

## **Course Title: Bruce Springsteen: America's Poet Laureate—an in-depth appreciation**

*“... Last Thursday, at the Harvard Square theatre, I saw my rock'n'roll past flash before my eyes. And I saw something else: 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. He would go on to become Bruce's manager, and still is. Landau didn't believe Springsteen's music was simply a retro soul and rock and roll, but that he took his musical influences, i.e. Berry, Presley, 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.”

**Course description:** This is an eight-week course. The instructor will break the course up chronologically into eight distinct periods in the life and career of Bruce Springsteen, from his birth in 1949 to the present, celebrating 50 years—and counting--in what may be the most remarkable career in rock and roll. Each session will include:

- A thorough, fast-moving background lecture about each period, including; quotes, excerpts from books, and photographs of Bruce and key people close to him, including family, friends and bandmates, presented in a slide show format with accompanying biographical commentary.
- Selected music videos, live videos and film clips of Mr. Springsteen performing some of his most well-known and impactful songs.
- CD versions, both studio and live of several of his important recordings, with frequent lyric analysis.
- A live music component, where the instructor—and special guests--will perform in class Springsteen material from each period on piano, guitar and voice, as well as demonstrate specific melodic themes, chord progressions, and arrangement and production aspects of selected recordings.
- A question/answer period where the students get to critique, comment on, participate and weigh in on any aspect of the class or the subject.

## **Week-by-Week Course Outline and Syllabus (eight weeks)**

***\*suggested reading, viewing and listening:***

### **Reading:**

*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

*It Ain't No Sin To Be Glad You're Alive: The Promise of Bruce Springsteen*, Eric Alterman, 2001

*Bruce Springsteen: Two Hearts: The Definitive Biography, 1972-2003* Dave Marsh , 2005

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

*Runaway American Dream: Listening to Bruce Springsteen*, Jimmy Guterman, 2005

*Born in the U.S.A.: Bruce Springsteen and the American Tradition*, Jim Cullen and Daniel Cavicchi, 2005

*Big Man: Real Life & Tall Tales*, by Clarence Clemons, 2009

*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*, edited by Jeff Berger, 2013

*Boss: Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band --The Illustrated History*, Gillian Garr, 2016

*Born to Run*, Bruce Springsteen, 2016

### **Viewing:**

*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--* This was the first official appearance of Bruce Springsteen & 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,

*The 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Concert*, 2009

**Week 1: 1949-71; “He only wanted to play the goddam guitar.”** Childhood in Freehold, New Jersey: Catholicism, family life, alienation, the loner in school. His first bands; *The Castiles, Earth, Child, Steel Mill, Dr. Zoom and the Sonic Boom.*

**Listening:** *These albums represent the roots/influences of Bruce Springsteen’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)

**Week 2: 1972-74; “I have seen rock and roll future, and its name is Bruce Springsteen.”** Columbia comes calling; John Hammond and the legendary audition, *Greetings from Asbury Park*, club gigs, 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.*

**Listening:**

*Greetings from Asbury Park, N.J.* (1973)

*The Wild, the Innocent & the E Street Shuffle* (1973)

*Tracks*, (1998)

**Week 3: 1975: Thunder Road and the endless highway:** The incredible artistic, critical 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:**

*Born to Run*, 1975

*Hammersmith Odeon, London '75*

*Live/1975–85*

**Week 4: 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; The acoustic album *Nebraska* and its brutal depiction of American life.

**Listening:**

*Darkness on the Edge of Town*, 1978

*The Promise* (tracks from 1977-78) 2010

*The River* 1980

*The Ties That Bind: The River Collection*, 2015

*Nebraska* 1982

**Week 5: 1984-85: Superstardom beckons, and Bruce responds.** The seven hit-single phenomenon that was *Born in the USA*; indoor coliseum and outdoor stadium tours, Pop culture calls; fan magazines, remixes, a live double LP hits #1, and love and marriage—with the wrong girl.

**Listening:**

Born in the USA, 1984

Live/1975–85

18 Tracks, 1999

**Week 6: 1986-95 The aftermath of the hurricane:** Bruce tries new things and “breaks up” the E Street band. The brilliant break-up album, *Tunnel of Love*, Bruce plays East Berlin, Amnesty International; Exit actress Julianne Phillips, enter Jersey girl Patti Scialfa. Bruce moves to LA; CBS releases *Human Touch and Lucky Town* on the same day; accusations of going “Hollywood” surround the Boss.

**Listening:**

Tunnel of Love 1987

Chimes of Freedom 1988

Human Touch 1992

Lucky Town 1992

The Essential Bruce Springsteen 2003

**Week 7: 1995-2007: the rock and roller grows up: “We need you now;” Back to Jersey to raise a family.** Marriage, fatherhood, and *The Ghost of Tom Joad* sends Bruce back to his folk, acoustic roots, bringing a new generation of listeners into the fold. “*Blood brothers, one and all;*” the official return of the E Street band, in 1999 armed with four guitars and hundreds of tunes; 132 shows in 16 months all over the US and Europe, leaving it all on the stage. The horror of 9/11 and Bruce’s heartfelt, heroic and historic response, *The Rising*; the introspective *Devils & Dust* gives way to the triumphant and rootsy *Seeger Sessions* album and subsequent tour.

**Listening:**

The Ghost of Tom Joad 1995

Blood Brothers 1996

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

The Rising 2002

Devils & Dust 2005

We Shall Overcome: The Seeger Sessions 2006

**Week 8: 2007-present: The rock and roll poet turns 60:** E Street Radio, The title song from the *Wrestler*, the deaths of Danny and Clarence, Bruce kicks ass at the Super Bowl, 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.

**Listening:**

Magic (2007)

Working on a Dream (2009)

Wrecking Ball (2012)

High Hopes (2014)