

“COVER ME”:
ROLLING STONE COVERAGE OF BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN AND
THE E STREET BAND, 1973-2007

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This thesis entitled

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Springsteen and the E Street Band

Bruce Springsteen had struggled as a musician in the New Jersey shore town of Asbury Park for nearly a decade before he was signed to CBS Records in June 1972.¹ He soon assembled a band of musicians who had played in some of his previous groups. That “band of archetypes,” as described by Springsteen biographer and *Rolling Stone* writer Dave Marsh, included saxophonist Clarence Clemons, organist Danny Federici, bassist Garry Talent, pianist David Sancious and drummer Vini Lopez.² Dubbed the E Street Band after the street that Sancious’ mother lived on in Belmont, New Jersey, they played their first show on November 12, 1972.³

Their first album, *Greetings from Asbury Park, N.J.*, had little impact on the charts, selling an initial 11,000 copies when it was released in January 1973.⁴ By 1975 the group’s lineup changed, with the departure of Sancious and Lopez and the addition of guitarist Steven Van Zandt, drummer Max Weinberg and pianist Roy Bittan. Touring and recording with Springsteen until its 1989 dissolution, this lineup changed only with the 1984 departure of Van Zandt and the subsequent addition of guitarist Nils Lofgren and backing vocalist Patti Scialfa.⁵ During their time together Springsteen and the E Street Band rose from obscurity to the heights of superstardom.

¹ Christopher Sandford, *Springsteen Point Blank* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1999), 422-423.

² Dave Marsh, *Born to Run* (1979; New York: Dell Publishing, 1981), 63-64.

³ Sandford, *Springsteen Point Blank*, 57.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 423-424.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 209-211, 305.

After disbanding the E Street Band, Springsteen embarked on a solo career for most of the 1990s. He briefly reunited with the group in 1995 to record new songs for a greatest hits compilation.⁶ His solo work often strayed from the traditional E Street Band sound, which caused it to be met with mixed reviews.⁷ In 1999, he reunited with the band for a yearlong tour, and in 2002 they recorded their first studio album together since 1984.⁸ Touring continued from 2002 through 2004, but in 2005 and 2006 he returned to solo work.⁹ Reports of a new E Street Band album and tour surfaced in 2007.¹⁰

Springsteen has been the subject of numerous studies in a wide variety of academic disciplines. However, they will not be addressed at length since they are not pertinent to the study at hand that examined the link between media coverage, public memory, and the creation of celebrity. Springsteen has been the focus of research on political activism, citizenship issues, crime and legal issues, feminism, community, theology, psychology, nostalgia, musicology, leadership, teaching, iconography, the working class, Vietnam, September 11 and narrative writing.¹¹ Despite the wealth of study on Springsteen, no scholars have examined the coverage of his career as it relates to public memory and the creation of celebrity.

⁶ Sandford, *Springsteen Point Blank*, 360.

⁷ "Who's the Boss," *Entertainment Weekly*, June 5, 1992.

⁸ See Matt Hendrickson, "Bruce's Band Rides Again," *Rolling Stone*, January 21, 1999, 21; and Lindsay Goldenberg, "In Brief," *Rolling Stone*, July 4, 2002, 33.

⁹ See Anthony DeCurtis, "Live: Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band," *Rolling Stone*, September 5, 2002, 32; Austin Scaggs, "Springsteen Grand Slam," *Rolling Stone*, October 16, 2003, 32; David Fricke, "Taking It to the Streets," *Rolling Stone*, September 2, 2004, 37; Brian Hiatt, "New Bruce Album Set for Spring," *Rolling Stone*, March 10, 2005, 39; and Brian Hiatt, "Bruce Springsteen: Folk-Rock Surprise," *Rolling Stone*, March 23, 2006, 26.

¹⁰ Andy Greene, "Bruce Brings the Rock for New Album," *Rolling Stone*, June 1, 2007. <http://www.rollingstone.com/rockdaily/index.php/2007/06/01/bruce-brings-the-rock-for-new-album> [accessed June 30, 2007].

¹¹ Pennsylvania State University, "Abstracts," *Glory Days: A Bruce Springsteen Symposium*, <http://app.outreach.psu.edu/springsteen/schedule/AbstractList.asp> [accessed July 3, 2007].

Rolling Stone Magazine

Founded by Jann Wenner in November 1967, *Rolling Stone* was called “the authoritative voice on popular music for most of the Western world” by rock music criticism researcher Ulf Lindberg.¹² By 1975 the magazine “had become as powerful as the record companies themselves—able, with its coverage, to all but make or break careers,” according to *Rolling Stone* historian Robert Sam Anson.¹³ He also claimed:

No other print medium would match its reach—by 1975, 2,000,000 readers around the world—nor the loyalty of its readers. If they read it in *Rolling Stone*, they believed it. One readership survey in the mid-Seventies found that nearly 80 percent of the readership was influenced in its record-buying tastes by what they read in Jann Wenner’s magazine. And not only did they read—they bought, an average of more than five albums a month, 60 albums a year, 120 million albums altogether.¹⁴

More than 30 years later it still had the largest circulation of any music magazine, with more than 1.4 million readers as of December 31, 2006, according to the Audit Bureau of Circulation.¹⁵

Rolling Stone has remained the dominant force in American rock music magazines since the 1960s for several reasons. Lindberg suggested that it became respected outside of the music world in the journalism field because of the “high journalistic standards of its reports on rock, youth culture and general interest topics.”¹⁶ He added that it was quickly accepted as the voice of youth culture by the general press

¹² Ulf Lindberg, Gestur Gudmundson, Morten Michelson, and Hans Weisethaunet, *Rock Criticism from the Beginning: Amusers, Bruisers and Cool-Headed Cruisers* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2005), 133.

¹³ Robert Sam Anson, *Gone Crazy and Back Again: The Rise and Fall of the Rolling Stone Generation* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981), 229.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 229-230.

¹⁵ “Consumer Magazines,” in Audit Bureau of Circulations [database online] <http://abcas3.accessabc.com/ecirc/magform.asp> [accessed February 26, 2007].

¹⁶ Lindberg, Gudmundson, Michelson, and Weisethaunet, *Rock Criticism from the Beginning*, 301.

because it “was apparently the most serious magazine around.”¹⁷ *Rolling Stone* historian Robert Draper claimed it was also thought of as fairly independent by the music industry, which advertised in it and loaned it money on occasion.¹⁸ Lindberg said, “Its status as *the* American music magazine has been buttressed by the magazine itself through its unique gift for marketing and canonizing itself through countless anniversary books.”¹⁹ He added, “Even though *Rolling Stone* lost its cutting edge with regard to music early on, no one has been able to challenge its central position in the field of rock criticism.”²⁰

Despite its prominence, some have argued that the magazine has lost its relevance and abandoned any credibility it once had in favor of selling more issues. Donaton noted that when *Rolling Stone* was confronted with the decision of sticking with the aging baby boomers who had been its original audience or leaving them in order to seek out a new generation of teenagers and college students, the magazine chose to go after both.²¹ It credited its continued success to this move. Meanwhile, Felix Dennis, founder of the competitor *Blender*, criticized *Rolling Stone* for trying to serve too many purposes. He said, “Jann Wenner, bless his heart, but who really wants to read a magazine that is Britney Spears; Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young; and articles about starving Nicaraguan children?”²² *Blender* editor Andy Pemberton said, “Shouldn’t some of those stories be in *Newsweek* or something?”²³ Dennis also suggested that *Rolling Stone* was wrapped up in

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Robert Draper, *Rolling Stone Magazine: The Uncensored History* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 178-179.

¹⁹ Lindberg, Gudmundson, Michelson, and Weisethaunet, *Rock Criticism from the Beginning*, 302.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Scott Donaton, “Media Reassess as Boomers Age,” *Advertising Age*, July 15, 1991, 13.

²² Alex Kuczynski, “*Rolling Stone* is Challenged by Newcomer,” *New York Times*, April 30, 2001, 1.

²³ Ibid.

the past by describing it in terms of a party metaphor where it was in one corner “wishing they were in a lap-dancing joint in Haight-Ashbury.”²⁴

Samuel G. Freedman, a Columbia University journalism professor, wrote in a 2002 *USA Today* article that the magazine sold out by hiring the editor-in-chief of *For Him Magazine*.²⁵ He said, “Now, one of the most worthless trends in magazine journalism—the rise of the so-called ‘laddie’ magazines such as Maxim—has been handed the living legacy that is *Rolling Stone*. So what if FHM’s American edition is the fastest-growing magazine in the USA, with a circulation topping 1 million? It’s the oldest story in the world that stupidity sells.”

A week later, Wenner responded with an article in which he said, “The improvements that we are making to the magazine demonstrate our willingness to constantly try new ideas, create new visions for a new time and reader, and stay true to the mission I stated in our first issue: ‘*Rolling Stone* is not just about music, but about the things and attitudes that the music embraces.’”

Scott Plagenhoef, managing editor of the online music magazine *Pitchfork*, said that *Rolling Stone* has become “an establishment magazine” and “the opposite of youth culture, which is exactly what it’s trying to cover.”²⁶

Further claims have been made about the magazine’s editorial decisions being driven in part by advertising concerns. Draper claimed that the magazine avoided criticizing record companies until the early 1980s when it no longer relied on them for

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Samuel G. Freedman, “Literary ‘Rolling Stone’ Sells Out to Male Titillation,” *USA Today*, July 8, 2002, 13a.

²⁶ Kiera Butler, “Listen to This,” *Columbia Journalism Review* 45, no. 1 (2006): 54.

advertising revenue.²⁷ Since then it has become “fat with revenues from fashion and automobile advertisers.”²⁸

Creation of Public Memory

Bodnar defined public memory as the “body of beliefs about the past that help a public or society understand both its past and its present, and, by implication, its future.”²⁹ News media have long played a role in creating public memory. Huyssen claimed that the media are foremost in the construction of a culture’s memory.³⁰ Schudson suggested that newspapers are “the most representative carrier and construer and creator of modern public consciousness.”³¹ In her study of American obituaries, Hume argued that newspapers “tend to publish obituaries that reflect the dominant society’s cultural construction.”³² She added that decisions about the inclusion of certain obituaries “might have been made as policy, some because of the competitive nature of the newspaper business, some because of economic constraints that limited space or staff, and some because of simple happenstance.”³³ While Kitch claimed that “magazines have

²⁷ Draper, *Rolling Stone Magazine*, 20.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁹ John Bodnar, “Public Memory in an American City: Commemoration in Cleveland,” In *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, ed. John R. Gillis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 76.

³⁰ Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 4-5.

³¹ Michael Schudson, *The Power of News* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 37.

³² Janice Hume, *Obituaries in American Culture* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), 19.

³³ *Ibid.*, 163.

a special relationship with memory,” she noted that they have been largely overlooked in studies of collective memory.³⁴

Schudson argued that while individuals may have their own versions of specific events, those recollections differ from the “culturally standard versions,” especially in the case of those who were direct participants.³⁵ With the passage of time, those individual versions become less influential.³⁶ He contended that by publishing for mass audiences, media legitimize the versions of reality that they create.³⁷

Kitch said that journalists “make heroes, even mythic figures, of well-known people, conflating fame with newsworthiness and public significance, while at the same time they explain the famous in terms of the ordinary, uniting audience members with each other and with the celebrity through ‘basic values.’”³⁸

Since magazines are in a position to create public memory, the editorial decisions of their staffs help to determine the way that society views and recalls people and events. The choices they make about what to cover and the manner and tone in which they cover these things give them the potential to impact what society values and who it respects as its heroes.

In a culture of increasing celebrity worship, rock musicians have become the focus of much attention. In terms of rock musicians, few have had the impact of Springsteen and the E Street Band. In addition to selling millions of albums, they have

³⁴ Carolyn Kitch, *Pages from the Past: History and Memory in American Magazines* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 3.

³⁵ Michael Schudson, *Watergate in American Memory: How We Remember, Forget, and Reconstruct the Past* (New York: BasicBooks, 1992), 4.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

³⁷ Schudson, *The Power of News*, 33.

³⁸ Kitch, *Pages from the Past*, 85-86.

been regarded as one of the finest live acts in rock history and have been credited by many for saving the genre from the onslaught of disco music in the late 1970s.

Present Study

This study investigated how a hugely influential magazine, *Rolling Stone*, has covered one of popular music's biggest icons in order to discover how the magazine fixes public memory and thereby creates celebrity. It examined whether the magazine's coverage of Springsteen changed over time; whether it corresponded to events in his career or personal life; what subjects it dealt with; the location, size and general tone of articles; and what recurring themes characterized coverage.

This study examined the 387 articles that made up *Rolling Stone's* coverage of Springsteen and the E Street Band, from their first mention in the magazine on March 15, 1973, until their most recent on June 1, 2007, when it reported that the group would reunite for an album and tour. A complete list of articles pertaining to them was obtained from the Asbury Park Public Library, home to a Springsteen collection including more than 4,915 holdings, such as books, song books, tour books, comic books, magazines, fanzines, Internet articles and academic articles and papers.³⁹ Efforts to secure interviews with Springsteen's management, publicist and biographer Dave Marsh were unsuccessful.

³⁹ Asbury Park Public Library, "Magazines, R-Z," *The Bruce Springsteen Special Collection*, http://www.asburyparklibrary.org/BSSC/BSSC_Magazines3.htm [accessed June 23, 2007].

Chapter 2 – “Growin’ Up”: 1973-1977

The early years of Springsteen’s career were a time of growth and learning. He began to establish himself as a premier live performer, moving up from bars to large clubs and theaters. Though commercial success eluded him in the beginning, he eventually found it with *Born to Run*, only to have his recording career sidelined for two years by a bitter legal battle with his manager. After reaching a settlement in 1977, he prepared to mount a comeback. During this formative period, *Rolling Stone* began to applaud his work, a practice that would continue throughout his career.

Rolling Stone’s coverage took a positive tone from the start, with him being presented as an up-and-coming talent. The magazine’s first mention of him hinted at the buzz building around him in a brief item in the “Random Notes” department about Columbia Records talent scout John Hammond having a heart attack at one of Springsteen’s shows. “[Hammond] attributed the most recent attack to a heavy work schedule and weakness from a virus he picked up in Paris. His doctor, however, disagreed. He says it was due to Hammond’s enthusiasm at the Springsteen show.”⁴⁰ In his 1973 review of Springsteen’s debut album, Lester Bangs said, “Bruce Springsteen is a bold new talent with more than a mouthful to say, and one look at the pic on the back [cover of the album] will tell you he’s got the glam to go places in this Gollywoodlawn world to boot.”⁴¹ In a review of Springsteen’s sophomore release, which hit record store shelves less than nine months after his debut, Ken Emerson wrote, “Having released two

⁴⁰ “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, March 15, 1973, 3.

⁴¹ Lester Bangs, “Greetings from Asbury Park, N.J.,” *Rolling Stone*, July 5, 1973, 64.

fine albums in less than a year, Springsteen is obviously a considerable new talent.”⁴²

Indeed, *Rolling Stone* named his second release, *The Wild, the Innocent & the E Street Shuffle*, one of the year’s best albums.⁴³

Despite the praise, he found himself compared to Bob Dylan early in his career. Similarities between the two made comparisons unavoidable. Springsteen had been discovered by Hammond, the man who discovered Dylan more than a decade earlier, and signed to Columbia, Dylan’s label. In the article “Bruce Springsteen: It’s Sign up a Genius Month,” Stuart Werbin said, “Much about Springsteen reminds people of Dylan—the slept-in appearance, foggy manner, the twang, the lyrics and the phrasing of his songs.”⁴⁴

Springsteen and the E Street Band gained notoriety early in their career through their live performances. In 1973 Werbin noted, “Bruce’s only national exposure so far came via recording of his live performance broadcast over fifty-three FM stations as part of the debut of the King Biscuit Flower Hour.”⁴⁵ Their live shows garnered positive reviews and were met with considerable anticipation. In April 1973 Werbin said:

His recent week’s appearance at Max’s Kansas City, however, created quite the scene in the Big Apple. The house was packed by the time he walked on stage each night. People were crammed on each other’s laps. His sets ran close to an hour followed by an impatient demand for an encore, which, because of time, and because he was playing second bill to Biff Rose, he could not fulfill.⁴⁶

⁴² Ken Emerson, “Springsteen Goes Gritty & Serious,” *Rolling Stone*, January 31, 1974, 49.

⁴³ “The 1974 Rolling Stone Music Awards,” *Rolling Stone*, January 16, 1975, 16.

⁴⁴ Stuart Werbin, “Bruce Springsteen: It’s Sign up a Genius Month,” *Rolling Stone*, April 26, 1973, 16.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

In a review of a series of ten sold-out Springsteen shows at New York City's Bottom Line club in 1975, Marsh said, "Springsteen is everything that has been claimed for him—a magical guitarist, singer, writer, rock & roll rejuvenator—but the E Street Band has nearly been lost in the shuffle. Which is ridiculous because this group may very well be the great American rock & roll band."⁴⁷ The legend of those shows grew to the point that in 2004 *Rolling Stone* named them one of the fifty moments that changed rock and roll history.⁴⁸ Reflecting on those shows in 2004, Van Zandt said, "Blowing minds was routine for us. We had been doing it for 10 years, and Bruce used all 10 years of it in those shows."⁴⁹

Though Springsteen consistently received positive reviews, he found himself pigeonholed as a critically acclaimed Dylan copy whose marathon live performances were becoming the stuff of legend. He had yet to find serious commercial success. In his October 1975 *Rolling Stone* article, "New Dylan from New Jersey? It Might as Well Be Springsteen," *New York Times* music reviewer John Rockwell said, "Springsteen's problem has been that while he has won audience and critical acclaim wherever he's played, his first two records haven't sold all that well—as of the release of the third, *Born to Run*, about 120,000 for *Greetings from Asbury Park, N.J.* and 175,000 for *The Wild, the Innocent and the E Street Shuffle*."⁵⁰ What Rockwell did not know was that a series of events had already been set into motion that would change that fact.

⁴⁷ Dave Marsh, "Bruce Springsteen: A Rock 'Star is Born,'" *Rolling Stone*, September 25, 1975, 118.

⁴⁸ "Springsteen Unleashed," *Rolling Stone*, June 24, 2004, 132.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ John Rockwell, "New Dylan from New Jersey? It Might as Well Be Springsteen," *Rolling Stone*, October 9, 1975, 9.

After seeing Springsteen perform in 1974, *Rolling Stone* records editor Jon Landau wrote in the Boston weekly alternative newspaper *The Real Paper*, “Last Thursday, at the Harvard Square Theatre, I saw rock and roll past flash before my eyes. And I saw something else: I saw rock and roll future and its name is Bruce Springsteen. And on a night when I needed to feel young, he made me feel like I was hearing music for the very first time.”⁵¹ According to Marsh, “The piece went on for another column and a half. But that one paragraph, besides containing the most frequently quoted line in the history of rock criticism, sealed Jon Landau’s future and, in a way, Bruce Springsteen’s. The stage was set. In a few weeks, the ‘rock and roll future’ tag would rocket literally around the world.”⁵²

Village Voice music critic and self-appointed “Dean of American Rock Critics,” Robert Christgau later claimed that “Bruce Springsteen is the first rock star in history ever to be propelled into prominence by print information.”⁵³ He added that “there is no doubt that [Springsteen’s popular success] kicked off from that Landau quote.”⁵⁴

In the months after Landau’s article was published, he and Springsteen began to exchange telephone calls, with Landau eventually signing on as co-producer for his third album, *Born to Run*.⁵⁵ With its release, Springsteen enjoyed a higher profile, appearing simultaneously on the covers of *Time* and *Newsweek* on October 27, 1975.⁵⁶ However, he did not make the cover of *Rolling Stone*, only receiving mention in a cover teaser on

⁵¹ Jon Landau, “Growing Young with Rock and Roll,” *The Real Paper*, May 22, 1974, 23.

⁵² Dave Marsh, *Born to Run*, 131.

⁵³ Robert Christgau, “Yes, There is a Rock-Critic Establishment (But is that Bad for Rock?),” *Village Voice*, January 26, 1976.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 147.

⁵⁶ See Cover, *Time*, October 27, 1975; and Cover, *Newsweek*, October 27, 1975.

October 9, 1975, “despite Jann’s love for the album,” according to Draper.⁵⁷ He said the omission was out of jealousy toward Landau, who had quit the magazine to become Springsteen’s co-producer and whose prophetic article appeared in *The Real Paper* instead of *Rolling Stone*. Marsh explained it as the result of the magazine’s “San Francisco bias and oversensitivity to Jon Landau’s involvement.”⁵⁸

Despite excluding him from the cover, the magazine ran Marsh’s review of the Bottom Line shows, Rockwell’s three-page feature and an album review in which writer Greil Marcus said, “It is a magnificent album that pays off on every bet ever placed on him—a ’57 Chevy running on melted down Crystals records that shuts down every claim that has been made. And it should crack his future wide open.”⁵⁹ The praise continued, with *Rolling Stone* naming *Born to Run* as one of the best albums of 1975 and Springsteen and Dylan as the artists of the year.⁶⁰

E Street Band members also began to get coverage, with Clemons being featured on the first page of a five-page article in February 1976 about the favorite instruments of musicians, including Stevie Wonder, Grateful Dead guitarist Bob Weir, Tom Waits, Freddie Fender and Herbie Hancock.⁶¹ Van Zandt received mention in “Random Notes” in April of that year for producing the debut album of Southside Johnny Lyon.⁶² The article also included a picture of Springsteen, Lyon, and him. In July *Rolling Stone*

⁵⁷ See Cover, *Rolling Stone*, October 9, 1975; and Draper, *Rolling Stone Magazine*, 239.

