

Warning: This film will make Tom Petty fans

By **BILL DEAN**

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Nailing a 30-year career in music and the complexities of a lifetime into a documentary film could easily enough demand a four-hour running time.

REVIEW

But then the question becomes — as in the case of "Runnin' Down a Dream," Peter Bogdanovich's mammoth look at the life of Tom Petty — how to keep it brisk, interesting and even compelling throughout.

The answers are twofold: First, in choosing a subject with enough meat-on-the-bones substance to bite into and digest. Second, in choosing precisely the right chef to serve it all up.

Petty's life, impact and career in music, from a Gainesville bass player to a worldwide music star who could hold his own with George Harrison and Bob Dylan, provides the satisfying

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Special to The Sun

'Runnin' Down a Dream'

■ **THE DOCUMENTARY:** "Runnin' Down a Dream," a documentary on Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, will have its Gainesville premiere today and Tuesday. Showings are sold out.

■ **THE DVD:** A four-disc boxed set of the film will also be released Tuesday and will include a full-length version of the '06 Gainesville concert.

■ **ONLINE:** Watch a trailer of the film and check out our archive of Petty stories at gainesville.com/tompetty

PETTY: Fast-paced narrative runs total of 4 hours

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ingredients. And given such a wealth of material, Bogdanovich becomes a sous, master and executive chef rolled into one, whipping up sweet-tasting bon mots and a satisfying, four-course meal at the same time.

From the start, Petty is his own chief narrator, recounting stories and passages both known and not-so-well known, from the beginnings of the Gainesville band Mudcrutch to later successes like the Heartbreakers' breakthrough album, "Damn The Torpedoes" (1979).

With Bogdanovich asking off-camera (and unheard) questions, the focus is on Petty and everyone else involved in the story, from Mudcrutch band members and all the Heartbreakers, including former drummer Stan Lynch and deceased bassist (and heroin-addiction casualty) Howie Epstein, both seen in archival interviews.

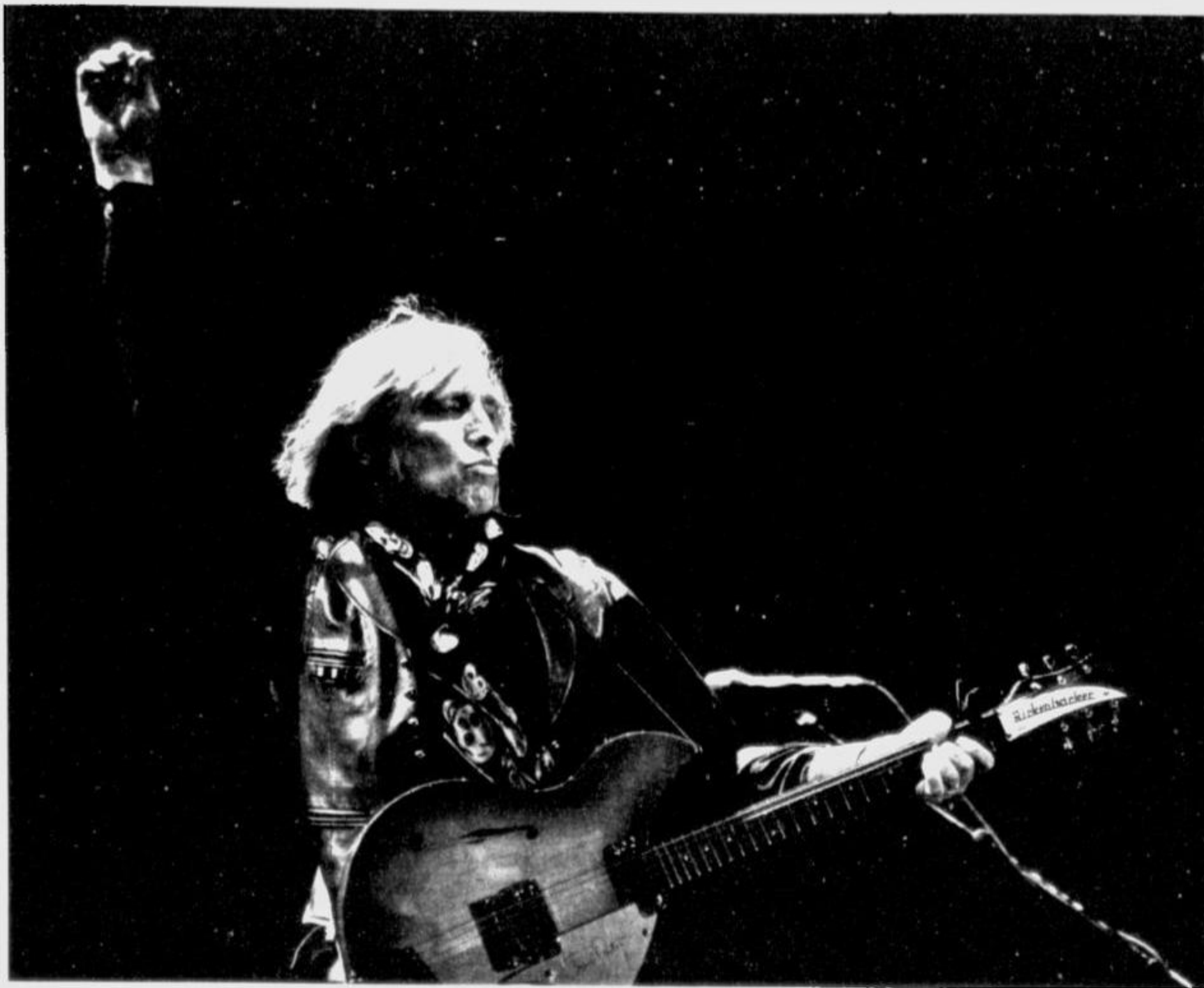
Weaving the musicians' on-camera stories with an almost nonstop use of photographs and rare footage keeps the pacing fast and entertaining. The wealth of never-before-seen footage of such scenes as the Mudcrutch farm festivals and the musicians' vehicles breaking down the day they left Gainesville for Hollywood is so remarkable, it's as if a young Bogdanovich had been hired in the early '70s to capture the story.

