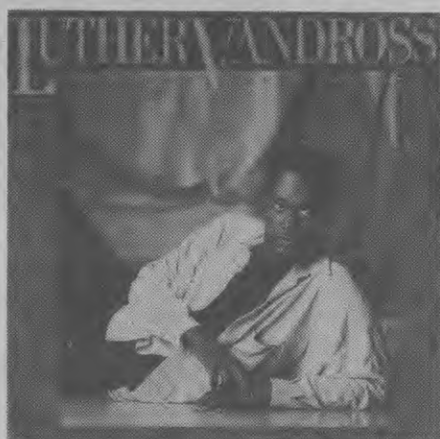


LUTHER VANDROSS



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Records

Fanfare for the Common Man

Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band
Live/1975-85
CBS

With the boy from Freehold NJ now probably the greatest social icon in the western world, his status probably demands a five-album set of his concerts over the last decade. Live performances are the essence of rock and roll, and the E Streeters have been among its very best exponents. Those who have followed the evolution of Springsteen's career will have their expectations satisfied by this record, which shows the breadth and scope of his music over a dozen years. In for a bigger treat however are the legions of Springsteen fans who became converts with *Born in the USA*. For them, *Live* will be an epic adventure in discovery.

Gargantuan it is — nearly three and a half hours — but the 40-song box set splits easily into three self-contained parts, roughly dating from Springsteen's epic tours of '78, '81, and '84. Only the opening track, 'Thunder Road', dates from 1975, and with its simple harp and piano backing, it's one of the most affecting. The main reservation I have about this set is not its Texan size, but sound. With the bulk of the material coming from stadium concerts, the musical dynamics are exaggerated, and the larger-than-life sound is a bit much for home consumption — although it's said that in a huge arena Springsteen can make 50,000 people feel he's sharing intimacies with them.

With his hammy showmanship, Springsteen is a part of the entertainment tradition that stretches back well past vaudeville, a rarity among white performers, and the E Streeters are the perfect showband, working their audience — and frontman — into a frenzy. 'Rosalita' is Springsteen at his barnstorming best, driven along by Clemons's relentless sax and



Bruce

Roy Bittan's fluid piano. Drummer Max Weinberg shows his years in theatre orchestra pits with his snare rolls, anticipating climaxes still verses away. The band shines in the tracks recorded at LA's Roxy club in 1978, before the gestures went over the top in an effort to communicate with arena audiences.

This collection shows *Darkness on the Edge of Town* off to its best advantage, when the street romantic took off his rose-coloured glasses and got real. Gone are the 'chainsaw through a dictionary' motor-mouthed excesses of *Asbury Park*, the band stays versatile but gets angry, and the material — 'Badlands', 'Candy's Room', 'Adam Raised a Cain', 'Racing in the Streets', 'Promised Land' — still allows them to work out.

On *The River*, which some regard as Springsteen treading water, risking self-parody, he simplifies the music and solidifies the messages. No longer the fantasist, Springsteen speaks for those disaffected and dispossessed by the 'runaway American Dream.' A cover of Woody Guthrie's bitterly ironical 'This Land is Your Land' fits perfectly with the music and love/hate attitudes of *Nebraska* and *Born in the USA*, but the honest acoustics of the former succeed on this record, whereas the simplified music causes the hits from the latter to become bombastic pounding; the E Streeters aren't given the room to shine.

Of the eight new songs in the set, the return to romance on Tom Waits' 'Jersey Girl,' is to me the

most significant. Edwin Starr's 'War,' while a clear message to Reagan, isn't my idea of the best the E Streeters have to offer. Of the many 60s jukebox hits they cover live, only the soul classic 'Raise Your Hand' is included — a belting crowdpleaser. More than being 'rock and roll's future,' I think the reason he's always been a critic's favourite is that he's fulfilled their hopes for rock and roll's past; he's what critics would wish Elvis Presley to have become. Despite the darkened images of the past few years, Springsteen the quaker has never given up hope, and the Steinbeckian journey of this album finishes with the optimism of 'No Surrender', 'Tenth Avenue Freeze Out', and, of course, 'Born to Run'. Springsteen believes in the promised land, and guards our dreams and visions.

Chris Bourke

Rap It Up

Run DMC
Raising Hell
Profile

There's been a straightjacket on black music that's only now coming off. Black music, and our perception of it, has been conditioned by the British rock press, which grabbed Nile Rodgers and Chic out of the bloodbath that was what was left of disco in 1980, and held that weak, simpering music aloft as being the epitome of subtlety and sophistication in soul. They were wrong. What it started was six years of mostly bad dance music, nonsense like Shannon's 'Let the Music Play' and clones like Princess and Nu Shooz.

Fortunately black music, disco, has been saved from the clutches of that media straightjacket. It's been saved by a music that's uniquely black, a music that talks in blackpeak, celebrates the realities of rock music, and puts down the cocktail for a good chillin' beer. Witness that when hip-hop goes wrong, as it does with Timex Social Club's 'Rumours,' it's a return to that faceless beat. Run DMC, on the other hand, have with *Raising Hell* released the most political black record since *There's a Riot Going On* — one, because we're all playing it, two, because it's black and proud to be black.

There's a sensibility here that's

CONTINUED ON PAGE 28

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