



# Conversations With Tom Petty

*Paul Zollo*

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OFFICIAL AND AUTHORIZED! The first book to focus solely on the life and work of the man responsible for some of the most memorable rock anthems of our generation. Tom and Paul conducted a series of in-depth discussions about Tom's career, with special focus on his songwriting. The conversations are reprinted here with little or no editorial comment and represent a unique perspective on Tom's entire career.

## Conversations With Tom Petty Details

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# From Reader Review Conversations With Tom Petty for online ebook

## Terri Lynn says

As a long time Tom Petty fan, I loved his interviews with Paul Zollo. I only wish he had discussed his private life more though he does include info on the time when someone committed arson and almost burned him and his wife and one of their daughters to death when burning their house down and especially interesting was how he, George Harrison, Jeff Lynne, Roy Orbison, and Bob Dylan became the Traveling Wilburys. I love those songs too- like End of the Line.

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## Robert says

Absolutely the wrong time to have read this book, since its format brings Tom Petty so vividly to life that it was actually quite upsetting. Nevertheless, this is wonderful.

As Tom writes in the foreword "This... is not an autobiography. That is for another book" (and interestingly, in the epilogue he mentions how a book written by his eventual biographer Warren Zanes helped inspire the album 'Highway Companion') - but as a portrait of a life in song, and of the life and times of the man that wrote them, this is peerless.

A tremendous achievement.

RIP, Tom Petty.

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## Cherie says

Part 1 flowed well. It followed a timeline set by the albums and what was going on musically and personally with Tom and the Heartbreakers. Lots of great trivia about how the albums and collaborations came about.

Part 2 was an album by album review of the songs and the stories behind the songs. Some of the ideas were duplicated from Part 1 but not many. I liked hearing how Tom felt about his songs and the ideas behind them, how they started with a skeleton idea or riff and created majesty. I wish I had the time to listen to the albums/songs while reading but I wouldn't be able to finish the book.

My favorite albums are Full Moon Fever, Into the Great Wide Open, and The Traveling Wilbury's Volume 1. I think Tom Petty's genius was that he wrote about everything and everyone around him, not just what was going on in his life. It gave him so many variables to write about and made his songs timeless and applicable to a broad audience. He comes across as humble even as he was driven to success. He didn't give himself an alternate, he had to be successful in a rock band because he didn't want to do any else. He had no backup plan. No Plan B.

The author asks great questions but the real value of the book is the straight-forward, honest, and thorough answers.

RIP Tom

Dana, I'm sad for your loss. There are no words in my vocabulary although I'm sure Tom would be able to come up with some.

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### **Dave says**

We're in good hands with Zollo, and Petty nicely opens up and revels tons of cool stuff about his songs and songwriting process. It's something I wish more songwriters would do. Petty's was inclined to take the lonely road and write alone, yet most of the hit material emerged from "nose to nose / tape to tape" collaborations with the likes of Lynne & Campbell. It always helps to have a great bandmates at your disposal. Like any mindful writer, in the end, Petty reveals only what he wants. Forsaking most of the distasteful and juicy material like an ugly divorce and addiction. Reading this book at the time of his death was like having a dark cloud over my head. Which ain't always a bad thing. Perhaps my only real gripe is my digital copy having numerous spelling errors.

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### **Ednor says**

Journalist Paul Zollo gives us exactly what's promised here: conversations with the prolific, popular songwriter/performer. Petty belongs in the pantheon of songwriters that includes Dylan, Young, Prine and Springsteen, among others. His popularity and populist songwriting themes probably cause a lot of people to underestimate him. But as I read through the book, I was reminded of just how many monster albums, just how many massive hits the man has recorded, both solo and with his longtime band The Heartbreakers.

I'm currently researching a novel that deals, in part, with the hair-metal scene of Los Angeles in the mid-1980s. To that end, I've read biographies and autobiographies of bands like Guns 'N Roses, Quiet Riot, and Mötley Crüe. I read the Petty book (purely for pleasure) just after finishing Nikki Sixx's self-indulgent, lurid autobiography, "Heroin Diaries." The contrast between these two songwriters could not be greater.

It's not that Petty (and his band) were saints or teetotalers, not by a longshot. Hell, his fabulously talented bass player, Howie Epstein, died from a heroin overdose. The difference is that Petty and his cohorts were all about the music, where Sixx and his crew were all about the partying and trying to uphold their bad-boy image. Sixx's songwriting is laughably shallow and crude, especially when compared to the tight, elegant prose of Petty and his right-hand man, guitarist Mike Campbell.

