

- [Recommendations](#)
- Subjects
 - [Biographies & Memoirs](#)
 - [Health & Wellness](#)
 - [Romance](#)
 - [Business](#)
 - [History & Politics](#)
 - [Sci-Fi & Fantasy](#)
 - [Children's Books](#)
 - [Mind, Body & Spirit](#)
 - [Self-Improvement](#)
 - [Comics & Graphic Novels](#)
 - [Mysteries & Thrillers](#)
 - [Sports & Recreation](#)
 - [Cookbooks, Food & Wine](#)
 - [Parenting & Relationships](#)
 - [Travel](#)
 - [Fiction & Literature](#)
 - [Religion](#)
 - [Young Adults & Teens](#)
- [Sign In | Register](#)
-
- 0

Bruce Springsteen: A Lost Interview from His 'Glory Days'

By Jeff Burger, Published: March 26, 2013

[Edit this Page](#)



Anthony Correia / shutterstock

The Boss is still the Boss: Forty years after the release of his debut record, "Greetings from Asbury Park, N.J.," [Bruce Springsteen](#) is currently on world tour for his 17th album, "[Wrecking Ball](#)." Over the decades, Springsteen has given a smattering of interviews, many of the best of which are collected in a new book, "[Springsteen on Springsteen](#)," edited by [Jeff Burger](#) and available April 1. Here, Bookish excerpts an interview from 1984, conducted backstage after a show in St. Paul at the start of the world tour for "[Born in the USA](#)." The piece is one of the collector's items in "Springsteen on Springsteen": Published in International Musician and Recording World (a UK publication that folded in 1991), the interview was never published online--until now. It captures Bruce at the height of his powers--in it, he talks about his favorite Stones song, recording "Nebraska" by accident, what's "rock and roll" about "Born to Run" and "Thunder Road," what it meant to lose his best friend Steve Van Zandt and how he felt about being called "The Boss."

"Born in the U.S.A." [was] Springsteen's all-time bestseller and the top-selling album by any artist in 1985. The collection spawned seven Top 10 singles--"Glory Days," "Dancing in the Dark," "I'm on Fire," "I'm Going Down," "Cover Me," "My Hometown" and the title track--and led to a worldwide concert tour. Springsteen was just beginning that tour when veteran rock journalist Don McLeese sat down with him in St. Paul, Minnesota. [This interview has been edited for length.]

Don McLeese: Any particular reason why you chose St. Paul as the opening city?

Bruce Springsteen: Didn't you hear me last night? To explore new worlds, find new forms of life and to go where man has never gone before. No, actually, the last tour, I believe, we started

out right in this area also. I like the Midwest. I like playing out here. 'Cause usually it's just you and the fans, and it's just more relaxing.

DM: What made you decide to do "Street Fighting Man" this time through?

BS: It was funny. I just picked it out of the air a few days ago during the rehearsal. It had that great line: "What can a poor boy do except sing in a rock-and-roll band?" It seems to fit in the whole thing, for some reason. You come crashing down, it has that edge-of-the-cliff thing when you hit it. And it's funny; it's got humor to it. I just kinda pulled it out of the blue, mainly 'cause I've always loved that line.

Reading Recommendations



DM: It just seemed really political, especially when you introduced it with "Let freedom ring, but you've got to fight for it."

BS: I guess it all ties in like that. That's just me being a fan. It's like, man, what's my favorite Stones song? It's something I do in the clubs at home all the time. Get up onstage, and we'll do "Gloria," "The Last Time," "Wooly Bully." But that song did seem to fit in the whole thing--with the whole feeling with the show and where it was going.

DM: We were amazed by that introduction you gave "Nebraska." Was Charlie Starkweather just a lonely guy?

BS: That whole "Nebraska" album was just that isolation thing, and what it does to you. The record was just basically about people being isolated from their jobs, from their friends, from their families, their fathers, their mothers, just not feeling connected to anything that's going on. Your government.

And when that happens, there's just a whole breakdown. When you lose that sense of community, there's some spiritual breakdown that occurs. And when that occurs, you just get shot off somewhere where nothing seems to matter.

DM: Were there things going on with you at that time that made you feel particularly isolated?

