

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN'S EAST OF EDEN



"It was so beautiful, I felt James Dean was back . . . When I saw James Dean for the first time I fell on the floor. When I saw Bob Dylan for the first time I fell on the floor. When I saw Bruce Springsteen for the first time I fell on the floor." Jackie De Shannon.

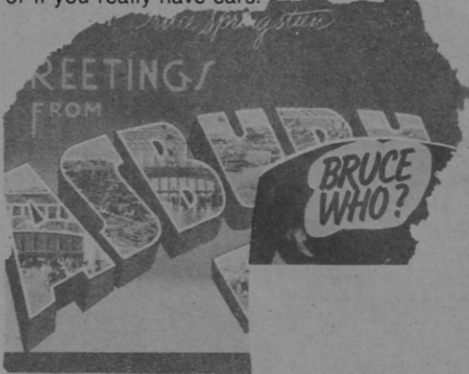
In 1973, after the release of his first album, Bruce Springsteen, from Asbury Park, New Jersey, was widely acclaimed as Dylan's logical successor. Dylan had been the last popular hero to encourage the belief that rock 'n' roll could still change the world, and right from the outset there were obvious similarities between Springsteen and Dylan. Similarities, showed even in appearance: both Dylan and Springsteen looked to suffer from lack of sleep, both grew stubbly beards.

Springsteen had been a guitarist with numerous Asbury Park-based R'n'B bands before recording his first LP, *Greetings from Asbury Park, N.J.* It was Springsteen's lyrics, however, which stood out; he wrote about the New Jersey streets from which he came, he was "the king of the alley" who "could walk like Brando right into the sun":

"The devil appeared like Jesus through the steam in the street
Showin' me a hand I knew even the cops couldn't beat
I felt his hot breath on my neck as I dove into the heat
It's so hard to be a saint when you're just a boy out on the street."

Mike Appel, Springsteen's manager, had typecast his prodigy as a folk troubadour, pre-1965 Dylan, and told him to write songs with plenty of lyrics.

It was no real coincidence that Springsteen was signed to CBS by the man who had a decade earlier signed up Bobby Dylan. Springsteen had been reading Tony Scaduto's autobiography of Dylan. He put the idea to Appel, Appel contacted John Hammond, told him he wanted him to listen to Springsteen because Hammond had discovered Dylan. And, Appel added, "we wanna see if that was just a fluke, or if you really have ears."

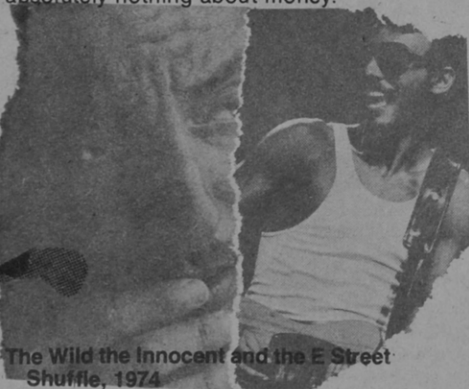


Greetings from Ashbury Park N.J., 1973

Hammond furthered the already-growing myth by telling *Time* he had reacted to Springsteen "with a force I'd felt maybe three times in my life" and, as he told *Rolling Stone*, Springsteen was "much further along, much more developed than Bobby was when he came to me". CBS record executives and rock critics alike began talking of Springsteen as "the new Dylan".

"What do I care, I'll do anything once," Springsteen said in April that year. "If it works, it works. But I don't wanna be concerned with too much of what's going on with promotion. That don't seem so important to me, but it's important to Mike. I trust whatever he does."

"In all my years in this business," Hammond said, "he is the only person I've met who cares absolutely nothing about money."



The Wild the Innocent and the E Street Shuffle, 1974

"The best thing anyone can do for me is not to mention Bob Dylan," Springsteen told *Time* in April 1974, "I've been influenced by everybody from Benny Goodman on: Sam Cooke, Wilson Pickett, Fats Domino. When I was nine and saw Elvis Presley on TV, I knew that was where it was at."

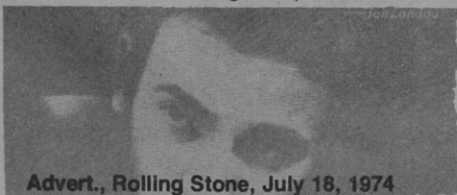
Springsteen's second album was a marked improvement on his first. He had ably shrugged off any debt to Dylan, he was now the songwriter in a band — the E Street Band — rather than a solo songwriter. The head-on rush of cinematic images that had characterised the first album had given way to a more mature concept.

"I never did separate the words and music all that much," Springsteen said after his second album, *The Wild, the Innocent and the E Street Shuffle*, had been released. "The only time I did was when I was playin' by myself. The lyrics aren't as flashy now as on the first album. Then it was all a lot of images. I was writing about all the things that were happenin' round me. If it felt right, it was okay. Lately I've been trying to deal more with ideas — with concepts, with themes. The stuff I'm writin' now is closer to what I was writin' in the bars. I got pulled away then. I walked in off the street and was about to get a record deal. I wasn't about to argue."

Despite enthusiastic reviews neither album sold more than 200,000 copies within the States. Springsteen was regarded at CBS as one of Clive Davis' proteges; he was nearly dropped after Davis left, his second album was — at best — only half-heartedly promoted.

Springsteen kept on touring, preferring to play small concert halls and clubs rather than large halls. Earlier he had had a disastrous tour as opening act for Chicago, playing in 20,000-seat halls. "Some groups just go out and plow through it," he said. "But I can't do it that way."

