

SOUND ADVICE

Petty's rock stands test of time

Wildflowers
Tom Petty
(Warner Bros.)

The critically correct thing to do here would be to dismiss Tom Petty as a journeyman rock dinosaur — a second-tier classic rocker whose best days (such as they were) are well behind him. But I am an unapologetic Petty fan, so we'll have none of that here.

The way I see it, Petty is a rock 'n' roll figure much like Neil Young — a timeless artist whose music transcends trends and fashion. "Damn the Torpedoes" sounds just as good today as it did in 1979. And I'll wager we'll be able to say the same thing about "Wildflowers" in 2009.

Petty is a dinosaur in one respect. In the age of rap, grunge and warmed-over punk, he is one of the last great proponents of mainstream American rock 'n' roll. His roots are in rock's '60s and '70s heyday, in the music of The British Invasion, Bob Dylan, The Byrds, The Band and Bruce Springsteen. And that's why so many "hip," punk-loving critics hate him.

Petty prefers melody to dissonance, vocal harmony to caterwauling. His riffs are rooted in the blues and country, not the anarchistic philosophy of the white, urban avant garde. He writes songs about the lives of everyday people, and spices them with a wry sense of humor. Most important of all, he's a complete natural as a songwriter, a pop craftsman with an uncanny knack for writing catchy hooks and chord progressions.

"Wildflowers," includes all of those qualities. It is an elegant, upbeat 15-song collection of adult rock 'n' roll that runs the gamut from Byrds-influenced folk ("Wildflowers") to Dylanesque rock ("You Don't Know How It Feels") to Beatles-style pop ("To Find a Friend," "House in the Woods," "Only a Broken Heart").

The release is billed as Petty's second solo album, but includes appearances by three of the four original Heartbreakers, guitarist Mike Campbell, keyboardist Benmont Tench and bassist Howie Epstein. The lineup of guest musicians also includes Beach Boys guitarist Carl Wilson and former Beatles drummer Ringo Starr. Conductor Michael Kamen orchestrates and conducts several tracks, including "Time to Move On," "It's Good To Be King" and "Wake Up Time."

It's an impressive musical package, with the guest players adding layers of vivid color to Petty's graceful collection of love songs and street-corner observations. The instrumentation ranges from the traditional guitars and drums to harpsichord, sitar, Mellotron, harmonium, zenon, orchestron and tack piano.



Tom Petty

A mature, utterly contemporary recording from one of rock's most talented artists.

Michael Norman

Stones in the Road
Mary Chapin Carpenter
(Columbia)

According to the conventional wisdom, Mary Chapin Carpenter is a folk singer who, through a mixture of timing, skill and perseverance, found an audience among country fans. So since her new album, "Stones in the Road," forsakes the bright, pop-savvy sound of her last album, "Come On, Come On," for an understated, more introspective approach, the conventional take will likely be that she's making a return to her folk roots.

But as usual, the conventional wisdom gets only half the picture. There's nothing on Carpenter's new album that can match the boogie-fueled drive of "The Bug" or the soulful swagger of "I Feel Lucky," but that hardly means it doesn't rock. Likewise, while the album has more than its share of traditional elements, thanks to the Celtic flavoring in "Jubilee" and Appalachian overtones that color the chorus "Why Walk When You Can Fly," its folk content is no higher than on her last two albums.

No matter how much some reviewers might want to cite such differences as evidence that success has somehow changed Carpenter, however, the truth is that "Stones in the Road" is entirely typical of her output. Because at bottom, her music has never been concerned with matters of style, choosing to emphasize what the songs say over how they say it. That's as much the case on this album as anywhere in her catalog.

J.D. Considine

■ For your information

Mary Chapin Carpenter appears at 8 p.m. Wednesday at the State Theatre at Playhouse Square. Tickets, \$24.75, are avail-



The Cranberries perform tomorrow at the Agora Theatre.

able at Advantix locations and the Playhouse Square box office, 1519 Euclid Ave., Cleveland, or by calling 241-6000. John Gorka opens.

No Need to Argue
Cranberries
(Island)

What put the Cranberries on the map wasn't the pop appeal of songs like "Linger," but the sheer pleasure of listening to Dolores O'Riordan sing.

It wasn't just the way her brogue stood out amid the other accents on the radio (though it would be hard to imagine an American making the second syllable of "linger" matter so); no, the most memorable thing about her delivery is its unvarnished emotionality. There's such a plaintive quality to her voice, such an alluring melancholy, that it's hard to hear her without empathizing with the heartbreak she sang about.

Maybe that's why the Cranberries' new album, "No Need to Argue," seems to have been built from her voice up. Never mind that it's Noel Hogan's guitar that generally defines the music's mood, or that Mike Hogan and Feargal Lawlor are as subtle and assured a rhythm section as any in alternative rock. All that takes a back seat to O'Riordan's warbling.

