

Music

Petty returns to the musical basics

Concert preview

By Don Adair
Correspondent

With the release of his last CD, "Wildflowers," Tom Petty hit his creative stride.

"Wildflowers" belongs to that category of record in which the songs get down to their bare essence, exposing them to the world without the cover of big instrumentation, guest musicians or hot production techniques.

On "Wildflowers," Petty and producer Rick Rubin chose to use

Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers

Location and time: The Gorge, tonight, 8:30; Sunday 7:30 p.m.

Tickets: \$27.60 and \$34.95 (tonight's show is sold out), available only at Ticketmaster outlets

only natural instruments — i.e., no synthesizers or computers — and recorded in aging studios that they judged to have the most natural, least-synthetic sound quality.

He found old microphones and recording gear and incorporated such arcane instruments as harmoniums and Mellotrons.

Like Neil Young, Petty has

developed a distrust of modern recording technology.

"I'd have to give it a D-plus. I think it's unhealthy for rock. I can hear digital *anything*; it sounds different."

"Wildflowers" is anything but cold; actually, it's Petty's warmest, most intimate record. In its (mostly) quiet way, its songs range widely, touching on country-blues, folk and even country, with hints of California guitar-pop and psychedelia (check out "A Higher Place" for its delicious Roger McGuinz 12-string stylings).

And the characters on "Wildflowers" seem closer to Petty's heart than the archetypal figures from past work. Unlike other aging



■ Tom Petty will play The Gorge tonight and Sunday.

Continued: **Petty, Page 5**

KINGSTON
5 Ranch
Bed & Breakfast
with a touch of Country Elegance
10 minutes from Silver Mountain
10 Minutes from Lookout
4390 Silver Valley Rd
Kingston, ID 83601
208 682 4862 Fax: 800-444-4505

Just Voted **ROCK CITY**
Restaurant
of the Year. *Cucina Italiana*

Serving Brunch on
Mother's Day. Call for
reservations

455-4400

Riverside & Stevens

A.C. R.B.

Petty

Continued from page 3

rockers — the Rolling Stones are a prime example — Petty doesn't try to recreate adolescent passions with these songs. They instead reflect the pleasures, pains and concessions that come with having lived a life.

*"Now and again I get the feeling
Well if I don't win, I'm gonna break
even*

*Rescue me, should I go wrong
If I dig too deep, If I stay too long."*

The songs, though modest at first blush, reveal themselves to be the best, most intimate, Petty collection of a successful 20-year career.

Even Petty seems surprised at how well the record turned out.

"One of the great surprises of my life is to be at this age and feel like I'm better than I was," he told USA

Today in November. "I thought I'd be less interested at this stage, but I have a keener interest than I did 10 years ago."

Petty first landed in the national spotlight in 1976, at a time when pop music was in a state of lethargic chaos. Rock's second great era, initiated by the Beatles and the Stones, had run its course, and punk had yet to kick in with its crude, revitalizing energy.

The mainstream scene was dominated by arena-rock bands that were heavy on craftsmanship but low on passion.

Petty arrived at about the same time as a handful of so-called new wave bands. With their stripped-down pop songs and jeans-and-skinnytie look, they prefigured the punks and hailed the early spirit of rock 'n' roll.

Petty's music was a throwback to

the folk-rock of the Byrds and middle-period Dylan. But as he recalls during the VHI show, it didn't fit into any other existing category, so he was lumped in with the new wave.

"I think we sold a lot of skinny ties and vests in those days," he says, laughing, in an interview airing these days on VHI.

He proved himself a renegade

early on, refusing first to bow to prevailing musical tastes, then battling his record label over its decision to release "Hard Promises" with an inflated "superstar" price tag.

Petty is also no respecter of genres: A charter member of the boomer superband the Traveling Wilburys, he hired Nirvana drummer Dave Grohl to sit in with the band last year

after Stan Lynch left to write and produce.

Over the course of 20 years, Petty has hung true to the spirit of rock 'n' roll, and in doing so has emerged as one of its leading figures.

His Gorge shows this weekend will carry the weight of a career that's just now beginning to show its true depths.

59

Mother's Day Dining & Event Guide

Mother's Day
BRUNCH BUFFET
10 a.m. to 2 p.m.