⁵⁸ Marsh, *Born to Run*, 168.

⁵⁹ Greil Marcus, “Springsteen’s Thousand & One American Nights,” *Rolling Stone*, October 9, 1975, 77.

⁶⁰ “The Best and the Baddest: The *Rolling Stone* Music Awards for 1975,” *Rolling Stone*, February 12, 1976, 12.

⁶¹ Rich Wiseman, “Axes of the Aces,” *Rolling Stone*, February 12, 1976, 52.

⁶² “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, April 22, 1976, 26.

included a feature about the band's obsession with playing softball while on the road.⁶³ The article, which included two photographs, detailed their game against a team of New Orleans disc jockeys and writers. A September edition of "Random Notes" included a photograph and brief about Clemons' appearance alongside actor Robert De Niro in the musical drama *New York, New York*.⁶⁴

In the latter half of 1976, coverage of Springsteen shifted in focus as events in his life affected his career. On July 27 he filed a breach-of-contract lawsuit against Mike Appel, his manager since 1972, and in September, "Random Notes" explained how he sought \$1 million in damages and the termination of his contract with Appel.⁶⁵ The contract, which he had signed on a car roof in 1972, gave Appel twice his own royalty rate, according to Springsteen biographer Christopher Sandford.⁶⁶ He countersued, attempting to prevent Springsteen from recording and Landau from producing him.⁶⁷ Marsh also wrote in his regular *Rolling Stone* column, "American Grandstand," about how his biography of Springsteen remained shelved because Appel would not permit him to quote lyrics from Springsteen's songs, of which Appel controlled the publishing rights.⁶⁸

While Springsteen made the 1976 *Rolling Stone* readers' poll as one of the runners-up to Peter Frampton for Artist of the Year, the magazine's critics' awards noted that he had not recorded an album in 1976 because of Appel's lawsuit and gave him the

⁶³ Jim Petersen, "Bruce Springsteen's E Street Softballers: Born to Hit & Run," *Rolling Stone*, July 1, 1976, 19.

⁶⁴ "Random Notes," *Rolling Stone*, September 23, 1976, 25.

⁶⁵ "Random Notes," *Rolling Stone*, September 9, 1976, 26.

⁶⁶ Sandford, *Springsteen Point Blank*, 51.

⁶⁷ "Random Notes," *Rolling Stone*, September 9, 1976, 26.

⁶⁸ "Paperback Writer: A True Story," *Rolling Stone*, August 12, 1976, 26.

award “The Future of Rock & Roll Will Just Have to Wait.”⁶⁹ Coverage remained scant throughout 1977, with only three articles mentioning him and only one of those articles focusing specifically on him. That article, a three-page story near the front of the magazine, came in August. Including two photographs, one of which occupied half a page, the article told the story of how he and Appel settled the case in May 1977, ending their association and allowing him to record again.⁷⁰ Though the details of the settlement were never released, Appel reportedly received as much as \$1 million.⁷¹ However, Springsteen claimed his real loss was that of time, and regaining control of his production and publishing was a victory. He told *Rolling Stone* reporter David McGee, “My interest is my career, which holds the promise of being able to significantly contribute to, and possibly influence, a generation of music.”⁷² Like Springsteen’s comment, the magazine’s final reference to him in 1977 hinted at a return to music. In its tenth anniversary issue, the magazine included lists of its reporters’ favorite albums of the past ten years. *Born to Run* was chosen by Dave Marsh, who called it the “definitive American rock LP,” and by Paul Nelson, who said, “What Dylan and the Stones were to the Sixties, Springsteen is to the Seventies.”⁷³

Having learned hard lessons from the lawsuit with Appel, Springsteen reached one of a number of turning points in his career. Despite his early achievements, even

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ “Bruce Springsteen Reclaims the Future,” *Rolling Stone*, August 11, 1977, 11.

⁷¹ Marsh, *Born to Run*, 206.

⁷² “Bruce Springsteen Reclaims the Future,” *Rolling Stone*, August 11, 1977, 12.

⁷³ “The Songs that Still Remain: Our Favorite Records of the Past Ten Years,” *Rolling Stone*, December 15, 1977, 149, 155.

greater success awaited him. In the initial phase of his career, *Rolling Stone* championed his recordings and live performances.

Chapter 3 – “The Promised Land”: 1978-1983

Springsteen made a triumphant comeback in the late 1970s, selling more records and concert tickets than ever. He took on a greater presence in the pages of *Rolling Stone*, which remained a consistent supporter of his work. While his star was on the rise, he remained loyal to his fans and his roots. By 1983, he once again retreated from the public eye as he prepared the album that would take his career to new levels.

On January 12, 1978, the magazine gave its first indication that Springsteen was preparing new material. In “Random Notes” it said that he was narrowing down potential tracks from almost fifty that he had written. Also included was a photograph of him backstage at a CBGB reggae concert, as well as a mention of Clemons’ successful cataract surgery.⁷⁴ As Springsteen geared up for his return to music with the release of *Darkness on the Edge of Town* on June 2, 1978, *Rolling Stone* gave him top billing in the June 15 edition of “Random Notes,” with a picture and a brief that mentioned the new album, a four-month tour in support of the release and the Top Forty status of Patti Smith’s single, “Because the Night,” which he co-wrote.⁷⁵ The album’s review, which included nearly an entire page of text and a photograph of him that filled three-quarters of a page, led the record review section in the July 27 issue. In it, Marsh called the E Street Band “one of the finest rock & roll groups ever assembled” and said the album was one of those records “that changes fundamentally the way we hear rock & roll, the way it’s recorded, the way it’s played.”⁷⁶ He added, “One ought to be wary of making such

⁷⁴ “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, January 12, 1978, 31.

⁷⁵ “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, June 15, 1978, 61.

⁷⁶ Dave Marsh, “The Boss’ Triumphant Return,” *Rolling Stone*, July 27, 1978, 57.

claims, but in this case, they're justified at every level."⁷⁷ Four letters pertaining to the review appeared in the September 21 issue. Three supported it, with one saying that it had actually been "understated," while the dissenting letter called it "the most ridiculous tripe I've ever seen you publish."⁷⁸

Springsteen's live touring once again rose to prominence in the coverage. In the magazine's 1978 summer concert wrap-up, his tour, which included more than eighty shows in seventy cities, took precedence over other major acts, with reporter James Henke declaring, "The thaw began last month, when the Jefferson Starship and Bob Seger each embarked on major tours, but things didn't really heat up until Bruce Springsteen began his four-month tour in late May after completing *Darkness on the Edge of Town*, his first album in two and a half years."⁷⁹ He was also the only one of the twenty-four rock music acts mentioned in the article to be pictured.⁸⁰

On July 13, 1978, his return to the road also got him a teaser on the magazine's cover. The teaser pointed to a four-page story by Paul Nelson, who interviewed him after a May performance. The article included three half-page photographs of Springsteen, both performing and backstage and included a sidebar that pointed out, among other things, that he had moved up to arena-sized venues in ten of the seventy cities on the tour.⁸¹ Nelson wrote, "Seeing Springsteen play Boston made me fall in love with rock & roll all over again. Here's this guy who just spent a year breaking his back on a new album, who'd gone straight into a four-month tour, and you couldn't pay him enough *not*

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ "Correspondence, Love Letters & Advice," *Rolling Stone*, September 21, 1978, 6.

⁷⁹ James Henke, "The Noise of Summer: Concert Wrap-up," *Rolling Stone*, June 29, 1978, 7.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 14.

⁸¹ "Bruce Mania: LP and Tour Make Their Own Gravy," *Rolling Stone*, July 13, 1978, 13.

to play for almost three hours. Every night. No matter where. Or to whom.”⁸² The article also played upon a theme that continued to be used in the description of Springsteen in the future: He was portrayed as a man who never lost his connection with his fans and his working-class roots despite his great success. In the article he said:

Sometimes after the show the kids’ll wait out back, and that’s the best part. It’s like Christmas or something. They don’t take it lightly, so you have no right to, either. It’s something that I’ve never done and I never will do. I’ll quit before I do that. . . . You don’t go out there to deliver seven dollars and fifty cents worth of music. My whole thing is to go out there and deliver what they could not possibly buy.⁸³

His picture first appeared on *Rolling Stone*’s cover on August 24, 1978. The issue included a four-page feature, plus two full-page photographs, and Marsh recounted the events of a week spent with Springsteen on tour. The theme found in Nelson’s article from the previous month reappeared. Springsteen told Marsh, “Every person, every individual in the crowd counts—to me. . . . What I always feel is that I don’t like to let people that have supported me down.”⁸⁴ Six letters pertaining to the article were included in the October 5 issue. All six supported either Marsh or Springsteen, whom one of the letters referred to as “a nice guy who got caught in an ugly business.”⁸⁵

Springsteen rounded out 1978 with three more mentions in “Random Notes,” all pertaining to live concerts. The October 5 edition began with a brief about his mother and sister making appearances during a run of three sold-out nights at New York’s Madison Square Garden.⁸⁶ The accompanying photographs occupied half the page. In

⁸² Paul Nelson, “Springsteen Fever: Rocker Comes Out of the ‘Darkness,’” *Rolling Stone*, July 13, 1978, 3.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁸⁴ Dave Marsh, “Bruce Springsteen Raises Cain,” *Rolling Stone*, August 24, 1978, 39.

⁸⁵ “Correspondence, Love Letters & Advice,” *Rolling Stone*, October 5, 1978, 7.

⁸⁶ “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, October 5, 1978, 49.

the November 2 edition he was pictured backstage with Bob Seger, and in the December 28 issue he was shown onstage with the Knack's Doug Fieger.⁸⁷ In that same issue Springsteen and the E Street Band were chosen as the Band of the Year by *Rolling Stone's* music critics, and *Darkness on the Edge of Town* was chosen as a runner-up to the Rolling Stones' *Some Girls* as Album of the Year.⁸⁸ The album also received this distinction in the 1978 readers' poll, and its producer, Landau, who by then had become Springsteen's manager, was named runner-up for Producer of the Year.⁸⁹ Springsteen also was chosen as Artist of the Year, Best Male Vocalist and Best Songwriter, while the E Street Band came in second to the Rolling Stones as Band of the Year.

Rolling Stone's coverage of Springsteen in 1979 focused largely on his live performances. Four of five references in "Random Notes" pertained to live appearances while one told of a leg injury he sustained while riding an off-road vehicle.⁹⁰ The remainder of coverage dealing with his live performances was dedicated to his involvement with the Musicians United for Safe Energy (MUSE) Concerts for a Non-Nuclear Future held in September at New York's Madison Square Garden. He was given high billing in the MUSE articles despite the fact that he was not one of the founding members of the group, he had not been publicly associated with politics previously and he was the only artist involved who did not sign the antinuclear pledge in the program.⁹¹

⁸⁷ See "Random Notes," *Rolling Stone*, November 2, 1978, 41; and "Random Notes," *Rolling Stone*, December 28, 1978-January 11, 1979, 27.

⁸⁸ "The *Rolling Stone* 1978 Critics' Awards," *Rolling Stone*, December 28, 1978-January 11, 1979, 11.

⁸⁹ "The 1978 *Rolling Stone* Readers' Poll," *Rolling Stone*, January 25, 1979, 15.

⁹⁰ See "Random Notes," *Rolling Stone*, February 22, 1979, 34; "Random Notes," *Rolling Stone*, May 3, 1979, 46; "Random Notes," *Rolling Stone*, June 14, 1979, 47; "Random Notes," *Rolling Stone*, July 26, 1979, 38; and "Random Notes," *Rolling Stone*, November 1, 1979, 35-36.

⁹¹ See "Third Antinuke Show Set in New York," *Rolling Stone*, September 6, 1979, 10; and Marsh, *Born to Run*, 241.

Backstage at one of the shows Landau explained to *Rolling Stone* reporter Diasann McLane that he did not sign the pledge because “Bruce felt that a statement wasn’t appropriate—the music was enough.”⁹² A five-page feature about MUSE published October 4 quoted fellow performers Jackson Browne, Bonnie Raitt, Graham Nash and John Hall but did not quote Springsteen.⁹³

His involvement solidified the economic potential of the benefit shows, according to McLane.⁹⁴ The nights headlined by Springsteen sold out quickly while the others, headlined by the Doobie Brothers, did not, according to Marsh.⁹⁵ In *The New York Times* Rockwell wrote of one of the shows, “It was a Springsteen crowd. One got the impression the other performers and perhaps even the nuke issue itself were barely being tolerated.”⁹⁶ When asked about program sales at one of the shows, a vendor told McLane, “We’re selling like hot cakes. See, I told all my vendors to hold the books open to the Springsteen page like this. Then to say, ‘Bruce Springsteen programs here!’ Like I said—they’re movin’ ’em.”⁹⁷ Marsh wrote, “The thunder began before he ever reached the stage: long swelling moans—‘Broooooce!’—that were a constant background to all the other acts. It sounded enough like ‘Boo!’ to make Chaka Khan and Bonnie Raitt inquire nervously.”⁹⁸ He added that “MUSE placed Springsteen firmly and permanently in the pantheon of American superstars.”⁹⁹ On November 15, Springsteen, along with

⁹² Diasann McLane, “MUSE: Rock Politics Comes of Age,” *Rolling Stone*, November 15, 1979, 11.

⁹³ Jane Goldman, “MUSE: Rock Unites to Fight Nukes,” *Rolling Stone*, October 4, 1979, 11.

⁹⁴ McLane, “MUSE: Rock Politics Comes of Age,” 9.

⁹⁵ Marsh, *Born to Run*, 240.

⁹⁶ John Rockwell, “Pop: Springsteen Makes Biggest Impact at Antinuclear Benefit,” *The New York Times*, September 24, 1979.

⁹⁷ McLane, “MUSE: Rock Politics Comes of Age,” 11.

⁹⁸ Marsh, *Born to Run*, 244.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 247.

MUSE performers Raitt, Carly Simon, James Taylor, Jackson Browne, Graham Nash and John Hall, appeared on the cover of *Rolling Stone*.¹⁰⁰

Springsteen and the E Street Band made a few appearances in the magazine in 1979 for topics not pertaining to their live performances: a February 22 article about the equipment used by nine famous drummers included Weinberg, and a September 6 article about a lawsuit filed by Springsteen and his record company, CBS, against record bootleggers.¹⁰¹

In February 1980, *Rolling Stone* readers voted Springsteen runner-up for 1979 Artist of the Year, Best Male Vocalist and Best Songwriter, despite the fact that he did not release any new material in 1979.¹⁰² The magazine's coverage of Springsteen was somewhat scant in the first nine months of 1980, with Springsteen being referenced in a review of the MUSE *No Nukes* live album and mentioned twice in "Random Notes."¹⁰³ This lack of coverage reflected the relatively low profile Springsteen was keeping at the time as he continued to work on his next album, *The River*, which he began in spring 1979 and finished in August 1980 when CBS forced him to submit the album, according to Sandford.¹⁰⁴ The October 2 edition of "Random Notes" revealed that the album was near completion. Shortly after the album's October 8 release, Springsteen returned to prominence in *Rolling Stone*'s pages.¹⁰⁵ Propelled by the number-five single "Hungry

¹⁰⁰ Cover, *Rolling Stone*, November 15, 1979.

¹⁰¹ See "Different Drums: A Look at the Equipment of the Pros," *Rolling Stone*, February 22, 1979, 70; and "Springsteen, CBS Sue Over Bootleg Albums," *Rolling Stone*, September 6, 1979, 10.

¹⁰² "Rolling Stone 1979 Readers' Poll," *Rolling Stone*, February 7, 1980, 10.

¹⁰³ See Paul Nelson, "'No Nukes': On the Sunny Side of the Street," *Rolling Stone*, February 7, 1980, 72; "Random Notes," *Rolling Stone*, March 20, 1980, 38; and "Random Notes," *Rolling Stone*, May 15, 1980, 33-34.

¹⁰⁴ Sandford, *Springsteen Point Blank*, 172.

¹⁰⁵ "Random Notes," *Rolling Stone*, October 2, 1980, 34.

Heart,” the album was his first to reach number one on the *Billboard* charts.¹⁰⁶ Shows from *The River* tour were mentioned in the November 13 “Random Notes” and a November 27 concert review, which also included a teaser on the issue’s cover.¹⁰⁷ In that review, reporter Fred Schruers noted that despite his two-year absence from performing, with the exception of the MUSE shows, Springsteen’s following continued to grow, with him playing mostly huge arenas in order to meet ticket demands.¹⁰⁸ In a December 11 review Nelson called *The River* “a rock & roll milestone.”¹⁰⁹

Springsteen appeared on the magazine’s cover on February 5, 1981, while the album was at number two on the charts behind John Lennon’s *Double Fantasy*.¹¹⁰ The issue included a four-page feature with four photographs, one of which occupied a full page, and the article drew upon the theme of Springsteen as a man unchanged by his fame.¹¹¹ Bittan told Schruers, “He cares as much, *more*, about the losers than the winners. He’s so unlike everything you think a successful rock star would be.”¹¹² A month later he was the “big winner” in the 1980 readers’ poll, taking awards for Best Album, Single, Male Vocalist and Songwriter.¹¹³ Both the readers and the critics named him Artist of the Year, and the E Street Band and Landau were chosen by the readers as Band of the Year and Best Producer respectively. The remaining coverage in 1981

¹⁰⁶ *Billboard*, “Artist Chart History,” *Bruce Springsteen*, http://www.billboard.com/bbcom/retrieve_chart_history.do?model.chartFormatGroupName=Albums&model.vnuArtistId=5738&model.vnuAlbumId=943342 [accessed June 23, 2007].

¹⁰⁷ See “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, November 13, 1980, 11; and Fred Schruers, “The Boss is Back,” *Rolling Stone*, November 27, 1980, 11.

¹⁰⁸ Fred Schruers, “The Boss is Back,” 11.

¹⁰⁹ Paul Nelson, “*The River*,” *Rolling Stone*, December 11, 1980, 51.

¹¹⁰ See Cover, *Rolling Stone*, February 5, 1981; and “Top Hundred Album Chart,” *Rolling Stone*, February 5, 1981, 58.

¹¹¹ Fred Schruers, “Bruce Springsteen and the Secret of the World,” *Rolling Stone*, February 5, 1981, 20.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ “*Rolling Stone*’s 1980 Rock & Roll Awards,” *Rolling Stone*, March 5, 1981, 30-31.

focused largely on live performances. His European tour was covered in “Random Notes” in May and July and in a June brief, and the tour’s U.S. leg was mentioned twice, as was a Vietnam veterans’ benefit at which he performed.¹¹⁴

Rolling Stone had generally stayed away from covering Springsteen’s love life, mentioning his girlfriends only three times up to the end of 1981.¹¹⁵ However, E Street Band relationships were mentioned in “Random Notes” on two occasions in 1981 because Weinberg, Federici, Bittan and Clemons got married.¹¹⁶

As 1982 began, Springsteen found himself under attack from the New York chapter of the National Organization for Women, which accused his music of being sexist because he referred to women as “little girls.”¹¹⁷ Though he may not have been popular with some feminists, he remained a favorite of *Rolling Stone* readers, who gave him enough votes in the 1981 readers’ poll, published in March 1982, to finish second in the Artist of the Year, Best Songwriter and Best Male Vocalist categories.¹¹⁸ Clemons tied with Rolling Stones guitarist Keith Richards for Best Instrumentalist, the E Street Band came in second for Band of the Year and Landau finished third for Producer of the Year, despite the fact that Springsteen’s most recent album, *The River*, had been released prior

¹¹⁴ See “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, May 28, 1981, 40; “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, July 23, 1981, 28; “Who’s Where?” *Rolling Stone*, June 25, 1981, 37; Christopher Connelly, “Springsteen Returns to the Road,” *Rolling Stone*, August 20, 1981, 36; “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, September 2, 1981, 37; “Vietnam Vets Concert,” *Rolling Stone*, October 1, 1981, 80; and Christopher Connelly, “Springsteen Wraps up Tour,” *Rolling Stone*, October 29, 1981, 40.

¹¹⁵ See “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, February 22, 1979, 34; “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, November 1, 1979, 36; and Fred Schruers, “Bruce Springsteen and the Secret of the World,” 21.

¹¹⁶ See “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, August 6, 1981, 29; and “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, December 24, 1981, 51.

¹¹⁷ “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, January 21, 1982, 28.

¹¹⁸ “1981 Readers’ and Critics’ Poll,” *Rolling Stone*, March 4, 1982, 36.

to the eligibility period for the poll. The magazine attributed the results to his heavy 1981 touring schedule, which “apparently captured many readers’ hearts—and votes.”¹¹⁹

The remaining coverage in the first half of 1982 focused primarily on guest appearances with others, including musicians Gary U.S. Bonds, Donna Summer and comedian Robin Williams.¹²⁰ While the magazine covered Springsteen’s work with others, it remained silent about the progress on his own album. He recorded a home demo tape of his new material on January 3 and attempted to record the songs with the band in the following months, but the magazine made no mention of their studio work until June 24.¹²¹ When the magazine announced on September 16 that he had opted to release that demo tape instead of the band’s version of the material, his new album, *Nebraska*, was four days from release.¹²² Both Christopher Connelly’s album preview and Steve Pond’s review touted the album as a risky venture due to its non-commercial sound.¹²³ Pond, who gave the album four and a half out of five stars, declared, “And if it’s a risky move commercially, *Nebraska* is also a tactical masterstroke, an inspired way out of the high-stakes rock & roll game that requires each new record to be bigger and grander than the last.”¹²⁴

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ See “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, March 4, 1982, 33; “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, April 15, 1982, 29; “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, April 29, 1982, 31; “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, May 27, 1982, 28; and “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, June 10, 1982, 35.

