

# Meet the Heartbreakers: Boys in Tom Petty's band

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They've performed before thousands of people, co-written hit songs and helped sell millions of records. They have appeared on TV, heard their collective name trumpeted on radio and seen it a thousand times in the press.

Probably few in their audiences, however, could name the members of what is considered one of the best rock bands in the world. The boys in this band could walk down the street unrecognized, without being asked for autographs, without bodyguards. That's because fearless leader Tom Petty gets nearly all the limelight.

Meet the Heartbreakers: guitarist Mike Campbell, drummer Stan Lynch, keyboard player Benmont Tench and bassist Howie Epstein.

Influenced by Bob Dylan, the Byrds, Beatles and Rolling Stones and others, Petty and the group are responsible for such rock 'n' roll chestnuts as "Breakdown," "American Girl," "Listen to Her Heart," "Refugee," "Don't Do Me Like That," "You Got Lucky," not to mention hits "Don't Come Around Here No More," "Jammin' Me," "Stop Draggin' My Heart Around" (with Stevie Nicks) and the current "Learning to Fly" from the group's latest album, "Into the Great Wide Open."

Campbell describes Petty and band as, "a five-headed beast. Everyone has a strong opinion and is very talented." He adds, however, "Tom is the leader who will ultimately have his way, right or wrong."

Petty has described Campbell as the band's "lieutenant," probably Campbell says, "because I co-write more than the others."

Campbell runs down the lineup this way: "Benmont probably is the most overall gifted musician in the group. He's the most important to the group, the most trained, though he would hate hearing that. But he knows more notes than we do and has lots of musical opinions."

"Stan provides the strong sense of humor element.



Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers.

He's always got a joke, sometimes at someone's expense. As a drummer he has lots of energy and is slightly crazy. His energy is important to the group, especially if things get lazy."

Campbell describes bassist Epstein as "the 10-year-old new member. Aside from his ability, is that his personality just fit in. His ego is a perfect balance." Epstein replaced original bassist Ron Blair in 1981 to work on the "Long After Dark" album.

While Petty has established parallel careers as a solo artist with the 3-million-selling "Full Moon Fever" and the youngest member of the Traveling Wilburys, few may know of the outside accomplishments of his band members.

Campbell has played on dozens of albums, just produced the debut album for Patti Scialfa (Bruce Springsteen's wife) and has co-written some future classics with Don Henley: "Boys of Summer" and "Heart of the Matter."

Drummer Lynch, always in demand as a session player, has collaborated with Henley on gems such as

"Gimme What You Got" and "The Last Worthless Evening." He also served as drummer and co-writer on four new recordings the Byrds included in their 1990 boxed set.

When the band isn't working, Tench may be the most sought-after Heartbreaker of all. He has toured with Stevie Nicks and Elvis Costello and played on albums by Bonnie Raitt, Joe Cocker, the Divinyls, the Replacements and Carlene Carter. Epstein produced Carter's album, "I Fell In Love" and John Prine's "The Missing Years," his first release in five years.

The band members share an unsurpassed desire to play rock 'n' roll, which may account for why they're in such demand and also for why the group has lasted so long.

"Once I found the guitar" while watching the Beatles on "Ed Sullivan" in 1964, "everything else stopped, nothing else interested me any more — well, girls — I was completely engrossed," Campbell says of his desire to play music.

The group was formed in Los Angeles in 1975 from the remnants of several Gainesville, Fla., bands.

"We played a long time before we made any money," Campbell says. "It's a miracle we're still together."

Bassist Epstein takes a practical approach. "Selling records doesn't hurt in keeping a band together," he says. However, he adds: "If we weren't really having fun playing together and didn't like each other, it wouldn't last even if we made a ton of money."

The band has endured and generally thrived partly because all egos are subverted in service to the songs.

It's been that way ever since Campbell met Petty in Gainesville in the early '70s.

"When I met Tom he was playing bass and was a background singer," Campbell says. "But he was the only one attempting to write his own songs. Writing songs was our immediate thing. We hit it off because we weren't copying off the radio."

"Our trip is a song-oriented trip. We have no rules about recording. The song dictates what's needed."

For example, though Campbell is one of the most sought-after guitarists in the business, with The Heart-

breakers his playing is an economic, less-is-more style that blends into the band's sound. No crowd pleasing showboating here.

"You mean, 'Don't bore us, get to the chorus?'" Campbell asks. "Long solos are cool, but it's much harder to say it well in three minutes. It requires more focus and is much more rewarding."

The band's songs play out like short stories and novels, with a central character striving for respect or greener pastures, and sometimes losing sight of what's important.

The group's latest album, "Into the Great Wide Open," is full of such "rebels without a clue." The titles tell tales of misguided souls "Making Some Noise" and demanding "All or Nothin'" for "All The Wrong Reasons."

"It's Tom's vision," Campbell says. "Tom writes 99 percent of the lyrics. It's hard to speak for him."

Aside from the album "Southern Accents," Petty hasn't intentionally recorded a concept album.

"If at the end of an album there's a common thread it may be subconscious," Campbell says. "Tom gets into a certain couple of characters for periods of time. Each song is a character in a story. The sequencing is subconscious."

What's not subconscious are the moral tones and themes of Petty's vision.

After a couple of love and sex songs, "if you're any good you want to say more without preaching politics," Campbell says. "I always felt even the love songs will have an underlying moral message: You've got to fight for what you want to make out of your life. Life can be good, but pay attention. There's lots of B.S. out there."

"There's an underlying feeling of hope and I think rock music has always been a medium for inspiring people. If it can inspire, it is successful."

Campbell is proud of the band's success in a tough, sometimes ruthless business.

He is proud that the Heartbreakers, with Petty at the helm, has remained on an uncompromising course into its third decade while fads and trends and styles have come and gone.