As a songwriter, I found Zollo's "Conversations" to be chock-full of anecdotes and explanations of Petty's techniques and songwriting methods. It was very inspirational, and especially rewarding when I ran across any common ground I share with the Florida-born rocker.

Petty is massively successful, and living the good life in Malibu. His cushy existence, though, doesn't dampen his desire to create and I find that very inspiring indeed.

This is less a book about gossip and Hollywood "Behind the Music" titillation, than a clear glimpse into the creative mind and thought process of one of our generation's greatest musical talents. Any Tom Petty fan, or anyone who writes, plays or records music will find this an entertaining and illuminating experience.

(Thanks to Larry for recommending it; you also cost me about \$65.00 in TP CDs.)

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### **Kyle Pucciarello says**

A little break from plowing through all of these YA novels for some inspiration with Tom Petty.

Very well done, using interviews with Tom to piece together his life story in his own words. While I enjoyed the first 2/3 of the book which chronologically followed his life, the true treasure for me was the last third where they dissecting songwriting and the process of creating an album.

As someone who writes and performs and dissects music constantly, these interviews were fascinating. Comments about his process, how he tries to be an antennae to anything that may turn into a line in a song, etc. It all resonated profoundly and inspired me to begin writing again.

Fantastic. Even sadder that he's gone.

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### **Josh Liller says**

I picked this up from the library after Petty died. This book is compilation of very extensive interviews by a musician/journalist, Paul Zollo, who clearly did his homework. It came out a decade ago, but the vast majority of Petty's accomplishments were complete by that time, including induction in the Rock-n-ROLL Hall Of Fame. Petty had only two studio albums between this book and his death, neither of which contained any charting singles and neither of which I think were memorable. About 2/3 of the book covers Petty's life and career, with the remaining 1/3 being focused on an album-by-album track-by-track discussion of Petty's music.

The interviews are extensive and Petty seemed pretty open and frank. He also comes off as a decent and positive person. He seems happy with his long career, not arrogant about it, and doesn't seem to have a grudge against anyone. Learning about Petty's early days in Gainesville and how he got into the music business were particularly interesting. Some particularly heartfelt stories involve the time an arsonist set his house on fire and how one of the members of the Heartbreakers descended into ultimately fatal heroin addiction.

This was my first time reading a book-length interview and the style didn't really work for me. This probably would have been better as a documentary than a book. The interviews also seem a little too unedited, wandering in a way that is natural for a conversation but comes across as meandering, especially if you're used to reading finely crafted narratives. Petty also comes across as a little too modest and mellow sometimes; he seems like a really likable guy, but not an especially interesting one to interview and alot of his songs don't have quite as interesting stories behind them as you might think. He even strongly downplays The Last DJ as something that needed to be said, but not something he was angry about now or when he was making it. Also, as someone who has almost no understanding of the technical/academic side of it (chords and such), some of the stuff Petty talks about in terms of writing songs flies right over my head. Because Zollo is also a musician he understands what Petty is talking about, but may not have realized non-musicians wont understand it. Petty's Foreword is only half a page long and pretty meaningless.

I read about the first 50 pages then ended up skipping around to parts that seemed like they were most likely to be interesting. I'm going to give this 3 stars on the strength of the content, but I can't really recommend it to anyone who isn't a really big Petty fan and/or really big rock buff. I think I would have been better off watching Peter Bogdanovich's documentary or reading one of the traditional biographies about Petty (Tom Petty: Rock 'n' Roll Guardian that came out a few years ago or the forthcoming Tom Petty: A Biography).

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### **Emily says**

Being a huge fan, I've always had a hard time perceiving what the general public thinks of Tom Petty, but I get the impression people see him as some sort of Bob Dylan-imitating, pot-smoking, long hair-sporting, no nukes-advocating folk rocker. Other than the hair and the advocacy, I've always found this impression pretty far off -- and in this book of straight Q & A, Petty's Type A personality shines right through. Readers interested in the musical process will enjoy scrupulous detail about the instruments and recording techniques used; for those who enjoy the more personal side of the songwriting process, Petty's description of the Traveling Wilburys' collaboration will wow. A confidentiality clause in Petty's divorce agreement with Jane Benyo, his wife of 22 years, keeps the musician from getting into a fair share of the personal, but this book -- a songwriter speaking about the music he has loved (he's almost encyclopedic) and the music he's created (he's always humble) -- is a refreshing rock bio read.

