

The SHPiEL

השפיל

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The SHPiEL Players

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Dear _____,

In the last edition of the SHPiEL, page 5 talks about the Kung-Fu Jews of Shanghai. The question is posed "How did they get there? Why did they go there?" to which the author answers, "We will never know."

Well, we will now.

Right before the Holocaust, Jews in Germany were offered the chance to escape to Shanghai, where they allowed the Jews to settle. Only a small number of Jews, maybe a few thousand, took the opportunity. The rest never figured tensions in Europe would escalate to the extent they did.

Shanghai wasn't overly welcoming to the Jews so much as the country was just indifferent. Take what you can get, right?

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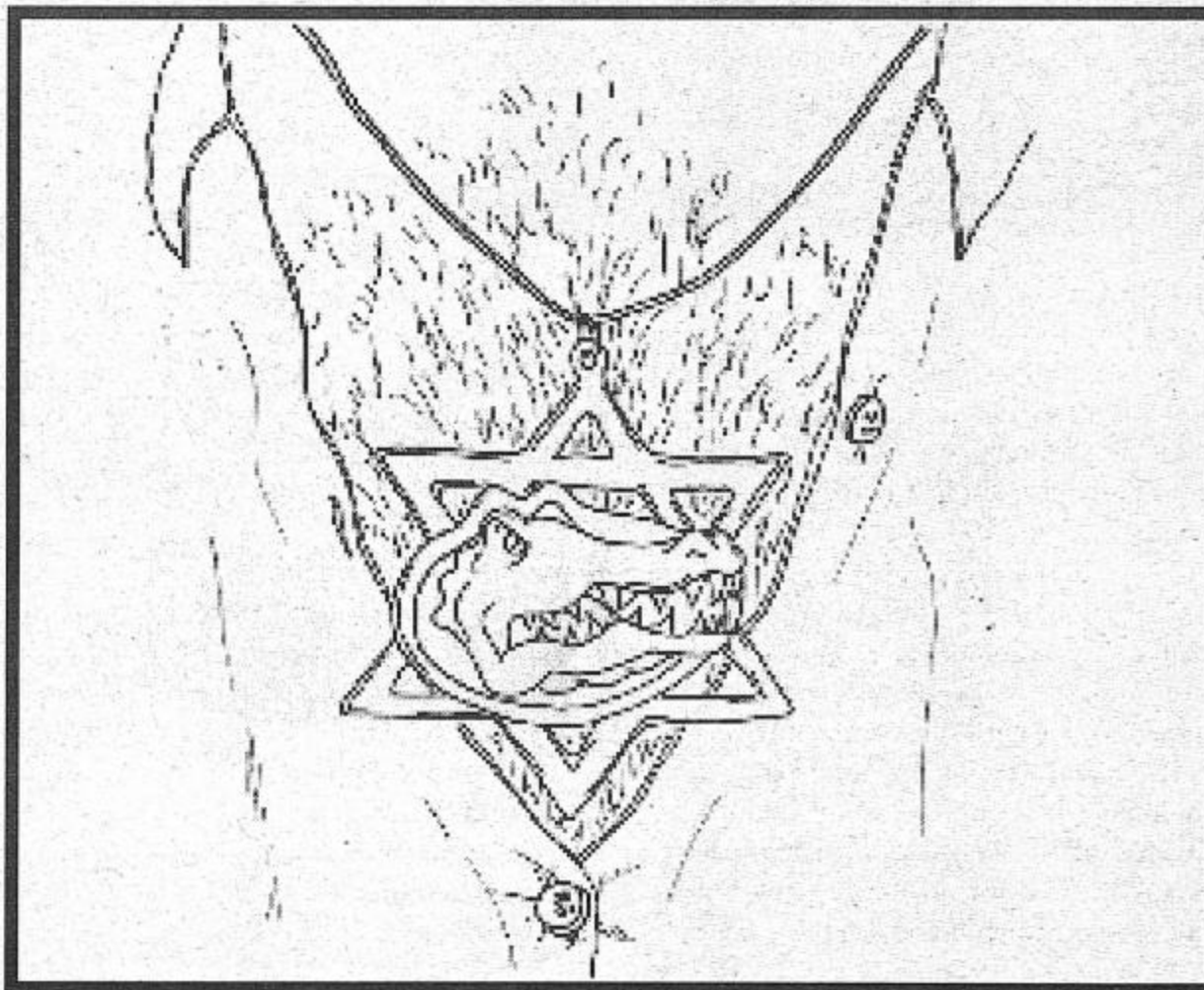
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Tom Petty Rocks Gainesville, Again

Photo & Story by Giselle Mazur

The '60s and '70s were a time of musical reinvention and the birth of some America's greatest singers and songwriters. It is the era in which Dylan, The Rolling Stones and The Byrds all began their legacies.

