

MUSIC:

## Tom Petty may be old(er), but he still rocks with 'Mojo'

By Greg Kot

Chicago Tribune (MCT)

Tom Petty has been making albums with the Heartbreakers since 1976, but "Mojo" is the first studio release in which the band sounds like it's on equal footing with the songs.

That's both a plus and minus. Petty's best songs have a certain economy best-served by terse arrangements and the self-effacing interplay of his bandmates. "Mojo" spotlights the interplay of the Heartbreakers, and gives guitarist Mike Campbell room to stretch.

A master at weaving different colors through Petty's songs, Campbell brings a new boldness to his playing, as is instantly apparent with the opening fanfare on "First Flash of Freedom." The songs aren't exactly jam-fests, but they feel looser, stretching out to accommodate his solos.

In "Good Enough," his six-string fire evokes the soulblues drama of the Allman Brothers at their vintage best, and "I Should Have Known It" is harder still, a flashback to Led Zeppelin.

Though the album was recorded in the band's North Hollywood, Calif., rehearsal space, it brims with references to the Heartbreakers' collective past in the deep South, with its images of sugarcane and a grandfather's pulpwood factory off U.S. Hwy. 41 in Florida. That makes the undeniable blues undercurrent in songs such as "Jefferson Jericho Blues," "Takin' My Time," "Candy," "U.S. 41" and "Let Yourself Go" understandable. These aren't classic Petty songs, but they are sturdy vehicles for a terrific, frequently underrated band.



Bradley Cooper as Templeton "Face" Peck; from left, UFC light heavyweight Quinton "Rampage" Jackson as B.A. Baracas; Sharlto Copley as H.M. "Howling Mad" Murdock; and Liam Neeson as Col. Hannibal Smith, star in Fox's \$100-million movie reboot of "The A-Team." (Courtesy Michael Muller/MCT)

MOVIE REVIEW:

## 'The Karate Kid'

By Colin Covert

Star Tribune (Minneapolis) (MCT)

Let's put the shortcomings of the new "Karate Kid" in perspective. The 1984 original, directed by "Rocky's" Oscar-winner John G. Avildsen, was hardly a cultural treasure. It was wildly implausible and corny, but if it hit you at the right point in your underdoggy adolescence, it generated warm memories.

The remake is equally farfetched, but lacks the innocence that made the first film so likable. The new "Kid" feels like a big-budget audition reel for sweet Jaden Smith, with Will and Jada Pinkett Smith hovering above the bloated 135-minute project as doting parents/producers.

The film follows 12-year-old Dre Parker (Smith) and his single mother, Sherry (Taraji P. Henson) on a job transfer from decaying Detroit to vibrant Beijing. Dre's transition is complicated by his lazy, disrespectful nature, his crush on his Chinese classmate Meiyang (Wenwen Han), and vicious bullying by schoolyard thug Chen (Zhenwei Wang) and his henchmen. Dre begs his mom to enroll him in a kung fu academy for self defense, but finds an unlikely mentor in his apartment's laconic handyman, Mr. Han (Jackie Chan). In the course of many training montages, he drops his bratty attitude, absorbs a dose of Buddhist humility, and learns to stand up for himself.

Smith is a cute kid, but fundamentally miscast. The protagonist in the original film was in his mid-teens, a young man in the making. Here, prepubescent seventh-graders enact heart-thumping romance and bone-thumping beat-downs, which makes for uncomfortable viewing. Ironically, Smith radiates a self-possessed confidence that makes him seem less vulnerable than his puppyish predecessor, Ralph Macchio.

And what about Jackie Chan? He is stuck with some Zen howlers here, explaining how kung fu is like life. Chan is playing an older, wearier character here, and his shambling body language is persuasive.

The climactic scene, the standing-room-only little league kung fu championship, is a numbing flurry of fast cutting, ear-bruising sound effects and spinning crane kicks. The David and Goliath mismatch plays out as it must, but it's hard to shout approval for pint-sized lads clobbering each other.