¹²¹ See Dave Marsh, *Glory Days: Bruce Springsteen in the 1980s* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987), 104; and “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, June 24, 1984, 23.

¹²² “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, September 16, 1982, 34.

¹²³ See Christopher Connelly, “Springsteen LP Draws Mixed Reactions,” *Rolling Stone*, October 14, 1982, 61; and Steve Pond, “Springsteen Delivers His Bravest Record Yet,” *Rolling Stone*, October 28, 1982, 65.

¹²⁴ Pond, “Springsteen Delivers His Bravest Record Yet,” 65.

Both the magazine's readers and the critics named *Nebraska* the 1982 Album of the Year.¹²⁵ The readers also chose him as the Artist of the Year, Best Male Vocalist and Best Songwriter. His success in the polls came as a surprise even to the magazine, which noted that he "kept a fairly low profile" and was "overshadowed on the charts and in the media by such acts as the Who, John Cougar and the Go-Go's."¹²⁶ He continued to lay low throughout 1983, working on his next album and being mentioned nine times in "Random Notes" that year. Three of those references pertained to his continued work on the album.¹²⁷ In the remaining six, he was secondary, such as being best man in Van Zandt's wedding.¹²⁸

Van Zandt, meanwhile, began to take a higher profile, beginning in September 1982 with a mention of a performance by his newly formed side project, Little Steven and the Disciples of Soul, giving indications that Springsteen was not the only one considering solo endeavors.¹²⁹ A month after the magazine's review of *Nebraska*, the release of Van Zandt's album, *Men Without Women*, made him the subject of a two-page feature, and in December another live appearance by his band received mention in "Random Notes."¹³⁰ Then, in February 1983 his wedding was referenced twice in

¹²⁵ "1982 Music Awards," *Rolling Stone*, March 3, 1983, 16.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ See Christopher Connelly, "Random Notes," *Rolling Stone*, May 12, 1983, 58; Christopher Connelly, "Random Notes," *Rolling Stone*, July 7, 1983, 41; and Christopher Connelly, "Random Notes," *Rolling Stone*, September 1, 1983, 31.

¹²⁸ See Christopher Connelly, "Random Notes," *Rolling Stone*, January 20, 1983, 28; Christopher Connelly, "Random Notes," *Rolling Stone*, February 3, 1983, 23; Christopher Connelly, "Random Notes," *Rolling Stone*, February 17, 1983, 28; Christopher Connelly, "Random Notes," *Rolling Stone*, May 26, 1983, 47; Christopher Connelly, "Random Notes," *Rolling Stone*, October 13, 1983, 10; and Christopher Connelly, "Random Notes," *Rolling Stone*, November 10, 1983, 11.

¹²⁹ "Random Notes," *Rolling Stone*, September 2, 1982, 23.

¹³⁰ See Debby Miller, "Miami Steve's His Own Boss on New LP," *Rolling Stone*, November 25, 1982, 65; and "Random Notes," *Rolling Stone*, December 23, 1982, 85.

“Random Notes.”¹³¹ In February 1984 the magazine told readers not to expect to hear him on many of the tracks on Springsteen’s new album because he had not been in the studio with the E Street Band in more than a year and a half.¹³² However, in the March 15 issue Van Zandt said he had played on “a good number” of the tracks.¹³³ While this was true, he was not being entirely forthcoming; he had decided to quit the band, a fact that was not made public until June.¹³⁴ His departure came as Springsteen stood poised to release *Born in the U.S.A.* and launch a two-year international tour.

Springsteen’s career rose to new heights in the late 1970s and early 1980s. While he had become a star, *Rolling Stone* depicted him as remaining in touch with his fans and his humble roots. Throughout this period, he remained popular with *Rolling Stone* and its readers. Despite the critical and commercial success Springsteen had achieved by the end of 1983, greater achievements were yet to come in the mid-1980s.

¹³¹ See Christopher Connelly, “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, February 3, 1983, 23; and Christopher Connelly, “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, February 17, 1983, 28.

¹³² Christopher Connelly, “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, February 2, 1984, 14.

¹³³ Christopher Connelly, “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, March 15, 1984, 15.

¹³⁴ Marsh, *Glory Days*, 162.

Chapter 4: “I’m On Fire”: 1984-1988

The mid-1980s were the time in which Springsteen moved from mere stardom into what Sandford called “one of the major global brands of the decade.”¹³⁵ As he sold out stadiums and his records ruled the charts, he also became the subject of increased coverage. *Rolling Stone* continued to hail his greatness, a practice that eventually met with some criticism. By the end of the period, Springsteen himself began to lead his own backlash against his public image with a shift in the nature of his music.

In 1984 *Rolling Stone* focused largely on *Born in the U.S.A.* and the accompanying world tour. Connelly’s album preview quoted unnamed sources who said that the album was “not a heavy, message-oriented LP” and that it was “simply a lot of fun.”¹³⁶ However, this analysis might have been flawed. Despite its stark sound, *Nebraska* had dealt with Springsteen’s personal struggles, not politics, according to Sandford¹³⁷ “The winter of 1981-82 was a bad time for him,” he said, because his girlfriend had left, he had nothing to do beyond working, he was drinking and he went to therapy for the first time.¹³⁸ *Born in the U.S.A.*, on the other hand, had messages that were simply masked by the upbeat, commercial nature of the music. In her review of the album Debby Miller, who gave the album five stars, said, “He may shove his broody characters out the door and send them cruising down the turnpike, but he gives them music they can pound on the dashboard to.”¹³⁹ The title track, which took the side of

¹³⁵ Sandford, *Springsteen Point Blank*, 203.

¹³⁶ Christopher Connelly, “‘Fun’ Springsteen album, tour due,” *Rolling Stone*, June 7, 1984, 40.

¹³⁷ Sandford, *Springsteen Point Blank*, 195.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Debby Miller, “Bruce Springsteen Gives the Little Guy Something to Cheer About,” *Rolling Stone*, July 19, 1984, 99.

American Vietnam veterans, had such a catchy sound that it was co-opted to serve other political purposes, including those of President Ronald Reagan, according to Marsh.¹⁴⁰

He said:

Released as it was in a time of chauvinism masquerading as patriotism, it was inevitable that “Born in the U.S.A.” would be misinterpreted, that the eponymous album would be heard as a celebration of “basic values,” no matter how hard Springsteen pushed his side of the tale. . . . Certainly, any popular song that honored the American Vietnam veteran in the age of Reagan and *Rambo* was going to be misconstrued as celebrating the war.¹⁴¹

Released on June 4, 1984, the album debuted at number one on the *Billboard* charts and achieved platinum status within two months and multi-platinum status in October.¹⁴²

The period following the release of *Born in the U.S.A.* saw change for both Springsteen and *Rolling Stone*'s coverage of him. The E Street Band hit the road in late June with new members, guitarist Nils Lofgren, who replaced Van Zandt, and backing vocalist Patti Scialfa.¹⁴³ Springsteen, who had previously “lived on fried chicken and Pepsi,” was “a changed man: he eats vegetables, runs six miles a day, lifts weights,” according to Miller.¹⁴⁴

While the magazine continued to cover staples like his live performances, it started to pay increased attention to other aspects of his life, namely his increasingly public political views and his love life. At two September shows in Pittsburgh he took

¹⁴⁰ Marsh, *Glory Days*, 260.

¹⁴¹ Marsh, *Glory Days*, 258.

¹⁴² See *Billboard*, “Artist Chart History,” *Bruce Springsteen*, http://www.billboard.com/bbcom/retrieve_chart_history.do?model.chartFormatGroupName=Albums&model.vnuArtistId=5738&model.vnuAlbumId=943342 [accessed June 23, 2007]; and “Gold and Platinum,” in Recording Industry Association of America [database online] <http://www.riaa.com/goldandplatinumdata.php?table=SEARCH> [accessed June 25, 2007].

¹⁴³ See Christopher Connelly, “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, July 5, 1984, 11; and Debby Miller, “Bruce in the Heartland,” *Rolling Stone*, August 16, 1984, 27.

¹⁴⁴ Miller, “Bruce in the Heartland,” 30.

swipes at Reagan, first commenting on the president citing him at a New Jersey campaign stop and later dedicating “The River” to the United Steelworkers of America’s Local 1397, “the most activist steel-union local in the country,” according to Connelly’s November 8 “Random Notes.”¹⁴⁵ Springsteen addressed some of the changes in a five-page interview that landed him on the magazine’s December 6 cover.¹⁴⁶ He told reporter Kurt Loder, “I don’t know if Reagan is a bad man. But I think there’s a large group of people in this country whose dreams don’t mean that much to him that just get indiscriminately swept aside.”¹⁴⁷ Loder also asked him several questions about his romantic relationships. However, the interview revealed that his connection with the fans and his roots remained intact. He said, “There were moments where it was very confusing, because I realized that I was a rich man, but I felt like a poor man inside. . . . But I don’t know if money changes you. I guess I don’t really think it *does* change you.”¹⁴⁸ As for the fans, he said, “The life of a rock & roll band will last as long as you look down into the audience and can see yourself, and your audience looks up at you and can see themselves.”¹⁴⁹

By his standards, the audience still saw themselves in him, as they named him Artist of the Year, Best Male Vocalist and Best Songwriter in the 1984 readers’ poll, which was published in February 1985.¹⁵⁰ They also voted the E Street Band as Band of the Year, *Born in the U.S.A.* as Album of the Year and “Dancing in the Dark” as Single

¹⁴⁵ Local 1397’s president, Ron Weisen, said, “If Reagan bought a cemetery in Pittsburgh, people would stop dying.” See Christopher Connelly, “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, November 8, 1984, 11.

¹⁴⁶ Cover, *Rolling Stone*, December 6, 1984.

¹⁴⁷ Kurt Loder, “The *Rolling Stone* Interview: Bruce Springsteen,” *Rolling Stone*, December 6, 1984, 24.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 70.

¹⁵⁰ “The Winners,” *Rolling Stone*, February 28, 1985, 26.

of the Year. The critics echoed those votes for Album of the Year, Band of the Year and Best Songwriter.¹⁵¹ He appeared on the cover of that issue, and in it he told Loder, “I know this is idealistic, but part of the idea our band had from the beginning was that you did not have to lose your connection to the people you write for.”¹⁵²

In 1985 the magazine continued to revisit the topic of his romantic life. It indicated twice in March that he had a new girlfriend, Julianne Phillips, and in April it printed a picture of the couple at the Grammy Awards.¹⁵³ When not focusing on his relationship, the magazine largely reported on his touring in 1985. That year’s summer double issue included a story about the European tour’s opening night, on which he played for 70,000 people, his largest audience up to that point, at Ireland’s Slane Castle.¹⁵⁴ Even that article managed to include the fact that he had recently married Phillips. However, the magazine did not take part in the media circus that surrounded his wedding ceremony in Phillips’ home state of Oregon. According to Sandford:

The Portland FM stations, MTV and, overnight, the press from Berkeley to Boston all danced a lurid, coast-to-coast conga. The *New York Times* managed to splash the story on 14 May. Most of the tabloids went into war-is-declared mode to break the news, which wasn’t much, in banner capitals. Upper-case puns on the word ‘Boss’ were the norm for Los Angeles. In Chicago, the *Sun-Times* ran an entire leader on the scoop. Op-ed pages bristled with the mixture of congratulation and gossip so vital to sales that, in Jersey, it was moved to the front page.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 27.

¹⁵² Kurt Loder, “Bruce!” *Rolling Stone*, February 28, 1985, 23.

¹⁵³ See Christopher Connelly, “Bruce Ends U.S. Tour,” *Rolling Stone*, March 14, 1985, 14; Christopher Connelly, “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, March 28, 1985, 20; and Christopher Connelly, “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, April 11, 1985, 6.

¹⁵⁴ Joe Breen, “70,000 See Springsteen Open Tour in Ireland,” *Rolling Stone*, July 18, 1985-August 1, 1985, 20.

¹⁵⁵ Sandford, *Springsteen Point Blank*, 254.

In a September review of a show before 55,000 people at Philadelphia's Veterans Stadium, Connelly noted that Springsteen managed to maintain his trademark intimacy with the audience and said, "Because Bruce Springsteen genuinely cares about his audience—and because his audience loves him so fervently—they still seem close to each other. Even from the mezzanine."¹⁵⁶ His connection with the fans reappeared in the October 10 issue, which featured him on the cover and included a two-page profile of his fans as well as a seven-page story about his hometown and a two-page piece about his "phenomenon."¹⁵⁷ In the fans profile, reporter Merle Ginsberg said, "Springsteen's followers are convinced he's just like them."¹⁵⁸

Letters to the editor published in the November 21 issue gave the indication that the magazine might have been too heavily saturated with Springsteen coverage. One letter said, "I know Bruce Springsteen said 'Cover Me,' but really, must you take the man quite so literally? Nary an issue goes by that doesn't mention the Boss' activities at least once."¹⁵⁹ Another said, "As a native of New Jersey, I found it hard to read Joseph Dalton's 'My Hometown' with a straight face. Talk about glorification—I felt as though I were reading the Book of Genesis." Despite the complaints, he appeared on the cover again on February 27, 1986, and readers and critics gave him awards for 1985 Artist of the Year, Best Male Singer, Best Live Performance, Best Songwriter and Sexiest Male.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶ Christopher Connelly, "Still the Boss," *Rolling Stone*, September 26, 1985, 18.

¹⁵⁷ See Cover, *Rolling Stone*, October 10, 1985; Joseph Dalton, "My Home Town," *Rolling Stone*, October 10, 1985, 20; Merle Ginsberg, "The Fans," *Rolling Stone*, October 10, 1985, 31; and Jefferson Morley, "The Phenomenon," *Rolling Stone*, October 10, 1985, 35.

¹⁵⁸ Merle Ginsberg, "The Fans," *Rolling Stone*, October 10, 1985, 31.

¹⁵⁹ See Elaine Snow, Letter, *Rolling Stone*, November 21, 1985, 6; and A. Maloney, Letter, *Rolling Stone*, November 21, 1985, 6.

¹⁶⁰ See Cover, *Rolling Stone*, February 27, 1986; and "1985 Readers and Critics Poll," *Rolling Stone*, February 27, 1986, 21.

Again some readers complained. One letter said, “When will it fade? Bruce this, Bruce that. I think we deserve a break from Brucemania. I’ve heard Springsteen’s songs on the radio until I’m blue in the face.”¹⁶¹

The coverage did not die off, and on August 28 reporter Mark Coleman made the magazine’s first reference to a three-disc, career-spanning live boxed set that the magazine continued to follow, mentioning it five more times in the next five months.¹⁶² Potentially shedding some light on a reason for the excitement surrounding the release, in October Loder said, “A live Springsteen album has always seemed a natural ploy for such an acclaimed concert performer, but Springsteen has resisted the notion for thirteen years.”¹⁶³ In December, reporter Michael Goldberg said that record retailers were predicting it would be the biggest preordered album, in terms of dollars, in history.¹⁶⁴ The album debuted at number one on the *Billboard* charts and reached platinum status within three months of its release.¹⁶⁵

Springsteen began 1987 by appearing on the February 26 cover and being named Artist of the Year by the magazine’s readers for the third consecutive year.¹⁶⁶ The live album, which Anthony DeCurtis said dominated record sales and radio play during the

¹⁶¹ Marianne Ferguson, Letter, *Rolling Stone*, March 27, 1986, 6.

¹⁶² See Mark Coleman, “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, August 28, 1986, 13; Mark Coleman, “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, September 11, 1986, 10; Kurt Loder, “Live Springsteen!” *Rolling Stone*, October 23, 1986, 15; Michael Goldberg, “The Springsteen Christmas,” *Rolling Stone*, December 14, 1986, 13; David Fricke, “Bruce Looks Down the Long Road,” *Rolling Stone*, January 15, 1987, 50.

¹⁶³ Loder, “Live Springsteen!” 15.

¹⁶⁴ Goldberg, “The Springsteen Christmas,” 13.

¹⁶⁵ See *Billboard*, “Artist Chart History,” *Bruce Springsteen*, http://www.billboard.com/bbcom/retrieve_chart_history.do?model.chartFormatGroupName=Albums&model.vnuArtistId=5738&model.vnuAlbumId=943342 [accessed June 23, 2007]; and “Gold and Platinum,” in Recording Industry Association of America [database online] <http://www.riaa.com/goldandplatinumdata.php?table=SEARCH> [accessed June 25, 2007].

¹⁶⁶ See Cover, *Rolling Stone*, February 26, 1987; and Anthony DeCurtis, “1986 Music Awards,” *Rolling Stone*, February 26, 1987, 9.

final two months of 1986, was named Album of the Year.¹⁶⁷ Once again, some readers were displeased. One letter said, “I’ve discovered the truth, and I shall make it known. The entire *Rolling Stone* establishment—including its readers—and the Bruce Springsteen Fan Club are one and the same. . . . What happens next year? Will Bruce be declared master of all time, space and dimension?”¹⁶⁸ DeCurtis also wondered about the future, saying that “the question that shadows the success of *Live/1975-85* is ‘Where does he go from here?’”¹⁶⁹ He added, “Given Springsteen’s recording history, it is unlikely that he’ll release a new album in 1987.”¹⁷⁰ His prediction could not have been more incorrect. Goldberg reported in May that sales of the live album, which was the best-selling boxed set of all time at that point, had dropped dramatically.¹⁷¹ In July the magazine announced that Springsteen was back in the studio working on his next album.¹⁷² Not only did the announcement of a new album come as a surprise, so did the album’s subject matter. In September, Loder said:

Suddenly, a new Bruce Springsteen album is on the way. It’s titled *Tunnel of Love*, and it is *not* a collection of songs about American angst and alienation, nor is it a-ristle with arena-rock anthems of the sort that kept 1984’s *Born in the U.S.A.* on the charts for more than two years. Instead, the new LP—the ninth release of Springsteen’s fourteen-year recording career—is said to be largely about love, a subject in which he’s apparently developed a renewed interest since his marriage to model Julianne Phillips. It’s not a solo Bruce outing like his 1982 release *Nebraska*, but neither is it exactly a standard band opus (members of the E Street Band play on the record, but in shifting configurations).¹⁷³

¹⁶⁷ DeCurtis, “1986 Music Awards,” 9-10.

¹⁶⁸ Jonathan Boldt, Letter, *Rolling Stone*, April 9, 1987, 6.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ Michael Goldberg, “Bruce Live Set Slips,” *Rolling Stone*, May 7, 1987, 9.

¹⁷² “Bruce is Back in the Studio in LA,” *Rolling Stone*, July 16, 1987, 25.

¹⁷³ Kurt Loder, “‘Tunnel of Love’ LP Due from Springsteen,” *Rolling Stone*, September 24, 1987, 15.

Public reaction to the album also differed from previous albums. New Jersey record store manager Jeff Lega told reporter Fred Goodman, “The excitement and hysteria of the live album just wasn’t there.”¹⁷⁴ Howard Appelbaum, vice president of Maryland’s Kemp Mill Records chain, told him, “*Tunnel of Love* is an intimate record and will take longer to get into people’s heads.”¹⁷⁵ Despite this, the magazine still looked favorably on the album, which it gave five stars. In December, reviewer Steve Pond noted the change in Springsteen’s work. He said, “A decade or so ago, Springsteen acquired a reputation for romanticizing his subject matter; on this album he doesn’t even romanticize romance.”¹⁷⁶ Regardless of these differences, the album still managed to debut at number one on the *Billboard* charts.¹⁷⁷

In the mid-1980s, Springsteen’s career rose to new heights. While still celebrating his concerts and recordings, *Rolling Stone* began to portray him as a voice for the marginalized as he became more outspoken about social issues, such as the treatment of Vietnam veterans and laborers. Having reached the top, he chose to travel in a new direction. He would spend the next several years trying to redefine himself and escape his public image.

¹⁷⁴ Fred Goodman, “Low-key Start for ‘Tunnel of Love,’” *Rolling Stone*, November 19, 1987, 15.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ Steve Pond, “Bruce’s Hard Look at Love,” *Rolling Stone*, December 3, 1987, 77.

¹⁷⁷ *Billboard*, “Artist Chart History,” *Bruce Springsteen*, http://www.billboard.com/bbcom/retrieve_chart_history.do?model.chartFormatGroupName=Albums&model.vnuArtistId=5738&model.vnuAlbumId=943342 [accessed June 23, 2007].

Chapter 5 – “Real World”: 1988-1997

Having become one of the biggest musical icons of the 1980s, Springsteen spent much of the next decade trying to distance himself from the image that had been created for him. Splitting with his wife, his band and his native state were all part of his attempt to embrace the “real” Bruce Springsteen instead of the myth. While he struggled to come to grips with his own growing legend and others tried to put cracks in his armor, *Rolling Stone* refused to abandon its mythologizing.

In 1988 he returned to the touring treadmill, and the magazine’s coverage followed suit, first reporting in the February 11 “Random Notes” that, contrary to rumors of a solo tour, the tour would include the entire E Street Band.¹⁷⁸ While that was accurate, changes were afoot. In March, DeCurtis reported that the band would be joined by a five-piece horn section and would be modifying its repertoire significantly, dropping some of the staple tunes.¹⁷⁹ In his April 7 review of the tour’s opening night, Pond noted other changes. He said, “The result wasn’t as anthemic, oversize or topical as the *Born in the U.S.A.* tour; instead, it was a three-hour reflection on love, commitment and family.”¹⁸⁰ Another observation had future implications. He noted that “one-time backup singer Patti Scialfa played rhythm guitar, frequently shared the microphone with Springsteen and took her place as his main foil in a set that was, after all, about relationships between men and women.”¹⁸¹ The following issue included a “Random

¹⁷⁸ Sheila Rogers, “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, February 11, 1988, 16.