He met up with Jon Landau, then a contributing editor at *Rolling Stone*, in April 1974. A month later Landau wrote a review in which he said "I saw rock and roll future and its name is Springsteen." CBS spent \$50,000 in publicising the quote.



Advert., Rolling Stone, July 18, 1974

"When I saw that ad, with the quote ripped out," Springsteen recalled in an interview with *NME*, "I went 'Uh-oh . . . this looks like real bad advertising'. and I called the company up and said, 'Hey . . . get that ad outta the papers, man, are you tryin' to murder me?'"

Springsteen placed complete trust in Appel, still telling *Rolling Stone* in late 1975 that "I think Mike is the greatest, number one". Appel had co-produced both of Springsteen's albums with his partner, Jim Cretecos. But when recording of the third album, *Born to Run*, had dragged on for several months since its start in June 1974 it was clear to Springsteen that "we needed an outside perspective".

Landau had previously produced albums for the MC5 and Livingston Taylor. When Springsteen turned to him he left his job at *Rolling Stone* to become co-producer.

"... With *Born to Run* it reached a point where it was a nightmare," Springsteen said. "We were not getting close. Then Jon came in and he was able to say 'Well you're not doing it because of this, and this, and these are factual things which in reality are blocking what you're doing' . . . Me, you know, I just want to hear it, I don't want to know. I have no desire to work the knobs, run the soundboard, none. I don't care what I know or not, so I'm dependent on someone who's there to get me the sound I want."

Appel began to resent Landau's growing influence over Springsteen but, with Landau now in control, *Born to Run* was eventually completed. It took a further four and a half months, 12½ months in all. Landau attributed the further delays to Springsteen's concern for detail: "He'd spend hours on one line. He'd say 'hang on guys, I wanna check a line' and four hours later he'd be sitting there trying to make the most minute changes in one verse."

Appel offered both *Newsweek* and *Time* interviews with Springsteen. Both magazines appeared with cover stories on October 27, Mike Appel's birthday.

At this time Springsteen's contracts were about to run out. Appel made the offer to renegotiate.



Born to Run, 1975.

"You know, kids go, Hey! When are you gonna make a record?" I say 'One of these days'": Springsteen, March 1977.

The legal wrangle that followed Springsteen's intention to begin recording a fourth album with Landau as his producer stopped him from recording for over a year. Appel had said he would "... fight and possibly destroy, through legal means, that which he had created, namely Springsteen's career". A settlement was eventually made out of court. Appel received over \$1 million in cash, contract and property rights and in return relinquished administration of Springsteen's pub-

lishing, recording and management. *Rolling Stone* described the case "a textbook example of a financially naive musician learning the meaning of money only upon success".



Springsteen, 1977

"(Appel's) interest in this action is strictly financial. My interest is my career, which up until now holds the promise of my being able to significantly contribute to, and possibly influence a generation of music." Bruce Springsteen in affidavit, December 8, 1976.

Bruce Springsteen has always been fighting for his career. In the beginning it was because he refused to play Top Forty; they wouldn't let him play in any of the New Jersey bars. Later he was fighting because they called him "the new Dylan" and "the future of rock and roll".

But it wasn't until they stopped him recording that Springsteen realised that, perhaps for the first time, he held little control over his own destiny. "For me, everything is through music," he once said. "I don't do anything else. I just want to be the best I can be, and I don't even think I know what that is."

"You're born with nothing, and better off that way, Soon as you've got something they send someone to try and take it away . . .": "Something in the night," Bruce Springsteen.

The song comes from the new album Springsteen began recording as soon as he had a settlement with Appel; the album once titled *Loose Windscreens*, then *Racing in the Streets* and, finally, *Darkness on the Edge of Town*. As the first album he has released in three years, *Darkness on the Edge of Town* has a lot to live up to and, predictably, some people will be disappointed.

Springsteen is neither the new Dylan nor rock 'n' roll's new messiah. *Darkness on the Edge of Town* is a disarmingly personal album, and its songs lack the fiery optimism that lay at the heart of *Born to Run*. The Sam Peckinpah "death or glory" vista that ran through such songs as "Lost in the Flood", "Incident on 57th Street" and "Jungleland" has gone. Springsteen's new hero is no longer fighting fate but resigned to it, choosing instead to live "only with strangers", and to walk "with angels that have no place". When Springsteen neatly changes a lyric that has been used in the Stones' "Street Fighting Man" and in the Mamas and the Papas' "Dancing in the Street" it is to draw attention to the underlying despair that runs the album's course:

"Cause summer's here and the time is right
For racin' in the street."

It may be wrong to interpret this constant theme as having reference to either Appel or the court case. But while Springsteen's songs are fictional they are often loosely based on fact and here the bond between fact and fiction is made all the more obvious by the inclusion of a song like "Adam Raised A Cain". Cain is traditionally regarded a killer, but he is also the mythical destroyer of illusion. Springsteen's vocals often seem passionate — almost intense — adding sincerity to his words:

"He was standin' in the door, I was standin' in the rain,
With the same hot blood burning in our veins . . ."

Obviously Springsteen's cult hero status will last only while he can continue to write convincingly about New Jersey street life, and to do this he must remain unaffected by success and its trappings. In choosing a hero whose only option is to "come home from work and wash up and go racin' in the street" Springsteen has done nothing to lose his cult following. That is the great triumph to *Darkness on the Edge of Town*, it may not fulfil Springsteen's promise to "make the greatest rock and roll record ever made", but there are all the signs that someday he will make that record.

Jeremy Templar