He wasn't, of course, and letting Petty and the others involved — from managers, record producers and industry heavyweights to musical participants like Stevie Nicks, Roger McGuinn, Jeff Lynne and George Harrison (in archival footage) — tell the stories has the effect of putting viewers in the action.

As the film suggests, the fuel of Petty's drive comes from turning one success into another; he whips through record company rejections and unacceptable offers like ripping G chords on a guitar.

And he talks Mudcrutch (and future Heartbreaker) guitarist Mike Campbell out of going to the University of Florida or joining the army. He also talks Benmont Tench's dad, a high-profile Gainesville judge, into letting Benmont give up college to pursue a career in music.

There are also glimpses into Petty's creative process: the songwriter on a stool playing the intro of "The Waiting" — and describing how he played it for weeks before coming up with the remainder of the song. That's followed by Pearl Jam's



Tom Petty performs at Austin City Limits in Austin, Texas, on Sept. 17, 2006.

JACKIE BOULLETT/RETNA



"Runnin' Down a Dream" director Peter Bogdanovich, left, responds during a Q&A session after the screening of the film Sunday at New York City's Walter Reade Theater at Lincoln Center.

CARY CONOVER/The Associated Press

Eddie Vedder, who describes himself as a teenager waiting in line to buy the album it was on — and learning to play "The Waiting" by the next day.

Bogdanovich's mastery,

acclaimed as far back as the black-and-white filmed "The Last Picture Show" in 1971, adds cinematic and insightful nuances to the film without calling attention to itself.

Though virtually all of Bogdanovich's interviews with subjects in the film were shot in color, one in which Petty talks about the Mudcrutch days is in black and white, an

approach that blends his descriptions almost seamlessly with the black-and-white photos of the band that appear onscreen while he's talking.

But the instant Petty begins describing his first trip to Hollywood to get a record deal, he's seen in color — an effect that gives his journey the allure of having gone from Kansas to the Land of Oz, which is exactly what happened.

And when Petty tackles the subject of conflicts with his father — and how he got through it by turning anger into ambition — Bogdanovich uses footage of a young Tom boxing in the yard with another kid, followed by a clip of a successful Petty on tour and throwing the end of a muffler around his neck and over his back. In that one instant, the simple act of throwing a muffler becomes a symbol of defiance.

The entire, engrossing effect of "Runnin' Down a Dream" begs a warning: Don't see it if you're not a fan and have no intention of becoming one, because such a status could change in four quick, and amazing, hours.