¹⁷⁹ Anthony DeCurtis, “Springsteen Expands Band,” *Rolling Stone*, March 24, 1988, 21.

¹⁸⁰ Steve Pond, “Bruce’s ‘Express’ Hits the Road in High Gear,” *Rolling Stone*, April 7, 1988, 15.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

Note” in which Phillips discussed the possibility of having children, saying, “I love kids. We both do, and I guess it’s really up to time. I’m leaving it up to fate.”¹⁸²

On May 5 the tour made Springsteen the subject of the magazine’s cover.¹⁸³ Once again, his presence led to some complaints, including one from a reader who said, “One more Bruce cover and I’ll be convinced that you’re changing the name of the magazine to *RollingSteen*.”¹⁸⁴ That issue also included a five-page feature in which Pond noted Springsteen had moved all the members of the band to different locations on the stage, and they had “flipped” when he had tried to do this on the previous tour.¹⁸⁵ “This time the musicians, who knew that their boss had considered a solo acoustic tour, quickly adjusted to the change,” he said.¹⁸⁶ As for married life, Springsteen told him, “I mean, there’s days when you’re real close and days when you’re real far away. I guess I feel like I know a lot more about it than I ever did, but it’s like anything else: you gotta write that new song every day.”¹⁸⁷

What he did not tell Pond was that his marriage was in trouble. By early May he and Phillips had split, and Scialfa had become his new partner in an “onstage-offstage” duo, according to Sandford.¹⁸⁸ However, the magazine only took note of her onstage presence. In the June 16 “Random Notes,” Rogers reported, “‘Everyone’s standing in different places,’ says backup singer and guitarist Patti Scialfa, downplaying her very prominent role in Bruce Springsteen’s Tunnel of Love Express. The willowy Scialfa now

¹⁸² Sheila Rogers, “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, April 21, 1988, 9.

¹⁸³ See Cover, *Rolling Stone*, May 5, 1988

¹⁸⁴ Tom Cote, Letter, *Rolling Stone*, June 16, 1988, 6.

¹⁸⁵ Steve Pond, “Bruce Springsteen’s ‘Tunnel’ Vision,” *Rolling Stone*, May 5, 1988, 40.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁸⁸ Sandford, *Springsteen Point Blank*, 290.

takes her place right next to Springsteen onstage, and she seems to have replaced Clarence Clemons as Bruce's main sidekick."¹⁸⁹ Tabloid pictures had surfaced on the previous day of the couple poolside in Rome and rumors had been swirling since May, according to Sandford.¹⁹⁰ In August *Rolling Stone*'s first report of the split came, saying Springsteen had issued a statement that, contrary to tabloid reports, "the issue of having children had no role in the separation and that he fully supported Julianne's pursuit of her career."¹⁹¹ When the magazine reported in October about his involvement in Amnesty International's Human Rights Now! Tour, it was referring to Scialfa as his girlfriend.¹⁹²

While *Rolling Stone* had long praised Springsteen's music as well as his connection to his fans, not everyone in the press held him in such high esteem by this point. In December 1988, *Esquire* writer John Lombardi said, "Springsteen simplified rock in the way Mao simplified Marx. He eliminated spontaneity."¹⁹³ He added, "In a sense, Bruce was the greatest member of the audience, a kind of superfan that lesser fans elected to the stage, not because he had anything new to offer but because he was one of them, the best recycler of lowered expectations, the greatest retailer of mass taste, the finest smoother of distinctions..."¹⁹⁴ Lombardi also criticized the notion that Springsteen was still in touch with his audience. He wrote, "He's not us, not anymore, he's thirty-nine, he married a model (why do rock stars always marry models?), made \$56 million in

¹⁸⁹ Sheila Rogers, "Random Notes," *Rolling Stone*, June 16, 1988, 9.

¹⁹⁰ Sandford, *Springsteen Point Blank*, 291.

¹⁹¹ Sheila Rogers, "Springsteen's Tunnel of Love," *Rolling Stone*, August 11, 1988, 11.

¹⁹² Sheila Rogers, "Random Notes," *Rolling Stone*, October 6, 1988, 11.

¹⁹³ John Lombardi, "The Sanctification of Bruce Springsteen and the Rise of Mass Hip," *Esquire*, December 1988, 139.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

eighteen months . . . is pumped up like Schwarzenegger, sleeked down like television, as high-concept as Sonny in Miami Vice. . . [sic]”¹⁹⁵

Springsteen also took some heat from *Rolling Stone*'s readers. In March 1989 he did not fare as well as he had in previous readers' polls. For the second year in a row U2, which had broken his four-year string of Artist of the Year awards in the previous year, swept the poll, winning Artist of the Year, Best Album, Best Single, Best Band, Best Male Singer, Best Songwriter, Best Video, Best Album Cover, Best Drummer and Best Bass Player.¹⁹⁶ Indeed, the magazine claimed that he had “suffered from a strong backlash,” placing fifth in the Worst Male Singer category.¹⁹⁷ He received further negative attention in May when the magazine reported that two former roadies sued him for denial of overtime pay.¹⁹⁸ However, this news received only a brief paragraph. The negativity was further softened as the story noted that several of the charges had been thrown out and that overtime pay was not a regular practice in the live concert business.

Despite these setbacks, the magazine's coverage in 1989 focused largely on various public appearances, including his attendance at parties and performances with Neil Young, Jackson Browne and Ringo Starr.¹⁹⁹ Eight of the twelve articles published in the magazine that year fell into that category. In November he capped off the year with a favorable showing in the list of the decade's best 100 albums, as chosen by the

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ “1988 Music Awards,” *Rolling Stone*, March 9, 1989, 61.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Jeffrey Ressler, “Former Roadies Sue Springsteen,” *Rolling Stone*, May 4, 1989, 25.

¹⁹⁹ See Sheila Rogers, “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, January 12, 1989, 10; Sheila Rogers, “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, March 9, 1989, 8; Sheila Rogers, “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, April 20, 1989, 13; Sheila Rogers, “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, August 10, 1989, 11; Sheila Rogers, “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, August 24, 1989, 16; Sheila Rogers, “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, September 21, 1989, 21; Sheila Rogers, “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, October 5, 1989, 11; and Sheila Rogers, “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, November 2, 1989, 12.

magazine's editors. *Born in the U.S.A.* came in at number six, *Tunnel of Love* at twenty-five, *Nebraska* at forty-three and *The River* at eighty-six.²⁰⁰ In that same month he ended the decade with one more significant change. Having been sidelined for several weeks that summer by recurrent flu and respiratory problems as well as psychological turmoil that caused him to enter therapy, he reemerged that fall and decided to fire the band, according to Sandford.²⁰¹ He gave each member "a \$2 million bonus, a handshake and his walking papers."²⁰² Rob Tannenbaum speculated about potential motives for the breakup in the magazine on January 11, 1990: "Since his involvement in last year's Amnesty International Human Rights Now! Tour, Springsteen has expressed a desire to expand the scope of his music. That, combined with his rapid rise to superstardom and very public divorce from Julianne Phillips, may have caused a kind of midlife career crisis."²⁰³ Springsteen had certainly given some indications of his desire to work with others during the Amnesty International tour, which marked the first time he went on the road with musicians other than those in the E Street Band since 1973. Near the beginning of the tour he said, "In rock & roll, you work in a very isolated environment. You move from town to town, but you're basically with the same group of thirty people. I wanted to look outward."²⁰⁴

Sandford suggested that Springsteen's reason "was neither crass, nor creative, but personal. He needed a break."²⁰⁵ Indeed, during the first half of 1990, he took a rest

²⁰⁰ "The 100 Best Albums of the Eighties," *Rolling Stone*, November 16, 1989, 64, 84, 102, 136.

²⁰¹ Sandford, *Springsteen Point Blank*, 302-305.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 307.

²⁰³ Rob Tannenbaum, "Springsteen Goes It Alone," *Rolling Stone*, January 11, 1990, 15.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 66.

²⁰⁵ Sandford, *Springsteen Point Blank*, 308.

from the touring and recording treadmill, making a handful of guest appearances with other musicians. *Rolling Stone*'s coverage reflected these activities with items in "Random Notes" about an appearance at a Clemmons solo show, a duet with former Credence Clearwater Revival frontman John Fogerty at the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame induction ceremony, a jam session at a Los Angeles club with Don Henley and Sting, and a duet with Tom Waits at producer Chuck Plotkin's wedding reception.²⁰⁶ So frequent were such performances that when mentioning a March guest appearance at a Tom Petty concert, the magazine referred to "the ubiquitous Bruce Springsteen" as an "inveterate surprise guest."²⁰⁷

His life was undergoing other major changes. In April 1990 he and Scialfa moved to a mansion in Beverly Hills, and in July their son Evan was born.²⁰⁸ According to Sandford, Springsteen was also trying to distance himself from "the saintly icon of pop lore who neither drank nor smoked, saving himself for the gigs as if his very soul hung on them."²⁰⁹ He said that with the birth of his son, work was no longer his main priority.²¹⁰ While *Rolling Stone* twice acknowledged the birth of his son, it did not criticize his move to Los Angeles as some publications and fans had.²¹¹ Instead, it continued to draw attention to his professional life, mentioning his work on a new album and his decision to allow rap group 2 Live Crew to use the backing track of "Born in the U.S.A." for an anti-

²⁰⁶ See Sheila Rogers, "Random Notes," *Rolling Stone*, February 8, 1990, 10; Fred Goodman, "Rock & Roll Hall of Fame," *Rolling Stone*, March 8, 1990, 19; Sheila Rogers, "Random Notes," *Rolling Stone*, April 5, 1990, 14; and Sheila Rogers, "Random Notes," *Rolling Stone*, May 31, 1990, 10.

²⁰⁷ See Sheila Rogers, "Random Notes," *Rolling Stone*, April 19, 1990, 12; and "1990 Yearbook," *Rolling Stone*, December 13, 1990, 52.

²⁰⁸ Sandford, *Springsteen Point Blank*, 312-314.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 310.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 314.

²¹¹ See Sheila Rogers, "Random Notes," *Rolling Stone*, September 6, 1990, 10; and Sheila Rogers, "Random Notes," *Rolling Stone*, September 20, 1990, 15.

censorship tune called “Banned in the U.S.A.”²¹² The magazine also continued to add to his legend, placing him on the cover of a special 1980s issue in November and declaring him the “Voice of the Decade.”²¹³ He chose the cover photograph, an outtake from the *Born in the U.S.A.* cover sessions.²¹⁴ In 2006 he told *Rolling Stone* that he wanted an American flag on the cover because he “was very conscious of being an American musician and addressing issues of the day.”²¹⁵ Sandford hypothesized that the praise continued because “in an era of screwed-up nihilism and recycled hits by Phil Collins, people needed him. Looking at the album charts between *Bad* and *Nevermind*, Hamlet was always missing.”²¹⁶ That issue included a six-page feature about Springsteen that celebrated his successes in the first half of the 1980s and defended his change of direction in the latter part of the decade. Gilmore wrote:

In the midst of a confusing and complex decade, he wrote more compassionately about America than any other writer of the decade. And after he did so, he set about the business of tending to his own life. An act like this is neither a retreat nor a failure. Instead, it is a way of refusing to be broken by the dissolution of the world around you. It is a way of saying that sooner or later, you have to bring your dreams of a better world into your own home and your own heart, and you have to see if you can live up to them. All in all, that isn’t such a bad way to finish off one decade. Or to begin another.²¹⁷

Like previous issues with Springsteen covers, this one met with mixed reactions from readers. One letter published in a January 1991 issue said, “There must be

²¹² See Sheila Rogers, “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, July 12, 1990, 13; and Jeffrey Ressler, “Banned in the U.S.A.,” *Rolling Stone*, August 9, 1990, 23.

²¹³ Cover. *Rolling Stone*, November 15, 1990.

²¹⁴ Alan Light, “Voice of America,” *Rolling Stone*, May 18, 2006, 160.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Sandford, *Springsteen Point Blank*, 316.

²¹⁷ Mikal Gilmore, “Bruce Springsteen,” *Rolling Stone*, November 15, 1990, 174.

something more to the Eighties than the Boss, bucks and breasts.”²¹⁸ Another reader wrote, “Though Gilmore tried to turn the Boss into Everyman, when Springsteen played to millions, few really heard what he was saying. His reach was just as extensive as Reagan’s, and the audiences of both men responded in the same blindly adoring way. Where has such hero worship gotten us as we enter the 1990s?”²¹⁹ However, others applauded the magazine for its glorification of Springsteen. One reader wrote, “Springsteen is back where he belongs, on your cover (RS 591). . . . Mikal Gilmore’s summation that he ‘wrote more honestly, more intelligently and more compassionately about America than any other writer of the decade’ expresses why Springsteen is truly the ‘Voice of the Decade,’ for the Eighties and the Nineties.”²²⁰

Rolling Stone continued to build upon Springsteen’s mystique in 1990 and 1991 despite the fact that his public activity was minimal. When he played at pair benefit concerts for the Christic Institute in November 1990, his first headlining shows since the Amnesty International tour in 1988, the magazine took the opportunity to heap more praise upon him. As Sandford said, “Nothing revved up the media quite like a live gig. Concerts were both the locus and focus of Springsteen’s musical life, and, no matter how good the albums, they were ninety percent of his fame.”²²¹ Of the two shows, *Rolling Stone*’s DeCurtis said:

Taken together, the two shows—beginning with a “Brilliant Disguise” and ending in the “Real World”—demonstrated that Springsteen’s ability to seize the moment onstage and make palpable the meaning of potent emotional and social issues has not at all diminished. He continues to look

²¹⁸ Chris Patyk, Letter, *Rolling Stone*, January 24, 1991, 4.

²¹⁹ Tim S. Hickey, Letter, *Rolling Stone*, January 24, 1991, 4.

²²⁰ Jan Sweeney, Letter, *Rolling Stone*, January 24, 1991, 4.

²²¹ Sandford, *Springsteen Point Blank*, 316.

deep inside himself and find a world there, a world we can enter to learn a bit about how a life proceeds, to learn a bit about ourselves and our own world.²²²

The remainder of his appearances in the magazine's pages during 1991 consisted largely of small items about his work in the studio as well as one-off live appearances at the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame induction ceremony, a Sting concert and a benefit show in New Jersey for an ailing musician.²²³ Arguably the biggest news in Springsteen's life that year, his marriage to Scialfa in June, received a paragraph in "Random Notes."²²⁴ However, the lack of coverage was mostly Springsteen's own doing, as he tried to avoid the publicity that surrounded his first marriage by hiring a helicopter to patrol the airspace over the event and publicly asking the press to respect his privacy.²²⁵ Even in that brief piece, the magazine managed to use its familiar iconic language, referring to him as "Jersey's blue-collar poet laureate."²²⁶

A less pleasant news item that year was also nearly avoided by the magazine. The lawsuit that had been brought against him by two former roadies in 1989 was settled out of court in September, but only after a great deal of negative publicity.²²⁷ However, *Rolling Stone* was not one of the participants in that. It published only a lengthy

²²² Anthony DeCurtis, "Springsteen Returns," *Rolling Stone*, January 10, 1991, 17.

²²³ See Sheila Rogers, "Random Notes," *Rolling Stone*, February 21, 1991, 11; Sheila Rogers and Chris Mundy, "Rock & Roll Hall of Fame," *Rolling Stone*, March 7, 1991, 11; Sheila Rogers, "Random Notes," *Rolling Stone*, March 21, 1991, 11-12; Chris Mundy, "Random Notes," *Rolling Stone*, April 18, 1991, 13; Chris Mundy, "Random Notes," *Rolling Stone*, May 16, 1991, 11; John Swenson, "Nils Lofgren: Life After Bruce," *Rolling Stone*, May 30, 1991, 17; Chris Mundy, "Random Notes," *Rolling Stone*, August 22, 1991, 11; Chris Mundy, "Random Notes," *Rolling Stone*, September 5, 1991, 10; and Chris Mundy, "Random Notes," *Rolling Stone*, November 14, 1991, 11.

²²⁴ Chris Mundy, "Random Notes," *Rolling Stone*, August 8, 1991, 13.

²²⁵ Sandford, *Springsteen Point Blank*, 320.

²²⁶ Chris Mundy, "Random Notes," *Rolling Stone*, August 8, 1991, 13.

²²⁷ David Hepworth, "Springsteen: The Q Interview," *Q*, August 1992.

paragraph about the settlement that made him seem mostly in the right.²²⁸ His coverage that year ended on a high note, with *Born to Run* and *Greetings from Asbury Park, N.J* being chosen as two of the “100 Classic Album Covers” by a panel of photographers, designers, art directors and music critics.²²⁹

As 1992 began, the focus was not on old albums, but new ones. In its February 20 issue, *Rolling Stone* joked that it took Springsteen and Scialfa less time to have their second child than it was taking for them to deliver the albums on which they were working.²³⁰ Two weeks later the magazine announced that he would be releasing two albums simultaneously that spring in a two-page article that gave details about the sessions that yielded the albums, despite the fact that, according to the article, “security around the project is so tight that one source at Sony Music said Columbia Records president Don Ienner has been using code words when referring to the albums and single so as to prevent media leaks.”²³¹ However, on March 19 the magazine named the first single from the album.²³²

The two albums, *Human Touch* and *Lucky Town*, were released March 31, and *Rolling Stone* continued to generate a buzz around them. While the April 16 cover focused largely on the booming Seattle grunge-rock scene, featuring Nirvana front man Kurt Cobain wearing a shirt with the words “Corporate magazines still suck,” it did include a tease at the top about the issue’s two-page preview of Springsteen’s new albums. The preview heralded the albums as ones that would “put Springsteen back in

²²⁸ Michael Goldberg, “Springsteen Settles Suits with Roadies,” *Rolling Stone*, October 17, 1991, 27.

²²⁹ “100 Classic Album Covers,” *Rolling Stone*, November 14, 1991, 110 & 147.

²³⁰ Chris Mundy, “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, February 20, 1992, 12.

²³¹ Michael Goldberg, “Double Dose of Springsteen,” *Rolling Stone*, March 5, 1992, 24.

²³² Michael Goldberg, “Jackson Charity Off to a Slow Start,” *Rolling Stone*, March 19, 1992, 24.

the rock & roll spotlight.”²³³ The article mentioned that some in the industry had concerns about how well the albums would sell given the fact that it had been five years since his last studio album and that his music was taking on new themes. However, it also displayed optimism, pointing out that the first single was a radio hit and quoting two record chain executives who thought the albums would be “monstrous” and “could take off like nobody’s business.”²³⁴

When *Rolling Stone*’s Anthony DeCurtis reviewed the albums on April 30, giving *Human Touch* four stars and *Lucky Town* half a star more, he declared that the former’s title track “stands among Springsteen’s best work.”²³⁵ Meanwhile, in the *Village Voice*, Christgau described the song as “Springsteen at his very worst.”²³⁶ Though he had once declared *Born in the U.S.A.* to be one of the best records of the century, he described Springsteen’s latest work as that of a “windbag in love.”²³⁷

Initially, the optimistic record chain executives’ predictions seemed to be correct, with *Human Touch* and *Lucky Town* debuting at numbers two and three, respectively, on the *Billboard* album charts. However, the albums quickly plummeted to numbers twelve and twenty-three within a month and to numbers thirty-three and forty-four after two months.²³⁸ Many fans were not pleased with the new Springsteen. The fanzine

²³³ James Henke, “Bruce’s Lucky Touch,” *Rolling Stone*, April 16, 1992, 15.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Anthony DeCurtis, “New Bruce: Lose Your Illusions,” *Rolling Stone*, April 30, 1992, 53-54.

²³⁶ Aly Sujo, “No Shirt, Less Hair, Fewer Sales? The Boss Has Industry Worried,” *Chicago Tribune*, March 23, 1992, 2.

²³⁷ See Aly Sujo, “No Shirt, Less Hair, Fewer Sales? The Boss Has Industry Worried,” *Chicago Tribune*, March 23, 1992, 2; and Robert Christgau, “Consumer Guide,” *Village Voice*, June 2, 1992.

²³⁸ See *Billboard*, “Bruce Springsteen Album Chart History,”

http://www.billboard.com/bbcom/retrieve_chart_history.do?model.chartFormatGroupName=Albums&model.vnuArtistId=5738&model.vnuAlbumId=943342 [accessed June 23, 2007]; Deborah Wilker, “Bruce

Backstreets witnessed a 66 percent drop in its sales from the mid-1980s.²³⁹ The poor reception from fans was apparent to Springsteen. He joked about the public's negative response to these albums while speaking about his father during his 1999 Rock & Roll Hall of Fame Induction. He said, "I've gotta thank him because—what would I conceivably have written about without him? I mean, you can imagine that if everything had gone great between us, we would have had disaster. I would have written just happy songs—and I tried it in the early '90s, and it didn't work; the public didn't like it."²⁴⁰

After the albums fell in the charts, certain elements of the press took the opportunity to take shots at Springsteen. *Entertainment Weekly* put Springsteen on its cover with the line "What Ever Happened to Bruce?"²⁴¹ The accompanying story began with the lines, "There are two stories we could tell about Bruce Springsteen in 1992. The first is something that smells like failure, commercial failure."²⁴²

With the albums selling poorly, the focus shifted to his bread and butter: the live performances. *Rolling Stone* announced in May that he was planning a late-summer tour with a new band that included Bittan, the only E Street Band alumnus to play on his new albums.²⁴³ On May 9 he made his television performing debut on "Saturday Night Live," a move that many publications, including *Entertainment Weekly*, suggested was intended to boost album sales.²⁴⁴ *Rolling Stone*, however, did not participate in all the naysaying.

