movie and television production businesses.

Their success with Imagines comes at a time when most small and medium-sized entertainment concerns, like the DeLaurentis Entertainment Group, New World Entertainment and the Weintraub Entertainment Group, have been struggling to survive.

"I think of myself as a movie director and not the chief executive of a company, but the two things seem to be working nicely together," said Howard, who at 35 has lost some hair since his acting days but still exudes the same fresh-faced enthusiasm.

Grazer, who at 38 has been producing films and television shows for a decade, said, "During a time when there's been a high mortality rate in

this business, we're pleased to be alive, and now the company's even successful."

Imagine has not yet turned a profit, and the fortunes of all production companies, no matter how loaded with talent or financially adept, rest precariously on the unpredictable tastes of moviegoers and television viewers.

But the critical and commercial popularity of "Parenthood," which is Imagine's third film and is certain to be its most profitable, with more than \$43 million worth of tickets sold in its first three weeks, will help finance future film and television development as well as provide a big dose of financial stability.

Imagine's other two films — "The Dream Team," starring Michael Keaton, and "The Burbs," starring Tom Hanks — were not wildly successful at the box office, but Grazer said both would be profitable for Imagine.

The company also has the luxury of long-term access to production financing and film distribution through deals with MCA Inc.'s Universal Pictures and with Showtime-The Movie Channel, the cable television network owned by Viacom International.

And it has received a glowing compliment from Wall Street, which has generally shunned smaller entertainment companies in recent years.

Imagine's stock has jumped sharply this year, closing Thursday at

\$12.25 in over-the-counter trading, up from about \$6 in January and a low of \$2 after the 1987 market collapse.

Imagine's achievements illustrate how Hollywood now tries to spread the considerable financial risks of its ventures, and the importance of personal connections in a business driven by relationships.

The company's strategy also demonstrates how ultimate success for production companies as well as for big studios lies not just in a few box-office successes but also in the ability to build a library of products that can be shown over and over on television and in other markets, generating steady earnings, easing the pain of the inevitable flops and helping to finance future production.

"Only when they have sufficient pictures to have a bona fide library will the situation stabilize enough to see steady earnings," said Christopher P. Dixon, an analyst at Kidder, Peabody.

"Building value with a library of motion pictures is the reason to look at Imagine."

For the quarter ended June 30, Imagine lost \$231,000 on revenues of \$5.9 million.

In the corresponding period last year, the company lost \$249,000 on revenues of just \$652,000.

Imagine's founding came from the dissatisfaction shared by Howard and Grazer at pursuing film projects with the top Hollywood studios.

## Petty has them singing along

## Music Review

By Jim Zebora  
Record-Journal staff

BRISTOL — If album rock has a king, it must be Tom Petty.

Petty is a performer for the modern rock fan. He's a drawing singer, a down home persona, a writer of songs with rather universal youthful sentiments.

He has the style that creates hits and keeps them alive in people minds and on the radio. Without challenging anyone too much, Petty makes his music pretty appealing.

And let's call him rock's sing-along king, too, since that's what he was Thursday night at Lake Compounce Festival Park. With the exception of a mid-set instrumental and — curiously enough — a Bob Dylan cover, Petty had a greater percentage of the crowd joining in unbidden than any performer in recent memory save Ringo Starr.

Accompanied by his Heartbreakers, a band like its leader dedicated to straightforward, non-complex rocking, Petty delivered 100 minutes of music that was variously enthusiastic and exciting. Not always at the same time, but often enough to make the show worthwhile.

Petty and the guys appeared on an elaborately decorated stage that included a wooden cigar-store Indian, a massive set of steer horns, various totems, a stuffed snake and mongoose having it out, and elaborate, entertaining lighting. What it all meant was a puzzle, but since this was a stop on Petty's "Strange Behavior" tour, the paraphernalia not exactly out of place.

Musically, this show was a mixed bag for Petty. He played old and new hits, but he played with them as well — modifying their sound, delivering acoustic versions rather than the traditional electric, fostering long jams with guitarist Mike Campbell.