BS: I don't know. There must have been; I wrote all those songs. To do it right, you've got to get down in there somehow.

It was a funny thing. I think I'd been touring for a long time, and I was home. I didn't have a

house; I'd never bought a house. I'd never really stopped. I was home for only a month, and I started to write all those songs. I wrote them real fast. Two months, the whole record, and for me that's real quick. I just sat at my desk, and it was something that was really fascinating for me. It was one of those times when you're not really thinking about it. I knew I wanted to make a certain type of record, but I certainly didn't plan to make that record.

Related Articles & Lists

Article: [Star-Maker Clive Davis' Favorite Music Books](#)

Article: [Elton, Rod, Neil, Bruce and More: Rock Gods Tell All](#)

Essentials List: [Essential Rock and Roll](#)

More Biographies & Memoirs

song there.

And so, that was the idea. I got this little cassette recorder that's supposed to be really good, plugged it in, turned it on, and the first song I did was "Nebraska." I just sat there; you can hear the chair creaking on "Highway Patrolman" in particular. I recorded them in a couple of days. Some songs I only did once, like "Highway Patrolman." The other songs I did maybe two times, three times at the most. I had only four tracks, so I could play the guitar, sing, then I could do two other things. That was it. I mixed it on this little board, an old beat-up Echoplex. It was real old, which is why the sound was kinda deep.

I put the tape in my pocket, carried it around a couple of weeks, 'cause I was going to teach the songs to the band. After a couple of days, I looked at the thing and said, "Uh-oh, I'd better stop carrying this around like this. Can somebody make a copy of this?"

It's just the exact thing I did in my house. It was hard to get on an album; that took us some time, because the recording was so strange that it wouldn't get onto wax. I don't know what the physics are about, but it was hard to get on record without it distorting really strange. It was definitely my quickest record.

Like, last night we did "Johnny 99," and that just rocks, man, and "Open All Night"--those are easy. The reason I think they work is that they're stories. People can just sit

Even the way we recorded it was just by accident. It was just for demos. I told Mike, the guy that does my guitars, "Mike, go get a tape player, so I can record these songs." I figured what takes me so long in the studio is not having the songs written. So I said I'm going to write them and I'm going to tape them. If I can make them sound good with just me, then I know they'll be fine. Then I can play them with the band. 'Cause if you rehearse with the band, the band can trick you. The band can play so good, you think you've got something going. Then you go in and record it, and you realize the band was playing really good, but there's no

and listen to the story.

DM: So many of those songs seem pretty bleak. The mood of the show is usually so exhilarating and celebratory. We were wondering whether you worried about how those songs would fit in.

BS: Mainly, I felt that those were good songs, so there was a place for them. I've always done a lot of different types of material during the show. I've never done stuff quite like that. I just felt I could make it work somehow.

Like, last night we did "Johnny 99," and that just rocks, man, and "Open All Night"--those are easy. The reason I think they work is that they're stories. People can just sit and listen to the story. I think there's a good amount of the audience that has the record, but I don't think it compares to the percentage that has the other records. But I felt that the audience was real responsive to it. It's just a trick of getting in and getting out of it.

DM: We thought that stuff was the most powerful material of the show.

BS: Well, thank you. I think it's the stuff that I feel . . . there's a balance. Just like life. You want to keep a certain amount of the old things. A lot of times they mean so much to me now because they mean so much to the audience. You got into "Thunder Road," and that song's as much their song as it is my song. They just take it over. And that's where it becomes more powerful. They're like little touchstones for people. And that's a great compliment. That's when the rock-and-roll thing is really happening, when it's realized, is when "Born to Run" or "Thunder Road"--I don't get tired of them, because they're different every time out. They don't mean exactly the same thing anymore.

As you get older, those extra couple of years, they're in there. Even if the words are the same and the music's the same . . . the song, it breathes and lets them in. That's a beautiful thing. That's when it's a good song. "Thunder Road," that's a good song, because I still feel it when I sing it. And it doesn't really contradict some of the newer songs. Somehow, it just breathes and lets all your different experiences you've had in. Those are the songs that we continue to do, because they resonate more.