Springsteen Finally to Sing on 'Saturday Night Live,'" *Chicago Tribune*, May 9, 1992, 20; and "Springsteen's Open Rehearsal," *Washington Post*, June 3, 1992, B7.

²³⁹ Sanford, *Springsteen Point Blank*, 323.

²⁴⁰ Bruce Springsteen. *1999 Rock & Roll Hall of Fame Induction*, (television broadcast) New York: VH1, March 15, 1999.

²⁴¹ Cover, *Entertainment Weekly*, June 5, 1992.

²⁴² "Who's the Boss," *Entertainment Weekly*, June 5, 1992.

²⁴³ Michael Goldberg, "Bruce Plans Late-Summer Tour," *Rolling Stone*, May 28, 1992, 23.

²⁴⁴ "Who's the Boss," *Entertainment Weekly*, June 5, 1992.

The August 6 issue featured him on the cover and included a seven-page interview.²⁴⁵

Reporter James Henke included some Springsteen apologetics, writing that “some segments of the media seemed to be reaping pleasure from Springsteen’s relative lack of success (and indeed, it is relative: Each of the albums has sold more than 1.5 million copies).”²⁴⁶ He also made reference to a June 5 tour dress rehearsal show in Los Angeles, declaring, “The concert proved that even without the E Street Band, Springsteen is still a masterful performer; in fact, his new band rocks harder and musically it challenges him more than his previous group.”²⁴⁷ On the other hand, *San Francisco Chronicle* reporter Robert Hilburn said that “Springsteen and the band didn’t bring the music alive.”²⁴⁸

The praise of Springsteen’s live performances continued in September with an item in “Random Notes” about his ability to keep his set lists fresh. The magazine’s twenty-fifth anniversary interviews issue in October included his 1984 interview with Loder and began with the large pullout quotation, “I believe that the life of a rock & roll band will last as long as you look down into the audience and see yourself and your audience looks up at you and sees themselves.”²⁴⁹ The November 26 “Random Notes” column included an item about how he “jolted MTV execs, contest winners and audience dignitaries” by playing an entirely electric set on MTV’s “Unplugged.”²⁵⁰ In its year-end

²⁴⁵ See Cover, *Rolling Stone*, August 6, 1992; and James Henke, “Springsteen: The *Rolling Stone* Interview,” *Rolling Stone*, August 6, 1992, 38.

²⁴⁶ James Henke, “Springsteen: The *Rolling Stone* Interview,” *Rolling Stone*, August 6, 1992, 40.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁸ Robert Hilburn, “Springsteen Struggles to Regain Glory,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 8, 1992, D1.

²⁴⁹ See Chris Mundy, “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, September 17, 1992, 20; and Kurt Loder, “Springsteen,” *Rolling Stone*, October 15, 1992, 130.

²⁵⁰ Chris Mundy, “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, November 26, 1992, 11.

issue, the magazine declared that his summer tour “brought back the glory days” and that he “gave audiences his all.”²⁵¹

The magazine’s coverage in 1993 continued to center on live performances, such as his appearance at the reopening of the Stone Pony in New Jersey, his performance with John Fogerty at the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame induction, a benefit concert in New Jersey and an album release of the MTV “Unplugged” performance.²⁵² The magazine continued to mythologize. In the item about the benefit concert, a warm-up prior to his European tour, “his Springsteenness” was described as a “local godhead.”²⁵³ The remaining coverage that year included a somewhat mixed review of a show in England and several “Random Notes” about charity gigs in the United States and an appearance at a listening party for Scialfa’s solo album *Rumble Doll*.²⁵⁴ The year’s comparatively scant coverage concluded with “Brilliant Disguise” being named number sixty-four in a list of the 100 best music videos.²⁵⁵

Coverage remained relatively minimal in 1994, as Springsteen’s public activity was limited mostly to a handful of live appearances. He was mentioned in the magazine nine times that year, and seven of those mentions were small items about such appearances.²⁵⁶ The other items included a “Random Note” about his appearance on a

²⁵¹ “On the Road,” *Rolling Stone*, December 10, 1992, 36.

²⁵² See Chris Mundy, “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, February 18, 1993, 11; Chris Mundy, “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, March 4, 1993, 16-17; Chris Mundy, “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, May 13, 1993, 13; and Pete Howard, “CD News,” *Random Notes*, May 27, 1993, 50.

²⁵³ Chris Mundy, “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, May 13, 1993, 13.

²⁵⁴ See David Sinclair, “Performance: Bruce Springsteen,” *Rolling Stone*, June 24, 1993, 30; Jancee Dunn, “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, July 8, 1993, 33; Jancee Dunn, “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, August 5, 1993, 34; and Jancee Dunn, “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, September 2, 1993, 31.

²⁵⁵ Rick Marin, “Brilliant Disguise,” *Rolling Stone*, October 14, 1993, 94.

²⁵⁶ See Jancee Dunn, “Rock & Roll Hall of Fame,” *Rolling Stone*, March 10, 1994, 27-29; Jancee Dunn, “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, May 5, 1994, 22; Jancee Dunn, “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, June 16,

Curtis Mayfield tribute album and an article about a legal battle to keep a British record label from releasing an album of demos that he recorded early in his career.²⁵⁷ One noticeable omission that year was the lack of any mention of “Streets of Philadelphia,” the song that he recorded for the soundtrack of the Jonathan Demme film *Philadelphia*, which addressed issues about HIV and AIDS. The song, which brought him the commercial and critical success that had largely escaped him for *Human Touch* and *Lucky Town*, won a Golden Globe, four Grammys and the Academy Award for “Best Song,” making Springsteen the first rock musician to win the award.²⁵⁸ According to Sandford, the song “signaled his arrival, as a compound star, into the elite,” and with it he had “established himself as a family entertainer.”²⁵⁹ The magazine’s only acknowledgement of the song’s success came in April 1995 when it mentioned his Grammy wins.²⁶⁰

In 1994 he returned to the studio to begin work on his next album; however, by the end of the year his progress had ground to a halt, according to Sandford.²⁶¹ Simultaneously, he was receiving calls and faxes from members of the E Street Band asking him to get the band back together. At that point Landau hatched the idea of releasing a greatest hits album that would include some newly recorded songs with the E Street Band, and in January 1995 they all entered the studio together for the first time

1994, 35; Jancee Dunn, “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, August 11, 1994, 20; Jancee Dunn, “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, September 22, 1994, 20; and Jancee Dunn, “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, October 20, 1994, 27; and Jancee Dunn, “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, December 15, 1994, 17.

²⁵⁷ See Jancee Dunn, “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, February 24, 1994, 29; and Fred Goodman, “Prodigal Songs,” *Rolling Stone*, March 24, 1994, 12.

²⁵⁸ Sandford, *Springsteen Point Blank*, 348-350.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 349 & 357.

²⁶⁰ Jancee Dunn, “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, April 20, 1995, 15.

²⁶¹ Sandford, *Springsteen Point Blank*, 353.

since the *Born in the U.S.A.* sessions.²⁶² In February, *Rolling Stone* made an announcement about the new release, and in an April review, the album received three stars.²⁶³ While the rating may have seemed low in comparison to past albums, reviewer Parke Puterbaugh's main complaint was that the songs did not sound right out of the context of their original albums. He contended that the songs did not "portray a remarkable career in a flattering or accurate light" and that "every album Springsteen has made is best heard in toto."²⁶⁴ Indeed, the first paragraph of the review read more like a fluff piece than the beginning of a three-star album review. He wrote:

Bruce Springsteen is a peerless songwriter and consummate artist whose every painstakingly crafted album serves as an impassioned and literate pulse taking of a generation's fortunes. He is the foremost live performer in the history of rock & roll, a self-described prisoner of the music he loves, for whom every show is played as if it might be his last. Though some may argue the point, Springsteen single-handedly rescued rock & roll from its banal post-'60s doldrums. Moreover, his music developed a conscience that didn't ignore the darkening of the runaway American dream as the country greedily blundered its way through the '80s.²⁶⁵

As for the new songs, which he compared to Woody Guthrie folk songs, he simply said that the E Street Band's involvement was obsolete. He ended with a prophetic statement, writing, "This may, in fact, be where Springsteen is headed. It wouldn't be surprising if, on his next travels, he walked alone with a guitar and harmonica for companions."²⁶⁶

²⁶² Ibid., 360.

²⁶³ See Jancee Dunn, "Random Notes," *Rolling Stone*, February 23, 1995, 20; and Parke Puterbaugh, "Bruce Springsteen: Greatest Hits," *Rolling Stone*, April 6, 1995, 60.

²⁶⁴ Parke Puterbaugh, "Bruce Springsteen: Greatest Hits," *Rolling Stone*, April 6, 1995, 61.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 60-61.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 61.

Springsteen's next album, *The Ghost of Tom Joad*, took exactly that approach, bearing some similarities to *Nebraska* and telling stories of downtrodden characters facing desolation. According to Sandford, Columbia executives lobbied for an album that returned to the sound of the E Street Band and hoped that the album would sound like "Bruce in any state but Nebraska."²⁶⁷ Despite their fears, the album was met with praise. *Rolling Stone's* Gilmore wrote, "I'm convinced it's Springsteen's best album in ten years, and I also think it's among the bravest work that anyone has given us this decade."²⁶⁸ He also revisited the notion that Springsteen was a voice for the common people. He said:

By climbing into their hearts and minds, Springsteen has given voice to people who rarely have one in this culture. And giving voice to people who are typically denied expression in our other arts and media has always been one of rock & roll's most important virtues. As we move into the rough times and badlands that lie ahead, such acts will count for more than ever before.²⁶⁹

Springsteen began an eighteen-month tour in support of the album on November 26, five days after the release of the album.²⁷⁰ The tour, which featured solo acoustic versions of the new material and a few reworked versions of classics that barely resembled the originals, "was artfully conceived, but almost morose, in the opinion of some fans," according to *Boston Globe* writer Steve Morse.²⁷¹ Though he successfully sold out small theaters around the world; however, he did not spark the kind of attention

²⁶⁷ Sandford, *Springsteen Point Blank*, 371.

²⁶⁸ Mikal Gilmore, "The Ghost of Tom Joad," *Rolling Stone*, December 28, 1995, 127.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Sandford, *Springsteen Point Blank*, 377.

²⁷¹ Steve Morse, "Springsteen Talks About Life, Changes, and His New Boxed Set," *Boston Globe*, November 20, 1998, C17.

that had marked previous tours.²⁷² Despite the critical praise and the album's decent showing in the charts—it reached number eleven, while *Nebraska* had only made it to number 174—Springsteen received much less press coverage during this period.²⁷³ In late October 1996, *Seattle Times* columnist Terry McDermott wrote, “At the moment . . . Bruce Springsteen himself is not terribly hip. The music is as good as ever, but he’s yesterday’s news.”²⁷⁴

Rolling Stone's coverage in 1996 focused mostly on the tour. Three of the six times he was mentioned in the magazine that year focused on the tour.²⁷⁵ He was also once again noted for crusading for the little guy. In an article about ticket scalping, a fan said, “Bruce does care about the fans, and I think Bruce’s organization has made some effort to stop scalpers.”²⁷⁶ A “Random Note” in December included a picture of Springsteen and Jesse Jackson leading a demonstration against a California state ballot initiative that would outlaw a number of affirmative action programs.²⁷⁷ The remaining items dealt with his appearance at Frank Sinatra’s 80th birthday party and a Woody Guthrie celebration concert.²⁷⁸

Springsteen met with many accolades in 1997. “Lionized both home and away,” he won Sweden’s prestigious Polar Music Award, the Grammy for Best Contemporary

²⁷² Sandford, *Springsteen Point Blank*, 381-382.

²⁷³ See *Billboard*, “Artist Chart History,” *Bruce Springsteen*, http://www.billboard.com/bbcom/retrieve_chart_history.do?model.chartFormatGroupName=Albums&model.vnuArtistId=5738&model.vnuAlbumId=943342 [accessed June 23, 2007].

²⁷⁴ Terry McDermott, “Motivated by the Music of the Boss,” *Seattle Times*, October 29, 1996, B1.

²⁷⁵ See “Grapevine,” *Rolling Stone*, February 8, 1996, 24; Eric Boehlert, “Ticket Masters,” *Rolling Stone*, March 7, 1996, 12-13; and Matt Hendrickson, “On the Road,” *Rolling Stone*, September 19, 1996, 34.

²⁷⁶ Eric Boehlert, “Ticket Masters,” *Rolling Stone*, March 7, 1996, 13.

²⁷⁷ Nilou Panahpour, “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, December 26, 1996, 90.

²⁷⁸ See Nilou Panahpour, “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, January 25, 1996, 17; and Nilou Panahpour, “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, November 14, 1996, 25.

Folk Album and a number of other awards.²⁷⁹ Creatively, however, he did not fare so well. In March he began writing material for a new album but quickly developed a case of writer's block.²⁸⁰ Spending much of the year in the studio, he failed to generate any recordings that he deemed worthy of release.²⁸¹ Coverage continued to shrink that year, with *Rolling Stone* mentioning him three times. A February article about the *Tom Joad* tour touched upon his connection to his roots, noting that "Springsteen is aware that some found his sobering record to be an arbitrary departure, but he explains, '[*Tom Joad*] wasn't that different from the legacy of my own family. My parents struggled a lot.'"²⁸² In the April 17 issue he was shown with Beck, who was on the issue's cover, at the Grammy Awards with the caption, "Passing the ol'[sic] generational torch."²⁸³ In May, *Born in the U.S.A.* was included in the magazine's list of the 200 best albums ever made.²⁸⁴

Springsteen spent much of the 1990s trying to prevent himself from being pigeonholed as the superstar that he became in the 1980s. At times his efforts caused him to be labeled as irrelevant. Through it all, *Rolling Stone* continued to carry his standard, applauding his changes and canonizing his past. Several of his moves were unpopular with some fans and critics. Abandoning the E Street Band and the traditional sound and themes of his music were unpopular moves with some, but this would not have appeared to be the case simply from reading *Rolling Stone's* consistently laudatory coverage.

²⁷⁹ Sandford, *Springsteen Point Blank*, 391-392.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 392-393.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*

²⁸² Fred Schruers, "Bruce Springsteen Finds 'A Sense of Place,'" *Rolling Stone*, February 6, 1997, 18.

²⁸³ Nilou Panahpour, "Random Notes," *Rolling Stone*, April 17, 1997, 21.

²⁸⁴ "The *Rolling Stone* 200: The Essential Rock Collection," *Rolling Stone*, May 15, 1997, 82.

Chapter 6 – “Blood Brothers”: 1998-2007

Having come to terms with his mythology, Springsteen permitted himself to embrace many of the things he had left behind, most notably the E Street Band. While he revived old friendships, *Rolling Stone* continued its celebratory relationship with him. The magazine heaped praise on his albums and live performances. He continued to be a voice for the common man, speaking out against poor treatment of laborers, racism, police brutality and President George W. Bush’s administration. In the wake of the September 11 attacks on the United States, the voice of America returned to resurrect the morale of the nation.

Though coverage continued to be comparatively moderate in 1998, it stuck to the same themes that appeared in the past. He continued to be the voice of the downtrodden and marginalized in an issue about “The American Dream, 1998” with an excerpt of an interview in which he defended the rights of workers. He said, “People deserve the right to work, and when you rob someone of that right, you’re robbing them of an enormous part of their life. . . . And I think it’s the responsibility not just of the government, but all of us, to make sure no one is left out.”²⁸⁵

Having decided to abandon the tunes he had been working on in 1997, he spent much of 1998 mining the vault of old recordings for the purposes of assembling a box set of previously unreleased material, including demos and outtakes recorded throughout the course of his career. That year, and the following year, turned out to be one of career revival thanks to the revisiting of his past. With his record label mounting a “BRUCE IS BACK” public relations campaign, the four-disc box set, *Tracks*, rose to number 27 on

²⁸⁵ Anthony DeCurtis, “Bruce Springsteen: In His Own Words,” *Rolling Stone*, May 28, 1998, 137.

the *Billboard* album charts and went platinum within a month of its release.²⁸⁶ According to Sandford, “It was a second coming. Anyone with \$70 and four hours to kill would, and did, love it.”²⁸⁷ By 1998 he was one of the 500 wealthiest people in California and was still selling more than five million albums worldwide annually.²⁸⁸

Back on the rise, he was in demand to make appearances at a number of galas, including one to celebrate peace in Ireland that was hosted by British Prime Minister Tony Blair. However, Springsteen did not attend that event nor most of the others because he did not like being co-opted.²⁸⁹ However, he did perform at a party to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of *Rolling Stone* because, as Sandford said, “that was for love.”²⁹⁰

The remainder of *Rolling Stone*'s coverage that year focused on current events that were wrapped up in the past. In September, the magazine reported that the box set was due in November and hinted that he might be touring in 1999 with the E Street Band.²⁹¹ In November, it announced that he was among the list nominees for induction into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame inductees in 1999.²⁹² In an interview published in December, he discussed the box set, the Hall of Fame, the possibility of an E Street Band reunion tour and his decision to move back to New Jersey. The discussion of the latter

²⁸⁶ See Sandford, *Springsteen Point Blank*, 393; *Billboard*, “Artist Chart History,” *Bruce Springsteen*, http://www.billboard.com/bbcom/retrieve_chart_history.do?model.chartFormatGroupName=Albums&model.vnuArtistId=5738&model.vnuAlbumId=943342 [accessed June 23, 2007]; and “Gold and Platinum,” in Recording Industry Association of America [database online] <http://www.riaa.com/goldandplatinumdata.php?table=SEARCH> [accessed June 25, 2007].

²⁸⁷ Sandford, *Springsteen Point Blank*, 410.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 393.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 402.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁹¹ Matt Hendrickson, “Dylan and Springsteen Dig Into the Vaults,” *Rolling Stone*, September 2, 1998, 30.

²⁹² Steve Futterman, “Hall of Fame Nominees Announced,” *Rolling Stone*, November 26, 1998, 30.

revisited his connection to his roots. He said, “We have a big family nearby—a sixty-to-seventy-member family. I grew up like that. I grew up on a little L-shaped block, where we had six houses—all relatives. It’s great. It makes for a relatively normal life, and you get a lot of support from people. It helps the day make sense.”²⁹³ Described as “the living symbol of heartfelt, muscular rock & roll,” he also emphasized that he did not care whether or not he fit into the contemporary music scene. He said, “I’ve created a body of work that expresses fundamentally who I am. . . . And I am interested in presenting what I do to anybody who’s interested. . . . Today I have less access to the mainstream. I’m not going to be on MTV, and there are probably a lot of radio stations I can’t get on. So I go out and perform when I can.”²⁹⁴

Despite his lack of concern, coverage began to increase in 1999 because of the reunification of the E Street Band. In January, the magazine announced that Springsteen and “the best-known backing band in history” would mount their first tour since 1988 that summer.²⁹⁵ The tour was heralded as one of the biggest concert events of the year, with a concert promoter declaring them “one of the top concert attractions in history.”²⁹⁶ In February, the magazine broke the news that Springsteen would be inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, and in April it declared the group’s performance at the induction ceremony to be one of the high points of the evening.²⁹⁷

²⁹³ Anthony DeCurtis, “Springsteen’s Secret History,” *Rolling Stone*, December 10, 1998, 90.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁵ Matt Hendrickson, “Bruce’s Band Rides Again,” *Rolling Stone*, January 21, 1999, 21.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁷ See Noah Tarnow, “Springsteen, McCartney Top List of Hall of Fame Inductees,” *Rolling Stone*, February 4, 1999, 27; and Anthony Bozza, “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, April 29, 1999, 21.

The remaining coverage that year focused entirely on the reunion tour. In August it reported that every show on the U.S. leg of the tour sold out on the first day.²⁹⁸ The mythologizing of his live shows continued. The cover of the September 2 issue declared it “The Rockin’ est [*sic*] Show on Earth.”²⁹⁹ DeCurtis said that “Springsteen embraces a performance ethic that ultimately boils down to this: If a small city’s worth of people buy tickets for your shows the instant they go on sale, your job is to rock the house until the walls shake.”³⁰⁰ In his review of the first four U.S. shows, part of a fifteen-night stand at the Continental Airlines Arena in New Jersey that sold out in thirteen hours, he emphasized the theme of connection, declaring that the shows were not nostalgic longings of the past but were instead a celebration of “the shared history of an artist, a group of musicians and an audience.”³⁰¹ He said, “They are not canned greatest-hits regurgitations, mere self-congratulations for past success. Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band have created a body of work that speaks to our deepest desires for connection. Regardless of what the future holds, these shows testify that those desires can sometimes be satisfied.”³⁰²

The tour and the praise both continued in 2000. In January, the tour was voted the year’s best by *Rolling Stone*’s music critics.³⁰³ The magazine reported in March that he was adding twenty-seven more shows to a tour that had been seen by 1.8 million people

²⁹⁸ Austin Scaggs, “In the News,” *Rolling Stone*, August 6, 1999, 18.

²⁹⁹ Cover, *Rolling Stone*, September 2, 1999.

³⁰⁰ Anthony DeCurtis, “Bruce Springsteen and the Legendary E Street Band,” *Rolling Stone*, September 2, 1999, 60.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 62.