And he artfully added an eclectic set of cover songs that began with "So You Want To Be A Rock'n'Roll Star," and continued through Dylan's "You Ain't Goin' Nowhere" and ended with the soul shouter, "Shout."

Even when he's cooking, Petty is a relaxed musician. His straightforward songs fit into a smooth groove that doesn't put many demands on him, his band or his audience. "American Girl," the second song of the set, was a perfect example of his level-headed art, a loose song that invited more participation than analysis.



Staff photo by David Rocha

Tom Petty, king of album rock, gave a performance at Lake Compounce Thursday night

Other songs such as "The Waiting" and "Good Loving Is Hard To Find" fit Petty's pattern perfectly, balancing an exciting delivery with a lyric that needed no interpretation.

Petty was at his best, though, when he went off the track with songs like "Listen To Her Heart." Sure, this is one of his many hits, but in the tentative acoustic mode presented Thursday at Lake Compounce, it became vastly more intriguing.

The most complex music of the set hailed from Petty's most recent Full Moon Fever album, his first without the Heartbreakers. Responsible for the sound of this record was Jeff Lynne, whose elaborate production is a trademark.

Lynne was a member, with Petty, George Harrison, Bob Dylan and the late Roy Orbison of the Traveling Wilburys, and he transferred that band's sound directly to Petty's songs on the record.

Petty took the songs back at Compounce, however, adding inflection and nuance to "Free Fallin'," "I Won't Back Down" and even "Runnin' Down A Dream," and adding a bit to their intrigue as well.

The 20-song set — no encore; Petty and the band were fighting about whether to go back on as this reviewer left through the stage entrance — was mostly characterized by Petty's familiarity and amiability. Nothing was left to chance, and nothing was a major surprise. He just came on stage, did his job, and did it very well.

The Petty show was opened by the exciting Minneapolis band, The Replacements, a group that has only recently departed bars and small halls for arenas.

But success hasn't spoiled The Replacements or the band's way of rocking. Singer/guitarist/frontman Paul Westerberg still wears messy clothes and messy hair, and still displays a casual attitude onstage.

Don't believe it. Westerberg is a crafty songwriter and performer, and he puts his soul into his rocking.

Though The Replacements did only a 40-minute set, their music was infectious and sometimes thrilling. Petty may have been the star, but hearing the Replacements do "I'll Be You" and other songs was worth the price of admission.

## Friends of Meriden Library kick off year with jazz concert

MERIDEN — The Friends of Meriden Public Library will kick off their seventh year of operation with a concert by the Riverboat Ramblers on Thursday, Sept. 14 at 7 p.m. The Friends will hold a brief annual meeting during the intermission. Everyone is welcome to attend the free performance.

The Riverboat Ramblers Dixieland Jazz Band has become one of New England's foremost purveyors of dix-

ieland jazz since the group's start in 1978. Versatility, musicianship and showmanship are combined to enlighten audiences about the vast American jazz heritage, at the same time presenting an exciting, entertaining show.

Performances include all styles of music, from early ragtime to the music of the big band era. Shows focus on the musical stylings of such jazz luminaries as Louis "Satchmo" Arm-

strong, "Fats" Waller, Jack Teagarden and Duke Ellington.

The members of the group have performed throughout the country, including performances at the birthplace of jazz, New Orleans. The sounds of the Riverboat Ramblers have been heard at Opryland USA, Preservation Hall in New Orleans and the Red Garter Saloon in Sandusky, Ohio.

The group performs regularly, representing the Eastern CT Symphony as the resident jazz ensemble. Individual members have also performed with the greats of jazz, including Sonny Stitt, Mel Torme and Marian McPartland.

The Friends of Meriden Public Library are an 810-member volunteer organization that seeks to provide enhancements to basic library services and materials. For further information about the Friends, please call the Library at 238-2344.

**PAUL'S PRODUCE CENTER**

1207 SO. BROAD ST. WALLINGFORD, CT

(NEXT DOOR TO HOME MEAT CENTER) FRI & SAT 9/1 & 2

**WEEKEND SPECIALS**

Butter & Sugar  
CORN

LEMONS  
10 FOR 99¢

NATIVE  
PEACHES