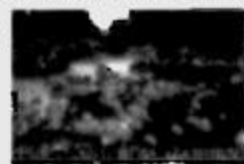


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Petty will rock O'Dome after 13 years

**Tom Petty
and the
Heartbreakers**

■ **When:**
Sept. 21

■ **Where:**
O'Connell
Center

■ **Opening
act:** The
Strokes

■ Tickets for the Sept. 21 concert, a part of the band's 30th anniversary tour, go on sale July 22.

By **DAVE SCHLENKER**
Sun entertainment editor

Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers are coming home for their 30th anniversary. The Gainesville-bred band — and Rock and Roll Hall of Famers —

will perform at the O'Connell Center on Sept. 21.

Tickets go on sale July 22 at TicketMaster outlets. Alternative rockers The Strokes are scheduled to open the show, according to Petty's publicist Heidi Ellen Robinson Fitzgerald.

"I can't wait," said keyboard player Benmont Tench, an original member who still keeps close ties to Gainesville. "I'm really, really happy about it. I'm so
PETTY on Page 6A



Special to The Sun

Tickets for Tom Petty go on sale July 22.

LARGEST IN YEARS

GRU to seek 13.4 percent rate increase

PETTY: Gainesville native feels nostalgic

Continued from 1A

thrilled they finally announced it."

The concert is part of the "Highway Companion" Tour, named for Petty's upcoming solo album. The tour celebrates the 30th anniversary of the band's debut, gold-certified, self-titled album, which included the flagship hits "Breakdown" and "American Girl."

The band last played Gainesville in 1993 at the O'Connell Center.

"We are so excited. It has been a while," said Gainesville resident Rachel Tench, Benmont's sister. "Everybody here embraces them as their hometown kids."

The Heartbreakers launched a three-leg anniversary tour

earlier this summer, with Petty's third solo album, "Highway Companion," scheduled for release July 25. The band's last studio album was 2002's "The Last DJ," yet the anniversary tour has played to sold-out crowds from New York City's Madison Square Garden to last month's Bonnaroo Music & Arts Festival in Tennessee, where Petty brought Stevie Nicks on stage as a surprise guest.

The tour has been turning heads among critics and fans.

"This year, Petty and his brilliant band the Heartbreakers are celebrating their 30th anniversary as one of the finest, most enduring outfits in rock 'n' roll," wrote The Boston Globe's Jonathan Perry in a concert review.

Naturally, this buzz has reached Gainesville, where rumors of a local stop have been circulating for weeks. Even the band's relatives in Gainesville knew it likely would happen, but details have been slim and discreet.

Rachel Tench has been anxiously awaiting the news to break. "When this hits — I mean, really hits — I think people are going to be really charged," she said. "I think this town is just going to bust open."

Tench and close friend Sadie Darnell, Petty's cousin and a retired Gainesville Police captain, were overwhelmed with this city's response when The Heartbreakers played here in 1993. Rachel Tench called the atmosphere in Gainesville simply electric, while Darnell

recalled "Petty parties all over the community."

Both expect an even bigger response when the band's 30th anniversary tour arrives.

The music community, anyway, agrees.

"I think it's huge. Literally, there's not a better touring band in the world," said Ken Block, lead singer for Sister Hazel, sometimes referred to as "the second biggest band to come out of Gainesville."

"This is very significant. (Petty) is the genuine superstar that came out of Gainesville," said Marty Jourard, a former Gainesville musician who found fame in the 1980s as a keyboard/sax player for The Motels. "The main thing Petty did was that he became a mind-blowing songwriter."

Jourard and his former Gainesville bands — Southpaw and Road Turkey (featuring drummer Stan Lynch before he joined The Heartbreakers) — used to share stages with Petty's former Gainesville band Mudcrutch.

Jourard, now a Seattle area musician and teacher, is no stranger to touring and noted The Heartbreakers' 13-year gap between Gainesville performances likely had more to do with budgets and bean counters than the band's desire to play their hometown.

"Petty liked Gainesville," Jourard said. "That was the environment that allowed Petty to be Petty."

Tench said the band has wanted to play Gainesville for a long time. He, too, remembers the atmosphere at the

O'Connell Center in 1993: "That was just wonderful. It was so much fun, just a really special gig."

Petty himself has been downright nostalgic about his hometown in recent years. In an interview with Gainesville Magazine last year, he was asked if he had visited Gainesville lately.

"No, but I sure would love to," he answered. "There's really not too many days go by that I don't think about it. I think about it quite a bit. One of my dreams is to really go back there, spend a little time and just go around and get nostalgic, you know? I loved it there."

The band will not get much down time in Gainesville, however, as they play Atlanta the following day and then San Diego on Sept. 27.

Times and ticket prices have not been announced yet. In fact, as of late Friday afternoon, O'Connell Center officials were unable to confirm the concert. "We're not there yet," said Darius Dunn, O'Connell Center associate director.

The concert was posted on the band's Web site late Friday, and Robinson Fitzgerald, Petty's publicist, said it is definitely a done deal. Dunn said all those signs are positive, but he has not been given the green light from promoters to confirm the concert.

The Heartbreakers are original members Petty, Tench, guitarist Mike Campbell and bassist Ron Blair, as well as drummer Steve Ferrone (Lynch left the band in 1994) and guitarist Scott Thurston.

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