³⁰² *Ibid.*

³⁰³ “1999 Readers and Critics Poll,” *Rolling Stone*, January 20, 2000, 49.

the previous year.³⁰⁴ A July review of a show in Anaheim said that the “routinely great live performer” delivered a “three-hour marathon” that was “typically transcendent—exhilarating, goofy and emotionally wrenching in equal measure.”³⁰⁵ He shared the cover of the August 17 “Summer Music Special Issue” with the likes of Dave Matthews, Pearl Jam’s Eddie Vedder and Britney Spears.³⁰⁶ That issue contained a review of the tour’s final show, the last of a sold-out ten-night run at New York’s Madison Square Garden. Reviewer John Colapinto said, “It would be unfair to suggest that Springsteen lacks the musical, vocal or physical stamina to wring the kind of magic from the night that he did fifteen years ago. The question is whether he needs to bother anymore.”³⁰⁷ He noted that it was the mostly middle-aged audience, not Springsteen, who grew tired by the end of the three-and-a-half-hour show.³⁰⁸

That review also mentioned that he performed the song “American Skin (41 Shots),” which had stirred up controversy because it was inspired by the New York City police killing of Amadou Diallo, an unarmed West African immigrant.³⁰⁹ The song drew fire from New York City policemen and city officials. The Patrolmen’s Benevolent Association urged officers to boycott the Madison Square Garden shows.³¹⁰ Robert Lucente, the president of the New York State Chapter of the Fraternal Order of Police,

³⁰⁴ Austin Scaggs, “Springsteen Back on Tour,” *Rolling Stone*, March 16, 2000, 14.

³⁰⁵ Marc Weingarten, “Performance: Bruce Springsteen,” *Rolling Stone*, July 6, 2000, 60.

³⁰⁶ Cover, *Rolling Stone*, August 17, 2000.

³⁰⁷ John Colapinto, “Twenty-Five Reports From the Summer’s Hottest Tours,” *Rolling Stone*, August 17, 2000, 73.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁹ See John Colapinto, “Twenty-Five Reports From the Summer’s Hottest Tours,” *Rolling Stone*, August 17, 2000, 73; and “41 Shots,” *Boston Globe*, June 15, 2000, A23.

³¹⁰ Julian E. Barnes, “Springsteen Song About Diallo Prompts Anger From Police,” *New York Times*, June 13, 2000, 3.

publicly called Springsteen a “fucking dirtbag” and a “floating fag.”³¹¹ New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani came to the defense of the officers, saying, “There are still people trying to create the impression that the police officers are guilty, and they are going to feel strongly about that.”³¹² In an op-ed piece for the *New York Times*, police officer George Mole wrote:

Cops are used to being despised, not only by the predators we arrest but—it often seems—by the society we protect. But I didn’t expect that Bruce Springsteen, poet of the working class, would turn his back on the working men and women who wear the shield. . . . Can Springsteen not see that the four officers, like Amadou Diallo himself, were working men who wanted to go home that night, who wanted to see their families again? I’ve enjoyed Springsteen’s music for many years, but that pleasure is gone now. I can no longer relate to an artist who in his work shows contempt for me and my fellow officers.³¹³

New York Times writer John Tierney also criticized Springsteen in his piece “Has the Boss Joined Ranks with the Limousine Liberals?”³¹⁴ He wrote that

Springsteen is no longer the poor Jersey kid singing about his blue-collar neighbors. He is a millionaire who doesn’t have to hitchhike on Route 9 anymore. The singer who once defended Vietnam veterans and Middle American values has lately been focused on conventional liberal causes, like homelessness and AIDS. Besides his current anthem against police brutality, he has been crusading to preserve affirmative action programs, not exactly a popular cause in his old neighborhoods. The singer who recorded

³¹¹ Anthony DeCurtis, “Unlike Eminem and Cat, Springsteen Shows Courage Under Fire,” *Rolling Stone*, June 17, 2000.
http://www.rollingstone.com/artists/bruce-springsteen/articles/story/5924225/unlike_eminem_and_cat_springsteen_shows_courage_under_fire [accessed June 25, 2007].

³¹² Julian E. Barnes, “Springsteen Song About Diallo Prompts Anger From Police,” *New York Times*, June 13, 2000, 3.

³¹³ George Mole, “The Working People Springsteen Doesn’t Understand,” June 17, 2000, 15.

³¹⁴ John Tierney, “Has the Boss Joined Ranks with the Limousine Liberals?” *New York Times*, June 14, 2000, 1.

“Greetings From Asbury Park seems to have made an ideological crossing of the Hudson: “Greetings From Central Park West.”³¹⁵

Rolling Stone’s DeCurtis, however, defended Springsteen and the song as “a model of intelligent political songwriting.”³¹⁶ He said that when the song was performed the opening night of the Madison Square Garden run, Springsteen “surrounded it with songs that universalized the issues that help create tragedies like the Diallo shooting—issues like immigration, race, economics, corporate exploitation, class struggle and the tarnished, but enduring, ideal of what America can be.”³¹⁷ He also noted, “That Springsteen has also performed benefits for officers killed in the line of duty has rarely been mentioned in all the media furor.”³¹⁸

The controversy eventually blew over. Lucente issued a public apology for his statements.³¹⁹ In December, Springsteen received the Humanitarian Community Service Award from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.³²⁰ Once the tour ended in early July, Springsteen took a break

³¹⁵ Ibid. Springsteen in fact had not stopped supporting veterans’ causes. When a Rutgers University professor asked Springsteen’s office for permission to reprint the lyrics to “Born in the U.S.A.” in an anthology of stories, songs and poems about the Vietnam War, he received a fax saying, “Feel free to use it. And if you want to, make a \$100 contribution to a veterans’ organization.” See Jon Pareles, “That’s Dr. Boss to You: A Dropout as B.M.O.C.,” *New York Times*, October 28, 2000, 11.

³¹⁶ Anthony DeCurtis, “Unlike Eminem and Cat, Springsteen Shows Courage Under Fire,” *Rolling Stone*, June 17, 2000.
http://www.rollingstone.com/artists/brucespringsteen/articles/story/5924225/unlike_eminem_and_cat_springsteen_shows_courage_under_fire [accessed June 25, 2007].

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ Andrew Dansby, “New York Cop Apologizes for Springsteen Comments,” *Rolling Stone*, June 17, 2000.
http://www.rollingstone.com/artists/brucespringsteen/articles/story/5922598/new_york_cop_apologizes_for_springsteen_comments [accessed June 25, 2007].

³²⁰ “Springsteen Gets NAACP Humanitarian Award,” *Lexington Herald-Leader*, December 5, 2000, A2.

from the public spotlight for most of the rest of the year, sparking questions about whether the reunion was temporary or permanent.³²¹

His public life remained relatively uneventful for most of 2001. In March, the magazine reported that HBO would broadcast almost two hours of footage from the last two Madison Square Garden shows on the reunion tour.³²² An accompanying album, *Live in New York City*, debuted at number five on the *Billboard* album charts and was certified platinum by early May.³²³ *Rolling Stone* reviewer Greg Kot gave the album three-and-a-half stars, calling it “more than just a souvenir of a nostalgia tour; it’s a document of a great combo still burning to outdo itself.”³²⁴ He added that “the inclusion of ‘American Skin,’ one of Springsteen’s finest songs, alone justifies the release of *Live in New York City*.”³²⁵ Following the release of the album, Springsteen continued to remain out of the public spotlight until after the terrorist attacks on September 11. He opened the “America: A Tribute to Heroes” telethon, seen in more than 200 nations, with the unreleased song “My City of Ruins,” a song that fit the occasion despite the fact that it was written a year earlier about his old stomping grounds of Asbury Park, New Jersey.³²⁶

³²¹ Bob Ivry, “What’s up Boss?—As Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band End Their Tour, Fans Wonder What They Plan to Do Next,” *Seattle Times*, July 4, 2000, E1.

³²² Austin Scaggs, “Springsteen Live on HBO,” *Rolling Stone*, March 15, 2001, 27.

³²³ *Billboard*, “Artist Chart History,” *Bruce Springsteen*, http://www.billboard.com/bbcom/retrieve_chart_history.do?model.chartFormatGroupName=Albums&model.vnuArtistId=5738&model.vnuAlbumId=943342 [accessed June 23, 2007], and “Gold and Platinum,” in Recording Industry Association of America [database online] <http://www.riaa.com/goldandplatinumdata.php?table=SEARCH> [accessed June 25, 2007].

³²⁴ Greg Kot, “E Street on Broadway,” *Rolling Stone*, April 26, 2001, 60.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*

³²⁶ “I Heard the News Today,” *Rolling Stone*, October 25, 2001, 21.

That song and what it stood for continued to reverberate in his activities throughout 2001 and 2002. In October, he organized and headlined two shows in New Jersey to benefit Monmouth County victims and survivors of the attacks.³²⁷ He played five benefit shows in Asbury Park in December to raise money for the revitalization of the town.³²⁸ *Rolling Stone* continued to show Springsteen as man who cared. In his January 2002 review of the Asbury Park benefit shows, Austin Scaggs noted that two of the first night's highlights were Springsteen opening with a tribute to the recently deceased former Beatle George Harrison and a performance of "My City of Ruins."³²⁹ In May, the magazine reported that he donated money to the Alliance of Neighbors of Monmouth County to create a wellness center and educational foundation for September 11 victims.³³⁰

The magazine broke the news in July that Springsteen and the E Street Band had been at work in Atlanta on their first studio album since *Born in the U.S.A.*³³¹ *The Rising*, full of songs dealing largely with the events of September 11, hit store shelves later that month, debuting at number one on the *Billboard* album charts and achieving multi-platinum status.³³² In August, the magazine revealed that the group would begin a tour that month that would continue into

³²⁷ Andrew Dansby, "Bruce, Bon Jovi Lead NJ Show," *Rolling Stone*, October 16, 2001. http://www.rollingstone.com/artists/brucespringsteen/articles/story/5919556/bruce_bon_jovi_lead_nj_show [accessed June 26, 2007].

³²⁸ Austin Scaggs, "Springsteen Remembers George Harrison in Asbury Park," *Rolling Stone*, January 17, 2002, 11.

³²⁹ Ibid.

³³⁰ Lindsay Goldenberg, "In Brief," *Rolling Stone*, May 9, 2002, 20.

³³¹ Lindsay Goldenberg, "In Brief," *Rolling Stone*, July 4, 2002, 33.

Billboard, "Artist Chart History," *Bruce Springsteen*, http://www.billboard.com/bbcom/retrieve_chart_history.do?model.chartFormatGroupName=Albums&model.vnuArtistId=5738&model.vnuAlbumId=943342 [accessed June 23, 2007], and "Gold and Platinum," in Recording Industry Association of America [database online] <http://www.riaa.com/goldandplatinumdata.php?table=SEARCH> [accessed June 25, 2007].

2003.³³³ Springsteen told the magazine, “I wanted to make an album that was essential, even if you have every single one of my other albums.”³³⁴

Rolling Stone seemed to think it was essential. He appeared on the cover of the August 22 issue, which also featured a seven-page interview with him.³³⁵ The magazine even mythologized its own coverage of him by including a guide to his previous studio albums and a section with pictures of his previous ten appearances on the magazine’s cover as well as excerpts of interviews from each of those issues.³³⁶ The magazine used the record guide as an opportunity to revise history, elevating its rating of *Nebraska* by half a star to a full five stars and demoting *Human Touch* and *Lucky Town* to three stars, while in 1992 they had been given four and four-and-a-half stars, respectively.³³⁷ *Human Touch*, whose title track had once stood “among Springsteen’s best work,” was now called his “weakest album.”³³⁸ At the beginning of his interview piece, reporter Mark Binelli made it clear that Springsteen was not a relic of the past despite his age. Describing him as “remarkably fit” with his “trendy” clothes, he noted that “only his sideburns hint at gray” and that Springsteen enjoyed listening to new rap

³³³ Jenny Eliscu, “Springsteen Back with New Album and Tour,” *Rolling Stone*, August 22, 2002, 62.

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ See Cover, *Rolling Stone*, August 22, 2002; and Mark Binelli, “Bruce Springsteen’s American Gospel,” *Rolling Stone*, August 22, 2002, 62.

³³⁶ See Rob Sheffield, “Bruce, Album by Album,” *Rolling Stone*, August 22, 2002, 65; and “Cover Me: From the RS Files,” *Rolling Stone*, August 22, 2002, 66.

³³⁷ See Rob Sheffield, “Bruce, Album by Album,” *Rolling Stone*, August 22, 2002, 65; Steve Pond, “Springsteen Delivers His Bravest Record Yet,” *Rolling Stone*, October 28, 1982, 65; and Anthony DeCurtis, “New Bruce: Lose Your Illusions,” *Rolling Stone*, April 30, 1992, 53-54.

³³⁸ See Rob Sheffield, “Bruce, Album by Album,” *Rolling Stone*, August 22, 2002, 65; and Anthony DeCurtis, “New Bruce: Lose Your Illusions,” *Rolling Stone*, April 30, 1992, 53-54.

music.³³⁹ The interview also revisited the connection between Springsteen and his fans. He told Binelli that he realized that he needed to make the album a few days after September 11 when “a man drove by, rolled his window down and yelled, ‘We need ya!’”³⁴⁰ Springsteen said:

That made me sense, like, “Oh, I have a job to do.” Our band, hopefully, we were built to be there when the chips are down. That was part of the idea of the band, to provide support. The most fundamental thing I hear from fans, constantly, is “Man, you got me through”—whatever it might be. “My divorce. My graduation. My high school. This part of my life, that part.” And I usually wanna [*sic*] say back, “Well, you know, you guys got me through quite a bit yourselves!”³⁴¹

Kurt Loder, who had become an infrequent contributor to the magazine after leaving his position as senior editor in 1988 to work at MTV and who had conducted the famous interview with Springsteen during the height of the *Born in the U.S.A.* mania, wrote the review for the album.³⁴² Giving it five stars, he declared, “I can’t think of another album in which such an abundance of great songs might be said to seem the least of its achievements.”³⁴³ He added:

The heart sags at the prospect of pop stars weighing in on the subject of September 11th. Which of them could possibly transmute the fiery horror of that day with the force of their art, or offer up anything beyond a dismal trivialization?

The answer, it turns out, is Bruce Springsteen. With his new album, *The Rising*, Springsteen wades into the wreckage and pain of that horrendous event and emerges bearing fifteen songs that genuflect with enormous grace before the sorrows that drift in its wake. The small miracle of his

³³⁹ Mark Binelli, “Bruce Springsteen’s American Gospel,” *Rolling Stone*, August 22, 2002, 62.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 94.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*

³⁴² “Kurt Loder: Biography,” <http://www.mtv.com/news/correspondents/loder/bio.jhtml> [accessed June 26, 2007].

³⁴³ Kurt Loder, “Gimme Shelter: Springsteen Searches for Love and Faith in the Ruins,” *Rolling Stone*, August 22, 2002, 82.

accomplishment is that at no point does he give vent to the anger felt by so many Americans: the hunger for revenge.³⁴⁴

Rolling Stone was there when the yearlong tour began in New Jersey on August 7. DeCurtis said that “Springsteen slashed at his guitar and sang with an intimidating intensity” but that it was a “stiff opening night.”³⁴⁵ The review also included reactions from five fans, four in their thirties and one in her early twenties, who attended the show. All five gave positive reviews, two of them specifically mentioning how much they liked the new material, which made up half of the show’s set list.³⁴⁶ In September, Scaggs declared that “there is no doubt that Bruce owned the season, scoring a platinum album in less than a month and mounting the highest-profile tour so far this year.”³⁴⁷ He added that Columbia Records had mounted a large promotional campaign to support the album, with Springsteen making more television appearances than he had ever agreed to before. He pointed out that Springsteen was still looking out for the fans by keeping ticket prices down at \$75 or less, compared to the \$350 charged by the Rolling Stones. Finally, he seemed to suggest that Springsteen was a universally popular figure at the time. His show in New York City was attended by celebrities, firefighters and police officers.³⁴⁸ The latter was something of a feat considering that they had boycotted his shows only two years earlier. Scaggs noted that *The Rising* debuted at number one in the United Kingdom, Germany, Spain and Italy, “proving that Springsteen is also a hero outside the

³⁴⁴ Ibid, 81.

³⁴⁵ Anthony DeCurtis, “Live: Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band,” *Rolling Stone*, September 5, 2002, 32.

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

³⁴⁷ Austin Scaggs, “Summer of Bruce,” *Rolling Stone*, September 19, 2002, 30.

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

United States.”³⁴⁹ In October, Kot reported that “business is booming” on the tour.³⁵⁰

Van Zandt told him that “it’s very rare for an arena show to be focused so much on a new album—but the audience isn’t just tolerating the new stuff. They’re coming to hear it.”³⁵¹

Van Zandt himself was receiving increased attention from the magazine as well. In October it published an article about his new syndicated radio show, *Little Steven’s Underground Garage*.³⁵² In December, he and Springsteen were named as two of the magazine’s twenty “People of the Year.”³⁵³ They were met with more honors as well. *Rolling Stone* named *The Rising* one of the fifty best albums of the year, and the magazine’s readers choose *Darkness on the Edge of Town* and *Born to Run* as numbers sixty-three and thirty-two, respectively, on their list of the 100 best albums of all time.³⁵⁴

The accolades continued into 2003, with the readers naming *The Rising* as the Best Album of 2002, the tour as the Best Tour and Springsteen as Artist of the Year, Best Rock Artist and Most Welcome Comeback.³⁵⁵ The critics also voted it the Best Tour; however, *The Rising* was voted number ten in the Best Album category, and Springsteen came in second and third, respectively, on their lists of Artist of the Year and Best Male Performer.³⁵⁶ The magazine joked about the rampage he was on, saying:

It wasn’t enough that New Jersey’s own killed ‘em [*sic*] in the *Rolling Stone* Music Awards: the readers’ Artist of the Year and Album of the Year, among other nods. Springsteen then went on to crush at the

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ Greg Kot, “Springsteen Gets Loose,” *Rolling Stone*, October 31, 2002, 38.

³⁵¹ Ibid.

³⁵² “Little Steven’s Underground Garage,” *Rolling Stone*, October 3, 2002, 58.

³⁵³ See Mark Binelli, “Steven Van Zandt,” *Rolling Stone*, December 12, 2002, 84; and Anthony DeCurtis, “Bruce Springsteen,” *Rolling Stone*, December 12, 2002, 84.

³⁵⁴ See David Fricke, “50 Best Albums of 2002,” *Rolling Stone*, December 26, 2002, 110; and “The Readers’ 100,” *Rolling Stone*, October 17, 2002, 56 & 59.

³⁵⁵ “Music Awards 2002,” *Rolling Stone*, February 6, 2003, 35-36.

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

Grammys, too, taking nominations for Album of the Year, for *The Rising*, and Song of the Year, for “The Rising.” Next up: Bruce throws it down at the NBA slam-dunk competition.³⁵⁷

He was also featured in the magazine’s “American Icons” issue, and the group was named the eleventh best live band in the world.³⁵⁸

The year was also a highly profitable one. He also came in seventh on the magazine’s list of the year’s fifty richest rock musicians, having earned \$24.8 million in 2002.³⁵⁹ In April it reported that he made \$37.8 million in ticket sales in one day for a series of ten late-summer shows at New Jersey’s Giants Stadium.³⁶⁰ Reporter Steve Knopper joked that it was “about the same number of dates the New York Giants are scheduled to play there in 2003.”³⁶¹ Though he was earning record amounts of money, he continued to give back. In May, the magazine noted that he headlined a benefit concert to pay for the medical expenses of the son of Asbury Jukes guitarist Bobby Bandiera.³⁶²

Rolling Stone reported that summer concert ticket sales were generally down but that Springsteen was an exception, setting a single-venue record with his sold-out ten-night stand at Giants Stadium.³⁶³ In its coverage of the Giants Stadium run, the magazine portrayed it as a giant celebration, with the venue being “transformed into a mock beach boardwalk, with a Ferris wheel, volleyball courts and even a Springsteen karaoke

³⁵⁷ “Everyone’s Talking About. . . Bruce Springsteen, Winner,” *Rolling Stone*, February 6, 2003, 5.

³⁵⁸ See Jimmy Iovine, “Elvis Presley, Bob Dylan & Bruce Springsteen,” *Rolling Stone*, May 15, 2003, 74; and “Best in Show,” *Rolling Stone*, July 10, 2003, 50.

³⁵⁹ Robert LaFranco, “Rock’s 50 Richest,” *Rolling Stone*, April 3, 2003, 59.

³⁶⁰ Steve Knopper, “Record-Breaking Summer Tours,” *Rolling Stone*, April 17, 2003, 32.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*

³⁶² Kirk Miller, “Jersey Boys,” *Rolling Stone*, May 29, 2003, 16.

³⁶³ Steve Knopper, “Summer Tours in Trouble,” *Rolling Stone*, June 26, 2003, 29.

stage.”³⁶⁴ Reporter Shirley Halperin noted the connection that fans felt to him. One fan told her, “Bruce means everything to me—more than my wife! That’s why I’m over here without her.”³⁶⁵ Another said, “Bruce is a way of life. It’s a religion, actually.”³⁶⁶ In his review of the opening night of the run, Fricke noted that the show was a reminder “that stadium shows don’t have to suck, even from the far rows.”³⁶⁷ Playing at the nearby PNC Bank Arts Center, Pearl Jam’s Eddie Vedder joked, “I heard [Springsteen] was supposed to play this very venue, but apparently they didn’t have 167 open nights in a row.”³⁶⁸ The excitement continued all the way up to the final show of the tour in early October at New York’s Shea Stadium, where Bob Dylan made a guest appearance. Reporter David Swanson said that the final “three-night stand was a familiar mix of incendiary politics, special guests . . . and seemingly endless music.”³⁶⁹ He added that although “the atmosphere was loose and celebratory,” not everyone was pleased.³⁷⁰ The New York City Police Department cancelled his escort for one of the shows because he played “American Skin (41 Shots).”³⁷¹ In October, the magazine reported that the 2003 tour was going to become the second-highest grossing tour in history, behind the Rolling Stones’ 1994 Voodoo Lounge Tour, despite its comparatively low ticket prices.³⁷²

Springsteen capped off 2003 with more accolades. Nearly all of his albums appeared on the magazine’s list of the 500 greatest albums of all time. *Born to Run*, *Born*

³⁶⁴ Shirley Halperin, “Springsteen’s Homecoming,” *Rolling Stone*, August 21, 2003, 15.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁷ David Fricke, “Live: Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band,” *Rolling Stone*, August 21, 2003, 84.

