

MUSIC

Florida native Tom Petty pays a visit to his homeland

By SKIP SHEFFIELD
STAFF WRITER

The heartbreak is over. Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers are making their first swing through Florida in four years, with a stop at 8 p.m. Wednesday at Coral Sky Amphitheater in West Palm Beach.

The elusive Petty, a Florida native who got his start in the Gainesville area, ventured into the public arena June 14 to promote his latest CD "Echo," which entered the Billboard Top 200 Albums list at No. 10 and has yielded the singles "Room at the Top" and "Free Girl Now."

To show how much a part of the establishment Petty now is, he was awarded a star on Hollywood's Walk of Fame on April 28. His boxed-set "Greatest Hits" hasn't left the Billboard charts since its release in late 1993.

In April 1996, Petty received UCLA's George and Ira Gershwin Award for Lifetime Achievement, followed by the prestigious Golden Note Award from ASCAP in May 1996. This is the kind of stuff that happens when you've been in the business 23 years (since Petty left Gainesville for Los Angeles in 1976), consistently producing pop hits.

Petty's career has not been without its rough patches. He quarreled with his first record company, MCA, when it purchased ABC Records. He refused to be simply transferred to another label without his consent.

Petty also fought with his publishing company, believing that artists should own their own songwriting copyrights. Petty's successful battles, heralded in his album "Damn The Torpedoes" (1979), helped other artists with their own battles with publishers.

Petty had another row with MCA when he resisted having his 1981 "Hard Promises" album sold at a higher "superstar price."

Though seemingly mellow and laid-back, Petty exhibited an



explosive temper when he badly injured his left hand when he smashed it through a wall in a fit of frustration during the making of "Southern Accents" (1985).

Petty asserted his independence with a solo album, "Full Moon Fever," in 1989, and he entered the top echelons of rock stardom by recording with "The Traveling Willburys" (Bob Dylan, George Harrison, Roy Orbison and Jeff Lynne) for platinum albums in 1988 and 1990.

Petty rejoined his bandmates in 1991 for platinum success with "Into The Great Wide Open." His

last tour was to promote the triple platinum "Wildflowers" in 1995.

Petty, playing his signature Rickenbacker 12-string as well as six-string guitars, will play with longtime bandmates Mike Campbell (guitars), Howie Epstein (bass) and Benmont Tench (keyboards), along with associates Scott Thurston (guitars, harmonica) and drummer Steve Ferrone.

Tickets for Tom Petty are \$27.50 on the lawn and \$47.50 reserved seats. Call (561) 793-0445.



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