

Course Title: Bruce Springsteen: America's Poet Laureate

Course description:

Instructor: Pete Elman

"...Last Thursday, I saw my rock'n'roll past flash before my eyes. 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..." Jon Landau, 1974.

Landau would go on to become Bruce's manager. He didn't believe Springsteen's music was simply retro soul and rock and roll, but that he took his musical influences, i.e. Presley, Berry, Orbison, Spector and Dylan, and formed his own distinctive sound. Springsteen didn't reinvent rock and roll; he made his own stamp and developed his own signature. Just as you can listen to any Berry song and say, "that's the Chuck Berry sound," you can listen to a Bruce song and say "that's the Springsteen sound." We will break the course up chronologically into six distinct periods in the life and career of Bruce Springsteen, now 76, from his birth in 1949 to the present, celebrating 52 years—and counting—in what may be the most remarkable career in rock and roll.

Week-by-Week Course Outline and Syllabus

Suggested reading and viewing for the entire course; suggested listening by week; plus audio playlist and video clips specific to that week.

Reading for entire class:

Born to Run: The Bruce Springsteen Story, Dave Marsh, 1979

Springsteen, Robert Hilburn, 1985

Glory Days: Bruce Springsteen in the 1980s, Dave Marsh, 1987.

Springsteen: Point Blank by Chris Sandford, 1999

Bruce Springsteen: Songs, 2001

Bruce Springsteen: Two Hearts: The Definitive Biography, Dave Marsh , 2005

The Ties That Bind: Bruce Springsteen A to E to Z. Gary Graff, 2005

Bruce, Peter Carlin, 2012

Talk About a Dream: The Essential Interviews of Bruce Springsteen, Chris

Phillips, editor of Backstreets magazine, 2013

Springsteen on Springsteen: Interviews, Speeches, and Encounters, 2013

Boss: Bruce Springsteen & E Street Band --Illustrated History, Gillian Garr, 2016

Born to Run, Bruce Springsteen, 2016—the definitive autobiography

Tonight in Jungleland--Peter Ames Carlin, 2025

Viewing (documentary films) for entire class:

Born To Run: 30th Anniversary 3-Disc Set (CD/2DVD) 2005

The Promise: The Darkness on the Edge of Town Story, 2010

No Nukes, 1980-- first official appearance of Bruce & the E Street Band on film

The Ties That Bind: The River Collection, 4 CD--3 DVD box set, 2015

Bruce Springsteen and the E-Street Band DVD - Blood Brothers 2001

Bruce Springsteen - The Complete Video Anthology, 1978-2000, 2001

Bruce Springsteen & the E Street Band - Live in New York City, 2001,

Western Stars, a film by Thom Zimny (2019), available on Amazon Prime Video

Letter to You, a film by Thom Zimny (2020), available on Apple TV

Deliver Me from Nowhere, 2025, film by Scott Cooper, starring Jeremy White

Week 1: 1949-71; “He only wanted to play the goddam guitar.” Childhood in New Jersey: Catholicism, family life, alienation, the loner. His first bands; *The Castiles, Earth, Child, Steel Mill, Dr. Zoom and the Sonic Boom*. Columbia comes calling; John Hammond and the legendary audition, *Greetings from Asbury Park*.

Listening: These five albums represent key influences of Bruce’s music:

Elvis Presley, *30 #1 hits*, (released in 2002)

Chuck Berry, *The Great Twenty-Eight* (released in 1989)

Roy Orbison *Greatest hits*, 1962

Phil Spector, *Wall of Sound: The Very Best of Phil Spector* 1961-1966

Bob Dylan, *Highway 61* 1965

Greetings from Asbury Park, N.J. 1973—Bruce’s debut album on Columbia

*****in-class playlist for week one:***

Born to Run

Seaside Bar Song, 1973, outtake from the Wild the Innocent & the E Street Shuffle

Paradise by the “C”

Mary Queen of Arkansas

For you

Does this bus stop at 82nd street?

Blinded by the light

Growin’ Up

*****special video clips for week one:***

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=COFHGFZxtnY>

Elvis, 1956 “Hound Dog”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jenWdylTtzs>

Beatles, 1964, I want to hold your hand”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YjVh89sHDnI>

Bruce live: So hard to be a saint in the city

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aNNJh1fLRx8>

Bruce live: Spirit in the Night

Week 2: 1973-75: “I have seen rock and roll future, and its name is Bruce Springsteen.” the “new Dylan” strays from his rock and roll roots, and returns with a vengeance with *The Wild the Innocent and the E Street shuffle*. *Thunder Road* and the endless highway: The musically diverse and commercial triumph that was *Born to Run*; An in-depth look at the members of the legendary E Street band, and a look at the accompanying tours that established them as rock and roll’s premier live act.