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### **Tracy says**

What first drew me to Tom Petty's music some 20 years ago was the poetic way he put lyrics together coupled with a unique yet always accessible musical sound. His music truly is the soundtrack to his fans' lives. I can hear one of his songs and think Oh, yeah, I listened to this a lot when I was going through... whatever it may be. I've seen the TP and the Heartbreakers 5 times with my husband and have come away with fantastic memories of those evenings. I hope to have that chance again someday.

I was intrigued to learn about his writing process which he explains in the book that many times it's not a process at all- lyrics just come to him. Though I'm not a songwriter, his words inspire me for the other kinds of writing that I do. This was a pleasant surprise that I didn't anticipate when picking up the book. I also loved hearing TP tell the story about meeting his 2nd wife and the stories about his mother and grandmother. You can tell he has a genuine respect for women that is so often lacking with rock stars.

Refreshing in that the book isn't a tell-all, gossip-laden, poorly written work of drivel, but that's never been Petty's style anyway. This was a celebration of music and artists and the process, including the highs and the lows, in which one succeeds in mastering their artistic talents. And well written to boot!

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### **Bonnie McGregor says**

This is one of the best rock and roll biographies out there. The unique format of having the rock star give candid interviews for the entire chronological story of his life is exceptional. And Tom Petty seems to really enjoy reminiscing about his childhood, his early years as a musician in Florida and his seemingly overnight stardom with The Heartbreakers. I truly loved the section about his friendship and collaborations with George Harrison, Jeff Lynne and Roy Orbison. Their output together is extraordinary. My only criticism

would be the seemingly laid back commentary by Petty on the death of his longtime bandmate, Howie Epstein. It sounds like Petty is remorseful, but certainly elusive in sharing his honest feelings for not doing more to help this talented man during a prolonged addiction. That aside, this is an insightful read on the life and career of one of our great rock musicians.

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### **Ira says**

IF you like T.P. this is the book for you, if your not a fan, then not so much. The book is split into two parts - the first about the man, the band, and their lives revolving around the music. Real interesting stuff and you realize just how prolific and solid an artist T.P. has been. What's more, he's just honest, funny and a genuinely good guy with a clear head on his shoulders.

The second part is a dissection, album by album, song by song of Petty's albums, collections and box sets. There's a lot of in depth discussion, all in interview form, about the craft of recording and song-writing which was fascinating, even to someone who doesn't play any instruments. T.P. has a great memory for how things went down in the studio and song-writing phases and is very forthcoming about his band's capabilities and where they have taken his music. Petty if nothing else is very critical of himself but often pleased with what he and the band have accomplished.

Mike Campbell (the driving musical force of the H.B's and Benmont Tench (their grounding rock) are paid their due in many respects throughout the book and the sad saga of Howie Epstein is covered with brutal honesty.

The best part of this book was seeing how big of a success T.P.'s career has been and that it couldn't have happened to a better guy. Actually, my favorite part of this book was how it got me to get my T.P. albums off the shelf and listen to them a new. I felt like I was in high school again.

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### **Allan Heron says**

Essentially a lengthy interview with Tom Petty split into two parts - his life and his songs.

It takes you up to the then imminent release of Highway Companion. The interview format allows you to get a good view of Petty as an individual. He's warm and generous in his praise of others and, whilst there's no false modesty, there's a sense of wonder about what he's achieved.

With Petty's recent death, this will be as near to an autobiography as we are likely to get.

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### **Lynn says**

Pretty cool book. Interesting to hear behind the scenes details of the growing pains of the band and insight into his famous fellow musicians, most notably George Harrison who was a dear friend to Tom and his family and quite the merry prankster. Also cool to hear about how Annie Lennox was so thoughtful, caring and nurturing to Tom and his family after his home was set fire with he and his family in it by a delusional "fan". They were able to escape with what they had on and not much else and Annie went and bought clothes for the entire family and did her best to make them comfortable. Also, Dave Stewart is a weirdo, but I already knew that. Really sad to hear about Howie Epstein's addiction finally taking his life and how much it impacted his fellow band mates as they had to come to terms with the fact that they were losing their dear

friend.

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**Thad says**

tom petty is the coolest uncle i never had.

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**Kim Juillot says**

A must-read for all his fans. Very in-depth. Hard to put down.

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