³⁶⁸ Shirley Halperin, “Springsteen’s Homecoming,” *Rolling Stone*, August 21, 2003, 16.

³⁶⁹ David Swanson, “Springsteen’s Big Finish,” *Rolling Stone*, November 13, 2003, 26.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*

³⁷² Austin Scaggs, “Springsteen Grand Slam,” *Rolling Stone*, October 16, 2003, 32.

in the U.S.A., The Wild, the Innocent and the E Street Shuffle, Darkness on the Edge of Town, Nebraska, The River, Greetings From Asbury Park, N.J. and Tunnel of Love appeared at numbers eighteen, eighty-five, 132, 151, 224, 250, 370 and 475, respectively. In December, the magazine once again named him one of the “People of the Year.”³⁷³ The accompanying article unknowingly hinted at events to come in the latter half of 2004, noting that during the final show of the tour he told the audience to “shout a little louder if you want the president impeached.”³⁷⁴ The articles then raised the question, “Hey, Bruce, what are you doing next year?”³⁷⁵

Before Springsteen answered that question, he had to accumulate some more honors. In February 2004, *Rolling Stone* reported that the 2003 tour, which earned \$115.9 million, was the highest-grossing tour of the year.³⁷⁶ It also noted that the E Street Band managed to achieve this feat with forty-seven shows and tickets ranging from \$55 to \$75, while second-place earner Celine Dion earned \$80.5 million from 145 shows priced between \$87.50 and \$225 per ticket.³⁷⁷ Springsteen also showed up again on the magazine’s “Rich List” for a second year, though he moved up to second place, earning \$81.7 million.³⁷⁸ It reported that he had “the best in the business,” receiving a guarantee of seventy percent of the potential gross from every show.³⁷⁹ He also earned a lot of money from merchandising, and “profit margins are good when you go on tour without all the usual explosions, giant helium-filled props and revolving stages—just the band

³⁷³ “People of the Year: Bruce Springsteen,” *Rolling Stone*, December 25, 2003, 94.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁶ Warren Cohen, “2003 Comes Alive,” *Rolling Stone*, February 5, 2004, 10.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁸ Robert LaFranco, “The 2004 Rock Rich List,” *Rolling Stone*, March 18, 2004, 48.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

and a black curtain.”³⁸⁰ In April, he was also named one of the fifty greatest artists of all time.³⁸¹ Each of the “Immortals,” as the magazine called them, had a piece written about them by another famous musician. Jackson Browne wrote, “In many ways, Bruce Springsteen is the embodiment of rock & roll. Combining strains of Appalachian music, rockabilly, blues and R&B, his work epitomizes rock’s deepest values: desire, the need for freedom and the search to find yourself.”³⁸² He added, “He’s a family man, with kids and the same values and concerns as working-class Americans.”³⁸³ In June, the 1975 Bottom Line shows were named one of the fifty moments that changed rock music history.³⁸⁴

The magazine also gave some attention to Scialfa and Van Zandt. Scialfa, then fifty years old, was the subject of a two-page feature in July in which she was described as “the epitome of a sexy rock chick.”³⁸⁵ While describing the Springsteens’ home in Rumson, New Jersey, reporter Jancee Dunn noted that “if you live in Rumson or its environs, you are not issued your driver’s license unless you can do the ‘Jersey boast,’ a story of your personal encounter with Bruce and Patti that concludes with the proud declaration that they are Just Like Us.”³⁸⁶ Her new solo album, *23 Street Lullaby*, was given four stars and was later named one of the records of the year.³⁸⁷ The magazine also included a “Random Note” about one of her solo shows to support the album in

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

³⁸¹ Jackson Browne, “Bruce Springsteen,” *Rolling Stone*, April 15, 2004, 102.

³⁸² Ibid.

³⁸³ Ibid.

³⁸⁴ “Springsteen Unleashed,” *Rolling Stone*, June 24, 2004, 132.

³⁸⁵ Jancee Dunn, “Redheaded Stranger,” *Rolling Stone*, July 8, 2004, 59.

³⁸⁶ Ibid., 60.

³⁸⁷ See Anthony DeCurtis, “Big Red,” *Rolling Stone*, July 8, 2004, 124; and “The Fifty Records of the Year,” *Rolling Stone*, December 20, 2004, 151.

October.³⁸⁸ In March, the magazine ran a two-page interview with Van Zandt, whose syndicated radio show was broadcast on 130 stations nationwide and was also coming to Sirius Satellite Radio.³⁸⁹ It also printed a piece about his International Underground Garage Festival, which was held in August and included Springsteen as a celebrity master of ceremonies.³⁹⁰ Van Zandt told Fricke that the band was now “back into that cycle of albums and tours” and that he loved it even though he was having success as an actor and radio personality.³⁹¹

The E Street Band returned to the road in October as part of the Vote for Change Tour, a series of shows held in swing states aimed at getting voters to elect John Kerry instead of George W. Bush in the 2004 presidential election.³⁹² The tour, which had no ties to the Kerry campaign, was presented by the progressive-activist group MoveOn.org and included other acts like Pearl Jam, John Mellencamp, John Fogerty, R.E.M., the Dave Matthews Band, Jackson Browne, Bonnie Raitt, James Taylor and the Dixie Chicks.³⁹³ According to Landau, the performers, managers, agents and lawyers were “doing this one hundred percent pro bono.”³⁹⁴ Springsteen had already been planning to embark on a fall solo tour of battleground states before the idea for Vote for Change was hatched.³⁹⁵ He told *Rolling Stone*, “This is one of the most critical elections of my lifetime, certainly since I was a young man. It’s a matter of the preservation and

³⁸⁸ Austin Scaggs and Rob Sheffield, “Who’s the Boss?” *Rolling Stone*, October 28, 2004, 40.

³⁸⁹ David Fricke, “The Garage Crusade,” *Rolling Stone*, March 18, 2004, 40.

³⁹⁰ David Fricke, “Freak Out!” *Rolling Stone*, September 16, 2004, 91.

³⁹¹ David Fricke, “The Garage Crusade,” *Rolling Stone*, March 18, 2004, 41.

³⁹² David Fricke, “Taking It to the Streets,” *Rolling Stone*, September 2, 2004, 37.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, 38.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 48.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 38.

protection of democracy, of having an open and transparent leadership and sustaining the trust of your citizenry.”³⁹⁶

Though he had often been vocal about social issues, this marked the first time that Springsteen publicly endorsed a political candidate.³⁹⁷ In an op-ed piece he wrote for the *New York Times* in August, he said, “Personally, for the last twenty-five years I have always stayed one step away from partisan politics. Instead, I have been partisan about a set of ideals: economic justice, civil rights, a humane foreign policy, freedom and a decent life for all of our citizens.”³⁹⁸ The magazine ran a six-page feature about the tour and also reprinted the entire *New York Times* op-ed piece.³⁹⁹ Political leanings had an effect on *Rolling Stone*’s editorial decisions, as Wenner had organized a pair of Kerry benefit concerts that summer that raised more than \$12 million and featured the Dave Matthews Band, Barbara Streisand and John Mellencamp.⁴⁰⁰

Rolling Stone continued to publicize the Vote for Change Tour, and Springsteen particularly, throughout the fall. In September it published a story about the planned all-star finale in Miami.⁴⁰¹ He appeared on the cover of the magazine’s October 14 issue along with some of the other Vote for Change artists with the line “Rockin’ Rebels.”⁴⁰² The issue included a five-page piece with brief statements from musicians about why they thought the election was important.⁴⁰³ Springsteen, on the other hand, got three

³⁹⁶ Ibid., 37.

³⁹⁷ Ibid., 38.

³⁹⁸ Bruce Springsteen, “Chords for Change,” *New York Times*, August 5, 2004, 23.

³⁹⁹ See David Fricke, “Taking It to the Streets,” *Rolling Stone*, September 2, 2004, 37; and Bruce Springsteen, “What We Stand For,” *Rolling Stone*, September 2, 2004, 38.

⁴⁰⁰ David Fricke, “Taking It to the Streets,” *Rolling Stone*, September 2, 2004, 38.

⁴⁰¹ Jenny Eliscu, “Showdown in Miami,” *Rolling Stone*, September 16, 2004, 23.

⁴⁰² Cover, *Rolling Stone*, October 14, 2004.

⁴⁰³ “Voices for Change,” *Rolling Stone*, October 14, 2004, 64.

pages to voice his opinions as part of an interview with Wenner.⁴⁰⁴ In it Wenner said, “Because you scrupulously avoided commercial use of your music, you built a reputation for integrity and conscience. You must be aware of the potency of that.”⁴⁰⁵ The magazine covered the tour to its end, with a three page piece about the finale in Washington, D.C.⁴⁰⁶ The tour raised \$15 million in a matter of fifteen days, according to *Rolling Stone*.⁴⁰⁷

For many fans, the shows were about the music and not the political message. MoveOn executive director Eli Pariser said, “Frankly, if it had no political element, the tour would have done well.”⁴⁰⁸ The *New York Times* reported that “fans in the parking lot of Continental Airlines Arena before the show . . . hardly seemed to mind their hero’s sudden conversion into a Democratic Party activist.”⁴⁰⁹ One fan said, “When Bruce plays ‘Badlands,’ they’re not going to decide to vote for Kerry rather than Bush. They just want to hear ‘Badlands.’”⁴¹⁰

The year ended and the next one began, as prior years had, with accolades. In December, “Born to Run” and “Thunder Road” were named numbers twenty-one and eighty-six, respectively, on the magazine’s “500 Greatest Songs of All Time” list, which were chosen by musicians, record industry executives, writers and *Rolling Stone* editors.⁴¹¹ For the third consecutive year, he was named one of the magazine’s “People

⁴⁰⁴ Jann S. Wenner, “‘We’ve Been Mised,’” *Rolling Stone*, October 14, 2004, 73.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁶ David Fricke, “Showdown in D.C.” *Rolling Stone*, November 11, 2004, 19.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁸ Jenny Eliscu, “Showdown in Miami,” *Rolling Stone*, September 16, 2004, 23-24.

⁴⁰⁹ Damien Cave, “For Fans at Springsteen Concert, the Music Seems to Matter More Than the Message,” *New York Times*, October 14, 2004, 6.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹¹ “500 Greatest Songs of All Time,” *Rolling Stone*, December 9, 2004, 86 & 112.

of the Year” and published a speech he gave at a Kerry rally in Cleveland in November.⁴¹² In January 2005, the magazine’s readers voted him third in the Best Male Performer category, and the Vote for Change Tour was chosen as Best Tour.⁴¹³ The *Blood Brothers* documentary, filmed during the E Street Band’s 1995 *Greatest Hits* sessions, was included in a list of the best music DVDs ever.⁴¹⁴

In March 2005, the focus shifted back to new projects, with *Rolling Stone* announcing that in April Springsteen would release a “raw, rootsy” album, *Devils & Dust*, that was “neither an E Street Band album nor an acoustic album,” according to reporter Brian Hiatt.⁴¹⁵ He added that the title track was “an overview song, in the tradition of ‘Badlands’ and ‘Born in the U.S.A.’ and that the accompanying tour would possibly include some E Street Band members.”⁴¹⁶ Two weeks later the details about the tour changed, with it being reported that he would “ditch the E Street Band for the first time since 1999” to play either solo or with a small band.⁴¹⁷

In April, Hiatt reported that *Devils & Dust* would be one of the first albums available only on the new CD/DVD hybrid format known as DualDisc, and he also declared that it was one of “five DualDiscs you need.”⁴¹⁸ Later that month, he reported that the tour would be a solo one, despite the fact that Springsteen had attempted rehearsing with a small band that included Lofgren.⁴¹⁹ Springsteen told him, “It’s the

⁴¹² “People of the Year: Bruce Springsteen,” *Rolling Stone*, December 30, 2004, 70.

⁴¹³ “2004 Readers’ & Critics’ Poll,” *Rolling Stone*, January 27, 2005, 55.

⁴¹⁴ “Coolest DVDs Ever,” *Rolling Stone*, February 24, 2005, 24.

⁴¹⁵ Brian Hiatt, “New Bruce Album Set for Spring,” *Rolling Stone*, March 10, 2005, 39.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁷ Steve Knopper, “Cool Tours, Hot Summer,” *Rolling Stone*, March 24, 2005, 14.

⁴¹⁸ Brian Hiatt, “DualDisc Takes Off,” *Rolling Stone*, April 7, 2005, 20.

⁴¹⁹ Brian Hiatt, “Springsteen Goes Back to Basics,” *Rolling Stone*, April 21, 2005, 17-18.

opposite of playing with the E Street Band.”⁴²⁰ He added, “It’s not about acoustic versions of my hits—that’s what’s not going to happen. I want to forewarn potential ticket buyers: I’m not going to be playing an acoustic version of ‘Thunder Road.’”⁴²¹ However, he did mention that he had written some material for another E Street Band album and that “we’ll be doing that sooner rather than later.”⁴²²

The album and tour shared some similarities with *The Ghost of Tom Joad*. Both albums featured solo acoustic tunes, many of which were set in the Southwest. Indeed, many of the songs had been written following the *Joad* tour but were put aside until he wrote the title track after the beginning of the Iraq War in 2003.⁴²³ Besides the solo acoustic format, the two tours shared another similarity: ticket scalping. Just as it had in 1996, *Rolling Stone* reported that scalping was making it difficult for fans to obtain tickets to his shows.⁴²⁴ However, the problem had become even worse with online ticket brokers using new technologies. Looking out for the fans once again, Springsteen began taking new steps to combat the problem. The magazine reported that he mandated that buyers of the best seats to his shows had to claim their tickets in person with identification on the day of the show.⁴²⁵ However, it later noted that some scalpers had circumvented the process by accompanying their customers to the will call window.⁴²⁶

Reviewing the first show of the tour, *Rolling Stone* declared, “No one rocks stadiums quite like Bruce Springsteen, but on his new tour, he’s showing his softer side,

⁴²⁰ Ibid., 17.

⁴²¹ Ibid., 18.

⁴²² Ibid.

⁴²³ Ibid., 17-18.

⁴²⁴ Steve Knopper, “Why You Can’t Get Tickets,” *Rolling Stone*, May 5, 2005, 13.

⁴²⁵ Ibid., 14.

⁴²⁶ Steve Knopper, “Can Scalpers be Stopped?” *Rolling Stone*, June 16, 2005, 20.

and the results are just as enthralling.”⁴²⁷ Despite the fact that the “performance centered around the kind of personal, narrative-based material that tends to signal ‘bathroom break’ at most Enormodome shows,” the three fans whose comments were featured in the magazine had nothing but praise to offer. One said, “I saw four *Joad* shows—this blew them out of the water.”⁴²⁸

Devils & Dust was not only outdoing *Joad* in terms of concert reviews. It debuted at number one in ten countries, including the United States, and Fricke gave it four-and-a-half stars, declaring it “Springsteen’s most audacious record since the home-demo American Gothic of 1982’s *Nebraska*.”⁴²⁹ Landau told the magazine, “Thirty-plus years into his career, Bruce is writing new songs, some of which are the best ever, and the audience is involved with his present work and not just the past. That is a unique situation.”⁴³⁰

Springsteen’s life and *Rolling Stone*’s coverage of him intersected with that of U2 several times in 2005. In March he inducted them into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame. *Rolling Stone* gave him more coverage than some of the inductees, including a half-page photograph of him with lead singer Bono and reprinting his entire speech.⁴³¹ The November 3 issue included an interview with Bono in which Wenner asked him about his

⁴²⁷ “Unplugged,” *Rolling Stone*, May 19, 2005, 7.

⁴²⁸ Brian Hiatt, “Review: Bruce Springsteen,” *Rolling Stone*, May 19, 2005, 86.

⁴²⁹ *Billboard*, “Artist Chart History,” *Bruce Springsteen*, http://www.billboard.com/bbcom/retrieve_chart_history.do?model.chartFormatGroupName=Albums&model.vnuArtistId=5738&model.vnuAlbumId=943342 [accessed June 23, 2007]; Brian Hiatt, “Acoustic Bruce Electrifies Fans,” *Rolling Stone*, June 2, 2005, 17; and David Fricke, “Bruce Springsteen: *Devils & Dust*,” *Rolling Stone*, May 5, 2005, 69.

⁴³⁰ Brian Hiatt, “Acoustic Bruce Electrifies Fans,” *Rolling Stone*, June 2, 2005, 17.

⁴³¹ See Austin Scaggs, “Rock’s Biggest Night,” *Rolling Stone*, April 7, 2005, 15; and Bruce Springsteen, “Springsteen Celebrates U2,” *Rolling Stone*, April 7, 2005, 16.

friendship with Springsteen.⁴³² Bono told him, “Bruce taught us so much—how to play arenas, and not rip people off, how to communicate to the back of the stalls, how to be emotional, how to be operatic and not overblown, how to have dignity.”⁴³³ He added, “If Dylan is Faulkner, then Springsteen is Steinbeck.”⁴³⁴ Two weeks later, “Random Notes” included a photograph of him and Scialfa during a guest appearance at U2’s concert in Philadelphia a month earlier.⁴³⁵

The E Street Band was still clearly on peoples’ minds. In June, Hiatt had asked Landau about possible plans for celebrating the thirtieth anniversary of *Born to Run* that fall. At the time, Landau only said, “We’re aware of that anniversary.”⁴³⁶ By October the magazine was reporting that a special edition of the album including DVDs of a 1975 concert and a new documentary would be released in mid-November.⁴³⁷ The magazine later ran a two-page feature about the release, which debuted at number 18 on the *Billboard* charts.⁴³⁸ Landau said, “It felt like a masterpiece then. Thirty years later, I’m sure of it.”⁴³⁹ DeCurtis gave the anniversary edition five stars.⁴⁴⁰ In mentioning Landau, both articles pointed out that he was not only the album’s co-producer and Springsteen’s

⁴³² Jann S. Wenner, “Bono: The *Rolling Stone* Interview,” *Rolling Stone*, November 3, 2005, 64.

⁴³³ Ibid.

⁴³⁴ Ibid.

⁴³⁵ Lauren Gitlin, Andy Greene and Gillian Telling, “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, November 17, 2005, 44.

⁴³⁶ Brian Hiatt, “Acoustic Bruce Electrifies Fans,” *Rolling Stone*, June 2, 2005, 17.

⁴³⁷ “Rock Fall Preview,” *Rolling Stone*, October 20, 2005, 24.

⁴³⁸ See Brian Hiatt, “‘Born to Run’ Turns Thirty,” *Rolling Stone*, November 17, 2005, 17-18; and *Billboard*, “Artist Chart History,” *Bruce Springsteen*,

http://www.billboard.com/bbcom/retrieve_chart_history.do?model.chartFormatGroupName=Albums&model.vnuArtistId=5738&model.vnuAlbumId=943342 [accessed June 23, 2007].

⁴³⁹ Brian Hiatt, “‘Born to Run’ Turns Thirty,” *Rolling Stone*, November 17, 2005, 17.

⁴⁴⁰ Anthony DeCurtis, “Ragged Glory,” *Rolling Stone*, December 1, 2005, 130.

manager, but also a former editor for the magazine.⁴⁴¹ In December, *Rolling Stone* named *Devils & Dust* the fifth-best record of the year.⁴⁴² It said that “nearly every one of Springsteen’s protagonists is caught in the tug of war between hope and despair” and that “there’s no E Street Band to redeem these people with rock & roll catharsis.”⁴⁴³

Indeed, the E Street Band’s “rock & roll catharsis” was not anywhere on the horizon, as 2006 turned out to be a year of folk music for Springsteen. The first hint of this came in February when the magazine included a “Random Note” about him playing a Woody Guthrie song at a live tribute to the *Nebraska* album.⁴⁴⁴ A month later it reported that he was completing his first-ever album of cover songs, dedicated entirely to songs penned or popularized by folk music legend Pete Seeger.⁴⁴⁵ Later that month it revealed that he would tour that spring with “an ensemble even larger than the E Street Band.”⁴⁴⁶ Landau said that the album, *We Shall Overcome: The Seeger Sessions*, had a “light, swinging, incredibly joyful sound to it.”⁴⁴⁷

Rolling Stone dedicated a two-page feature to the album, which debuted at number three on the *Billboard* charts, upon its release.⁴⁴⁸ Reporter Neil Strauss revisited the theme of Springsteen’s humanity, writing:

⁴⁴¹ See Brian Hiatt, “‘Born to Run’ Turns Thirty,” *Rolling Stone*, November 17, 2005, 17; and Anthony DeCurtis, “Ragged Glory,” *Rolling Stone*, December 1, 2005, 130.

⁴⁴² “The Top 50 Records of 2005,” *Rolling Stone*, December 29, 2005, 107.

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁴ Lauren Gitlin, Andy Greene and Evan Serpick, “Random Notes,” *Rolling Stone*, February 9, 2006, 30.

⁴⁴⁵ Austin Scaggs, “Bruce, Bob Prep New CDs,” *Rolling Stone*, March 9, 2006, 35.