It's nice. The band's been together a long time. Danny [Federici, organist] since 1968. Ten years almost for everybody. Max [Weinberg, drummer] and Roy [Bittan, pianist] joined in '74, so they're ten years this year. And the new people are great.

DM: What has the loss of [guitarist] Steve [Van Zandt] meant to the band?

BS: Ah, Steve; Steve's my best friend, you know? He's the greatest. We've been friends since we were kids.

I'm glad Steve is doing what he's doing, because I think he made a great record. I thought his record was fantastic. And that's what he's got to do. He's got the talent--he always did--and he's got something' to say. We're real close; we still are.

DM: Let's get to your new album. What was the idea--the concept--and why did it take so long?

BS: Probably because I didn't have an idea. [Laughs] What takes so long is finding out what the idea is. You have a feeling that you go by. After "Nebraska," you have to come from there and get back to somewhere very different. We recorded a lot of the stuff when I did "Nebraska."

You know, this is supposed to be "survival music," basically; that's the idea behind most of the records, just try to contain the new things that you've learned with the things that you know. Life gets pretty different as you get older. It changes quite a bit.

To me, the type of things that people do which make their lives heroic are a lot of times very small, little things. Little things that happen in the kitchen, or between a husband and wife, or between them and their kids.

DM: How has it changed for you?

BS: Oh, gee, the music, you can probably hear it better in there than I can explain it. "Glory Days," you know. It's in that song somehow. It gets better, I think.

DM: Are you happier?

BS: Yes, I actually am.

DM: Even though the tone of the last two records isn't as liberating, maybe, as some of the earlier stuff?

BS: I don't think happiness is necessarily . . . it's a lot of different things. To me, the music is liberating, because my job, what I'm interested in doing, is doing something that's like what life is like. Or what life feels like. I feel the last two records were very . . . they felt very real to me in an everyday sort of sense.

To me, the type of things that people do which make their lives heroic are a lot of times very small, little things. Little things that happen in the kitchen, or between a husband and wife, or between them and their kids. It's a great experience, but it's not always big. That's what kind of interests me. There's plenty of room for those types of victories, and I think the records have that. "Glory Days," "Darlington County"--you know, the sense of life is in the spirit. It's not necessarily in the facts of the songs.

It is that "We keep on going" thing. Like that little bit that they edited onto the end of the film "Grapes of Wrath." To me, that's what it's like. That's what my life is like, a lot of the times. The experience is a big experience, but the rest of the time, it's just the same old thing. You've got

your friends, you try to keep your friendships going, your relationships going. You try to accept as much responsibility as you can as you get older. You know, to me, that's where the richness of the thing is. "Let freedom ring"--somehow that fits in. It's an everyday thing. I guess that's what I want to say.

Our job is, we just blow into town, tell everybody to keep going, and we blow on out.

DM: What do you think of people's tendency to put you on a pedestal? Last night you kind of addressed that when you said, "I hate being called the Boss, but sometimes I like it."

BS: That's about the size of it. [Laughs.] It's hard, you know, you don't see yourself in that fashion most of the time. The celebrity thing in America, it's the old story of getting elected to a club you may not want to be a member of. But you are anyway. You're just another trivia question on "Jeopardy" or something. A lot of times it's funny. People idolize you and they ridicule you. I guess they're both just a part of it. That's just the way that my life is. Certainly you can't take either of those things too seriously. It's just part of the job.

Jeff Burger edited "[Springsteen on Springsteen: Interviews, Speeches, and Encounters](#)," which Chicago Review Press published April 1. He has contributed to Reader's Digest, Family Circle, GQ, the Los Angeles Times, Barron's and more than 75 other magazines, newspapers and books, including many national and international music periodicals. In addition to Bruce Springsteen (who was twenty-four when Burger talked with him), he has published interviews with such leading musicians as Billy Joel, Tom Waits, the Righteous Brothers and the members of Steely Dan. He lives in Ridgewood, New Jersey.

Advertisement
Follow Bookish

Newsletters. Alerts. Recommendations.

[SUBSCRIBE](#)

By signing up, you agree to Bookish [Terms of Use](#)

Thank you! An email will be sent shortly

MostPopular



[New Young Adult Books: Spring 2013](#)