In this time of story telling, free love and folk rock 'n' roll, one Gainesville native and his band became one of the biggest music icons of the century.

Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers returned home for the first time in over a decade to play to a sold out crowd at the Steven C. O'Connell center Sept. 21. The concert was broadcast live on radio stations in over 70 cities, as well as filmed for television. Tickets to the show were the hottest commodity around, selling out in just minutes and being scalped for hundreds of dollars at the show.

The 55-year-old high school drop out who can wear a black velvet jacket and magenta dress shirt and not look like a fashion victim from the glam era, Petty epitomizes all that is rock star yet maintains a sincerely gracious attitude.

The first thing he noticed when he arrived in Gainesville was a sign painted on the Northwest 34th Street wall that read "Welcome home Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers." He kindly thanked the unknown artist for the sentiment and went on to describe how different Gainesville is these days.

"Things change in 30 years you know," Petty said, "they move on."

When asked what has changed the most, there was a moment of serious consideration before the band answered. Petty misses the Florida Theatre, which has been transformed into a local night club. He did note that the Seagle Building is still standing, and then joked that the historical downtown structure is probably just too big to tear down.

Ron Blair, bassist for the Heartbreakers, said he was sad that an old house they used to call "The Zoo" was finally demolished. It had been notorious for throwing animalistic parties.

A more cultural change can be seen in the local music scene, Petty said. While in 1965 the music was separate from the University, these days the two are almost synonymous. Most of the local bands are also students at UF or Santa Fe Community College.

More than anything, Petty and the Heartbreakers are just glad that music is still such a big part of the city. They noted that it is still impossible to walk downtown without seeing bands in tiny storefront bars and hear music spilling into the streets. The town has

held on to its creativity and appreciation of the art.

Gainesville and the South in general, are a large inspiration for a number of Petty's songs. "American Girl" even references State Road 441, also called Southwest 13th Street- the road that runs along campus.

He is clearly thankful for all of his success, and modestly insists that he has just gotten lucky. He said the band just made music "we could hold our head up and listen to," and attributes his fame to the fans that made him the idol he has become.

On popular music today, Petty said that despite the criticisms of modern artists and the use of explicit lyrics, he recognizes it is a form of poetry and has relevance to our generation.

"I think every generation goes for something the parents can't stand," Petty said. Then he added, "If parents really understood it, it wouldn't be much use." He is, however, pleased that he has managed to write meaningful songs without the use of "naughty words," and fails to see how flooding songs with profanity is helping modern culture.

At about 9 p.m., Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers took the stage in front of thousands of screaming fans. Even UF alumni and actor Stephen Root, most famously known for his roles in "Office Space" and "Dodgeball: A True Underdog Story," was spotted among those in attendance.

The electricity in the air was undeniable as fans sang along and danced in the aisles. Special guest Stevie Nicks made a surprise appearance that drove the audience wild. Among the songs she and Petty performed was "Southern Accents," one Petty has not done live since his last visit to Gainesville.

After the last song, the O'Connell Center audience was so ecstatic they demanded a return to the stage. Lighters and cell phones were held high, and the cheers and clapping continued until the band returned for a three-song encore that topped off the night.

The band does not know what the next year will bring them, but they do have a few projects up their sleeve. They hope to release a "Heartbreakers" album which has been in the pipeline for years, and have also been working with Academy Award-winning director/screenwriter Peter Bogdanovich on a documentary focusing on the band's remarkable 30-year reign over rock 'n' roll. Petty is also in his second season of hosting of an XM Satellite Radio Show, "Tom Petty's Buried Treasure," an hour-long weekly program.

Petty could not say when the band would return to Gainesville the next time, but hopes it will not take another 13 years. "Till then, "[we] take it on faith; [we] take it to the heart. The waiting is the hardest part."



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