Despite the fact record companies like to market female-fronted combos by putting a pretty face way out front (often to the point of reconfiguring the group as singer-plus-accompaniment), O'Riordan's dominance of the album would be justified even if she weren't so photogenic.

Some of that has to do with the way she has sharpened her vocal skills since the band's first album, "Everybody Else Is Doing It, So Why Can't We?" As before, she makes excellent use of the slight break between her upper and lower registers, using it to convey everything from a stifled sob ("I Can't Be with You"), to a wail of bereavement ("Empty").

But her singing isn't quite the blunt-edged instrument it seemed an album ago. This time around, she softens and shapes the tunes in a variety of ways. "Ode to My Family," for instance, finds her decorating the melody with everything from quicksilver grace notes to tiny, yodel-like yelps, while "Twenty One" contrasts the breathy whisper of the refrain against the wordless ululation of the counter-melody.

J.D. Considine

■ For your information

The Cranberries concert tomorrow at the Agora Theatre in Cleveland is sold out.

MoodSwing
Joshua Redman
(Warner Bros.)

In his third album since blasting on to the jazz scene, Joshua Redman continues to operate within the boundaries of jazz's mainstream. While not an original player, he is a consummate stylist, possessing a smooth, sinewy tone and an innate ability to make whatever he plays sound easy and refined. More to the point, many jazz players spend a lifetime trying to mature to a level of cool sophistication that he has already reached.

"MoodSwing," like his two previous albums, is immediately accessible to jazz diehards and jazz-lite fans. Unlike "Wish" and "Joshua Redman," "MoodSwing" operates at low to medium simmer; there are no languid ballads nor any barn burners here. The second cut, "Chill" pretty much sums up what he's trying to accomplish in "MoodSwing." He does venture once to jazz's edge, "Dialogue." It comes off well not because he sounds all that stellar but because it is one of the few stretches on disc that he's made as a leader.

Therein lies "MoodSwing's" weakness. Despite nifty tunes (all penned by him) and a well oiled band, "MoodSwing" doesn't hold up well under repeated listening.

Stephen Phillips

HITS

These charts, compiled by SoundScan, show how music is selling locally. Nationwide rankings in parentheses.

TOP SINGLES

1. Always Bon Jovi (Mercury) (2)
2. I'll Make Love to You Boyz II Men (Motown) (3)
3. Practice What You Preach Barry White (A&M) (9)
4. Flava in Ya Ear Craig Mack (Bad Boy) (4)
5. You Want This Janet Jackson (Virgin) (15)
6. I Wanna Be Down Brandy (Atlantic) (5)
7. Never Lie Immature (MCA) (6)
8. Before I Let You Go Blackstreet (Interscope) (17)
9. Here Comes the Hotstepper Ini Kamoze (Columbia) (1)
10. All I Wanna Do Sheryl Crow (A&M) (10)

TOP LPs

1. Unplugged in New York Nirvana (Geffen) (1)
2. II Boyz II Men (Motown) (2)
3. Youthanasia Megadeth (Capitol) (4)
4. Murder Was the Case Soundtrack (Atlantic/Interscope) (3)
5. Big Ones Aerosmith (Geffen) (6)
6. Diary Scarface (Virgin) (12)
7. Bob Seger's Greatest Hits (Capitol) (19)
8. Wildflowers Tom Petty (Warner) (8)
9. Smash Offspring (Epitaph) (5)
10. No Need to Argue Cranberries (Polygram) (13)

RHYTHM & BLUES

1. II Boyz II Men (Motown) (1)
2. Murder Was the Case Soundtrack (Atlantic/Interscope) (2)
3. Diary Scarface (Virgin) (3)
4. Creepin' On Ah Come Up Bone Thugs 'N Harmony (Ruthless) (8)
5. The Icon Is Love Barry White (A&M) (4)
6. Rhythm of Love Anita Baker (Elektra) (5)
7. Jason's Lyric Soundtrack (Mercury) (6)
8. Songs Luther Vandross (Epic) (7)
9. Planet of Da Apes Da Lench Mob (Priority) (25)
10. Blackstreet Blackstreet (Interscope) (13)

COUNTRY

1. Tractors Tractors (Arista) (2)
2. Not a Moment Too Soon Tim McGraw (Curb) (3)
3. Stones in the Road Mary Chapin Carpenter (Columbia) (1)
4. Who I Am Alan Jackson (Arista) (4)
5. Waitin' on Sundown Brooks & Dunn (Arista) (5)
6. When Love Finds You Vince Gill (MCA) (6)
6. Kickin' It Up John Michael Montgomery (Atlantic) (10)
8. Third Rock From the Sun Joe Diffie (Epic) (9)
9. Read My Mind Reba McEntire (MCA) (12)
10. Heartsongs Dolly Parton (Columbia) (21)