⁴⁴⁶ Brian Hiatt, “Bruce Springsteen: Folk-Rock Surprise,” *Rolling Stone*, March 23, 2006, 26.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁸ See *Billboard*, “Artist Chart History,” *Bruce Springsteen*, http://www.billboard.com/bbcom/retrieve_chart_history.do?model.chartFormatGroupName=Albums&model.vnuArtistId=5738&model.vnuAlbumId=943342 [accessed June 23, 2007]; and Neil Strauss, “Springsteen Hears Voices,” *Rolling Stone*, May 4, 2006, 52-53.

People often use words like ‘real’ and ‘grounded’ when they describe Springsteen, but to get more specific, what’s most unusual about him is that he doesn’t have a fiber of pretension in his being—especially rare for a guy who’s been called the Boss for most of his adult life. Beyond that, he’s the only rock-star dad I’ve ever interviewed who not only seems happy to chauffeur his children around but can actually remember and quote papers they’ve written for school.⁴⁴⁹

He added, “At fifty-six, Springsteen has earned his Neil Young pass, entitling him to basically record whatever he wants because, be it good or bad, commercial or noncommercial, it’s done with integrity.”⁴⁵⁰ Springsteen told him, “Right now, I just feel like I’m at the top of my game. And I’ve never felt freer or like I’ve had more music in me.”⁴⁵¹ Reviewer Jonathan Ringen gave the album four stars, declaring it “his most jubilant disc since *Born in the U.S.A.* and more fun than a tribute to Pete Seeger has any right to be.”⁴⁵² He added:

Springsteen has always mined a deep vein of Americana, from the hot-rod-and-B-movie-obsessed early albums to the Steinbeckian social realism of *The Ghost of Tom Joad* and last year’s *Devils and Dust*. But with his first-ever album of songs written by other people, it feels like he’s turned to the music of our shared past to find a moral compass for a nation that’s gone off the rails.⁴⁵³

In April, the magazine reported that the group would perform at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, being held for the first time since Hurricane Katrina.⁴⁵⁴ Landau said, “We sensed what a powerful event this is gonna be. And this album is more connected to New Orleans than anything Bruce has ever done.”⁴⁵⁵ Festival organizer Quint Davis said, “What happened to New Orleans is an American tragedy. And Bruce

⁴⁴⁹ Neil Strauss, “Springsteen Hears Voices,” *Rolling Stone*, May 4, 2006, 53.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

⁴⁵² Jonathan Ringen, “Regular Folk,” *Rolling Stone*, May 4, 2006, 57.

⁴⁵³ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁴ Steve Knopper, “Springsteen Rocks Jazz Fest,” *Rolling Stone*, April 6, 2006, 20.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid.

is the quintessential American musician.”⁴⁵⁶ The performance received glowing reviews. Dave Malone, whose band also performed at the festival, told *Rolling Stone* reporter Keith Spera, “I was sitting there crying like a third-grader. It was one of the best things I’ve seen in my life.”⁴⁵⁷ Fricke recommended that readers download bootlegs of the show.⁴⁵⁸

Like other years, 2006 was not without its accolades for past contributions. His 1981 and 1990 *Rolling Stone* cover appearances were chosen as two of the magazine’s “100 Greatest Covers.”⁴⁵⁹ Speaking about the latter appearance, when he was declared “Voice of the Decade,” he said:

It could have been Michael Jackson or Prince or Madonna. But using me, well, I suppose that’s what I was aiming at. I was very aware that the people I was referencing were people who were not afraid to take on some history as part of their song and dance. I worked through [the Eighties] to find my link in the chain of artists who were willing to do that—whether it was Woody Guthrie or Bob Dylan or Elvis or James Brown, Curtis Mayfield, Marvin Gaye. That was the kind of impact I was interested in having.⁴⁶⁰

In the magazine’s October “Hot Issue,” he was named as a “Hot Influence.”⁴⁶¹ Hiatt wrote:

These days, E Street is the coolest, most crowded thoroughfare in rock: Hipster acts from the Killers to Ben Kweller are snapping up glockenspiels and words that rhyme with ‘highway’ as they rush to give themselves Bruce-inspired makeover. . . . Why is Bossiness so hip? With constant touring, TV specials and multiple album releases, Springsteen has been as visible as ever recently.⁴⁶²

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁷ Keith Spera, “Jazz Fest Swings Again,” *Rolling Stone*, June 15, 2006, 27.

⁴⁵⁸ David Fricke, “Download Now,” *Rolling Stone*, June 15, 2006, 96.

⁴⁵⁹ See Alan Light, “Soul on Ice,” *Rolling Stone*, May 18, 2006, 136; and Alan Light, “Voice of America,” *Rolling Stone*, May 18, 2006, 160.

⁴⁶⁰ Alan Light, “Voice of America,” *Rolling Stone*, May 18, 2006, 160.

⁴⁶¹ Brian Hiatt, “Hot Influence: Bruce Springsteen,” *Rolling Stone*, October 19, 2006, 76.

⁴⁶² Ibid.

He rounded out the year with more praise for his current work. *The Seeger Sessions* was named the twenty-ninth best album of the year.⁴⁶³ Also, his version of the Depression-era tune “How Can a Poor Man Stand Such Times and Live,” with newly updated lyrics to honor New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, was named the twenty-fourth best song of the year.⁴⁶⁴

His popularity with *Rolling Stone* readers continued into 2007, as he was named number three in the Best Male Performer category and *The Seeger Sessions* voted number ten in the Best Album category.⁴⁶⁵ The magazine has sustained its praise of his work, naming “Born to Run” number 22 on its list of “40 Songs That Changed the World” in May.⁴⁶⁶

In May, the magazine reported that he would release an album and DVD recorded during the *Seeger Sessions* tour’s November 2006 stop in Dublin.⁴⁶⁷ The album debuted at number 23 on the *Billboard* charts.⁴⁶⁸ In June, *Rolling Stone* reported that he had been working on a new E Street Band album, slated for a September release with a world tour to follow.⁴⁶⁹ Reporter Andy Greene hypothesized that with Clemons turning sixty-five, the tour could be the final one with the entire band.⁴⁷⁰

⁴⁶³ “The Top 50,” *Rolling Stone*, December 28, 2006, 106.

⁴⁶⁴ “The 100 Best Songs of the Year,” *Rolling Stone*, December 28, 2006, 105.

⁴⁶⁵ “2006 Readers’ & Critics’ Poll,” *Rolling Stone*, January 25, 2007, 16.

⁴⁶⁶ Douglas Wolk, “40 Songs That Changed the World,” *Rolling Stone*, May 3, 2007, 82.

⁴⁶⁷ David Kushner, “In the News,” *Rolling Stone*, May 3, 2007, 24.

⁴⁶⁸ See *Billboard*, “Artist Chart History,” *Bruce Springsteen*, http://www.billboard.com/bbcom/retrieve_chart_history.do?model.chartFormatGroupName=Albums&model.vnuArtistId=5738&model.vnuAlbumId=943342 [accessed June 23, 2007].

⁴⁶⁹ Andy Greene, “Bruce Brings the Rock for New Album,” *Rolling Stone*, June 1, 2007.

<http://www.rollingstone.com/rockdaily/index.php/2007/06/01/bruce-brings-the-rock-for-new-album> [accessed June 30, 2007].

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

The new millennium saw Springsteen revisiting his past and returning to superstardom. While he revived old friendships, *Rolling Stone* continued its celebratory relationship with him. In the magazine's pages, he continued to come to the defense of ordinary people, speaking on behalf of workers, reviving the spirits of grieving nation in the wake of the September 11 attacks, mounting a tour to oust a controversial president, protecting his fans from ticket scalpers and honoring the victims of Hurricane Katrina. When he was not preoccupied with saving the world, he found time to make chart-topping albums and launch record-breaking world tours that won him the continued admiration of the magazine.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Several major themes emerged in *Rolling Stone*'s coverage of Springsteen from 1973 to 2007. One of the first to appear was a focus on his live performances. His concerts were given a nearly monumental status, and his reputation as a live performer was regarded as unparalleled. This trend began with the small club shows that helped him garner much attention in the early days of his career and continued with the sell-out stadium shows of recent years. Even after his dismissal of the E Street Band and his subsequent tour in the early 1990s with what some fans pejoratively referred to as the "Other Band," the magazine continued to extol the merits of his live concerts.

As his success grew in the latter half of the 1970s, another theme began to appear. He was portrayed as a man who never lost his connection to his fans and his working-class roots despite his massive success. He was simultaneously part of the pantheon of rock gods and a regular mortal who lived a life not unlike that of his adoring fans. This description has continued ever since and become part of his legend. While fans and other publications criticized his move to Los Angeles in the early 1990s as an abandonment of his roots and began to call him irrelevant, *Rolling Stone* continued to wave his flag. This behavior remained unchanged as Springsteen began to distance himself from his public persona with music about his personal life. While this theme first appeared in the 1970s, it was given greater play in the 1980s as he became more outspoken about issues like the treatment of workers and Vietnam veterans. No longer was he just in touch with his roots; he became the voice of the downtrodden and marginalized. This reputation

continued in the 1990s with recordings like *The Ghost of Tom Joad* and in the 2000s with *The Rising*.

In the 1990s, he became more openly involved in liberal political causes, such as AIDS, homelessness, police brutality and affirmative action. In 2004, he openly endorsed a political candidate for the first time as he launched the Vote for Change Tour to oust President George W. Bush and elect John Kerry. Some claimed that this shift was an indication that Springsteen's success and his residency in California during most of the 1990s had caused him to lose touch with his roots. *Rolling Stone*, however, remained supportive of his causes. Indeed, Springsteen shared some political leanings with Wenner, who was a Kerry supporter and had co-founded the Robin Hood Foundation in 1988 to help impoverished New Yorkers.⁴⁷¹

Another theme was the idea that he could do no wrong. *Rolling Stone's* coverage did not reflect the negativity about his music and personal life that appeared in other places. While stories about his affair with Scialfa made headlines elsewhere, the magazine avoided it. It also largely evaded coverage of the lawsuit brought against him by two former roadies in 1989. While he received a lot of negative publicity regarding the case in other publications, in the pages of *Rolling Stone*, his side was given more merit. It defended the quality of his music and his relevance when others were critical in the early 1990s.

Rolling Stone's coverage of Springsteen often reflected events in his career and personal life. Periods of heavy touring were accompanied by corresponding coverage,

⁴⁷¹ Stephen Taub, Nanette Byrnes and David Carey, "The Wall Street 100," *Financial World*, July 6, 1993, 41.

while it frequently diminished during his stints in the recording studio. However, the lack of coverage during those times was due in part to the lack of information given out by Landau. In 1992 he said:

I have learned from a history of working with Bruce that when you're in the studio, things change. And the reporting of information that's outdated as soon as it's printed just confuses people. So the approach we've taken over the years, for better or worse, is that we really have nothing to say until we're done, then we try to be as informative as we can be. Although that can make a certain amount of sense to us, the down side can be for a long period of time to go by without us saying anything.⁴⁷²

The magazine's portrayal of Springsteen involved a careful blending of the ordinary and the extraordinary. On the one hand, he was shown as an average man who had much in common with his working-class fans. The magazine continually emphasized that fame had failed to sever his connection to the values of such people. He was co-opted as the spokesman for average Americans as well as the downtrodden and marginalized. At the same time, he was portrayed as a larger-than-life performer who could command stadium-sized audiences for marathon-length concerts.

The magazine also elevated his successes to mythic status while downplaying or avoiding the less pleasant moments of his life. *Rolling Stone* failed to take part in the tabloid coverage of stories like his first marriage and subsequent divorce as well as his legal battles. Rather than dwelling on controversial topics, the magazine emphasized the quality of his live performances and albums.

⁴⁷² Thom Duffy, "Landau's Creative Touch with Springsteen," *Billboard*, June 13, 1992, 16.

These findings echo Kitch's findings that the "prototypical working-class white hero remains a prominent symbol in news and entertainment media today."⁴⁷³ In studying American magazines, she found that stories often shared a similar main character: "the common man who is ordinary, just like any of us, and yet has heroic potential."⁴⁷⁴ The same can be said for *Rolling Stone's* treatment of Springsteen. By portraying him as an ordinary man with values that paralleled those of regular Americans, the magazine united the readers with him. The coverage also supports Hume's claim that the press takes heroes and "relates their stories, legitimizing them and amplifying their attributes."⁴⁷⁵ *Rolling Stone* magnified Springsteen's reputation as a live performer and as the authentic voice of America.

Springsteen was often portrayed positively, with favorable album and concert reviews. This favorable attention was further reinforced by themes of his persistent connection to his fans and working-class roots despite his success. While coverage was supportive from the beginning, it was comparatively moderate during the early days of the E Street Band. Draper suggested this was the result of a widening gap between the magazine and youth culture in the 1970s.⁴⁷⁶

They lauded their old titans, or kicked them, and regarded the field with wrinkled noses. New York's scabrous underground—the Velvet Underground, the New York Dolls—warranted only the barest acknowledgement. . . . Bands like the Allman Brothers and Led Zeppelin

⁴⁷³ Kitch, *Pages from the Past*, 177.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁴⁷⁵ Janice Hume, "Press, Published History, and Regional Lore Shaping the Public Memory of a Revolutionary War Heroine," *Journalism History* 30, no. 4 (2005): 201.

⁴⁷⁶ Draper, *Rolling Stone Magazine: The Uncensored History*, 269.

inspired scores of imitators but relatively scant coverage. *Crawdaddy!*, not *Rolling Stone*, broke Springsteen.⁴⁷⁷

However, as his fame skyrocketed, *Rolling Stone*'s coverage of him followed suit, with the magazine eventually being accused by some of barely falling short of acting as his propaganda arm. However, this heavy saturation did not bother Springsteen. In 1987 he told Gilmore:

What is "overexposed"? It really has no meaning, you know? It's kind of a newspaper thing. I just ignore it, to be honest with you. I make the best records I can make. I try to work on them and put them out when it feels right and they feel like they're ready. That's what it is—not whether I'm overexposed or underexposed or not exposed. It's like "Hey, put the record on. Is it good? Do you like it? Is it rockin' ya? Is it speaking to you? Am I talking to you?" And the rest is what society does to sell newspapers or magazines.⁴⁷⁸

According to Lester Bangs, dishing out praise was part of the very fabric of *Rolling Stone*. In 1999 he said that

Wenner threw me out for being, quote, "Disrespectful to musicians," end quote. I wrote a review of Canned Heat, an album called *New Age*, that said, "Why do we love Canned Heat? Let us count the ways. We love them because they did the longest boogie ever put on record. We love them because..." I mean it was making fun of them. I guess you're not supposed to do that. Well, obviously not in that magazine.⁴⁷⁹

He added, "And I never did get along with Jann, because he really likes the suck-up type of writing."⁴⁸⁰ Bangs also attacked Landau's credibility. He said, "Landau was saying things at the time like every Glenn Campbell album, every

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., 269-270.

⁴⁷⁸ Mikal Gilmore, "Bruce Springsteen," *Rolling Stone*, November 5-December 10, 1987, 26.

⁴⁷⁹ Jim DeRogatis, "A Final Chat with Lester Bangs," *Perfect Sound Forever*, November 1999. <http://www.furious.com/Perfect/lesterbangs.html> [accessed July 9, 2007].

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid.

Jerry Vale album, every Helen Reddy album, every Ann Murray album was a distinct piece of art which should not be looked at as a piece of product.”⁴⁸¹

Bangs’ claims about Wenner seem to have some merit. Wenner, who is co-founder, vice-chairman and inductee in the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, has been known to play favorites, both in his magazine and in the list of artists inducted into the Hall of Fame.⁴⁸² In 2007, Peter Tork, former member of the Monkees, accused him of single-handedly blocking the group’s induction into the Hall of Fame because the group did not play all of their own instruments on their first two albums.⁴⁸³ Tork claimed that a *Rolling Stone* reporter once told him, “You were going to get a glowing column but Jann Wenner took my column, shredded it and said, ‘We’re not going to say anything nice about him.’”⁴⁸⁴ Neil Peart, drummer for the progressive rock band Rush, wrote in his book *Traveling Music* that one of the magazine’s writers told him that his group had been requested more than any other band to be the subject of a cover story, but was not chosen because editors thought Rush was “uncool.”⁴⁸⁵ After the magazine published its “100 Best Albums of the Last Twenty Years” in August 1987, *Miami Herald* writer Tom Moon criticized it as the “100 Pop and Rock Albums Released by Major Labels for Mass Consumption.”⁴⁸⁶ He wrote:

On the list, the blues took a back seat to the profoundness of Brooce [*sic*] (four [albums] for Springsteen, at least two of them

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.

⁴⁸² Lola Ogunnaike, “Arts Briefing: Highlights Fame: Wenner to be Honored,” *New York Times*, January 12, 2004, 2.

⁴⁸³ Richard Johnson, “Monkee Lashes Out at Wenner,” *New York Post*, June 10, 2007, 6.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁵ Neil Peart, *Traveling Music: The Soundtrack to My Life and Times* (Toronto: ECW Press, 2004), 260.

⁴⁸⁶ Tom Moon, “*Rolling Stone* Left Much Unturned in Top 100 List,” *Miami Herald*, August 23, 1987, 2K.

for sentimental rather than musical reasons) and classic albums from Parliament/Funkadelic, the Kinks and Peter Gabriel were not considered as important as greatest hits compilations from Sly Stone (who, wonder of wonders, gets his due, as both *Stand!* and *There's A Riot Goin' On* are listed), the Who and Otis Redding.⁴⁸⁷

Wenner's influence on editorial decisions supports Hume's contention that internal policy can affect what is included and consequently remembered.⁴⁸⁸

In 2000, Paul Nelson, former *Rolling Stone* record reviews editor, claimed that rock music criticism had lost its critical element.⁴⁸⁹ He said, "I don't read *Rolling Stone* anymore. . . . Everything is all *People* magazine now. It's all celebrity driven. You can't say anything bad anymore." *Rolling Stone* has avoided negativity in its coverage of artists other than Springsteen. McGeary found that the magazine took such an approach with John Lennon.⁴⁹⁰ Even when confronting the many controversies and shortcomings in Lennon's life, the magazine used these as opportunities to applaud his humanity.

Popular magazines possess the ability to make celebrities through their choices about what they cover. Through its editorial decisions, *Rolling Stone* affected public memory of Springsteen. By taking a laudatory stance on him from the beginning and building upon that over the course of his career, while at the same time downplaying controversies, the magazine presented a one-sided picture of him. This approach to

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁸ Hume, *Obituaries in American Culture*, 163.

⁴⁸⁹ Steven Ward, "What Ever Happened to Rock Critic Paul Nelson?" *RockCritics.com*, March 2000. <http://www.rockcritics.com/interview/paulnelson.html> [accessed July 9, 2007].

⁴⁹⁰ Bryan McGeary, "Everybody's Got Something to Hide Except for Me and John Lennon: *Rolling Stone's* Creation of a Mythic Pop Culture Icon" (paper presented to the 2007 Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication Convention, Washington, D.C., August 9-12, 2007).

coverage ultimately changed little during thirty-four years of coverage. By occupying its position as the premier American music magazine, *Rolling Stone* had the ability to make its version of him the legitimate, “culturally standard” one.⁴⁹¹

An avenue for future research would include a more-in-depth examination of the nature of the relationship between Springsteen and *Rolling Stone* to determine whether he drove the coverage or the coverage propelled him or whether the relationship was symbiotic.

While *Rolling Stone* helped create the celebrity status of Springsteen, he continually tried to remain grounded. In a 1992 interview for the magazine, he said, “But you can get enslaved by your own myth or your own image, for lack of a better word. And it’s bad enough having other people seeing you that way, but seeing yourself that way is really bad. It’s pathetic.”⁴⁹²

⁴⁹¹ See Schudson, *The Power of News*, 33; and Schudson, *Watergate in American Memory*, 4.

⁴⁹² James Henke, “Springsteen: The *Rolling Stone* Interview,” *Rolling Stone*, August 6, 1992, 41.

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MCGEARY, BRYAN. Master of Science November 2007. Journalism

“COVER ME”: *ROLLING STONE* COVERAGE OF BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN &
THE E STREET BAND, 1973-2007 (91 pp.)

Director of Thesis: Cary Roberts Frith

This study investigated how a hugely influential magazine, *Rolling Stone*, has covered one of popular music's biggest icons in order to discover how the magazine fixes public memory and thereby creates celebrity. It examined how the magazine's coverage of Springsteen changed over time; whether it corresponded to events in his career or personal life; what subjects it dealt with; the location, size and general tone of articles; and what recurring themes characterized coverage.

Examined in the study were the magazine's 387 articles about Springsteen and the E Street Band from their first mention in the magazine on March 15, 1973, until their most recent on June 1, 2007, when it reported that the group would reunite for an album and tour. A complete list of articles pertaining to them was obtained from the Asbury Park Public Library, home to a Springsteen collection including more than 4,915 holdings, such as books, song books, tour books, comic books, magazines, fanzines, Internet articles and academic articles and papers.

Several major themes emerged in the coverage. His concerts were given a nearly monumental status, and his reputation as a live performer was regarded as nearly unparalleled. He was portrayed as a man who never lost his connection to his fans and his working-class roots despite his massive success. Later, he became the voice of the

downtrodden and marginalized. The magazine's coverage did not reflect the negativity that appeared in other places.

Through its editorial decisions, *Rolling Stone* affected public memory of Springsteen. By taking a laudatory stance on him from the beginning and building upon that over the course of his career while at the same time downplaying controversies, the magazine presented a one-sided picture of him. This approach to coverage ultimately changed little during thirty-four years of coverage. By occupying its position as the premier American music magazine, *Rolling Stone* had the ability to make its version of him the legitimate, generally accepted one.

Approved: _____

Assistant Professor of Journalism

