

Introduction to BOSS

Welcome to the inaugural issue of *BOSS: The Biannual Online-Journal of Springsteen Studies*, the first periodic, peer-reviewed publication devoted exclusively to scholarly work on the music, writing, and performance of Bruce Springsteen. Given his enduring global popularity, his diverse oeuvre, as well as his self-conscious engagement with the American past and the American storytelling and songwriting traditions, Springsteen represents a key cultural figure of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. *BOSS* aims to secure a place in the contemporary academy for what can now be called Springsteen Studies, thereby providing scholars the opportunity to engage with Springsteen and his work, analyze his cultural significance, as well as explore the meaning of his music.

Some of the earliest published scholarly work on Springsteen dates back to articles in 1983 editions of *Popular Music and Society* and *Social Text*. Since then, and especially since the mid-2000s, Springsteen's work has garnered considerable attention from scholars across a range of disciplines. The "Special Collections" note at the end of this first issue of *BOSS* showcases Denise Green's "Library of Hope and Dreams," a comprehensive, annotated, online bibliography of scholarly publications on Springsteen that currently lists nearly 300 items, including multiple journal articles and book chapters, several scholarly monographs, and a number of edited collections of interdisciplinary essays. Green has also identified 31 PhD and masters' theses focused on Springsteen's life and art. As the focus of wide academic interest, both in published scholarship and in college and university classrooms, Springsteen's cultural production is a worthy addition to those scholarly journals dedicated to a single subject.

BOSS seeks not only to inspire further scholarly investigation of Springsteen but also to bridge a gap between fans and academics. Springsteen Studies has already demonstrated its popular appeal. Most of the academic publications on Springsteen have been published by popular—rather than university—presses, indicating an audience outside of academic institutions interested in reading scholarly work on Springsteen. While we hope articles published in *BOSS* will receive serious consideration by fellow scholars, we also hope to engage a broader public interested in Springsteen. In order to garner popular readership, we will strive to publish readable academic articles that provide original scholarly analysis but are not brimming with scholarly jargon. *BOSS* is an open access online journal aimed at a wide readership in the United States, Canada, and abroad.

In keeping with the recent thirtieth anniversary of the release of *Born in the U.S.A.*, our lead article by Jason Schneider, “Another Side of ‘Born in the U.S.A.’: Form, Paradox, and Rhetorical Indirection,” addresses the confusion and controversy that have surrounded one of Springsteen’s best known and most historically significant songs. Drawing on the theories of Kenneth Burke and others, Schneider argues for a nuanced reading of the song that reconciles its seeming dissonance between musical form and lyrical content. Recognizing the song’s “rhetorical indirection,” argues Schneider, helps us to better comprehend the paradoxical socio-political complexities that Springsteen addresses in his lyrics and to better understand “the relationship that all national subjects must negotiate with their governments and communities.”

Inspired by Springsteen’s South By Southwest Music Conference and Festival (SXSW) keynote address, William Wolff discusses the folk characteristics of Springsteen’s songwriting approach in “Springsteen, Tradition, and the Purpose of the Artist.” Arguing that these folk influences result in traditional music built on the past and speaking to the concerns of the present, Wolff places Springsteen in conversation with William Wordsworth and T.S. Eliot, tracing various influences that ground Springsteen “in an evolving understanding of history, everyday life, and contemporary culture.” Wolff further weighs the ramifications of Springsteen’s discussion of his influences and the “authenticity” of modern music, illuminating the consequences and significance of Springsteen’s emerging role as a cultural ambassador for the arts.

Brad Warren and Patrick West also focus on the title track of Springsteen’s 1984 album in their article “Whose Hometown? Reception of Bruce Springsteen as an Index of Australian National Identities.” The authors take up “Born in the U.S.A.” as well as a short story collection by Australian author Peter Carey and the 1986 blockbuster *Crocodile Dundee*, using cultural productions to examine the dual forces shaping Australian identity in the mid-1980s. Warren and West also trace the rise of the “individualized listening practices” that have allowed for more fluid correlations between music and national identity, a change reflected in the ambiguous pronouns of Springsteen’s “We Take Care of Our Own.”

The final article of our inaugural issue combines scholarship and personal history to “underscore how listening to Springsteen’s music can facilitate moral development.” Rodney Dieser’s “Springsteen as Developmental Therapist: An Autoethnography” uses the author’s adolescent experience in authoritarian home and school settings to illustrate how Springsteen’s songs helped foster emotional maturation for one individual who was not taught moral development in other social contexts. Drawing on theories from developmental psychology as well as memories of his adolescence, Dieser points to

specific examples of how Springsteen's music assisted his progression through what scholars have identified as distinct stages of moral development.

BOSS will also provide a space for the assessment and discussion of the latest works about Springsteen that have analytical depth and are rigorously researched, whether published by scholarly or popular presses. In this issue, we include reviews of the 2013 documentary *Springsteen & I*, composed of fan-made videos that testify to Springsteen's transformative effect on some listeners, as well as *Bruce Springsteen: American Poet and Prophet* (Scarecrow Press, 2014), a new analysis of Springsteen's canon and career that attempts to understand the popularity of Springsteen's music in the cultural, social, and political context of the late twentieth-century United States.

The editors of *BOSS* express our gratitude to Mona Okada and Springsteen's legal team for allowing us to quote generously from Springsteen's work. For helping craft the course of the journal's future with their invaluable insight, we would like to thank the members of *BOSS*'s editorial advisory board: Eric Alterman, Jim Cullen, Steven Fein, Bryan Garman, Stephen Hazan Arnoff, Donna Luff, Lorraine Mangione, Lauren Onkey, June Skinner Sawyers, Bryant Simon, and Jerry Zolten. Our thanks as well to McGill University, specifically Amy Buckland and Joel Natanblut of the McGill Library, as well as Leonard Moore in the Department of History, for giving *BOSS* a home.

BOSS seeks to create a place for scholars and fans to engage in academic dialogue about Springsteen's music and performance as well as the cultural and historical significance of his work. We therefore encourage submissions that consider any and all aspects of Springsteen's cultural capital, those that are inter- and multi-disciplinary, and those that bring his work into conversation with the writers and performers that have influenced his oeuvre and those that he, in turn, has influenced. As with this inaugural issue, we intend *BOSS* as a forum for scholarly and accessible discourse that demonstrates why Bruce Springsteen matters as a historical and cultural figure and illuminates what engaged interdisciplinary scholarly analysis about Springsteen has to offer fans and scholars alike.

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