

# Introduction

Welcome to the sixth issue of BOSS: The Biannual Online Journal of Springsteen Studies, an open-access journal devoted to the study of the music, writing, and performance of Bruce Springsteen. Since our last issue in 2022, Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band made their triumphant return to the stage with a blistering world tour in 2023. This tour was defined not only by the euphoria of experiencing rock and roll in the flesh again but also by the thematic concerns that have preoccupied Springsteen in recent years: mortality and reflecting on the past.

These themes were perfectly articulated in the one-two punch of "Last Man Standing" and "Backstreets." In these performances, the invigorating image of teenage punks "running on the backstreets" turns into bittersweet reveries and faded pictures in an old scrapbook. Springsteen brought this wistfulness to his September 15, 2024, performance at the Sea.Hear.Now Festival in Asbury Park, New Jersey, where his life and career seemed to come full circle, performing on the very shores of where he first plied his trade. Reflecting on his journey, Springsteen remarked, "I never thought I'd live to see this sight in my lifetime. The band, we were here on that little street corner when nobody was here, and I didn't know when I would see folks in this good town again."

Aside from all this looking in the rear-view mirror, there's so much on the horizon. One of the most exciting developments is the opening of the Bruce Springsteen Archives and Center for American Music in 2026. Our latest issue features curator Melissa Ziobro, who takes BOSS readers exclusively inside the treasures housed in the archives—soon to make their public debut in the building. This 30,000-square-foot museum space promises to connect students, scholars, and fans from around the world not only to Springsteen's legacy but also to American music as a whole. It will

act as a living, interactive testament to the far-reaching historical and interdisciplinary impact of Springsteen's incredible work.

This commitment to education that the BSACAM will endeavor relates to the topic of our first article by Daniel Loughran, which examines the intersection of Paulo Freire's theory of "radical pedagogy" and Springsteen's approach to engaging his audience. As the chasm between political parties continues to widen in contemporary America, Loughran's scholarship feels more important than ever. He argues that both Freire and Springsteen use models of dialogic praxis—learning through open, two-way conversations that lead to reflection and action—to create positive change and help American citizens reclaim a shared sense of values, enabling them to see each other not as enemies but as neighbors.

The relationship between Bruce Springsteen and literature is rich and continues to be a point of focus for scholars, including Timothy Penner, whose piece provides a new way of examining Ernest Hemingway as an influence on Bruce Springsteen's songwriting. He explores how the economical, raw musical poetics of *Nebraska* align with Hemingway's Iceberg Principle, a singular method of storytelling where details and characters' interiority are kept under the surface.

Considering the recently released Warren Zanes' *Deliver Me from Nowhere* and its upcoming film adaptation, *Nebraska* seems to be generating significant discourse amongst Springsteen scholars, a conversation that will likely continue. Therefore, it feels fitting that Nick Sansone offers a compelling analysis of the sparsely studied film *The Indian Runner*, directed by Sean Penn. Through a detailed examination of the film's stylistic, narrative, and thematic elements, the article examines how *The Indian Runner* both honors and transcends its source material. This piece highlights how the hybridity between music and cinema in Springsteen Studies offers a wealth of scholarly insights.

Continuing in this vein, Marian Jago discusses how Springsteen uses other forms of media, particularly cinema, to carefully sculpt his legacy. She argues that through his various “memoir projects”—such as his autobiography, *Springsteen on Broadway*, *Western Stars*, and more—he is crafting a mythology that extends beyond his identity as a rock and roller.

We also offer several reviews, including *Mary Climbs In: The Journeys of Bruce Springsteen’s Women Fans*, an important work that highlights the female reception of Springsteen’s music; *Renegades: Born in the USA*, Bruce Springsteen and Barack Obama's podcast, which explores race relations, family life, and coming-of-age in the United States through their distinct yet surprisingly similar personal lenses; and the new podcast *Because the Boss Belongs to Us*, which debates the validity of Springsteen as a queer icon, bringing fresh perspectives from younger generations and the LGBTQ+ community to the Springsteen conversation.

We hope these peer-reviewed articles from multiple academic disciplines, along with our reviews and inside look at the Springsteen archives, will appeal to both scholars and fans. Just as Bruce Springsteen continues to interrogate his own legacy, so too do we, the scholars and readers of BOSS. We appreciate the historical, cultural, and political dimensions of his work and are thrilled to see Springsteen Studies continue to thrive.

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