The recent superhero spoof "Kick-Ass" had the wit to turn that kind of child-abuse imagery into a grand sick joke. "The Karate Kid" invites us to cheer the spectacle for real, and even when the good guy triumphs, that spoils the fun.

**2 stars;** Starring: Jaden Smith, Jackie Chan, Taraji P. Henson; Directed by Harald Zwart; Rated PG for bullying, martial arts action violence and some mild language.

MOVIE REVIEW:

## 'The A-Team'

By Colin Covert

Star Tribune (Minneapolis) (MCT)

Excuse me, I need to sit down, catch my breath and extinguish my singed eyebrows. I've just experienced "The A-Team," a highly combustible concoction of testosterone, napalm and gunpowder, seasoned with cheesy comedy and served flambe.

In what feels like a tryout for the next "Mission: Impossible" directing job, Joe Carnahan has made the reboot of the 1980s TV series an excuse to blow up every vehicle, prop and backdrop in a four-mile radius. Maybe Carnahan should consider asking his doctor if Ritalin is right for him. I could use a little myself right now.

For those of you who don't remember the show – no problem. The leading characters, four Army Rangers turned soldiers of fortune, are swiftly introduced and click into place as smoothly as Lego pieces. Atop the command chain is Colonel Hannibal Smith (Liam Neeson), who likes Cuban cigars and plans, especially when they come together. His partners-in-havoc include B.A. Baracus (Quinton "Rampage" Jackson), a rip-snortin' brawler, terrified of flying but quick to forgive the tricks that get him onto planes when pacified with food. Howling Mad Murdoch (Sharlto Copley) is the team's pilot, who often seems to be several landing gear short of a set. And Face (Bradley Cooper) is a prime hunk of T-bone, irresistible to women. That includes Army Capt. Sosa (a perfunctory Jessica Biel), assigned to capture the men who are, for reasons that hardly matter, on the run.

The lead actors range from OK (Jackson has a scary physicality but needs to take the marbles out of his mouth) to great. Copley, the breakout star of last year's sci-fi gem "District 9," plays the nutty pilot with a collection of "Rain Man" tics that makes us wonder if he's pretend-nuts or truly loco; his impromptu "Braveheart" speech is a thing of downright Shakespearean nuttiness. Cooper's narcissistic cocktail of charm and snark isn't as intoxicating as Robert Downey Jr.'s Tony Stark, but he is buffed to frequently displayed perfection. And while it's a shame to see a committed actor like Neeson doing a Bruce Willis-style toss-off role, why shouldn't he enrich his golden years with easy parts and easier paychecks?

The film is a relentless, unapologetic, in-your-face barrage of special effects and virtuoso stunts that roars into action in the pre-credits prelude and rarely downshifts. It could just as easily have been called "High Concept Action Film #753," so randomly are the set pieces churned out. The main benefit of basing "The A-Team" on a pre-existing series is that it comes partially assembled, with the character quirks already in place. That way we can get to the detonations faster.

**3 stars;** Starring: Liam Neeson, Bradley Cooper, Sharlto Copley, Quinton "Rampage" Jackson; Directed by: Joe Carnahan; Rated PG-13 for intense sequences of action and violence throughout, language and smoking

Movie picks		Local critic								
★ Outstanding	■ Worthy effort	▼ So-so	● A bomb	New review	Chicago Tribune	Los Angeles Times	Miami Herald	Philadelphia Inquirer	Minneapolis Star Tribune	Seattle Times
Get Him to the Greek	R	-	■	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼
Killers	PG 13	-	●	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼
Marmaduke	PG	-	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼
Prince of Persia	PG 13	-	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼
Robin Hood	R	-	■	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼
Sex and the City 2	R	-	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼
Shrek Forever After	PG	-	■	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼
Splice	R	-	■	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