Listening:

The Wild, the Innocent & the E Street Shuffle 1973

Tracks, 1998

Born to Run, 1975

Live at Hammersmith Odeon, London '75

Live/1975–85

***** in-class playlist for week two:***

E Street shuffle

Incident on 57th street

NYC Serenade

She’s the one

Meeting across the river

*****special video clips for week two:***

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f_ISDQy03LY

Sandy, 4th of July, Asbury Park, from London, live

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jlsBJxH1CWg>

Rosalita, live, Phoenix 1978

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x5kXnq5IjdU>

Thunder Road, live 1975

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YnNnYjlF1Us>

Backstreets, from London 1975

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KzrtlXuiV3Y>

Tenth avenue freeze-out, from Tempe

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kMyXw35IgYA>

Jungleland—from London 1975

Week 3: 1976-82: Legal limbo and professional purgatory. Bruce writes dozens of powerful songs while the lawyers put his career on hold. *Darkness on the Edge of Town* is released to unprecedented critical acclaim, as the live show reaches epic levels. The double album, *The River*, cements Springsteen position as the face of American rock and roll as the Reagan years commence; the political Bruce emerges;

Listening:

Darkness on the Edge of Town, 1978

The Promise (tracks from 1977-78) 2010

The River, 1980—a double album

The Ties That Bind: The River Collection, 2015

***** in-class playlist for week three:***

Badlands

Prove it all Night

Racing in the Street

Ties that Bind

Sherry Darling

Hungry Heart

Independence Day

Cadillac Ranch

*****special video clips for week three:***

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P8HXvt-v5v0>

Houston '78, Darkness on the Edge of Town

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XRdNwHmUiiQ>

Promised Land, Tempe, 1980

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=utVR3EgQkHs>

No Nukes, The River 1982

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RrZ-F-NzWTo>

Music Cares/Because the Night, with Patty Smith

Week 4: 1982-85: Introspection, and then superstardom beckons and Bruce responds. The acoustic album *Nebraska* and its brutal depiction of American life during the Reagan years.; the seven hit-single phenomenon that was *Born in the USA*; indoor coliseum and outdoor stadium tours and pop culture calls; fan magazines, remixes, a live double LP hits #1, and love and marriage—with the wrong girl. With the help of therapy, Bruce confronts his depression.

Listening:

Nebraska 1982

Born in the USA, 1984
Live/1975–85
18 Tracks, 1999

**** *in-class playlist for week four***

Nebraska
Johnny 99
Born in the USA
Cover Me
I'm on Fire
Darlington County
No Surrender
Bobby Jean
My Hometown

*****special video clips for week four:***

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M3eu1gW-bQ8>

Official music video, Atlantic City 1982

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6OjW1TDANxk&list=TLPQMTkwMzIwMjBi6JE9iXuuWA&index=6>

“Taxi Driver” clip, ‘you talkin’ to me?’ 1976

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6vQpW9XRiyM>

Glory days official music video 1984

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=129kuDCQtHs>

Dancing in the Dark official music video 1984

Week 5: 1986-2001: The aftermath of the hurricane: Bruce tries new things and “breaks up” the E Street band. The brilliant break-up album, *Tunnel of Love*, Exit actress Julianne Phillips, enter Jersey girl Patti Scialfa. Bruce moves to LA; CBS releases *Human Touch* and *Lucky Town* on the same day; *The Ghost of Tom Joad* thrusts Bruce back into America’s conscience.

Listening:

Tunnel of Love 1987

Human Touch 1992

Lucky Town 1992

The Ghost of Tom Joad 1995

Bruce Springsteen & The E Street Band: Live in NYC, from 1999-2000 tour, 2001

**** *in-class playlist for week five***

Tunnel of Love

Brilliant Disguise
All that heaven will allow
Walk Like a Man
Ghost of Tom Joad acoustic
Sinaloa Cowboys—with photos
Youngstown medley
Galveston Bay

****special video clips for week five:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M9BNoNFKCBI>

We are the world 1983

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=idnJnjV_8rg

Brilliant Disguise 1986

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MkFQHScyti0>

One Step Up 1986

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=85cNRQo1m3A>

Human Touch 1992

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ueIYdZrglVo>

Living Proof 1992

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4z2DtNW79sQ>

Streets of Philadelphia

Week 6: 2001-2025: the rock and roller grows up: Back to Jersey to raise a family. The horror of 9/11 and Bruce's heartfelt, heroic and historic response, *The Rising*; the introspective *Devils & Dust* gives way to the rootsy *Seeger Sessions* album and subsequent tour. **The rock and roll poet turns 60:** E Street Radio, The title song from the *Wrestler*, the deaths of Danny and Clarence. Barack Obama—with Bruce on board--brings hope and change to America, the Kennedy center and numerous other awards; a slew of albums, each to fit the times. Meanwhile, the greatest rock and roll band on the planet continues, incredibly, to improve with age, conquering the landscape, one city at a time, delivering hope, love, inspiration and community—and kick-ass rock and roll. *Born to Run*; the definitive autobiography, *Bruce on Broadway*, *Western Stars*, *Letter to You*, *Only the Strong Survive*.

Listening:

The Rising (2002)

Devils & Dust (2005)

We Shall Overcome: The Seeger Sessions (2006)

Magic (2007)

Wrecking Ball (2012)

Western Stars (2019)
Letter to You (2020)
Only the Strong Survive (2022)

**** *in-class playlist for week six:***

Lonesome Day
The Rising
Into the Fire
Radio Nowhere
We Take Care of our Own
This American Land
Tucson train
Letter to You
Ghosts
Night Shift

*****special video clips for week six:***

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NKYYChoQIvI>

Nothing Man 2002

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CapO4lucqH4>

My City of ruins, Barcelona

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nKIBLJtYigE>

Barack awards Bruce the presidential medal of freedom, 2016

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ajbJqfNS0aA>

Born to run, from London 1975

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FN0wMm50hzs>

Detroit medley from Tempe 1980