



Bruce Springsteen - Under Review 1978-1982: Tales of the Working Man

Bruce Springsteen has arguably become the last link in the chain of the 20th century's larger than life songwriters. Not since the Jersey native broke in the 1970s has any one artist come along with such considerable success and iconic status and, quite frankly, it's not certain anybody else will.

When the general public thinks of the Boss, they usually think of his two most substantially successful releases, *Born To Run* (1975) and *Born in the USA* (1984). But critically, the albums that are being significantly explored decades later are the three records that filled the gap between the two giants - *Darkness on the Edge of Town* (1978), *The River* (1980), and *Nebraska* (1982). In the cumbersomely titled *Bruce Springsteen: Under Review 1978-1982 Tales of the Working Man*, Springsteen's self-defining years are explored in an independent critical analysis that involves the likes of famed music critic Robert Christgau, early E-Street Band member Vini Lopez, Springsteen biographers June Skinner Sayers and Eric Alterman, and several other noteworthy figures.

The film first explores the success and hype that Springsteen experienced around the release of *Born to Run*, what many considered one of the best rock n' roll records of a decade full of great rock n' roll records. While *Born to Run* was the freewheeling record everyone gripped onto at the time, Springsteen's focus began to shift towards themes that had closer ties to realism and the world milling about around him, rather than the good time escapism that colors most popular music. After a dispute with his former manager Mike Appell, Springsteen began a downward spiral and felt betrayed - feelings that would ultimately contribute to the topic matter present within *Darkness on the Edge of Town*. One of the better points raised in this film's analysis compares "Stolen Car," in which they go out in the night for one last ride and everything falls apart, with the earlier romantic ideals of *Born to Run*. At the time, people didn't know if the Boss had the staying power (oddly enough people are wondering the same thing about his upcoming release, *Magic*), but over three decades later it is clear that each album was a part of the Boss' maturation process as an artist and his search for authenticity.

A follow up to *Darkness on the Edge of Town* necessarily had to be something substantial considering that album's mild success, and what the public got was basically what they wanted. The film explores the hype around his first number one single, "Hungry Heart," and claims *The River* to be a composite work of all the records Springsteen had made up until then. A fantastic point of irony is presented when the video of "Hungry Heart" is shown, with people shoving their fists in the air and chanting along to a song that's about a guy getting in his car and leaving his family. A similar and now notorious misunderstanding came along several years later when Reagan-era Republicans co-opted "Born in the U.S.A." as a political campaign song, when in reality the song is about the struggles of war. *The River* also captured the live feel that Springsteen until then had yet to capture in the studio, providing a bit of relief from the seriousness of *Darkness on the Edge of Town*. The film calls the period surrounding *Darkness* and *The River* as Springsteen's "existential crisis" - a statement that can't be argued upon to any tremendous extent.

The final stop in the Under Review timeline is the 1982 album Nebraska, which is arguably Springsteen's most revealing and personal record and, as Robert Christgau claims, one that has come to be considered with exceptional weight amongst the current crop of younger, "indie"-styled fans and performers. While that is a semi-true statement (Springsteen having clearly impacted the likes of Connor Oberst), it is also quite an over-simplification, as Nebraska's reach extends far and beyond just the young crowd. During the period he made the album Springsteen was clinically depressed, and as such the music is addressed to anyone dealing with struggles similar to what he was experiencing at the time. Sure young, angsty songwriters are drawn to such a work, but the better point raised in the film is the very cinematic style of writing Nebraska hones, partly contributed to by the influence of the film Badlands, which the album's title track was a direct response to.

Although the analysis of Tales of the Working Man has its fair share of unexploited points, don't let the solid cast of Springsteen aficionados fool you into thinking this is all new territory. On the contrary; much of the topic matter presented here has been discussed in music critic forums, as well as Springsteen fan circles, for quite some time now. For anyone not already riding in one of those Boss-centric orbits, those not on intimate terms with the details of Springsteen's life and career from 1978-1982, Tales of the Working Man is certainly a reasonable starting point. But for anyone who falls outside of the novice range when it comes to the details of Bruce Springsteen's career, most of this ground has already been covered.

<http://lostatsea.net/feature.phtml?fid=46959304046ee6be461585>