

Petty CD is welcome 'Companion'

CD REVIEWS

Tom Petty, "Highway Companion" (American):

As an American boy raised on promises, Tom Petty has spent the last three decades on and off the road embodying the all-American search for a better life somewhere else.

As Petty and his band The Heartbreakers mark their 30th anniversary as recording artists, Gainesville's favorite son has released a new album of songs that both defy and acknowledge the passing of time. On the aptly-titled "Highway Companion," the head Heartbreaker is in a reflective mood, with mixed emotions about where he's been and what lies ahead.

From the very first lines of the opening song, "Saving Grace" ("I'm passing sleeping cities, fading by degrees, not believing all I see ...") through the reflection on love lost on the final cut, "The Golden Rose," Petty seems torn between fixing



COURTESY PHOTU

"Highway Companion" is Tom Petty's third solo album, coming after "Full Moon Fever" (1989) and "Wildflowers" (1994).

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his eyes on the rearview mirror or the road ahead. Along the way, the listener is taken on a lovely, bittersweet journey that ranks among Petty's strongest efforts in recent years.

Although guitarist Mike Campbell is the only Heartbreaker present on this solo album, "Highway Companion" has all the hallmarks of a Petty and The Heartbreakers classic. A master of live performances, Petty's other great attribute has always been his ability to write clever, catchy songs that mutate the very best of The Byrds — and fellow Traveling Wilburys Bob Dylan and the late George Harrison — into his own distinct Southern twang.

"Square One," arguably one of Petty's sweetest, saddest love songs ever, is as sparse as a weeping willow on a November morning, while "Flirting with Time" is, ironically, a wonderfully bouncy homage to the best of '60s pop reminiscent of The Searchers or The Beatles circa "Rubber Soul."

Never one to forget his roots, Petty's pen is also in fine form on the ridiculously catchy "Down South." Short of Dylan himself, few if any songwriters today could turn a phrase as witty as "create myself down South, impress all the women, pretend I'm Samuel Clemens, wear seersucker and white linens."

For many fans, Petty's music has long held a very special

place riding shotgun as they travel along life's highway. And three decades after Petty first entered the American rock 'n' roll pantheon, "Highway Companion" reaffirms his position as a master chronicler for a nation forever in pursuit of something so close, but still out of reach. — PJ Levine

Pharrell, "In My Mind" (Interscope): Memorable collaborations with rappers and singers west to east has made Pharrell Williams a force on the pop-music landscape.

No question.

It's no surprise to watch the second half of The Neptunes production team in music videos helmed by Jay-Z, Justin Timberlake, Snoop, Mariah Carey and others. Catchy beats that